

“Like Family”

What Refugees and Their Sponsors Reveal About Subsidiarity and Solidarity

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October 2026

A Cardus Research Report

CARDUS

How to Cite

Nauta, Renze. "'Like Family': What Refugees and Their Sponsors Reveal About Subsidiarity and Solidarity." Cardus, 2026. https://www.cardus.ca/research/work-economics/reports/like-family/.

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Key Points

- Subsidiarity is a principle that prioritizes action and decision-making by civil society, specifically those people and institutions that are closest to a given matter.
- Canada's refugee resettlement system illustrates subsidiarity in practice. For decades, private sponsors, many of them churches, have been key partners with government in helping refugees integrate into Canadian society.
- Research consistently shows that refugees who are sponsored by civil-society groups tend to have better integration outcomes than government-assisted refugees. Cardus has previously argued that subsidiarity helps to explain this difference: Because private sponsors are nearer to the refugees they sponsor, they can build the meaningful relationships that are crucial to integration and respond to needs in ways that government assistance cannot.
- This paper presents four case studies of subsidiarity in action in Canada's refugee system. These examples show how sponsors furnish crucial support in securing housing, finding employment, and integrating into communities. By helping refugees with their material and social needs, sponsors illustrate how those closest to the refugees are in a unique position to provide care.

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Introduction

Subsidiarity is a principle of social organization that prioritizes action and decision-making by competent individuals and institutions that are closest to a given matter. It is most obviously seen in federal systems of government that reserve powers on national issues to national governments and leave most other powers to local, provincial, or state governments.

Because subsidiarity is seen most clearly in federal systems, it risks being misunderstood *only* or *primarily* as a principle of federalism. While it has important implications for governments, its origins, and its primary application, are in respect of the institutions of civil society.[1] These institutions include labour unions, churches, community organizations, sports leagues, service clubs, and many more. Each meets a unique social need. And they are not interchangeable, for each has its own character and its own realm for which it is best suited. A sports league promotes health and camaraderie during leisure, while a labour union protects workers in the workplace, and a service club channels our charitable impulse into collective action.

The principle of subsidiarity recognizes the natural truth that a healthy society requires an array of institutions and that, together, they make up a social fabric that meets the manifold needs of human persons in society. Moreover, the closer to the human person that these institutions operate, the better. This is not simply because they have a better understanding of these person's needs, although often they do. Nor is it simply because they can address issues more efficiently, although often they can. Rather, those who are closest to an issue generally have a greater sense of care for the people involved in it.

Canada has a prime example of subsidiarity in its refugee program, which harnesses the power of local communities in resettling refugees from abroad. Previous Cardus research highlighted a wealth of data showing that refugees sponsored by private individuals and groups tend to have better economic outcomes than those who are assisted by government.[2] That report focused on how subsidiarity helps to clarify the respective roles of government and private sponsors. However, subsequent interviews with refugees and their sponsors uncovered rich ways in which subsidiarity works *within* private sponsorship groups to support refugee resettlement.

This paper reports on these interviews, highlighting direct examples of subsidiarity in action. These stories of real refugees and their sponsors show how subsidiarity is manifest at all levels of the program. They also reveal how refugees and sponsors develop strong and deep bonds of solidarity that help refugees integrate into Canadian society.

1 The principle of subsidiarity was elaborated and defined by two encyclicals of the Catholic Church, *Rerum Novarum* (1891) and *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931), that dealt extensively with the roles of labour unions and professional associations in addressing the major social issues of the times.

2 Nauta, "Bonds of Solidarity." Complete citations are provided for all sources at the end of this report.

The Structure of Private Sponsorship

Canada's system of private refugee sponsorship was the first of its kind in the world and has become a model for other countries. Many studies have noted its success in integrating refugees into Canadian society. Previous Cardus research argued that the principle of subsidiarity is a key reason for its success by devolving some responsibility for integration from government to civil society.[3]

There are three main categories of private sponsors in Canada's refugee program:[4]

- Sponsorship Agreement Holders, which are organizations that have a formal, longstanding agreement with the Government of Canada to resettle refugees on an ongoing basis
- Groups of Five, which are temporary groupings of at least five individual Canadians who band together to resettle a specific refugee or refugee family
- Community Groups, which are corporations or other organizations that take on the same responsibilities as a Group of Five to resettle a refugee or family

Of these, Sponsorship Agreement Holders have the most formal structure. Each signs an agreement with the Government of Canada outlining expectations, policies, and procedures. The agreement identifies three kinds of entities that may participate in a Sponsorship Agreement:[5]

- Sponsorship Agreement Holder: The formal signatory for the agreement, it is the umbrella group that is ultimately responsible for the resettlement of refugees under this agreement.
- Constituent groups: These are "groups of individuals or organizations which a [Sponsorship Agreement Holder] can authorize to sponsor refugees under its Sponsorship Agreement."
- Co-sponsor: This is "an individual or organization that partners with a [Sponsorship Agreement Holder] to share responsibility for an undertaking."

