

## ST. MARK'S CIRCLE OF WELCOME REPORT – MAY 3

*“...For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited.”*

The St. Mark's Circle of Welcome met on Tuesday, May 3 to review the holy work that this congregation has been a part of over the last few months and to discuss the ministry that has assisted the Ihsas family in their transition to Northern Virginia. We discussed the positives and pluses of the ministry and the needs of future involvement in this type of ministry.

The relationships established by this ministry will always be with the members and the community involved. The Ihsas family brought to us the realization of the needs beyond our local world. It provided means for us to reach out to help others not only in our religious community, but in the Muslim community and work together with the Jewish community. It was a whole community involvement with not only our church members, but including the staffs at Buncombe County Health Department, Minnie Joes, and Pisgah Legal Services who were ready to help make our family feel they were wanted here. We couldn't have provided as much to the Ihsas family without the help from Montreat Presbyterian members and the loan of a church van from a local church.

We were able to do so much in the short time that the Ihsas family was with us here. With less than a 24-hour notice, we furnished their temporary housing with linens, towels, and food. We provided them with transportation to their home, the grocery, the schools, the medical visits, the park, the mosque, and many more locations. We were able to provide them with food, clothing, books, toys, phones, Ipads, and bicycles. We had educators who were willing to provide enhanced childcare while the parents attended classes at ABtech. We were there when they needed to talk and had questions. We became friends.

There were challenges with the program. There was miscommunication from LSC as to the involvement expected both in time and money of the circle of welcome. There were cultural differences and language translation confusion. The family being placed in Montreat created challenges in transportation, education, jobs, and providing the family a sense of independence. There was a need to set boundaries with the family. It was important that the family understood and took ownership. Even with these challenges, the circle was able to provide for the family.

The Circle of Welcome should be proud that we provided the family a base to start a life in America. In their own townhome in Northern Virginia, they are around friends and family from Afghanistan. The father has jobs there as well. Al is going to take to the family bicycles that we have provided for the family. The Circle determined to send the family \$2,000 to help them in their new home from the contributions given to the church for the family and the Afghan resettlement.

Just like parents when we send off our children into the world, we worry about them and the challenges they will face. Yet we are proud that we gave them wings to become apart of our country.

A personal note: I was glad to be a part of this ministry and it was an extremely worthwhile mission.

Submitted by,  
Cindy Lauster