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26 June 2019

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

RE: 40th Anniversary of the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program

Forty years ago, Canadians were moved by the plight of the “boat people” fleeing the violence and destruction of the Vietnam War. In response, over 60,000 Vietnamese, Cambodian and Laotian refugees were brought to Canada, many of whom were welcomed by faith communities. This unprecedented response led to the establishment of the Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) program in 1979. Since then, it has been a vital component of Canada’s immigration system and has been recognized worldwide as demonstrating Canada’s humanitarian leadership.

Through this program, over 327,000 refugees have been resettled in Canada. For the first time ever, our country has resettled more refugees than any other country in the world.

Our diocese entered a Sponsorship Agreement with the Government on 22 July 1979 and has been one of the pioneers of this program. Since 2000, we have sponsored over 2,700 refugees. I would like to acknowledge the compassion, generosity and leadership of our pastors, parish refugee committees and our parishioners. You have worked hard to provide a home for refugees who have come to Canada from countries around the world. I thank you for your hard work, perseverance, countless volunteer hours and financial commitment.

Over the past few years, our rural parishes have made a significant contribution to this program. This history is portrayed in a new video “Open Hearts – Small Town Refugee Sponsorship Diocese London” which captures a sample of four sponsoring groups out of many rural faith communities that have successfully sponsored and integrated refugees in Chatham, Forest, Ingersoll, Kingsville, Leamington, Lucan, Mitchell, Norfolk, Ridgetown, Sarnia, Sebringville, St. Thomas, Stratford, Strathroy, Tecumseh, Tilbury, Tillsonburg, Wallaceburg, Woodstock and Zurich. You can view this inspiring video at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lmydAAVRAc0&t=3s>

“Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow” (Is 1:17). Our response to the plight of refugees is a concrete expression of our faith in God. They are our brothers and sisters.

As we join our fellow Canadians in celebrating the 40th anniversary of the PSR program, I thank you for your ongoing dedication to refugee protection. During our Year of Prayer, let us pray for the millions of refugees in our world today and for our Refugee Ministries.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Rev. Ronald P. Fabbro, C.S.B.
Bishop of London