

## **SPONSORING AN AFGHAN REFUGEE FAMILY (as of 29 Sept)**

The leadership of the Kershaw Baptist Association (KBA) is praying about and actively discussing the possibility of sponsoring one of the many refugee families from Afghanistan that are coming to America. We know there are in excess of 120,000 of these refugees.

There are many organizations across the US that the US government works with in resettling refugees. One of these is the faith-based organization Lutheran Services. They have an office in Columbia and are accepting and resettling approximately 200 Afghan refugees in the Columbia area. They are also resettling hundreds of refugees in the Greenville, SC and the Charleston, SC areas. They have been engaged in this kind of effort since the early 1990's, so they are very experienced. The KBA Associational Missionary has been in regular contact with Lutheran Services in the last few weeks to gather information. He has also participated in a webinar with them, as well as met with them in their office, along with two KBA Pastors.

The South Carolina Baptist Convention considers Lutheran Services to be the organization they network with in communicating information to our Baptist churches. They recommend that we work with them closely, too. The SCBC will be hosting a training workshop on hosting a refugee family on Thursday, October 14, led by Lutheran Services.

### **WHAT ABOUT THE REFUGEES THEMSELVES?**

These individuals and families are coming out of a war-torn country that has known nothing but war and oppression all their lives and for many generations. No doubt, each person will have their own stories and trauma.

We are told that many of the refugees will be young families. This will include children of various ages. Most of these families will have at least one person who speaks English, possibly more. All of them are currently being processed at US military bases to make sure they are 'safe', in every way discernable, to enter our country and communities. This includes screening for medical issues, including childhood shots and Covid shots. I am told that all refugees will have received full Covid immunization. Since childhood shots is usually a process, this may be something that an adopting organization will need to be aware of. Refugee families are expected to be arriving in the Columbia area in the next two weeks.

As a norm, most Afghan refugee families will want to live in close proximity to other Afghans. There is an Afghan community in the Columbia area, as is the case in many large American cities.

Most of the Afghan people that will come our way are called 'parolees' by the government. They left Afghanistan hastily and did not have the time to fill out all required paperwork so they could be fully vetted refugees when they arrive. As a parolee, they will have two years to settle

across the US and prove themselves as responsible individuals. If not, they can be sent back to their homeland. Their life may be in danger, so they definitely don't want to do that, so we expect them to become model citizens. They will be coming with definite restrictions for their first 1-2 years in country. We hope these restrictions will not make it more difficult for sponsoring organizations.

It is of the utmost urgency that the family is settled and established as soon as possible, including housing, job(s), schools, medical needs, etc. The goal is for them to be on their own as soon as possible without further assistance.

We are told to look at this endeavor as a temporary charge. It is the goal that most families should be on their own anywhere from 6 months to a year from arrival in our community. This is not to be a long-term deal.

Upon arrival, we are told they will need hygiene supplies immediately, as well as a place to live until something more permanent is identified. They may be eligible for public benefits for the first 30-90 days, but that is not definite, yet, so we must be prepared to care for them completely if we choose to be a sponsor.

### **WHAT ARE THE MOVING PARTS?**

There are many moving parts in sponsoring a refugee family. Here are most of the many things that will be required of a sponsoring organization.

1) **HOUSING:** get the family located in a home. They are required to have a physical address. Though many were used to living in smaller, simpler homes in their homeland, we want to make sure they have a home that meets our standards (such as, sisters and brothers in different rooms.)

- \* Do we have landlords or real estate agents in our churches who can help with this?
- \* Is there a church with an empty parsonage? Or, one of our church members who has a home they can live in, temporarily?
- \* Do we have a drive in the churches for food & supplies?
- \* What kinds of foods will they like here in the US?
- \* They are required to have new mattresses
- \* We are thinking they may need to live in the Lugoff area, closer to Columbia where the small Afghan community resides

2) **JOBS:** the husband is expected to work a job to earn the living & provide for the family. Many Afghan wives were not allowed to work in their country, but if they want to work in the US, they may do so, for sure. We need to identify local employers who will hire them.

