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RLN exists to explore issues at the intersections of faith and life. In doing so we solicit and publish a range of opinions, not all of which reflect the official positions of the Diocese.

We acknowledge that we meet and work in Treaty 1, 2, and 3 Land, the traditional land of the Anishinaabe, Cree, and Dakota people and the homeland of the Metis Nation. We are grateful for their stewardship of this land and their hospitality which allows us to live, work, and serve God the Creator here.

RLN welcomes story ideas, news items, and other input. If you want to be involved in this media ministry, please [email the editor](#).

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# The War is Not Over

Photo: manhhai

We live in a world full of displaced people. In 2021, the UN Refugee Agency estimated that at least [82.4 million people](#)—roughly 1 in every 95 persons—have fled their homes due to conflict, persecution, or human rights violations. Marlene Smith, the Refugee Coordinator for the Diocese of Rupert's Land, cites in her 2021 Activity Report that the number of refugees in need of global resettlement is only growing, with an increase from 1,440,408 displaced persons in 2020 to 1,445,383 in 2021. The process of resettling people who have found themselves stateless—without a home country—is a long and complicated process, and one that requires acts of profound benevolence and faith. Indeed, we often see charitable organizations and faith communities spearheading these sponsorship initiatives.

The Diocese of Rupert's Land has been actively sponsoring some of the world's most vulnerable refugees since 1979, after signing an Agreement with the Federal Government to help resettle the Vietnamese "boat people." Since then, numerous parishes in the diocese have been active in forming refugee committees and coalitions to lead the sponsorship of displaced persons from around the world. The stories attached to these sponsorships are incredibly moving, and a testament to the important work that is fostered within communities of faith.

For April's issue, we're featuring some of these sponsorship stories, submitted by members of the diocesan Refugee Ministry. I would encourage readers to check out the [Refugee Sponsorship page](#) on the Diocese of Rupert's Land website, where there are plenty of

educational resources on the work being done by this remarkable ministry.

We're also featuring an interview conducted by RLN Reporter at Large, Hannah Foulger, with Andrea Shalay, Mennonite Central Committee's (MCC) peace engagement co-ordinator for Europe. A Winnipegger of Ukrainian ancestry, Shalay and her fellow staff were forced to evacuate Ukraine in the wake of Russia's military operations. Foulger, based in Toronto, was able to reach Shalay at a location in Ireland. Flip to page five to read the full interview.

And finally, can performance art save us from war? "Over fifty years ago, a great artist named Yoko Ono dared to imagine this," writes Jane Barter in her review of Peter Jackson's documentary series *The Beatles: Get Back*, released November 2021. Barter draws our attention to Yoko Ono's performance art of the late 60s and points to its abiding significance. In *Cut Piece* and *Bed-Ins*, Ono imagined how performance art might fight the establishment of the war in a way that a violent revolution could not. Ono's art was a form of protest or, as Barter writes, "an enactment of rendering whole, of healing, of restoration."

She goes on to write that "For the larger and more interesting story than that of a great rock band breaking up is that of bodies, once torn apart, becoming whole."

Today, there is still a war going on, and Yoko Ono's art remains as important as ever.



Sara Krahn is the editor of Rupert's Land News.



# Finding Refuge in God

GEOFFREY WOODCROFT

**My heart is in anguish within me,  
the terrors of death have fallen upon me.  
Fear and trembling come upon me,  
and horror overwhelms me.  
And I say, ‘O that I had wings like a dove!  
I would fly away and be at rest;  
truly, I would flee far away;  
I would lodge in the wilderness...  
—Psalm 55.4-7**

*I have assigned titles to persons in the following witness of the Gospel, to respect confidentiality.*

This morning, I read a post on a social media written by someone I will call a Disciple in the diocese of Rupert’s Land. The Disciple had found herself in the centre of a God story. While riding the bus in Winnipeg, she encountered a 13-year-old person child, who I will call Child of God who was alone, hungry, tired, under-resourced, and uncared-for. The Disciple said that it took Child of God significant time, courage, and strength to respond to Disciple’s gentle questions around safety and care. For the next several hours Disciple worked at communicating, resourcing, and befriending the child who was terrified, shocked, half-frozen and starving.

