

## Maureen Hellwig

Since 2017, my parish, Old St. Pat's, has been actively working to support refugees and asylum-seekers that come to Chicago. I was eager to join the Immigrant & Refugee Ministry (IRM), as I had many wonderful years of working with immigrants through my connection with Erie Neighborhood House as a volunteer and employee.

Initially, the IRM worked with two refugee families – one from Syria, and one from Myanmar. Then, as migrant asylum-seekers poured into Chicago, we shifted our focus to helping them. It is estimated that 72,000 migrants arrived from Venezuela, many put on buses by the governor of Texas, and then dumped in front of Chicago police stations. After all, the Texas governor smirked, Chicago claims to be “a sanctuary city.” We *are* a sanctuary city, and although that term has been politicized, history tells us we have been that for immigrants since the founding of the city in 1837. Immigrants built Chicago.

After chairing the IRM committee for about 5 years, I turned that role over to another parishioner in 2022 and became what IRM calls a “family liaison.” Each of our eight Venezuelan families has two family liaisons, one of whom speaks Spanish. In my case, my partner is a Lithuanian woman who immigrated to the United States after World War II. She initially lived in Chicago, where she learned English, then studied Spanish at a university in Florida, married a Mexican, lived in Houston for many years, and finally returned to Chicago, where she attended Old St. Pat's and joined the IRM. She, herself, is a Chicago story, an immigrant success story.

Our work with our immigrant families begins with finding them an apartment, paying the first six month's rent, finding jobs for the adults, and helping them get their children registered for school. After they start work, they begin to pay part of their rent, and by the end of a year, they are generally paying most of it.

More recently, our Immigrant Ministry resources are going toward paying lawyers to represent our families as they are now being called to court for deportation hearings. I regard such court proceedings as “un-American activities.” Maybe we need a Statue of Liberty at our southern border to remind “Americans” that these migrants are just like their own ancestors who cheered when they saw the lady in the harbor. These are the same kind of folks, just seeking a safer and better life. Welcoming them should be no different than it was for the average American's grandparents (unless you were Irish, and your forebears arrived a little earlier). Let us pray for, and not discriminate against, our new neighbors!