- \* What business owners in our churches may be willing to hire refugee(s)?

3) **MEDICAL:** each individual and each family will be different with different medical needs. As of now, they will come to us with very little medical assistance from the government. They may or may not have short term Medicaid benefits. We need to be prepared to meet all their medical needs.

- \* Are there local doctors and medical services who will offer to care for these individuals and families... free of charge?

- \* It is my understanding that children will be eligible for SNAP, WIC & Headstart

4) **LANGUAGE:** most, if not all of the family members will need to learn English.

- \* Which of our churches that teach 'English as a Second Language' (ESL) can help?

5) **TRANSPORTATION:** until they have drivers licenses and have a car, they will need to use public transportation and/or be transported to and from necessary destinations.

- \* What are the public transportation opportunities in the area in which the refugee family lives?

- \* Who will volunteer to provide transport to and from job applications, jobs, school, etc

- \* Who can oversee that the adult refugees receive driver training & a drivers license?

- \* Is there someone in our churches who may be able to donate a car or van? Or, can we raise the funds to purchase such?

6) **SCHOOLS:** refugee children need to be enrolled in the local public schools.

- \* Kershaw County School District has been contacted & will accept all children, testing them to determine their academic level

- \* Is language an issue? Do the children know English?

- \* Are the children up to grade level or will they need homework assistance and tutoring?

- \* Background checks will be required of all volunteers who work with children

7) **CIRCLE OF WELCOME:** men and women from our churches will be needed to make the refugees feel welcome ... Afghan wives may need some female friends & mentoring ... there will need to be some cultural orientation (Krispy Kreme hot!)

8) **FINANCES:** amount of finances needed will be based on specific needs of the family

- \* We do not know the amount necessary yet... but think in terms of how much it normally takes an American family of four to live on for 6 months to a year
- \* Each refugee will be allocated \$1,225 each, per person, when they arrive ... this will be managed by Lutheran Services and to be used for things like housing, food & medical
- \* KBA can provide some seed money, to be determined later
- \* The sponsoring church can provide some seed money, to be determined later
- \* KBA churches can choose to contribute... take up love offering(s)... donate gift cards
- \* Necessary emphasis: if we sponsor this family as an Association, we are completely responsible for caring for their needs until they are on their own... or move out of area
- \* **The KBA Missions Committee will recommend at the fall meeting that KBA gives \$10,000 to Friendship Church and another \$10,000 be raised by our KBA churches. (Friendship Church is giving \$10,000 to the effort, themselves.)**

### **IS THERE A LEAD CHURCH?**

It is exciting to report that Pastor Andrew Tate and Executive Pastor Keith Willoughby, both of Friendship Church in Lugoff, want to be our lead church in this endeavor. Pastor Andrew has a neat story you'll want to hear one day! They are organizing some of their members to be leaders/parts of the many teams that will be required to care for the refugee family. Of course, we will need members of many other churches to be part of this fun, too. While we don't need too many cooks in the kitchen and will follow their lead in sponsoring this family ... we will need many workers from our churches with servant hearts and special skills/abilities.

### **WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE AS AN ASSOCIATION?**

The KBA Missions Committee is meeting on Tuesday, Sept 28 to discuss this consideration. The expectation is that they will make a recommendation, one way or the other **met on Tuesday, Sept 28, unanimously recommending that KBA partner with Friendship Church in this matter.**

~~If the recommendation is in the affirmative and they recommend that we proceed with this sponsorship, in accordance with the KBA by laws, we will have a special called meeting of the KBA Executive Committee on Thursday, October 10.~~ The committee will present their recommendation at the KBA fall meeting on Tuesday, October 19, 6 pm at Hermitage Baptist Church, Camden. It will be discussed and voted on at that time.

### **WHO DO I TALK TO FOR MORE INFORMATION?**

Contact Ron Underwood at the KBA missions center / 432-3028; 847-0952... or contact the KBA Moderator, Todd Gandy, 320-8792

Pray on for God's definite leadership!