There are many aspects of the story that ought to be reported here, but I will only dwell on a couple. Child of God is a missing Indigenous person, searched-for by the police for a week. Disciple found Child of God at the end of the bus transfer with no place to go, no guardian to provide safety, and no food. Disciple and Child of God shared a mobile phone trying to connect with Child and Family Services, but it was Saturday, and they had no success in securing safety.

Over the course of developing their relationship, much happened in God’s creation. Disciple earned a modicum of Child of God’s trust. Disciple also learned Child of God’s story, or at least a part thereof, and freely chose to advance the relationship in two significant ways: Disciple journeyed with Child of God until a safe and healthy solution was found. And Disciple now physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually shares the burden that had been thrust upon the 13-year-old Child of God. I cannot emphasize enough the power of these out-comes when understanding this God moment as prophecy for the Church and the local context in which it serves.

“‘O that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest; truly, I would flee far away; I would lodge in the wilderness...” The psalmist toys with God, but there is no escape. There is only one refuge, and that is God. How shall a 13-year-old have the wings of a dove, and flee to make a peaceable home in the wilderness, especially at the end of the transfer on a frigid winter’s day?

As the Church we are the hands, feet, ears and eyes of Christ, the very same courageous and vulnerable Jesus who has been mixed-up in the lives of the disenfranchised, oppressed, tyrannized children of God for a very long time. The iteration of Church/Body we inhabit is the same Jesus, the same incarnation of God, and we ought to be witness to all our siblings’ stories of refuge in God.



Geoffrey Woodcroft,  
Bishop of Rupert’s Land

# Winnipegger Andrea Shalay Flees Ukraine

HANNAH FOULGER



Photo: Karolynne Hubert

*In August of 2020, Andrea Shalay relocated to Zaporizhia, Ukraine to begin a new position with Mennonite Central Committee as their new Peace Engagement Coordinator for Europe. At the time, the country seemed relatively stable, but also a good location to set out on new adventures. Little did she know, a mere six months later, she would have to flee her new home in the wake of an impending attack by the Russian army.*

*On March 10, 2022, I spoke with Shalay about her experiences, her spiritual journey and the needs she sees at this time. Zoom connected us from across the world. I was in Toronto, Ontario and Shalay was in Hollywood, Ireland for a brief stay before moving onto Berlin for a peace summit.*

—Hannah Foulger, RLN Reporter at Large

**Foulger:** What were you doing with MCC in Ukraine?

**Shalay:** Last August, I started a three-year service worker position with Mennonite Central Committee. My title is peace engagement coordinator for Europe. A big core aspect of my work is centred around connecting different peace organizations and Mennonite peace organizations across Europe and building up those relationships and building up their capacity for peace-related programming.

**Foulger:** Where were you living and how were you settling in?

**Shalay:** I was in Ukraine about six months

before I left. I spent the first about four months staying with a host family and then I just got settled into an apartment. I was in the apartment for about two months before I had to leave all that behind.

**Foulger:** And what were you working on up until the most recent events?

**Shalay:** We were organizing an event at the end of March in Berlin that's still going ahead. Delegates from a bunch of different Mennonite peace organizations from across Europe will be attending. I was also putting together training for my colleagues in conflict resolution. I was still in the process of settling into my position. I was doing a lot of learning, meeting contacts and getting to know them so that I can then have a better sense of how to best connect them with each other.

**Foulger:** And at what point did you decide that you needed to leave?

**Shalay:** We left on February 13. MCC has a process where we consult with our various partners and contacts within a context (to decide) whether we stay or leave a particular location.

**Foulger:** And how much time did you have between getting told that you needed to leave and the time that you had to leave?

**Shalay:** I was informed on Saturday morning, and we left Sunday evening. On Saturday, I tried to go about my normal routine as much as possible. I didn't find out until later on Saturday specifically when we were leaving.

While I was packing, I wasn't sure at that time whether I would be back. I was preparing for a return in a couple of weeks.

**Foulger:** There was a little while when you couldn't disclose on social media where you were after leaving Ukraine. When did you arrive in Ireland and why Ireland?

**Shalay:** I arrived in Ireland a week ago. It was already actually on my itinerary before I left Ukraine. We have some connections there that relate to peace work and MCC has a long-standing relationship with these organizations.

