



Jeanine Greene: Refugee Ministry

What motivated you to get involved with BUMC's refugee ministry?

Jeanine: I've been involved with helping refugees on and off for a good part of my life. When I was fresh out of college and lacking a "real" job, I found my way to Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service to see if I could help out in my spare time. Before I knew it, I was out at the airport, shepherding refugees through customs, immigration procedures and on to their next flights. It was such an incredible honor to be part of the first moments these Southeast Asian refugees spent in our country that long days at the airport flew by. It wasn't until two weeks into this flurry of activity that I was asked to fill out tax forms – and I realized that I actually did have a "real" job. This led to a two-year stint working in a refugee camp in the Philippines and then refugee policy work in Washington.

Tell us a little about the work of this fairly new ministry here at BUMC.

Jeanine: As the numbers of displaced persons worldwide continues to mount, BUMC, with members of Congregation Beth El and St. Mark Presbyterian, is reaching out to new refugee arrivals. As we prepare to receive a refugee family later this year, we are now laying the groundwork for the many tasks that will be necessary to get them settled and make their way in a new country. We have a committed team in place, but would be happy to welcome more volunteers since there will be plenty to do on many fronts.

You've hosted several dinners in your home to support refugee families in our area. Tell us about the dinners and what you hope to accomplish.

Jeanine: Refugees remain very dear to my heart, and it has been difficult to see how the almost universal support for refugee resettlement I experienced when starting out has eroded. In an effort to stand by these new arrivals (who have already been through so much), my husband and I recently hosted two dinners for refugee families in our area. With contributions from American diners, the dinners were small-scale fundraisers, featuring the people, culture and cuisine of Syria and Afghanistan. The food was fabulous, lovingly prepared by our refugee guests-of-honor. But most important was the opportunity to sit down and share a meal with them and see how much we have in common. One Afghan guest told me that his family has been here for seven months, and they have made Afghan friends, but this was the first time they were invited to socialize with Americans. He saw this as a turning point, and a hopeful sign of things to come.

What else do you think that BUMCers could be doing to support recent immigrants and refugees and what kind of resources would we need to put in place to accomplish that?

Jeanine: It is heartening to see the warm response of our American dinner guests and their solidarity with the new refugee neighbors. We were thrilled to have Rev. Jenny and Kara, as well as other BUMC members at our table. There is much goodwill within our congregations and many ways to welcome the stranger. Certainly we will have the opportunity to do that when the refugee family arrives, and I would encourage anyone interested to contact the Refugee Ministry Team. I also hope to continue this dinner series in some form. As a congregation that strives to Wash More Feet, I will be grateful for your prayers, ideas and support as we consider ways to reach out most effectively to our newest neighbors.

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