

St. Mark Lutheran Church
Migrant Ministries Committee
Meeting Minutes
3/20//24

Attendees: Carl Anderson, Cindy Ashton, George Elder, Marilyn Gosell (guest), Mike Haase (co-chair), Jill Heinking – St Raymond’s (guest), Linda Olson (co-chair), Diane Quast, Jeannie Weber, Les Weber

Linda called the meeting to order. Cindy agreed to take meeting minutes.

Pastor Les introduced and the group sang the song “Build a Longer Table”, followed by an opening prayer led by Pastor Carl.

Minutes from our last meeting (12 March 2024) were accepted.

Updates and progress since the last meeting started with a discussion on an email from a St. Mark member, who listed questions and concerns about using the parsonage for housing immigrants. The committee reviewed the concerns and acknowledged that most (if not all) of the issues have been recognized and are part of the information-gathering process that we are currently undertaking. Linda will reply to this member with thanks for sharing these concerns. The committee noted the importance of welcoming all St. Mark members to our meetings, however, also noting the challenge to give advance notice when the meetings are not held at a consistent time or day on a week-to-week basis. The committee also reiterated the need to communicate with the congregation and are posting the meeting minutes in the church foyer outside of the Great Room.

Jill described support by St. Raymond’s for a refugee family to be housed at St Edmunds school (their family is going into the 3rd floor of a Chicago apartment – St Edmund’s is in Oak Park and is having migrants moved into the school), (a 501.c.3 entity), arriving on 27 March 2024. She also discussed circumstantial differences between asylum seekers and refugees. Refugees are fully vetted, have federal government support, including three months of housing, and have work permits; asylum seekers do not initially have access to this support. Furnishing houses can be accomplished in a few days by contacting local charity groups such as Common Threads (Arlington Heights), Lucille’s, etc, besides outreach to congregations. Jill identified Catholic Charities and The Sanctuary Working Group out of Wellington United Church of Christ in Oak Park as organizations that can assist in finding asylum seeker families; Refugee One and Exodus work with groups to support refugees. Jill stated that St. Raymond’s pastor has asked for a detailed plan of what we would like to request from St. Raymond’s to support this project. The committee will develop a request at a future date when further details of the project have been confirmed.

Task Updates:

- Insurance coverage: Mike is working with Church Mutual to get a quote for all St. Mark buildings. A full quote is expected soon to compare with our existing policy. Our current insurer, Great American, initially said they would not insure the parsonage and now say they will at no additional cost.
- Village of Mount Prospect requirements if the parsonage is rented out:
 - one person to attend a Crime-Free Housing meeting (4 hours); said person is yet to be identified.

- rental contract providing rules and responsibilities of both landlord and tenant – this was not village request – it is a best practice. Village requires a Rental License
- We are encouraged to develop a “Code of Conduct” policy that outlines rules and responsibilities of all parties. We can get existing documents from other churches who are already supporting migrant families. We have a contract written by Linda Ngyen of Luther Memorial – it has been used by many churches. A copy is on the share drive
- There are lawyers in the Mount Prospect area with expertise in asylum seekers; Les will share contact details when needed.
- Financials: Linda developed a housing cost estimate for six months that includes: gas, electric, water, food, internet, and renter’s insurance, based on highest and lowest monthly costs when the parsonage was in use during 2023. This draft estimate for the total of six months is \$5125. An undetermined amount will be added as a cushion for unforeseen expenses and the estimate will be refined as new information is acquired.
 - It is this committee’s intention that all costs associated with housing a family at the parsonage would be paid by funds collected for this purpose, and none from St. Mark budget. A separate account has been created for this purpose.
 - There are multiple food pantries around the Mount Prospect area where a family can obtain food for free, including Lutheran Church of the Cross (LCC), who already has stated a commitment to St. Mark for this project, Willow Creek, Elk Grove Township, and the Village of Mt. Prospect.
 - Diane stated that she obtains a monthly gift card (\$50-75) from Costco that could be used by a family housed at the parsonage.
 - At least 3-4 churches have verbally stated a desire to support this project financially or by contributing resources, such as the LCC food pantry.
- Exploring where to get a family: our initial goal was to support an asylum-seeking family and potentially provide housing in the currently unused parsonage. Linda and Mike will contact two organizations in the Chicago area to determine the availability of a family that best meets our timeframe of occupying the parsonage for six months. Jill mentioned that refugee families could be a good fit with our six-month limitation as families arrive every week from all around the world. Given the global nature of refugees, they may participate in religions other than Christian.
- Timeline for new St. Mark pastor: it is anticipated that six months to house a migrant family in the parsonage is still viable and would not conflict with a potential new pastor.
- Linda has drafted a proposal outlining details of this project including our recommendation to house a migrant family in the parsonage that will be submitted to the Church Council by 31 March 2024. All committee members are asked to review/edit draft and identify missing information or concerns.

