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WELCOMING THE STRANGER:

An Exploration of the Nature of the Work of Mennonite Christians in the Work of
Refugee Assistance in the region of Waterloo

By:

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B.S.W. University of Calgary (2002)

THESIS

Submitted to the Faculty of Social Work
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for

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Abstract

Mennonite Christians in the Kitchener Waterloo region have been involved in the work of refugee assistance for the past 25 years as an expression of their Christian faith. Their involvement is primarily in two forms. One form of refugee assistance is through providing sponsorship to refugees from overseas to Canada. Sponsorship is done through the Mennonite Central Committee of Ontario and Federal Private Sponsorship Program. In this program, Church congregations commit themselves to the financial and settlement support of the sponsored refugee(s) for a minimum of one year. The other form of assistance is through the funding and staffing of the Mennonite Coalition for Refugee Support (MCRS), a small agency in downtown Kitchener that provides settlement support to refugee claimants as well as assistance on the refugee claim process.

This qualitative study explored the work of refugee assistance undertaken by Mennonite Christians in the Kitchener Waterloo region through their engagement in private sponsorship and with MCRS. Twelve individuals participated in the research through engagement in qualitative, semi-structured interviews. Data from the interviews was analyzed and four themes emerged that help to describe the nature of the work of refugee assistance. Although many themes emerged from the research, it was found that overarching each of these is the greater theme of “Welcoming the Stranger” which describes the desire of Mennonite Christians to adhere to the Biblical call to play host to those who are marginalized within society.

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The completion of thesis research was my primary goal upon entering the Master of Social Work program at Wilfrid Laurier University. However, completion of this piece of work would not have been possible without the support of many important people in my life.

I would like to give my utmost thanks to God who has graciously placed me in a situation in which I have had the freedom and opportunity to pursue this academic goal, and has gifted me with the ability to do so. To whom much is given, much is required.

I would also like to thank my dear wife Elizabeth who I deeply love and who at much cost and sacrifice, has traveled this journey with me. Although there has been a cost, this year has also been an exciting one for us as we have explored ideas, places and relationships together. Our shared conviction is that this year will be a defining moment of our future. I anticipate walking with you as we determine that future together.

I would be remiss if I did not express my love and thanks to my beautiful children, Alexandria, Gabriel and Hazel. Your joy and enthusiasm is infectious and you continue to make my life rich.

I also give thanks to my thesis advisor Professor Ginette Lafreniere, who from the very beginning expressed interest in my research subject. Your expert insight, unrepentant critique as well as your enthusiasm and encouragement have carried me through this project. Lastly, further thanks go to members of my thesis advisory committee, Professors Cheryl Anne Cait, Martha Kuwee Kumsa and Peter Dunn. Thank-you for your insight and support on this project.

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CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION

1.0 Preface

In late August, 2003, I traveled with my wife Elizabeth and our three young children from Edmonton to Waterloo so that I could study in the Master of Social Work program at Wilfrid Laurier University. Aside from my desire to add more letters to my name, I was particularly interested in the academic challenge of writing a thesis. Due to some community work that I did within ethnocultural communities in Edmonton, as well as a practicum placement working with refugees through the Mennonite Central Committee of Ontario I came to care about the role of Christians in their work with refugees. As such, this is the platform upon which I decided to engage my research.

As I enter into my qualitative thesis research, it is helpful for me to reflect upon who I am as a researcher, and what personal history I bring to it. In doing so, I am able to identify key people, experiences and influences that have contributed to my personal formation. Over the next few pages I would like to share some of these key factors, as I believe that hearing my experiences will contribute to understanding why I have chosen to follow this research path.

My Social Location

I care deeply about my faith and have an immense respect for my parents who introduced and modeled this faith to me in such a gentle manner that when the time came for me to choose a path, I followed their lead. In this regard, I am affiliated with an evangelical Christian church, and have been throughout my life. I hesitate to share this due to the negative associations that many public evangelical figures have brought upon themselves and all of us who claim this identity. I can almost hear the responses:

Evangelicals are intolerant, dogmatic and homophobic. Sadly, these accusations have merit.

However, despite all the negativity, I choose to maintain my identity because not all evangelicals speak with the same voice. Although their voice is not the loudest, there are a small number of evangelical leaders who have a passion for issues of social justice, and whose voice rings loudest and clearest in my ear. I have been influenced by the work and writings of Tony Campolo, Ron Sider, and more recently Jim Wallis, who have demonstrated to me what it truly means to be a Christian with a social conscience by providing an alternative Christian voice on social and political issues. I have also been inspired by the work of Greg Paul and others at Sanctuary, a community of people in Toronto who provide deep care, respect and dignity to the marginalized members of the downtown core.

1.1 Developing a Social Conscience

Around the time that Bob Geldof of the English punk band, the Boomtown Rats, collected a group of recording artists from the United Kingdom to raise awareness and funds for the drought crisis in Ethiopia, I was a student at a small Bible School in Peterborough, Ontario. At that time I was one year out of high school and did not have the mindset or the ambition to think critically about any of the Christian teachings or assumptions that had been presented to me growing up in the church. However, one morning sitting in Bible class I was awakened. I listened to an instructor demean the charity work of Bob Geldof by making the shocking and horrific statement that the work of feeding the hungry in Ethiopia was in vain as it only “fattened them up so they can go to hell”.

As I read these words in print I feel a disappointment at the absurdity of this statement to an extreme that I did not experience at the time these words were spoken. For when I say that at the time I was awakened by this remark, I say with shame and regret that it was a slow awakening. I regret that I did not have the courage at the time to challenge the instructor on this statement; as it was not only cold hearted, it was contrary to the heart of the Christian gospel.

However, I cannot turn back the clock. Fortunately, my awakening continued in the years following my completion of Bible School. This awakening was primarily through the strong influence I received through the work of two individuals – Bruce Cockburn and Ron Sider.

Sometime in the late 1980's, though I am not certain just when or how, I picked up on the music of Bruce Cockburn. From the beginning I was aware that he was a singer/songwriter who reflected a Christian faith in his early work, and who was fully awake and angry at the injustice that he saw in Central America in the 1980's. As part of my solitary journey, I listened to his music and attended his concerts, at times on my own, and found myself becoming politicized. Through this process, I was also developing the conviction that the Christian voice of compassion and justice must be raised on social and political issues, particularly those that are harming the vulnerable and poor and benefiting the rich and powerful. This divide between the rich and poor is one that I had not given much previous thought.

A few years after my personal discovery of Bruce Cockburn, I came across a book called "Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger" by evangelical theologian Ron Sider, a Mennonite originally from Southwestern Ontario. The book was approximately twenty

years old at the time that I first read it, yet it was a book that challenged me as a western Christian to look critically at not only my own relative wealth, but at the gross wealth of those around me.

Recognizing where I was positioned on a global scale was an enlightening time for me. Just as important, however, it was an exciting time for I had begun to develop a worldview that was my own, one which was shaped by my personal convictions and was, I felt, truly Christian. In the years that have followed the events that I have described above, I have begun to give voice to my convictions. Yet I remain a Christian. I have not given up on the evangelical church and have discovered that the awful thinking of my Bible School instructor so many years ago is not rampant within the church. However, although his voice may be shared by a few, I am also aware that the strong voice for social justice represented by Cockburn and Sider is a voice that is crying out in the wilderness. For myself, I do not want to live in the land of either the judgmental, as represented by my former Bible school teacher, or the land of the comfortable, as represented by those who hear the faint cry from the wilderness but are not willing to turn their ear to it for risk of being called to action. Instead, I want to share in the voice of my mentors. I want to gather courage, fuel my conviction and raise my own awareness, as well as the awareness of those within my Christian community. I want to be among the Christians in the evangelical church who are willing to engage in social justice and compassion; working for the equal opportunity of all people and communities to attain that which they need to develop and maintain their integrity.

1.2 My Journey as a Researcher

My Christian journey took me from the suburbs of Southern Ontario where I was raised to the inner city of Edmonton, Alberta. Near the end of my ten years in Edmonton, as I previously mentioned, I had the opportunity to work with a group of leaders from various ethnocultural communities while employed as a community worker with the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers. It was within this work context that a former refugee, and leader in the Kurdish community, made a remark that captured my attention. She stated that in her experience assisting other Kurdish refugees who have followed her to Canada; those who are sponsored by a church seem to have a better settlement experience than those refugees who are sponsored by the Federal Government. This insight was significant to me because as a Christian I feel passionate about the role that I believe we have been called to play in the work of justice and compassion towards refugees.

At the time that my colleague shared her insight on settlement with me I was dwelling anxiously in the period between submitting my application for Graduate Studies at Wilfrid Laurier University and waiting for a reply. Shortly after receiving my acceptance from the Faculty of Social Work, and as I was making a choice regarding the selection of my practicum placement, my mind returned to this insight. Amidst the myriad of options for my practicum was an opportunity to work with two Mennonite agencies in Kitchener working with refugees, the Mennonite Central Committee of Ontario and their affiliate, the Mennonite Coalition for Refugee Support. This opportunity was exciting for although I am not a Mennonite, in the past few years I have had a deepening respect for the leading

and exceptional role within the Christian community that I have witnessed Mennonites provide in addressing social issues.

Thinking specifically about my Kurdish colleague's observation, my initial plan was to compare the settlement experiences of refugees sponsored by the Government of Canada with those sponsored by churches. However, I was aware of my own time constraints that I felt would limit my opportunity to develop the level of familiarity and comfort needed for potential research participants to feel safe to engage in meaningful interaction. As well, resource constraints would limit my ability to provide translation services that would allow potential participants to fully express themselves in their first language for the purposes of a research interview.

At the same time that I was considering my research plan, I facilitated a focus group, for the purposes of my practicum, bringing congregation members from various Mennonite churches involved in the private sponsorship of refugees together for mutual learning. In a discussion with my thesis advisor about this focus group, my attention was turned to the possibility of researching the work of refugee assistance through learning about the experiences of Mennonites who are involved in this work on a voluntary basis. I was enthused about this idea because it provided me with the opportunity to examine the involvement of Christians in refugee assistance, as well as to explore my sense that, in the work of compassion towards refugees, Mennonites have set themselves apart from the larger body of Christians. Further, it allowed me to engage in research that was possible within my limited time constraints and resources.

Based upon the shift in focus of my research from refugees as recipients of a service, to Mennonites as service providers, the specific question that I have chosen to research is as follows:

“What is the nature of the work of Mennonite Christians in the Kitchener Waterloo region in the area of refugee assistance?”

A study of this question using qualitative inquiry allows me to focus on the important work of refugee assistance that I have seen Mennonites commit to, particularly in the areas of private sponsorship and the founding and continued operation of the Mennonite Coalition of Refugee Support.

And so the journey goes thus far. In Edmonton, a Kurdish woman who I deeply respect piqued my interest on the role of Christians in refugee assistance. In Kitchener Waterloo, my exposure to the Mennonite community provided me the opportunity to explore in depth the nature of the work of a specific community of Christians involved in the work of refugee assistance.

1.3 Important Milestones

Choosing to study the nature of the work of Mennonites involved in refugee assistance is timely due to the important milestones of the private sponsorship program and the Mennonite Coalition of Refugee Support. The private sponsorship program is 25 years old in 2004; for, as identified earlier, the first sponsorship agreement was signed between the Federal Government and the Mennonite Central Committee in 1979. This was a well-recognized event due to its direct relationship at that time to the sponsorship of refugees from Indochina. One of the Mennonite congregations that I have associated with was involved in the sponsorship of many Indochinese refugees to Kitchener-Waterloo, and

has remained active in sponsorship from that time forward. Despite the sustained momentum, or in some cases renewed momentum, of involvement in the private sponsorship program by Mennonite congregations, the Federal Government has seemingly not sustained their enthusiasm for the program. As I learned through my field placement in the refugee sponsorship program with the Mennonite Central Committee, allocation of resources from the Federal Government has not been adequate to address the issue of efficiency of the private sponsorship program. Through the course of the research, participants spoke about the lengthy processing period and administrative delays overseas that led to frustration among sponsoring groups and a prolonging of the wait for resettlement that refugees must endure. Through my field placement I learned that there is a campaign involving numerous sponsorship groups to request greater attention to this program by the Federal Government. Therefore, the greater understanding of the nature of this work, and the expressed commitment of those involved gives advocates for increased government resources greater confidence in the importance of the private sponsorship program.

Not only has the private sponsorship program hit an important milestone, but MCRS, where two of the research participants have been actively involved, is marking 2004 as an important year in its history. Since its inception in the 1980's, the agency has been under the umbrella of MCCO. However, the agency will become incorporated as its own entity in 2004, giving it impetus to continue and expand in its work assisting refugee claimants. Although MCRS was given lower profile in this research, it is a significant agency in Kitchener Waterloo due to its sole focus upon the marginalized population of refugee claimants. This is an important point as the flow of refugee claimants to this region

continues to increase as border officials seek to keep the pressure off Toronto by directing refugee claimants to the area.

1.4 Overview of Thesis

Chapter One of the thesis provides an understanding of my personal journey and how I have come to the point of engaging in this specific research. Having identified the path that I have traveled in the development of a research topic, the specific question explored in this research is as follows:

“What is the nature of the work of Mennonite Christians in the Kitchener Waterloo region in the area of refugee assistance?”

Mennonite Christians are the primary subject of my research; therefore I have included in Chapter Two a brief description of their theological roots and a historical overview of their presence in the Kitchener Waterloo region. As well, due to the shared refugee experience of Mennonites in history with refugees today, I have discussed the refugee experience of Mennonites from Europe to Canada after World War II. Lastly, because the research is within the context of refugee assistance, I have provided a description of the programs through which refugees whom research participants are working with are accepted into Canada.

In Chapter Three, a review is completed of various sources of literature that I believe is relevant to this thesis research. There is no research that specifically discusses the nature of the work of Mennonites involved in refugee assistance. However, a number of topics that address the specificity of their work are reviewed.

Chapter Four examines the methodology employed to embark upon the research. A further description of the development of the research question is provided, as well as the

methods followed to identify research participants and collect data for analysis. An explanation of the application of the grounded theory methodology is also given.

Chapter Five then discusses the findings collected through the interviews with research participants. The four themes presented in the findings come together under the central category of “welcoming the stranger”. The four themes are “religiosity”, “common needs”, “heightened consciousness” and “negotiating relationships”.

Chapter Six concludes with a discussion of the findings and limitations to the research followed by concluding comments.

CHAPTER TWO – PLACING THE RESEARCH IN CONTEXT

2.0 Introduction

The subject of my research, and the active voices present in my thesis, are Mennonites in the Kitchener-Waterloo region who are involved in the work of refugee assistance. The other lives in the research that must be understood are the refugee(s) with whom the participants are currently or previously engaged. Both Mennonites and refugees are among the ever expanding ethnically diverse population in the region of Kitchener- Waterloo. However, though both are a segment of the population, they possess a very different status and history in the area. This chapter will seek to provide a historical representation of Mennonites as a Christian tradition as well as background information on their notable presence in the Kitchener-Waterloo region. Lastly, I will seek to demonstrate how the two worlds of Mennonites and refugees, though vastly different in many respects, share some similar experiences and have had their lives converge through the work of refugee assistance.

2.1 Anabaptist Heritage of Mennonites

To fully understand the term Mennonite one must look at their Christian tradition. Mennonites have roots in the Anabaptist tradition of the European Protestant Reformation in the Sixteenth Century (MHSC, 1998). The feature that earned Anabaptists their name was the belief that people entering the church should do so with full awareness (MHSC, 1998). As a result, Anabaptists rejected the Roman Catholic tradition of infant baptism, believing that the decision to be baptized must be made as an adult (MHSC, 1998). Since the group who developed this condition had themselves been baptized as children, they became known as Anabaptists, or re-baptizers (MHSC, 1998).

The Anabaptist movement began in the countries of Holland, Germany and Switzerland. An important figure in Holland was Menno Simons, whose name the Mennonites continue to carry (MHSC, 1998). Although Menno Simons is recognized as an important figure, he was not one of the early leaders, rather “his significance lies in the fact that he assumed the responsibilities of leadership at the crucial moment of the movement when it was in danger of losing its original identity” (MHSC, 1998). It was the tradition of adult baptism and the theology of peace that set the Anabaptists apart from both the Roman Catholic Church and other Protestant reformers, meaning that suspicion was directed towards them, and that at times they were martyred for their beliefs (MHSC, 1998).

2.2 Mennonites in Waterloo Region – A Historical Overview

The lack of acceptance by European governments of Mennonite religious views led them to become a martyred and migratory group. In 1683 the first Mennonites crossed the Atlantic to Pennsylvania hopeful for the opportunity to practice their religion freely and to escape military service (MHSC, 1998). However, when the United States entered into an armed struggle with Britain, this led the Mennonites to again be on the move (MHSC, 1998).

As a result there were numerous waves of migration of Mennonites to Canada in the nineteenth and twentieth century. The first Mennonites to immigrate to Canada settled in the Niagara Peninsula in the late eighteenth century. They arrived from Pennsylvania in a search for affordable land coupled with a promise from the officials of Upper Canada that they would be exempt from military service (Epp, 2002, p. 17). However, by the nineteenth century, other Mennonites from Pennsylvania came to settle further into

Ontario, along the Grand River, having purchased land from a land speculator, who had previously acquired the land from the people of the Six Nations tribe (p. 17).

The Pennsylvania Mennonites settling in the region of Waterloo were soon followed by a wave of Mennonite migrants coming directly from Europe. These Amish Mennonites, of Swiss heritage, arrived in the years following 1823 and purchased land “west of Kitchener-Waterloo and the adjoining counties of Perth and Oxford” (Epp, 2002, p. 17). In 1889, a split climaxed among the Swiss Mennonite over a disagreement on contemporary practices within Mennonite churches such as “the adoption of Sunday schools, prayer meetings, preaching in the English language and revival meetings” (p. 18). These “Old Order” Mennonites continue to have an attractive presence across the pastoral countryside north of Waterloo with their weathered barns, century old farmhouses and lifestyles devoid of most modern technologies.

In the 1920’s, the Mennonite community in the region of Waterloo expanded again with the arrival of Russian Mennonites of Dutch ancestry (Epp, 2002, p. 19). Russian Mennonites were fleeing revolution and famine in the Soviet Union (p. 19). Other Mennonites later joined them following another migration from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe after World War II (p. 19). The wave of Russian Mennonites in the 1920’s and post World War II will receive particular attention in section 2.3 Mennonites and the Refugee Experience.

As early settlers to the region of Waterloo, Mennonites established themselves as part of the fabric of society. Mennonite churches and social service agencies, such as the House of Friendship, have a strong presence in the area. Further, some of the largest businesses in the area today were founded or once owned by Mennonites (Epp, 2002, p.

19). However, as the Region of Waterloo grows and diversifies Mennonite presence, aside from the Old Order and more conservative Mennonites, is less conspicuous and they have become “simply one part of the cultural mix in the area” (p. 20).

2.3 Mennonites and the Refugee Experience

Among the Mennonites residing in the Kitchener Waterloo region, a segment of them arrived in Canada from Russia after both World War I and World War II. This group of Mennonites deserves particular attention to this research due to their experience as refugees and people who suffered loss and devastation due to persecution, famine and drought.

In the early 1920's, following World War I, the combination of revolution, famine and drought in the Soviet Union was responsible for the death of millions of native Russians as well as thousands of Germans and Mennonites (Smith, 1981, p. 317). As a result of these cumulative disasters, Mennonites in Russia, in a manner that characterized their 400 year old history, sought a way to leave Russia and trek to a land of safety through mass migration (p. 317). Due to the favourable impression as superior farmers made on the Canadian government by Mennonite immigrants of 1874, Canada became the land of destiny for approximately 21,000 Mennonite immigrants from Russia by the year 1930 (p. 324).

