



This is WHO WE ARE *This is* WHAT WE DO

✦ ICSJ PARISH REFUGEE EFFORT ✦

Two weeks ago, Fr. Larry talked about the formation of a Refugee Committee in our Parish. With enthusiasm and commitment, this small group reached out to Catholic Charities Resettlement Staff, parishioners from nearby churches who had already sponsored refugee families, studied the process of identifying and vetting of refugees, and learned the requirements for sponsorship—including the necessary funding for a family’s first three months of rent/security deposit.

We thought we were chugging along, ready to start a series of informational updates for the Parish during the month of February. But then, the Presidential Executive Order that indefinitely bars Syrian refugees, suspends all refugee admissions for 120 days and blocks citizens from seven Muslim-majority countries for 90 days, was issued. And we were put on hold.

Meanwhile, there are 7.6 million displaced persons—3.5 million of whom are children—within Syria, while an estimated 3.8 million have already fled to other countries. But other countries, like Somalia and The Sudan, face similar problems: their homes bombed into rubble, no clean water, hospitals barely functioning and any schools left standing too dangerous to attend.

In total, it is estimated there are over 65 million refugees—people who are forced to escape their homeland for fear of persecution or war—worldwide. Fifty percent of those are under 18 years old. The road to escape is treacherous and uncertain and, once out of their country, they face a vetting system to enter the U.S. that takes 18-24 months or longer, (involving the United Nations and our State Department, FBI, Department of Homeland Security, the National Counterterrorism Center and Defense Department.)

But we are a generous people and I am heartened by those who have contacted us, to say “I want to help, too.” And this is happening across all lines of faith in Chicago—all of a sudden, offers of help are pouring in. A story in the Tribune highlighted the combined effort of a Catholic Church in Wilmette with a Synagogue in Northfield. But there is a limited amount that we are able to do until the ban is lifted.

We will, however, keep you updated. And ask that you remember Cardinal Cupich’s words from his letter last week: *“It is time to put aside fear and join together to recover who we are and what we represent to a world badly in need of hope and solidarity.”*

– Betty Woodward, committee member

Want to help? Contact one of our committee members,

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or visit our parish website at www.icsjparish.org/refugee-effort