Father Cory Brost joined our meeting to discuss his program at Viator House (Maryville) that houses asylum-seeking young men, who have no other families to settle with in the US. He stated that asylum-seekers are not eligible for government support and Viator House (VH) relies on volunteers and private funding to support these people. VH works with shelters and lawyers to house young men 18 – 24 y and also rent their dormitories. VH residents learn to cook, clean and take care of the properties where they live. VH provides many resources to assist with language skills, mental and physical health, food (no alcohol or drugs are allowed), immigration (residency) and to acquire work permits, and a stipend of \$100/month so that they can eventually move out to a safe and affordable place on their own. When residents move out of

VH, they are still monitored from a distance and have assistance from VH as needed. Father Cory indicated a desire to collaborate with St. Mark in several possible ways: 1) provide supplies and volunteers to assist with a migrant family we house in the parsonage, 2) identify young men who are ready to move out of VH to live independently in the parsonage as part of a long-term rental agreement with St. Mark or 3) purchase the parsonage to extend the housing facilities of VH. For refugees, Father Cory recommended contacting Exodus World Relief to find refugee families and noted that the federal government provides vetting and three months of housing. Father Cory also could present seminars at St. Mark to educate the community about asylum seekers.

Next steps:

- Linda and Mike to contact Catholic Charities and The Sanctuary Working Group of Wellington United Church of Christ agencies to determine the possibility of asylum-seeking families that are a good match for St. Mark.
- We also will consider housing a refugee family, who would have advantages of being vetted and have federal government support including housing for three months along with a shorter path for a work permit

Next meeting is Wed, March 27 at 1:30.

Carl said a closing prayer.

Additional Information

For reference, the following definitions of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants are from [Amnesty International](#).

Who is a refugee?

A refugee is a person who has fled their own country because they are at risk of serious human rights violations and persecution there. The risks to their safety and life were so great that they felt they had no choice but to leave and seek safety outside their country because their own government cannot or will not protect them from those dangers. Refugees have a right to international protection.

Who is an asylum seeker?

An asylum seeker is a person who has left their country and is seeking protection from persecution and serious human rights violations in another country, but who hasn't yet been legally recognized as a refugee and is waiting to receive a decision on their asylum claim. Seeking asylum is a human right. This means everyone should be allowed to enter another country to seek asylum.

Who is a migrant?

There is no internationally accepted legal definition of a migrant. Like most agencies and organizations, we at Amnesty International understand migrants to be people staying outside their country of origin, who are not asylum seekers or refugees.

Some migrants leave their country because they want to work, study or join family, for example. Others feel they must leave because of poverty, political unrest, gang violence, natural disasters or other serious circumstances that exist there.

Lots of people don't fit the legal definition of a refugee but could nevertheless be in danger if they went home.

It is important to understand that, just because migrants do not flee persecution, they are still entitled to have all their human rights protected and respected, regardless of the status they have in the country they moved to. Governments must protect all migrants from racist

and xenophobic violence, exploitation and **forced labour**. Migrants should never be detained or forced to return to their countries without a legitimate reason.