

**A
COVENANT
between
THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN CONNECTICUT (ECCT)
and
INTEGRATED REFUGEE & IMMIGRANT SERVICES (IRIS)**

I. Preface: Toward a New Covenant Relationship

Since 1982, refugee resettlement has been a key expression of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut's participation in God's mission. IRIS—Integrated Refugee & Immigrant Services, as an agency of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut and with the abiding support of the church and its people, has been the primary means by which this participation in God's mission has been accomplished.

Over the past decade IRIS has become increasingly self-sustaining, with many new partners and volunteers. At the same time, the Episcopal Church in Connecticut has moved away from centralized diocesan programming to an emphasis on supporting mission engagement at the local parish level. Recognizing IRIS's desire for independence and self-governance, IRIS and the Episcopal Church in Connecticut agree that going forward IRIS's purpose will best be served as an organization fully independent from, but in a covenanted relationship with, The Episcopal Church in Connecticut.

Therefore we, the Episcopal Church in Connecticut and IRIS, celebrate the relationship that has been life-affirming for us and for the refugees we have served over the past three decades, and seek to begin a new chapter in our relationship. This new chapter, founded on our shared commitment to supporting refugees, gives IRIS a fully independent form of governance and sets forth new and continuing commitments for both parties. We will accomplish our transition to this new relationship through this written Covenant between the Episcopal Church in Connecticut and IRIS.

II. History and Background

A refugee is a person who has fled his or her country of origin due to persecution on the basis of race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. Refugees face imminent threats of violence including imprisonment, torture, or death. Seeking shelter for themselves and their children, they flee in the hope of finding peace and safety in another country.

In the United States, faith communities have historically played an important role in resettling refugees, particularly since the aftermath of World War II. For decades, The Episcopal Church at the national level has participated in this mission.

In 1942, the Episcopal Church in Connecticut created Episcopal Social Service, Inc. (ESS), a not-for-profit corporation that engaged in social justice and human services

work throughout the state. In 1982, following the passage of the Refugee Act of 1980 that formalized the process through which refugees are admitted to, and resettled in, the United States, ESS began resettling refugees as part of its human services work. The refugee resettlement program of ESS was named Interfaith Refugee Ministry until 2007 when, in order to reflect more accurately the agency's work and mission, its name was changed to IRIS—Integrated Refugee & Immigrant Services.

IRIS is a nonsectarian, federally recognized refugee resettlement program and a subsidiary organization of ESS. Because of this historical arrangement, the Convention of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut provides annual financial support to IRIS, and ESS bylaws ensure church oversight.

IRIS is also affiliated with two national organizations that work directly with the U.S. Department of State on refugee admissions: Church World Service (CWS) and Episcopal Migration Ministries. Episcopal Migration Ministries (EMM) grew out of The Episcopal Church's long tradition of the grass roots congregational ministry of resettling refugees. Today, EMM is The Episcopal Church's national organization that offers Episcopalians opportunities to participate in the mission of welcoming refugees.

IRIS's affiliation with CWS and EMM is vital. They each send approximately 100 refugees per year to IRIS and provide valuable training, processing, oversight, and guidance on federal requirements for resettling refugees. Moreover, CWS and EMM help to connect IRIS to the national network of refugee resettlement agencies. They organize advocacy efforts on relevant immigration issues and strengthen IRIS's connection to the tradition of faith-based support for refugees. IRIS intends to maintain its close relationships and contractual affiliations with both CWS and EMM.

Since 1982, IRIS has resettled more than 4,500 refugee women, men, and children in Connecticut. Its mission is to enable refugees and other displaced people to establish new lives, regain hope, and contribute to their communities. Through outreach, advocacy, and public events, IRIS also educates the community about the refugee experience and related issues. In recent years IRIS has flourished due to many factors: the commitment of its staff, volunteers, and donors; its widening network of connections with a variety of secular and religious institutions; and its strong relationship with the Episcopal Church in Connecticut.

III. RATIONALE FOR A CONTINUED RELATIONSHIP

The Episcopal Church in Connecticut and IRIS offer separate statements describing the values and beliefs underlying their decision to enter into this Covenant.

(A) Episcopal Church in Connecticut

"The Episcopal Church in Connecticut pledges to continue to support refugees through our ongoing relationship with IRIS. Our faith tradition provides the foundation for this commitment. By continuing our relationship with IRIS, we respond to a scriptural mandate to welcome the stranger in our midst. We uphold

the values expressed in our Baptismal Covenant. We recognize the hope and promise of Easter in the life of each refugee person. We believe that the mission of God is happening throughout the world, and that we are called to participate here—at home—in God’s worldwide mission. We embrace this call by supporting refugees, and we are grateful for our partnership with IRIS which enables us to do so.”

