



**UNITED WELCOME
MEETING HELD MARCH 10, 2016**

10:30 a.m.
Lyn

Christ Church,

Present were: Dave Bremner (Chair) Rev. Wendy MacLean, Eileen Doner (Acting Secretary) Doug Mather, Sylvia Foxtan, Lynne Galvin, John Hanson, Carolyn Matheson, Linda James, Joan Tallon, Barb Lunman, Rev. Al Rose, Joanna Perry, Rev. Marianne Emig Munro
Regrets: Rev. Kimberly Heath, Harvey Loyst, Diane Daub

The meeting was **called to order** by the chair at 10:30 a.m.

- 1.0 **Opening Prayer** - Wendy MacLean talked about the spring theme of migration and how enriched our lives are when people find each other in new relationships as in our connection to the refugees coming to Canada.
- 2.0 **Agenda** - The Agenda was accepted with one addition. 6.1 Rev. Marianne Emig Munro speaks on the refugee sponsorship experience of the Presbyterian and other churches.
- 3.0 **Minutes** of the February meeting were accepted with one correction: 5.2 should read “hosting” a Government sponsored family instead of “accepting”.
- 4.0 **Refugees for Brockville Committee update** - nothing new to report.
- 5.0 **Update on Action Items**
 - 5.1 **Website** - Doug Mather reported that the website for United Welcome may be accessed by going to www.wallstreetchurch.com and clicking on Refugee Sponsorship. In addition to specific information there are links to other useful websites.
 - 5.2 **Additional churches** - Rev. Al Rose reported that the Board of Mallorytown Lansdowne Pastoral Charge has voted to be part of United Welcome and Jan Orr is the contact person. There is an ongoing basement at Mallorytown United Church and they would be open to donating any needed items in their stock.

- 5.3 Doctor** - Bev Delaney has begun the process of registering with a doctor.
- 5.4 Collection of items** - Linda James reported that the list is nearly filled and that we probably have more than we will need. Depending on our family we may have surplus items to pass to another sponsoring group. Linda has explained to donors that after all the families are settled, leftover items will be donated to the Our Kenyan Kids Garage Sale. A sponsor came forward to pay for the cleaning of two chairs.
- 5.5 Financial update** - Dave Bremner reported that we currently have \$8,113.10 in the United Welcome Fund. Barb Lunman reported that the UCW at Athens United Church has a monthly soup and sandwich lunch and will contribute half of the proceeds from three lunches, a minimum of \$1,000, to United Welcome. Barb suggested that donors be invited to commit to paying a portion of monthly expenses such as hydro bills.
- 5.6 Volunteer Recruitment** - Eileen Doner reported that 12 people have volunteered. They have each been given a letter on United Welcome letterhead to submit with the application for a criminal background check. Eileen checked with Joanna Perry, the volunteer coordinator for Refugees for Brockville, regarding a binder of information for refugee families and was directed to United Way for their 'little black book'. United Way has discontinued it because it is out of date. It was decided that a formal binder isn't necessary and we will provide community service and other information as it is required.
- 5.7 Status of application** - Dave Bremner reported that the application to sponsor the Sarakby family was forwarded from the United Church of Canada (UCC) to the Government a week ago. He noted that now that the Government has fulfilled the commitment to bring in 25,000 refugees, the people sent to screen for medical and security risks have returned to Canada. Dave received a list from the UCC of 19 potential families that could be sponsored privately. He, Linda James and Carolyn Matheson selected six families and replied to the UCC only to receive the reply that none of them had been cleared for medical and security acceptance. It was reported on the news this week that John McCallum, the Minister of Immigration and

Refugees had announced that now that the commitment to bring 25,000 refugees has been filled, the new emphasis will be on family reunification. Linda James noted that as of March 1st all privately sponsored refugees will have to pay for transportation. There has been no success in settling government sponsored refugees in Brockville and all the families initially housed in a hotel in Ottawa have been placed in housing.

Four Rivers Presbytery have sponsored 4 families in partnership with the Mosque in Kingston and with a large donation they now plan to bring in relatives of those families.

Action - Dave Bremner will contact Dawn Clark of Four Rivers Presbytery to see if a new family could be settled here.

Linda James noted that the house on Bennett Street which was donated for a year has already been held empty for 6 months.

Since the Presbyterian group welcomed a family of 10 so quickly, it was **Moved** by Barb Lunman, **Seconded** by Lynne Galvin that we open our criteria of a family up to 10 people. **Carried.**

6.0 Other Information

6.1 Refugee Experience - Rev. Marianne Emig Munro described the experience the sponsoring group led by the Presbyterian Church has had since their family of 10 arrived in a blizzard a month ago. Their application went to the Presbyterian Church of Canada on February 5th, was approved and the family arrived in Ottawa on February 16th. They did not have passports but had permanent residency documents. Their house was not available until March 1st and they lived with a family for a few days and then in the Bennett Street House. They are Muslim and have little English. They had been in Lebanon, living in two rooms in a hospital where the father worked in the garden and the mother in the laundry. They arrived with winter clothing. Marianne stressed that the volunteers tried not to overwhelm them for the first several days. This family is warm and affectionate and open to hugs.

Education: The Board of Education has been very helpful and accommodating with their integration. The primary school children are at Commonwealth School, older children at BCI and the father is taking English classes at T.R. Leger School. The mother has chosen

not to take ESL classes yet. The children were allowed to begin school before immunization was brought up to date.

Finances: Since this is a blended visa sponsorship the government provides \$1,400 per month for 6 months (months 2-7). This is not enough to support the family and the sponsors have \$30,000 with plans for more fundraising during the year. They will also receive the child tax credit. They have set up a bank account at Scotia Bank and the family has a debit card. Scotia Bank has a special package for refugees. They have been given help by a volunteer with setting up a budget.

Medical: They were immediately registered for OHIP at Service Ontario and used the form from Scotia Bank which provided their address. They also have the Federal Health Plan for a year. They are registered with two doctors who work together, a woman for the female family members and a man for the father and son. An Egyptian dentist who speaks Arabic will look after the family. Berne Reesor, a retired dentist, screened the family and the father needs some dental work but the children are pretty good.

Shopping: All the foods they need are available at Food Basics and Superstore and Superstore also has Halal meat. Ahmad has taken them to a Halal butcher in Pakenham. They like jasmine rice, pita bread and lots of fresh fruits and vegetables. Volunteers shopped with them for the first few weeks but now they go on their own. They plan to plant a garden behind their house.

Communication: They have been hooked up to internet that is less expensive than cable and they use an internet phone. There are also a few cell phones in the family and they have English/Arabic dictionaries from Amazon. The city initially funded a translator.

House: Enbridge and Hydro both waved set-up charges. Furniture was all donated but new mattresses were purchased.

Privacy: The sponsorship group is respecting the privacy of the family and might suggest a newspaper article in the future. It is important that no pictures be made public.

Marianne stressed that this is a learning process and each situation will be different. They have not introduced the city bus yet but will

do that soon. They need instruction in use of seatbelts and the group purchased new children's car seats to meet current safety standards.

6.2 Service of gratitude and hope - It was decided that in order to keep up the momentum while we wait, we would have an event with all participating United Churches. A Service with music and stories will be held at Lyn United Church on Sunday May 15th at 4 pm followed by a pot luck supper. If possible, one of the settled families will be asked to tell their story.

7.0 Next meeting date: Thursday April 14th at 10:30 a.m.

The meeting adjourned at 12:20 p.m.

Eileen Doner

Acting Secretary