

Dear Holy Trinity Migrant Team Familia,

Thank you for your continued prayers and support of the migrant team ministry at Holy Trinity. As we conclude this year of pandemic, we want to share with you the efforts of parishioners and team members during this unprecedented time. With your support, and through the commitment of more than 14 liaisons and so many volunteers, our members are navigating this period with grace. During Advent, while we pause to embrace hope, peace and joy, we invite you to learn about our members and our work:

Bernadette & Marie were referred to us by their lawyers from the Georgetown Law Center right before the COVID shutdown. Bernadette was an advocate for human rights in her home country of Gabon — work that caused her to be persecuted and then flee to the U.S. In March, Bernadette and her daughter Marie were completely alone, had temporary housing that was about to expire and had no money for food or a birthday gift for Marie's 5th birthday. But now, what a change! The team has been able to support Bernadette and Marie to where now they have their own small apartment, steady food and weekend work. In August, Bernadette received asylum and is now seeking a green card. Bernadette has been diligently working on her English with classes and conversation partners. Marie has started online school and is only disappointed it is not longer, since she has so many more questions for her teacher.

Enrique and Yosselin fled the drug violence in Honduras in 2019 with their four boys. The family arrived at the Kino Border Initiative, having made their way through Guatemala and Mexico on foot and bus as part of the migrant caravan. COVID-19 has made their lives very uncertain. The team continues to provide support with housing, medical care, legal support through Just Neighbors, education support and food insecurity. Their four sons are thriving in school and now insist we speak in their new language, English. Team liaison Ash Hawken shared their story in the *Cura Virtualis* blog this month.

Fredys is a young man who fled to the U.S. from Honduras in 2017. He spent several weeks in detention in Arizona while going through the asylum process with the Kino Border Initiative. After being granted asylum, Fredys was sent to Falls Church, VA to live with his sister. The Migrant Team has supported Fredys in taking ESL and financial literacy classes. The Migrant Team has also assisted Fredys in submitting his green card application and paying his filing fees. Fredys works in construction and his employment during COVID has been inconsistent. Fredys has several dental issues that the team is addressing. Thanks to Dr. Robert Cheron and Catholic Charities, Fredys is reclaiming good dental health.

Mario is a young man seeking asylum after fleeing Nicaragua. Mario is sponsored by a family at Holy Trinity, and his hearing date is scheduled for 2024. Our Migrant Fund supported Mario's basic living (clothing, housing, food, transportation) and medical/dental care through May of this year. Gainfully employed by a local tech company, Mario is thriving. He is an active member of the team, generously donating his time to counsel new members on the challenges and opportunities



Illustration by @arielsinhaha

they face. Mario is an active member of Our Lady Queen of the Americas, often playing guitar at Mass. He is a volunteer at the Washington English Center, which assists new immigrants in improving their English skills. Thanks to new parishioners Ryan and Natalia, Mario is now the proud owner of a car.

Mario J is also a young man who fled Nicaragua after protesting the injustices of the current president. Representing himself, he won his asylum case this past June after one year in U.S. detention. Hard-working with boundless energy, Mario J has been working 6-7 days per week at a landscaping firm to pay off his debts in arriving here, as well as to save for the future. The team has helped Mario J with clothing and other basics as well as friendship and support.

Mugahid is the most recent member of our Migrant Team, having been referred by the CAIR (Capital Area Immigrants' Rights) Coalition last month. Mugahid fled Sudan in June 2019 after being targeted due to his participation in peaceful protests. His journey to safety took him to Egypt, Ecuador and then overland through Columbia, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, and Mexico. Finally able to claim asylum, he was placed in the Farmville, VA Detention Center in June of this year where he contracted COVID. His dedicated CAIR lawyers were able to win his asylum case on October 15, but Mugahid was left with no resources, family or community. Due to the generosity of Jennifer and Tim Touchette (Attache Corporate Housing), Mugahid was moved out of a shelter into a temporary apartment. Another parishioner donated a laptop so that Mugahid could begin his English studies. In fact, he scored a 56/60 on his language evaluation at the Washington English Center! As an asylee, Mugahid has access to benefits and services through Catholic Charities and the DC government. Our main focus is identifying housing for him by early January. He wants to improve his English skills and continue his university studies, eventually attending law school.

