



St. Mary Parish
Ridgefield, CT

Saint Mary Parish Supporting Refugee Resettlement Project



Homeless Jesus, a sculpture by Timothy Schmalz

For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in. –[Matthew 25:35](#)

A Faith Filled Response to a Global Crisis

Today, there are as many as 110 million people who have been displaced from their homes around the world, due to conflict, persecution or famine. Pope Francis and others have described this as the greatest humanitarian crisis since World War II.

Recognizing this crisis, St. Mary Parish, in support of the First Congregational Church's Refugee Resettlement in Ridgefield Committee (RRRC) and the non-profit organization, Integrated Refugee & Immigrant Services (IRIS), is offering its Parish-owned house at 184 High Ridge Avenue to resettle a refugee family in Ridgefield within the next couple of months.

As followers of Christ, and witnessing our Catholic faith under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we believe that we must do whatever we can to reach out and help those desperately in need.

On the following pages are questions and answers we hope are helpful.

Questions & Answers

Who is a refugee?

A refugee is a displaced person who has been forced to leave his or her homeland due to war, famine, or political, racial and/or religious persecution. Often refugees, once displaced, are placed in refugee camps. They can be in these camps for many years.

How many refugees come into the US?

In 2023, the U.S. will have accepted approximately 115,000 refugees from all over the world. The U.S. has set a goal of 125,000 in 2024. Connecticut accepts about 800 refugees a year.

What does the refugee resettlement vetting process look like?

The process of vetting refugees is very rigorous. Refugees are subject to extensive review in two areas before being accepted into our country. First, it must be determined whether or not they are indeed refugees (that is, in danger of persecution or worse, should they return home). Second, there are extensive security reviews of their identities, background checks, and other information. These security reviews are conducted by the Department of Homeland Security, FBI, Departments of State and Defense and other related agencies and can take as long as two years to complete before a refugee is considered for entry into our country. It is only after this security review is completed that the process of determining where in the United States the family will be sent begins. By the time they are placed, the family has gone through an exhaustive investigative review. More details of the process can be found at www.uscis.gov/refugeescreening.

Who is the Refugee Resettlement in Ridgefield Committee (RRRC)?

RRRC is a group founded by members of the First Congregational Church of Ridgefield (FCC), who have been exploring how to respond to the global refugee crisis on a local level. Over the past six months, they have been working with the non-profit group, Integrated Refugee & Immigrant Services (IRIS) of New Haven and members of the Ridgefield community who were previously involved in the town's 2016 refugee resettlement program. They have organized over 75 volunteers from their community and the broader Ridgefield community to support a resettlement family in Ridgefield, working as a local co-sponsor partner with IRIS. Besides housing, the group has worked to identify volunteers who can interpret, drive, teach English and help with medical, educational, employment opportunities and other anticipated needs. The goal of the group is to help the Refugee family become self-sufficient as soon as possible.

Who is Integrated Refugee and Immigrant Services (IRIS)?

Integrated Refugee and Immigrant Services (IRIS) is a non-profit organization that is one of three local resettlement agencies in Connecticut. In operation since 1982, IRIS has helped resettle over 5,000 individuals from more than 30 countries. For local co-sponsor groups like RRRC, they provide detailed guidance, case worker support, and coordination with specialized health services and other agencies involved in the refugee resettlement process. They also approve the committee's readiness to sponsor a Refugee resettlement.

Have any other nearby towns resettled refugees?

Yes, Danbury, Wilton, Brookfield, Hartford, New Haven and Stamford have all welcomed refugee families in the past year. St. Mary has previously successfully hosted a Syrian family of 4 in 2016. The First Congregational Church in Ridgefield has also previously hosted a Syrian woman, who lived in one of its apartments and is now actively helping with more recent arrivals.

How did our Parish get involved?

The RRRC, on which a couple of our Parishioners sit, approached us, asking if we would consider housing a refugee family. Since one of our Parish properties is now vacant, our Pastor, Msgr. Royal, after considerable research and discussion with the RRRC, various Parishioners supporting this effort and in consultation with Bishop Caggiano and the Parish Council, approved making the house available to help a refugee family.

Why our Parish?

Our Parish is one of a number of local communities contributing to this resettlement effort. Moreover, our rental property offers the new family a very convenient location. Rather than being outside of the center of Town—and isolated to some degree—the house we are offering is in the heart of our Community, close to shopping, schools, etc. It is an opportunity for the family to instantly feel part of our Community and self-reliant since they will be able to walk to many places on their own.

Is our Parish incurring other costs associated with this effort?