In many Sponsorship Agreement Holders, these types of entities operate in a layered hierarchy. For example, a major Sponsorship Agreement Holder in Canada is the Office for Refugees of the Archdiocese of Toronto.[6] It oversees several parish refugee committees across the archdiocese, which are the constituent groups under the agreement. In many cases, there is also a co-sponsor under the refugee committee—perhaps an individual or a family seeking to reunite with a family member—that is carrying out the majority of day-to-day resettlement that the committee

3 Nauta, "Bonds of Solidarity."

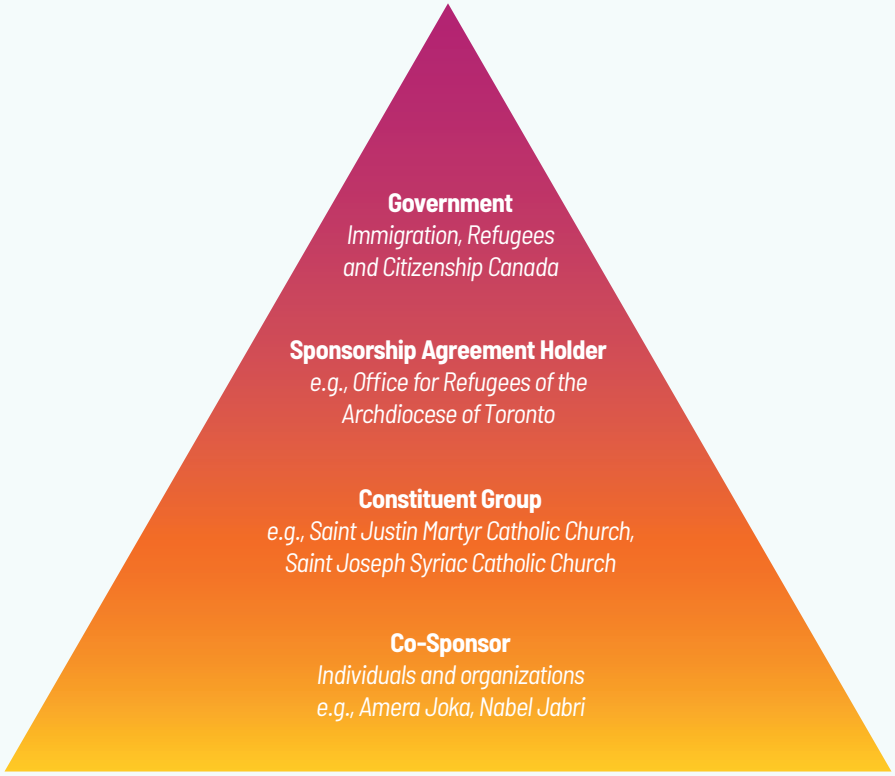
4 Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, "Private Sponsorship."

5 Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, "Sponsorship Agreement," quotations from p. 26.

6 Many of the details in this section were obtained from an interview with Deacon Rudy Ovcjak, director of the Office for Refugees of the Archdiocese of Toronto, on April 1, 2026.

oversees. Essentially, the hierarchy follows a pyramid structure, with the Government of Canada overseeing the entire structure through Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (figure 1).

Figure 1. The Structure of Private Sponsorship of Refugees



Subsidiarity in Action

The layered structure of private sponsorship reveals an application of the principle of subsidiarity. Perhaps nothing underscores the wisdom of this structure more than the stories of refugees themselves and their sponsors. Cardus interviewed four sets of refugees and sponsors. Their stories outline the ways in which subsidiarity plays an essential role in developing the strong bonds of solidarity between the two.