**Foulger:** Now, this is kind of a ridiculous question, but I feel like it needs to be asked. So if you are working in peace relations, why leave a warzone?

**Shalay:** That's not the level of peacebuilding that I do. And, it's a priority for Mennonite Central Committee not to put any of their staff or volunteers in harm's way.

**Foulger:** At the moment, who and what are you worried about?

**Shalay:** At the top of my list are my colleagues who are still in Ukraine. So I pray for them a lot. And I'm also on the communication list for the church I was attending in Ukraine. So I get regular updates from the community there, which are both worrying but also deeply heartening. They had a service on Sunday in the church building. And they've been doing outreach to seniors, giving words of encouragement to each other. Being witness to their faithfulness in such extreme circumstances has been incredibly powerful. It astounds me on a regular basis.

**Foulger:** I know that you are of Ukrainian descent, so how are you managing in watching this country that you not only have come to make your own home, but is also where your ancestors came from?

**Shalay:** One of the things that surprised me was how personal it felt. This wasn't something that was happening somewhere else, you know, or even to another country, it felt like it was being done to me. I've had to sit with this and be aware of how all of this has been impacting me. That has been very integral in my role as a

peacebuilder, that I give myself enough time and place to process my own thoughts and feelings so that I can be in the best position to be a support for others.

**Foulger:** What are your plans for the future?

**Shalay:** My work hasn't changed too much yet but I am already thinking about long term strategies, how we could be helping build peace once things settle down. What might be needed. What kind of resources we need to put in place now so that we can work towards peace even at the grassroots level, once it's safe enough for us to get into certain areas.

**Foulger:** How do you feel called to pray and process at this time?

**Shalay:** The whole conflict started around the same time as Lent. I was planning a fast for Lent. When the conflict actually began, I actually decided not to fast. I realized that my life was a fast, in a way.

I don't actually have a set place to live for the next while. It's also been a process of giving up things and letting go. All my personal possessions are still in Ukraine. I didn't take anything with me other than just two weeks' worth of clothing and toiletries.

I packed clothes appropriate for Jordan (where I stayed after leaving Ukraine). I didn't bring any personal items. And that made it harder to go through so much change and transition, without anchors. Having the opportunity to connect with good community-oriented people has, I think, helped a fair bit, too, especially being here in Ireland, and with people who have been through peacebuilding processes before, but I've been in hard times, like the troubles.

Recently I visited the [Corrymeela Community](#), which is on the north coast of Northern Ireland, and I attended a worship session that incorporated Taizé. That was the first time in about two months that I genuinely felt peace. So I think one of the things I'm going to be doing moving forward is trying to be better at making time for stillness, or silence and for simplicity.

# Home is where our story begins...

SHERI BLAYLOCK

**On December 8, 2021, a family of five Syrian refugees landed at Richardson International Airport in a pandemic: Manar, Khodor, and sons Mohammad (16), Yousef (15), and Abed Al Raouf (9). Waiting for them in Portage la Prairie was Khodor's sister, Iftikar and her family along with members of the Sponsorship Committee. This is the story of their journey to Canada as refugees.**

## Before the War

Before the war in Syria, they were a big family—parents, sisters, brothers, grandkids—who lived in one house. They felt safe in their life. Education was free, good, and centred around the Middle East (there was no knowledge of Canada). Even University tuition was free, though transportation, room and board, and books were not, and there was no such thing as a student loan. Khodor had registered for university but could not continue because of lack of money.

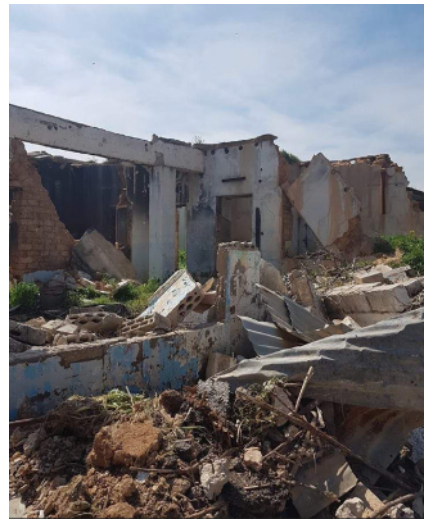
There was also inequality in Syrian society. Those who were the same kind of Muslim as President al-Assad were considered “higher” than the rest: non-Muslims (Christians, Jews, etc.) and the “wrong” kind of Muslim. These systemic barriers made it difficult to get ahead even with a good education.