The experience of Russian Mennonites in the 1920's is an important time in Mennonite history. In response to the plight of Russian Mennonites suffering the effects of civil war, drought and famine, the Mennonite Central Committee was established in North America (Smith, 1981, p. 317). In 1921, A.J. Miller, a representative of the Mennonite Central Committee entered difficult negotiations with officials of the Soviet

Union, who were suspicious of foreign influence, to provide relief to Mennonites in Soviet territory (p. 319). After much work by Miller, the Soviet Union agreed to allow Mennonites to come into the Soviet Union to provide assistance, with the understanding that the Mennonites providing assistance would not discriminate between Russian Mennonites and non-Mennonites in their relief operation (p. 319). The primary source of relief was in the operation of feeding kitchens that by May 1922 were feeding 40,000 people daily (p. 321). Over 80 years since its inception the Mennonite Central Committee has grown beyond relief work. However, to this day, relief work remains an important element of the Mennonite Central Committee.

After World War II, the Mennonites who arrived in Canada were among the approximately 35,000 ethnic German Mennonites who had been living in the Ukraine region of the Soviet Union. These Mennonites became refugees in 1941, when war broke out between the Soviet Union and Germany and they were evacuated by German troops for resettlement in Poland (Epp, 2000, p. 43; Regehr, 1996, p. 80). The trek westward from the Ukraine to Poland through the winter months of 1943-44 is described in historical writing as the worst of the refugee experience for the Mennonite sojourners. For example, the trek included overburdened wagons, continuous rain and animals and people left to die along the wayside (Epp, 2000, p. 43; Regehr, 1996, p. 80). However, the most important description of this group of refugees is the gender makeup. As Epp states, a high percentage of the families were headed by a female due to the number of men who had been arrested and exiled while in the Soviet Union or had been conscripted to fight by either the Soviet or the German forces (p. 4). The loss of men and the

reconfiguring of the family unit, as shared retrospectively by survivors, became a pivotal and defining element of the experience of the Mennonite refugees (p. 36).

The survivors of the trek arrived in German-occupied Poland and remained for one year until the area fell to the Soviet Union (Regehr, 1996, p. 80). The treatment of the Mennonite refugees at that time varied, with some being repatriated back to the Soviet Union and subsequently exiled to Siberia, and others “harassed, and physically and sexually abused but then allowed to continue westward or to find shelter with local people” (p. 81). Many of those who continued westward became immigrants to Canada.

After the war was over, Canada was identified as the preferred destination of the Mennonite refugees in Western Europe (Regehr, 1996, p. 80). The primary reason for this is that many of the refugees had close relatives and friends who arrived in Canada during the immigration of the 1920’s (Epp, 2002, p. 19). There was initial difficulty in arranging resettlement to Canada owed to the country’s reluctance to accept post war refugees from Europe (Regehr, 1996, p. 91). However, due to the plight of the European refugees, the strength of the Canadian economy and the ongoing labour shortages in Canada, the stringent immigration policies were relaxed (p. 91).

Recognizing Canada’s shifting policy, the Mennonites already present in Canada became effective lobbyists for the resettlement of Mennonite refugees (Regehr, 1996, p. 91). In 1946, the Canadian Government permitted the sponsorship of European refugees to Canada by close family members (p. 91). As a result, through the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization, Mennonites took on the sponsorship of family members languishing as refugees in Europe (p. 92). Between the years 1947-1951, close to 8,000 Mennonite refugees are documented to have immigrated to Canada, with just over 6,000

arriving through the “Close Relative Scheme” (p. 94). As has already been stated, a significant number of the refugees settled in the Kitchener Waterloo region.

The treacherous and challenging experiences of the ethnic German Mennonites who sojourned from the Ukraine to Western Europe cannot be downplayed. They endured an extremely difficult time as refugees living through a brutal war. As a result, they have a historical link with refugees who arrive to Canada in this day and age. However, I feel that it would be remiss to not acknowledge the element of privilege or fortune that aided their survival and eventual resettlement. As ethnic Germans, the Mennonite refugees were evacuated from the Ukraine by the incoming German forces. At the same time, these same German forces were responsible for the abuse and extermination of the Mennonite’s ethnic Ukrainian and Soviet Jewish neighbours (Epp, 1996, p. 34). On the basis of their ethnicity the Mennonites were considered worthy of evacuation. In regards to their resettlement, as has been noted, the Mennonites were aided by the presence of their family members in Canada. Russian Mennonite immigrants from the 1920’s had established a seemingly influential presence since their arrival and assisted in the arrangements to bring their family to Canada. Due to the presence and influence of their family, the Mennonites, among other Eastern European refugees, were looked upon with favour by the Federal Government (Regehr, 1996, p. 93).

2.4 Mennonite Involvement with Refugees

In the Kitchener-Waterloo region, Mennonites are involved in refugee assistance in the capacity of providing private sponsorship to refugees from overseas and through the development and support of the Mennonite Coalition for Refugee Support.

Mennonites involved in a private sponsorship take on a large responsibility by providing for financial and practical needs of the refugee(s) that they are supporting. The sponsoring group is responsible, in most cases, to provide for these needs over the course of the first year of the refugee(s) arrival. The following is a list of the areas that sponsoring groups are responsible to provide:

- Financial support for food, clothing, transportation and other material needs
- Housing and furnishings
- Providing orientation to life in Canada, including providing information on rights and responsibilities of residents
- Assistance in accessing services including medical care
- Assistance in getting access to resources: interpreters, community support groups, settlement services, etc.
- Assistance getting children into school and dealing with the school system
- Assistance in finding help learning English (e.g. getting into an ESL class)
- Assistance in finding employment
- Emotional support and friendship
- Assistance in becoming independent (Rose, 2000, p. 4).

In the development and support of the Mennonite Coalition for Refugee Support, the Mennonites in the Kitchener-Waterloo region have also taken on the responsibility of financially upholding the agency and maintaining its ongoing operation. The financial obligation is substantial as there is no government funding to provide settlement support to refugee claimants. As a result, the Mennonites are not able to receive government funding for the operational costs of the agency. Support for the ongoing operation of the

agency is provided by volunteer board members from the various Mennonite churches in the Kitchener-Waterloo community.

2.5 Refugees: Methods of Acceptance into Canada

The ability of Mennonites to currently provide assistance to refugees is due to the international commitment that Canada has made to refugee resettlement. Canada has signed the 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol (CIC - Refugees, 2002). This Convention protects refugees from being returned to a country where they would face persecution (2002). Refugee protection was passed into law with the 1976 Immigration Act (Canadian Council for Refugees, 1998, p. 5) and its new replacement, the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act of 2002.

Privately sponsored refugees and refugee claimants whom Mennonites assist arrive in Canada through two official government programs. These are the *In-Canada Refugee Protection Process* and the *Private Sponsorship Program*. The Private Sponsorship Program has two related programs called the *Joint Assisted Sponsorship* program and the *Women at Risk* program. Each of these programs are described below.

The *In-Canada Refugee Protection Process* is designed for refugee claimants who arrive to Canada and proceed to claim refugee status (CIC - Refugees, 2002). In this program, refugee claimants apply for a hearing before the Immigration and Refugee Board seeking status as a Convention Refugee. Successful applicants are granted permanent residency while those who are unsuccessful in their refugee claim are deported from Canada. This process can be very complex and difficult for a refugee claimant to maneuver without support. Therefore, assistance provided to refugee claimants is important in order for them to receive a fair hearing.

The *Private Sponsorship Program* permits refugees to be sponsored from overseas by private groups (CIC - Refugees, 2002). Private sponsorships are primarily facilitated by a Sponsorship Agreement Holder (SAH), who is an organization holding a formal agreement with the Federal Government to provide refugee sponsorship (Rose, 2000, p. 2). According to T. Wichert, National Coordinator of the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Refugee Program, MCC, which is the relief, development and advocacy arm of the Mennonite Church, was the first organization to become a SAH when they signed a formal agreement, in 1979, with the Federal Government to provide private sponsorship to overseas refugees (personal communication, November, 28, 2003).

Not all SAHs are Christian Protestant organizations. A SAH may be any religious or ethnocultural organization or other humanitarian organization (p. 2), which acts as an umbrella organization and guarantor for their constituent groups. In the context of my research, MCC Ontario is the SAH and Mennonite Christians working through their local Church congregation are the constituency base. The sponsorship is provided through the local congregation with administrative and other support provided by MCC Ontario. Private sponsors are responsible to provide all financial and material support for the refugee and to assist in the settlement process during the refugee's first twelve months in Canada (p. 4).

The *Joint Assistance Sponsorship* program is a program through which sponsorship is shared between the Federal Government and a SAH (Rose, 2000, p. 4). This program was specially designed to meet the needs of refugees with extraordinary needs that may surpass sponsoring group's financial resources (p. 5). Therefore, the Federal Government provides the financial resources while the sponsoring group provides the settlement

support (p. 5). The *Women at Risk* (AWR) program was established in 1988 to address the special needs of refugee women in “precarious or permanently unstable circumstances” (p. 5). Refugees in the AWR program may come to Canada as government-assisted, private sponsored or joint assisted refugees (p. 5).

In my research, the majority of participants are involved in refugee assistance through the Private Sponsorship Program. Other participants are volunteers with MCRC in providing assistance to refugee claimants. In both cases the settlement needs are similar; the primary difference being that refugee claimants live in greater uncertainty regarding their future as their status as permanent residents has not been established.

CHAPTER THREE – LITERATURE REVIEW

3.0 Introduction

There is no literature I am aware of that looks directly at the nature of the work of Mennonites and refugee assistance. However, there are many subject areas in the literature that are important to the study of Mennonites involved in refugee assistance. Therefore, a broad scope of the literature was reviewed to cover the following topics.

First, literature is reviewed that explores Mennonites in cross-cultural relations, including the past and current relationship between First Nations people in Canada and Mennonites and the relationship between Mennonite and refugees from Indochina during the refugee crisis in the 1970's. Second, the helping nature of religion is examined in a study that looks at the how religion impacts voluntary service as well as research that examines the involvement of the church in providing refugee sanctuary in the United States. Third, the relationship between refugees and their need for social support is examined. Social support is understood as one of the primary areas of involvement provided in refugee assistance in the context of this research. Next, gender differences are explored in the context of forming helping relationships. In my own study there are seven male and five female research participants. The possibility for differences in the type of help that they provide will be explored in this portion of the literature review. Lastly, the relationship between social involvement and a heightened awareness of social issues is examined.

3.1 Mennonites in Cross Cultural Relations

Recognizing that the research on Mennonites involved in refugee assistance involves cross-cultural relations, literature specific to that topic is reviewed. The first topic is a

historical and contemporary review of Mennonite relations with First Nations in various regions across Canada. The second topic is an examination of literature on the relationship of Mennonites in Kitchener Waterloo with the Hmong refugees of Indochina. Specifically, it looks at the dynamics behind the conversion of Hmong refugees to Christianity and to becoming Mennonites specifically.

First Nations and Mennonites

A critical examination of the settlement of Mennonites in southern Manitoba and Southwestern Ontario makes it difficult to ignore the role that Mennonite presence has played in the oppression of First Nations people. This examination is relevant because it provides an example of Mennonite relations with a diverse people group, such as occurs in the work of refugee assistance.

In the article *Metis, Mennonites and the 'Unsettled Prairie', 1874-1896* Donovan Geisbrecht challenges the common perception of Mennonite settlers in southern Manitoba as that of non-intrusive immigrants. Based upon archival research, Geisbrecht (2001) states that “between 1879 and 1898 over thirty letters and memorandums were written concerning Metis rights to several sections on the Mennonite East Reserve including land in Gruenfeld, the very first Mennonite village in western Canada” (p. 104). This archival documentation presents a challenge to the Mennonite identity of being a voice for the oppressed. As Geisbrecht concludes, the story of Metis-Mennonite relations gives reason for pause, in which “Mennonites would be well advised to consider themselves not only a voice for the oppressed but also in some cases a cause of oppression” (p. 109).

Another large area of Mennonite settlement in the nineteenth century is the region of Kitchener-Waterloo in southwestern Ontario. Like Giesbrecht, Researcher E. Reginald

Good, also completed archival research. In his work, Good (2001) unearthed documents which indicate that First Nations people had legal entitlement to land settled by Mennonites in what is now the Kitchener-Waterloo Region (p. 99). Good states that in 1784, Governor General Frederick Haldimand granted the Six Nations close to a million acres of land along the Grand River intended for “they and their descendants...to enjoy forever” (p. 99). However, what is significant is that tracts of this land granted to the First Nations were sold off, including 60,000 acres to Pennsylvania Mennonites (p. 99). The money paid for this Crown land was to be put into trust for the Six Nations; however, to the date of Good’s writing, neither the Federal or Provincial Government have provided an account to the Six Nations for this money (p. 99).

Leonard Doell describes the role of the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) in addressing the issue of land displacement in Laird, Saskatchewan. Doell (2001) states that the Young Chippewyan Band has a claim before the Federal Court on land northwest of the town of Laird (p. 167). According to Doell, MCC, in their moral obligation, has worked on behalf of the First Nations people to “build a bridge between the (Mennonite) land owners at Laird and the descendants of the Young Chippewyan Band” (p. 167). The investigation of the relationship between Mennonite settlers and First Nations people is significant as it demonstrates that their settlement has come at a cost to the First Nations people.

As stated, this history is a challenge to the Mennonite identity of peacemakers as they were involved in the unjust treatment of First Nations people through the land displacement. At the same time, in the local context of northern Saskatchewan, there is some evidence that Mennonites are addressing their role in the displacement First Nations

people, demonstrating that they are now actively engaged in their identity as peacemakers.

Hmong Refugees and Mennonites of Kitchener Waterloo

While the Vietnamese constituted a large number of the Indochinese refugees in the late 1970's, the Hmong peoples from the mountainous region of Laos represent a small number of those sponsored to Canada (Winland, 1994, p. 23). Of particular interest to this research, a high percentage of the Hmong came to Kitchener, Ontario due to the presence of the Mennonite Central Committee of Ontario whose policy was to aid those refugees categorized as "difficult to sponsor" (Winland, 1992, p. 101). The Hmong people are traditionally adherents to a form of eastern religion, though one that "did not possess a consciously articulated religion recognized as a separate set of beliefs and practices" (Winland, 1994, p. 23). While missionary influence in the late 1940's among the Hmong of Laos saw a high rate of conversions to Christianity, it is believed that only one of four Hmong families that arrived in Kitchener, Ontario were baptized Christians (Winland, 1992, p. 102). However, as of 1989, of the 65 Hmong families living in the Waterloo region, approximately one-half had affiliation with the Hmong Christian Mennonite Church, whose attendance was 260 people at that time (p. 106).

Interpreting and understanding the significant conversion to Christianity among the Hmong people in the Waterloo region is important. According to Roberts & Davidson, (as cited in Lewis, Fraser & Pecora, 1988) people are affiliated with a particular religion for either social or intrapersonal reasons (p. 277). Those who join for social reasons are interested in the community and social activities provided by the church, while those who join for intrapersonal reasons are drawn to the theological insights provided by the church and the opportunity to have questions of transcendence addressed (p. 277). Among the

Hmong in Kitchener, religious change acted as a mechanism of acculturation and provided an institution able to “strengthen primary ethnic support groups” (Winland, 1992, p. 104), suggesting that affiliation with Christianity was for social reasons as described above.

This finding is congruent with the research conducted by Lewis et al (1988) among Indochinese refugees in Utah, USA. Their research indicates that of the Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian and Hmong refugees studied, the Hmong were the most likely of the four groups to have converted to a Western religion (p. 279). Further, it was concluded that the primary reason for conversion was ethnic identity and social support (p. 281). Understanding that the Hmong may convert for reasons of identity and support emphasizes the importance of their communal relations.

3.2 Helping Nature of Religion

Religion is one of the factors understood to positively impact levels of volunteerism. Research participants in this study are all active in a local Mennonite church and all act in a voluntary capacity in their provision of refugee assistance. Therefore, two studies that examine religiosity and volunteerism are reviewed. Next, two studies that discuss the inspiring influence of religion on involvement in refugee assistance will be examined. In both of these studies refugee assistance is provided in the form of sanctuary provision by churches in the U.S.A. to refugees from Central America.

Religiosity and Volunteerism

A strong emphasis within Christianity is the responsibility of adherents to care for others. Along these lines, there exists a significant amount of research on the topic of

religiosity as a predictor of volunteerism (Park & Smith, 2000). As stated, two such studies will be reviewed.

First, a study by Park and Smith (2000) measures the level of voluntary activity based upon various dimensions of religion. The dimensions are religiosity (one's behaviour and attitude towards religion), religious identity (the sense of belonging to a particular religious tradition or movement), religious socialization (exposure to religious values and behaviour during formative years) and religious social networks (the degree of access to other religious adherents) (p. 272). A finding of significance in this study is in regards to the dimension of religious socialization. Specifically, the transmission of a parent's "mainline" (as opposed to evangelical or charismatic) Protestant identity is a predictor of church related volunteering (Park & Smith, 2000, p. 279).

A related study by Lam (2002) investigates the relationship between various dimensions of religiosity and volunteerism. Examined are the participatory (level of religious participation), devotional (level of Bible reading and prayer etc), affiliative (denomination representation) and theological (beliefs) dimensions of religiosity (p. 405).

The findings of Lam's study indicate that each of the four dimensions of religiosity promote voluntary participation (Lam, 2002, p. 415). Specifically, there is a positive relationship between the four dimensions of religiosity and voluntary participation in the form of being a member of a volunteer organization and doing voluntary work for a volunteer organization (p. 415). Among the various dimensions, one relationship that is significant is the private, or devotional, dimension of religiosity such as prayer and religious reading which is found to increase the odds of membership in a voluntary

association (p. 411). Further, affiliation specifically with a Protestant church also has a positive impact on involvement in a voluntary association (p. 411).

The common finding of these two studies is that affiliation with the Protestant church is a positive indicator for involvement in voluntary activity. This includes participation in church related and non church related activity.

Religious Inspiration for Refugee Assistance

There is no literature available relevant specifically to the topic of the religious inspiration of Mennonites from the Kitchener-Waterloo region, or elsewhere in Canada, involved in refugee assistance. However, existing research looks at this topic in the context of other denominations in the United States.

Park, (1998) discusses how a Quaker and a United Methodist congregation in the United States used Biblical texts and religious teachings as an inspiration for their involvement in providing sanctuary to refugees (p. 399). The Biblical texts that the two religious denominations relied upon came from the Old Testament book of Leviticus and the New Testament book of Matthew (p. 399). According to Park, in the Leviticus text, the people of Israel are instructed that because they were once refugees in Egypt, they should therefore care for the refugees that are in their midst (p. 399). The book of Matthew is said to instruct the reader to care for the stranger, for in doing so one is mysteriously caring directly for Jesus (p. 399). In *Refugee Ministry in the Local Congregation*, a handbook for Mennonite congregations in the USA, Mummert (1992) devotes a chapter to the Biblical framework for refugee ministry. In developing a rationale for involvement of Mennonites in refugee assistance Mummert, like the Quakers and Methodists, draws upon the same Old and New Testament texts (p. 64).

