

Local Catholic Church leading effort to bring Syrian family of four to Parksville Qualicum Beach

by [Candace Wu - Parksville Qualicum Beach News](#)

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Parksville's Church of Ascension is trying to raise \$40,000 to sponsor a refugee family from Syria or Iraq.

Since Sunday, Father Karam Alraban said parish members have "generously" donated \$13,900. The money will help cover the costs of daily life for the refugee family, including clothing, food and rent for one year in Parksville.

Alraban said the process is expected to take about six months.

He said the Catholic Church, which has an 800-family membership, has warmly embraced the idea of sponsoring a refugee family.

For Alraban, the project hits close to home.

"I am an example of being a refugee," he told The NEWS on Wednesday.

Alraban was born in Bagdad, Iraq and ordained as a priest in 2011 in the Syriac Catholic Rite. He was targeted in Iraq and fled to Canada in 2014. He received convention refugee status in Canada and was incarnated into the diocese of Victoria.

He said he "understands" what it's like to not be able to pray in your church and to be treated like a fourth class citizen in society.

"There is a long-standing history of the persecution of Christians in the Middle East," he said. "They are facing violence and the are victims... There is no country in the Middle East that will accept them."

Alraban called this "a grand opportunity" to make a difference in the lives of people with no prospects and little hope.

He has formed an eight-member refuge sponsorship committee.

"Together the members of the committee have extensive and related experience in the areas of law, government relations, finance, office procedures, teaching, medicine, and public relations," he said.

"Our committee cannot achieve success without the participation of the entire parish... This mission will include everyone in Ascension parish, and I have been assured that the committee will turn to the members and groups of the parish for help in related activities when the need arises."

The Church of Ascension will operate as a constituent group under the umbrella of the 'sponsorship agreement holder' relationship the Anglican diocese has with the federal government. Committee members attended a training session hosted by the Anglican diocese in Victoria in mid-November and early December. They will continue to attend training events as they occur.

Alraban said this fundraising project started in the parish and will stay within the parish, meaning there will not be public fundraising events.

However, he said if people want to contribute to the refugee sponsorship efforts they can come to the parish to offer support.

“Anyone who wants to help refugees is most welcomed,” he said. “It’s not just the case of our parish, it’s a case of humanity.”

Alraban said if this endeavor is successful, the church is “absolutely” open to sponsoring more refugees after learning the process.

B.C. is expecting mainly privately sponsored refugees — about 200 dispersed across 13 cities by the end of the year.

The province also anticipates receiving up to 3,500 government-assisted refugees over the longer term.

Jobs Minister Shirley Bond said five refugee response teams in British Columbian communities where refugees are expected to settle — including Vancouver Island — are being funded with \$500,000 from a previously announced \$1-million provincial refugee readiness fund.

The other \$500,000 will go to the Immigrant Services Society of B.C. to help fund its efforts to support refugees and marshal the efforts of various volunteers and agencies.

“We will be ready to receive them,” said Bond. “British Columbians have expressed in unbelievable ways across this province their generosity and their willingness to be part of the solution.”

The province is also allocating \$1.5 million in federal-provincial job grants to support skills training for refugees and to help match them to employers ready to hire new Canadians.

“We think it’s critical,” Bond said. “The most effective way to be successfully integrated is to be employed in our province.”

Another \$2.6 million is promised by the province for language training and the Provincial Health Services Authority is hiring and training 30 additional interpreters.

— With files from Black Press