When Khodor's dad was diagnosed with cancer, as the eldest son, he had to find a job that would bring in regular income to the family. He worked in the shipping and receiving department of a government warehouse that distributed items like blankets and other essentials. Life continued; Khodor got married and had children.

## Displacement in Syria

The war did not begin in their area of the country, but when it intensified, they began a

journey of displacement in Syria. They climbed on the back of vehicles normally used to transport animals. Wherever they went, war seemed to follow. They went to Damascus because they thought surely no one would bomb the capital. Within Damascus, all the displaced people would walk together since there were no rides to be found. This was a time of great sadness as Khodor buried many friends and his brother, Azurdeen, along the way. When the bombing of Damascus started, they were forced to leave Syria for Lebanon.



**Bombed rubble from Iftikar & Khodor's childhood home**

Mohammad, now 16, remembers vaguely the bombs and other sounds of war and thanks God they are still alive. Yousef, now 15, remembers being very scared by the sounds of the helicopters, missiles, guns, and bombs.

## Hardship in Lebanon

The most difficult years were when they lived in Lebanon. The Syrian government had previously committed crimes in Lebanon, and the Lebanese people did not forget. Khodor



and his family endured eight years of bullying and harassment. They moved four or five times to different refugee camps, where life was difficult.

"I had a motorbike and people would try to steal it," says Mohammad. "They'd follow us home and try to take it. Even if I was stronger than the Lebanese boys, I would not fight back because I didn't want my family to get in trouble as I knew we were unwelcome visitors in that land. I felt afraid, concerned, and worried all the time."

"I knew all the streets where we lived in Lebanon, not because I wanted to but because I had to," says Yousef. "I had to know which street to take that would get me out of any trouble that happened—I always had to have another route, a Plan B, in my mind."

The UN gave Lebanese landowners money to allow Syrians to build on their land. Khodor, his brother, and brother-in-law built a tiny house about six years into their external displacement. The house needed fixing regularly and they did the best they could with what they had. There were no ceilings and the rain sounded very loud on the tin roof. Eventually, they found canvas to make ceilings, which dulled the clatter of the rain. They weren't allowed money, and the kids could not attend school. Every day was the same, sitting around with no routine, no work, no opportunities, no goals, "watching your life waste away." It was soul destroying. The Lebanese Army would do monthly "round ups" of Syrians and put them in jail because they knew the UN would pay for the Syrians' bail. Also, the Syrian government paid people to find Syrians who had worked as civil servants and return them to Syria. Why? No one knew. But they knew it was unsafe to go anywhere. They lived in fear every day; it was like living in an open-air jail.

### Journey to Canadian Soil

Iftikar's family arrived in Portage la Prairie in December 2016. Khodor says, "When my sister left for Canada, I was so happy for her and her children. It would be a new life, a new

opportunity. I had heard some good things about Canada and I told her, if Canada calls, say yes."

Iftikar's family was one of two that the [Portage and Area Refugee Coalition](#) (PARC) sponsored with St. Mary la Prairie. The Chair of PARC, Auna-Marie Brown, was a force. She had a way of making things happen. Auna and her husband Bill quickly became Iftikar's family's Canadian grandparents. In 2019, Auna started a sponsorship for Iftikar's older brother. Auna had not been feeling 100% for most of 2020 and we were physically separated for most of it by the pandemic. In December of 2020, Auna died suddenly and took a piece of our hearts with her. For the Syrians, it was a massive blow. It was hard not to be able to mourn as a community.

When Iftikar received word on December 7, 2021, that the Lebanese government was going to let her brother's family leave Lebanon, she could not believe it. Although very happy, she would not allow herself to get too excited. We watched the plane online and there was much relief when it landed in Istanbul, Turkey. During our night, Khodor and his family boarded their next plane and as soon as I woke up, I checked their flight—they were over Poland—and updated the committee. All day we watched the plane icon fly across the Atlantic Ocean until it landed in Toronto. They were on Canadian soil. Cue the tears.



