

## **News from IFRP, Interfaith Refugee Partnership (formerly ICRP, Interchurch Refugee Partnership)**

We have recently changed our name to reflect the diversity of the wonderful group of volunteers who have been helping us these past years and to broaden our base as our work continues.

When we began the work of sponsoring one Syrian refugee family in March 2015, we had no idea that in the next five years we would bring over 34 individuals, consisting of one extended family, four single families, all with children, and one single man. At the moment, we are awaiting the arrival of a young couple, presently in Beirut, and further down the road, two single men, one in Beirut and the other in Egypt. This has been made possible by our very successful fundraising events in 2015 and 2016, and by several generous donors who have respectively taken responsibility for two separate sponsorships.

Helping the families settle has been exhilarating and often very demanding work. We cannot thank sufficiently the large number of volunteers who have willingly devoted endless hours and energy to helping the newcomers feel at home in Kingston.

We would like to say that after five years we have completed the work of sponsorship, but the reality is different. According to the UNHCR website there are now 68.5 million forcibly displaced people worldwide, of which 40 million are internally displaced, 3.1 million are asylum seekers, and 25.4 million are refugees. Of the latter, Syrians continue to be the largest group at 6.3 million. We may be told by the media that the war there is over, but men age 18-48 still face mandatory military service, large areas are still controlled by armed groups, homes and communities have been totally destroyed or occupied by others, and such basics as food, medicine, electricity, sanitation, fuel and schools are all lacking. A personal account of conditions by a Syrian Canadian living in Kingston can be found on our website: <https://interfaithrefugeepartnership.com/>

In response to the ongoing need, with your help our work must continue. At our next meeting on June 3 we will be making the difficult selection of the next family to be sponsored from a list of heartbreaking stories. Following that, and before we can submit the application for sponsorship, we will do the necessary fundraising and call for dedicated volunteers to serve on such essential teams as coordinator, medical, dental, and education. For ongoing information please see our website.

The website also contains IFRP's "terms of reference" and lists our partner congregations (Chalmers UCC, Sydenham UCC, St. Mark's Lutheran, and associate members (St. Andrew's Presbyterian and Princess Street UCC) and our valued community group led by Ellen and Ray Peters.

St. Mark's has been the charity of record since 2015. We are most grateful to their treasurer but agree that it is time for another church to take on this role, starting January 1, 2020. We hope that a new congregation will step up to assume this task since it is essential for the work to continue. Please contact any committee member for a brief overview of the task.

We cannot thank you enough for your ongoing concern, prayers and assistance. We look forward to updating you in June when we will be seeking your further assistance for our next sponsored family.

*Written by Marguerite Van Die, Coordinator, IFRP Committee.  
Peter Goheen, Monika Holzschuh, Mary Davis Little and Michael Purcell  
are the Chalmers and SSUC Representatives on the IFRP Steering Committee.*