

Eight Reasons To Be Thankful During This Pandemic

Even if you are one of the lucky ones to escape catching the virus, you do so at a price: working from the kitchen table instead of your office; balancing childcare while on a Zoom call; worrying about the kids online learning; following all the necessary restrictions—social distancing, the ever-present mask, washing your hands a hundred times a day, heeding the advice to stay out of restaurants and bars, and staying away from crowds, or worse, from your grandkids.

No, it's not easy. But it is good to balance what we go through with what our eight refugee families have to face.

It has been 3 1/2 years since we welcomed our first family—from Afghanistan. Since then, our Parish has sponsored families from Myanmar, Ethiopia, Malaysia,

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and joined with St Teresa of Avila to welcome a Rohingya family escaping the ethnic cleansing efforts of the Myanmar government. And, late summer, added our seventh and eighth families from Syria and Burundi (**pictured above**).

Adapting to a new country with an unfamiliar language and a strange new culture is difficult, especially if the last 5-10 years have been spent in a refugee camp. But add to that the pandemic, and things become much more difficult. Parents have been laid off from their jobs, their kids struggling doing their school work online—especially with only one computer in the household. Their best friends—often our Parish volunteers—no longer can make home visits. And our two new families have arrived right in the midst of this chaos.

Our seventh family of five arrived from Syria knowing hardly any English. Because of Covid, there are no longer any in-person ESL classes. So the family is on a waiting list to attend a virtual class with an ESL provider. Catholic Charities case workers



who once were regular visitors now only communicate online. The two boys, 8 and 12, are in 3rd and 7th grade at Clinton Elementary while the youngest—a 4-year-old girl—is on a wait list for preschool. The father was a taxi driver in Syria but that is a long-term dream for him in America; he not only needs a driver license but enough driving experience to apply to Lyft or Uber. But then, there would be the worry of bringing the virus home. Yet through



all this, they remain upbeat and thankful to be in Chicago, away from the civil war in their home country which has left nearly 500,000 dead or missing and 6.2 million internally displaced.

Our Parish's eighth family arrived last month from the poorest country in the world—Burundi—located in East Africa where 75% of its population lives below the poverty line and more than 50% are chronically hungry. They have little

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access to health care and educational services (only 10% of boys—no girls— are allowed a secondary education) but live with government corruption and seemingly endless civil wars.

Yet out of this horror, a small family of three has escaped here to Chicago. The parents both worked for NGOs—Jesuit Refugee Services and Lutheran World Service—while in a Kenya refugee camp where their son, Ryan, was born eight years ago. Almost immediately, he was diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy and it was apparent he would need 24-hour care for his daily needs. The parents were desperate to get Ryan to a country that had adequate medical care. Finally the miracle they were hoping and praying for happened; the family was approved to enter the United States. He is now being evaluated at Rush, as Ryan cannot talk or walk and might not be able to hear. Once the evaluation is completed,

a special wheel chair, one that can protect his fragile body from injury, will be needed. Currently he sits on his mom's lap, resting his head on her chest while the dad carries him wherever they go. Since both parents speak English, once their social security information arrives, they too, will be on the lookout for jobs. (A few families in the Parish have

already responded to a special plea by Fr. Larry for Ryan and his parents.)

So how can we, as a Catholic Community, help these two families? First and foremost, any leads on

possible jobs would be immensely helpful. Second, winter is coming (or, almost here) and both families, will be in need of warm clothes: best option here are gift cards from Walmart or Target, or gently used jackets, hats and boots. (A hint: the Syrian kids are quite small.) And computers, cell phones and a TV would be extremely welcome. And of course, financial donations are always needed (**visit www.icsjparish/refugee-effort to make a donation**).

A last thought: the “hero” of Pope Francis’s latest Encyclical, Fratelli Tutti, is none other than the Good Samaritan who disregarded all cultural and religious boundaries to rescue his neighbor. Francis ends with a prayer, asking God to grant that we may “discover Christ in each human being...recognizing Him in the suffering of the abandoned and forgotten of our world.”

How Can You Help?

- Job leads
- Winter clothing donations for adults and small children
- Gift Cards for daily needs
- Computers, cell phones, televisions
- Financial support; donations can be made at icsjparish.org/refugee-effort

Contact Betty Woodward at betdmiowa@gmail.com to arrange assistance. Thank you!



Learn more and see how you can get involved at www.icsjparish.org/refugee-effort