

# The First Christmas in Canada

## *Refugee Supporting Group*

The two refugee families sponsored by our parish have already arrived in Vancouver and have settled in well in our community. They were assisted by the members of the Refugee Supporting Group in finding suitable accommodation, furnishing homes, applying for identification and medical cards, and registering schools for their children. What lies ahead is the new page of their lives in a far distant land from their war-shattered home country, Syria.



Garden of Gethsemane presented their donated Christmas gifts to both of the families who experienced their first Christmas in Canada.

“Watching the faces of the kids as they received their gifts, seeing the parents’ smiles depicting love and joy, that is the spirit of what we are doing.” one of the volunteers exclaimed.

On Dec 23, the supporting group organized a home

The children of Albert and George’s family curiously eyed colourfully wrapped Christmas gifts as the arrival of Santa Claus – Representatives of



visit and Christmas carolling to the home of the two families. Eleven volunteers formed the carolling group and they visited the families separately in the evening.

Garden of Gethsemane, Surrey on Dec. 20 at our Parish.

Rev. Richard Au, Rev. Henry Yeung and volunteers from the refugee supporting group prayed with the families in the chapel for the peace of Syria and the representatives of

“I thought, at first, it would be awkward trying to communicate with people who belong to other culture and don’t speak our language” said a new volunteer who visited the families the first time. “What I realized is that when you smile, it’s the universal language; smiling helps. I think peace begins with a smile.”

The year of 2016 meant so much to the volunteers as they got a new experience in communicating with people from another culture and understanding the needs of the families who suffered from wars and persecution because of their Christian status.

Since their arrival, the supporting group has helped them find housing, enrolled the children in school, and found employment for the head of household.

“We weren’t expecting such a wonderful Christmas

celebration, especially for our first Christmas in Canada ,” said Roba, the wife of George. “Everyone has been so kind and caring.” Roba hoped that in the coming year, she and George would be able to learn the language, extend their friendships and move forward in their new life in Canada.

While singing Christmas carols with the family, Albert was eager to let us listen to the popular Christmas songs tuned in Arabic. For making us understand how the Christmas songs such as Joy to the world and Jingle Bells are sung in Syria, Albert’s family sang like a choir and the children found fun in the group singing.

In the Message for the 2017 World Day of Migrants and Refugees, Pope Francis said that we need to recognize the right of children to be children. Events like carolling give these children who have gone through so much just found fun and joy in that opportunity.



“I know they have gone through some things and we don’t know their struggles, but they don’t think about it at this moment, and just want to have fun. It has been a great experience for us as



well as for the families.” said Susan, one of our supporting group members.

We pray : Almighty, all-merciful God, through Christ



Jesus, you have taught us to love one another, to love our neighbours as ourselves, and even to love our enemies. In times of violence and fear, let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts.

Help us see each person in light of the love and grace you have shown us in Christ. Amen.