**Khodor and his family arrive in Canada.**



Khodor recalls, "When I came to Canada in December, I felt like I was re-born, like I was out of jail and free. I will never be able to thank the people in Portage enough. Auna has a special place in my heart always."

Now, Iftikar is so happy to see them comfortable, eating well, happy, laughing. She turns to her nephews who are sitting at the table to tell them that their dad was always giving, that he is a kind man, and that it is wonderful to see him receiving something good for all his sacrifices. Yousef's eyes brim with tears. "It is important for them to hear what a good man their father is," says Iftikar.

During the 14 day Quarantine, they did activities inside the house that we had prepared. "Quarantine was difficult," says Khodor, "but we knew it had to be done and it was only for 14 days, we knew there was an ending. We were safe. I would look out the window and everything was white. I spent a lot of time watching my neighbour clear his snow. I marveled at how strong he was, even though he was an older man. Everything is always so clean outside their house." At first they spent the days sleeping and eating, adjusting to the new time zone and catching up on lost meals. And they had video chats with Iftikar. Before they arrived, I had labeled a lot of objects around the house. With Iftikar's help, they practiced pronouncing these words and there is now Arabic beside the English. Binders of alphabet pages and vocabulary were left for each person and a bookshelf of children's books. They rested, planned for the future, and the boys shoveled snow. Manar and Khodor learned how to use the appliances. The first night they were awake they heard a foreign sound. At first, they didn't remember where they were and thought the war had found them again. But a call to Iftikar revealed that everything was fine, it was just the train a block away.

Then, after five negative COVID-19 tests and two weeks, quarantine was over!

### **"Welcome to Canada"**

I asked them what life has been like since

they've been out of quarantine. Manar said that she is very happy and a little nervous because of the language. She's excited to learn how to drive and is studying for her written knowledge test (Khodor already passed his). As a mom, she feels relief that her children are safe and knows that they will now have a good future if they work hard.

Khodor feels warm inside., Food once more tastes good and he feels like a human again. He was stunned that a committee member's 93-year-old mother came by their house just to say, 'Welcome to Canada.' "A couple in their 80s [Barb & John], came to the lake where we were skating just to spend time with us! Life is busy with school and lots of studying. I'm excited to learn English and I'm happy. I started volunteering at MCC and I like the work."

Mohammad is no longer worried about everything. He likes learning English and is excited to get a job as soon as he can. At school or out and about in Portage, he feels comfortable.

Yousef remembers, "As soon as I got on the first plane [in Beirut] I felt different. It was like a deep breath." He has many goals that he wants to achieve. He likes learning English, can't wait to learn how to drive, and maybe someday will become a mechanic. He feels safe here and at school.

Abed Al Raouf loves the snow, loves skating on the lake, and sliding. He enjoys school and says he has nice friends in his class.



**Skating on the lake in Portage la Prairie.**

As the Co-Sponsor of the Berro Family, I am so grateful for the opportunity to do this work with the other volunteers, for whom I am very thankful. Yes, it is a lot more work than I had originally signed up for, but I happily do it, for my “sister” Iftikar, for the new family, for Auna, and selfishly, for me. Seeing the whole extended family’s happiness has become a salve for the gaping wound that is the pandemic. Watching someone slide down a hill covered in snow for the first time with a massive smile on their face or laughing as they try ice skating for the first time is good for one’s mental health. I remember back to when Iftikar’s family first arrived and how they learned the language and I see the same thing happening again. It’s so fun watching people master a word or a phrase and I can almost see the new pathways forming in their brains as they struggle to find the words. I know the next time I visit, whatever they were struggling with will have been mastered and we’ll be on to the next challenge.



**Yousef and Abed Al Raouf experience the thrills of winter.**

From Iftikar I have learned the meaning of the words resilience, kindness, and generosity. She is one of the strongest people I know. Whenever I feel like I can’t do something or I want to give up, I remember everything Iftikar’s accomplished in the short five years that she has been here, and I mentally buck myself up and get on with it.

At the end of my “interview” with the family, after our bellies were full of the delicious molokhia Manar had made because she knows it is one of my favourites, I asked them: if you only had one word to describe your journey what would it be? After glancing at each other, they agreed the word would be: shukran. Thank you. And to them I say right back, shukran. Thank you for taking the risk to come to a land you had not even heard of to start a new life. And thank you for taking me into your hearts. I could not have asked for a better-chosen family.



