

Ideas to Inspire Your Refugee Sunday

2024 marked the first year that Alongside Hope, working with the network of Anglican SAHs, promoted and supported a national Refugee Sunday. A variety of events were held. The following highlights a few of those in the hope that they will inspire more events in 2025.

Diocese of Kootenay

St. Francis (Lake Country) -- The congregation invited a young man (29 years old) of South Sudanese heritage who was born in Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya to speak. He is sponsoring the resettlement of two younger brothers. He spoke about life in Kakuma Camp, his own journey from the camp to Kelowna, and about the PSR (Private Sponsorship of Refugees) application process he had just gone through.

All Saints (Vernon) -- The priest spoke briefly about the Biblical background of refugees. Then Sue Kershaw, the diocesan Refugee Coordinator, spoke about the three stages of the refugee application process from the SAH perspective (Intake, Overseas visa offices, Resettlement) and recounted a family's story for each stage.

St. John the Evangelist (Salmon Arm) -- The priest "interviewed" four members of the family that the parish sponsored in 2019. Sue had met a week earlier with the family to find out what they would feel comfortable talking about, drafted questions for the priest which would solicit that information and wrote the questions and potential answers for each of them -- but they didn't have to refer to those notes!

The Diocese of Kootenay Synod passed a motion in June 2024 that states Refugee Sunday will be celebrated on the third Sunday of October in the coming years.

Diocese of Nova Scotia and PEI

Sarah Cooper, diocesan Refugee Coordinator for NS&PEI reported that a Refugee Sunday at the Cathedral Church of All Saints in Halifax went well. She did a presentation at both services and then, with some excellent co-teachers, taught a lesson at Sunday School about refugees. This generated a wonderful conversation about what it would be like to move to a new country and how to treat others who are new and don't have friends, etc. They watched some great videos and had some good conversations with the 6-9 age group.

Sarah also shared information about a Walk for Refugees organized by other stakeholders that was happening in Halifax two weeks hence. It turned out to be a lovely event! Members of the Cathedral carried a big banner that had been ordered, and a current Anglican church sponsorship group came with the newcomer they're supporting. A few others also came from Anglican churches who are waiting for refugees to arrive, and some who were just interested in the cause. The walk was the first to happen since COVID, so the numbers were relatively small, but it was powerful, nonetheless.

Sarah added, "This job can be really hard, but it's times like these that I am reminded how great and rewarding it is too!"



Diocese of Rupert's Land

"Planning activities for the first Refugee Sunday started with getting Bishop Geoffrey Woodcroft's blessing – which was received," reported Diocesan Refugee Coordinator, Marlene Smith. She went on to explain that the Diocese of Rupert's Land chose to bring newcomers and Indigenous people together to mark Refugee Sunday.

"We continued with the theme, WORKING TOWARDS RECONCILIATION, that was the theme of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Report 2015, chaired by the Honourable Murray Sinclair – chief commissioner of the National Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.

"Conversations were held with the Dean of St. John's Cathedral, Sponsorship Agreement Holder Association Staff for Indigenous-Newcomer Allyship (Métis), clergy who serve in Indigenous Ministries within the Diocese, and an Elder who assists the Diocese. Articles were published in the monthly magazine and newsletters leading up to Refugee Sunday.

The first article published was from Alongside Hope/PWRDF, "Why Refugee Sunday." Subsequent articles by Marlene were published in the weekly newsletter.

"The service, held June 23, 2024 at Epiphany Indigenous Anglican Church, was a culmination of hearts and minds coming together in a memorable and respectful way. Rev Vincent Solomon, Eva Brown, and Gary Russell of Epiphany, welcomed us all, with the bishop, clergy, and newcomers, present. Elder Amanda did smudging and teaching before the service began. Rev. Vincent sang a 'welcome' song that he had written while playing his drum. Scripture was read, prayers were offered, music was played, and songs were sung. Bishop Geoff accompanied us on guitar as we sang the gradual hymn, 'Draw the Circle Wide.' Recent newcomers – young and old, and older newcomers participated in the service. We had the opportunity to give and to learn from each other. During the offertory after the Peace, we sang 'Let There be Peace on Earth.' During Holy Communion, a newcomer sang 'On Eagle's Wings.'

"Many of us met as strangers, engaged in planning, worshipped together, gathered after the service to share, eat, and drink, and left no longer strangers, but friends. The service was arranged by Rev. Vincent Solomon with some resources from PWRDF/Alongside Hope, combined with suggestions from the planning team. Rev. Vincent has offered to do teaching with newcomers on Indigenous History. We plan to make this an annual event."