Ignace: The Power of Presence

Ignace (not his real name) and his family were involved in politics in Côte d'Ivoire.[7] The results of an election in 2010 caused them to flee to Ghana. Ignace and his sister came to Canada as refugees

7 All details in this section were obtained from an interview with Ignace on June 10, 2026, and an interview with Rita Perta on May 28, 2026.

in 2015 through a program for young adults administered by the Office for Refugees of the Archdiocese of Toronto in coordination with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Ignace was sponsored by Saint Justin Martyr Catholic Church in Unionville, Ontario, where Rita Perta led the refugee committee. The relationship started when the Office for Refugees gave a presentation to the parish on refugee sponsorship. About thirty parishioners volunteered to help, of whom about seven became part of the core team. Many parishioners made donations, as high as $1,000, to support the efforts.

While he was in Ghana, Ignace met a representative of the Office for Refugees who helped him with his application to come to Canada. Even prior to his arrival, Rita and the committee had found him a job as a produce clerk at a local No Frills grocery store. He was able to start working within ten days of arriving in Canada. It wasn't necessarily easy, as he mostly spoke French and wasn't accustomed to certain Canadian work customs, but he started improving his English and adjusted quickly to the work culture. After a few months, he started working full-time at a manufacturing company and applied to college for software engineering and programming. Today, he works for property management company BGIS.

Parishioners offered their expertise to help Ignace: A former banker helped him open bank accounts; a retired accountant helped him with his finances; a real estate agent helped him find an apartment. One team member opened her home to Ignace for two weeks until he could sign the lease for his own place.

The staff of the archdiocese were extremely helpful throughout the process, Rita says. The committee never took a step without their guidance, especially in the earliest stages. "They were present to us," says Rita. "Just a phone call or an email away."

A few years later, Ignace reconnected with a woman he knew in Côte d'Ivoire, but was separated from because of the fallout from the 2010 election results. They married and he was able to sponsor her to come to Canada. Today, they have two young children. He has since become a Canadian citizen.

Rita reports that Ignace was very independent and motivated from the moment he arrived in Canada. For his part, Ignace says he is grateful for the generous welcome he received from the Saint Justin Martyr community. He arrived in Canada in December and was immediately invited to Christmas and New Year's parties where he met a lot of new people. Although he now attends a church in Pickering where he moved with his family, he maintains relationships with his original sponsoring community, which he describes as being "like family," inviting Rita and others to family events such as his citizenship ceremony and his children's birthday parties.

For all the practical necessities, Rita says that refugee resettlement comes down to being there for the newcomer. "It's all about presence," she says, "and letting the other person know that you care about them."

What Is the Civil-Society Sponsorship Advantage?

Decades' worth of data demonstrate that privately sponsored refugees have an advantage in economic integration compared to government-assisted refugees. For example:

- A 2016 study of Syrian refugees found that more than half of privately sponsored refugees had found employment within their first year of arriving in Canada, compared to less than 10 percent of government-assisted refugees.[8]
- Privately sponsored refugees are referred to employment services more frequently than government-assisted refugees (63 percent versus 27 percent, respectively).[9]
- Privately sponsored refugees generally have higher incomes than government-assisted refugees. Among male refugees, privately sponsored refugees' incomes are 14 percent higher on average than government-assisted refugees' incomes after one year in Canada. Among female refugees, privately sponsored refugees' incomes are more than 20 percent higher.[10]

This advantage persists even when certain variables are controlled for. One study by Statistics Canada considered the probability that refugees would have income earned from employment in each year following their arrival in Canada. The researchers used multivariate analysis to control for educational attainment and linguistic skills. Privately sponsored refugees showed a much higher probability in the first year: over 90 percent among men and over 70 percent among women, compared to just over 70 percent for male government-assisted refugees and under 50 percent for female government-assisted refugees. This advantage narrowed in the second and subsequent years, but the gaps remained statistically significant up to fifteen years after arrival in Canada, the last year that was included in the study.[11]

The Khalaf Family: Charity Begets Charity

The Khalaf family arrived in Canada as refugees from Iraq in 2017.[12] They were five: parents Farooq and Faten and their three adult children, Fadi, Faez, and Fanan. As Chaldean Catholics, they experienced religious discrimination in their hometown of Baghdad. At first, they left Iraq for Lebanon, where they lived for two and a half years. There, life was still uncomfortable and the family continued to experience discrimination.

8 Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, "Rapid Impact Evaluation."

9 Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, "Rapid Impact Evaluation."