**Manar’s home-cooked molokhia. Molokhia is a traditional Middle Eastern dish made using finely minced leaves from the Molokhia plant.**

—By Sheri Blaylock, Co-Sponsor of the Berro Family Sponsorship, with translations by Iftikar Al Houlani

The Portage and Area Refugee Coalition welcomes financial donations large and small. Donations can be made online through CanadaHelps or in person at the Newcomers’ Welcome Centre at 110 Saskatchewan Avenue West.



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## Parish News Roundup

### The parish of St. Luke celebrates a birthday



In 1889, members of Holy Trinity started a Sunday school on the south side of the Assiniboine River. It was a long walk for children from the new neighbourhood to return to Holy Trinity for afternoon Sunday school. An empty store on Maria Avenue, later Stradbroke Avenue, was being rented, but soon more space would be needed.

On April 14, 1897, Archbishop Machray “did erect and form ... the Parish of St. Luke, Winnipeg...”. The first service in the present building, constructed in 1904, was on February 14, 1905, though not until 1910 did the church have the extended chancel or bell tower with its chime of eight bells. Church House—the parish hall—was added in 1914–1915.

In 1914, 281 men from St. Luke’s went to war; 43 did not return. In the narthex is a mural painted by Frank H. Johnston commemorating the Winnipeg Grenadiers, along with the Vimy Ridge Cross. In 1915, as a memorial to those who gave their lives, club rooms in the basement of Church House became the Soldiers’ Chapel. This was renovated in 1965, and again in 2018, becoming accessible for those with physical disabilities. It now houses the Columbarium along with the beautiful, coloured glass Soldiers’ Window.

In the 60s, St. Luke’s, Crescent Fort Rouge, and Augustine churches joined in creating the

Community Ecumenical Ministry. The rectory became an information and resource centre. On Saturday mornings, the Whale Sale took over the boardroom and the then Jomini Library to operate a “nearly new shop,” which helped finance our portion of the Ministry

Like many churches, St. Luke’s membership has had its ups and downs: changes in the style of worship – Book of Common Prayer (BCP) vs Book of Alternative Services (BAS) – inner tensions over personalities and budgets, changes in the demographics of the neighbourhood and what has affected every church, “People don’t go to church anymore...”.

We don’t have as many clergy as we used to, and we don’t have a full-time verger in a church-owned house across the back lane.

Age and time changes all.

Where are we now? At the moment, we are picking up the pieces from the COVID pandemic’s openings and closures, as we had done after the closures due to the Spanish flu pandemic of 1918–1919.

We celebrate our past and work for our future.

I am indebted to Billie Nodelman and Andrew Thomson, for their book, “In This Place”, published for St. Luke’s centenary in 1997, and I have used my personal memories since 1958.

*Seek not to pour the world into thy tiny mould,  
Each as its nature is, its being must unfold;  
Thou art but a string in life’s vast sounding board,  
And other strings as sweet may not with thine accord.*

The Parish Church of St. Luke, born in 1897, keeping and proclaiming the faith in 2022.

—Submitted by Sheila Welbergen, editor of *The Winged Ox*



## Refugee Sponsorship Stories

### Welcome to Canada, Djamal!



Photo: Djamal, with his sister Saida at Winnipeg airport.

After several years of delay and many misadventures, a missing Ramadan family member arrived at Winnipeg airport on Thursday, December 16, 2021.

Djamal Ramadan Adam was left behind at the refugee camp in Chad when he could not be found as the rest of his family were leaving for Canada in 2016.

His departure was further delayed, first by bureaucratic red tape, then by the Covid pandemic. Red River Churches Refugee Team wishes Djamal all the best as he gets acquainted with life in his new Canadian home.

The Ramadam Adam family group, displaced by the Sudanese civil war, came from a refugee camp in Chad, where they lived for several years. This group includes a woman with four sons, a daughter, a daughter-in-law and three grandchildren.

—Reprinted with permission from the Red River Churches Refugee Team

[The Red River Churches Refugee Team](#) is a network of churches who are currently working together to sponsor three refugee families to come settle in Selkirk, Manitoba. To donate or find out more about the team's sponsorship efforts, visit the team [website](#).

