

On Tuesday, July 18, a group of individuals from various religious organizations will gather at First Congregational Church at 7:00 PM to discuss supporting another refugee family from Syria. A few years ago St. Francis helped tangentially with the resettlement of a family fleeing the war torn country. This time we will have more involvement in the work that is needed, and I know that there will be more information coming as plans emerge. With all the many and vital causes in the world, this one--refugees in general and Syria in particular--cries out for our attention and action.

It goes without saying that this type of support is fundamental to our understanding of what it means to be Christian. According to the biblical narrative, Jesus himself was a refugee, fleeing Bethlehem for the safety of Egypt during the infanticide ordered by Herod. Furthermore, Jesus' teaching in Matthew 25 drives home that our help for those who are hungry or naked or homeless or sick or in prison is nothing short of serving him. The opposite reality is also true. When we reject those who are hungry or naked or homeless or sick or in prison we are denying Christ.

Of course, one need not be Christian to recognize the call of, and respond to, those in need. We do not have the corner on morality and ethics. We do, however, compromise our practice when we do not engage in issues that involve those who are less fortunate, victims of violence and neglect, or struggle on the margins of society. In the discussions that I have with many at St. Francis, it is clear that responding to the needs of our community and engaging in actions that will help our neighbors is fundamental to their spiritual life. We try to affirm this spoken or unspoken belief by our commitment to support--financially, in-kind, and with real engagement--those organizations that provide care and support for the neediest among us.

Meanwhile, it can be difficult to know where and how to use our resources in a world that is so fraught with need, not to mention the technological environment in which we live that allows us to be aware of the avalanche of need that exists locally, nationally, and globally. For many, this can be overwhelming. I hope that for us that these issues continue to raise within us the face of Christ. Yes, there can be times when we despair of things getting any better, life improving, humans and societies evolving. Though in those times--and, hopefully, in all times--we can see the face of Christ in the other. This will not solve all the problems that exist. However, it should transform our perspective. We are not alone and the ones with whom we are engaged possess dignity and value. They are God's own as well.

Thus, while we have worked through financial straits as an organization over the past year, I hope that we continue to keep our eyes on the goal and end of our spiritual practice. Literally, keep our eyes on Christ, and in so doing, keep our eyes on the needs, concerns, cares, hopes, and dreams of our own lives, the lives of those in Stamford and beyond, and the lives of those in God's world. Whatever happens, the hope is that we can say when asked that we did our best and we tried to remain faithful. The promise we are given is that as we seek to see Christ in the other, the face of Christ smiles lovingly back at us. It is not a cheesy thing to say. Indeed, the life of the world is caught up in our doing this.