Identity and solidarity with past others involved in similar work also serves as a motivating factor to become engaged in refugee assistance. Park (1998) indicates that the churches she studied found inspiration in the Underground Railroad for slaves and the sanctuary provided by churches to draft resisters during the Vietnam War (p. 399). Bibler-Coutin (1993) in her work on religious activism and the sanctuary movement in the United States also discusses how identity with past figures acts as a catalyst to action. She describes a group of pastors in Southern California galvanized by the assassination of Oscar Romero in El Salvador, an Archbishop who took up the work of the poor after one of his priests, Father Rutilio Grande, had been killed for his involvement in ministry among the poor (p. 24). Understanding this commitment, the group of pastors in California soon began to turn their attention to the sanctuary movement as a way to address the human rights abuses of Central American refugees living among them (p. 28).

Similar to the literature on religion and volunteering, the studies discussed above demonstrate a relationship between religion and the voluntary work of helping. In the latter studies, those involved in refugee ministry pay attention to Biblical teachings on compassion and are inspired by the examples of others who have gone on ahead of them in this work.

3.3 Social Support and Refugee Settlement

The presence of social support is an important contributor to the emotional and material stability of refugees who are resettling in Canada (Simich, Beiser & Mawani, 2002, p. 600). According to Strober (1994) in the context of resettlement and adaptation, social support is cited as “one of the most effective factors for moderating stress, easing transitions and restoring previous adaptive mechanisms” (p. 26).

A definition of social support is provided by House (as cited in Simich et. al.) who describes it as “help of various types – emotional, informational, instrumental and affirmational – derived from such social relationships” (p. 600). In a similar definition, social support is understood as “the degree of available and reciprocal interpersonal environmental resources which offer practical, emotional, and event related support” (Strober, 1994, p. 26).

The importance of social support for post Gulf War male Iraqi refugees is highlighted in an American study looking at psychological and economic adaptation. Takeda (2000) states that social support may provide three positive outcomes. First, it can lead to cognitive changes including enhancement of self-esteem and confidence in dealing with problems associated with refugee settlement (p. 7). Second, social support can produce affective changes including increased motivation among those suffering from depression (p. 7). And third, it can serve as a safety net through the perception that assistance is available, even if not accessed (p. 7).

The importance of social support for refugees is also understood in the context of the stress creating needs and circumstances that they face. In two separate studies, service providers identify what they believe to be the greatest needs of refugees. First, in a study on the challenges of settlement to Canada among male refugees from Iraq, service providers identify a number of challenges faced in settlement. These are language barriers, barriers to employment, access to stable housing, lack of understanding in regards to Canadian culture and overcoming trauma from previous experience (Michalski, 2001, p. 219). In a separate study, the major needs of refugees newly arrived to Sydney, Australia are identified as housing, English competency, ability to understand

the system, employment, finances and family reunification (Waxman, 1998, p. 765). A synthesis of these two studies identifies common social needs which include housing, employment, and the ability to communicate in the first language of the host nation. A lack in the provision of these needs is a contributor to psychological stress, thereby explaining the need for social support.

Informal social support, as may be found in the ethnocultural community of the refugee, is an important consideration. In two studies of the secondary migration of refugees from within Canada (as cited in Simich, Beiser and Mawani, 2002) “the presence of a like ethnic community proved a significant factor in (secondary) migration decisions” (p. 600). A study of the adaptation of Salvadoran refugees in Montreal states that new arrivals are dependent upon their ethnocultural community for social support to reduce the stresses related to adaptation (Jacob, 1992, p. 24). In assessing the level by which refugees access community based social programs, Michalski (2001) found that male Iraqi refugees in Canada were more likely to rely upon their informal networks of friends and families than community programs (p. 215). The critical elements of social support provided by one’s own community include identification with one’s circumstances, and the ability to communicate in one’s first language. As well, previous studies (as cited by Michalski, 2001) demonstrate that cultural factors exist which place an emphasis on “self help, informal support networks of support and even faith groups to deal with personal and financial problems” (p. 220), thereby explaining the greater likelihood of refugees to seek support from their own ethnocultural community.

Various studies cite the importance of social support for government assisted refugees (Simich, Beiser & Mawani, 2002; Michalski, 2001) to Canada. In making

recommendations for improvement, Simich et. al. suggest the need to expand the Private Sponsorship and Joint Assisted Sponsorship program (p. 605), whereby groups such as faith communities sponsor a refugee(s). In Private and Joint Assisted Sponsorship the benefit is that refugees may have access to advice and emotional support provided by the sponsors (p. 605). While this does not address the above need for refugees to find support from their own community, it does enhance the social network of the refugee and the likelihood of a successful settlement experience.

3.4 Gender and the Helping Relationship

Observation of differences between men and women in their relational styles has led to extensive research on the origins of gender differences. One of the differences that have been observed is the forms of expression and affection and the understanding of the notion of morality.

A well known work on gender differences is by Carol Gilligan in her critique of Kohlberg's theory of moral development. As described by Crain (1985), Kohlberg developed three levels of moral reasoning through which people progressed. These classifications of moral reasoning are called pre-conventional, conventional and post conventional. At the level of post conventional, morality is based upon the notion of fairness, or justice. In relating Kohlberg's work to women, Gilligan (1982) argues that his work was biased against women because it used only male participants in its research (18). Through her own research Gilligan and Attanucci (1988) developed what she titled a *care perspective* as an alternative approach to moral decision making and that this is distinct from Kohlberg's justice perspective (p. 224). The two moral injunctions captured

by these different perspectives are the injunction to not treat others unfairly and the injunction to not turn away from the needs of another individual (p. 225).

Gilligan and Attanucci (1988) report on three studies undertaken to test the two differing perspectives of morality and to determine the extent to which “men and women differentially raise concerns about justice and care in discussing moral conflicts in their lives” (p. 225). In the data analysis Gilligan and Attanucci develop five categories in which a subject’s response was placed – *Care Only*, *Care Focus*, *Care Justice*, *Justice Focus*, *Justice Only* (p. 231). The findings indicate that there is a significant relationship between ones gender and form of moral orientation. Both men and women respond to the category of *Care Justice*, but a *Care Focus* response was much more likely found in women and a *Justice Focus* was much more likely found in men (p. 231). In order to emphasize the difference Gilligan states that “if women were excluded from a study of moral reasoning, *Care Focus* (emphasis mine) could easily be overlooked” (p. 232).

In another study of gender difference, Anderson (1988) compared how male and females perceived their volunteer experience in a church operated homeless shelter (p. 55). This comparison was done by studying log entries in a log book that was kept throughout the shelter’s operation over the winter months (p. 55). As well, volunteers were asked to complete a survey asking about the positive and negative experiences of working in the shelter (p. 55).

The findings of this study indicate difference in the positive experiences of men and women. Women were more likely to give a response categorized as “gaining in awareness and understanding” (Anderson, 1988, p. 58) while men were more likely to provide a response categorized as “fulfilling a need” (p. 58). This difference suggests that

female volunteers at the shelter were more focused on their interpersonal development while men were more focused on the completion of instrumental tasks. For example, female volunteers spoke more about the development of relationships with the guests while male volunteers spoke more about the accomplishment of tasks associated with their volunteer role (p. 58). Despite gender differences found in the research, the author concludes that the differences are not mutually exclusive stating that their data does not support the notion that “males are only goal oriented and women are only nurturing” (p. 58).

In another study, the difference in relational patterns of male and females were studied. Looking at the dimensions of age and gender in friendship Fox, Gibbs and Auerbach (1985) found that differences exist in the description of friendship between male and female participants and that these differences continue to exist, throughout the three age categories under study – young (18-22), midlife (35-55), and older (65-75). Descriptions of friendship were coded as empathy, altruism and companionship. The authors state that “the most conspicuous gender difference for all age-groups in the study is that men’s and women’s responses fall consistently into instrumental and expressive behavioral categories, respectively” (p. 493).

Although the authors describe men and women as instrumental and expressive accordingly, they emphasize that they are *not* stating that men do not value friendship, but rather that they define it in different terms. The primary reason cited to explain the difference in men’s and women’s description of friendships is in their patterns of socialization. Particularly, boys are raised to believe that the masculine role is equated with a source of power that brings with it economic and social rewards (p. 500).

3.5 Heightened Awareness and Social Involvement

As individuals become involved in voluntary activity with a marginalized population, they may do so because of an awareness of the circumstances and a desire to help. As Mennonites involve themselves in refugee assistance, it is important to understand the impact of their involvement on their own level of awareness of social issues and on their choice to remain involved in an ongoing manner.

In a study of raised awareness and social involvement, Hoehn (1983) identifies four experiences that lead to an increased awareness of social issues and problems. These are (1) being discriminated against, (2) witnessing the suffering of some other person, (3) bonding with someone or gaining access to the meaning of their life-world and, (4) confrontation with discontinuities in oneself (p. 35).

A study by McAdam (1989) was conducted on the differences in level of social activism between University students who participated in the civil rights movement Freedom Summer project in 1964 and those who were invited to participate but did not do so (p. 750). McAdam (as cited in Corning & Myers, 2002) found that students who applied to participate in Freedom Summer were those who were involved in social activism on their University campus (p. 724). As well, those who were the most active in social activism on campus were more likely to follow through with participation in Freedom Summer (p. 724). Further, those who participated were most likely to sustain activism throughout their life (p. 724).

In the study by McAdam, ongoing activism was measured in the short-term and long-term. Over the short-term (1964-1970) McAdam states that Freedom Summer “volunteers were far more politically active than the ‘no shows’” (p. 750). This difference

persists over the long-term (to 1983) as the differences that exist between the two groups “continue to exercise some independent influence over the volunteers’ later activist careers” (p. 754).

CHAPTER FOUR – RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.0 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to formally introduce the methodology employed to complete my research. I will begin by describing the term *qualitative research* and provide an explanation as to why I have chosen qualitative research as my method of inquiry. Second, I will seek to introduce the research paradigm which underlined my research. I seek to describe how my own worldview entered into and impacted my research. This will be followed by a review of my research question, as well an explanation of the research design, the strategy for participant selection and form of data generation that I employed to carry out the exploration of the said research question. As well, I will provide an overview of my use of grounded theory methodology analysis. Lastly, I will present and describe the twelve individuals who generously participated in my research.

4.1 Qualitative Research

For the purpose of my research, I have chosen to engage in qualitative inquiry in order to understand the nature of the work of Mennonites involved in refugee assistance in the Kitchener-Waterloo region. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), qualitative research is a form of research that does not arrive at findings by utilizing statistical procedures or other forms of quantification (p. 10). Rather, qualitative research is inquiry into people's "lives, lived experiences, behaviours, emotions and feelings" that is arrived at through interviews, observations and analysis of, for example, documents, films or videotapes (p. 11).

My reason for choosing qualitative research as my method of inquiry is two-fold. First, qualitative inquiry is a good fit for who I am as a person. As stated by Strauss and Corbin (1998), some people are more oriented and temperamentally suited to doing (qualitative research) (p. 11). I feel that I am an individual who is innately interested in people's stories and in my own personal relationships I seek to understand the journeys that individuals travel that bring them to the point where they are at in their life. My second reason for choosing qualitative inquiry is that it is well suited to the form of research in which I am engaged. According to Stern (as cited in Strauss & Corbin) qualitative research can be used to explore an area of which there is little known in the research (p. 11), such as in my study of Mennonites involved in refugee assistance. Qualitative research can also be utilized to obtain details about phenomena that may be difficult to extract through quantitative research (p. 11). In my research, my desire is to understand individual's experiences, inspiration and feelings about their work in refugee assistance which cannot be described through numbers.

4.2 Research Paradigm

The practice of identifying a paradigm through which I engage in my research is important in allowing me to understand the ontological assumptions that I make about human nature and how I view the abstract notion of reality. Upon reflection of how I view human nature and reality, the research paradigm that I choose to identify with is that referred to as fallibilistic realism.

According to Anastas (1999), fallibilistic realism is based in realism (p. 17). In his description of the realist position, Harre (1972) introduces the concepts of *reference* and *demonstration* (p. 90). Reference is the comprehensible verbal expression of an entity

whether it can be observed or not observed while demonstration is the actual ability to indicate the existence of an entity (p. 90). Harre describes the realist position schematically by outlining the following principles:

1. Some theoretical terms refer to hypothetical entities.
2. Some hypothetical entities are candidates for existence.
3. Some candidates for existence are demonstratable. (p. 90)

The schema laid out by Harre makes plausible a connection between what we know and the way things are through the process of reference and demonstration.

The fallibilistic realism paradigm is described as “a new model of science” that incorporates the critique of logical positivism while not abandoning entirely the concept of a knowable reality (Anastas, 1999, p. 17). Rather, it asserts that in the consideration of reality, context must be understood. As Anastas states, “the immediate and historical context in which scientific investigation takes place is considered to be an integral part of the process that must be understood in evaluating its products” (p. 17).

The notion of fallibilistic realism is not broadly accepted. Sutton (as cited in Johnson, 1995), concerned with the logic of combining the idea of a known reality with the view that our views may be false, states that:

...continuing to support realism, while at the same time, claiming that it does not deliver the goods (true and reliable knowledge of an objective reality) sounds like a religious claim of faith or philosophical mythology much more than a useful idea. (p. 1)

Further explanation of the paradigm of fallibilistic realism helps to address the concern raised by Sutton. Anastas (1999) provides two premises upon which the

fallibilistic realism paradigm is based. The first premise is that “there is an invariant reality that exists apart from any particular observer of it” (p. 18). The second premise is that there will be an element of error in our approach to knowing this reality (Anastas, 1999, p. 19), meaning that the methodology employed in research and the theories derived from the research will not be infallible (p. 19). The two premises put forward by Anastas are recognized by Kazi & Spurling (2000) who state that, “reality exists external to the observer, and although it cannot be apprehended as it is (for the observer’s theoretical orientation acts as a filter), one can strive for an approximation of this reality” (p. 5).

An example of how the assumptions inherent in fallibilistic realism entered into my research has to do with the notion of basic needs. In my interview guide I asked the question, “*How do you hope that refugees will benefit or be changed from your involvement in this work?*” In conjunction with this question I provided the prompt “*What do refugees need?*” Through both this question and the prompt, I am making the assumption that refugees coming to Canada have a set of core, basic needs that are similar between them regardless of their cultural and situational context. This assumption is the “realism” of my chosen paradigm, a verbal reference to a hypothetical entity. However, the needs of the refugee(s) may vary depending on how they are defined, and who defines them. A refugee coming to Canada may define their needs differently than I as a Canadian who is assisting them in settlement. Or, refugees coming with different backgrounds may define their own needs differently from one another. This factor illustrates the “fallibilism” of my chosen paradigm. Although, a known reality exists, it

contains the possibility of error and must be understood within the proper and appropriate context.

As the term fallibilistic realism suggests, and as my own example illustrates, there is a dichotomy in the fallibilistic realism paradigm. The dichotomy being that a knowable reality exists; however, due to factors such as advanced scientific knowledge (Kazi & Spurling, 2000, p. 5), and one's own bias, as shaped by our assumptions, our understanding of reality contains the possibility of error. My view of reality states that all refugees coming to Canada share the same basic needs; however, the actual need for food, clothing and shelter will vary dependent upon the context and circumstances of a refugee's flight from their home country and the context of their arrival to Canada. For example, the gender of a refugee may impact the type and level of need as female refugees are at greater likelihood to have experienced some form of violence. Further, refugees arriving to Canada who have family present may not experience basic needs to the same degree as a refugee coming to Canada who has no family or support system. Therefore, although basic needs are real, one's experience of those needs is dependent upon the various circumstances of refugees fleeing home and arrival to Canada.

4.3 Research Question

The original research question that I was interested in studying was a comparison of settlement experiences between government assisted refugees and privately church sponsored refugees. Interest in this question came from the observation of a former colleague in Edmonton, who as a former refugee from Kurdistan now working with Kurdish refugees to Edmonton, made the comment to me that church sponsored refugees have better settlement experiences than government sponsored refugees. This was

interesting to me because I identify as a Christian who has a growing conviction that Christians need to be more engaged in the work of compassion and social justice, the work of ensuring that people are provided with that which they deserve and need.

Despite my interest in researching a comparison of settlement experiences between government sponsored and church sponsored refugees, for reasons of practicality I did not pursue this research area. One of the practical challenges was the identification of research participants, as I was new to the area and did not have any contacts to depend upon for collecting a list of potential participants. The second challenge was dealing with the language barrier and the realization that I may be required to provide a translator for the interview and interview transcription in order to fully capture the stories of participants. Hiring a translator would come at a financial cost that I could not afford. Lastly, I was on a tight timeline to complete my thesis and was encouraged by my thesis committee to keep the research simple.

In reconsidering my research question, a conversation with my thesis advisor pointed me to the idea of interviewing Christians who are providing settlement assistance to refugees. Interviewing Christians involved in refugee assistance was a logical choice for me as I was able to identify potential research participants through my practicum with the Mennonite Central Committee of Ontario and the Mennonite Coalition for Refugee Support. Interviewing Christians involved in refugee assistance also addressed my other needs of exploring the work of Christians in refugee assistance and to simplify my research question. Therefore, based upon this process I developed the following research question:

“What is the nature of the work of Mennonites Christians in the Kitchener Waterloo region in the area of refugee assistance?”

The objective of my research was to identify individuals from within the Mennonite churches in the Kitchener Waterloo Region who are involved in the work of refugee assistance. I have listened to their stories, experiences and challenges in the work of refugee assistance in order to understand what is happening in this work of compassion and to document the findings in a way that gives insight into their work.

4.4 Research Design Selection

The research undertaken utilized a flexible method research design in order to explore the experiences of Mennonites involved in the work of refugee assistance in the region of Waterloo. According to Anastas (1999), flexible method studies are characterized as “‘rich’, ‘thick’ or ‘experience near’ depictions of social or psychological phenomena in context” (p. 61). I believe that this design type was applicable to my research because the investigation required that research participants step back and do a critical analysis of their work in refugee assistance. It provided them the opportunity to respond to questions in their own words as they explored and described their experience with this work.

4.5 Participant Selection Strategy

For the purpose of my research, I selected of sample size of twelve research participants. Through my practicum with the Mennonite Central Committee, I was able to identify five churches, or groups of churches, currently involved in private sponsorship. I sought to recruit two research participants from each of these sponsoring groups. In the end, I was successful in recruiting at least one participant from each of the sponsoring

groups with the number of participants from each group ranging between one and three for a total of ten. Further, I sought successfully to recruit two participants involved with the Mennonite Coalition for Refugee Support.

All research participants were requested to meet the following criteria:

- They will self identify as Mennonite.
- They will state that they regularly attend a Mennonite church in the Kitchener Waterloo region.
- They will have involvement in the work of refugee assistance in a voluntary capacity.
- They will have accrued one year of volunteer experience in refugee assistance over the past two years from the date of the interview.
- They will be eighteen years of age or older.

Research participants were drawn from among Mennonite churches in the Kitchener-Waterloo region using a nonprobability sampling technique. Specifically, with permission of the Mennonite Central Committee of Ontario, I used a purposive sample by providing an invitation letter (Appendix E) to eleven key contacts made through my MSW practicum placement, who shared the key characteristics of involvement in refugee assistance from a Mennonite Christian perspective, to participate in the research. As the key contacts were not sufficient to meet my quota of twelve participants, I requested that these individuals identify other potential research participants. In the end, one research participant was as a result of this form of snowball sampling.

4.6 Data Generation

For the purpose of data generation I engaged in a semi-structured in-depth interview with each of the twelve research participants. The interviews were semi-structured as a data collection tool (Appendix B) was developed that allowed for specific topic areas of interest to be explored with the research participant. At the same time, the interview was designed to be flexible enough that it would allow the research participant to guide the flow of the interview and to discuss matters they deemed important.

