

Refugee Resettlement Task Force – 2016 Annual Report to Serving Commission

The Refugee Resettlement Task Force was reactivated effective April 28, 2016 to explore the possibility of Grace sponsoring another refugee family, as a means of celebrating the upcoming 40th anniversary (October, 2016) of sponsoring our first refugee families. Those interested included Becky and Syd Ball, Beverly Bauman, Christa Duncan, John and Nancy Munro, Judy Joy, Sean and Brittany Moua, Terry and Betty Ann Domm, Vicki Quraishi, Sylvia Countess, Josh Williamson and Pastors Norma Johnson and Larry Richardson. During the course of our research and education opportunities, we learned that the current process is **very different** from when we originally sponsored families 40 years ago; specifically, that there is no group in Oak Ridge actively pursuing this type of sponsorship in Oak Ridge.

Individuals can certainly find opportunities galore to volunteer to assist immigrants/refugees, but they must do so in Knoxville. Our two recent education events sponsored by the Refugee Resettlement group, was indicative of these changes. These meetings were both publicized 4-6 weeks in advance through weekly worship bulletins, and the *Lutheran Light* issue for September. The Men's Breakfast held on Saturday, September 10th and the Grace's Greatest Quarterly Gathering held on Tuesday, September 27th were each attended by approximately 14 interested individuals, and many of those 14 persons attended **both** meetings.

Also, we learned that **Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (LIRS) no longer provides these services in E. Tennessee**, and this is why we would work with a group in Knoxville, such as Bridge Refugees Services and Knoxville Internationals Network (KIN), who are affiliated with Catholic World Services and an Episcopal group. This ecumenical group is the authorized group for E. Tennessee for receiving fully vetted individuals/families by the United Nations High Commissioner (UNHC) into the US. It seems quite possible that immigrant programs will continue to be changing in the near term and that the needs of immigrants will not soon disappear.

The Constitution and Bylaws Task Force, at their meeting on October 3, 2016, discussed the proposed Refugee Resettlement Task Force. It was felt that Grace's expectations have changed, since we cannot sponsor in Oak Ridge. At the November 28th meeting, it was agreed to archive the language for this task force, until such time as it can be determined, what is the interest level and the availability of the resources necessary for this venture.

Many of those persons expressing an interest are not able to drive to various locations in Knoxville to volunteer, or attend evening events, workshops, etc. Some are actively involved in our ESOL classes, serving our neighbors here at Grace, and do not want to impact this long-time and growing ministry. In addition, it is felt that the input and support of Grace's new pastor is necessary, and that there were too many demands at this time on all of Grace's resources – both people and financial.

By archiving the language for a proposed Refugee Resettlement Task Force, the Constitution & Bylaws Task Force is leaving a permanent written record of our vision for the scope and function of such a Task Force. At any time in the future, the Council can decide to add the Refugee Resettlement Task Force to the Continuing Resolutions.

The Proclaiming Commission provided an excellent program on Sunday, November 20th at Grace's annual Thanksgiving Dinner. Betty Ann Domm presented a brief background and some of the experiences of our first immigrants – the Pilgrims. A panel discussion followed, among two individuals from Grace, who came to America as immigrants/refugees, and two students from our ESOL classes about their experiences and those of recent immigrants. Approximately 80 people attended this event.

Once our new pastor has been installed and our congregation has a better idea of our resources available, Council can decide on further steps to be taken regarding refugee/immigrant resettlement. I will keep all the information I have from LIRS, The Bridge, KIN and our Minutes and various articles of interest concerning this task force. **Anyone who wants more information about volunteering with one of the groups in Knoxville can contact me.**

Submitted by Vicki Quraishi