

Practical Ways to Reach Out to Refugees, Immigrants, and Visitors from other Countries

“God in His providence has brought men to our very doors and thrust them, as it were, into our arms, that they might learn the truth, and be qualified to do a work we could not do in getting the light before men of other tongues.” (Ev 570) Yet often our churches co-exist in the same community, sometimes in the same block, with refugees and other recent immigrants for years, without reaching out to them not because we don’t care, but because we don’t know where to start, whether we will be able to communicate, and how to reach out to them without offending them.

It is actually much easier than it seems. If you have God’s love in your heart, it will shine through!

You Can Help!

- Pray for that God will lead you to some of His “guests” from other countries.
- Watch for unexpected guests at your church who seem shy and may not be fluent in English. Get to know them. Ask where they are from, how long they have been in America, and where they live. Be creative. Use “sign language” or paper and pencil. Find a way to communicate. (Where there is a will, there is a way!)
- Visit the guests from other countries who visit your church (even if you are not the pastor). Their hearts will be warmed to know someone cares.
- Invite them to give a special music, read a scripture, or pray in their language. Involve them.
- If no refugees or immigrants are visiting your church, go out and find them!
- Contact a local refugee assistance organization or your local department of public assistance and ask what refugees are in the area. They may even have a demographics density map.
- Watch for people of other nationalities, at your local grocery store, post office, or gas station. Say “Hi!” Ask if they speak another language. Find out what language they speak. Learn a word or two in their language. Make friends. Exchange contact information. Invite them to your home and visit theirs. (It’s not impolite in their culture. In fact, it is a sign that you really care.) Invite them to church, but don’t be offended if they’re not ready. Keep up the friendship. Ask your church to pray for your new friends. When you find fresh fruits or vegetables on sale, buy an extra bag and drop it by their home, unexpectedly.
- Contact a local College or University and find out if they have foreign exchange students and, if so, from which countries. Imagine yourself in their situation, often with no transportation, and few, if any, American friends. Be a friend. Invite them to join you for special events and holidays. Provide transportation. Take them shopping. Ask them about their country.

- When you find refugees, immigrants, or visitors from other cultures, tell your church about them. Ask your church to pray for a way to reach out to them. Plan a special awareness event and invite someone from the community to tell you about their country, culture and experience.
 - Invite them to your community services center.
 - Help children with homework.
 - Play with the children and find and plan constructive and educational activities for them.
 - Take a child by the hand, and you take the parent by the heart.
 - Provide music lessons for the children. Help them get an instrument.
 - Offer to help them learn to drive, study for their citizenship test, etc.
 - Picture yourself in their situation, and ask God for wisdom to anticipate their needs.
 - Ask them what their needs are.
- When a few refugees begin to come to church:
 - Provide transportation to those who would like to attend but cannot.
 - Provide Bibles, Sabbath School lessons, and other materials in their language. (See refugeeministries.org for resources, or contact Terri Saelee, coordinator of Adventist Refugee and Immigrant Ministries in the North American Division).
 - Provide a room for them to study the Sabbath School lesson together in their language.
 - Ask what they need. Prayerfully find ways to help. Remember God has a special love for refugees and often works unusual miracles in their behalf. (See the book of Exodus.)
 - Help their children to be able to attend Adventist schools.
 - Tell your local conference, and North American Division Refugee and Immigrant Ministries about them so you can receive updates and additional resources as they become available.
- As the group grows,
 - Appoint, or ask them to appoint, a representative of their group to be on your church board. Give the representative some time at each board meeting to give an update of the progress, needs, and challenges the group is facing.
 - Keep dialogue open with the representative as well and other members as their group grows and the needs change.
 - Expedite membership transfers to show your eagerness to have them in your church.
 - Invite an Adventist pastor to speak to them in their own language and help them organize their group to function more effectively. (Contact ARIM for details.)
 - Watch for the time when they will need a time and place to conduct full worship services in their language. Facilitate their search.
 - Spawn a church plant. Enjoy the fellowship of these precious, gentle brothers and sisters in Christ, but don't discourage them from launching out on their own as a separate and distinct congregation so that they can more effectively reach unreached people of their language group.

If there are no refugees, immigrants, or temporary foreign visitors in your area, you can still extend a welcoming hand of friendship to them.

- Pray for these precious souls God is sending to us and let us at ARIM* know that you are praying
 - That God will put them in touch with caring Adventists near their homes.
 - That God will impress our members, who live in cities with refugees, immigrants, and temporary foreign visitors to reach out unselfishly to our Karen brothers and sisters.
- Sponsor refugee children to attend an Adventist School.
- Sponsor a lay leader to attend lay pastor training in his language.
- Help sponsor trained ethnic pastors to organize Karen congregations where Karen Adventists can worship in a language they can understand, and be trained to reach out to other Karen people who have not yet heard the Everlasting Gospel.
- Donate to provide funds to reach out to reach out to these “strangers in our midst”.
- Donate funds or time and expertise to set up or maintain websites with resources for refugees, immigrants, and foreign visitors and those who are reaching out to them.

For more information on reaching out to refugees, immigrants, and God’s other guests from around the world, keep abreast of new resources added frequently to www.refugeeministries.org or email Terri Saelee, coordinator of North American Division Adventist Refugee and Immigrant Ministries Terri.Saelee@nad.adventist.org. May God richly bless you as you Welcome God’s Guests!