The data collection tool was developed through analysis of the literature reviewed for the purpose of this thesis and from identifying areas that I personally feel were important to understand. The literature revealed that Christians involved in refugee assistance are inspired by religious teachings. Therefore, I was interested in knowing what inspires Mennonites to engage in refugee assistance, particularly as I recognize them as being a strong role model for refugee assistance among other Christians. To explore this, the first question that I asked was “*What inspires you as a Mennonite Christian to be involved in the work of refugee assistance?*”

Further input on the development of the interview guide was provided by my thesis advisor and members of my thesis committee. From their input I added a section on Background Information and Demographics. This information allowed me to provide a description of the research participants in the body of the thesis.

After completing the interview guide, I piloted it on an executive staff member of a local agency which is part of the Mennonite constituency. Although no major changes were made to the interview guide, piloting it allowed me to become comfortable with the flow of the guide and the use of prompts to assist participants in sharing information.

Each interview was audio taped with the participant's permission in order for the data to be retained, transcribed and analyzed. Participants read and signed an Informed Consent Statement (Appendix C) and completed a demographic information sheet (Appendix D).

4.7 Grounded Theory Analysis

Data collected through the interviews was analyzed according to the grounded theory technique explained by Strauss and Corbin (1998) in their book *Basics of Qualitative Research* and originally presented in Glaser and Strauss' *Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. The term "grounded theory" is used to describe theory that is derived from the data, gathered in a systematic fashion and analyzed through the research process (p. 12). Therefore, rather than beginning with a preconceived theory in mind "the researcher begins with an area of study and allows the theory to emerge from the data" (p. 12). As has been stated, the area of study is the nature of the work of Mennonites involved in refugee assistance. In the course of interviewing twelve participants involved on a volunteer basis in the work of refugee assistance, theory has emerged through analysis of the data.

The analytic process within grounded theory is comprised of three stages. The first stage is referred to as "open coding". In the stage of open coding concepts are named, and categories are defined and then developed according to their properties and dimensions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 103). A concept is developed through the conceptualizing or naming of a phenomenon. A category is the grouping together of concepts that characterize the same phenomenon. As stated by Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner and

McKormack Steinmetz (1991) the consequence for the researcher of establishing categories that arise from the data is the organization of their final data (p. 145).

Upon transcribing my interviews I began my open coding by going through the data line by line. As described by Charmaz (2001) I used active codes to describe what was happening in the data (p. 675). I found that the use of active codes assisted in the categorization of concepts because it demonstrated to me what it is that participants are doing. An example of an active code used in my analysis is "*securing affordable housing*".

I first analyzed the responses provided by each of the five female research participants. After coding data by each of them I then analyzed and coded responses by each of the seven male participants. My purpose for dividing the initial analysis along gender lines was my sense that I would find similarities in responses among the female participants that were not as evident as among the male research participants. Particularly, I heard repeatedly during my data collection that female participants felt passionate about forming friendships with the refugees with whom they were working.

Codes that I used in my analysis to name this phenomenon of forming friendships include "Being a Friend", "Becoming Rich in Relationships" and "Providing Friendships". These like concepts were then placed together into a category called "Negotiating Relationships".

The second stage of data analysis is called "axial coding". Strauss and Corbin (1998) describe the purpose of axial coding as:

To begin the process of reassembling data that were fractured during open coding. In axial coding, categories are related to their subcategories to form more precise and complete explanations about phenomena. (p. 124)

The relationship between a category and a subcategory is such that a category stands for a phenomenon, whereas a subcategory “answer(s) questions about the phenomenon such as when, where, why, who, how and with what consequences” (p. 125).

At this stage I examined the categories that I had developed and looked at their relationship with one another. As stated above, one of the categories developed in the stage of open coding was “Negotiating Relationships”. Another category developed was what I call “Gendered Notion of Helping”. Through understanding the use of categories and subcategories I was able to identify the latter as a subcategory by how it helped to explain the category “Negotiating Relationships”. For example through use of the chart below I was able to visualize how “Gendered Notion of Helping” was a subcategory that explains the category “Negotiating Relationships”.

Category	Properties	Dimensions
<i>Gendered Notion of Helping</i>	Type	Practical support, emotional support, advocate
	Duration	Limited..... Unlimited
	Scope	Tight boundaries.....Loose boundaries

Specifically, it explained how the relationship between the research participants and the refugee(s) they are assisting must be worked out in terms of the type of help provided, the timeline of helping and the establishment of boundaries to the helping.

The final stage of analysis in the grounded theory methodology is called “selective coding”. At this stage the researcher develops a central category that is representative of the main theme of the research. In helping to explain a central category, Strauss and Corbin (1990) state that, “in an exaggerated sense, it consists of all the products of analysis condensed into a few words that seem to explain what ‘this research is all about’” (p. 146).

As I reviewed my data analysis through the stage of axial coding and reflected upon the categories that emerged, I identified “Welcoming the Stranger” was the central category that best represents the research. “Welcoming the Stranger” is closely related to the category of “Religiosity” as it is a reference to the Biblical text that was cited repeatedly by research participants and was also identified in the literature. Developing a central category from a present category is a legitimate development according to Strauss and Corbin (1998) who state that:

A central category may develop out of the list of existing categories. Or a researcher may study the categories and determine that, although each category tells part of the story, none captures it completely (p. 146).

Although it can be seen that this central category has grown out of an existing category, the remaining categories contributed to, or emerged from, the work of “welcoming the stranger”.

For example, the category “Common Needs” contributed to the welcome provided to refugees as it described the intense involvement of the participant’s provision of social support. In their support work participants set out not only to meet basic physical needs, but the need for community, emotional support, and being cared for. Provision of these

needs can be understood as the essence of welcoming. On the other hand “Negotiating Relationships” and the category “Heightened Consciousness” emerged through the process of participants welcoming refugees into their lives, forming relationships and hearing and learning their story.

4.8 Description of the Research Participants

The twelve participants in the research study comprised a near gender balance of seven men and five women. Demographics were collected on eleven of the participants with one participant choosing not to provide demographic data.

An important feature of the participant demographic was that all participants were members of Mennonite churches belonging to the Mennonite Church of Eastern Canada (MCEC). According to their website, MCEC is partnered with other Mennonite conferences to form the Mennonite Church Canada which is in part a member of the Mennonite World Conference, described as “a global fellowship of churches committed to living out God's mission at home and around the world” (MCEC, 2004).

The men in the study ranged in age from 34 to 63 while the women in the study ranged in age from 31 to 61. The length of involvement in the voluntary work of refugee assistance of the participants was difficult to determine as many of them have served on and off over the past many years. Further, some were involved in refugee assistance in other capacities including in their vocational or educational pursuits. When considering the most recent continuous involvement, the average length of time in voluntary refugee assistance work among the participants was 4 ½ years.

In regards to vocation, it was of interest that four of the participants currently or previously worked in the social services field. Others worked in a variety of settings with

various job descriptions such as plant manager, commercial and agricultural lender and probation officer. One of the participants described her vocation as a mother while another described herself as a retired teacher. All of the participants have completed some form of post secondary education with three participants possessing a Diploma, four holding a Bachelor's degree, three with a Master's level degree and one with a PhD.

Of the eleven participants who chose to provide demographic data, ten of the participants were born in Canada, with the other participant born in Germany. All of the participants were Caucasian. They have been involved with refugees from various countries. Ten of the participants identified working with refugees from two or more countries. The countries most often cited include Afghanistan, Sudan and Colombia.

4.9 Introduction of Research Participants

In the following, an introduction is provided for each of the research participants. Pseudonyms have been used to protect their identity.

Anne – Anne was the longest serving in refugee assistance among the research participants. Her experience working with refugees came in both a voluntary capacity and through her paid employment. Anne drew upon her own personal life story to inform her work in refugee assistance. Her commitment and passion for this work was demonstrated through the overseas trips that she had organized to the countries from which many of the refugees with whom she has worked originate.

Bob – Bob had been involved in refugee assistance for approximately four years. He was currently serving as the chair of the refugee committee with his church and had been in that position since the summer of 2003. While not limiting the role of the church, Bob also spoke about the importance of the refugee finding support from their own

ethnocultural community and believed in their desire to become independent and contributors to society.

Caleb – The involvement that Caleb provided in refugee assistance was as a refugee committee member. Caleb drew upon past experience in refugee assistance in the 1980's as well as his current involvement to inform his thoughts on the nature of this work.

Caleb held an advanced degree and was currently employed in ministry. He spoke about one of the great challenges in refugee assistance as he shared the story of a refugee with whom he was working with struggling with mental health issues.

Deborah – As a retired teacher, Deborah found that she has time available to be extensively involved in her church's current sponsorship. She found that her experience as a teacher working in a school with an ethnically diverse population was of benefit to her in this work. Deborah also found that teaching was a component in much of the settlement work that she does.

Elizabeth – Elizabeth was a young mother who has been involved in refugee assistance through her church. She had also completed qualitative research on the settlement experiences of Iraqi refugees in relation to housing. As she discussed, she and her husband and son were making plans to work overseas where she looked forward to the challenge of adapting to a new culture much in the manner that she had seen the refugees with whom she has worked do.

Freda – Freda had been involved in refugee sponsorship at a committee level in her church for the past 41/2 years. She grew up in the United States and witnessed refugee assistance on both sides of the border. She was employed part-time in the field of social services.

Gabriel – As a member of a church congregation with a long history in refugee assistance, Gabriel served on a sponsorship committee for the past three years. His church was partnered with two other congregations in sponsoring a family from the Middle East. Gabriel raised the important issue of possible discrimination experienced in the settlement experience.

Hannah – Hannah had five years experience in refugee assistance in various capacities. She spoke passionately about her work and the challenges involved in caring for her family, maintaining her career and providing care for refugee(s) with whom her church is involved.

Isaac – Like Hannah, Isaac's experience in refugee assistance had been in various capacities. He related how he and other sponsors maintained a relationship with a family sponsored in 1978.

James – As a refugee committee member with his church, James was currently involved in the sponsorship and settlement of a refugee family. His church partnered with other congregations in the provision of the sponsorship and settlement work.

Kenneth – Kenneth and his wife were inspired to be involved in refugee assistance after reading about the need for church sponsors in a Mennonite publication. He was the key member of his congregation involved in refugee assistance, and spoke about the need for his congregation to continually be outward focused, existing not only for the purpose of their own members.

Luke – Luke was a member of a church that was very active in providing assistance to refugees. He had been directly involved with refugee assistance for three years and taught a Sunday School class comprised of refugees.

Further descriptions of themselves, their experiences and their convictions are shared as their voices are brought forward in the findings section of the thesis.

CHAPTER FIVE – FINDINGS

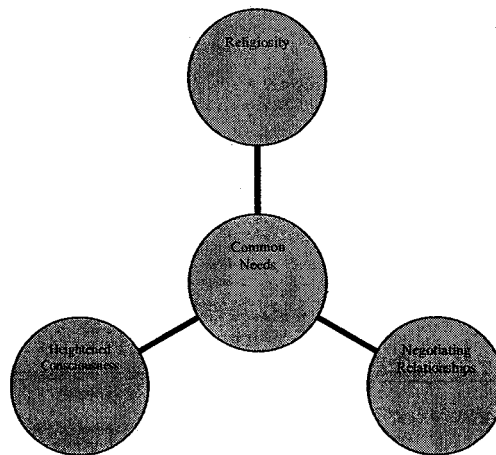
5.0 Introduction

According to the research findings, through the voluntary work of refugee assistance, research participants make an impact upon both the lives of the refugee(s) with whom they are engaged and upon their own personal lives. The participants are inspired to do the work of refugee assistance through belief in the need to live out the Biblical mandate to care for those who are marginalized within society.

Specifically, the desire to provide a welcome to those who are stateless, such as refugees, flows from the Biblical mandate and the teachings of Jesus to welcome the stranger. Meeting the common needs of refugees through social support is the active expression of the desire to provide a welcome. Through involvement with refugees in the act of providing social support, participants find that relationships with refugees emerge as well as a heightened awareness of both refugees and their own circumstances.

Therefore, the themes under which I will share my findings can be seen in the following diagram.

“Welcoming the Stranger”



Among Mennonites in the Kitchener-Waterloo region, the work of refugee assistance is the work of “Welcoming the Stranger”. This work centres on meeting the “common needs” of refugees arriving to Canada. For Mennonites, the inspiration to meet these needs is informed by their “religiosity”, including their own understanding of the Biblical teaching to “welcome the stranger”, and the teachings and role modeling of previous generations and the church of their youth. The result of engaging in refugee assistance through the provision of social support is the emergence of a “heightened consciousness” of the circumstances of refugees. The relationship between these two concepts moves back and forth, for as a result of having heightened consciousnesses on issues concerning refugees, Mennonites involved in the work of refugee assistance demonstrate a desire to remain in the work on an ongoing basis. Another result of being involved in refugee assistance is the need for “negotiating relationships” with the refugees with whom one is engaged. Within the context of this work, Mennonites providing assistance and the

refugee(s) work closely together, meaning that the relationship needs to be well understood between the two parties.

5.1 Religiosity

Volunteer work is a demanding task requiring a high level of commitment that, unlike other forms of charity, asks for more than financial resources. Rather, it asks for one's own personal time, a commodity an individual may hold even more precious.

Through their involvement in the work of refugee assistance, research participants commit a high level of energy, time and resources to their work. Elizabeth's words describe her own commitment to this work. She illustrates the encouragement she received to remain committed to her work of refugee assistance through listening to a Sunday morning sermon:

...it's so helpful to be in the room with someone else who has that much passion and commitment to serving refugees because as someone who is slaving it out in the trenches at MCRS it's so good to hear once in a while how other people view this kind of work. How Christ views this kind of work. And to be encouraged to pick yourself up again and go on for another fundraising dinner.

Deborah also found herself extremely busy in her volunteer capacity doing settlement work with a family sponsored through her church. As a retired teacher she continues to do substitute work and must fit the settlement work in around the uncertainty of her schedule:

Well, you don't really know what you're getting into with any project...and I would never have expected to be this heavily involved, and spent as much time as

what I ended up doing. But I enjoyed it enough that I didn't try to find a substitute.

... It's been an enjoyable experience...I would not want to do this every year. I don't think I have the strength to do this, to be involved in this every year. I am not twenty anymore. But, no, it's a journey that I am very happy to have taken.

As a result of the high level of commitment required to engage in the work of refugee assistance as demonstrated by Elizabeth and Deborah, it is important to understand what inspires Mennonite Christians to engage in this work on a voluntary basis.

As research participants indicate, volunteer work in the form of refugee assistance is an expression of their religious and moral values. These values are embedded into participants through their understanding of Biblical teachings that they have personally applied to themselves.

Among the Biblical texts that served as an inspiration for their work, participants referred particularly to Christ's teachings as found in the New Testament. A passage that was frequently cited is from the Gospel of Matthew emphasizing the importance of acting with compassion towards the naked, hungry and stranger. Through common reference to this Biblical passage, research participants create an image of the refugees with whom they work as "the stranger" and their work as the work of "welcoming the stranger".

Elizabeth connects this passage from the gospel of Matthew directly to her own work with refugees, describing the challenge it presents due to the fear created within our society of those who are strangers:

It's always there, all of the things in our Christian charity work that we do, providing clothing, food, and, but then there's the issue of the stranger. And I

think that in our culture, that is one of Christ's commands that is very difficult to take hold of because of this fear that we have. And I guess doing refugee work is one way that I can see to fulfill that command of Christ in my life.

Bob is the newly appointed chair of the refugee committee at his church and has been involved in this work on and off for close to four years. In reflecting upon the inspiration for this work he also emphasizes Christ's teachings in Matthew, describing it as the underpinning to his work:

The Biblical teaching of acceptance of a stranger, clothe the naked, give to the hungry. This certainly gives underpinnings to my desire to help people. The teachings are in Matthew, I generally refer to Christ's teachings in the New Testament. We should help the poor, the naked, the hungry...So that would be it, the main part of where my expressions come from.

Caleb also places a high priority on the work of refugee assistance, and emphasizes its importance by again referring to the teaching of Christ:

It seems to me that it is one of the most important things we can do. We are saving peoples lives from a dangerous situation, to give them a new chance, a new start, and helping them to reorient to another country. It is one of the most important things we can do.

Caleb, who is in vocational ministry, continues by elaborating on why the work of refugee assistance is so important:

Because of Christ's teachings. The importance of helping other people, the importance of finding value in other people. Showing something of God's concern and care.

Caleb does not make specific reference to the work of helping the stranger. However, he stresses the importance of helping and showing love through concern and care.

Hannah is heavily involved in refugee assistance and has vast experience in this work. She makes reference to the teaching of Christ to love others by what is often referred to as the “golden rule”. Through quoting the “golden rule” Hannah now conceptualizes the refugee(s) as a “neighbour”:

What inspires me? As a Mennonite, I think, as a Christian, probably the basic thing is Jesus command to love thy neighbour as thyself. And I think that was taught for me early on in my home and I have adopted that in my life, as well as my husband and children. And the most easy way for me to love thy neighbour is to reach out to others, and I find it very natural to be involved with individuals coming to Canada who are new immigrants or refugees to Canada.

Isaac, who has been involved in refugee sponsorship through his church, describes the neighbourly act of extending an invitation to the refugee(s) to become a part of the church community:

But I think community is most important. We needed to feel that they were a part of the community, but also that they were with friends and they could count on us and eventually count on the whole community to be a part of that. Have friends and develop.

(So what role did you and the church play in meeting that particular need?)

There were a lot of things. And in fact we supplied the material things that I mentioned. I would say somebody went to that house almost every day. To check to see if there were things that were needed...but then we went to the larger

community. We had a dentist that was willing to give his services to fix up the family's teeth. So he was involved at that time he was not a part of our group but, he was willing to do it. We had another friend of my wife's particularly who being a teacher she was able to spend some time with them, and do some teaching with them. But there was also taking them to medical appointments, but just inviting them into our fellowship because there were times when house churches would get together for a common meal and they were included in that.

Deborah's practical expression of caring can be understood as an expression of the "golden rule" and the command to love your neighbour. She describes how her belief in the tangible work of caring for others is important to her understanding of what it means to be a Christian:

(You said earlier when you were talking about the Christian part of it, that it is something that you need to do. Can you talk about that a bit?)

Well, I have a strong belief that we can't just live for ourselves...I really think we need to share because it's not just, I mean sure you work hard to get where you are, but some of it is just the good fortune of being born in this country too. So, I believe strongly that we have to share.

While most participants referred to the New Testament teaching in the Gospel of Matthew, in an exceptional case, Elizabeth also referred to the Old Testament poetry of the Psalms. In this text she again found an inspiration for refugee assistance:

...the Christ side of my motivation for doing refugee work is what I read in the Bible of just the experience of the dislocation of the Jews as they were in exile, and the psalms that were written of the longing for home, and the longing to be

still and to stop traveling. And to no longer be strangers in the land where we are. And, you know, just the faces of the people I have met coming up in my mind as I read those passages...the Bible has these lists of things, in the Psalms especially, it says praise God because he takes care of the widows and orphans and the strangers.

In her reference to the Psalms, Elizabeth again draws upon the image of the stranger. The message that research participants present is that caring for the stranger is the work of God, and therefore a work, as Christians, that they are compelled to embrace. Further, it is recognized that the stranger may become a neighbour as they are welcomed into the community life of sharing and relationship.

Generational Helpers

As religious teachings have inspired research participants to be engaged in refugee assistance directly, they have also been influenced by these teachings indirectly through witnessing the involvement of their parents or their church of origin in activities of compassion. This includes supporting refugees from areas such as Indochina twenty five years ago, as well as supporting Mennonite refugees from Russia in the early 1900's.

