

Refugee Settlement Ministry Interview – Sunday, December 10, 2017

The Rev'd Paul MacLean, an Honorary Assistant at Church of the Redeemer and a member of the Refugee Settlement Committee, interviewed two other members of the committee in order to give the parish a deeper understanding of the ministry they are pursuing.

We are taking the homily time to present the refugee settlement ministry in which we have been engaged. Our two co-chairs, Anne and Mary, will introduce the members of the committee and the family we have been sponsoring, and then I will conduct an interview with two of our members.

I'd like to introduce Lorena Azucena and Micky Fraterman. Lorena, as a young child, was a member of a family from El Salvador sponsored by the Redeemer many years ago. She stayed in touch through two Redeemer members (Ian Green and Pamela Thomson) and then volunteered to join our committee. Micky is a member of First Narayever Shul on Brunswick Avenue and through her connection with Sally-Beth and myself on two previous settlements was welcomed onto the Redeemer committee. The committee thought that it would give us all a different perspective to hear the thoughts of two members of our committee who are not members of the Redeemer, and we are very grateful that Lorena and Micky have agreed to be with us today for not just one but two services.

I'll start with Lorena:

What was it like being a child in a sponsored family?

Thankful for all the benefits of being in Canada, but not always easy – mum working two jobs.

Very important having guidance from Ian Green (member of settlement committee) – having key people who can spend time with the family is essential.

Very important to have a settlement committee, rather than just the money.

Without coming to Canada, my brothers would probably be dead and I would have lots of kids to raise on my own, but no education.

Why did you want to join the Redeemer settlement committee?

Paying it forward.

A desire to help immigrant families.

I can't save the world, but I can do my part.

I want to be a contributing citizen of Canada.

My eyes were opened to the condition of refugees when I studied political science at university, and I wanted to return to El Salvador to do development work there; but my life led me back to Toronto, and so I want to make my contribution here.

Now I'll turn to Micky. What were your motivations for being involved in this settlement ministry?

As Paul mentioned I had been working with him and Sally Beth on refugee sponsorship so I liked the opportunity to use my previous experience and my skills again when I was asked to join them. I had seen what a huge difference it makes when a whole group of people help settle newcomers and I wanted to be part of this again.

So Micky, How did you feel being involved in this ministry?

I always feel that you get more back than what you give when working with refugees! It is very rewarding to see how much we can offer newcomers to Canada in one year! (Comments on trust) It has been a wonderful experience to work with The Redeemer Refugee Group; everybody is so committed and caring and their expertise is extremely beneficial to settle refugees.

Lorena, how about you? What are your feelings about being involved in this ministry?

I feel good. I feel excited for the family and what they can accomplish. I appreciate the opportunity to give. I knew I couldn't do this on my own, I had to work with a group. Meeting everyone in this group has been inspiring.

Lorena, (I know that you are very active in your local RC congregation ...) Do you make any connection between this settlement work and your faith?

Jesus said that if you give food to the hungry, welcome strangers, and take care of people in need, you do it for him. This is what we are supposed to do as people of faith.

Micky, how about for you?

I am a member of a nearby synagogue who is very focused on Social Action. "Tikkun Olam", Repair the World is an important focus of Judaism. It means doing acts of kindness to those who may be at a disadvantage. The phrase is found in the Mishnah, a body of classical rabbinic teachings. I am very grateful and honoured to have been part of the Redeemer Refugee sponsorship Committee and I am looking forward to being part of a future sponsorship here at Redeemer if I am invited back!

Micky, This wasn't exactly planned at the beginning, but we did end up with an interfaith committee at the Redeemer – 3 Jews, 1 RC & Redeemer members. What was your experience being part of this interfaith group?

Well, my role on the Board at the First Narayever is connecting the shul community with the wider community and personally I have worked in other interfaith settings. I feel It's is really all about community and about mutual respect working for a common goal. It opens one's mind really.
And...working with the Redeemer members I learned that Anglicans really like having a good time!

Thank you, both. I'm going to conclude with a connection to one of our readings and an expression of gratitude.

Connection with first reading from the Prophet, 2nd Isaiah. This is a word to people who have been in exile for 150 years. Forced from their country by a foreign power & the collusion of their own weak leaders. Stateless. (Their psalm was: 'By the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept when we remembered you, O Zion ... How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?'). A people discouraged, dazed and destitute. Refugees. And what is the first prophetic word they hear in 150 years? 'Comfort. O, comfort my people.' We are engaged today in a ministry of comfort. And we are doing this ministry of comfort together – Jews, Gentiles, Anglicans, Roman Catholics ... and if we look past our own hope-giving project to other settlement committees, we include people of other faiths and people of no faith but who have good will – all of us engaged in the work of God: 'He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.'

Comfort, freely given can build lasting bonds of gratitude in all of us. Members of our committee recently had the experience of a most enjoyable banquet to mark the end of one year with our Karen family. At the end of our feast, Lah Wah stood up and gave a heartfelt thank you to God and to us for all we have done for them. She said that she and her family had all looked forward to coming to Canada, but they had no idea that there would be people who would welcome them & provide such comfort to the extent that we did. Lah Wah's beautiful smile said everything, and it lit up our faces as well.