

#RefugeesWelcome Dinners Breaking Bread, Building Relationships and Walking Together

Breaking Bread and Sharing a Meal

Sitting down together to share a meal is a timeless tradition that cuts across all cultures and religions. The act of communities inviting recently arrived immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers holds immense meaning, offering a welcoming space to build relationships and learn from one another. This is a great way to show hospitality and to urge Members of Congress to support refugee resettlement. This holiday season is an especially meaningful time to participate in an event, but it is still a powerful event anytime of the year. Many civic groups and congregations have hosted welcome dinners that also double as a fundraising event to collect donations and funds to help refugees rebuild their lives in the United States. See the documentary, *Welcome to Shelbyville*, for examples of how sharing a dinner can break down barriers and transform communities. (www.welcometoshelbyvillefilm.com/)

Logistics:

1. Contact your [local refugee resettlement office](#) to build a relationship. Ask them if you can be helpful with any events they might be planning. Ask them if the idea of a community dinner is one that will work for their office, and if so, if they know of refugees who might be interested.
2. Meet one-to-one with key leaders in your congregation or community who are interested in helping.
3. Once you have the resettlement office and community leaders committed to assisting with the event, sign your event up on the #RefugeesWelcome Dinners map at bit.ly/WelcomeWeekendReg.
4. Understand the issues being discussed in your community around refugee resettlement.
5. Identify the best space for the event: a home, church, temple or community center.
6. Divide tasks for outreach, cooking, taking pictures and other logistics.
7. Consider translation needs and ways to ensure the meal includes options for everyone.
8. Invite your Representative, Senator, or their staff to be part of the dinner
9. Contact Megan Cagle with Church World Service at mcagle@cwsglobal.org for assistance with media outreach so your dinner can help urge Congress to support refugee resettlement!

Building Relationships

As you share your meal, take time to get to know one another and build a relationship that will go beyond this one meal. Discuss where you come from and your family traditions.

Sample discussion topics include:

1. Identify common core values, passions and tastes. Have a few icebreaker questions ahead of time like what is your favorite food? What do you like most about the town we live in?
2. Story of self: Have everyone tell their story in 2-3 minutes about what transforming events in their lives shaped them. Be respectful if someone does not want to share details about painful experiences, and find ways to focus on commonalities and sharing different cultural traditions. <http://billmoyers.com/content/how-to-tell-your-story-of-self/>
3. Ask refugees how you can support them and identify ways to work together in the future.

Walking Together

Think together about what the next steps in the relationship could be as you continue to walk together on this journey. There are multiple possible opportunities and outcomes.

1. Invite refugees to speak at your congregation's weekly service or education classes.
2. Host another larger dinner with more people from ally and newcomer communities.
3. Set a time to meet with your local, state and national policymakers about the importance of policies that support refugee resettlement and address conflicts around the world that force people to flee their homes.
4. Share pictures and stories on social media. Make sure refugees provide consent and feel comfortable with their stories being shared publicly, since identifying information could impact family members back in their home countries.
5. Write an Opinion Editorial about the dinner or contact a local media outlet to run a story about the shared meal together.

Contact information for refugee resettlement organizations

While it's best to build relationships directly with a refugee resettlement office near you (see list: bit.ly/RefugeeResettlementSites), you can also contact national resettlement agency staff:

- Church World Service: Jen Smyers, jsmyers@cwsglobal.org
- Episcopal Migration Ministries: Lacy Broemel, lbroemel@episcopalchurch.org
- HIAS: Elizabeth Mandelman, elizabeth.mandelman@hias.org
- International Rescue Committee: Anna Greene, anna.greene@rescue.org
- Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service: Brittney Nystrom, bnystrom@lirs.org
- U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops: Matt Wilch, mwilch@usccb.org
- U.S. Committee for Refugees & Immigrants: Esmeralda Lopez, elopez@uscrdc.org
- Ethiopian Community Development Council: Lucy Negash - lnegash@ecdcus.org
- World Relief: Jenny Yang, jgyang@worldrelief.org
- Refugee Council USA: Shaina Ward, sward@rcusa.org