

This past Saturday, April 18, a group of four volunteers from St. Bede's had the privilege of visiting El Refugio and Stewart Detention Center in Lumpkin, Georgia. El Refugio is a sacred place of refuge that provides hospitality and support for families and friends of immigrants detained at Stewart, many of whom travel long distances to visit their loved ones.

Our group spent time with more than a dozen families at El Refugio throughout the day. We served lunch, helped provide information, and offered companionship. It was an honor to be entrusted with these difficult and heartbreaking stories, and to offer the small comfort of a listening ear or a cup of coffee.

Thanks to the generosity of the St. Bede's community, we were also able to deliver 117 gas cards—75 provided by the Church of the Epiphany and 42 by St. Bede's. Each visitor to El Refugio receives a gas card to help defray the cost of traveling to Stewart.

In addition to our time at El Refugio, group members visited detainees at Stewart. These visits offered a sobering glimpse into the uncertainty and hardship many are facing. With these stories shared in trust, we offer a few examples so that our community might better understand and hold these individuals and their families in prayer.

We met individuals whose lives have been upended in different ways:

One woman came here as a legal refugee with Temporary Protected Status. She is a lawyer who fled political violence in her home country several years ago. In the United States, she obtained a driver's license, worked at a hotel, and paid taxes for five years. When her TPS was repealed without warning, she was detained by ICE following a traffic stop. She has been at Stewart since December and describes her experience as a nightmare. A Catholic, she prays regularly with other women, but continues to struggle with deep frustration and sadness.

One man came here seeking asylum from a South American country, where he and his spouse were targeted with violence after organizing resistance among small vendors against extortion by organized crime. They have lived in the United States for three years, but their final asylum decision has been postponed multiple times, now until 2028. In the meantime, he has maintained a work permit and driver's license, paid taxes, and supported a family in which three members have completed welding training and now work in construction. He was detained during a routine ICE check-in after being given his next check-in date. During the visit, he broke down in tears several times. His family is now unsure whether to invest in legal representation to seek his

release, or to use those limited funds to help him resettle in a third country, as he fears returning home.

One family connected with St. Bede's accompanied the volunteers to visit a loved one who has been detained for 10 months while his legal case proceeds. They were deeply distressed by his physical condition and what he shared about his health. He is diabetic and has had a foot amputated. He is not allowed to use his prosthesis and has been confined to a wheelchair during his time at Stewart. Previously active and physically strong, he now has significant swelling in his face, and his hands shake so severely that he struggles to drink from a cup. He is unable to move his remaining foot. Efforts to obtain adequate medical care have been extremely difficult.

The visitor team continues to pray for these individuals and their families, whose stories we now carry with us. We invite the entire St. Bede's community to join us in these prayers. May justice and peace prevail.