10 Picot et al., "Labour Market Outcomes Among Refugees to Canada."

11 Kaida et al., "Long-Term Economic Outcomes."

12 All details in this section were obtained from an interview with the Khalaf family and Nabel Jabri on May 27, 2026.

As the family searched for a better life elsewhere, they were in touch with Faten's second cousin, Nabel Jabri. Nabel left Iraq in 2007 due to discrimination against Christians and went to Syria. He arrived in Canada in 2009 and after three years in Laval, Nabel moved to Toronto, where he starting volunteering with the Office for Refugees. Eventually, he became the head of the refugee committee at his church, Saint Joseph's Syriac Catholic Church in Mississauga.

"Uncle Nabel" encouraged the Khalafs to apply to Canada for refugee status. When they arrived, he opened his home to the family until they could move into their own place. He helped them navigate their new society, assisting them in opening a bank account, applying for drivers' licenses, finding a comfortable place to live, gathering furniture, and finding work.

The Khalaf siblings settled into jobs very quickly. Nabel's son helped them write their resumés. Within a week of arriving, Faez had been hired for a night shift at a Raba convenience store. It was only one day a week, but it was a start while he and his siblings searched for other jobs on Indeed and attended Sheridan College for the government-funded Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada program. Later, Faez found a job at Walmart selling credit cards. After discovering that he had a knack for sales, he joined a telecommunications company as a sales representative. A few promotions later, he is now a district manager at the company. Fadi, for his part, found a job selling building materials for flooring companies. Today, he is a partner with the business.

Fanan started a job within just a few days of landing in Canada. The job came through someone at the church who knew the manager of an Adonis food market. While Fanan worked there, she learned English with her brothers at Sheridan. She also worked for a while in shoe sales at Aldo, eventually joining Bell as a sales agent. She then studied insurance, becoming an agent.

The siblings have now fully integrated into Canada. Faez met his wife here and they recently welcomed their first child. Fanan met her husband, who was from Ottawa, and they also recently welcomed their first child. Fadi continues to be involved in business as partner in his firm. These successes do not mean that life is easy in Canada. Despite earning a good salary, all the Khalaf siblings indicated that affordability in Canada is very challenging for them. Yet they cannot imagine living anywhere else.

Nabel encouraged the Khalafs to "pay it forward" in thanksgiving for the generosity extended to them. They took that message to heart to the extent that Faez has himself sponsored two refugee families through an organization called Life with Christ.

The Kahlafs' story is a remarkable account of how charity begets charity. The generosity shown to Nabel stirred him to get involved in refugee sponsorship. His generosity in turn motivated Faez to do the same. These three generations of sponsors carry a genuine mark of self-sacrificial care that inspires the same sense of care in others.

What Causes the Civil-Society Sponsorship Advantage?

Scholars have pointed to many reasons to explain why privately sponsored refugees tend to have better integration outcomes than government-assisted refugees.

- Personalized assistance: Sponsors are partial toward those whom they have sponsored. The sponsor's ability to identify the refugee of their choice is a key aspect of private sponsorship that motivates them to invest their personal time and resources in assistance tailored to the need of the individual refugee. Settlement agencies are by contrast tied to the regulations set forth by governments, constraining their ability to provide tailored assistance.[13] The stories outlined in this paper all show the flexibility of sponsors to provide for refugees' needs.

- Social capital: Research has shown that private sponsors tend to be people with high levels of social capital—higher than settlement agency workers—which they leverage to help refugees.[14] The recruitment of a banker, an accountant, and a real estate agent from within the Saint Justin Martyr Church community is an example of this.

- Welcoming community: Private sponsorship is usually done in an institutional setting through a church or diaspora community organization, giving the privately sponsored refugees a built-in community.[15] Karen's invitation to John to join her family for his first Thanksgiving dinner is an example of this. We also see these relationships continue, as when Ignace invites Rita to his own family's celebrations.

- Prioritization of employment: Some scholars have suggested that private sponsors tend to place a stronger emphasis on employment than settlement agency workers, who may be more likely to emphasize language training in the first year after arriving in Canada.[16] The examples in this paper point to the priority that sponsors put on employment, as when Rita's team found Ignace a job even before he arrived in Canada, or when the Khalaf siblings found jobs within days of arriving.

All these reasons point to subsidiarity as the underlying reason for privately sponsored refugees' advantage. By entrusting civil society with the resettlement of privately sponsored refugees, Canada's system allows civil-society sponsors to provide all these benefits and invest in the care necessary to help newcomers thrive.

