



# Hope for the Holidays

Be a Saint!

## Breaking Bread and Building Bridges

Sharing a Meal during the Advent Season



### Acts 2.46

*Day by day, as they spent much time together... they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts.*

We're inviting you to host a meal inviting your immigrant and refugee neighbors to "break bread" with you and discuss how current immigration policies are impacting their lives. We hope that this initial Breaking Bread and Build Bridges meal will be the first of many meals shared together as you seek to build relationships with immigrants and refugees in your communities.

The 2014 LIRS Refugee Social Connections Survey revealed that

"sharing a meal with someone can be a meaningful experience, but doesn't necessarily lead to deep connection or a feeling of belonging, particularly if it only happens one time...integration requires sharing many meals, stories, and experiences over a longer period of time" (Rex Foster, 2014).

For many newcomers our holidays and the traditions that surround them are new. We often don't consider it, but Thanksgiving, for example, is a holiday that is only celebrated in the U.S., Canada, Liberia and some of the Caribbean islands. The Advent season is a wonderful time to build relationships and share traditions. Whether you decide to "break bread" on Thanksgiving or on another day during this season use this toolkit to help you engage your new neighbors.

## The Purpose of Breaking Bread

1. It provides the opportunity to reframe refugees-who we think they are based on what we have heard or seen in the media or from others. The Fostering Community Engagement and Welcoming Communities Project supported by the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) explores this idea of reframing refugees. It states:

If we play the word association game, and I say "refugee" what word comes into mind for many Americans? For too many, the word is "camp." So much of what we currently know and understand about refugees comes from the very beginning of their experience, and the extreme circumstances involved with going from one tough situation to the next. Wouldn't it be better if we could think more about how refugees' lives change – and their communities, too – once they are settled and stable? Wouldn't it be more accurate, and more positive, if people associated the word "refugee" with words like neighbor, worker, business owner, voter, parent, community leader, person of faith, or any of our other many roles and identities in our communities?



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## Reframing Refugees, Messaging Toolkit

<http://www.welcomingrefugees.org/sites/default/files/documents/resources/Reframing%20Refugees%20Messaging%20Toolkit.pdf>

2. It allows us to get to know and build stronger relationships with our immigrant and refugee neighbors and better understand how current immigration policies affect not only their lives, but the life of the entire community. Nationally, we are facing an extraordinary challenge to our nation's rich history of welcoming immigrants. Recent policies- (the reduction in the number of refugees allowed to enter the country this fiscal year – 45,000; the termination of the Central American Migrants program that allowed youth in El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala to escape gang violence; the termination of Deferred Action Childhood Arrivals (DACA) which allowed youth to work and live free of the threat of deportation; and the termination of Temporary Protected Status for migrants from particular nations) set forth by the Trump Administration have redefined the way the United States supports immigrants and refugees. This is a clear deviation from our history as a welcoming nation and as a leader in institution and execution of foreign policies.

### As You Prepare

***View these videos about other breaking bread events. They are sure to inspire you!***

Refugee Welcome: <https://www.purpose.com/welcoming-refugees-to-dinner>

CNN: <http://www.cnn.com/2017/02/01/us/syria-supper-club/index.html>

## Logistics

### The Invite

As joyous as the holiday season can be, it can also be a lonely and isolating time for many refugees or immigrants who have left or lost loved ones. The Advent season is a powerful time to embrace them and share the love of Christ. Your invitation can be formal or informal. Decide how many people you can accommodate. Intentionally reach out to refugees and immigrants in your community. Refugees and immigrants are a vibrant part of our social networks. Extend an invitation following a Sunday worship service, PTA meeting, soccer game, or another school activity. Is your colleague, neighbor, hairdresser, favorite local business owner, or accountant an immigrant? Consider inviting them over the next time you see them. There is no prescribed way, we simply encourage you to do it.

If you do not know any refugees or immigrants contact your local resettlement agency. These agencies can help you find dinner guests and they will also provide you with information about how refugees come to your community. Email [visitation@lirs.org](mailto:visitation@lirs.org) if you need help getting in touch with a resettlement agency in your area.



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### The Meal



Invite your guests to bring a dish. In many cultures, this is customary and will provide an opportunity to learn about one another's culture and help your guest to feel at home. Label all foods so that everyone knows what they are eating in case of allergies or other restrictions.

Avoid food that is not allowed under some refugees' religion. Be sure to have some vegetarian options. In particular, avoid pork and any pork-based ingredients such as gelatin, or containing alcohol for Muslim guests. A full guide on halal food restrictions can be found at: <https://www.utoronto.ca/~facilities/documents/GuidetoHalalFoods.pdf>

Do not forget to have enough paper goods and beverages. Also, if you are having several guests, you may want to create a list of the items that they are bringing so that the labels can be typed ahead of time (so everyone can read it).

### Photos

Everyone has different opinions about taking photos and additionally about posting their images on social media sites. Get permissions before taking photos and before posting on any social media outlets, publications or websites. Seeking permission is especially critical when photographing individuals without immigration status, such as undocumented immigrants or those seeking asylum, as it could put their life or immigration case in jeopardy.

### Conversations

Use this dinner as an opportunity for everyone to share their respective immigration stories- new and old Americans. However, encourage non-refugee attendees to be sensitive about questioning refugees. Many have experienced unimaginable trauma and rather not relive it by constantly rehearsing the story of their experiences. Suggest that attendees focus on commonalities and shared interests. Making friends and building social networks can be difficult for any newcomer, it is even more challenging for a refugee who often is unable to communicate with others. This setting should be as welcoming and comfortable as possible. Consider posting welcome signs in various languages throughout the space.



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### Space

### *Where can I host a dinner?*

You don't have to host in your own home, although you can. Dinners can take place at churches, restaurants, in community spaces or in rented spaces. Think about where you would like to meet new friends and spend some quality time – somewhere you can eat, have conversations and welcome your guests.

If you have pets, place them in an area away from guests in case of fears, allergies or customs that do not believe animals should be inside of the home. Remember, the goal is to make your guests as comfortable as possible.

### Set Up and Clean Up

Having guests is a lot of work. Plan ahead and solicit the support of family and friends who can help with preparations- shopping, cooking, setting up extra tables and chairs, labeling dishes as well as clean up.

### Encourage Continued Engagement

Before the meal is over encourage attendees to exchange contact information. Plan another meal or outing (picnic in the park, playdate for children, trip to the library, etc.). Whatever you choose, do not let this be your one and only time of getting to know one another.

**For more information on how to organize a Breaking Bread, Building Bridges event, please visit <http://www.interfaithimmigration.org/2013/01/22/breaking-bread-and-building-bridges-toolkit>**

