

United Church exploring possibility of refugee sponsorship

St. Paul's United Church in Bancroft is looking into what it might do to help out in the current Syrian refugee crisis. The Board of Elders unanimously expressed interest in refugee sponsorship, and is holding a meeting for all members of the area United Church congregations. Invitations have been sent to the Anglican and Catholic parishes as well. The organizers stress that the meeting is open to people from all faiths; the invitation is to the total community. The meeting itself will take place in the sanctuary of the Bancroft church on Tuesday, Feb. 2, starting at 7 p.m.

"This will be the start of a conversation," said Rev. Lynn Watson, the minister of St. Paul's. The meeting will try to assess the community's willingness to get involved in the refugee situation. If there is interest, the question of the various types of involvement will be discussed, from fund-raising to actual settlement in Bancroft. Rev. Watson further stated that any effort would be enhanced if it was undertaken by a partnership among a number of local groups.

St. Paul's has played a role in a refugee crisis before. In 1979, it sponsored a Vietnamese family. This was part of the national effort to help the "boat people" fleeing their homeland after conflicts with Cambodia and China. In total, more than 50,000 Vietnamese came to Canada at that time.

Rev. Watson commented on the symbolism of the locale. "We will discuss providing sanctuary in the church's sanctuary," she noted. She also stated that she was motivated to help "by my ministerial understanding of the responsibilities of Christians. It's very appropriate to discuss the issue in a Christian church, since Jesus and the Holy Family were refugees themselves, when they had to flee into Egypt to avoid the murderous reign of King Herod. In another Christian sense, we're asking if there's room at the inn for people displaced from their homes."

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