



The Georgia Bulletin

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THE NEWSPAPER OF THE CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF ATLANTA

Deacons view refugee crisis In Greece

BY NICHOLE GOLDEN
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ATLANTA—Refugees from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq are arriving by the thousands daily in the nation of Greece, a country struggling with its own devastated economy.

Deacons Steve Swope and Bill Hampton of the Archdiocese of Atlanta are spreading the word about the plight of refugees following a nine-day trip to Greece and Serbia for Catholic Relief Services in January.

Deacon Swope, of St. George Church in Newnan, and Deacon Hampton, of St. Matthew Church in Tyrone, were part of a 10-member delegation that went to see emergency operations firsthand and help serve the refugees.

“It was really different from other CRS trips,” said Deacon Swope, a global CRS fellow.

Unlike a 2014 trip he made to Kenya, where the emergency response was related to drought, poverty and hunger, those flowing through Greece and Serbia are fleeing violence and persecution. The refugees are primarily families who were once middle class, having worked as accountants, lawyers or other professionals.

“Frankly, six or seven years ago, they were just like us. Now they’re on the run,” said Deacon Swope.

“The poorest of the poor can’t leave” the war-torn region, he said.

CRS is working with local partners in Greece, Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia and other countries to provide food and shelter, sanitation, medical care and trans-

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SEEKING A ‘PURPOSEFUL JOB’



PHOTO BY MICHAEL ALEXANDER

Ryan Carroll, 26, explains the duties he performs at Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta at Scottish Rite. Standing by his side is Riley Cerone, a career specialist with Briggs & Associates, who works closely with Carroll on various facets of his employment needs. Carroll attends St. Thomas Aquinas Church, Alpharetta. Cerone, a 2009 graduate of Blessed Trinity High School, attends St. Peter Chanel Church, Roswell.

Medical center jobs are breakthrough for young adults with disabilities

BY NICHOLE GOLDEN
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ATLANTA—Ryan Carroll’s favorite place to be is on the job at Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta.

In his power wheelchair, Carroll navigates the hallways

of the hospital’s Scottish Rite campus with ease and speed as he delivers lab specimens from the Aflac Cancer and Blood Disorders Center to various departments.

Carroll, 26, has been a Children’s Healthcare employee for more than a year.

“I love it. They have to tell me to go home early,” said Carroll.

A St. Thomas Aquinas Church parishioner and member of the Knights of Columbus, Carroll graduated with a special education diploma from Roswell High School in 2010.

As a toddler, Carroll suffered from uncontrollable seizures and had a portion of his brain removed. The physical challenges he has are similar to those of stroke victims, including partial

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PHOTO BY MIKAELE SANSONE/CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICES

Deacon Steve Swope, left, of St. George Church, Newnan, talks with interpreter Taida Rastic and Erin Mackey, right, of Catholic Relief Services in Serbia, near the Croatian border. Deacon Swope and Deacon Bill Hampton of Tyrone were part of a CRS delegation visiting Greece and Serbia in January to learn about the needs of refugees. Translation services are part of what CRS offers to help families make informed decisions about where and how to seek asylum.

CRISIS

From Page 1

lation services. Catholic partner organizations include Caritas Greece and Caritas Athens.

Nikki Gamer, CRS communications officer for Europe, said emergency relief has been provided to approximately 235,000 people in the region since last summer. The number could rise sharply in the coming months when warmer weather arrives, she said.

A March 1 report by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees said over 122,000 people had landed in Greece in January and February 2016 after crossing the Mediterranean Sea, and the build up of refugees in the country was an imminent humanitarian crisis. Forty-one percent are from Syria, 27 percent from Afghanistan and 17 percent from Iraq.

Food and emergency living supplies distributed to refugees include winter clothing, sleeping bags and mats, hygiene packages, food rations and water.

In Macedonia and Serbia, doctors are treating hundreds daily. Temporary shelter camps of

“We have a moral obligation to help people in need. That’s our Christian duty.”

Deacon Steve Swope

trailers with beds and bathrooms are situated in Serbia.

CRS and other partners are providing translation services, information and legal resources about rights to apply for asylum so refugees can make informed decisions.

