



The Venerable The Archdeacon of Saint Francis  
Anglican Diocese of Quebec

Feast of the Epiphany, 2016

**St Francis Deanery Syrian Refugee Project Update**

In response to the global humanitarian crisis affecting Syria, the Vestries of St George's Lennoxville and St Barnabas North Hatley passed motions to guarantee the \$30,000 needed to sponsor a refugee family. There was much speculation about whether the Deanery could raise this amount quickly enough and even whether the Deanery would be able to reimburse the two Parishes. In the end both vestries went forward with faith that the monies would be raised. Within three weeks, and therefore without the need of the funds guaranteed by the two parishes, \$36,000 had been raised. As of January 1<sup>st</sup> the amount is \$47,000. And all this is before the formal fundraising projects have even begun.

The congregations of St Anne's Richmond, St George's Lennoxville, St Barnabas' North Hatley, St Augustine's Danville, St Luke's Magog, St Steven's Coaticook, St George's Ayer's Cliff, St George's Georgeville, and The Church of the Advent Sherbrooke have all donated monies from their church corporations. Several other Deanery activities, such as 'Guess Who's Coming to Dinner' initiative, the Monthly Soup Luncheon and the Country Gospel Hour, and the November Deanery Service in St Paul's Bury donated their proceeds to the refugee fund. Stephen Sheeran, husband of the Rural Dean, had a special polar bear swim in Lake Massawippi to raise funds for Syrian refugees. Thirty-nine individuals also donated to the fund. In the new year there will be several Deanery wide special fundraising events to raise the additional \$14,000 needed to sponsor another family of five to come to Sherbrooke.



St George's hosted a Refugee Christmas Dinner organised by a group of students from the University of Sherbrooke on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of December. There were over 200 people in attendance. It was touching to see the dozens of children, some that had only just arrived from refugee camps in Lebanon, screaming with delight to see Santa Claus. I could not help but be struck with how precious their safety was and how wonderful it was to see them behaving like kids.



The Deanery Refugee Project is being run in co-operation with St Ephrem's Syrian Orthodox Church in Sherbrooke, the oldest Syrian congregation in Canada. The founders of this congregation were themselves refugees from previous periods of persecution in the 1940s and the early 1900s. The Deanery of St Francis is one of the few Anglican communities in Canada that has a sister Syrian community to work with. We support all the refugee initiatives for Christian and Muslim refugees fleeing the destabilisation of Syria, but feel the pre-existing relationship with our local Syrian community is a sign of our mutual witness in Christ. The other factor that plays into this is the warning by the United Nations that many Christian refugees are attempting to stay out of the refugee camps because they are afraid of further persecution. They are therefore being classed as highly vulnerable refugees. The Syrian community is able to help find those who are in this particularly dangerous position.



On New Year's Eve, St George's Lennoxville hosted the entire Syrian community for their celebrations. The evening began with a formal presentation of a cheque for the first \$30,000 from the Deanery, followed with prayers for those lost, killed, or left behind in the Middle East. Special prayers were said for the 16 young men who had been massacred in church the evening before in Syria. Then they partied as only Middle Easterners can, in a spirit of hope for a better year and thanksgiving for the grace they had received. 175 people of all ages danced traditional Syrian dances, ate a traditional Syrian meal, and sang until the early hours of the morning. I think it was the first time I knew I was at the best New Year's party in town.

I would like to thank all those who have supported this project with their time, work, money, and donations of clothes and other items. There is still need for furniture, electronics (especially kitchen appliances such as stoves and refrigerators), and of course jobs for the new refugees. At this point there is no need for clothing. We look forward to seeing you at some of the upcoming refugee fundraising events. We give thanks for the honour of assisting our brothers and sisters in this distressing time and thank them for the energy, courage, and hope which they give to us by their witness to Christ under persecution.

Edward OGS