Freda is from the United States and relates how the involvement of the church of her youth in refugee sponsorship and the sanctuary movement has affected her present outlook. Specifically, she shares how it has influenced her current role in the church:

I have always been interested internationally, in the stories of people.

(Can you go back and identify where those interests came from?)

I grew up in a church in Ohio that was involved in refugee things as well. We were one of the first churches that would have done sponsorships with boat

people. And so I grew up just knowing that. There were several families from Russia that came. We were also one of the sanctuary churches. So I guess that also was a good fit when [my church] here asked me as well. I had grown up with an experience, all my life, just, knowing it. Kind of this is what you do. Why wouldn't you do this?

(When you say "this is what you do")

This is what churches do, churches help...

Both James and Kenneth, who are currently involved with their own churches in refugee sponsorship, also attended churches during their youth that were involved in this work. Further, they both identify their family's part in the church sponsorship as contributing to their current involvement in refugee assistance work. James, who is a key member of his refugee sponsorship committee, describes how witnessing his church and family involved in this work helps to explain his current sponsorship work:

...when I was about, I would say anywhere from about twelve to fourteen the church that I was attending had sponsored a refugee family and my parents were the key people in the settlement. And we got to meet the family and they are great friends with that family, still today. And that was many years ago. And I think just seeing that, you know the way that it worked with my parents, and their refugee family that they were sponsoring, or helping. It gave me a good feeling about what we were trying to accomplish.

Similarly, Kenneth was also part of a church that did refugee sponsorship during his teen years. Reflecting on his churches involvement, as well as his families' involvement,

with the sponsored family gives explanation to his current capacity as coordinator of a refugee sponsorship:

Well I remember when I was about 14, and I originally came from a Presbyterian Church, and my family sponsored a refugee, or sorry, my church sponsored a refugee family from Vietnam. And it was a very positive experience for our church. And I remember meeting this family and being very impressed by them and being so engrossed by their story and where they...and where they'd come from. I'd watched them, as they came to Canada, now they had some language skill, spoke English already and stuff. But how quickly they'd...come to Canada and get involved. So I think for me that was one (source of inspiration).

Other participants spoke specifically about the attitudes and views of their parents towards helping. Bob identifies how his parents own worldview was shaped by their interpretation of the Bible:

So that would be it, the main part of where my expressions come from. But it also comes from my family upbringing, how my parents demonstrated acceptance of people that were disadvantaged in one way or the other.

(Can you talk about that a bit further?)

Especially my dad, and my mom too. They were always for the underdog. They were always, in anything, they were always supporting, cheering the person that had less ability. So we would have people that were challenged come through...so there was always that aspect in the family. Any kind of discussion, be it political or economic discussions, or any other kind of discussions, that dad especially would always be supporting the disadvantaged. And would say that we should

build these mechanisms of support, politically and that the church should help, institutions should help people that are in those kinds of situations.

...it was just how they interpreted the Bible that they believed...

Deborah also identifies her parent's generosity as a positive example for her, stating specifically how it helps to define her worldview of wealth and possessions:

My father shared huge amounts of money throughout his life to charity, so I guess it's one of my dreams too.

(So that belief is rooted in family, can you talk more about that?)

Well I was born in a Mennonite family, a farm family, that wasn't affluent but there was always money there. As I said, my dad believed very strongly in helping others, locally and internationally before he died. I counted up all the foster children that he and my mother had supported, it was something like nineteen over I don't know how many years, I didn't count that. But that was just one of their many projects. You know there's a huge donation to MCC. So it meant a lot to him to help others, so with that kind of modeling it's kind of hard to be totally self absorbed.

By directly crediting their parents for the positive role model and influence that they provided, Deborah and Bob indicate that family plays a critical role in the socialization and development of moral and religious values. Freda, James and Kenneth demonstrate that the church has the potential to be a positive role model for youth. Through the words of all these participants, it is evident that the model provided to them by their parents, as well as the church of their youth, in doing the work of helping, contains explanatory power for their current engagement in refugee assistance.

Another source of identification with past figures that was discussed for being involved in refugee assistance is the Mennonite historical experience as refugees. Luke states being only a generation removed from the refugee experience of his parents and grandparents resounds with him as he involves himself in the life of refugees:

Well, Mennonite history, yeah. I'm what you call, a Russian Mennonite. So, that, I mean, I'm one generation away from refugees. My parents were kids when they came. But they came as refugees. So, of course, that resonates. Particularly working with someone like Afghan people who are just a few kilometres away from where my parents were in Russia. I mean, relatively, saying a few kilometres. So, yeah, that inspiration from that angle of history is definitely there. Sure, the experience is a bit different, but general thought is not.

Freda also mentions the specific experience of Russian Mennonites as refugees and points to her family connection to this through her husband. For Freda, assisting refugees is a way of carrying on the work that was happening in previous generations:

I look back to when I got the call from the committee at church to ask me to do this or not, it was between that and doing something at the Sunday School program. The refugee program tweaked my interest. Working with other people whose lives have been disrupted, knowing the history of my own husbands family, with Russian Mennonite background, continuing the work of refugees that way interested me. I have always been interested internationally, in the stories of people.

Gabriel also indicates that the Mennonite history as refugees may have some impact upon why he and others Mennonites choose to be involved in refugee assistance:

I mean from my own experience it's the fact that we've done it in the past, it's worked well, it's been a good experience, and it's a way of helping other people. But I suspect that there could be some things from, you know, the fact that Mennonites in general, you know, were in the sense refugees fleeing various countries and then came.

Reference to the Mennonite history as refugees takes the participants back another generation. The participants involvement not only emulates the work of their parents and childhood churches who were assisting refugees from Indochina, but the participants involvement is also an extension of the work of Mennonites assisting refugees from Russia, which for Luke and Freda includes their own family members.

Religiosity and Diversity

In a discussion on the inspiration of Mennonites to engage in refugee assistance it is important to consider the topic of religious diversity. Among the research participants, a number of them were involved in the sponsorship of Muslim families or work with refugee claimants who are Muslim. Therefore, as a second sub-category of religiosity it is important to understand how religious difference is treated by the research participants who approach this work from a Christian faith perspective.

Anne, who has a vast history in working with refugees, shares the experience of praying with a refugee from Kurdistan who was concerned for their family's safety:

So, and I also, I have been with Muslims who are facing, something like Kurdish back in, when the war was going on, the Kurds here who were really just so anxious about their family, and I just said 'Can I pray for you?' You know I was holding them, they were crying, I said 'can I pray for you?' 'Yes'. So I did, they were very happy about that, and they felt safe. And so I don't feel like I can't do

that. But doing that doesn't mean that I am trying to convert them. I am showing them this is, that even I can't help them, but let's ask God to. He loves your family. So, I'm not averse to doing something like that. In terms of talking about my faith I never bring it up unless somebody else asks.

Anne emphasizes that she is not seeking to convert the Muslim that she is working with. In fact, she states that her faith is not a topic of discussion unless someone raises it other than herself. Although Anne describes herself as careful in her approach to sharing her Christian faith, her story demonstrates the vulnerable position to religious coercion of refugees who may often be dealing with anxiety about life circumstances without support.

Hannah describes the role of the church in nurturing Christian faith among individuals who had a conversion experience prior to coming to Canada, as well as supporting a family who appear to be going through a conversion experience:

I think the one family, I think this person had an encounter with God, as he said, before he even came to Canada. So he became a Christian before and I think our church has just nurtured that faith and helped him understand what Christianity, or helped him come to a better understanding through the teaching and through Bible reading and supportive Christians. Another family I think is just in the middle of both. Because Islam has been such a part of, has been their whole life, I think they're just searching to see what Christianity is all about.

Hannah's description of the family in the midst of conversion demonstrates a very passive approach to conversion. While the church sees themselves as a facilitator of

conversion, Hannah's description gives the power to the family to make their own decision on faith issues.

Luke, who teaches a Sunday School class to refugees at his church, describes how working with refugees has enhanced his theology and confirmed his own conviction regarding the nature of helping work:

...it has shown me much more as an individual who has come out of the Mennonite Brethren emphasis to the Mennonite emphasis, much more social type thing. That the glass of water is as important as the preaching the Word, or evangelizing...it's much more a sense of becoming a trustworthy person to them, becoming a friend of theirs.

When his church made the decision to sponsor a Muslim family from Afghanistan, Gabriel indicates that there were a small number of congregation members who questioned why a Christian family was not being sponsored. However, as Gabriel describes, the overall feeling among the congregants is that as Christians they are to be a help to all people regardless of their religion. Gabriel then goes on to express a liberal view of Christian theology that the God of Islam and Christianity are the same God and that as a sponsoring group they assisted the family in finding a Mosque to attend for prayer:

There was a couple of people at our church that asked about, there were some questions about us sponsoring a family that's not Christian, but basically I think people are OK with it and they're recognizing that Jesus came for everyone and we don't want to be exclusive. I think the preference would have been, I think people would have liked if we could have sponsored a Christian family and taught

them more about it. It hasn't really been a problem. Even at the fundraiser that they spoke at, they gave thanks to the Almighty God for a church that would help them and while I don't know a lot about the Muslim faith, I believe that's the same God that we are serving.

Because in the past, the families that we've sponsored have been, well, maybe not Christian, but from Christian nations. This family is Muslim. So that has been, well, we've struggled with that and as a Christian church and realize that Jesus came for everyone, you know, kind of thing and this is a family we're supposed to support. So finding a mosque for them to go to and finding a community of Afghani people that they could relate to is one and yet they've been able to find those fairly quickly in Kitchener. That's been a good thing.

(Did you find that they were able to find them almost on their own?)

The first night we were there we knew of a store by the KW Reception Centre where they stayed for the first three weeks, there was a corner store around owned by an Afghani man. So the first night we went for a walk a few of the older ones, found this store and so right away they made a contact. It wasn't long after that they met a man that their father had worked with in Pakistan. And he was here living in Canada for three months so he has taken them to the mosque for prayers on Friday and things like that already.

Elizabeth, who is planning to live in the developing world with her family, speaks about her opposition to a scenario in which a sponsored refugee is expected to attend church and potentially convert to Christianity:

There is, this is not my personal experience, but I have heard sometimes that private sponsorships, if Christian churches sponsor a Muslim family, they feel obligated to come to a Christian church, or maybe to convert to...and that makes me totally uncomfortable and I can't imagine that, you know. No private sponsorship that I am a part of would ever be considered an obligation. I guess this has to do with my own theology too, but I guess I see, for instance, Islam and Christianity being two rivers going to the same ocean. I have picked one river, you've picked a different river but we're all going to the same place.

Gabriel's understanding of Christian's and Muslim's sharing the same God, and Elizabeth's metaphor of "two rivers" provides a pluralistic view of religion. Anne and Hannah are not averse to presenting their Christian faith, though they demonstrate a stance of respect in this regard. Meanwhile Luke place emphasis upon the social nature of his faith expression, placing importance upon giving a "glass of water" above preaching or seeking to evangelize.

5.2 Common Needs

Through involvement in the settlement work of either sponsored refugees or refugee claimants, the research participants recognize that they are involved in the provision of needs that are common among most refugees. However, it is also recognized that the forms of support provided must differ in order to meet the varied needs of the refugee(s). Analysis of the data indicates that participants view themselves as providing social support in three various dimensions. These sub-categories of the category "common needs" are "practical support", "daily support" and "emotional support". These three dimensions of support are analyzed with particular attention provided to emotional

support and the philosophical question it raises on the notion of empathy in the context of diversity. Further, a sub-category titled “increasing the volunteer base” looks at the challenge that participants face in engaging their broader congregation in the front line support work of refugee assistance.

Practical Support

Providing practical support to refugees is an inherent part of the work of private sponsorship and of the Mennonite Coalition for Refugee Support. Through the interactions that occur between refugees and the research participants, the element of providing practical support is very present. Participants speak about providing assistance with housing, transportation, and maneuvering the health care, education and social service systems. Deborah, who as a retired teacher considers teaching refugees an important part of her work, describes how practical support can be as simple as sharing knowledge of where to shop for sales and bargains:

I am a great bargain shopper, I can take them to a lot of places where they can maximize their money...and I get pleasure out of doing that, so I have done a fair bit of that.

One of the challenges faced by support persons providing practical support is regarding the issue of creating dependence. A variance in approaches to the provision of transportation highlights this. In one case Luke stresses the importance of a church group willing to provide transportation to refugees whom they supporting:

Working with refugees the first thing you have got to do is provide them with transportation... and if a church wants to start working with refugees you've got

to have people who are willing to drive people regularly...to phone them every week and say can I give you a ride?

James, who is a member of a joint church committee involved in sponsorship, indicates that the committee he is a part of has taken time to teach the refugee(s) how to use the bus system. It is felt by the committee that this will promote independence and minimize reliance upon the sponsors for transportation:

...one of the people from the committee who has been working closely with the family would actually take the family on the bus, take them to their doctors appointment, on the bus, so they would know how to get there, so they could do that on their own.

To help understand the different responses, Luke is speaking in the context of providing the refugee(s) with transportation to and from church, when bus service is less available. James is referring to daily activities and routines when sponsors are less available and bus transportation is at full schedule. The difference in approaches raises the issue of the need to find a balance between provision of support and assisting refugee(s) to become independent. Findings related to the notion of friendship and boundaries to helping will be discussed in the section “Negotiating Relationships”,

Daily Support

In regards to daily support, which speaks to the accessibility of support on a day to day basis, a significant insight is that its need is greatest in the early stages of the sponsorship. Bob, who is the chair of the refugee committee with his Church, knows in the early days after arrival to Canada that regular contact provides positive reassurance that support is close by and ensures that the new refugee(s) are finding their way:

...first days and weeks there's lots of contact making sure that they are okay, know where the grocery store is, where the bus routes are, and start getting settled into English classes and all the paperwork...

Elizabeth, who earlier described the intensity of her work, displays a remarkable attitude of generosity towards a newcomer family who are reliant upon her in "crisis" moments. For Elizabeth it is described as an investment in friendship:

I remember this family from the Congo, their first year here it was so difficult to, because every time the phone rang and it was them, you knew that there was a big crisis going on, and you had to drop everything here and go. So, that's always hard. So how do you set limits on that?

But, I guess like most friendships you just kind of muddle through it and because their lives get easier as they get settled the friendship becomes easier because there is less demand on it. But certainly in the beginning I don't know if there should be very many limits put on it. Um, at least that's how we felt when we were in it.

Elizabeth's poignant description of support again raises the issue of whether boundaries should be placed on helping. In essence Elizabeth is asking a question on how accessible she is able to be and what is the personal impact related to her accessibility. For Elizabeth this is a dilemma that she grapples with. Hannah also describes and names this struggle in her work of refugee assistance:

When you establish a relationship, it's not a working relationship. It's not a client. The boundaries are different. So you hear their stories, and you hear their pain and struggle. It's not like your leaving as a therapist or, you know...them

with their issues. They have no one, so, what...do you take and how much do you help? How much do you get involved? I think that's my biggest struggle. I always want...and try to be involved in more people's lives. That's what I would like to do, but I often don't have the time.

The indication is that participants are very aware of the need that the refugee(s) may have throughout the sponsorship, particularly in the early stages. They are also aware that this places a high demand upon their time, resources and energy. The tension exists in the desire to be involved in people's lives, and the realization that limitations exist as to how much one is able to help.

Emotional Support

The provision of practical and daily support leads to the establishment of a relationship between participants and the refugee(s). As the relationship develops, participants find they are giving emotional support. As a result, participants come to identify commonalities between themselves and the refugee(s) with whom they are involved. These commonalities are centered on the notion of shared emotional needs that exist even beyond the differences between themselves and refugees. Bob describes what he sees as common emotional needs:

...we are all humans and we have emotions, wants and desires. We all want security, we all want peace in our lives. We want to be, to just know day to day that we are going to be okay. That we all want family and community around.

Describing similar elements, Anne, with her vast experience and accumulated insight, illustrates her understanding of commonality:

Well I think everyone has the same basic needs for a sense of security, a sense of being cared about, a sense of purpose, there is something for them to do, to relate to, a shared kind of concerns that they have about world problems...

Through recognition of these common needs for love, security and peace, participants sought to provide emotional support to refugee(s). This is accomplished through development of what is understood as empathy. In a display of empathy Hannah draws upon her personal experience with her own family and describes the need for refugees to experience a family atmosphere:

I, personally, have taken, as our family, on us to invite people over and just embrace them in our family. That is very easy for us to do. We enjoy that and we have Friday night dinner things, BBQs. Canada Day is the big day where I have almost an international day, and invite as many people as we can, but more and more individuals that I get to know, and I'm working full time now, it's becoming very difficult so I've recognized that it can't be up to me. I have to let it be known to the congregations of the needs of these individuals. And congregations are really good to respond with material aid and can give. And they really do. Towels, sheets, bedding. We can get all of that together. I think the next growing pains, and next steps for congregations, particularly ones, is the social and emotional support individuals need and how do you connect them to the larger church, the refugee families that are with us, and to individual families and that they actually see that they need to be adopted into a family circle because they've lost all of that. And are quite lonely and need that support. So I would say the greatest need is the social and emotional support.

Female participants display empathy in their attempt to understand the challenges of motherhood faced by refugee women. Through the shared experience of motherhood with refugee women, female participants provide a rich description of commonality or sameness. Freda, who is a young mother, describes the shared struggles of motherhood in the context of having a daughter the same age as the refugee mother she is working with:

And so she's struggling the same struggles that we are all struggling. But, except that she's dealing with, the loss of her husband. And then her oldest son chose to go back to study. So dealing with a loss in that way. He's been back and forth a few times, but realizing that she's dealing with her own language, she's dealing with a child my daughter's age who getting ready for kindergarten in a year, and life goes on regardless of what happens.

An important consideration by Freda is that, despite the commonality, circumstances vary drastically between her and the refugee mother. As a result, she identifies that the potential to deal with the struggle is an important difference between them.

Also drawing upon her own understanding of motherhood, Elizabeth, the mother of a young son, describes how she can provide emotional support in a practical way:

The big similarity I guess that I find is looking after children. That that's an instant common ground. If someone comes into the office with a child who obviously has been asked to sit and be still for a long time and you can take them into a different corner and read them a story or, something like that just to see the gratefulness on a mom's face. Or, to just even, when you're chatting in the office, you know, how are they liking school and are they making friends, sort of that

similarity I think is global. Any mother anywhere has all kinds of things in common with any other mother.

Reaching out to the young child, Elizabeth expresses empathy through understanding the challenges of motherhood, and in effect experiences a connection to the refugee mother.

As a woman relating to another woman, Hannah also describes the notion of commonality. She finds similarity in concerns related to motherhood, and social roles and expectations:

You know, a mom from Sudan and a mom from Kitchener-Waterloo, you know, I don't find much difference. We love our children. We love our husbands. We want to be good women. There are so many similarities. And I think when you get past the cultural differences and even the religious differences, we are women and that really connects me to women. Yeah, I think, and I think I sense that with the women that I meet, that come, that there's this connection. So yeah, we've got the same concerns, you know, are we gaining weight? Is our hair growing gray?

What are we going to cook for dinner?

Hannah's feeling of connection is similar to the metaphor "walking in the shoes of" that is often used to illustrate the notion of empathy. In Hannah's description of the woman to woman connection that she experienced, differences of culture and religion are superseded.

Increasing the Volunteer Base

Recruitment of a greater number of people from the church congregation in the work would help to address the issue of high needs of refugees, and the challenge faced by participants to assist with the practical, daily and emotional needs of the refugee(s).

