

March Update (revised):

The Joint Board has approved the committee continue to work toward a memorandum of understanding with Team Idleb to sponsor Waseem and Rasha to Canada.

(Originally, this updated included two pictures of Waseem and Rasha and their last name but they have been removed because they are concerned their case will be discovered online.

The main purpose of the photos was to contrast Rasha when on holiday in Turkey and while in Saudi Arabia where she is required to wear the abaya. She is also effectively under house arrest during the day since she is not free to leave the home unaccompanied by a male relative. So while Waseem is at work, she is required to stay at home. This is quite different from the freedom she grew up with in Syria.)

On Feb. 27th we met with 5 members of group. Team Idleb is now known as OC Refugee (OC stands for Ottawa Centre.) Same energetic people, they just wanted a better name to describe their group.

We worked on the wording of the memorandum of understanding and the assignment of roles. They are taking the lead on almost all parts of the sponsorship with support from OKPC Refugee Committee where required (for instance representing the United Church and using Trinity's charitable organization status for fundraising.)

Trinity has now registered at CanadaHelps and online donations can now be made through that organization's webpage for Trinity United Kars. This has been set up to allow donations to be directed to the refugee fund, as well as Trinity's memorial and general funds, so the page can continue to be used after the refugee project is finished. Aside from allowing donations to be made online, the CanadaHelps account handles the charitable contribution receipts and deposits the donations directly into the bank account. This reduces the stress on treasurers.

Fundraising is the responsibility of OC Refugee and the congregations will not be asked to fund this sponsorship. Anyone from the church may make a donation to the refugee fund over and above their regular church givings. To do so, we ask that you use the offering plate or the mail, marking the cheque or envelope "Refugee Fund". This ensures the treasurers know where to direct the extra donation. You will receive your receipt from the church at the end of the year as usual. Please do not use CanadaHelps if you are a regular giver. You can point that website out to friends and family interested in supporting our sponsorship if they prefer to donate online. (Link below)

OC Refugee has also started an application for funding from United for Refugees. They will be planning major fundraising events and as soon as we have details, we'll be letting you know, should you wish to attend.

Our next meeting will be on March 12th after the St. James breakfast. Please feel free to drop by and meet these energetic young adults and talk with them directly.

www.TrinityUnited.Org/donate.html

February Update:

When we met last month, the OKPC Refugee committee decided to pursue a partnership with a group from Centretown and Lowertown to see if this would be the best use of our energies.

Many of you may have seen members of this group when they came out for the St. James Breakfast. The group is made up of young adults, are full of energy and ideas and have been a joy to work with so far. The group brings a mixture of talents, all useful and a passion for social justice.

They have identified a couple, Waseem and Rasha who are currently in Saudi Arabia teaching English at an international school there. This coming December their work visas expire and at the point they will be deported back to Syria.

Since leaving to work in Saudi Arabia, Rasha's parents have escaped and are now in Germany.

Waseem's parents refused to leave their town near Aleppo but we heard in the past week that the town is effectively gone as a result of the latest military action in the area and Waseem's parents are now at the border of Turkey.

As a committee we are working to draw up a detailed memorandum of understanding with Team Idleb (named after Waseem's home province in Syria) which will outline the responsibilities the churches and the community group will take on. Once we have that, we will get this approved by the Joint Board.

In the meantime, events move quickly. Two other rural pastoral charges have asked to join in with us and Waseem's cousin, his wife and 4 children, are now in Saudi Arabia and would also like to come to Canada.

We meet again today to move forward as quickly as we can. From you we need prayers, encouragement, and if we identify you as having a particular skill we need, we hope you will consider responding to our request for help. There will be several roles for people with specialized skills to play in the process.

Team Idleb understand fundraising is their responsibility but are confident that they can tap into the desire of their cohort to contribute and that there will be no problems raising enough, not just for Waseem and Rasha but also for the cousin and his family.

For now, our focus remains on Waseem and Rasha and we will cross additional bridges as they present themselves.

January Update:

In January the congregations of the Osgoode Kars Pastoral Charge voted to create a Refugee Committee to look into sponsoring a refugee family.

The OKPC Refugee Committee was put in touch with a group from Lowertown looking for a Sponsorship Agreement Holder to help them bring to Canada some Syrian Refugees currently in Saudi Arabia.