



Wishing You a Blessed Lent

As we journey through Lent, this sacred period of 40 days that mirrors Christ’s time in the wilderness, let us reflect on the Paschal Mystery, Jesus’ passion, death, and resurrection. This season calls us to prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, offering us a privileged opportunity to renew our relationship with the Lord, ensuring that our lives are conformed to His teachings, and preparing us for the joyous celebration of Easter.

May this Lent be a time of profound spiritual growth, paving the way for a joy-filled Easter. Let us rejoice in Christ’s victory over death, embracing His resurrection and sharing in the Alleluia of new beginnings. Wishing you and your family a blessed Lent and a joyous Easter season.



What We’ve Accomplished Together

Together we, along with many parish volunteers, and cosponsors, have welcomed 377 refugees to Canada.

Here, as newcomers, they have begun to live a life filled with hope and renewed optimism. Together, we have initiated the resettlement application to assist 728 refugees, paving the way for their eventual arrival to Canada. Here, they will live in freedom. This is a testimony to what we are able to accomplish together as we respond to the Lord’s invitation “I was a stranger and you welcomed Me”.

The infographic, included on page 2, and which is available on our website, summarizes the many accomplishments of 2023 that we can celebrate together. With the help of the Lord and through the generosity of Catholics throughout the Archdiocese,

Continue on page 2

Ensuring Sustainable Resettlement

The primary objective of the Private Sponsorship of Refugees program is to rescue refugees from their current plight, offering them a new home where they can live in peace and safety. Once the sponsored refugee arrives in Canada, sponsors play a crucial role in facilitating their integration into Canadian society, fostering self-reliance, and promoting active participation.

In addition to promoting linguistic and social integration, sponsors must work diligently with newcomers to ensure they take active steps toward economic integration.

The Importance of Securing Employment: While learning English is pivotal for integration, securing employment, including entry-level positions necessary to gain Canadian experience, has become increasingly vital, especially given the current economic environment and the crisis in affordable rental accommodations. Stable employment is crucial, particularly considering that landlords now often demand a stable employment history from applicants.

Continue from page 2

Table of Contents

Wishing you a Blessed Lent.....Page	1
Ensuring Sustainable Resettlement.....Page	1
What We’ve Accomplished Together.....Page	1
Program For Sudan Conflict.....Page	3
Program For Israel-Hamas Conflict.....Page	3
Christians Persecution in Iraq & Syria.....Page	4
Iraq: Country Report.....Page	4
A Sponsor’s Experience.....Page	7

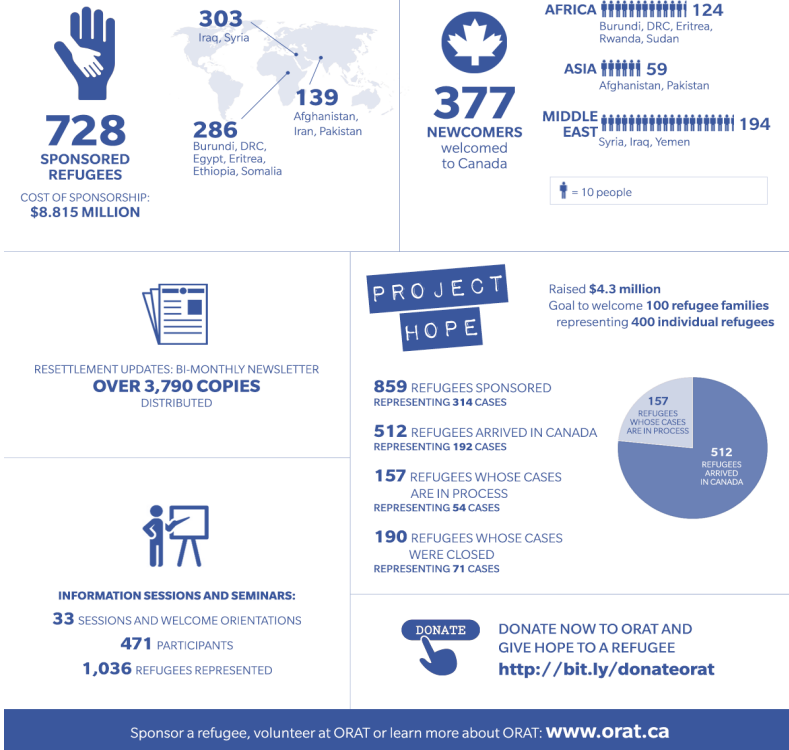
What We've Accomplished Together

Continued from page 1

we have been able to raise over \$4.3MM to assist in the resettlement of refugees from many corners of the world.