However participants echoed one another in expressing the difficulty of engaging the

larger church congregation. As the sole member of his church involved in refugee assistance, Isaac puts this frustration in clear terms: “Too many people and not enough (laughing) and not enough people to help...”

Part of the dilemma for participants when expressing the frustration of low congregational involvement is the knowledge that congregation members have provided practical support through, for example, the donation of their finances. Kenneth, who initiated his churches involvement in refugee sponsorship, and is the key participant in the refugee settlement work, expresses the contradictory feelings inherent in such recognition:

They’ve been supportive of the project, and a lot of people have done some things, but there aren’t a lot of people who have come forward and said, “I really want to be a part of this” and “how can I be a part of this?”

Even raising financial support can be a challenge as there are many expenses and needs within a church and as Hannah acknowledges church congregation members have other interests. Hannah has become aware of this as the church refugee committee of which she is a member seeks to raise its profile within the church:

Um, at this point we make an appeal to the congregation, and we had one offering for example at Christmas Eve and that came in. All the money we need for the sponsorship for our Colombian family came in one night.

(Wow)

We were, we are one part of the team that is sponsoring so, that’s there. That’s an issue though up for discussion because there are many needs within our

congregation and others feel that we need to pay off the mortgage, and we need stuff for camp, we need stuff for youth, and they are all very valid.

Anne, who has been involved in the work of refugee assistance for many years, has come to terms with the realization that not all congregation members share her passion for this type of work: “But then, I have to say, o.k., this is a big part of your life. You have to work with the fact that not everybody has the focus, vision.”

Isaac is employed full time in the helping profession. He finds himself close to retirement and in a demonstration of his commitment, is eager upon retirement to be more involved than he is currently when he has less competing demands upon his time:

Well I read the newsletter a little more carefully in the last few days and you will see that there are lots of things that are happening, that fortunately are ongoing because we have volunteers who keep working with it. I'm within about 18 months of retirement so when that happens I will have a little more time to volunteer time and contribute more that way. But I, my desire is more to be, to do the one on one thing, I like my job here because I'm working one to one with people and not spending a lot of time with the policy issues. That would be my wish.

For the participants, the willingness to be involved in refugee assistance is there, but the issue to address is the amount of time that any one of them can provide. For other congregation members, the issue is the willingness to be involved based upon interest level and the willingness to sacrifice personal time. Further, other congregation members have competing interests within the church that draw upon their resources, and potentially compete for resources.

5.3 Heightened Consciousness

For those willing and able to invest in the work of refugee assistance they may find that they are changed people as a result. The experience of walking alongside a newly arrived refugee to Canada has a profound impact on the lives of research participants. They have witnessed forms of subtle discrimination towards the refugee(s) through the course of the settlement work. The participants have also come to recognize the striking contrast of their own wealth with the suffering and material poverty of those with whom they walk, challenging them to evaluate their own privileged lives. The above findings are presented under the sub-category “impact of another’s experience.” Finally, among those who are newer to this form of voluntary work, they have come to the important conclusion that this work is important and is something that they will continue to do. This finding is presented under the sub-category of “ongoing involvement in refugee assistance”

Impact of Another’s Experience

Evidence of being impacted by another’s life experiences can be seen in the stories shared by the research participants of their involvement in refugee assistance. For example, Gabriel describes what appears to be a form of covert discrimination towards the refugee family that he is involved with. He shares the story of trying to find housing for the extended family and how he and the committee encountered a refusal by a landlord based upon what appears to be discriminatory principles:

...housing was another challenge. Because I think we found out as we told landlords that this was a family of twelve Afghani refugees, it closed a few doors. Finally what we did was we found a house that was for sale and perfect, as far as

location, and found a member of our congregation who was willing to buy it as an investment property.

Especially since we were very close to finding a rental property and actually had two townhouse units picked out and had a date prepared to move these people and our credit application was turned down for some reason, or our application for tenancy I guess. They said it was turned down and wouldn't really give us reason why. According to people I've talked to, property managers can't give reasons; they can get into trouble with landlords if they do give reasons why they're turning down a credit application. But I mean, it had nothing to do with the credit history. Number one, the family had none and we made that clear ahead of time. And the people that were involved, you know we said we'll get as many guarantors as you want. I mean, we're a congregation of 300 people and there's another two congregations on top of that. We even offered to pay the rent up front for the full year but that still wasn't enough.

The solution by the committee to allow a congregation member to purchase a house to offer for rent is one that meets the family's needs. However, there are two important considerations that must be made. First, the need for a member of the congregation to purchase a house for the church to rent was precipitated by the refusal of a previous landlord to house the refugee family. The apparent discrimination led to the need to seek this solution. Second, the apparent discrimination means that the ability of the family to find and retain housing makes them dependent upon the resources of the church. These two considerations expose the vulnerability of the refugee family to both the private housing market, and to the church itself. As a result, the church, and the individual

member of the congregation who owns the house, have placed themselves in a position of power over the family. This is a factor that must be acknowledged and considered in their relationship.

Through her involvement in various aspects of refugee assistance work, Elizabeth describes learning about how refugees experience discrimination. She states that this is due to their lack of power in dealing with social systems, contrasting that with her own power as a Canadian:

Until someone comes along and says, “you know I don’t know why social assistance is not giving me my child benefit tax cheque anymore. Do you know what it was?” You know. And you call up for them and the person on the other end of the phone is mean. They’re being mean. And you know (refugees) they don’t have the power to say “you’re being mean, I would like to talk to your supervisor”. But I can say, “Excuse me”...and that is awful, it is so unfortunate that it needs to be that way. So one of things that I benefit from in my refugee settlement work, is just a reality check on how my Canada is very different from someone else’s Canada. And I guess you always get that when you become friends with people who are knocking, or socioeconomic class, or who are in different...in some way. So that’s one of the ways that in which I feel.

(Can you clarify, that is an interesting statement, “My Canada is different from somebody else’s Canada”)

I see all the time how I can slide into an office and I know exactly what to wear and how to act and to be polite. And to ask the right questions and to not annoy someone. And then I also know when things have gone too far and I can demand

to speak to a supervisor or a manager. And feel totally comfortable in that situation. And know what my options are. And that is just not true for someone who is just new here. Or has an accent, or the skin color is different.

From Hannah's experience she finds also that refugees need someone to advocate for them on their behalf due to seemingly discriminatory practices:

They need an advocate often. Even refugees that come and speak English are seen often as not having the ability and or overlooked or treated quite unfairly and having someone who can just walk alongside in presence, not even speak, just be there, can be a powerful presence to get things accomplished and get things done, just various offices they have to be in, banks they have to deal with, things like that.

So there was an incidence just the other day where my husband and I were involved in supporting a family and they had received a call from Immigration Canada and it was very upsetting news.

(This is a claimant?)

The one person is a claimant. My husband just went with the other person and just being there has delayed the decision and possibly the decision will be more in favour than not, had the person gone alone, I think for sure we know what the decision would have been.

Participants have come to learn about more than discrimination in the local context. Many research participants discuss how they have become aware of the trauma that refugees have faced in life prior to coming to Canada. For Gabriel, there is a sharp difference between seeing news stories about violence and meeting someone who has

direct experience with violence and torture. As he describes, the impact on him and potentially other congregants is a profound increased awareness of these important issues:

For me personally it's been good to increase awareness of Afghanistan and Pakistan. They grew up in Afghanistan but had to flee about twenty years ago, and had been living in Pakistan the last twenty or twenty one years. So it's been an increased awareness of that, and an increased awareness of the Muslim faith and just realizing, that good feeling, that sense of OK, I've done something good here by meeting these people and the gratitude that they have is wonderful.

I think the whole thing of increased awareness.

We're not always aware of what it's like when we see stories on the news about violence occurring, but to actually meet someone. The one son who was beaten, taken and imprisoned and beaten and left at the side of the road. I mean he's got scars on his arms and he showed me the scars. To hear that story as a congregation, making us number one what terrible things are going on in the world and the number two, making us thankful for what we have.

In a story shared by Caleb, who was closely involved in the sponsorship of a refugee from Central America, he relates how he witnessed directly the tragic effects of torture that left a refugee with whom he was involved in a fragile emotional and mental state:

Story of involvement with refugee who was seriously mentally disturbed and that was very discouraging. It was very difficult to work with him, and not all that successful. We were able to get him settled and find a job and those sorts of things, but life was still very difficult and problematic. Well ultimately he

committed suicide, some years after, five years or so. That was a discouraging experience for some people. You try to help but you can't help. You try to get him help, to see counseling, but he wasn't interested in cooperating, or going through that process.

Well he had been tortured in El Salvador and going to a counselor here used to dealing with ordinary people; this was something else, totally out of the counselor's experience.

The description of suffering in terms of mental and emotional distress is not surprising considering the torture and violence experienced by many refugees. Kenneth, who is active in the settlement work of a sponsored refugee family, makes mention of the persecution and violence experienced by the refugee family whom he is involved with. Particularly, he shares the impact of that relationship upon his outlook on life:

...but I think one, probably for me one of the things that has changed the most is an incredible appreciation for what I have. Just a real, a real eye opener in terms of how safe our community is, how we have all the resources we could possibly want. How we live in incredible comfort. How we live in freedom. You know this family came over because of persecution based on her job as a social worker trying to help the disenfranchised in Colombia, and the government not liking that. How we just have the freedom to speak what we want to speak, and the things that we want to do. It's been a real eye opener for me to see, not just to hear about it, or to read about it in a magazine. But to walk with a family, and to hear the stories, and to see their bullet wounds (points to his hand) and you know that brings it home for me.

Through this story Kenneth brings together the element of gaining access to the difficulties in the life world of another and contrasting them with his own privilege. As a result he describes having a deeper appreciation for the safety and material wealth to which he has been privileged.

Hannah discusses her opportunity to gain access into the life of refugees and to contrast her own privilege with the real life difficulties faced by refugees. She describes having her life and circumstances placed in perspective and her priorities reordered:

And I think it puts me in a position of gratitude and thankfulness. Being a refugee is not a choice and when you're forced to flee or when war and oppressive governments control who you are and where you live and what you do. It has a great effect on an individual. And I don't have that. I have this freedom to go where I want to go, when I want to go anywhere, without a visa. And many individuals can't do that. So I think it puts the perspective of my life in this world in great perspective of what's important.

Caleb, Kenneth and Hannah all demonstrate an awareness of the struggles that refugees face in their flight from their homeland. In the stories shared by Kenneth and Hannah, they explain the privilege of having access to the personal tragedies and struggles experienced by the refugee(s) and the heightened awareness of their own comfort and security.

As described, much of the awareness raised in the conscience of research participants is in regards to the gap between their own relative wealth and comfort and the poverty, pain and suffering of refugees. This awareness reflects the growing anti-globalization

protest movement, stemming from increased awareness of the vulnerability of many people due to the widening gap between the rich and the poor.

The disparity in wealth is acknowledged by Gabriel as it has been observed by himself and the congregants of his church. The awareness of the inequality is made poignant through the personal encounter of the refugee(s) who have come to Canada with what he describes as very little:

That's important for me personally because I mean, I didn't mention that when you asked that question, but we have had to think about the wealth that we have. When you meet someone who's coming with nothing, I mean, what they could carry onto the plane, and then have no jobs now and then we think about the lifestyle we live. I think they could definitely, some values that could be learned. We as a congregation, specifically, are largely a rural congregation. Our church is in the middle of the country and while there's not as many, I mean, there's a lot of either retired farmers or farmers who are actively farming now, they've sold some dairy quota or something where they have a sizable, well, we're financially fairly stable, our congregation. And I think because of that, we live a fairly good, a fairly high lifestyle and as a congregation to meet and greet some people who have nothing is certainly going to help us look at our priorities and acknowledge that there's no doubt about that.

Deborah demonstrates an understanding of global inequality as she describes her motivation as a Christian to be involved in refugee assistance:

I think its pure grace of God, luck, that we happen to be born in Canada and they did not. I mean we could just as easily been born in their circumstances. So, I

think it's grossly unfair that twenty percent of the world gets eighty percent of the resources and conversely.

Research participants do not make explicit a causal link regarding the disparity of wealth between the rich and the poor and the flow of refugees. However, Isaac observes that it is the privileged nations who control the destiny of refugees. His observation is that the number of worldwide refugees is indeed large, and that homeland security impacts the human security of refugees, making it very difficult to gain entry into Canada:

Think about the number of refugees in the world and how I think Canada has certainly slowed the flow. It makes it very difficult for refugees to gain status in the country. 9-11 being one of the critical times when you had to stop and look at who was coming in, but in so doing we've really done damage and hurt a lot of people we could be helping. And let's face it, there aren't too many people in this country who has not been, or who was born here. I mean...generations ago were raised here, and the people who were like that we've put in reservations. And so that we all have this tie of being newcomers, and in so many respects yet we don't want newcomers.

Through the journey of providing settlement support and other forms of refugee assistance, participants are impacted by what they have seen and by the lived experiences shared with them by the refugee(s). This impact is a lasting one, as the words of research participants is that they will commit to ongoing involvement in this form of work.

Ongoing Involvement in Refugee Assistance

It might be expected that a commitment to ongoing engagement in this work would exist among those who have been involved in refugee assistance work, and have had their awareness raised on the issues faced by refugees. Evidence of such an ongoing

commitment can be found in the participants comments. Anne, has been involved in refugee assistance work for a number of years as both a volunteer and as a paid professional. She discusses her commitment to this work and the risks that she has incurred:

Yes, now I wouldn't, I really got to know people and I didn't take unnecessary risks, but I did take risks, on behalf of people, I think if you are in this sector you have to take risks or you won't be able to do your job. There's too many uncertainties in peoples live. But I could just show you success story, after success story, after success story. I never once got burned. Never once. And now I have made the decision to not continue to do that, to take that kind of financial risk about five years ago...

...you know this is not a job, this is a vocation for me. Maybe I have three or four more years, to work, to be employed in it, but it is a vocation, so I am not going to apologize anymore at all for this. As well, I just, having the opportunity to meet people from these different areas, it compelled me to go to Africa. Now I have gone twice to the same area, and I am building relationships with people there that are just wonderful. And that has opened up a whole new vista for me in my life.

(Can you talk more about that experience? You are working with refugees here, and then you are spending time...)

I took my holiday time a year ago, and then again this past January, to go to Uganda to visit refugee settlements in the north, and then to Sudan to visit the internally displaced camps.

Through taking financial risks in sponsorship and organizing trips to Africa Anne demonstrates her work as a vocation that is imbedded in her personality. In her case she has already been involved in this work over the long term. Her comments demonstrate her desire to continue.

Elizabeth also shares how her involvement in refugee assistance work is an inherent part of her being. She describes it in terms of a life calling and an expression of her commitment to Christ:

In the past, before I came to KW I was working as a computer tech in spatial data organizing person for a company in Calgary. And really looking for a life's work. Or a, a vision, or something to put my spirit into. A direction to pursue. And that is part of the reason why I did a Masters degree, was to search, to make that search for a something to do more defined. And so when it eventually came around that my Masters degree would be on refugee settlement issues I sort of sensed not only an academic calling down that road but also a, here it is, you asked and here it is, this is what I, I heard Christ saying this is what I want you to do with the time that I have given you. And so one of the ways that I have benefited with my assisting refugees, is in this way. I don't feel like here I am, a person with all these resources and no direction. I feel like I've got a direction...

Elizabeth also shares how her involvement with refugees has inspired her in her plans to work overseas:

And I guess too what also inspires me is the plans that (my family and I) have for working overseas. I have been thinking a lot, which we are hoping to do this year or the next, I have been thinking a lot about what it means to be a stranger, and

how it feels to leave all your networks and your family and your friends behind. How it feels to reinvent oneself in a different language and all of those things that I have seen friends and other refugees go through with my work at MCRS. So it's, for me the inspiration is sort of double sided and I guess in a somewhat selfish way. But just to be inspired by the courage people have to begin again. So that I can be filled with a spirit that will carry me through the difficulties of the first few years overseas.

Kenneth describes how awareness of refugee issues has inspired him to keep the needs of the outside world in view of his church congregation as a means of challenging their complacency:

And uh, perhaps though, maybe some frustration with how little we tend to do as a community and how complacent we are with what we have and how uncomfortable we can be when sharing the wealth we have and wanting to horde it.

I am going to continue to challenge my church to sponsor refugees because I think it has been important. And I think it has been important for our church also, just to get outside, of, we have a great church, but it's very, it's very much an inward focused church. We sort of very much take care of ourselves, and take care of new people who come into our church. But we are not an outward focussed, not a missional church if that's what you want to call it. We are becoming more like that, and I would like to see us continue and not to stop, and to have the faith to step out and say, you know this was, this was a good experience.

The words of the participants indicate that refugee assistance is not simply a form of work. Rather, as demonstrated by the ongoing commitment to this work, it is a passion that can not go away. The stories of the research participants, particularly with Anne and Elizabeth in their separate intentions to do overseas work; clearly indicate that an awareness of need can be a precursor to committed engagement in this work.

5.4 Negotiating Relationships

As participants engage in the work of refugee assistance, they find themselves dealing at a relational level with the refugee(s) whom they are assisting. As has been mentioned, in the work of refugee assistance and “welcoming the stranger” participants are engaged in settlement work and the provision of social support. Through their close interaction with refugees they are internally negotiating the relationship that exists between themselves and the sponsored individual or family. Likewise, for those involved in supporting refugee claimants through MCRS they have become aware of the relational nature of the work, and the need to determine the nature of the relationships that develop.

Through the process of data collection I sensed that there was a difference between the way that male and female research participants defined their relationship with the refugee(s). It appeared that female participants were more likely to describe the relationship in terms of a friendship, and then to go on to describe the nature and depth of this friendship. It also appeared that male participants were more likely to describe the relationship in a detached form, focusing less on the friendship and more on the forms of practical support. As a result of the investment by female participants, they find themselves challenged to meet the many demands placed upon them beyond caring for refugees. The demand to meet multiple needs is raised in the sub-category “gendered

notion of helping”. Although there are apparent differences between men and women in their helping, it appears that these differences are not exclusive and a flow occurs between the male and female ways of relating. The sub-category “crossing the gendered divide” addresses this phenomenon.

Responses from female and male research participants highlight the different understanding of the role of friendship in the helping relationship. Hannah, as a career woman and mother involved in refugee sponsorship, describes how she has become a very close friend to one of the refugees whom she has been assisting:

I guess I would even say for many, I’m their friend. I’ve become their friend. I would say my best friend is a refugee from another country who came about three years ago.

And it’s an amazing relationship. So we were friends. And when we greet each other at church, we really felt it as friends. It’s so good to see you or when we phone in the week or when there’s a need and they come to me, they state some of the, and I know exactly the kids’ names and what’s going on and I’m a friend who says, OK, let’s see what we can do about that.

Anne also describes how relationships are an essential element to her work in refugee assistance. Anne has a long history of involvement in refugee sponsorship at her church and in her paid employment:

Yes. I just feel rich in my relationships with people. I have probably broken all the rules of professionalism in becoming friends, but, you know this is not a job; this is a vocation for me. Maybe I have three for four more years, to work, to be

employed in it, but it is a vocation, so I am not going to apologize anymore at all for this.

