

St. Mark Lutheran Church
Migrant Ministries Committee
Meeting Minutes
3/12/24

Attendees: Cindy Ashton, Jeannie Weber, Les Weber, George Elder, Carl Anderson, Marilyn Gosell (guest), Pastor Katherine Ehlert – Church of the Cross (guest), Jill Heinking – St Raymonds (guest), Mike Haase (co-chair), and Linda Olson (co-chair)

Minutes from our last meeting were accepted.

Pastor Carl opened our second team meeting with prayer and our outside guests introduced themselves.

Pr. Ehlert confirmed Church of the Cross has a food pantry and can provide food to a family once a week.

Jill Heinking can speak Spanish and can help with translation requirements. She discussed the difference between asylum seekers and refugees, and we confirmed we are interested only in asylum seekers at this time.

Libby Reimann of Grace Lutheran is a school teacher and was not able to attend.

We explained that the purpose of our committee is to determine feasibility of using the parsonage to house a migrant family and how we can be involved. After we finalize these things we will put together a proposal to give to the church council and they will decide if we will host a migrant family.

Linda confirmed that we added St Mark to the list of churches on the letter being sent to Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson saying he should not evict migrants from Chicago shelters.

Mike gave a summary of his discussions with the Village of Mt Prospect. Jhoana Mendoza Torres is a community social worker, and she would help connect people with available services. Mt Prospect has a food pantry and our family could take advantage of that. Director of Community Development, William Schroeder, said we would need a Renter's License - \$75 but fee is waived for non-profits. The number of people allowed in a house is determined by the number of rooms and their size, and we could not exceed village guidelines. There were no other issues.

Mike explained that we can keep our current insurance by having a rental contract, charging a nominal fee and having renter's insurance – we have requested a quote. We are also getting a quote for all of our buildings from Church Mutual – they currently insure just the educational wing. When we get the quotes back we will compare them to our current insurance costs and determine if there is any additional cost to housing a migrant family.

Les sent legal questions to Mary Campbell (lawyer who is involved with AMMPARO) and he discussed the following responses:

1. If it were necessary to evict a family from the parsonage or other church facility, what procedures would we follow?

“Eviction -since they probably wouldn't be signing a lease, that wouldn't be an issue. But let me say that evictions are extremely damaging on people's records and all measures should be taken before anything is even attempted in a court setting. I'm sure an agreement outside of legal

proceedings for the family could be reached in the event that there is a total breakdown in communication.”

2. Would we need or would it be helpful to have additional kinds of insurance if we shelter a family?

“That is a question for your insurance agent. Likely no additional insurance would be necessary as a parsonage is already classified as a living space.”

3. How can we enforce a code of conduct?

“It is important to draft an agreement that sets out expectations on BOTH sides. I would say that you should look at naming a culturally sensitive outsider that can help you in the case of a conflict. You should consider working with some organization that provides case management support, so that could be a person who could be helpful in that context.”

4. If we require the family to vacate the property at the end of the time limit, how does the family or how do we find a place for them?

“If you decided to terminate the relationship, it would be good to help the family find another place to go. I have seen some congregations give the family a couple months notice of their support termination and then help them figure out where to go.”

We then called Pr. Goede of Augustana Lutheran in Hyde Park so she could explain their experiences with housing a family in their church.

Many families are waiting for work permits, the process is very backed up and it is taking more than one year to get them.

Most families are in need of stays longer than 6 months – they expect to keep their family for 14 months.

There are 4 in their family and they stay in a converted church office with very little.

They went to a police station in Hyde Park to get their family. They asked who they can help, there were no legal issues, they loaded them into a car and took them to their church.

They take the family grocery shopping every 2 weeks and it costs them about \$150.

The family works around the church for money and are doing some odd jobs – they have skills and want to work. They also sell food – away from other food vendors.

There is a free medical clinic in Pilsen and they drive them there, as well as doctor appointments and services to get ID's.

They gave them a transit card but they have gotten to know people and become part of a community.

They have found a lawyer and case worker for them.

They have phones that they pay for themselves.

They have temporary protected status so they are here legally. They apply for asylum before coming here, are given a court date that could be anywhere, they crossed the border and were then bussed to Chicago. If court is far from Chicago, they can change it to Chicago with the help of a lawyer.

It was emphasized that getting a lawyer and case worker for the family will be very important. A case worker would be very helpful once we have a family.

Viator House at Maryville is involved with the asylum program. Father Cory Brost (773-615-5412) is a resource who we could talk to.

Exodus and World Relief are also involved with the asylum programs.

We explained that we can use the parsonage for only 6 months as we may need it for our new pastor, when we get one. If the family refuses to leave, the eviction process is very long and expensive, and hopefully it never comes to that.

We already have \$2600 in our migrant ministry fund which gives us a good start for funding. There are grants available on the synod website, but we will probably not be ready to apply for them before they expire.

Linda will discuss communications with Nancy, but it was felt we could post the meeting minutes and let people read them.

Linda will contact Pr. Kathy Nolte and see if she can provide the help we need in getting a family in need of just 6 months of housing, or a family in need of more but willing to accept less. If not, Mike and Cindy will contact AAMPARO and Viator House.

Next meeting is Wed, March 20 at 1:30. Carl said a closing prayer.