We are making the house available free of charge for 6 months and will provide the normal property maintenance, which we provide for all our rental properties. The tenants will be responsible for all utilities (heat, electricity, water, sewer, etc.), and renter's insurance. They will be supported by funds raised by the RRRC, IRIS, state funds as well as by any employment income. The Parish will incur no additional costs. This arrangement will be re-evaluated after the initial 6 months.

What other kinds of help will the refugee family receive?

The family's resettlement expenses will be partially paid through a combination of private and public funding sources. Public funding includes a one-time grant from the US Department of State, a monthly allowance from CT Department of Social Services (which terminates after a period of time), SNAP (food stamps) benefits, and HUSKY Healthcare coverage. Private funding will come from, funds raised by RRRC, local individuals and businesses committed to this cause.

How long will it take for the family to get settled?

The goal is for the new family to become economically self-sufficient within 6 months after arrival. In a relatively short period of time, people arriving in this country who are at first lost, often become comfortable within a matter of months as they begin learning the language, find employment, start school, and are able to move about the local community. English language skills are a major determinant of the speed of resettlement, which is why the RRRC will put significant emphasis in this area. If the family is not fully settled after six months, RRRC will work with the family and IRIS to determine how to help the family continues to move toward the self-sufficiency goals. Our Parish will in turn evaluate the situation and decide on how to proceed with the housing arrangement.

When will the family be resettled in Ridgefield?

Several weeks before the family's scheduled arrival in the U.S., their detailed information will be received by IRIS, which then matches the family with one of its co-sponsor partners like RRRC. Once the family is tentatively proposed for Ridgefield, the RRRC will learn details such as its composition, country of origin, religious background, language capabilities, education, etc. The RRRC gets several days to review the details and determine if the fit looks right to them. The RRRC does not need to accept the assignment if it does not look like a good fit for the group's capabilities and arrangements. A refugee family can come from various countries. They will only be assigned to Ridgefield if the RRRC can provide initial language support for the family. Once the assignment is accepted, they could arrive in Ridgefield in the February/March timeframe.

Is there Town of Ridgefield support?

Yes! There are many people who have reached out to volunteer and contribute financially. RRRC has been active in keeping Town leaders such as First Selectman, Rudy Marconi, Police Chief, Jeffrey Kreitz, and Tony Philips, Director of Social Services, informed of its plans. School Superintendent, Dr. Suzie Da Silva, plus organizations such as the Boys & Girls Club have been briefed and have shown their enthusiasm and support as well. In addition, a number of local companies have shown interest in offering employment once the skill set of the new family is known. Refugee families have previously encountered a warm welcome in Ridgefield and in various parts of Connecticut.

Why not help our own people rather than those from another country?

Our Parish does help many local residents and people in need within our community, through many outreach efforts and organizations such as Dorothy Day Hospitality House, St. Peter's Run, Stephen Ministry, Knights of Columbus, Midnight Run, The Sister Joan Fund and our Annual Catholic Appeal. Since we are in a position to do so, we have also decided to help a refugee family, recognizing that many needs exist globally and that we are also part of a global community. In the words of Pope Francis, refugees are "women and men, boys and girls, who are no different than our own family members and friends."

How can we as Parishioners help with this effort?

Financial Donations

Your tax-deductible donation will support the family's transition expenses (housing, training, etc.) until they achieve employment and self-sufficiency. The First Congregational Church of Ridgefield is accepting donations on behalf of RRRC. If you would care to donate to this cause, you can either send a check directly to the Refugee Resettlement in Ridgefield Committee at First Congregational Church of Ridgefield, 103 Main Street, Ridgefield, 06877. Mark donations, ATTN: Refugee Resettlement in Ridgefield Committee. You can also give online via the First Congregational Church's website, www.firstcongregational.com/refugee.

Clothing and Household Items

The vast majority of refugees are allowed to come to the U.S. with only one or two bags of personal effects. The house we are offering will be furnished by donations. However, once we know the ages and gender of the family members, RRRC will develop a list of items they will need such as clothing, additional furniture and small household appliances, which will be shared with St. Mary and the local community.

Volunteering Time & Skills

The refugee family will need many hours of volunteer time and support. Volunteers will be needed to drive them to appointments and shopping, language tutoring, childcare, helping them find employment, teaching them about American culture/customs and helping them with their finances/budgeting. You may sign up to help in any of these areas by contacting RRRC by email at refugee@firstcongregational.com or by signing up for one of the committees directly on their website, www.firstcongregational.com/refugee. Please put the word "Volunteer" in the subject line of your email.

How can we learn more?

There will be an information session at 7:00pm on Monday, January 15th in our Family Hall, where you can gain more information and have any additional questions answered by members from our Parish, RRRC and IRIS.

