

Voices: Helping our Afghan allies is about faith and patriotism

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While the headlines might have moved on, there still is plenty of work to be done for the effective resettlement of our new Afghan neighbors.

We need Congress to pass the Afghan Adjustment Act, and my fellow Texans and Christians should welcome the incredible opportunity to show the love and compassion of Christ to the estimated 4,500 Afghans who will call Texas home.

A matter of faith

As a pastor, I believe no one is expendable, because each person is made in the image of God and has intrinsic worth. Saving our Afghan allies from harm is not only our patriotic duty, but it's also a clear requirement of practicing our faith as followers of Jesus.

Northwood Church is multiethnic and multigenerational, and has at the time of this writing trained more than 125 Northwood members and raised more than \$150,000 to help resettle three Afghan families.

Our members are from all political persuasions and have varying opinions on these issues. However, we are unified in moving forward following the commands of Jesus to welcome and love the stranger.

Throughout the Bible, Christians are called to care for the foreigner, the stranger and the immigrant. In the Greek New Testament, Jesus commands his followers to "practice hospitality," which literally translates "practice

loving strangers.”

It would be naïve not to acknowledge the logistical challenges immigration and refugee situations present to our country. However, we must understand equally the church during this time cannot be led by fear or partisanship.

Jesus calls us to put his kingdom first. We are called to love and serve people placed in our communities, not argue whether they should be admitted there.

Not all Texans—and not all Christians—agree on every refugee and immigration policy. We all need to agree, however, that all human life is precious and do whatever we can to offer refuge and safety to anyone fleeing situations of persecution, violence and death.

A matter of patriotism

Our Afghan neighbors risked their lives to support U.S. troops, and we owe them both our gratitude and the ability to resettle here permanently.

Many Afghans arrived in this country on parole status, which allows them to work and be lawfully present in the United States for two years. But they do not have access to the benefits given to most refugees or a path to permanent legal status.

Even as they settle in our state, our Afghan neighbors are faced with uncertainty. This, despite the fact the return of the Taliban means many of those who supported U.S. troops still are unable to return home.

Congress should act to protect vulnerable immigrant groups—first, by passing the Afghan Adjustment Act, just as it passed similar adjustment acts during and after the Vietnam War. When President Ford oversaw an evacuation of 130,000 South Vietnamese allies to Guam, many of these

allies became refugees and eventually were resettled in Texas.

Over the years, I have seen firsthand the positive impact they have made on our community. These wonderful people made remarkable personal sacrifices for our country during the Vietnam War. By keeping our promise to bring them to the United States, we helped them continue to serve by becoming contributing members of our community.

A matter of Christ's command

What we and many other churches in Dallas-Fort Worth are doing is not new. Historically, the church has a long history of welcoming refugees and helping them get resettled, as has our country.

Christ's command to love the stranger extended to our Vietnamese allies years ago, and it extends to our Afghan allies today. We must view our Afghan allies both as fellow patriots and as neighbors whom our faith compels us to love. Welcoming them as refugees would show them the care we owe those who serve and would give them the love Christ commands we share with the stranger.

I am convinced that extending welcome is both our patriotic duty and our Christian responsibility today.

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