St. Columba by-the-Lake’s Refugee Sponsorship Project

St. Columba by-the-Lake is a middle size and active congregation located in the Montreal suburb of Pointe Claire, Quebec. In June of 2010 our congregation answered the call to sponsor a refugee family. Since then our ‘Team for Refugee Action’ has been working towards bringing a refugee family to Canada and we haven’t looked back since. Little did we realize what we were embarking on and how much it would transform our own relationship with Jesus, our connection to the ‘other’ and what it means to welcome a stranger.

THE CALL It all started from a study group in which we read “Everything Must Change” by Brian D. McLaren. We found ourselves ashamed to be living in a society of so much wealth when many others had so little. Moreover, much of our wealth is dependent on the exploitation of others less fortunate than we. We determined that we absolutely needed to make at least one small change. The decision taken was to sponsor a refugee family

THE QUESTION OF FUNDRAISING Our target objective is $24,000: a rather large amount for our small congregation. Nevertheless we have faith that God will provide. We have had FUN trying new events...a 24 hour fast, an Ethiopian supper, and bit by bit the money has been coming in. It is like the miracle of the loaves...it keeps multiplying and we have almost attained our goal.

THE TEAM FOR REFUGEE ACTION Our steering committee initially consisted of six individuals (four adults and 2 youth) along with the active support of our minister Ian Fraser. During this entire process we have benefited from the invaluable support of ‘Action Refugees Montreal’ without which we would most certainly not be as advanced as we are today. It is crucial to have someone that knows how the refugee sponsorship system works here in Canada and Québec working with us. They continue to walk us through the many bureaucratic twists and turns and have been action as a liaison for us providing very important updates on our family’s situation. Our steering committee has now expanded to 12 with the support of an enthusiastic congregation. We early on decided that our youth were to have a major role in welcoming the stranger. They have inspired us
with the extent of their global understanding and the leadership they have provided us.

_We early on understood that sponsoring a refugee family was simply the catalyst for a larger mission and we quickly became the 'Team for Refugee Action'._

**THE JOURNEY (or the process)** It will soon be three years that we have been working towards sponsoring our refugee family. It has been a period of growing global awareness, bureaucratic challenges, emotional bonding, and personal growth. We initially believed the process would take but a year or two. We have since learned what it means to be patient and in so doing realize how insignificant our frustrations (and there have been a few!) have been compared to refugees who wait for years to be sponsored. We simply can not imagine...

_The process is long and complicated...the journey however is rich with experiences, growth and transformations. It is also a pendulum between waiting patiently and rushing around to get things ready only to have to put the brakes on again._

**THE TRANSFORMATION** During this time each of us has been blessed with epiphanies regarding our own faith and our connection with refugees. And the family has not even arrived yet! We anticipate with excitement how this initiative will continue to transform us, even as it offers hope to others.

**THE LATEST UPDATE** Our family is waiting to be cleared for TB tests. We have now been told that they should be getting the results of their medical tests by the end of May. This is the third postponement. They have been living as refugees in Uganda for the past 2 years. The very least we can do is to wait for them. In the meantime we continue to prepare and we try to advocate on their behalf and other refugees as well. We eagerly await their arrival with open hearts.

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