Since the inception of the Project Hope Initiative, we have welcomed over 512 refugees to Canada, with another 157 refugees yet to come. In total, 859 refugees have been helped because of the generosity of many, who have given of their time, talent and treasure to respond to this urgent need of our time. It is indeed a testimony of the love of God's people for suffering humanity.

As we know, numbers do not tell the whole story. The reality of these numbers are found in the lives of those who have been touched by this important work of the Archdiocese. We have included in our newsletters the stories of refugees that we have had the privilege to help. In this newsletter, we have incorporated the experience of the Good Shepherd Parish Refugee Committee. We trust that their story will serve as an inspiration to you and provide insight into the level of dedication and effort required to fulfill this mission.



728 SPONSORED REFUGEES
COST OF SPONSORSHIP: \$8.815 MILLION

303 Iraq, Syria
139 Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan
286 Burundi, DRC, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia

377 NEWCOMERS welcomed to Canada

AFRICA 124 (Burundi, DRC, Eritrea, Rwanda, Sudan)
ASIA 59 (Afghanistan, Pakistan)
MIDDLE EAST 194 (Syria, Iraq, Yemen)

1 person = 10 people

PROJECT HOPE
Raised \$4.3 million
Goal to welcome 100 refugee families representing 400 individual refugees

859 REFUGEES SPONSORED REPRESENTING 314 CASES
512 REFUGEES ARRIVED IN CANADA REPRESENTING 192 CASES
157 REFUGEES WHOSE CASES ARE IN PROCESS REPRESENTING 54 CASES
190 REFUGEES WHOSE CASES WERE CLOSED REPRESENTING 71 CASES

RESETTLEMENT UPDATES: BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OVER 3,790 COPIES DISTRIBUTED

INFORMATION SESSIONS AND SEMINARS: 33 SESSIONS AND WELCOME ORIENTATIONS 471 PARTICIPANTS 1,036 REFUGEES REPRESENTED

DONATE DONATE NOW TO ORAT AND GIVE HOPE TO A REFUGEE <http://bit.ly/donateorat>

Sponsor a refugee, volunteer at ORAT or learn more about ORAT: www.orat.ca

Ensuring Sustainable Resettlement

Continued from page 1

This becomes essential for newcomers as they enter the second year of their arrival in Canada and need to secure their own rental accommodation.

At times, it may be necessary for newcomers to work while attending English as a Second Language (ESL) classes.

Sponsors are encouraged to explore their networks for potential job opportunities. All employment income can be used to bridge any expense gaps, and employment income exceeding 50% of the monthly Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) can also be utilized to lower sponsorship costs.

Resist Over-Supporting Newcomers: Often, Immigration Canada's financial support guidelines for newcomers, aligned with prevailing social assistance rates, fall short of actual expenses incurred. Sponsors may be tempted to over-support newcomers by providing funds beyond those prescribed by Immigration Canada.

It is crucial for newcomers to learn to live within their means,

especially if they cannot secure employment and must rely on social assistance in their second year in Canada. Sponsors are tasked with assisting newcomers in creating a sustainable budget, which reflects the worst-case scenario should the newcomer need to rely on social assistance after the completion of the one-year settlement period.

In addition to securing employment, sponsors are encouraged to consider the following as ways of bridging the gap between RAP and actual expenses:



Continue on page 6

New Pathway for Affected Persons by The Conflict in Sudan

Source: RSTP Bulletin January 5, 2024



On December 28, 2023, [the Government of Canada announced](#) a new family-based humanitarian pathway to permanent residence for persons who resided in Sudan when the conflict began on April 15, 2023.