Elizabeth, who is actively involved with a local refugee agency, as both a volunteer and a board member, describes how establishing friendships helps bring a sense of normalcy back to peoples lives and provides them with much needed support:

I think friendship. Um, I mean you can't be best friends with everyone, especially with my work at MCRS. You can't. But there is that privilege of being a friendly face that will listen. One of the things I love about MCRS is that there are no desks and that you can take time to actually listen to how peoples lives are, as well as dealing with their settlement concerns. Um, so I think that aspect, that friendship building is a big benefit because these people, all of them, had functioning social networks where they were in their own country and they needed them there and they need them here, just like we all do.

Sharing a different perspective Bob, as the chairperson of the refugee committee at his church, describes friendship in a very detached manner:

Generally my experience is that refugees are extremely independent, and want to be independent, and want to do their own stuff, and they work hard at getting off the support systems. So, it usually is just a transition period.

Sometime there is a personal relationship. But more so, it's that I find they have found their own way in the community, their own friendships. They have found community; usually it's within their own cultural groups. But sometimes it's through English classes, or any other ways of...so a lot of times we find that people, that contact isn't very often. They have established themselves and they

don't need the support system. And a lot of times it's not a personal relationship with the refugee, it's a formal relationship. And they're not, they're not necessarily looking to us for friendship and were not necessarily looking for that either, or personal relationship. They understand it's a, it can be that, but first and foremost it's a relationship of helping from an institution.

Caleb describes in vague terms the need for refugees to experience friendship and emotional support. However, he is much more specific in terms of the parameters of practical assistance:

Certainly security in the sense of being secure and safe having someone they know that they can depend upon, they can trust and can assist them, someone they can go to. Someone to check up on them and make sure they are all right. And of course there are all the organizational things they need help with in terms of the government, papers, transportation to government hearings, and assistance in finding material things.

Gabriel also describes a relationship that is free from intimate notions of friendship by recalling a fun and humorous moment with the refugee(s):

At first I was a little nervous, you know, about how much joking around and having fun you want to do, but we've been doing that fairly well. We recently found out...One of them told us that they had a surprise for us and so we were out, actually a group of us had gone out to have supper with them, on Friday night and this one son came down with a picture of him and a girl. Found out after that that it was wife. That they had their interview in the embassy on the October 8th and the 24th of October, was married. His wife had stayed back in Pakistan and so

this was a big surprise to us, and we said we'll look and see what has to be done, see if we can help to bring her to Canada. But then there was much teasing back and forth with some of the other sons to make sure they didn't have a wife somewhere back. And they received that well. They're easily to get along with, very easy going and love to kid each other. So that's been good.

The difference in these various responses appears to be in the understanding of what it means to help. For example, with Hannah the notion of helping is tied to being in a close personal relationship with the person who is the recipient of the help. On the other hand, Bob acknowledges that friendship may result from the work with which he is engaged in with the refugee(s) but it is not the primary mechanism through which a helping relationship is established.

Gendered Notion of Helping

Within the context of a helping relationship, a dilemma is raised by female participants. Participants are presented with the challenge of needing to care for the refugee(s) while also meeting the needs of others, including their family. Hannah describes her various obligations to care for herself, her family, and for the refugee(s) whom she is assisting. She then goes on to describe how she has resolved the dilemma of meeting the multiplicity of care needs:

I think that's my biggest struggle. I always want, and I don't mean to do more for them. I, be more with them and try to be involved in more peoples lives. That's what I would like to do, but I often don't have the time.

(Right. Right. Can you describe how you set boundaries?)

Umm. My husband helps. (Laughing) Umm. I've learned this particularly because I've got the full time job, it's done it for me. I mean in a small way I decided

when we invite people over it doesn't happen in the week, it happens on the weekends. And even Friday nights is going to be a really good night to have dinner with an individual at different times. And sometimes on Sunday afternoons, but we keep Saturday as our day as a family. I mean it might be small but I think that's how I've helped myself to be able to know that I'm being involved with the individual that I would like to get to know more and have over and fellowship with and socialize with. But also know that I have a limited amount of energy and time to do that when my work and family life with my children are in the week. That's a small way I've done that. And, connecting with other individuals who are interested in being a part of welcoming the community, getting to know the community. So another community kind of to talk about the needs, so I'm not the only one that hears them, and then maybe we can make this a little bit broader.

(Hmm. Mmm)

...that helps me a lot.

Freda describes how she incorporates her caring work for refugees into her caring work for her family. By doing so she is able to benefit from her multiple obligations. This is accomplished by taking refugee(s) stories and experiences and incorporating them into life lessons for her children:

Well again, just hearing the stories of people, making myself aware, able to talk to my children in a different way. Make them aware that the world, there's many stories out there in the world and there's these stories of hope for people that have come that we've been able to help.

(Can you identify some ways that you incorporate that into your family?)

No, my kids are young enough still, I think that it would just be in talking, like with my oldest child and taking stories of, with an older child who likes to think that guns are cool and things like that and telling stories, well, you know, putting faces to these people and listening to their stories of this is what's happened, this is what's happened because of force that was used against people, this is what's happened, this is you know...Doing it in a kind way, and in a non-frightening way sort of thing. There are realities that, this is why we say, this is why we say war is wrong. And look at what happens when...and being able to follow down. And he knows, I mean, some of these people he knows, one family has been to our house a few times, and these are stories of people.

From the broader context of the church as the agent of caring, Elizabeth demonstrates thinking that struggles with the moral challenge of a church's obligation to caring for its membership while also caring for others outside the congregation:

So how then does the Mennonite church, if it has these troubles with even diversity between Mennonites and non Mennonites, how does it manage diversity that is, also includes languages and skin colour. Now I've seen Mennonite churches that do manage that quite well First Mennonite for example, and their Spanish speaking population...um, I have been in Mennonite churches where the spirit seems to be less inward looking and more outward looking. I am thinking of (a) Mennonite Church where I preached one Sunday, seemed to be far less about these Mennonite events are happening this month, and this Mennonite person is coming to speak, these Mennonite camps are available for your children, and

more this is what the community is doing. Or we are getting together with this Anglican church to do this event. You know, so, I guess that's maybe one way. I don't know how you turn a church around from inward looking to outward looking. Maybe that is the key for Mennonite churches who are looking at becoming more diverse. To make sure that outward is also there in force as well as celebrating Mennoniteness. But I don't know where is the line? How do you stay Mennonite and be a place where Mennonites can come and enjoy other Mennonites. But also be a place that doesn't exclude other people from...I'm not sure. I mean maybe the answer is you go to the outward looking church if you want to focus less on being Mennonite and more on being Christian. And if what you want is potlucks (laughing), you know what I mean, and, right, if those ones are important to you then you go to the inward looking.

Crossing the Gendered Divide

What has been portrayed is the investment of women in friendships with the refugee(s) and the ensuing struggle with the multiplicity of care needs beyond refugee assistance. Although a gendered notion of helping seems to exist, whereby female participants place a higher value on establishing friendships, this is not an exclusive category. For male research participants expressed ways of relating that cross the gendered divide. In describing his work with a refugee family from Colombia, Kenneth draws upon the spiritual image of being "blessed" to describe the benefit of having a close relationship with the refugee(s):

So, um, the rest of the family, on a weekly basis we will probably see them three or four times. And that's actually decreased, at the beginning it was probably more five times a week or so as we were driving them around, doing stuff like

that. Um, good relationship, although we've really, we've been blessed with this because we like, we genuinely like these people. I mean, I imagine that there are people who sponsor families that don't click, or they don't get along, whatever. We've been blessed by the fact that we've really enjoyed their company so we often have them over for meals, and they have us over at their house for meals. And uh, and so there's sort of a casual, social part of it. And then and I say, there's obviously the part where we're helping them sort of get, getting on their feet here in Canada, but then that reciprocal part...

Other participants comment on the establishment of a friendship with the refugee(s). Each of the three participants below describes friendship as a positive return on the work that they have invested in the refugee family. Isaac, who has been informed in this work through his current involvement as well as his experience in the mid 1970's, recognizes that the refugee family has established relationships within their own community. However, he continues to stress the benefit of his own relationship with the refugee(s) in terms of an established friendship:

We consider this family good friends. So there is the friendship aspect of it. I think they in turn because of what we have done for them. I think they have their own community and their own, well as far as the children are concerned, they are moving onto to being contributors to our society. What I gain is the friendship.

Likewise, Luke describes how he has increased his friendship circle: "Well, I've gained friends. There's nobody as polite and wonderful as Afghan people. They have to be the most hospitable people around. It's just incredible." In a straightforward statement James, who is currently active in settlement work with a refugee family, emphasizes that

friendship has occurred between himself and the family whom he is assisting: “Well I think I already have benefited, just from the friendship that I have gained. I don’t refer to them as the refugee family. I refer to them as my friends.”

As men become more expressive about friendship, in a similar fashion, in a similar fashion female participants move between friendship that is practical and expressive.

In answer to a question concerning the needs of refugees, Freda identifies needs met through practical support. She describes these as basic needs. Freda then identifies other relational needs of refugees that present an emotional or psychological burden, requiring support at an emotional level:

The immediate needs when they come are housing and clothing... those are the basic needs. Language is a huge need, and for many of the refugees, a sense of beyond language and after the first year, they either need to find a job or... I mean those are all big needs that weigh upon you having to figure out what you’re going to do next. You may feel safe but then there’s more things that are there waiting that have to be handled and dealt with. And then also dealing, I think for some people dealing with the need for counseling, dealing with the crisis that they’ve come through.

Deborah also demonstrates a moving between expressive and instrumental caring. She is able to identify the need for emotional support, while at the same time emphasizing the practical concerns:

I think one of their greatest needs is just to have that emotional network of knowing; they can pick up the phone and call one of us, and know that we would drive them to wherever.

I think its more just helping them to deal with...how do we get our OHIP card?

Why do we need a SIN card, how do we get it? ... A lot of questions...

Anne provides a description of how she prioritizes the work that she engages in with the newly arrived refugee(s):

The first thing that they need when they come into this place, in this country is welcoming. It is very powerful, for a refugee to come and feel welcomed. That is my absolute biggest priority as far as I am concerned personally and then to find a place to be safe, to live, and then to find friendship and support to help them work out the suffering and the trauma that they have carried with them...

Analyzing Anne's description of her role with refugee(s) upon their arrival, it is evident that she flows between expressive and instrumental ways of relating. The importance of the expressive manner of relating is emphasized initially and is followed by an instrumental form of relating such as finding housing.

What has emerged is that some difference does exist in the way by which female and male participants describe the helping relationship that they have established with the refugee(s). Men describe the practical forms of assistance that they provide to refugees. While they also discuss the notion of friendship, they do not do so as strongly as female participants. Female participants are much more expressive in describing their relationships with the refugee(s), and the importance of these relationships. At the same time they are also very practical in their assistance. Any suggestion that males are solely goal oriented and that females are solely nurturing is not evidenced in this study. However, though there is a crossing over between the two domains, males do appear to at least dominate in the former and females dominate in the latter.

CHAPTER SIX – DISCUSSION

6.0 Introduction

As I described early on in my thesis, I have developed a growing conviction that the Christian voice of compassion must be a voice that is strong. At this juncture in my research I feel now that I have heard a strong voice. As the research participants invited me into the world of refugee assistance, I heard voices that express a strong commitment to caring for the marginalized, spilling from the overflow of hearts felt by concern for the plight of the refugee(s) with whom they are engaged.

In Chapter Five, I presented four themes that emerged from listening to participants stories of involvement in refugee assistance. In the following discussion, I will address each of the themes under which the findings have been organized. This will be followed by a discussion on the relevance of this research. It is relevant to my own journey. However, I believe that it also has relevance to the research participants, and to other key organizations that administer and carry out private refugee sponsorship. Finally, to close the chapter, I will discuss the limits of my research.

6.1 Religiosity

The involvement of research participants in the work of refugee assistance is a form of voluntary activity that requires a heavy personal and financial commitment over an extended period of time. In the personal interviews with participants, they indicated that their inspiration for engagement in this work comes from their personal understanding of Biblical passages and the adherence to Biblical instruction to care for the marginalized as

role modeled by their parents and the church in which they were raised. This finding shares some similarities with the literature reviewed in chapter three.

The notion that participants engage in voluntary work as an application of religious teachings is similar to findings by Lam (2002) who measured the influence of religion on civic engagement in the form of voluntary association participation. In the private or devotional dimension of religiosity, Lam found that the frequency by which individuals engage in prayer and religious reading increases the odds of voluntary association membership by a significant level (p. 411). In my research, participants readily referred to Biblical passages, particularly from the Gospel of Matthew, which have inspired and legitimized their involvement in refugee assistance. The repeated reference to Biblical passages suggests that, like Lam states, religion has an influence upon voluntary activity. The difference between Lam's study and my study of Mennonites involved in refugee assistance is that Lam is looking specifically at secular civic engagement whereas as research participants in my study are specifically working within the context of their church.

The distinction of religiously inspired voluntary activity that occurs within the context of the church is similar to the research of church congregations involved in Sanctuary provision of refugees in the United States. Bibler Coutin (1993) found that Biblical teachings were very important for congregation members in informing and inspiring involvement in the provision of sanctuary for refugees from Central America. Research by Park (1998) also indicates that Biblical passages and religious teachings were applied by congregations to interpret the act of refugee sheltering (p. 399). Overall, applying Biblical passages to sanctuary work is important to church congregants as it allows them

to construct the work of sanctuary as religious activity (Bibler Coutin, p. 195; Park, p. 394).

The nature of the work of Mennonites is within the context of the church, serving, for example, on a church refugee committee or representing their respective congregations as board members with MCRS. The teaching of Christ in the gospel of Matthew that participants frequently refer to is the command to welcome those in your midst who are naked, hungry and a stranger. Christ's teaching is presented as having strong meaning for Mennonite Christians for there is a clear parallel drawn between the stranger and the refugee. Therefore, "welcoming the stranger" is a religious act that is understood by research participants as an expression of their calling and of their Christian faith.

The decision to engage in refugee assistance on the part of the research participants is also attributed in part to the role model provided to them by their parents and the church in which they were raised. The impact of the family on forming values congruent with voluntary activity has been previously understood in research. Through personal interviews with community organizers, Mondros and Wilson (as cited in Shragge, 2003) identify a number of factors that contribute to the decision by organizers to engage in activist work (161). One of these factors is what the authors call *Family Background*. Mondros and Wilson state that "families provide a worldview, a set of values and beliefs about people and society, and teach them about social conditions that legitimate activism." (p. 162). The description provided by research participants of the influence of their parents draws parallels to the above study of community organizers. Likewise, reference to the role model of the church is similar to the finding of Bibler-Coutin (1993) that identification with past figures can act as a catalyst to social involvement (p. 24).

As a result, the dual influence of personal application of Biblical teachings and the role model of family and church merge to generate a strong orientation towards church related voluntary activity that focuses on caring for the marginalized. In the case of the research participants, the form of voluntary work is refugee assistance which is understood as a clear manner of welcoming the refugee as “stranger”.

Religious Diversity

An issue related to religiosity that emerged is the treatment of religious diversity, as participants are distinctly Mennonite Christians and many of the refugees with whom they are involved are Muslim. The understanding and approach to this difference appears to be influenced by the values and theology of the individual participants.

Among some participants, there was a clear expression of a theology of universalism. That is, in the situation of Christianity and Islam, these two religions are expressions that lead to the same God. Elizabeth’s metaphor of the two rivers and one ocean is a vivid description of this theology. Other participants did not explicitly share this view. Some spoke about the need to be prepared to share one’s beliefs, but emphasized the value of respect and that sharing only comes upon invitation while another view emphasized the social nature of religion over the proclamation of religious views.

Within these various approaches to religious difference, stories did arise from the research in regards to the religious conversion of refugees to Christianity. In one scenario Luke noted that refugees have been exposed to Christianity in refugee camps and have converted to the Christian worldview. In another scenario Hannah describes how Muslim refugees have developed an interest to learn more about Christianity and are attending her church. From such stories it is important to understand what dynamics may be at play leading a refugee to convert to Christianity.

According to Roberts and Davidson, (as cited in Lewis, Fraser & Pecora, 1988) people affiliate themselves with a particular religion for either social or intrapersonal reasons (p. 277). Those who join for intrapersonal reasons are drawn to the theological insights provided by the church and the opportunity to have questions of transcendence addressed while those who join for social reasons are interested in the community and activities provided by the church (p. 277). As world religions cross ethnic and national boundaries, and conversion on one level is personal, it is possible that refugees may convert to Christianity for intrapersonal reasons.

Regarding the social dynamic of conversion it may be that a refugee perceives an advantage to becoming a Christian in terms of enhancing their settlement experience and increasing social support. For example, Winland (1992) states that Mennonite sponsored Hmong refugees who settled in Kitchener appear to have converted to Christianity for reasons of social support (p. 104). Through the course of my involvement in Mennonite activities this past year I have met Mennonites of various ethnic origins, including former Hmong refugees. Recognizing that they have maintained their ethnic identity while being Mennonite, I see how the Hmong demonstrate that there is space for individuals to choose their religious orientation. However, in the context of refugee assistance it is important for Mennonites of the dominant culture to recognize that the refugee(s) may be vulnerable to the inherent influence that they possess as their primary supporters. It is also important on the part of refugee sponsors to be aware of the power imbalance between themselves and the refugee(s). This is particularly true in the area of religious difference and the potential for the exploitation of vulnerable refugees.

In light of the respect demonstrated by research participants however, concern for them using their privileged position to seek the conversion of refugees appears to be nominal, if at all. Based upon understanding of their Christian faith, and their role as Christians, the values of mutual learning and respect are paramount and sharing the Christian worldview will occur in open dialogue and upon invitation.

6.2 Common Needs

The religious factors of Biblical teachings and the generational influence of parental role models and church activity provide the inspiration to engage in the work of “welcoming the stranger”. This work is demonstrated by meeting the common needs of refugees through the provision of social support which aims to meet the practical, daily and emotional needs of refugees who arrive new to Canada and are facing issues of settlement and adjustment.

The findings indicate that meeting the practical needs of refugees is one of the primary concerns and objectives of research participants involved in refugee assistance. In regards to private sponsorship, participants are obligated to provide for the practical needs of the refugee(s). Likewise, those involved with MCRS recognize the need to assist refugee claimants in accessing housing, language instruction and employment. This form of support is essential as it is recognized to pose a great challenge for refugees and is able to mitigate psychological distress (Michalski, 2001, p. 219).

Addressing the emotional needs of refugees is also a primary concern for many of the research participants. As the findings indicate, participants display empathy towards the circumstances of the refugee(s) and it is at this level of relationship with the refugee(s) that research participants describe common needs. With a strong emphasis on

commonality in displaying empathy, it is important to this research to have an understanding of empathy.

Empathy is described by Kadushin (1990) as the ability to draw on personal experiences that elicit similar emotions to the emotions expressed by the other (p. 111). For participants, this is done as they draw upon their own need for family and security or find commonalities in the shared experiences of motherhood. In traditional social work, empathy has “long been offered as a primary means of facilitating interpersonal understanding across difference, a way of stepping into another’s world and attempting to see and experience things from the other’s point of view” (Clark, 2000). Therefore, empathy is also understood metaphorically as being “tuned into” or “walking in the shoes of” the recipient (Kadushin, 1990, p. 110).