Deacon Swope underscored the difference between being classified as a migrant, who is leaving a country for economic reasons, and a refugee, who is escaping war or persecution.

In this crisis, only those fleeing Iraq, Afghanistan or Syria are permitted to apply for asylum in Europe. Deacon Swope said that at every step in their journey, refugees are interviewed, photographed and fingerprinted and compared with terrorist databases.

Those from countries like Morocco and Libya are not allowed outside of Greece and have 30 days to seek asylum, which is



PHOTO BY MIKAELE SANSONE/CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICES

A Syrian refugee and his son walk to the bus that will take them to a border camp. Formerly middle class, this father carries all of the possessions gathered over a lifetime in a black plastic bag after being forced from his home by war.

typically not granted. They must return to their native countries.

Deacon Swope called it an “irrational fear” to believe that the Syrian refugees all want to come to the United States and are terrorists.

“Americans are not getting the reality of the situation,” he said. “They don’t hate the West. They detest ISIS,” he said.

While in Greece, the delegation of deacons, priests and two CRS staff members volunteered at a Caritas Athens refugee soup kitchen and visited refugee camps in Serbia.

“We have a moral obligation to help”

Deacon Swope has been sharing the stories of people he met, including refugees and aid workers, on his blog, “A Deacon’s View.”

A young widow, Hiat, is one refugee the group encountered. The woman had already sent an

8-year-old son to Germany to live with an uncle and is unsure of the future for her other five children traveling with her.

“My children have done nothing wrong,” she told the group.

Hiat’s husband was a civilian killed in the Syrian civil war.

Imagine an emergency forcing you to leave your home. You can only pack what’s absolutely necessary for survival. This young mother made this decision to depart, leaving her wedding album and other possessions behind. Each child carried a backpack with needed items.

“It has to all fit. There’s no sentimentality,” said Deacon Swope.

When the deacons speak to parish or civic groups, they are often asked why the Syrian people didn’t fight back.

He recalls Atlanta’s Civil War history when the city fell to Union troops led by Gen. William T. Sherman.

“No group of citizens can fight an army. They weren’t organized as an army,” said the deacon.

Deacon Swope urged Catholics and Americans not to be afraid of helping the millions in need because of potentially suspicious individuals he believes are few in number.

The most extraordinary scientific advances, the most amazing technical abilities, the most astonishing economic growth, unless they are accompanied by authentic social and moral progress, will definitively turn against man.

Los progresos científicos más extraordinarios, las proezas técnicas más sorprendentes, el crecimiento económico más prodigioso, si no van acompañados de un auténtico progreso social y moral, se vuelven en definitiva en contra del hombre. (Laudato Si' # 4)

Dirty Carpet?

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AtlantaCarpetCleaning.org



PHOTO BY MIKAELE SANSONE/CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICES

A Caritas volunteer feeds a hungry child in the Caritas Athens Soup Kitchen for refugees in Greece. Catholic Relief Services and partner organizations such as Caritas provide humanitarian aid to the thousands arriving from Syria each day.

VITAL STATISTICS

4,786,412 Syrian refugees are registered in refugee camps.

- 2.68 million are in Turkey
- 1.06 million are in Lebanon
- 637,000 are in Jordan
- 245,000 are in Iraq
- 118,500 are in Egypt
- 28,000 are in North Africa

Source: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and Government of Turkey

Over 1 million additional refugees and migrants from a range of countries, including Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq, reached Europe in 2015.

Source: Catholic Relief Services

“We have a moral obligation to help people in need. That’s our Christian duty. We’ve always done it,” he said. “Previous generations have not even considered ignoring the plight of others.”

Deacon Swope also urged

Americans to be intellectually honest about the crisis being one of the consequences of U.S. actions in the region, regardless of intent.

“Our allies are left picking up the pieces,” he noted.

On “A Deacon’s View,” he also outlined economic reasons for supporting the refugees and countries accepting them.

There are many groups working alongside CRS, and Deacon Swope praised the large number of organizations collaborating together with no bickering or gaps in services.

“They work together seamlessly,” he said.

Donations, prayers for peace, and communicating with lawmakers are three practical things all Catholics can do, say both deacons.