13 Wilkinson and Garcea, "The Economic Integration of Refugees"; Ali et al., "Structures and Strategies."

14 Macklin et al., "A Preliminary Investigation"; Ali et al., "Structures and Strategies."

15 Kaida et al., "Long-Term Economic Outcomes."

16 J. Hyndman, "Probing Canadian Integration with Refugees: Whose Responsibility and at What Scale?" Centre for Refugee Studies, York University, 14th National Metropolis Conference, 2012, quoted in Jedwab, "GARs vs. PSRs."

Waad Bate: Love Reciprocates

Nabel Jabri and Saint Joseph's Syriac Catholic Church did not only help to resettle the Khalaf family. They have resettled a total of twenty-two families, one of whom was the Bates.[17] Waad and Mays Bate have two children, aged seven and five years. Waad worked as a top chef in the United States embassy in Iraq. He fled in 2024 after being threatened by ISIS for his employment with the Americans. He first sought refuge in Turkey and stayed there for two years. His sister Amera, who was living in Canada, worked two jobs in order to send money, along with her siblings, to the Bate family.

Waad and his family applied to the Government of Canada for refugee status. Amera attended a meeting organized by the Office for Refugees to explain how to fill out the application. Nabel walked her through the whole process. Amera says that she stayed up until 3:00 a.m. each night for a week (due to the time-zone difference) to help Waad with the application. There were some paperwork complications, so the family hired a lawyer. The Bate family was interviewed by the Canadian embassy in Ankara, had medical exams, and were ultimately accepted to come to Canada.

Amera and the extended family met the Bates at the airport when they arrived in Canada. At first, the Bates lived with Waad's brother in Brampton. The extended family helped them with paperwork, such as health care applications and social insurance documents. They rented an apartment in the same building as Mays's parents. Waad got a driver's license right away and found a good, but inexpensive, car.

Compounding the last several years of uncertainty is the fact that one of the Bate boys has a rare disease. His is one of only ten known cases in the world. Since arriving in Canada, he has been seen by seven doctors and had a first surgery in April 2026. Once his son's condition is more under control, Waad's goal is to use his skills as a chef and open a restaurant. He wants this business to provide others an opportunity for good employment. In the meantime, the whole family has rallied around Waad's son while he receives the treatment he needs. Amera herself feels supported by the whole family, noting that Waad helps her too, for example in fixing her car.

Seeing her nephew get such excellent care is what motivates Amera to work so hard to integrate the family in Canada. "I really care about him," she says.

17 All details in this section were obtained from an interview with Waad Bate and Amera Joka on May 28, 2026.

What Is the Civil-Society Sponsorship Advantage in Practice?

In 2016, Statistics Canada surveyed Syrian refugees to ask them what kind of help they received from their sponsors or settlement workers.[18] On most measures, more privately sponsored refugees reported receiving assistance:

- How to look for a place to live: 76 percent of privately sponsored refugees vs. 62 percent of government-assisted refugees.
- How to rent a place to live: 83 percent vs. 79 percent
- How to shop for food: 83 percent vs. 70 percent
- How to buy clothes, furniture, etc.: 72 percent vs. 55 percent
- How to fill out tax forms: 48 percent vs. 30 percent
- How to find a doctor: 64 percent vs. 39 percent
- How to find child care: 33 percent vs. 28 percent.

On three measures, more government-assisted refugees reported receiving assistance, but the gaps are small:

- How to use public transit: 78 percent of privately sponsored refugees vs. 79 percent of government-assisted refugees
- About cultural differences in Canada: 63 percent vs. 68 percent
- How to register children in school: 58 percent vs. 59 percent

John: Knowing When to Step In and When to Stand Back

The Kanata Baptist Church in Kanata, Ontario, has resettled nine refugee families, totaling twenty-nine people, from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Malawi, Moldova, Syria, and Ukraine.[19] The church is a constituent group of the Canadian Baptists of Ontario and Quebec, which is a Sponsorship Agreement Holder. Kanata Baptist has done many different kinds of refugee sponsorships, having co-sponsored with local families as well as smaller Baptist churches in the Ottawa area, and having participated in the Blended Visa-Office Referred program, in which a Sponsorship Agreement Holder shares the financial responsibility of resettling a refugee with Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada.

18 Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, "Rapid Impact Evaluation."

