

## SJA Report Nov. 2019

We have looked at several actions that might be possible for us as a congregation. The National Administration has changed laws and rules, requirements and mandates, which make it harder to try to help persons seeking asylum. There is no way we can be a Sanctuary Church as we looked into this last summer. That is no longer an option due to the changing rules and potential huge fines that might be imposed.

Asylum seekers are now held in a detention center with rather large bail fees imposed to enable them to get out. If allowed out, usually with local family, they are now not allowed to obtain a Green Card to work legally. Any illegal work they do to support themselves and family, cannot be submitted as proof of their ability to support themselves and not be a burden on society. And the bind they are in continues.

We have had the opportunity to help one asylum seeker who had no money to call home to Cuba. We raised over \$300 for her from our UU and the Beth Shalom Congregation, and we will be asked again if more is needed. Any left over she gets in a credit card when hopefully she is released after her court hearing in January 2020.

It has come to my attention that there are other ways to help persons caught in the tangle of asylum seeking. There is a family where the husband has returned to

Mexico to apply for what was guaranteed a visa for legal return. But with changing rules that visa was unexpectedly denied. We are hoping we can connect him to people we know in Mexico, so that he can leave the dangerous village where his parents are and go to a city to earn money. Meanwhile his legal wife and child, US citizens, need support and care here while they await his legal return.

This situation would take a commitment of maybe some money but of friendship and support as one mother or family to another. As we get involved and succeed with one family, there are unfortunately many others that need our time and interest and caring. I already have had a mother with a child about the same age, volunteer to befriend her. Hopefully we can offer her some integration into our congregation for further support and friendships.

There are other areas where we can be of service. Years before we volunteered at a local elementary school. That gradually fell apart. I have been volunteering at Blair Elementary now for 7-8 years. They need and would welcome more volunteers besides me. There is work from listening to kids read to you, to you reading to them, helping with math, working in a classroom, to just putting back library books. A commitment would be for a morning or afternoon, or 2 or 3 hours a week on a regular basis. One would hopefully commit to come every week at the same time so teachers would know and could depend on you. Of course you can call in sick, or plan a

vacation notifying them ahead of time. We need to meet our personal needs too. For our own support, we could meet after services once a month for a brown bag lunch and share our experiences together, helping each other understand and appreciate hard times and difficult situations as well as share our success stories. Again, with the offer of a support meeting of the volunteers, I have had a previous volunteer step up and be willing to help.

So there are two things we could do. Both take a real commitment. The first would involve only a few families or persons; the second would involve any amount of individuals who would be willing and interested.

There is also the educational opportunity of having speakers. We have had them come on Wednesday evenings after supper, 7 PM. We have noticed that only a certain age group of our congregation attends these. We were thinking of having speakers come Sunday after services maybe once a month or whenever. A snack or brown bag lunch could be offered. A fee could be requested to help fund the congregation. I already have several speakers willing to come. Suggestion for speakers is always welcomed.

We do put a notice in the Flash weekly for suggested actions. The Beacon carries a monthly educational article about social justice issues. As stated earlier, there is a table with information about an issue displayed about

once a month after services during coffee hour. Again suggestions are welcomed.

At our meeting, one individual wanted us to mention that we urge donations to JFON and PAC. The rest felt that there are many worthy organizations with financial needs, and that each congregant should make their own decisions.

I hope that the Board will approve of our supporting (1) the family separated by immigration issues, (2) donations to the asylum seeker separated from family in Cuba, and (3) also support our volunteering in the public schools. With that support, we can proceed to act publically in the name of UUCGT.

Thank you!

Submitted by Emmy Lou Cholak  
Social Justice Action Committee