

St. Luke's, Altoona

In February, Greg Williams, a Junior Warden at St. Luke's (Altoona) and a member of the church's Shaped by Faith team, attended an Altoona Convocation meeting. A new project was suggested to form a refugee resettlement program. After the meeting, members from St. Luke's (Altoona), St. James (Bedford), St. John's (Huntingdon) and Trinity (Tyrone) met and formed breakout groups to explore their parishes' resources and fundraising options. St. James, St. Luke's, and St. John's (Huntingdon) all had somewhat empty rectories with offices but had living space available.

Everyone was a rookie in this type of ministry. Greg contacted the Diocese office for help and was advised to use the webpage of the Diocesan Migration Ministry Resources Group's and the website of Episcopal Migration Ministries to obtain information. Several members of their project team attended EMM's Borderland Migration webinar in March.

St. Luke's had concerns about whether it would be right for them to go through the process of preparing for and welcoming a refugee family because the Shaped By Faith process revealed their individual budget projections showed they may only survive a few more years.

Knowing that climate change has caused coffee crops in Central American countries to fail, along with adversely affecting their unstable governments, we can expect people to continue migrating from their homes because they have lost their livelihoods. Wars and rising ocean waters will continue to cause populations, particularly the poorer ones, to lose their homes and not be able to rebuild. It also often seems to make the increase in despotic governments more likely which leads to people fleeing for their safety.

Look within your own parish or join with neighboring parishes and explore how you can support resettling and welcoming refugees into your community. These several parishes in the Convocation are still working on a plan and exploring possibilities to help refugees. It is the first step to finding where the Spirit will lead them.