



FAITH LUTHERAN CHURCH

1402 E Avenue C
Bismarck, ND 58501

Siblings in Christ,

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ.

We, your pastors, were concerned to learn of the stop work order issued by the U.S. State Department on January 24th, which halted all refugee reception and placement services under the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program.¹ This stop work order directly affects our ministry partners Bismarck Global Neighbors (our local refugee resettlement agency) and Global Refuge (formerly Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service), a ministry of our church for the past 85 years. It puts many newly arrived refugees, who have come to the U.S. through the most rigorous of the very few legal immigration pathways, at great risk.

In Leviticus 19:33-34, the LORD God commands the people of Israel: “When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the LORD your God.” Our congregation knows this truth, for this is part of our story as God’s people here in North Dakota. Many of the founding members of Faith Lutheran, and many in our community today, were and are Germans from Russia. They and their families knew firsthand the pain of persecution and the trauma of being forced to leave their homes. They came to the United States and eventually to North Dakota to build lives, farms, businesses, and communities. They, along with other immigrants from other places and the many native peoples who call this land home, contributed greatly to making North Dakota a healthy and beautiful place to live and work. They followed God, built this church, and raised many of you up as disciples of Jesus Christ.

In 2019, Burleigh County was required by the federal government to authorize continued refugee resettlement in our area. Many people, including from our congregation, spoke passionately and faithfully about our call to welcome the stranger and about the important contributions of refugees to our common life here in Bismarck. The County Commission ultimately voted to continue refugee resettlement. Since then, Bismarck has welcomed many new people from Ukraine, Venezuela, Afghanistan, and beyond who are valued, contributing members of our community. Last year, you all helped furnish an apartment and provide welcome and care for a new family arriving from Afghanistan at a critical moment in their lives.

This is our call as Christians. As we continue to live out this call together at a time of increased anti-immigrant sentiment, we urge you to:

1. Be in prayer for a change of heart in this country toward refugees and immigrants, that we may love them as ourselves - as our God commands.
2. Check on immigrants and refugees that you know in our community. This is a difficult and very anxious time for new Americans, regardless of immigration status or length of time lived in the US.

¹ This is a separate order from the federal funding freeze issued on January 27th, which was rescinded on January 29th. The refugee resettlement stop work order remains in effect as of this writing.



3. Advocate. Call, email, or write to our legislators, urging them to support the resumption of refugee resettlement services even as they work to reform the US immigration system (which is badly needed). Encourage them to sponsor legislation that provides for more clear, streamlined, legal pathways for immigration, so that we can welcome the foreigner in our midst as we have done in the past in North Dakota, building our great state.

Representative Julie Fedorchak
Bismarck office: 701-354-6700
Email contact form found at: fedorchak.house.gov

Senator John Hoeven
Bismarck office: 701-250-4618
Email contact form found at: hoeven.senate.gov

Senator Kevin Cramer
Bismarck office: 701-204-0500
Email contact form found at: cramer.senate.gov

Sample script:

Hello, I'm (name), a constituent from (town of residence). Please stand with refugees by urging the federal government to end its suspension of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program. The "Realigning the United States Refugee Admissions Program" executive order abruptly shuts the door on refugees who have waited years, and even decades, for resettlement. As a Christian, I support refugees resettling in my community and believe we have a responsibility to help those in need find safety. My Lutheran congregation was founded by Germans from Russia, who also fled persecution and resettled here, helping make our state the great place that it is. This is our heritage. Please urge President Trump and Secretaries Rubio and Noem to reconsider and lift suspension of the program. Thank you.

4. Consider donating to Bismarck Global Neighbors (bismarckglobalneighbors.org/donate), Global Refuge (globalrefuge.org/donate), or another refugee resettlement agency. Our ministry partners are still trying to provide services to support our vulnerable, newly-arrived neighbors, but without their main funding sources and limited operational capacity.

We know that immigration is a difficult topic in our country, that our immigration system is broken and in need of repair, and that the way forward has been unclear for some time. What is clear is our responsibility as followers of Christ: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me... just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me" (Matthew 25:35, 40). If you have questions or concerns about what we have shared in this letter, we welcome you to contact us by phone, email, or by visiting us in the church office. Thank you for your faithfulness to God's call, to our heritage as Faith Lutheran Church, and to the ministry we have shared together these many years.

In Christ,

Pastor Derek Harkins



Pastor Sylvia Bull