However, in the discussion of empathy, it is important to acknowledge that other thinking expresses concern over the assumption of sameness as it is sought in developing empathy in the context of diversity (Clark, 2000, p. 4). One concern is that the notion of commonality does not acknowledge the “influence of cultural differences on empathic processes” (p. 4). Research participants identify refugees and themselves as sharing common needs at an emotional level. These include a need for safety, security and family. From the point of view of the research participants recognizing these common needs allows them to provide greater support to the refugee(s). However, what must be understood is whether this focus on commonality prevents participants from seeing cultural differences. Expressing empathy in a manner that understands diversity is crucial to effective engagement. Ibrahim (1991) states that understanding another’s worldview and cultural identification, as well as having a clear understanding of concerns can

facilitate cross-cultural empathy (p. 18). Therefore, a need exists for those involved in cross-cultural voluntary work, particularly those who are engaged at an emotional level, to understand commonality and diversity in order to properly express empathy. In the process of “welcoming the stranger” through the provision of social support and the expression of empathy, research participants are challenged to understand both the common needs of the “stranger” and the otherness or difference that the refugee(s) bring to their relationship.

6.3 Heightened Consciousness

One of the enriching elements in the findings that research participants shared in common was their raised consciousness about refugee’s circumstances in contrast with their own comfort. A heightened consciousness on the part of research participants has come about through learning and understanding the challenges that refugees have experienced, witnessing the refugee(s) face discrimination and by taking a reflective look at the disparity in wealth between the refugee(s) and themselves. Research participants demonstrate both verbally and through their ongoing plans for involvement in this voluntary work, a commitment to refugee assistance as a result of being confronted with the circumstances faced by refugees. Therefore, within the religious activity of “welcoming the stranger” there appears to be a symbiotic relationship between “common needs” and “heightened consciousness”. As participants work to meet the “common needs” of refugees, their consciousness is heightened of those needs leading back to a desire to continue in the work of meeting needs.

The experience by research participants of having their consciousness raised on social issues is consistent with some of the experiences that Hoehn states lead to an increased

awareness of social issues. The first of these experiences outlined by Hoehn (1983) is that of being discriminated against (p. 35). Research participants were not themselves discriminated against, but their involvement with refugees brought them up close to some of the discrimination that the refugee(s) experiences. Discrimination has been described by Meertens and Pettigrew (as cited in Beiser, Noh, Hou, Kaspar & Rummens, 2001) as either “hot, close and direct” or “cool, distant, and indirect” (p. 62). The description of discrimination provided by research participants in the findings section appears to be the latter, as it is more covert and subtle in form.

The subtle forms of discrimination described by research participants includes landlords rejecting a large family for housing or workers at social agencies not providing the full extent of services that the refugee(s) have the right to access. These experiences highlight the importance of research participants playing the role of advocate for refugees facing discrimination. This increased role played by research participants demonstrates the interplay between meeting the refugee(s) needs and one’s own heightened awareness. As participants become more aware of the forms of covert discrimination faced by refugees, they develop a greater need to which they must respond.

Two other experiences that Hoehn (1983) says lead to an increased awareness of social issues are what he calls witnessing the suffering of some other person and bonding with someone or gaining access to the meaning of their life world (p. 35). In their work with refugees research participants describe these experiences; however, their description of these experiences demonstrates that it is difficult to separate out the experience of witnessing one’s suffering with the experience of developing a bond with that person. Participants do not describe witnessing directly the suffering of refugees. Rather, they

witness the psychological trauma and physical scars that individuals are left with.

However, they are not witness to the scars and trauma of the refugee(s) in isolation; rather it occurs within the development of a special bond between the refugee(s) and participants.

Related to the finding of a heightened consciousness, research participants describe an ongoing commitment to involvement in the work of refugee assistance. As Elizabeth, moved from being a computer technician to a graduate student researching settlement issues among refugees to a church volunteer in refugee assistance, she found that she received her life direction. After Kenneth and his wife read about the need for Canadian churches to provide refugee sponsorship, they involved their church in this capacity. Now that he has done so, Kenneth speaks about the need for his church to remain involved in work that benefits those outside of their direct community. From these stories, it appears that personal involvement in social action begets further involvement.

The Freedom Summer study by McAdam demonstrates the connection between one's level of social involvement and an ongoing commitment to social involvement. McAdam (as cited in Corning & Myers, 2002) found that those who were involved in social activism on their university campus were more likely to be involved in the civil rights movement during the summer of 1964 (p. 724). McAdam also found that those who were involved in the civil rights movement were likely to remain involved in social activism throughout their adulthood (p. 724). The difference between the social involvement of the civil rights activists in McAdam's study and the refugee program volunteers is the type of activity. The participants in McAdam's study were involved in direct social action on a very contentious issue that put their own safety, security and comfort at risk (McAdam,

1989, 748). Participants in my study are not involved in direct action, but rather in the work of social support that, although heavily taxes their own personal time and involves some financial risk, does not involve the type of sacrifice and risk as experienced by those involved in civil rights activism. However, as found in McAdam's research, previous activity and commitment level predicts ongoing involvement. Therefore, the expressed ongoing commitment to refugee assistance of the research participants coupled with McAdam's study suggests that the current involvement in refugee assistance work predicts ongoing future involvement. Having one's consciousness heightened through caring for refugee's needs creates a strong desire to continue caring for refugees needs.

6.4 Negotiating Relationships

Another result of working with refugees in meeting their "common needs" is that research participants find themselves in a relationship with the person(s) they are supporting. As research participants describe their relationship with the refugee(s), they give the impression of a gender difference in how men and women form and describe relationships.

In my study female participants talk more passionately about the relationships with the refugee(s) while male participants present themselves as taking a more distant stance towards the relationship. The earlier reviewed literature by Gilligan (1982), Fox, Gibbs and Auberach (1985) Anderson (1988) and Gilligan and Attanucci (1988) demonstrates that there are differences in the manner by which men and women engage in friendship and helping. However, each of the above works also supports the notion that these differences are not mutually exclusive. In his conclusion Anderson (1988) recognizes that the differences are not mutually exclusive, stating that "the purpose of this paper is not to

prove that males are only goal oriented and females are only nurturing” (p. 58).

Reviewing Gilligan and Attanucci’s (1988) work shows that more men and women were identified in a combined *Care Justice* category than in a category that focused upon either *Care* or *Justice* (232). Therefore, though men are found at the justice end of the spectrum and women at the care end of the spectrum, the majority of men and women combined cluster in the centre, demonstrating that men and women think in both of these terms.

As stated in Chapter Five, participants in my study also cross over the gender line in their description of relationships with refugee(s). Male participants certainly talked about their friendship with the refugees with whom they were supporting, while female participants demonstrated that they are very skilled at carrying out the instrumental tasks of settlement work.

In seeking to understand the difference that does appear in his research, Anderson (1988) raises the idea that men and women are socialized differently (57). Understanding the differences among research participants as a matter of socialization gives a lot of room for variability as there may be differences in how individuals are socialized. How one is socialized is subject to many factors. Although the discourse emphasizing gender differences may dominate, parental attitudes towards gender roles and the influence of other family members, teachers, television and children’s literature will either reinforce or challenge the dominant discourse. Therefore, it is plausible to conclude that the gendered forms of helping are socially constructed. Likewise, the crossing over and the variability in the helping are due to the many factors that challenge the stereotype of male and female roles.

To further discuss the notion of friendship as developed between research participants and the refugee(s), it is important to consider the ability of the participant to sustain the friendship. One can suppose a situation arising from the intense provision of social support in which the refugee(s) develop high expectations for the relationship. If a research participant is engaged in assistance under the notion of friendship, the definition of friendship must be clear between the two parties and the expectations for the friendship well understood. In this regard, the volunteer must specifically seek the cultural understanding of friendship so as to avoid potential confusion or conflict. As well, the research participant, in defining the friendship, must consider their ability to sustain the relationship to the fairness of the refugee(s). Although participants demonstrate a high level of commitment, it is not difficult to imagine the natural waning of the initial enthusiasm.

6.5 Limitations

This research has focused on the nature of the work of refugee assistance among a particular group in a particular community in Ontario. In doing so, it has explored an area that has previously received little attention. At the same time, due to its specific focus, limitations to the research are present.

One of the limitations to this work is that it does not give voice to the refugees who are the “other” in this research. Through interviews with twelve individuals who self identify as Mennonite, this research presents their understanding of the nature of their work in refugee assistance. The voice that is not heard is that of the refugees who have been sponsored to Canada by Mennonites in the Kitchener Waterloo region, or who have otherwise been supported through MCRS. In the work of “welcoming the stranger”, the

voice of refugees is absent, first, in the area of “common needs”, in which research participants speak for refugees in the identification of their needs. The research does not provide opportunity for the refugee to voice their understanding of need and to address the notion that needs are common among them. The refugee voice is also absent in the area of “negotiating relationships” in which research participants, particularly women participants, describe the relationship as a friendship. Hearing the refugee perspective on the relationship they have with Mennonite supporters would allow for a more critical analysis of the relationship and the element of power imbalance.

Another limitation of this research is in its narrow scope focusing on Mennonite involvement in refugee assistance. I have given lots of credit, all deserved I believe, to Mennonites for their commitment to social justice and compassion, and have highlighted the historic role of the Mennonite Central Committee as the first organization to enter an agreement with the Federal Government to provide private refugee sponsorship. However, Mennonites are not the only organization involved in private refugee sponsorship. Neither are Christian faith groups the only organizations involved in this form of refugee sponsorship. Many ethnocultural communities are engaged in this work and it is important to understand how settlement experiences of refugees compare between those sponsored by Mennonite faith communities and those sponsored by their own ethnocultural community. (As I write this, I want to be clear that Mennonites themselves are represented by many ethnocultural groups and that Mennonite private sponsorship may include a Mennonite faith community sponsoring a Mennonite refugee. Such was the case in Kenneth’s sponsorship.) It is important to understand how issues

such as language barriers, cross-cultural awareness and power imbalance are negotiated based upon the common ethnicity of the sponsoring group.

A third limitation of this research is that it does not explore in depth the nature of the relationship between the Mennonite Central Committee, as the sponsorship agreement holder, and the Federal Government. The involvement of Mennonites in private refugee sponsorship raises a series of questions. First, does the Federal Government recognize the benefit of private sponsorship and give Mennonite sponsors adequate resources and administrative support? Second, does the involvement of Mennonites (and other faith based, and ethnocultural groups) in private sponsorship relieve the Federal Government of their responsibility to assist refugees overseas in resettlement to Canada? Likewise, is the government's failure to provide settlement services to refugee claimants to be viewed as the Mennonite's opportunity to fulfill its Biblical call to care for the vulnerable, or is the presence of MCRS another way to relieve the government of their responsibility to care for this marginalized population? Further research could explore the perspectives of both government officials and Mennonite sponsors.

Although each of the areas above is presented as a limitation to the research, they also invite an opportunity for further research. Private refugee sponsorship is a relatively unknown phenomenon that presents an interesting triad between state, church and refugees that must be understood.

6.6 Conclusion

The involvement of Mennonite Christians in refugee assistance contributes much to the area of social care among a marginalized population. Their history of involvement in

the Kitchener Waterloo region is very strong in the dual areas of private refugee sponsorship and assistance to refugee claimants.

This research has explored the nature of the work of Mennonites involved in refugee assistance. In their focus upon welcoming refugees as the stranger presented by Christ in the book of Matthew, Mennonites are fulfilling their call to follow Christ by caring for the needs others. By doing so, Christ teaches that they are in essence caring for him by virtue of his intimate identification with the poor. In welcoming refugees to Kitchener Waterloo, Mennonites discover that the benefits are reciprocal. Relationships are formed between Mennonites and refugees that are described in meaningful terms by the Mennonite sponsors and Mennonites involved with refugees are challenged to look at the circumstances of refugees and reflect upon their personal privilege and wealth. It is believed that in doing so, Mennonites will be further committed to the work of refugee assistance.

Through this research, it is my hope that the work of Mennonites involved in refugee assistance will be recognized as providing an important contribution to the resettlement of refugees to the Kitchener Waterloo region. The work of Mennonite Christians in refugee assistance deserves to be honoured. Further, it is also my hope that the recognition of one's own privilege in contrast to the harsh difficulties faced by refugees will continue to inspire Mennonite Christians to be involved in this work, and to model for their children, and other faith communities the link between "welcoming the stranger" and caring for the refugee. The church plays an important role in responding to the needs of the marginalized, and due to tragic circumstances, the refugee is truly the marginalized among us.

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APPENDIX A

Definition of Terms

The following terms are used through the course of this research. Therefore, definitions are provided to ensure that all readers have a common definition.

Para-Church Organization – An outreach agency created to work alongside the Church and supported by the Church. The Mennonite Coalition for Refugee Support was founded by the Mennonite Churches in Kitchener Waterloo and is funded primarily by local Mennonite Churches and individuals within the local Mennonite Churches.

Refugee - According to the 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, a refugee is defined as:

One who owing to a well founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside of the country of his nationality, and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country

(UNHCR – Basic Facts, 2004).

Refugee Assistance – The work of the Mennonites involved with refugees is described as *refugee assistance*. Refugee assistance includes private sponsorship of overseas refugees, and assisting refugee claimants with emergency housing, assistance in the claim process, as well other settlement services. In Kitchener Waterloo, the work of Mennonites in private sponsorship occurs within the context of a local Church congregation. The work of Mennonites in assisting refugee claimants is through the Mennonite Coalition for Refugee Support.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada – CIC is a department of the Federal Government

that was established in 1994 to deal with immigrant and refugee issues. Regarding refugees the departments mandate is to “resettle, protect and provide a safe haven for refugees” (“CIC” – About the Department, 2004)

Region of Waterloo – In instances where the word “region” is capitalized, I am referring to the geopolitical area. In instances where the word “region” is not capitalized, I am referring to the larger area surrounding area of Kitchener Waterloo. Research participants were selected from the region of Waterloo in its broader sense.

APPENDIX B

Data Generation Tool

Background Information

1. How long have you been involved in church related refugee assistance work?
2. What is the country of origin of refugee(s) that you have worked with?
3. Are you involved in the private sponsorship of a refugee from overseas?
4. Are you a volunteer with the Mennonite Coalition for Refugee Support?
5. What type of tasks are you involved with in the work of refugee assistance?

Interview Guide

1. What inspires you as a Mennonite Christian to be involved in the work of refugee assistance?

Prompts

How have your own personal experiences inspired you?

How have stories of other involved in this work inspired you?

How have your people's history inspired you?

How have your religious beliefs inspired you?

2. How do you hope that refugees will benefit or be changed from your involvement in this work?

Prompts

What do refugees need? (social support/practical support/emotional support/spiritual support)

How are you able to help refugees?

3. How do you hope that you will benefit or be changed from your involvement in this work?

Prompts

What do you hope to learn?

What do you hope to accomplish?

In what areas do you hope to grow?

4. How do you hope that your church congregation will benefit or be changed from your involvement in this work?

Prompts

What does the congregation need to learn about refugees?

What does the congregation need to know about your involvement with refugees?

How does the congregation expect to benefit?

5. How would you describe your relationship with the refugee(s) you are working with?

Prompts

How are you similar?

How are you different?

How do you approach the differences?

6. What are the challenges that you have experienced in your work in refugee assistance?

Prompts

How prepared did you feel upon entering into this work?

What would have helped you feel more prepared?

What did you encounter that you did not expect?

What did you encounter that you did expect?

7. Is there anything more would you like to say about your work in the area of refugee assistance?

APPENDIX C

Wilfrid Laurier University – Faculty of Social Work

Informed Consent Statement

Researcher – Paul Millar

Faculty Advisor – Ginette Lafreniere

For the purposes of this research, interviews will be conducted with approximately 12 research participants. Participation will consist of an approximately one hour semi-structured in-depth interview and your permission to be contacted by the researcher after the interview for any clarification or elaboration of information provided in the interview.

You are a volunteer in this interview. You can choose not to answer a question and you can choose not to participate in the interview at any time before, during or after the interview. If you choose to withdraw from the interview all information that reveals your identity will be immediately destroyed. All information that is collected in the interview will be kept in a locked drawer that can only be opened by me or my faculty advisor.

The interview will be audio recorded with your permission. Transcription of the audiotape will be completed by the researcher. The audiotape and transcription will be coded numerically. The audiotape and transcription will be used only for the purpose of the research. The audiotape and transcription will be shredded and destroyed upon defense of my thesis. All information saved on computer will be deleted from the hard drive or disc upon defense of my thesis.

Your name will be coded using a pseudonym and identifying information will be altered or not included in any publication or public statement. Quotations will only be used with your written permission. Individuals can participate without being quoted.

For the purposes of confidentiality, you are requested to not provide the names or identifying information of any third parties (refugees). Any third party information that is provided will be deleted from the audiotape and transcript.

A benefit of participating in this research is the opportunity to look introspectively and critically at the work of refugee assistance in which you are involved. Further, your involvement in the research will inform local Mennonite Churches about the nature of their work.

If you have any questions about the study and its procedures, or your rights as a research participant, please contact me at (519) 880-8478 or pmillar@interbaun.com. Or, you may contact my faculty advisor Ginette Lafreniere at Wilfrid Laurier University at (519) 884-0710 extension 2688 or glafreni@wlu.ca.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University Research Ethics Board. If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your

rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Dr. Bill Marr, Chair, University Research Ethics Board, Wilfrid Laurier University, (519) 884-0710, extension 2468.

The results of this research will be used for the purpose of my Master of Social Work Thesis. Copies of my thesis will be retained by Wilfrid Laurier University and myself. A copy will also be provided to the Bettina Russell Memorial Fund who have provided support to this research.

I have read and understand the information provided in this form. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this research study on the nature of the work of Mennonites from the Kitchener Waterloo region involved in the area of refugee assistance, and I provide permission to be contacted at a later date for any clarification or elaboration upon a point made in the course of the interview.

Signature of Participant

Signature of Researcher

Date

Date

Code _____

I agree to allow non identifying personal quotations to be used in the research.

Signature of Participant

Signature of Researcher

Date

Date

I would like to be invited to attend a learning forum on the findings of the study at the conclusion of the research.

Yes _____ No _____

Contact Information:

Name:

Phone:

Address:

Phone:

E-mail address:

APPENDIX D

Demographic Information

Demographics

1. Age?
2. Gender?
3. Occupation?
4. Highest level of education?
5. Name of church in which you attend?
6. Country of origin?

APPENDIX E

Invitation to Participate in Research

Dear _____;

I am a Master of Social Work student at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, ON. I recently completed a practicum with the Mennonite Central Committee – Refugee Program and the Mennonite Coalition for Refugee Support. As a result of my involvement with these agencies, I have become interested in the nature of the work of the Mennonite Churches in the Kitchener Waterloo region in the area of refugee assistance.

As a result, I will be engaging in thesis research on the question:

“What is the nature of the work of Mennonites in the Kitchener Waterloo region in the area of refugee assistance?”

For the purpose of this research, my plan is to interview individuals involved in refugee assistance in the context of a Mennonite Church in the Kitchener Waterloo region. Research participants will be interviewed in an approximately one hour semi-structured in-depth interview. The interview will be audio recorded with your permission. The audiotape and transcription will be coded numerically and all information provided in the interview will be considered confidential. I will also request that participants provide permission for me to contact them after the interview if clarification or elaboration is required upon a point made in the interview.

A benefit of participating in this research is the opportunity to look introspectively and critically at the work of refugee assistance in which you are involved. Further, your involvement in the research will inform Mennonite Churches in the Kitchener Waterloo region about the nature of their work.

The criteria for participation in the research is as follows:

- You will self identify as Mennonite.
- You will regularly attend a Mennonite Church in the Kitchener Waterloo region.
- You will be involved in the work of refugee assistance in a voluntary capacity.
- You will have accrued one year of volunteer experience in refugee assistance over the past two years from the date of the interview.
- You will be eighteen years of age or older.

If you meet the following criteria and are interested in participating in this research, please contact me at (519) 880-8478 or pmillar@interbaun.com

Thank-you for considering this request.

Sincerely,

Paul Millar