“We have to give alms. Make it a sacrificial gift,” said Deacon Swope. “That’s what the heart of Lent is all about.”

“Their faces were just scared”

Deacon Hampton, who has traveled to Haiti and Nicaragua for CRS, remembers much joy in those countries despite the extreme poverty.

“There was always hope. I can’t say I saw that on the faces of the people I met,” said Deacon Hampton about the trip to Greece.

As a father and grandfather, Deacon Hampton said the most disturbing aspect was meeting children who are 9 to 13 years old.

“Their faces were just scared. They had seen too much,” he said.

The CRS relief effort in Greece and surrounding countries is true emergency relief, he emphasized.

He called Catholic Relief Services “the best in the world in emergency relief.”

“The church should be proud,” he added.

Deacon Hampton has presented programs in Florida on the

Meals for Burkina Faso event at 2016 Eucharistic Congress

COLLEGE PARK—A Starve Wars meal-packing event will take place Friday, June 3, at the site of the 2016 Eucharistic Congress, the Georgia International Convention Center in College Park.

Starve Wars is a collaborative effort by the Office of Life, Dignity and Justice of the Archdiocese of Atlanta, Catholic Relief Services, Helping Hands and the people of the archdiocese.

Three billion people around the world live in poverty. During this event, volunteers will pack 100,000 meals to go

to the impoverished country of Burkina Faso, West Africa.

Meal packing will be divided into two sessions. The first will be from 9 to 10:30 a.m. and the second will be from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Sessions will be in Hall A at the GICC.

The event requires 550 volunteers of all ages, both lay people and clergy, including priests, deacons and deacons in formation. Online registration will be open soon.

For more information, contact Kathy Montag, CRS capacity building specialist, at kmontag@archatl.com.

refugee response since returning. He said those attending seem surprised how much they have in common with the Syrians.

“These are moms and dads just like us,” he said. “They want to go home. They know they can never go home. It’s not going away.”

The relief workers are often the first welcoming and willing people the refugees have encountered since fleeing. Deacon Hampton saw only patience from aid workers despite fuses running short sometimes.

“They try to love them back,” said Deacon Hampton.

Like Deacon Swope, he suspects European nations will begin closing their borders due to the influx of refugees.

On March 1 the U.N. refugee agency said while European nations had committed to relocating 66,400 refugees from Greece, only 1,539 spaces have

been pledged and 325 actual relocations have taken place. Border restrictions were adopted by Austria, Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia and Macedonia.

“At some point, the U.S. is going to have to step up. Advocacy at this point is very important,” said Deacon Hampton.

As Catholics, the Eucharist commits Christ’s disciples to serving those in need, reminded Deacon Hampton.

“We’ve got to become involved,” he said.

To learn more about the work of Catholic Relief Services and church partners in Greece and Serbia, go to www.crs.org and click on “Europe” under the tab, “Our Work Overseas.” Secure donations to the efforts can be made online. To read about the deacons’ trip, visit <http://deaconsview.com>.

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Plight of refugees touches hearts at Holy Trinity Church, leading to action

BY NICHOLE GOLDEN
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PEACHTREE CITY—Parishioners of Holy Trinity Church in Peachtree City have answered the plea of Pope Francis to sponsor refugees by adopting a family of 11 fleeing persecution in Myanmar.

Before the Sunday Angelus at St. Peter's Square on Sept. 6, 2015, the pope appealed to all European parishes, monasteries and religious communities to host a refugee family.

"Faced with the tragedy of tens of thousands of refugees who flee death from war and hunger, and who have begun a journey moved by hope for survival, the Gospel calls us to be 'neighbors' of the smallest and the abandoned, and to give them concrete hope," said Pope Francis in the address.

Led by Jennifer Harmeling of Sharpsburg, a group of Holy Trinity members decided to join the efforts. The group will work with Catholic Charities Atlanta to help resettle a family in their Fayette County community.

Harmeling organized a March 3 Refugee Forum at the parish to help others learn about the refugee crisis and the rigorous process of seeking asylum in the United States.

Forum speakers included Frances McBrayer, program director for refugee resettlement with Catholic Charities Atlanta; Edly Vliet, community relations officer for the Atlanta office of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services; and Deacon Steve Swope, a Catholic Relief Services global fellow.

