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## Refugee Ministry Overview

***Presbyterian Disaster Assistance “is a ministry of relief and response to national and international disasters, aid to refugees and displaced persons, refugee resettlement and efforts toward development.” This ministry is “carried out through ecumenical partnerships, related church agencies, middle governing bodies, and congregations.”<sup>1</sup>***

“Aid to refugees and displaced persons” is PDA’s birth story. Many Presbyterians, however, are not familiar with PDA’s role in engaging Presbyterians in refugee ministries or our history in helping to establish refugee-serving organizations all over the United States.

In order to increase PDA’s ability to “inspire, equip and connect the PC(USA) in its many expressions”<sup>2</sup> to ministries with refugees and asylum seekers, a part-time staff position was created in 2014. The Catalyst for Refugees and Asylum is responsible for coordinating the PC(USA) humanitarian response to and advocacy on behalf of refugees, asylum seekers and other forced migrants.

Refugees are individuals who are

- a) outside their own country,
- b) afraid of likely persecution or death if sent back to that country because of their religion, race, nationality, political opinion or membership in a social group, and
- c) whose government is unwilling or unable to protect them.

Asylum seekers are refugees who are asking a government to recognize them as refugees and the government has yet to make a decision.

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<sup>1</sup> 2008 Report of Changes to the Appendixes of the GAC Manual of Operations

<sup>2</sup> PMA Mission Statement: “Inspire, equip and connect the PC(USA) in its many expressions to serve Christ in the world through new and existing communities of faith, hope, love and witness.”

## Refugee Ministries in the U.S.

As part of the PDA national ministry, PDA supports refugee ministries in four ways:

- Assistance to refugees resettling in the United States in partnership with Church World Service (CWS);
- Assistance to those seeking asylum and [alternatives to detention](#) in partnership with Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service;
- Responses to refugee-related inquiries in coordination with the [Office of Immigration Issues](#); and
- Supporting and equipping local congregations and task forces, in collaboration with and through Presbyterian mid councils.

## PDA support for Mid Councils and Congregations

### 1. Information & Referral

PDA receives regular briefings from our government and from international and domestic non-profit partners on developing refugee situations and our country's response. PDA can connect Presbyterians to non-profit organizations in the U.S. serving refugees and asylum seekers. In the past few weeks we have received questions like, "Are Syrians being resettled in or near my community?" "How can my church help Syrian refugees?" or "How do refugees come to the United States?" And even, "Aren't admitting Syrian refugees to the U.S. a security threat?"

### 2. Educational and Worship Resources

PDA creates and shares educational resources for congregational use.

Examples of these are: materials for World Refugee Day, Prayer for Syrian Refugees, and a PowerPoint from CWS on the Syrian Refugee crisis. A documentary film on immigration detention and visitation ministries, "Locked In A Box: Rediscovering Our Humanity in Immigration Detention," with accompanying discussion guide.

### 3. Refugee Ministry Consultation & Guidance

PDA provides technical assistance and guidance through individual phone consultations, conference calls or webinars, and face-to-face local or regional gatherings.

In September 2014 in Tucson, AZ, PDA hosted a Mid Council Consultation with representatives from the southern border states to discuss humanitarian response to Central Americans. In 2015, PDA has conducted site visits to Mid Councils and local partners.

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#### 4. Ministries of Presence

PDA, with the support of the National Response Team (NRT), offer technical, emotional and spiritual support to local ministries and their volunteers. PDA staff and NRT members are working together to develop new resources to increase the capacity and resiliency of local ministries with refugees and asylum seekers. Recently, NRT members assessed church buildings for transitional housing and offered Care for Caregiver retreats.

#### 5. Financial Support

Mid Councils may request financial assistance on behalf of local congregations or task forces to support refugee ministries in much the same way that they request assistance for disaster response. These grants are intended for ministries that directly engage Presbyterian congregations and their members. The sponsoring Mid Council is responsible for financial reporting and is accountable for the proper use of funds. There are two types of grants available:

**An initial grant** request up to \$7,500 can be made by the Mid Council to PDA, signed by the Presbytery or Synod Executive. These are one-time grants to assist in responding to a new or emergent refugee situation. All funds must be expended before requesting any additional PDA funding.

**A special project grant** is available to support an established group or project in their local ministry. The amount of the grant award varies, taking into consideration the size and scope of the initiative. These grants are provided for one year with quarterly reporting. Mid Councils may re-apply in subsequent years.

PC(USA) funds to support these grants come from One Great Hour of Sharing and special appeals in response to refugee-related emergencies. In 2014, a special appeal was issued to respond to the Central American children and families seeking asylum from Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras. In the past year, PDA has provided financial support to four Mid Councils for services to the Central American refugees.

### PDA Support through National Organizations

#### Church World Service Immigration & Refugee Program

Church World Service is one of nine national non-governmental organizations with agreements with the U.S. Government to receive newly arriving refugees for three months. They also contract to assist the US Government overseas in the interviewing and processing of refugees seeking to be resettled to the United States. CWS receives additional governmental and foundation grants to extend services in some areas. (Local offices do their

own fundraising and many serve refugees for one or more years after arrival.) CWS provides resettlement and integration services through local CWS offices and non-profit partners in 33 locations around the U.S.

PDA provides annual funding to support Church World Service national staff in New York City and Washington, D.C., as well as to increase the funding available to the local resettlement services. PDA participates in various CWS briefings throughout the year.

### **Lutheran Immigration & Refugee Service**

Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) is one of the nine national non-governmental to resettle refugees. Rooted in a shared commitment to congregations and mission partners to witness to the healing love of Christ to all refugees, regardless of how they enter the United States, PDA and LIRS developed a partnership to serve asylum seekers in the 1990's.

In 2012, with PDA support, LIRS launched the Community Support Initiative to invest in a new model of interdisciplinary collaboration among organizations serving asylum seekers and others seeking humanitarian protection. The primary focus is to provide coordinated legal, case management, and housing services. Success of the program is measured in two areas: a) Improving health and well-being for our clients; and b) maximizing compliance with of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) outside of detention.

### **International Refugee Ministries**

Outside the U.S., PDA supports refugees following the same protocol that guides other disaster response efforts. The most current example is the support for refugees and migrants in Hungary and a school for Syrian children led by Syrian teachers in Lebanon.

Additional information on PDA refugee ministries: <http://pda.pcusa.org/page/refugee/>

