

Immigrant Outreach

Imagine that you are arriving in Rochester for the first time. Imagine that you have never experienced snow before, let alone the sort of cold that Minnesota is famous for. You have no money, know no one, and your only clothing is what you wore while navigating the Central American jungles followed by the arid deserts of Mexico. You don't understand English. You are exhausted, hungry, and frightened.

This is the situation that two families who arrived in Rochester last November found themselves in. They finally got across the border in Eagle Pass, Texas — a crossing where an average of two people die by drowning or desert heat every day. These families were arrested, held in a freezing warehouse, fitted with a bulky tracking shackle, bussed to Chicago and released to freezing November streets. A Catholic church in Chicago helped them get to Rochester.

Much of this story can be found in a [December 9 Post Bulletin Article](#) (which is only available to online subscribers).

Several of us in the Rochester community have been helping with driving, child watching, and a surprising collection of everyday tasks that require a government id, a bank account, or a credit card. We have gotten to know the families personally and to see them as friends and neighbors. Beyond seeking more people for driving assistance, we are also looking for Spanish language driving instruction and a Spanish piano instruction for the nine year old. We would also note that Channel One has been an immense help through this period and they are always in need of additional donations and volunteer help.

The First Unitarian Universalist Church Immigration Justice Fund (IJF) signed a lease on a one bedroom apartment for one of the families and is helping with the rent. A longtime Rochester resident opened the downstairs part of their house for the second family - a mother and her nine year old son. This family will be moving to a one bedroom apartment in June and will be able to cover the rent as long as her employment remains steady. The IJF has guaranteed the payment on this apartment. She will be moving in in June and will be needing all the basics - furniture, cookware, sheets, towels, etc. Other items include bicycles for her and her nine year old son and a small piano keyboard for her son who is excited about learning to play.

The IFJ has taken a "leap of faith" and has agreed to underwrite the attorney fees of around \$5,000 for each person applying for asylum, which is required to get an official work permit, a social security number, a drivers license, etc. without knowing where all the funding will come from. They currently have about \$11,000 in the fund, which includes the generous donation of a little over \$1000 from the St. Luke's Christmas Eve offering, so more will be needed.

Tax deductible donations can be made out to First UU Church with Immigration Justice Fund in the memo line. You can contact Phil and Sue Wheeler (sue.wheeler55904@gmail.com) with donations of driving, housing materials, etc.