Harmeling first began thinking of helping refugees after watching an "Anthony Bourdain: Parts Unknown" television program on Lebanon. The episode highlighted the challenges of refugees living in camps there.

"It just really touched me," said Harmeling.

She tried to quiet thoughts of being called to help, but that



PHOTO BY MICHAEL ALEXANDER

Holy Trinity Church parishioner Jennifer Harmeling, center, and a group of fellow church members have committed themselves to helping resettle a family of 11 fleeing persecution in Myanmar. Here Harmeling is kneeling on the floor of the old rectory garage with her son Grant, left, and her daughter Samantha, where tangible donations for the refugee family have been collected and stored.

changed last summer.

"Then, the little boy washed up on shore," she said about the drowning of a Syrian child whose family was trying to reach Greece. A mother of two, Harmeling could not forget the tragedy captured in photographs of a Turkish officer carrying the child's body.

In opening the forum, Harmeling said some might wonder, "Why are you doing this? Why do you care?"

She urged attendees to keep open minds and share knowledge gained about the refugee crisis.

"It could just as easily be me and you," she told those gathered.

Former refugees helping this effort

Holy Trinity is the first church in the archdiocese since 2003 to sponsor a refugee through

Catholic Charities. The parishioners have experience, previously adopting the Hoti family escaping war-torn Kosovo in 1999.

Two members of the Hoti family, Mili Hoti and his sister, Ludja Halili, shared their experience of spending three months in a refugee camp with occasional peanut butter to eat and water but most days no food at all.

"I am so blessed to be in front of you tonight," said Halili. "I thought about this all day."

Halili was just 12 when her family arrived at Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport.

Now a happily married mother of two sons, Halili said she is grateful her family won't have to be afraid or hungry.

"They will never have to look over their shoulder," she said. "I'm so thankful there's good people still out there."

Halili's brother joined her at the lectern as she became emotional. After their experience of fleeing, he said the family couldn't believe in a better day.

"What day and what time is our life going to be taken?" had been their way of thinking for so long.

After a long plane ride to New York and another to Atlanta, the Hotis were anxious about what to expect.

"Faced with the tragedy of tens of thousands of refugees who flee death from war and hunger, and who have begun a journey moved by hope for survival, the Gospel calls us to be 'neighbors' of the smallest and the abandoned, and to give them concrete hope."

Pope Francis

"It was as scary as anything," said Hoti.

Seventeen years later, Hoti is an engineer, a homeowner and has no debt.

"What we have today, it's unbelievable. It's next to perfect," he said. "We're so grateful. Holy Trinity Church did save us prob-

Rather than a problem to be solved, the world is a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise.

El mundo es algo más que un problema a resolver, es un misterio gozoso que contemplamos con jubilosa alabanza. (Laudato Si' # 12)



PHOTO BY MIKAEL SANSON

Deacon Steve Swope, of St. George Church, Newnan, traveled in late January to Greece and Serbia to work with refugees along with Catholic Relief Services. He is shown serving food to one of the refugees during his trip. Deacon Swope shared his experiences at the March 3 Refugee Forum held at Holy Trinity Church, Peachtree City.

ably from being dead if not for them taking us out of that camp.”

The Hotis, who are Muslims, regularly participate in events at Holy Trinity like the CRS Helping Hands meal-packing day last December. Volunteers packaged hundreds of ready-to-eat meals for impoverished residents of Burkina Faso. The Hotis pledged support to the new refugee family from Myanmar arriving in April.

Holy Trinity parishioner Gerry Carolan led the outreach to the Hoti family 17 years ago. Mili Hoti still drives by Carolan's old house just to remember her support.

Harmeling is now drawing upon Carolan's wisdom and encouragement.

“I was so overwhelmed I didn't know where to start,” said Harmeling. “She had a ton of lessons learned.”

Deacon sees conditions overseas

Deacon Swope, of St. George Church in Newnan, provided forum attendees with an overview of his trip in late January to Greece and Serbia where Catholic Relief Services is among agencies aiding refugees fleeing Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and other nations.

“Why should Catholics care?” asked Deacon Swope. “I think it's summed up in the story of the Good Samaritan.”