To be eligible, the Principal Applicant must:

- Have been living in Sudan since April 15, 2023.
- Be outside of Canada the time the application is submitted or in Canada when the application for permanent residence is made. *
- Intend to live in a province or territory other than Quebec.
- Not have a [durable solution](#) available to them within a reasonable period of time.
- Be a child (of any age), grandchild, parent, grandparent, or sibling of a Canadian citizen or permanent resident who is living in Canada.
- Have their family member in Canada agree to support them for one year after arrival and have provided a statutory declaration from the family member that attests to this.

*Note: If the applicant is in Canada, they must have valid temporary resident status.

The family member in Canada must:

- Be a Canadian citizen or permanent resident who is 18 years or older.
- Live in Canada outside of Quebec.
- Be eligible (i.e., is not subject of a removal order, not detained, have no criminal convictions, not in default of any sponsorship undertakings or support payments and is not receiving social assistance other than disability).

- Meets the financial requirements and agrees to support the Principal Applicant and any accompanying family members for one year after their arrival in Canada.
- Has not, and will not, accept any financial compensation from the applicant.

Further details about the requirements for both the Principal Applicant and the family member in Canada, including the financial requirements for family members and their financial and nonfinancial support responsibilities, are available [here](#).

Please click [here](#) for future information about this program.

The temporary public policy that enables this new pathway will come into effect on February 27, 2024, and will end when 3,250 applications have been received for processing or one year after taking effect.

Immigration Measures to Help Israel-Hamas Conflict Victims

Source: RSTP Bulletin January 5, 2024



On December 21, 2023, [the Government of Canada announced](#) the following temporary immigration measures to support people affected by the conflict:

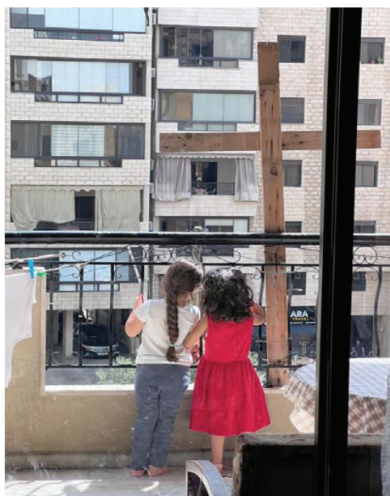
Fee-exempt study or open work permits for family members of Canadian citizens or permanent residents who have left Israel, the West Bank or Gaza since the start of the current conflict, and for Israeli and Palestinians already in Canada who feel unsafe returning to the region.

Prioritizing the processing of all existing and new permanent residence applications for Palestinians within family-based streams.

Please click [here](#) for further information about this program.

Christians Persecution in Iraq & Syria

Source: Excerpts from "A Demand for Action's" (ADFAs) Report



Two refugee girls from Iraq, whose families were visited Loyal Nehme and ADFA's local Lebanese team during the interview report

The year 2023 marks the 20th anniversary of the illegal invasion of Iraq and the subsequent overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime. The war not only altered Iraq's demographics but also had far-reaching repercussions for neighboring Syria. In 2011, eight years after the start of the Iraq War, Syria became embroiled in a distressing conflict. Moreover, countries

such as Turkey, Jordan,

and Lebanon were profoundly affected by the ensuing enormous refugee crisis. The wars had bitter consequences for all Iraqis and Syrians. Hundreds of thousands were killed, and millions were forced to flee their homes. The most affected religious groups, by numbers, are Shia and Sunni Muslims. However, the indigenous population—Christians and Yazidis—have suffered immensely from crimes against humanity and genocide. They have often been hit the hardest; at first internally displaced within their own countries, then forcibly displaced fleeing from threats of extermination, massacres, slavery, forced conversions, and surviving bombings of religious sites by extremist groups.

Persistence of Christian Exodus

Although nine years have passed since the threat of extermination by the ISIS terrorist group in 2014,

The exodus of Iraqi Christians has resulted in a drastic decrease in the Christian population of Iraq.

Christians are still impelled to leave. The military defeat of ISIS in 2017, did not end the marginalization and persecution that they continue to suffer. According to Louis Sako, Patriarch of the Chaldean Catholic Church, approximately 20 Christian families fled Iraq each month in 2022.