### Forming the Portage & Area Refugee Coalition

It all began with a sermon preached the Sunday after Alan Kurdi's drowning in September of 2015. By the end of that morning's Eucharist,

someone had asked if [St. Mary's la Prairie Anglican Church](#) could possibly be involved in sponsoring a refugee family. The next step was to invite Gail Schnabl, the refugee coordinator for the Diocese of Rupert's Land, to speak to vestry about what sponsorship entailed. At the same time other churches and groups in our community were thinking the same thing. So, we joined together to form the [Portage and Area Refugee Coalition](#).

Originally the coalition sponsored two families who arrived at different times in late 2016.

Since the forming of the Refugee Coalition, a variety of individuals and groups have taken on the resettlement of family members of the two original families. St. Mary's has been privileged to serve as the constituent group to each of these efforts. This process has not been without its challenges, as the variety of individuals and community coalitions has been different for each sponsorship, necessitating a certain flexibility. When St. Mary's was raising money for the two original families the project was called "The Leap of Faith" because it really and truly was.

Reflecting on the past years since this journey began, one can see the faith involved on behalf of our small Church community. One can also see the faithfulness of the God who called us into this endeavour.

One day at a Bible Study program we were following, we were invited to name a time when our Church had been faithful to God's calling. The consensus among the group present was that it was when we decided to take the leap of faith and get involved in refugee sponsorship. That response would seem to say it all.

—Submitted by Rev. John Dollof, parish pastor at St. Mary's la Prairie Anglican Church

Financial donations are still needed and can be made online through [this link](#) or in person at the Newcomers' Welcome Centre at 110 Saskatchewan Avenue West.

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# *Get Back,* Yoko Ono, and the Art of Performance

JANE BARTER

In 1964, two years before she met John Lennon, Yoko Ono exhibited *Cut Piece*, one of the earliest works of feminist performance art. For *Cut Piece*, Ono wore a suit and knelt onstage with only a pair of scissors accompanying her. During the performance, Ono remained still as audience members approached and cut pieces of her suit until she was stripped bare. Audience members were told they could keep the piece of fabric they had severed from her garment. This performance was a re-enactment of the multiple forms of stripping and fetishizing to which women's (and particularly Asian women's) bodies were subjected. It also hearkened to images of garments torn asunder after the atomic bombs were dropped on Ono's native Japan. As Julia Bryan-Wilson put it: "the clothing destroyed by the atom bomb and the repeated accounts of children wandering the streets with school uniforms hanging off them burned and torn, submit themselves as visual precedents for the tatters of *Cut Piece*" (Bryan-Wilson 2003).



Photo: Minoru Niizuma. Courtesy of Yoko Ono.  
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## **Yoko Ono. *Cut Piece* (1964) performed by Yoko Ono in *New Works of Yoko Ono*, Carnegie Recital Hall, New York, March 21, 1965.**

Throughout the performance, Ono's equanimity spoke to another form of being stripped bare, to a form of surrender that is not merely passive and empty but represents an artistic vision and a woman's integrity that exceed the cutters' shears. In the 1966 artist's statement on the piece, Ono wrote:

"People went on cutting the parts they do not like of me finally there was only the stone remained of me that was in me but they were still not satisfied and wanted to know what it's like in the stone." (Yoko Ono, "Biography/Statement." *The Stone*. New York: Judson Galler, 1966)

Watching Peter Jackson's eight-hour documentary, *Get Back*, was a little like seeking to know what it's like inside the stone after the cutters left. For over fifty years, the public has attempted to sever Ono with the sharp instruments of racism and misogyny. *Get Back* has done much to correct this and to expose the pernicious mythologies upon which the general animus against Ono was built. We now know, to quote Paul McCartney, "[the Beatles did not break up because Yoko sat on an amp.](#)" But do we know her any better? According to many commentators, we do. Since the release of *Get Back*, Ono's true nature, and her chief virtue apparently, have now been revealed. According to Dani Di Placido of [Forbes Magazine](#):

[V]iewers were surprised to see how unintrusive Ono's presence is during the recording sessions seen on *Get Back*; while the boys were jamming, she can be seen reading the newspaper, knitting, or helpfully rolling joints.

