

When Mark posted the video, “We Are the World” at Christmas, I knew I had my topic for this Vestry Meditation. I would like to offer up to the Glory of God the six adult students of English as a Second Language that Rich and I tutor on Monday nights through a robust program hosted by Literacy Volunteers in Stamford.

All our students have been in Stamford for at least five years. Some ten or 20 years. They file returns and pay taxes because they have legitimate employers. But, they are not eligible for any public benefits, such as social security or food stamps. And, there is at least a 10-20 year wait for a working visa. Some are well-educated; some only completed third grade.

They are ready students at every class, arriving on-time, pencils sharpened, homework completed. At the end of each tough two hour class of learning participles v gerunds, possessive adjectives vs. possessive pronouns, we share snacks, sing songs, and each student lines up for hugs from Rich and me.

We gently build trust and friendship. I am the very proud godmother of Jacob, now age 2 ½, the son of a beautiful couple from Central America, who have been our students for several years. What a blessing!

What might seem sweet and innocent, however, is not always so. Every student lives with anxiety and constant vigilance. One parking ticket could lead to deportation. Juan (names changed) describes his arrival in America as being blind – not knowing anything, the climate harsh, the city crowded and full of unknowns. Christo, Maria and Sadie barely know the local news about immigration because they work seven days a week are just too busy.

But, we know the threat. Every news story about deportation gives us a tightening in our stomachs.

Who would come to their defense? An employer, maybe. The resources of Building One Community and Literacy Volunteers, probably. And, the inter-faith community, hopefully.

Around Thanksgiving you may have heard about the mother in Stamford who was randomly picked to be deported, and would have left behind two honor-roll, Stamford High School daughters, one who needs her mother’s help with a volatile diabetes condition.

What I hear is that almost immediately after learning about this threatened deportation, Mark Lingle secured an impressive list of signatures from the faith-based community in, and he delivered the petition to the appropriate policy makers. Happy to report: the woman was granted a stay for several months and reconsideration of her case!

Our St. Francis partner, Building One Community asks: "What would Connecticut be without immigrants? The state's population would drop by 540,000 people. Stamford would have 43,000 fewer residents (out of a total of 130,000). 18 percent of the State's labor force would disappear, along with \$13.8 billion in economic activity. All our lives would change, diminished by the lack of variety in talent and outlook that immigrants bring to their new homes here."

We're so fortunate to live in a city where leadership believes in making an immigrant population productive and vital, and not a burden to the community. Rich, myself and more than 250 other tutors pitch in to teach more than 600 students through Literacy Volunteers.

Our lives are enriched and expanded by knowing about the holidays, politics, food, hopes and dreams of people from many places around the globe.

Humbly, we adore them. Those who speak at least two languages, work hard, are upstanding, funny, kind and generous. Let it be said, again: "We Are The World, We Are The People..."

I would also like to share Rich and I will be extending our English As A Second Language family by teaching English to business executives in Bogota, Colombia. We accepted a job assignment and plan to arrive in Bogota in mid-March and spend 5-6 months teaching and experiencing a new culture in this city in the Andes. We will keep our St Francis family updated as we adjust to the ups and downs of living and working in a South American country.

Talk about a Lenten journey! Who knows what I will learn about myself and my God this coming year!

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