Continue on page 5

EDUCATION CORNER

Iraq - Country Report



Iraq, officially the Republic of Iraq, is a country in West Asia and in the geopolitical region known as the Middle East. The country is bordered by Turkey to the north, Iran to the east, the Persian Gulf and Kuwait to the southeast, Saudi Arabia to the south, Jordan to the southwest, and Syria to the west.

Geo-History: Iraq's geo-history is a tapestry woven with the threads of ancient civilizations, including the Sumerians, Akkadians, Babylonians, and Assyrians, situated in the fertile land of Mesopotamia. Successive empires, such as the Achaemenid Persians, Hellenistic rulers, and the Sassanians, left their mark until the Islamic conquest in the 7th century. Baghdad's establishment as a center of learning during the Abbasid Caliphate marked a significant era. The Mongol invasion in 1258 and subsequent Ottoman rule followed. Iraq gained independence in 1932, enduring political upheavals, wars, and the aftermath of the 2003 Iraq War. The nation's geo-history reflects a complex interplay of civilizations, conquests, and contemporary challenges, shaping its identity as a historically rich and dynamic region.

Religious Affiliation: Iraq's religious landscape is characterized by a diverse mix of religious affiliations. The majority of Iraq's population is Muslim, with the two main branches being Shia Islam and Sunni Islam. Shia Muslims constitute a significant portion, particularly in the southern regions, including cities like Najaf and Karbala, which hold immense religious significance for Shia Islam. Sunni Muslims are predominant in the central and western parts of the country. Additionally, there are smaller religious communities, including Christians, Yazidis, and Mandaean, each with their unique religious traditions.

Despite historical coexistence, Iraq has faced

Continue on page 3

Christians Persecution in Iraq & Syria

Source: Excerpts from "A Demand for Action's" (ADFAs) Report

Continued from page 4

Syria: Dwindling Christian Population

The Syrian civil war, which began in 2011, has had a devastating impact on Christians who were targeted for genocide by extremist groups like ISIS and al-Qaeda affiliates. Thirty-three villages in Syria's northeast region of Khabour are emptied of their indigenous Christian population including such cities as Idlib, Ras Raqqa whose inhabitants had falling under control. Although Maaloula are now ISIS control, populations have Prior to the war, population in nearly 1.5 million, plummeted to approximately 300,000. Although these numbers are hard to verify, there is no doubt that Christians are actively fleeing Syria.

Syrian Christians declined from 1.5 million in 2011 to 300,000 in 2022.

Iraq: Drastic Population Decrease, Ongoing Challenges, Discrimination

The exodus of Iraqi Christians has resulted in a drastic decrease in the Christian population of Iraq, from approximately 1.5 million in 2003 to fewer than 150,000 in 2022.

The 2022 U.S. Department of State Report on International Religious Freedom in Iraq highlights

[Continue on page 6](#)

EDUCATION CORNER

Iraq - Country Report

[Continued from page 2](#)

sectarian tensions, especially in the post-2003 era, influencing the country's socio-political dynamics and contributing to challenges in achieving religious harmony and coexistence.

Refugee Outflow: Iraq has experienced significant refugee outflows primarily driven by conflicts, violence, and political instability. Over the years, waves of Iraqis have sought refuge in neighboring countries and beyond, with Syria, Jordan, and Turkey hosting substantial numbers of Iraqi refugees. The displacement has been fueled by events such as the Iraq War, sectarian tensions, and the rise of extremist groups. Iraq, with its diverse religious landscape, has witnessed members of religious minority groups, such as Christians, Yazidis, and Mandaeans, seeking refuge due to targeted violence and discrimination. The displacement of these religious minorities has been particularly prominent during periods of heightened conflict, notably after the 2003 Iraq War and the subsequent rise of ISIS. Many religious refugees from Iraq have sought safety in neighboring countries and beyond, contributing to the broader complexity of the regional refugee crisis. International efforts and humanitarian organizations have been involved in providing aid and support to these religious refugees, but the challenges persist, and the situation remains dynamic, influenced by ongoing geopolitical developments in the region.