This type of service to others dictates our salvation, he said.

Deacon Swope noted that the people of Syria really have only four choices: to stay in the civil war in their country and risk death; to live in a refugee camp in Jordan or elsewhere; to migrate to other cities where they live in destitution as street people; or to make their way to Europe by way of Turkey and the Aegean Sea and seek asylum.

The deacon, who traveled with other clergy to Greece, shared stories of people he met. Many arriving in the morning in below-freezing weather had no hats or coats, and children often were shoeless.

Deacon Swope met one father seeking treatment for his son's flu at a medical clinic. The father was a civil engineer who spoke four languages. He had moved to three different homes in Syria, and bombs destroyed the house each time.

“It was time to get his family out,” said the deacon.

CRS is providing shelter, food, clean water and translation services so refugees can make informed decisions about asylum.

“It's a beautiful thing to see how the church has responded,” said Deacon Swope.

CRS is partnering with Caritas Greece and Caritas Athens and a number of other nonprofit groups to fill in gaps in services.

The deacon said he is inspired by the Holy Trinity group and hopes to see other parishes develop similar projects.

“This is the Year of Mercy,” he said. “Mercy is where God's love meets the pain and chaos of the world.”

Vliet of USCIS, the government agency that oversees lawful immigration to the United States, said the agency is “deeply committed” to both safety and offering refuge to vulnerable populations.

USCIS works closely with the U.S. State Department and FBI to conduct name checks of those seeking asylum, she said. They crosscheck information provided during separate interviews of refugees.

“We will take those steps before they're even allowed to come to the U.S.,” emphasized Vliet.

She encouraged forum

participants to visit the USCIS facts page online, devoted to the stringent refugee security and screening process.

“Most folks think they can just come in. It's a lengthy process,” said Vliet.

Refugee family of 11 arrives in April

The family adopted by Holy Trinity includes a widowed father, his three grown children and their spouses, and four young children under the age of 6.

McBrayer of Catholic Charities Atlanta, a designated refugee resettlement agency, said the process of obtaining asylum often takes 18 to 24 months.

Refugees must first register with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and request third country resettlement. If requesting asylum in America, they are referred to the U.S. State Department and then undergo a process of security and medical checks. If approved, the State Department forwards names to approved resettlement agencies. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Office of Migration and Refugee Services resettles about 30 percent of refugees to the U.S. each year. Catholic Charities Atlanta is one of the agencies to receive refugees via the bishops' conference.

“You are the first parish to do this in a really long time,” McBrayer told the group.

The family arriving are Rohingya people, whom Amnesty International and other human rights organizations call the “most persecuted” in the world. “They are considered a stateless people,” said McBrayer. “They have been living in chaos a very long time.”

The family will need safe, affordable housing, access to resources such as groceries, and transportation.

Harmeling used a committee structure developed by Carolan to address the family's needs, including learning English, securing employment and education of the children.

Holy Trinity volunteers will meet the family at the airport.

“You guys will take them home,” said McBrayer. “Cultural orientation starts from the beginning.”

This orientation includes everything from use of children's car seats to simply how to operate the oven or the dishwasher.

Refugees receive Medicaid benefits for eight months but have to pay back travel costs within 42 months. For the family from Myanmar, this debt will be close to \$11,000.

“They are work authorized when they arrive,” said McBrayer. “The goal is self-sufficiency.”

According to McBrayer, 89 percent of the refugees assisted

by Catholic Charities Atlanta are self-sufficient within six months of arrival.

“You cannot fail”

Following the forum, volunteers selected index cards listing needed items ranging from kitchen tools to linens to help furnish a home for the family. The 40 people attending committed to purchasing almost all of the necessary items.

“I'm blown away,” said Harmeling.

Forum attendees also learned about Harmeling's other endeavor of collecting baby carriers for refugee moms through Carry the Future, a grassroots organization. So far, 2,500 carriers have been distributed.

“As a mom, it really spoke to me,” she said. “What an amazing difference this can make.”

Carrier drop-off sites include Holy Trinity Church and the Fayette public library branch in Peachtree City. New or gently used carriers may be donated for distribution so that fleeing parents can safely travel with their children.

