

WALKING WITH THE STRANGERS AMONG US

Over and over again, in both the Hebrew and Christian Testaments, we are called to welcome the stranger among us. Since 2018, a dedicated group of 12-15 St. Mary's parishioners have lived this call by joining a similar group from Congregation Sherith Israel in a Nueva Esperanza Accompaniment Team (NEAT) to walk with those establishing new lives of independence and dignity within our common community.

Previously, we could share photographs and tell the individual stories of these courageous people. No more. Their lives would be endangered. So here is a brief summary.

We have accompanied over 30 people in 15 families from 11 countries and 4 continents. Two have given birth to new American citizens after arrival. One fled his home country after he witnessed a drug gang murder his mother and aunt. Two individuals were forced to flee due to threats on their lives for opposing the corrupt governments and cartels in their different countries. One was imprisoned by ICE for 33 months and released only after an accident in her cell caused her serious physical damage.

A mother with three children came to the Bay Area after her abusive husband stalked her to two other countries to kill her. Another was a government lawyer whose supervisor threatened her after refusing his sexual advances.

We have walked with a person from Africa whose fundamentalist government threatened his life for working with an international humanitarian group bringing relief to a suffering people. One couple were forced to flee their home in eastern Ukraine, and another family who had worked with American forces in Afghanistan fled in fear after the Taliban reconquered their country.

We do not do things to, for, or at these heroic people, but respond to their goals and needs as they identify them. Thanks to the generosity of St. Mary's and the Episcopal Impact Fund, we have been able to provide material support in the form of attorneys, temporary housing, food, and clothing. In addition, we have provided access to schools, medical care, language programs, and public transportation. We have shared moments of joy at holidays and birthdays. Most importantly, as strangers in a strange land, they know they are never alone.

If you feel called to assist in this work, contact a priest or Migration Ministries at St. Mary's.