(B) IRIS

“As IRIS becomes an independent nonprofit, we pledge to maintain a close relationship with The Episcopal Church in Connecticut. There are many reasons for us to do so. First and foremost, we recognize the need to preserve strong support for refugee resettlement in the Episcopal community in Connecticut. Refugees coming to Connecticut will always need friends, mentors, and supporters who can meet their basic needs and help them start their lives over in their new community, and the Episcopal Church can continue to contribute to this mission in significant ways. The strong relationship between IRIS and the Episcopal Church in Connecticut, as described in this Covenant, sends a clear message to national, state, and local partners that this transition is supported by both parties. A gradual reduction in financial support by the Episcopal Church in Connecticut will give IRIS the time it needs to find and cultivate new sources of funding. Maintaining an ongoing relationship with the Episcopal Church in Connecticut will support our organizational stability and strategic progress. As we welcome refugees to Connecticut, we welcome the Episcopal Church in Connecticut and all of its members to join us in this transformative work.”

IV. TRANSFER OF GOVERNANCE AUTHORITY

In recognition of evolving organizational dynamics, the Episcopal Church in Connecticut supports the agreement of IRIS to:

- (A) Pursue recognition as a legal entity with its own 501(3)c status;
- (B) Carry out its mission without significant change;
- (C) Govern itself according to its own bylaws;
- (D) Accept the Convention's nomination of up to three seats on the IRIS Board of Directors, with those members formally appointed on a staggered basis (one per year) and serving on that Board subject to the IRIS bylaws;
- (E) Accept a gradual reduction of the annual financial allocation granted by the Convention.

V. PARTNERSHIP IN MISSION

(A) The Episcopal Church in Connecticut and IRIS will continue to be partners in mission. While the Episcopal Church in Connecticut and IRIS at times use different language to describe what mission means to them, both share a commitment to:

1. Foster peace, justice, and equity.
2. Offer radical hospitality to refugees and other displaced people.
3. Resist all forms of human oppression.
4. Uphold the universal human rights of all people.
5. Work collaboratively with local, national, and international partners toward these goals.

(B) In recognition of these shared commitments, the Episcopal Church in Connecticut and IRIS agree to:

1. Establish a process to continue their partnership in mission in a variety of ways, through mutually supportive practices that respect the evolving needs and aspirations of IRIS and the people it serves, and of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut and its diverse members.
2. Encourage and nourish relationships for grassroots sharing of human, spiritual, and material resources.
3. Confer and join together when appropriate to advocate for their shared vision of peace and justice.

(C) In addition, with regard to their current practices in mission:

1. The Episcopal Church in Connecticut agrees that IRIS will remain eligible to apply for grants, and/or to request other forms of financial support for its mission of refugee resettlement, including but not limited to: the Bishops' Fund for Children; mission endowment funds that may be stewarded by the Episcopal Church in Connecticut; event sponsorships; and gifts from individual parishes.
2. IRIS agrees to continue its outreach and education efforts at Episcopal churches in Connecticut, by sustaining existing relationships and by visiting with at least six additional Episcopal parishes per year during the first five years of this Covenant.
3. The Episcopal Church in Connecticut, through its Social Justice and Advocacy Committee, will assist IRIS in its outreach efforts in Connecticut by

offering introductions to new Episcopal parishes in order to facilitate connections, expand IRIS's network, and increase opportunities for parishes to support refugees and other displaced people in Connecticut.

4. IRIS agrees to continue its affiliation with Episcopal Migration Ministries.

VI. TOWARD ECONOMIC SELF-SUFFICIENCY

An organization is authentically autonomous when it is self-governed, self-propagated, and self-supporting financially. In order for IRIS to achieve financial self-sufficiency, the Episcopal Church in Connecticut and IRIS agree that the Church's annual budget allocation to IRIS, as voted by Convention, will decrease beginning in 2016 and conclude according to the following timetable:

Year	Budget Allocation	Reduction Amount
2015	48,000	0
2016	38,400	9,600
2017	28,800	9,600
2018	19,200	9,600
2019	9,600	9,600
2020	0	0
The Episcopal Church in Connecticut intends to provide IRIS with an annual financial gift from 2020 on, in amounts solely within the discretion and determination of the Episcopal Church of Connecticut.		

V. IMPLEMENTATION

This Covenant will be in effect from the first of January of the year immediately following its approval by the Convention of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut, and will continue for a period of five years, with possible renewal for any further period by mutual agreement of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut and IRIS.

There shall be a Covenant Committee composed of members from the Episcopal Church in Connecticut and IRIS, whose existence shall begin upon the signing of this Covenant by both parties. The term of that Committee shall be five years, renewable upon the written agreement of both parties. The task of this committee shall be to implement the goals described above, to ensure the faithful compliance of both parties with this Covenant, and to address any concerns about the Covenant or the relationship between IRIS and the Episcopal Church in Connecticut.