Harmeling said they hope to find a home to rent for the family soon and plan to donate the first month's rent and security deposit. A donation of a golf cart, to assist the family in getting around Peachtree City, is being sought.

A local consignment store has committed to providing a clothing allowance for each family member to select needed items, and a food pantry has agreed to supply food for several weeks after arrival.

Harmeling also needs transportation volunteers on a long-term basis.

“I'm going to need a lot of people who, say on a Tuesday, can take, X, Y and Z to work,” she explained.

TO LEARN MORE

■ To learn more about Holy Trinity Church's effort to adopt a refugee family from Myanmar, go to www.facebook.com/HolyTrinityPTCRefugeeAdoption/ or email Jennifer Harmeling at JNHarmeling@gmail.com.

■ Donations can be made to Holy Trinity Church with “Refugee Family” noted on the check memo line. Grocery store gift cards will also be accepted.

■ For details on how Catholic Charities Atlanta works to resettle refugees, visit www.catholiccharitiesatlanta.org.

■ New or used baby carriers or slings that will be donated to refugee families overseas can be donated at the Carry the Future collection site at Holy Trinity Church, 101 Walt Banks Road, Peachtree City.

Harmeling knows it will take a team of dedicated volunteers to help this family adapt to life in Georgia and foresees partnering with other churches and community groups.

“I've never done anything remotely similar to this before,” she said in admitting anxiety.

Deacon Swope offered assurance to her and the group.

“You cannot fail. This is God's work,” he told them.

Harmeling expressed hope that other parishes will replicate the idea by adopting arriving families. Annually, Georgia communities welcome 2,500 to 3,000 refugees.

“The biggest thing for me is this Year of Mercy,” said Harmeling. “Let's live out our faith.”

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Many hands build support for Myanmar refugees

BY NICHOLE GOLDEN

ngolden@georgiabulletin.org

PEACHTREE CITY—The support of volunteers from Holy Trinity Church in Peachtree City has helped a multi-generational family of refugees thrive since arriving from Myanmar in April.

Parishioner Jennifer Harmeling organized the effort, partnering with Catholic Charities to assist the family in adjusting to life in their new country.

Harmeling and others greeted the family at Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, furnished living spaces for them, and connected them with employment and educational resources.

The family of 11, who are Rohingya people, spoke no English. Amnesty International and other human rights organizations call Rohingyas the “most persecuted” ethnic group in the world.

Harmeling said the family no longer has to fear violence or death.

“They’re not human,” she said of how the minority group is viewed by the government in Myanmar. “You’re not allowed to work, kids can’t go to school.”

The patriarch of the family, Mohamed, lost his wife to illness. She initiated the asylum-seeking process while in a refugee camp in Malaysia but did not live to see the outcome.

The father is joined by his three daughters, their husbands, and four grandchildren.

Refugees register with the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees and request third country resettlement. If requesting asylum in America, they are referred to the U.S. State Department and undergo security and medical checks. If approved, the State Department sends names to resettlement agencies, including the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Office of Migration and Refugee Services. Catholic Charities Atlanta receives refugees via the bishops’ conference.

Refugees receive Medicaid benefits for eight months but must pay back travel costs within 42 months. For the family from Myanmar, this debt was close to \$11,000.

The family is increasingly self-sufficient and the younger men are employed.

Former refugee gives jobs to three men

While Catholic Charities uses volunteers known as Family Friends to help refugees, Holy Trinity is the first parish to officially adopt a family in 13 years.

Holy Trinity previously adopted the Hoti family escaping war-torn Kosovo in 1999.

Gerry Carolan led that effort and shared lessons learned with

Harmeling.

“I’ve gotten so much out of it,” said Harmeling. “They really are sincere people.”

She said the family just wants security and education for their children.

Collecting household items and setting up the apartment was the simple part. Other issues have been tougher to address, including transportation.

“It’s been the most challenging thing in my life,” said Harmeling.

She has thanked God every night for providing for the family.

“People have come out of the woodwork. It makes me like fall and cry,” said Harmeling.

There were times in the last eight months when a particular need arose and Harmeling had to admit, “I am lost. I have no idea what I am doing.”