ORAT's Response to the Persecution of Religious Minorities: The Iraqi community is the largest population ORAT has assisted since its inception. To date, ORAT has submitted applications to sponsor 4,436 Iraqi refugees, with the vast majority being Christian. Of these, 2,840 Iraqi refugees have already arrived in Canada, with an additional 728 Iraqi refugee currently in process. As part of our efforts to help the suffering Iraqi community, ORAT conducted mission trips to Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey to identify persecuted Iraqi Christians who had no family in Canada to sponsor them. Through this effort, ORAT and the supporting parishes successfully resettled 28 Iraqi families (representing 75 individuals) to Canada.



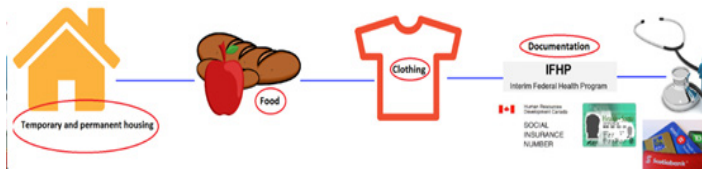
Chaldean Christians pray in St. George's Church in Irbil, Iraq, on Monday, July 31, 2022. Today, the number of Christians in Iraq is 150,000, compared to 1.5 million in 2003. PHOTO: AP Photo/Julie Zimmermann/Metrography

Ensuring Sustainable Resettlement

Continued from page 2

Use of Canada Child Benefit (CCB) & Other Government Entitlement Programs: The Canada Child Benefit (CCB) is a Federal Government subsidy program providing tax-free monthly benefits to eligible families raising children under 18. Newcomers should utilize these funds to bridge expense gaps and apply for other available government entitlement programs, such as the GST/HST rebate. If necessary CGs may consider a loan option, advancing funds to newcomers while awaiting CCB application processing and benefit release.

Reviewing Expenses: Sponsors are encouraged to review expenses with the newcomer, with a view to eliminating unnecessary expenses and/or taking advantage of less-expensive alternatives, like using in-store flyer specials for groceries, and purchasing second-hand clothing.



Use of In-Kind Donations: Soliciting in-kind donations such as furniture and clothing provides a means for Constituent Groups (CGs) to utilize limited sponsorship funds to address expense gaps. CGs should begin this work upon receiving the Pre-Notice of Arrival Transmission (Pre-NAT), indicating the imminent arrival of refugees.

Monies Brought by the Refugee to Canada: Assets and funds brought by the refugee to Canada can be directed towards addressing expense gaps. Funds exceeding Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) guidelines can also be used to lower sponsorship costs. CGs should work with refugees to complete the asset declaration form upon arrival in Canada.

For further details and resources, please click [here](#) to access the CG Handbook.

By implementing these strategies, sponsors can ensure a sustainable resettlement for newcomers, fostering their successful integration into Canadian society.

Christians Persecution in Iraq & Syria

*Source: Excerpts from “A Demand for Action’s” (ADFAs) Report
Continued from page 5*

that while security conditions in many parts of the country have improved, there are frequent reports of societal violence, by Iran-backed militias.

Security Conditions and Social Violence: Members of non-Muslim minority groups have reported abductions, threats, pressure, and harassment to force them to conform to Islamic customs.

Constraints Imposed by the Official Iraqi Constitution: The new constitution in Iraq prohibits Muslims from converting to other religions. Children born to Christian and Muslim parents are automatically considered Muslim. Iraqi civil laws facilitate the conversion of non-Muslims to Islam while prohibiting the conversion of Muslims to other religions. They also require the administrative designation of children as Muslims.

Recent Developments and Implications: After the ADFA team conducted interviews and research for this report, dramatic changes occurred in Iraq when President Abdul Latif Rashid revoked the official status of Patriarch Louis Sako as the official head of the Chaldean Church, Iraq’s largest Christian denomination. This decree not only undermines Patriarch Sako’s official position as leader of the Church but also his authority to administer Church properties and endowments. Patriarch Sako has left Baghdad and sought refuge in the Kurdistan Region (KRI), an autonomous region in the northern part of the country. This development has left the Christian

*In 2002, Iraq had 1.2–
2.1 million Christians.
but by 2022, there were
around 150,000*

community in an even more vulnerable position and will contribute to even more leaving the country.