19 All details in this section were obtained from an interview with John and Robert on May 21, 2026, and an interview with Karen McMorine and Rick Johnston on January 21, 2026.

Kanata Baptist's refugee committee is chaired by Karen McMorine and Rick Johnston. Their preferred model is to co-sponsor with another church or a family. This allows them to set up a reasonable division of responsibilities. As the constituent group, Kanata Baptist provides the organizational structure needed to do the work. Rick takes responsibility for translating and gathering the necessary documentation for the refugee application. It is a challenging task for a refugee doing it the first time, but Rick has done it so often that it's relatively easy for him.

Kanata Baptist's refugee committee puts a lot of responsibility on the co-sponsoring family, too. When a family approaches the church with a request to co-sponsor, Karen and the team interview the family to verify that they actually have the capacity to resettle a refugee. The purpose is to make sure that the resettlement process will go well and succeed in integrating the refugee into Canada. Once their application is accepted and the family arrives, the process is a partnership between Kanata Baptist and the co-sponsoring family. Karen and the rest of the committee do a lot of work to help the refugees find employment, assisting with their resumés, directing them to employment offices, and finding job postings. Rick has also gone with the refugees to apply for rental housing. Refugees often have difficulty getting landlords to agree to rent to them, but Rick's presence as a native-born Canadian will sometimes be enough to get the prospective landlord to overcome their qualms. Karen and Rick will also refer the refugee families to Matthew House, a furniture bank for newcomers to Canada.

John was a beneficiary of Kanata Baptist's refugee program.[20] His co-sponsor was his brother Robert, who had come to Canada in 2013 as part of a student refugee program run by World University Service of Canada. John was born in Rwanda, but the family was broken up by the genocide in 1995, and he found himself in Malawi.

With the assistance of Kanata Baptist's refugee committee, Robert fundraised to support John's sponsorship, receiving donations of up to $1,000. Robert himself provided half the total amount needed for the sponsorship. Robert helped John find a room to live in, while the church helped him find furniture for his place and a bike for transportation. Karen and Richard took John to get eyeglasses and to his first dental appointment in Canada. Robert helped John with his resumé and encouraged him to upgrade his education. When John arrived in October, Karen had him over for his first Canadian Thanksgiving dinner.

John notes that integration is not a quick process. Although he arrived in 2022, he said in the interview for this paper that he was "still in a transition to be a real Canadian." A few weeks after the interview, John became a Canadian citizen.

Karen and Richard say that the most special moments are when families are reunited at the airport. They recall John and Robert's reunion at the Ottawa airport. They stood back and let the brothers embrace each other after years apart. No refugee-sponsor relationship is as strong as the bond between brothers. In those moments, the sponsor's role is simply to welcome, and then to prioritize the restored bonds of family.

20 John asked that his last name not be used. His case was also profiled in Leung, "Sponsoring and Welcoming Refugees."

The Principle of Subsidiarity Revealed

The stories told in the previous section are just four of hundreds of thousands of stories like them that are replicated across the country. They also tell a narrative of how the principle of subsidiarity has shaped Canada's refugee sponsorship program, and clarify some key aspects of subsidiarity that are easy to misunderstand.

First, although subsidiarity is most often thought of in terms of federalism, subsidiarity primarily targets civil society. Canada's success in leveraging churches and families to resettle hundreds of thousands of refugees highlights that some responsibilities that we often associate with government can also, or better, be administered by civil society. The principle of subsidiarity encourages the delegation of certain of these responsibilities to civil-society organizations where possible. In fact, the principle is relevant to all social relationships. It governs relationships among levels of government, among institutions of civil society, and between civil-society institutions and government. It even pertains to relationships among individuals, since it suggests that institutions should refrain from subsuming the responsibility of individuals when the latter can handle something themselves.

Second, subsidiarity can be applied within institutions as well as between them. The principle of subsidiarity is about ensuring that decision-making and action is taken at the level closest to those affected by it as possible. In many cases, this means assigning responsibility to the institution that is closest to the people. But it may also mean assigning responsibility to the entity and individuals *within* an institution that are closest to a given situation. Thus, within a Sponsorship Agreement Holder organization like the Office for Refugees of the Archdiocese of Toronto, the care of refugees on a day-to-day basis is not carried out by the staff of the Office, but by the many parishes (the constituent groups) that are subsidiary to the archdiocese. Many of these delegated responsibilities are further delegated to partner families (co-sponsors). Thus, even with a Sponsorship Agreement Holder, the principle of subsidiarity prioritizes action by those closest to the refugees themselves.