This year our team extended beyond the borders of Georgetown, and we have welcomed Yanilson and Etienne & Olga and their sponsors.

Yanilson (Lino) is Garifuna, Afro-Indigenous descendants of shipwrecked Nigerian slaves who married Carib people on St. Vincent in the 1600s. Racial prejudice is strong in Honduras. The dark-skinned Garifuna children are segregated from the lighter skinned or "white" children in Honduran schools, given fewer resources, and taunted and bullied by white children and teachers alike. For Lino, more bullying and abuse came in adolescence — assigned female at birth, Lino now identifies as a transgender male. After years of abuse, Lino fled when thugs sent fire to his mother's house. Crossing the border brought additional poor treatment because of Lino's gender identity during his seven months at a women's detention center in El Paso. Fortunately Heidi Cerneka, a Maryknoll lay missionary and attorney, took on Yanilson's case and contacted a generous Maryland couple who agreed to pay his bond and serve as his sponsors. After living the first months in the shelter at Casa Ruby, where he celebrated his 19th birthday, he has now moved to an apartment with a partner. The Holy Trinity Migrant Team helped him obtain donated furniture, provided much-needed housewares, and continues to supply food. With help from Catholic Charities, Lino has a pro-bono immigration attorney, a Social Security card, and an Employment Authorization Document, or work permit. Much still lies ahead for Lino — finding a job, learning English, gaining asylum — but he is optimistic. His first goal is to save money to have his mother's fire-damaged house rebuilt.

Etienne & Olga are from the Democratic Republic of Congo. Etienne had been a human rights lawyer where he identified women and girls who are victims of abuse. He was targeted for this work and fled to the U.S. on a Fulbright with the State Department. After one year, he was able to bring over his wife Olga

and three children (a fourth was born here). A church in Arlington was helping them, but after a few years, one of their members approached the Migrant Team for advice. The family and sponsor are now fully integrated into our meetings and have been receiving employment leads, food assistance and language training. Etienne's goal is to get better work where he can use his education and legal knowledge.

In addition to these families that we are actively accompanying, the Migrant Team has also provided short-term support to those released from detention and in need of bus tickets, a night's lodging or personal care products.

The team just concluded the Ignatian process of discernment and in looking forward to 2021 (and hopefully a post-pandemic landscape), the team wants to grow its impact in the following ways:

- **Direct Accompaniment:** We are developing a more formal system to work with each family on their personal goals — from acquiring English, to more stable work, etc. The pandemic and all its health/economic consequences have been a setback. But with our biweekly meetings and goal focus, the team is connecting our families with the right resources, helping them navigate often confusing paperwork, and celebrating each success.
- **Resources and Networks:** The work of the Migrant Team is not limited to accompaniment. Members are actively working with other Jesuit parishes and organizations, other faith organizations, as well as local not-for-profits, to establish regional resource databases to support migrants and refugees. We are setting up “experts” in each area of food, legal, medical, language, education, employment, education and housing to connect immigrants and those that support them with the many resources this area has to offer. Parishioner John Brain has generously offered to help us build a system that can grow and improve.
- **Advocacy:** With the new administration comes new opportunities for advocacy. Our new advocacy team is looking for ways we can have local impact on laws that impact migrants as well as supporting groups like ISN when they need help representing social justice work on Capitol Hill.

And our final goal is to continue our expansion of our “familia” which includes you. Thank you for your continued generosity and for sharing in this beautiful and meaningful work.



Illustration by Jeannie Phan

We hope to continue to support our family members and to be able to respond to partners as needs arise. We know that you are asked to give to many causes (and often to Holy Trinity offertory!), and we ask that you consider a gift to assist us in 2021. Gifts may be made online and by check. Please mail checks to the attention of Ashley Klick and include Fund #900 in the memo.

Wishing you peace, joy and health this Advent season, and in the words of our families: Gracias! Melesi! Shkran! Merci!

Ashley Klick
Pastoral Associate for Social Justice

Jeanne Rossomme
Parishioner Lead, HT Migrant Team