In those instances, divine interventions took place, she said.

Milaim Hoti, a son of the family the parish resettled 17 years ago, befriended the new refugees.

“He made sure all three of them had jobs,” said Harmeling.

Hoshizaki, an ice machine manufacturer in Griffin, employs the men. For several months, a team of volunteers took the men to work and picked them up daily.

“It is miraculous,” said Carolan of the opportunity.

For Hoti, it’s about giving thanks for living the American dream.

“It’s our responsibility to be able to go back and remember where we came from,” said Hoti.

Camaraderie has developed between the men and their co-workers. “They work hard. They do their job. I think they have huge potential,” said Hoti.

The Hotis enjoys a special bond to this day with Carolan.

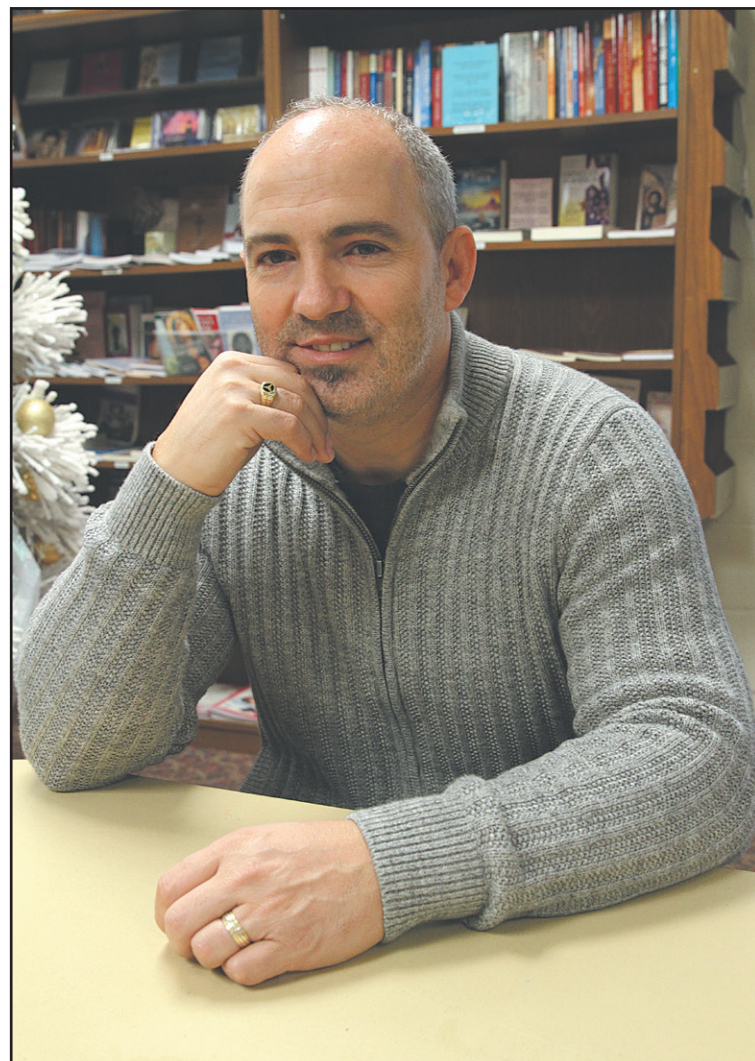


PHOTO BY MICHAEL ALEXANDER

Milaim Hoti and his family, which included his parents, sisters, brothers and sister-in-law, were sponsored by Holy Trinity Church when they fled war-torn Kosovo in 1999. Over a decade later Hoti, who is now married with three children of his own, pledged his support and help for the family from Myanmar when they arrived last April.

“I tell her all the time I still drive by her house,” said Hoti.

Carolan’s former residence is where the Hotis first came to stay after fleeing war and a grim stay in a

refugee camp.

Hoti and his mother immediately felt comforted when they saw a picture of Mother Teresa in Carolan’s home.

Many of Hoti’s childhood friends were Catholic, and Mother Teresa, of Albania, was from their part of the world.

“I couldn’t describe that morning,” he said about waking up in America.

Hoti, who like the family from Myanmar is Muslim, has gone out of his way to help, said Harmeling.