For further details and to access the complete report, please click [here](#).

A Sponsor's Experience

Good Shepherd Parish, Thornhill

On June 8th, 2011, Luciano Moro introduced Good Shepherd Parish Refugee Committee, to the Office for Refugees (ORAT) and the steps we might take to begin our journey assisting a refugee family in need, identified from ORAT's mission trips. With great support from our pastor, Father John Weber,



we welcomed a refugee family of two parents and four girls on February 25th, 2016. We were very well prepared, and the entire parish rejoiced when we celebrated Easter Sunday Mass with the family.

What steps of preparation resulted in our success for resettlement? As a community of faith, we remembered them in prayer at all the weekend Masses. We advertised, from the ambo, the need for a house to rent and we accepted an offer of a large empty home at the end of Mass that day.

What worked perfectly for us in acquiring everything that was needed was the following plan: On tables in the church hall, the signage read: Household articles; Bathroom items; Food necessities; School materials; Clothing for everyone – age etc. Attached to the item name was a card on which the parishioner signed their name, phone number and the item. The donor took the itemized paper, and we kept the information card. Many cards from various tables were often taken by a single individual. The requirement was that the purchased products were to be brought to the church the following weekend. 100% success! The K of C men delivered the boxes all labelled to the newly acquired house that very day. The committee was there to receive them. The utter joy in our parish that day was unbelievable. A few days before the family's arrival, the committee came together for a celebratory dinner in the furnished home.

Arrival day was exciting for everyone as we, the

Office of ORAT and committee, met the family at the airport and transported them to their new residence. The following days were very busy for everyone e.g. school registrations, government applications etc. We arranged a schedule whereupon families signed up to prepare and deliver dinner at 5:30 pm every evening for a month. This was a great gift for both families as they met and explained the meal they had prepared.

I will never forget the 26 trips I made to the dentist office with the children in those first few months. We were all so grateful to the Government of Ontario for this service.



The newcomer family were French speaking from Ivory Coast originally and so the parents attended Language school daily. In time the father was employed in a factory, riding his bicycle to save bus fare and he continues to do so to this day, 7 years later. The family

welcomed a baby brother in September of 2017. You can imagine how ecstatic they all were! They were living in a two-bedroom apartment, very crowded but very happy.

The finance committee was made up of three marvellous individuals who met every Friday evening in their home to teach and guide the parents and two eldest daughters, both of whom began working part-time within a year, along with attending high school. The team presented a budget and money/cash that they would need for the following few weeks. At this meeting the father would present the family report of expenditures and receipts for every penny that had been spent – bus transfers, food receipts, etc. This meeting schedule went on for the entire first year.

Once the year of responsibility for sponsorship completed, the committee dispersed but my sister and I continued to be very involved in all matters in which they required assistance. The schools called us regularly and we met with the family weekly. We were family and continue to be. The parents and children very much appreciate and love us as we do them.

Continue on page 8

A Sponsor's Experience

Good Shepherd Parish, Thornhill

Continued from page 7



*CG Co-Chairs – Good Shepherd Parish
(Left to Right, Carol & Catherine Von Zuben)*

Today I am so proud of their many accomplishments. The eldest daughter is completing her teacher's degree at York university; daughter #2 graduated with a Bachelor of Commerce and continues to work on her CA while being employed by Revenue Canada, both girls living together in an apartment; daughters #3 and 4 continue their studies at Seneca College; the baby is doing wonderfully well in grade 1 and his mother is the lunch supervisor in his school. All four girls worked part time in nearby stores all through their high school years.

My sister Carol and I continue to be very grateful for the opportunity given to our parish by the ORAT office to help in the sponsorship and settlement of this refugee family. Every parishioner benefitted greatly by their involvement in this process which brought the spirit of love and community to all of us.

ORAT's Benefactor



Archdiocese of Toronto

ShareLife

Fellow Collaborators

