

Interfaith Mission Service
A Partnership of Congregations, Organizations, and Individuals
Committed To Building a Beloved Community

Shares with its congregations, all faith leaders, and allied community partners and agencies
A PROGRESS REPORT ON HUNTSVILLE'S WELCOMING INITIATIVE

April 27 of 2016

The Interfaith Mission Service Welcoming Initiative is a uniting response to the world's refugee crisis to provide support for refugees, and work toward our goal of creating a more beloved, compassionate and inclusive community.

- Began as a North Alabama initiative dedicated to building a uniting response to the world's refugee crisis and has evolved to encompass not only relief to refugees but also a wider mission of creating a more welcoming Huntsville.
- Has Goals in Three Areas: education, outreach opportunities, and community engagement.
- Compliments and strengthens the City of Huntsville's adopted commitments to create a more compassionate and inclusive community

Our homework and preparation has been extensive and has included:

1. Research on refugee resettlement and conversations with numerous refugee resettlement leaders on several levels.
2. Gathering of hundreds of faith group statements, resolutions, humanitarian appeals, social policy pronouncements
3. Communicating and engagement with many local groups who share affinity with our cause and are involved in some level. This includes faith-based, civic, governmental, university, nonprofit, international and humanitarian entities. Some are advocating our common cause and others are willing to lend support in particular areas and needs as opportunities arise.
4. We have held two community conversations, resulting in an active coalition of persons and communities totaling over 60 people representing a broad cross-section.
5. [Global Ties Alabama](#) has become our most active partner and has committed institutional support and advocacy. We are in conversation with the leaders in the City of Huntsville to insure work is carried out with their full knowledge, especially those who provide leadership in the Inclusive and Compassionate City Commitments
6. We have looked to faith communities and faith-based organizations to provide leadership in two ways:
 - The Interfaith Mission Service is serving as the lead entity and is over time engaging its cooperative of congregations to work through their structures to invest as members.
 - IMS has also been reaching out beyond the IMS Cooperative to all County faith leaders and congregations with updates and suggestions for their direct engagement. They are being encouraged to join with IMS member congregations for common work in this area.
7. We have now visited two sites in the Chattanooga area that are part of the Refugee Resettlement system and are developing cooperative work with both. Huntsville congregations and groups are being contacted with details.
8. Huntsville is ripe for this to grow into a broader public initiative as we join in the [Welcoming America](#) movement.

SPECIFIC GOALS AND UPDATES:

EDUCATION: *Educate our congregations and the community about refugee resettlement, immigration reform, and building a smarter, stronger community by working together.*

- Provide comprehensive educational resources for congregations, organizations, civic leaders: litanies, scripture studies, prayers, sermon helps, Sunday school materials. The IMS Website is available for resources for all faiths.
- Promote use of "[Church Between Borders](#)" workshops in single or joint congregations (from the [Christian Reformed Church](#))
- Connect groups with speakers on refugee and immigrant matters available for Sunday school lessons, evening programs, interfaith dinners
- Promote the "Interviews and Writing Project—The Faces of Refugees Among Us" – compelling stories to "change the narrative" by connecting with our past and looking to our future

OUTREACH: *Assist in the support of refugees in nearby communities and support One Huntsville by building a foundation to help integrate all New Americans.*

- Chattanooga - Partnering with The Bridge and Neema Outreach Ministry, the IMS task force provides opportunities for congregations and organizations to donate humanitarian support to our nearest Refugee Resettlement Site.
- Seeking ways to help New Americans in Huntsville by investigating opportunities to reach out to the current immigrant population in Huntsville and assess their most pressing needs.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: *Engage the community in creating a more welcoming atmosphere where foreign-born and US-born Americans can find mutual respect and together build a stronger Huntsville.*

- Expand work with the faith community, both through the IMS cooperative and with all faith leaders
- Coordinate strategies with the City of Huntsville's Compassion and Inclusion Commitments
- Contribute to the goals of One Huntsville
- Continue building a collaborative relationship with Global Ties
- Build congregational investment in June World Refugee Day and community investment in Fall Welcome Week.

PRIORITY FOR THIS GOAL: EMBRACE WELCOMING AMERICA

- Announce Huntsville's involvement in the Welcoming America Movement
- Integrate learnings from the major Welcoming America conference in Atlanta that clarified how communities can implement initiatives to build safer, smarter, stronger communities
- Host a community workshop in Huntsville in June with Welcoming America trainers
- Engage the Huntsville International Society, City of Huntsville's Human Relations Commission, Hispanic Latino Advisory Council, UAHuntsville Diversity Office, Asha Kiran and other organizations to attend co-sponsor this event
- Make plans for Welcoming Week in September 2016

Welcoming America is a national, grassroots-driven collaboration dedicated to promoting mutual respect and cooperation between foreign-born and US-born Americans. Their ultimate goal is to create a welcoming atmosphere, community by community, in which all new Americans are more likely to integrate into the social fabric of their adopted hometowns. Welcoming America believes that in a land of opportunity, our communities are strongest when everyone who lives in them feels welcome.