

## The Good News/ Bad News Balance

*"Give me your tired your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free... Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed, to me. I lift my lamp beside the golden door."*  
*— from the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty.*

The statistics are alarming: in America the cap on admissions for refugees is at 45,000 a year, the lowest number since 1980. In the past six months, only 10,500 gained entry whereas in the same time period last year, 39,100 were admitted. For Muslims, the numbers are even more striking; from 22,900 in 2017 to only 1,800 in the first six months of 2018.

The above does not touch on those who are already in our country, the Dreamers who are the young undocumented immigrants brought to the U.S. as children, have lived and gone to school here. And could now face deportation. Cardinal Cupich has called this "an injustice, not to give amnesty to this group."

Now the nearly 60,000 Hondurans who were legally admitted to the US and have been living here since 1999 or earlier, also face deportation, forced to return to Honduras, an extremely troubled country. And the dramatic decrease in the number of Syrian refugees—10 million have been displaced from their homes—are of great humanitarian concern. The U.S. has accepted only eleven so far this year.

Our Cardinal has been outspoken in his belief that "we should stand with those made fearful by the hatred expressed and threats made during the past year toward immigrants and refugees." And he has urged all of us to bring Catholic teaching on this issue into the Public Square.

Which is what our Parish volunteers have been doing with our three refugee families (this now the Good News). Herein a quick update on them with some thoughts on how you could get involved over the summer on a one-off day.



### **Our family from Afghanistan has been here a whole year!**

Dildar, the father of four who was a military interpreter in Kabul, is now working in the facilities department of a Chicago law firm. His wife, Binafsha, is loving her ESL classes and is hoping to become more confident in her language skills so she can get a job when Aoib, the youngest at four, starts school.

The other three children are become very much at home in their new country. Idress at ten is starting middle school next year but meanwhile loves math and wants to be a doctor when he grows up. He and Shoaib (eight) play soccer and video games together. Then Yasaran, the only girl at six, is very creative and, though shy, wants to be around everyone to see what's going on!



### **Our second family, from Myanmar, arrived only a month after our Afghan family so they, too, have now marked a year here.**

Aa Ka, the father, is also working in a law firm in the food service area (where I bumped into him one night, attending a discussion hosted by Jenner & Block, and he couldn't wait to show me the beautiful view of his new city from the 45th floor!) Wife Lin is busy at home with Tristan (2.5) and Susanna at 7 months. The volunteers hosted a wonderful baby shower for Lin right before the birth.

**No babies in our third family but what we lovingly term "The Girls."** They are Rohingya refugees who are absolutely delighted to be in Chicago and in love with their "new family," the volunteers. The mom, Nashimah, had some health problems but is now doing well; her twin daughters (mid 20s) have both adjusted



quickly with Munirah working at the Thompson Hotel while Ramadana is working at O'Hare. To make life almost complete, Munirah has another, older daughter living close by with three kids (making her a grandmother)!

A few weeks ago, the family hosted a Halal (meat/poultry prepared as prescribed by Muslim law) meal for our volunteers with plates of sweet chicken/spicy beef/naan bread and tea. A Syrian couple from next door joined the group, all attempting to teach the volunteers how to eat without utensils while sitting on the floor.

**Finally, an introduction to our newest refugee, Elias, a single man from Ethiopia.** He was a journalist and political cartoonist for a newspaper in the Capital city, Addis Ababa, when the government was cracking down on the press, jailing and torturing many. Elias was

able to escape but then spent the next 12 years in a refugee camp in Kenya. But even there, he and other journalists kept appealing to UNHCR to move them as they were in constant fear of being attacked by Ethiopian government agents.

Elias has just started hospitality training in hopes of getting a job at a hotel, restaurant or the airport. Meanwhile, he continues working on his art projects (he has an art degree from the Ethiopian arts and cultural school).

So it seems "all is good" with our refugees. But there are some areas we could use some help. One-time or once a month options that could really prove invaluable to our refugees.

They are always in need of dental care/ESL training and identifying possible job opportunities. And with summer coming, a one-day visit to the Lincoln Park Zoo, the Field museum, Millennium Park, the Aquarium, etc. would be so welcome. They love outings like this but still a bit nervous about doing it on their own. We are also planning a "Sport Day" with our kids (generally age 4 to 11) sometime in the summer and would love some of our Parishioners and their kids to join in. And for our newest refugee, any want-to-be Picasso's in our Parish that could guide/accompany Elias to an arts supply store would be incredible gift.

While the volunteers provide the basics with our refugees, these families really belong to all of us. It was only through the incredible generosity of you, our Parishioners, that we were able to help bring them safely here. The small steps that we all took together have brought about huge changes in the lives of these refugees. In the words of Martin Luther King, "if we cannot do great things, we can do small things in a great way."

And that, thanks to you, we have done.