Peter Jackson himself offers these remarks in a recent [Sixty Minutes](#) interview:

She never has opinions about the stuff they're doing. She never says, 'Oh, I think the previous take was better than that one.' She's a very benign presence and she doesn't interfere in the slightest.

It takes a singular (and decidedly masculine) lack of imagination to view Yoko Ono in 1969 as merely unintrusive or benign or without opinion. At this time, Ono was at the height of her career, exhibiting internationally, and widely recognized as one of the great visionaries of performance art. To regard her as the sideshow to the jamming boys, the girlfriend sitting on the amp, is to cut once again at a figure. Although she is omnipresent throughout the eight-hour documentary, she evidently remains as concealed today as she was during those first impressions when she was introduced to popular culture.

Ono remarked that, throughout her art, she was "searching for an emptiness that is not empty" ([Brackett](#), 2017), a vision that is thoroughly influenced by her

Zen Buddhist background. Her performance on *Get Back* is often inscrutable, and yet in its inscrutability it interrupts the comfortable narrative of the boys jamming while the "girlfriends" look passively on. Throughout her career, Ono blurred the boundaries between art and life, and we should view her performance on *Get Back* (which, for all its seeming immediacy, was a thoroughly mediated production," [a documentary about a documentary](#)," as Jackson calls it) as consistent with her overarching aesthetic vision. Her emptiness is never empty. As Amanda Hess wrote in a [brilliant article for the New York Times](#):

"Ono simply never leaves. She refuses to decamp to the sidelines, but she also resists acting out stereotypes; she appears as neither a doting naïf nor a needling busybody. Instead she seems engaged in a kind of passive resistance, defying all expectations of women who enter the realm of rock genius."



Photo: Jas Smith

**March 1969—John Lennon and Yoko Ono stayed in their room for seven days at the Hilton Hotel, Amsterdam.**



After the recording of the *Let it Be* album, Ono and Lennon would display the power of passive resistance through their [Bed-Ins](#) in Amsterdam and Montreal. This time her performance art would protest another war that was mutilating Asian bodies: the war in Vietnam. The *Bed-In* was contingent upon the transformative exchange between artist/performers and audience/participant. If you can think peace together, it can be. One did not need a strategy to create the conditions of peace. The conditions for peace, as the conditions of violence, are available already within the flesh, within the self, and particularly in the encounter between enfleshed selves. Much of this message was lost in the controversy that the *Bed-Ins* engendered, but that, too, was part of Ono's vision. To display the quotidian act of lying around in bed, reading the newspaper, sipping coffee, was a disarming and entirely unexpected way to speak of peace during a senseless war which had become an endless spectacle of violence. As Ono stated:

**Artists themselves are beginning to lose their confidence. I have wondered myself about this. Why am I still an artist? Why am I not joining the violent revolutionaries? Then I realized that destruction is not my game. I like**

**to fight the establishment by using methods that are so removed from establishment-type thinking that the establishment doesn't know how to fight back.**

(Ono, cited in [Julia Bryan-Wilson](#) , 2003)

Both *Cut Piece* and *Bed-In* sought to break down the boundaries between art and life, and between performers/artists and audience/viewers. They also sought to invite the audience to engage in an imaginative exercise. In the former, to experience the violence of war, racism, and sexism; in the latter, to participate in the quotidian experience of peaceful exchange.

Read thus, the *Bed-Ins* are the performative antitheses to *Cut Piece*. They were an enactment of rendering whole, of healing, and of restoration. If this is so, then the old and tired story of the Beatles' breakup is at long last turned on its head, but in a far more profound way than Peter Jackson's renarration in *Get Back*. For the larger and more interesting story than that of a great rock band breaking up is that of bodies, once torn apart, becoming whole. Over fifty years ago, a great artist named Yoko Ono dared to imagine this. We are still longing for its performance.

***War is over (if we want it).***



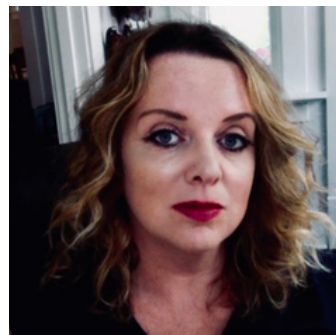
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