

Did you know there is an Arabic speaking congregation in our church?

The story of Vaughan Community Church's (VCC) partnership with Holy Spirit Church (HSC)

Between November 2015 and July 2016, more than 30,000 Syrian refugees arrived in Canada and about one third of them (12,377) settled in Ontario. We can only see this as a divine intervention from God, as among these numbers there are brothers and sisters that might have never had the opportunity to hear the good news. However, we believe that God brought these people to Toronto, into our neighbourhoods, where they can have greater exposure to the Christian faith.

Within our church walls, we now see brothers and sisters who speak another language and look different than us. These Arabic-speaking brothers and sisters are God's blessing sent to us, and we would like to share the story of how the beautiful blessing and partnership of **Holy Spirit Church (HSC)** and **Vaughan Community Church (VCC)** came to be.

We met Pastor Ihsan through Rev. John Chung (정헌범 목사), Director of Canada Mosaic Christian Alliance (CMCA) in January 2015. Pastor Ihsan was born in Iraq and fled to Lebanon in April 1998 where he came to know Christ as personal savior in 2000. He was ordained as a Pastor in 2013. He served as Assistant Pastor, full time minister and worship leader in Holy Spirit Church in Lebanon, where he directly involved in ministry for Syrian refugee camp and Palestinian camp in Dbayeh. He came to Canada in September 2014 as a refugee with his wife and two Children.

Through fellowship with Pastor Ihsan we learned of his past, his journey to faith, how he came to Canada as a refugee and his vision to plant an Iraqi church in Canada. And as we listened to his story, VCC also came to share Pastor Ihsan's vision and passion.

In the beginning, our relationship with Pastor Ihsan grew out of genuine Christian fellowship. We prayed for his family, encouraged him, checked in with him, and offered him rides to church, just as new friends would. As the weeks passed, our conversations with Pastor Ihsan grew deeper and we became close spiritual friends. More and more members of VCC began to join in Pastor Ihsan's vision and we began to pray together for his dream of planting a church in Arab and Muslim communities as one body in Christ.

During his time attending VCC's English Ministry service, Pastor Ihsan began to gain confidence in his ability to lead a church and was encouraged by God's faithfulness. In turn, members of VCC became more interested in predominantly Muslim countries and began asking more questions, as well as attending training sessions and seminars on how to become a friend to Muslim individuals. Even though there were language barriers between us and Pastor Ihsan at the beginning, the members of VCC delighted in his stories and his testimony. We went to visit his family in his home, and continued to encourage his vision and passion through prayer and fellowship. And when Pastor Ihsan came to church to pray, without hesitation we offered him Korean snacks and food, and like a church family should, we shared our prayer topics as well making our relationship only grow stronger.

As soon as he became better settled with his life in Canada, Pastor Ihsan started pursuing his calling to start an Arabic-speaking church. He met with members of the Arabic-speaking community and began to spread the gospel to whoever he could. Through the friendships and connections he developed in the community he began a small home church with his Arabic-speaking brothers and sisters.

During this time, he faithfully and unceasingly prayed that God would send him a partner – someone who could help him to reach his dream of an Arabic-speaking church. Though he was making steps towards achieving his vision, he often felt alone and discouraged. His journey felt long and his dream felt far away.

Hallelujah! God answered his prayer. A friend and worship leader whom he had served with in Lebanon was on his way to Canada with his family. Jirair and Mariana arrived in Toronto with two children on the first military plane of Syrian refugees on December 10, 2015, and joined in Pastor Ihsan's ministry. The united families began to officially lead service in their home with a small group of Arabic-speaking families. However, as the congregation began to grow upwards of 20 people, it became difficult to hold service in their home. VCC willingly offered our church space to our brothers and sisters at HSC and we eagerly anticipated their first service within our church walls. Up until this point, we were only able to watch from a distance at the wonderful work that was happening through HSC, however, through the HSC entering our doors we were able to share in their dream of bringing glory to God's Kingdom.

Before we met Pastor Ihsan, we had not made a place in our hearts and minds for these brothers and sisters, our Arabic-speaking friends. However, on September 11, 2016, on the day of VCC's 49th anniversary, HSC joined VCC and had their first service within our church walls. In one building, we were brothers and sisters worshipping in two different languages but as one body of Christ. What a historic moment for our churches!

Just as we started our worship in small family immigrant churches, we were reminded of God's faithfulness through His blessing upon HSC to hold worship in their own language in a foreign land. This miracle was a direct result of God's passion and love for his lost children. In His own unique and magnificent way he brought our churches together and blessed us both abundantly.

And it is our prayer that this story would encourage other congregations to follow God's heart for his lost children and reach out their hands to brothers and sisters from least reached peoples group.