Volunteers developed a relationship with representatives of the mosque in Fayetteville and were invited to a meal at a September event there.

“We were so warmly welcomed,” said Carolan.

Cultural adjustment is daunting

Rallying behind the family has become an interfaith endeavor.

Harmeling’s neighbors are Mormons and provided the family with diapers and other food pantry supplies.

Meals and hospitality are something the family, in turn, shares with

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their new friends.

“They can cook for us. It’s the only thing they can give,” noted Harmeling.

The young mother has learned much throughout the process.

“I finally am starting to grasp the cycle of poverty,” she said.

Although the men are working, they have no established credit and are unable to move to a new rental property or obtain cell phone contracts.

Still, they are making plans for the future.

“They have the hope of owning a home,” said Carolan.

Holy Trinity volunteers conduct ESL lessons with situational learning. Two of the children are enrolled in public school. Their English has improved immensely.

“They went to a Head Start program over the summer,” explained Carolan.

Teaching the family to sort through mail and about the value of time is challenging due to cultural differences. In Myanmar, the family bartered or paid cash for needed items.

“It’s very difficult to figure out what’s important ... this whole idea of having bills, writing checks,” explained Carolan.

Harmeling bought calendars to stress the importance of writing things down.

“We’re trying to give them the wings they need,” she said.

First party of her life for 5-year-old

Volunteer Lisa Chambliss is called the “fun one.” Chambliss meets up with the family for fun activities and treated them to their first Fourth of July celebration.

Harmeling gives special credit to Joan and Win Rorabaugh.

“She and her husband have been absolutely instrumental,” she said.

Joan Rorabaugh loves spending time with the children. She planned a birthday party for Shamsheda, who turned 5 in August. It was the child’s first party.

“It takes a village,” said Rorabaugh. “It’s been life-changing. You look in their faces and let them tell you their stories.”

Win Rorabaugh pals around with the guys, who call him “Uncle.” He taught them about use and care of golf carts, which helps the family get around in the cart path community. He also helped them shop for steel toe boots for work.

“I took him for granted. He took care of everything,” said Harmeling.

Volunteer Cathy Nemes focused on helping family members prepare for written driving tests. The parish committee purchased a used car and signed it over to one of the fathers when he earned a license.

Parishioners Mary Ann Cox and Kathy Fox, inspired to help through JustFaith, lent a hand by taking family members to doctors’ visits and other appointments.

“I think people pitched in where they knew they had strengths,” said



PHOTO BY MICHAEL ALEXANDER

On the second Sunday of Advent, Dec. 4, Holy Trinity Church in Peachtree City hosted a reception for the family of 11 they helped resettle earlier this year fleeing persecution in Myanmar. Standing with the family, centered across the front, are some of the folks who supported the parish’s effort including (l-r) volunteers Jennifer Harmeling, Lisa Chambliss and Kathy Fox, Kimberly Longshore of Catholic Charities Atlanta, volunteers Joan and Win Rorabaugh; (l-r, starting fourth from right) Vanessa Russell, Catholic Charities Atlanta CEO, and volunteers Cathy Nemes, Gerry Carolan and Milaim Hoti.

Fox. “It’s been wonderful to get to know them. I’m just really thankful to be part of it.”

Cox was amazed that Harmeling, who was a new parishioner, was able to take on the challenge.

“Jennifer just fell out of the sky. She had these wonderful plans,” said Cox.

On Dec. 4, volunteers held a brunch for the Holy Trinity community to meet the family. Father John Murphy, pastor, attended the brunch. Also attending were Vanessa Russell, CEO of Catholic Charities Atlanta, and Kimberly Longshore, refugee resource coordinator for Catholic Charities.

The Peachtree City family has

a support system and welcoming environment that many of Atlanta’s refugees don’t have.

Increasing its volunteer base would enable Catholic Charities to provide this type of support to more refugee families.

Harmeling hopes other churches will follow suit.

“I want to encourage other parishes,” she said.

“We have a special responsibility,” said Carolan.

For information on volunteering to help refugees resettled by Catholic Charities, contact Kimberly Longshore at 678-222-3964 or klongshore@catholiccharitiesatlanta.org.

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PSALM 116:12

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