Third, subsidiarity is sometimes as much about what *not* to do, leaving space for others to act. When an issue arises, there can be strong public pressure for higher-order institutions, especially governments, to "do something." Unfortunately, this instinct can have the negative effect of crowding out the actions of lower-order institutions that may be better placed to act. In some cases, the best course of action for higher-order authorities, such as governments, is simply to provide the space for lower-order authorities. This applies within institutions as well. If refugee sponsorship was done entirely by paid staff of the Office for Refugees or the Canadian Baptists of Ontario and Quebec, these organizations would be missing out on the hundreds of volunteers in the constituent groups who give of their time and resources. Even Kanata Baptist's emphasis on integration by co-sponsoring with family members already in Canada is an example of this, as they prioritize the most local of all bonds of solidarity: the bond of family. Subsidiarity is about prioritizing the bonds of affection that emerge from personal interactions. Perhaps the most beautiful expression of this is when John was greeted by his brother Robert at the Ottawa International Airport: Karen and Rick were there, but they stood back, allowing the bonds of family to take their place of honour.

Fourth, subsidiarity requires a strong role for higher authorities. Subsidiarity could be misinterpreted as calling for a weak higher authority, but nothing could be further from the truth. It places limits on higher authorities, but these authorities must be strong within the boundaries of their spheres. For example, while the Office for Refugees does not involve itself in the day-to-day operations of refugee resettlement, it plays an important role in providing education and guidance, and it provides a template for constituent groups and co-sponsors to follow. As noted above, Rita relied on their expertise to guide her own actions. There are also times when something might be done more efficiently at a higher level, as when Rick at Kanata Baptist took responsibility for refugee applications, which repetition had made him an expert at completing.

Fifth, higher-order authorities must retain control over matters of general application and establish structures to ensure that lower-order authorities are supported and run well. Subsidiarity simply assigns higher-order issues to higher-order authorities and lower-order issues to lower-order authorities. As the signatory of the Sponsorship Agreement with the Government of Canada, the Office for Refugees controls the financial aspects of refugee sponsorship within the Archdiocese of Toronto and puts in place certain necessary policies and procedures to ensure that programs are running well. In the same vein, the Government of Canada itself puts certain necessary rules in place, while giving flexibility to sponsors to provide tailored care. We even see this at the very local level, as when Karen and Rick at Kanata Baptist interview prospective co-sponsors about their capacity to resettle a refugee, in order to ensure that the integrity of their system is maintained.

Finally, subsidiarity is primarily a principle of care. Subsidiarity could be misinterpreted as being primarily about efficiency in decision-making and service delivery. Efficiency is certainly part of why subsidiarity is a useful principle. The stories above outline examples of private sponsors' involvement leading to greater efficiencies. For example, many sponsors used their personal networks to connect refugees with jobs within days or weeks of arriving in Canada, likely making the process much more efficient than if the refugees had simply scattered their resumés to a list of employers.

The primary benefit of subsidiarity is not efficiency, however, but care. The fundamental insight of subsidiarity is that society should be structured in such a way as to promote caring relationships among human persons. If there is one thing that shines through each of the stories above, it is the care, even love, that permeates the relationships between sponsors and refugees. It was Rita's presence and that of her team that let Ignace know that someone cared that he succeed. Amera's care for her brother and his family is what motivated her to work two jobs to support them.

Conclusion

Canada's refugee sponsorship system is a strong example of subsidiarity in action, both in the fact that it enables civil-society involvement in service delivery and is structured to leverage action at the level closest to the refugees as possible.

The stories of refugees and their sponsors tell a narrative of support, presence, and charity. All these sponsors gave of themselves for the sake of the refugees in their care. It is no surprise that sponsors use words like "family," "friendship," and "love" to describe their relationships with refugees.[21] The refugees, in turn—by working for Canadian companies, by starting families, by caring for their children, and even by sponsoring a new generation of refugees—are all contributing in their own way to the common good of their new home.

Subsidiarity is ultimately about protecting the space for people and communities to do exactly that. Canada's system of private sponsorship of refugees is a proven model of this and a prime example of the principle of subsidiarity in action.

21 Macklin et al., "The Kinship Between Refugee and Family Sponsorship," 6–7.

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