



THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

VIRGINIA CONFERENCE

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Virginia Conference members,

Our admiration and gratitude go out to our military, diplomats, and civil servants who have been working on the front line of the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. This work is soul-rending and heartbreaking as well as exhausting. We are thankful for their service and mourn the 13 service members who gave their all to save the lives of others.

We are grateful for the willingness of organizations, many of them faith-based, that are continuing the work of those who helped evacuate the Afghan refugees. Many of these refugees have risked and sacrificed more for our country than most of us will ever be asked to do and these resettlement agencies are working to make sure that those individuals have as soft a landing and as warm a welcome as possible. The Virginia Conference is committed to working alongside these agencies, picking up the baton of the work of the frontline, and continuing this work of caring for all our refugee families.

As a church, we are called to serve people who are marginalized, regardless of their race, background, or religion. We also understand that this race is not a sprint, but a marathon. Our work will continue for the coming months and years, ensuring our new neighbors and fellow children of God are loved and shown hospitality as we are commanded in the Scriptures "for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it" (Hebrews 13:2).

The Virginia Conference reminds churches that the connectional system can be a powerful tool to reach out to those who are in need. Your church may participate in this effort in the following ways:

1. **Pray and remember that Jesus Christ was also a refugee** - Ask God how your church can be involved in supporting these families who are marginalized. Pray for more people to hear God's call to care for the ones who are mourning (Romans 12:15).
2. **Give to UMCOR** - UMCOR released a statement ([click here to read the statement](#)) on how they will use UMCOR [Global Migration Advance Special \(#3022144\)](#). The Advance Special partners with Church World Service in assisting temporary settlement for the refugee families, through the Global Migration Advance Special. All offerings sent to the Virginia Conference will be directed to this fund.

3. **Refugee Response Team** - We have assembled a Refugee Response Team to coordinate the effort of our Annual Conference churches in the work to support the refugee families. Kenn Speicher, Arlington District/ lay member, will serve as the point of contact between various agencies and the local churches to support and sponsor the families in their settlement.
4. **Utilize the resources shared through the Conference website and communication channels**
- The Refugee Response team has already published a number of resources to help the churches, including the recent update which can be [downloaded here](#). Use these resources that will help your churches to be involved in this work. All resources can be found at www.vaumc.org/refugeeresponse.

I am grateful for all the work that has been done and anticipate the blessings to come as we continue on this long journey together! Please continue to pray and seek God's direction in our effort to care for these families!

Grace and Peace

Bishop Sharma D. Lewis
Resident Bishop
Virginia Conference of the United Methodist Church