

## **EMAIL FROM GINGER NORRIS, Outreach co-chair**

*Thank you so much for your interest in our efforts to help the Afghan refugees transition into the Owensboro community. We also invite you to come to Owensboro and get to know some of our “key players” and new friends.*

*1. FCC, Owensboro, has been involved with refugee resettlement for about 10 years, starting with a group of Burmese refugees who moved into apartments across from our church. At that time we developed a relationship with the local International Center, a satellite office for resettlement. We established a community garden for the neighborhood refugees, partnered with the International Center in providing educational programming and homework help, etc.*

*Fast forward 10 years. Our local newspaper ran an article about the Afghan refugees who would be relocating in Owensboro, and our Outreach Committee reached out to the International Center to determine ways we could assist them. Several of our members, as well as our minister Chris Michael, attended updated training and information sessions. We committed to assist with the collection of items for the home, and collected hundreds of dollars worth of home items. Individual members of the church began collecting furniture and larger items and assisting the International Center in better organizing their clothing and donations room. One of our members donated warehouse space for the storage of large items.*

*We began to realize that finding housing was the most immediate need and one of our well-connected members became a full-time volunteer who has worked tirelessly to obtain housing. The International Center was told by the government that they would be receiving more than the 100 refugees originally scheduled for Owensboro and the housing need became more of a housing crisis. As a church, we pleaded with friends who were landlords and we brainstormed ways in which these refugees might be housed. It was necessary to house about 170 people in a local hotel and then another problem became how to provide meals for these Afghans. There were no cooking facilities available in the hotel.*

*Diane Ford, the aforementioned volunteer {also mentioned in the NYTimes article}, and her husband secured business donations for meals and our church made available the church kitchen for 6 nights a week for Afghan cooking teams to come and prepare communal meals to take back to the hotel. Of course, this involved members of FCC being available to host the cooking teams and often to transport the cooks and the prepared food to the hotel.*

*The local Islamic Center as well as the Islamic Center in Evansville provided some of the food for the cooking teams – particularly the halal meat. Local farmers provided some of the fresh produce. Many members of our congregation are also involved with transporting the refugees to and from medical appointments, as well as other jobs.*

*2. The key word for this resettlement movement has been flexibility. We knew that the refugees who have been housed in the hotel awaiting permanent homes would need their resettlement funds for their individual apartments/houses. Therefore, we wanted to provide financial assistance during this preliminary time. Initially, we knew how important having halal meat and preparing their own food was to the group. We felt that by partnering with friends at the local Islamic Center we could work together in helping our new residents. (Our local Muslims have their trusted halal sources and were excited about the possibility of working with us.) Therefore,*

*the grant money {from WOC} will be used to purchase this meat for the communal cooking teams and to stock the refrigerators/pantries of Afghan refugees as they move into their new homes. Also, FCC has had a bimonthly food delivery of staples and fresh produce to our most needy refugee families (as selected by the International Center) for several years. Some of the Afghans who have moved into their own apartments and homes have been added to this list and halal meat will be included in their deliveries.*

*3. I am not positive about this, but we noticed that following the tornado {Dec 10-11} in Bowling Green we received more refugees than we had originally anticipated. We wondered if some of those refugees may have originally been slated for the BG area.*

*4. I have been overwhelmed by the generosity of so many people in our church and community. The time and energy expended by so many people has been unbelievable. The kindness and patience of nurses, health care workers, hotel staff, grocery store clerks etc. has been absolutely remarkable!*

*5. The majority of our new friends are appreciative and accepting. They have literally had their lives upended in ways they never imagined. Many have left behind family and all that they knew and loved. Several were very wealthy and respected in their home country and now everything they worked for has disappeared. Yet, they persevere and express their gratitude often. From them, many lessons have been learned.*

*I have learned the importance of being gracious under the most trying circumstances. I have learned that often in the face of great loss the most important thing we can do is sit and listen and show interest. I have learned that taking time for a cup of tea is a simple gift one can offer. I have learned the intrinsic correlation between [the comfort of] familiar food and the bonding that occurs when sharing part of one's culture through food. I have learned the importance of community: ethnic community, religious community, and gender community. One of the goals I wish to accomplish within the next few months is providing a meeting space and time for the Afghan women.*

*Courtney, again thank you and WOC for the opportunity to share this story. We are grateful for the generous grant and for your interest. We know these refugees are going to be wonderful additions to our community.*

*Ginger*

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**EMAIL FROM J. CHRIS MICHAEL, Senior Minister**

*I have little to add to what Ginger wrote earlier. She and others have been far more involved than I have been with this complex, difficult but wonderful process. I am glad for Ginger's amazing email.*

*I will say this: This church and community has been wonderful to welcome Afghan Muslims into our space. As you might imagine, I have had lots of conversations about who we are helping*

*and why it is this difficult and demanding of our faith. What does it mean to be Christian in such a small world? Do we really mean it when we say we welcome all just as Christ welcomes us? It's a really different thing to answer those questions with Afghan Muslims cooking in your church kitchen.*

*My working image of all of this is that we are building the airplane while we are flying it. We are helping twice as many people as we originally thought we would, helping them to find housing in a very tight market, all while the politics in this country are fractured and broken. I am astounded at the faithfulness shown by so many, but I am asking Mr. Jesus if he could help alleviate something, like maybe the pandemic.*

*Thank you for your ministry and work. We appreciate it.*