

2022-2023 Update from Immigration and Refugee Task Force

After an 8-month task force hiatus after Pr. Alex Steward's departure from the SEMI ELCA Synod, and therefore as chair of the task force, Robin McCants, Jack Eggleston, and Jessica Beamer met in August 2022 to discuss a new chair and a new direction for the task force. Beginning in September 2022, the task force has met monthly in person at Hope Lutheran Church in Farmington Hills as well as via zoom on the third Wednesday of each month from noon to 1:30pm. The goals of the task force include:

- 1) To further our understanding of what is happening in SE Michigan, Michigan at large, and the United States in issues relating to immigrants and refugees.
- 2) To be a presence in the community in partnership with those working to serve or advocate for immigrants and refugees.
- 3) To educate ourselves and then our congregations about what we can do to walk alongside refugees and immigrants.
- 4) To be a stronger presence within the SE Michigan Synod to further the work of the church's awareness of and valuation of work in immigration and refugee advocacy, justice, and support.

Monthly meetings have included speakers from Justice for Our Neighbors (Tori Booker), ELCA Advocacy and Ammparo (Mary Campbell), Samaritas New American Families (Zachary Shive), and Border Servant Corp (Mica De Las Rosa). In addition, a deepening relationship with Samaritas New American Families Program has resulted in Samaritas representatives attending each meeting. Consequently, newly forged connections between congregations interested in forming Welcome Teams and those newly arriving refugee families in need of this support have arisen from the task force. Specifically, Conference 8 has united six churches to welcome a small family from a Spanish-speaking country.

Task force members have developed relationships with and provide updates from a broad spectrum of faith-based and secular entities including: Guardian Angels and AMMPARO, Strangers No Longer, Freedom House, Hamtramck area refugee community, World Refugee Day and Advocacy Week, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services, Church World Service, Michigan Immigrant Rights Center, Michigan United, Justice for Our Neighbors, Border Servant Corp., SEMI ELCA Synod Justice Committees and Task Forces, Samaritas Opportunities for Engagements, ELCA Advocacy, and national legislative updates.

Special activities from 2022-2023 include:

- Resuming visits to Judge Jennifer Gorland's Chambers in Federal Immigration Court in Detroit to serve as Guardian Angels for unaccompanied minors going through the asylum request process in the U.S.

- December service experience sorting and packing donations at Samaritas storage facility in Sterling Heights and hearing from Samaritas staff involved in preparing for and moving refugee families into apartments and homes.
- Hosting two immigration-related workshops at the Justice Summit held on March 25, 2023, covering topics including: *Sponsoring a Refugee Family* and *Who are the Immigrants?*.
- Planning for an upcoming Border Immersion Experience planned for October 8-12, 2023, in El Paso, Texas in partnership with Border Servant Corp and led by Pr. Jack Eggleston.

If interested in participating in or learning more about the Immigration and Refugee Task Force, please contact Chair, Jessica Beamer, at djbeamer@sbcglobal.net.

Report Submitted by Jessica Beamer on 3/31/23.