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Dear friends,

I am writing to inform you of a difficult decision that has been made by the Diocesan Council.

The Anglican Diocese of British Columbia has played a pivotal role in sponsoring thousands of refugees. As a sponsorship agreement holder, the Diocese has established a strong record of raising money to sponsor refugee families and then financially supporting these families during their first year in Canada. We are the largest Sponsorship Agreement Holder (SAH) on Vancouver Island, and we are very proud of the work we have done alongside passionate and dedicated community members.

This work has been guided by our shared values: a desire to welcome the stranger, protect the persecuted, and act with compassion. In the face of growing conflicts around the world, this is more important than ever. We have undertaken this work despite the steep administrative costs because we know how important it is.

But due to new administrative requirements by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada that will cost us tens of thousands of dollars per year on top of the already significant costs we bear for this work, we simply will no longer be able afford to continue to act as a Sponsorship Agreement Holder. This is a difficult decision for us, and we recognize that there will be uncertainty in our community. It is not a decision we took lightly.

I want to ensure you that we will honour our existing commitments and we will focus on the 290 applications still in process. We anticipate that welcoming the applicants already in process will take at least another two years of work.

We are also providing a Q&A for members of Vancouver Island's refugee community in multiple languages that will provide refugee families who are pursuing family reunification with guidance. Nevertheless, I recognize that our decision will leave a gap. That is why we are exploring how we can continue to do this work in conjunction with other organizations. We are in conversation with the other Anglican dioceses in the province about possible ways to partner in this work and to find economies of scale that will allow us to continue this work.

I have been so touched by the way so many in our Diocese have given of their time and resources to support refugees. We are indebted to all the staff and volunteers who have made this program such a success. In particular, I want to mention our past and current staff who have played a significant role in making the program what it has become: Bruce Bryant-Scott, Rebecca Seibert, Tony Davis, Alvaro Moreno, and Andrea McCoy. We are grateful to Eulala Mills who chaired the Diocesan Refugee Committee and the countless others who dedicated time and energy to this important work over many years. Finally, we are so pleased that Jibril Mohamed will stay on as staff with the Diocese to assist us in welcoming those refugees whose applications have already been submitted.

I know that many of you, like me, have been personally involved in welcoming newcomers and that you have found this work to be life-giving. So many lives have been changed for the better because of this care and compassion. Only a few weeks ago, we welcomed the first Afghan woman refugee to Vancouver Island, a woman who was a non-profit employee and a civic engagement activist. A few months before that we had a young man come first in his age group at the Toronto Marathon within weeks of his arrival.

We will continue to live by our values: welcoming the stranger, protecting the persecuted, and acting with compassion.

Peace,


The Right Rev Anna Greenwood-Lee
bishop