

*“Also you shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the heart of a stranger,  
because you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”*

*Exodus 23:9*

Dear partners in hospitality,

It’s hard to imagine mainline Protestants ever being strangers in the land of Minnesota. But before lefse or bratwurst ever became staple representatives of Minnesotan culture, they represented faraway lands once called home by our ancestors: homes redefined for want of better opportunities, better lives for the generations we have now become.

Today thousands of people around the world are still fleeing persecution in their homelands and arriving in Minnesota, seeking new lives and opportunities. Though our state represents less than 2% of the total U.S. population, we typically welcome 10% of the country’s new refugees every year. Staple cuisine in Minnesota is expanding beyond lefse and bratwurst to include injera, mov kua dis tsuag, and samosas.

As the Church in Minnesota, and more importantly as part of the global Church, we are called to welcome these neighbors. By partnering with the Minnesota Council of Churches’ Refugee Services, we are given an opportunity to

- tangibly express the love God has poured out upon this land and its communities,
- learn about the journeys and cultures of our new Minnesota neighbors,
- live out the biblical call to hospitality,
- grow as a community in service to God’s children from all parts of the world, and
- be transformed as a faith community inviting others into its midst.

I was honored to spend my first year out of college as a full-time volunteer with the Minnesota Council of Churches’ Refugee Services program. Few memories in my life stand out more than sitting balloon-clad at the base of the Minneapolis-St. Paul airport baggage claim escalator, awaiting the arrival of a young Somali family; facilitating a conversation between a 12-member Liberian family and the Twin Cities congregation that had found homes for each of its children; and witnessing a Hmong family’s first few hours in the United States in the midst of a frigid Minnesota snowstorm.

I invite you to prayerfully consider celebrating Refugee Sunday as an opportunity to honor and welcome your new Minnesotan brothers and sisters.

God’s peace,

Christine Hallenbeck

Member, Committee on Refugee Services

*“Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.”*

*Romans 12:13*