



**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH OF CHAMPAIGN**



The Heart of Mission

January 19, 2021

In response to exploring “poverty,” a church member sent me a link to a recent podcast he had heard on *This American Life*, “Reluctant Bureaucrats” at <https://www.thisamericanlife.org/729/making-the-cut/act-three-6>. The podcast conveyed to him “an alarming crisis” that “for the sake of the homeless” demands our attention. He noted that we may have a better handle on the homeless crisis here in Champaign than San Francisco but we should never take it for granted. He is right. We should not take it for granted. I am personally grateful for you who are working in your own way and in small groups in our congregation to attend to the poor and to attend to our “neighbors without an address,” as **CU at Home** likes to say. (Don’t forget **One Winter’s Night**, Feb. 5).

One way to help the poor and homeless is to attend to “the stranger in our midst.” Attending to them; being their host; treating them as the Christ; loving them. Several events happened this past week that reminded me of the many places in scripture that God’s people are commanded not to forget the “stranger in our midst.” The NRSV translates the word “stranger” or “foreigner” as “alien.” I prefer “stranger.” “Alien” sounds like we are on Star Trek.

³³ *When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien.* ³⁴ *The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.* **Leviticus 19:33-34 (NRSV)**

Our **ESL** community (English as a Second Language) held a zoom café last Thursday that was a great way to help us turn “strangers” into “friends.” We introduced ourselves and our ESL

director, Jeanette Pyne, led us in a categories game. It was fun! Put the second Thursday of the month at 10am and join us for the next one.

Our **Raindrop Offering** recipient from this past summer, **Frontera de Cristo**, held a recent prayer service at the border. In their newsletter this week they shared some stirring and profound photos by Photographer John Kurc. They write,

We invite your prayers for the women and men, mainly from Central America, who are being returned to Agua Prieta every morning and evening in below freezing or near freezing conditions. The US Border Patrol detains them in locations more than four hours from here, throws away all their food and water, and takes them to a city where they have never been. We have not encountered any who know what city they are in when they arrive—only one man has told us that they were advised as to where they were being taken, and said he was told it would be Nogales. Some return wearing only a t-shirt and jeans.

We are grateful for our partnership with the Migrant Resource Center, the CAME, the School Sisters of Notre Dame, Café Justo, and volunteers from Agua Prieta and Douglas to provide a welcome to these women and men. Together with the support of Samaritans from many places, we have provided support for more than 1,200 people who were sent to Agua Prieta in the last three weeks, when the US Government began returning people to Mexico, but to locations more than four hours from the last place in Mexico they had been.

“Photographer John Kurc has been staying with us and providing photographs of the land devastation created by the border wall construction, as well as photographs at our ministry sites. [These photos were taken at the port of entry and at the MRC.](#) (The link will take you to the facebook page.)

I have been too long in reporting on **The Refugee Center**, one of our mission agencies that supports our refugee and immigrant community. This past week Lisa Wilson, the Executive Director, writes,

For our clients, COVID has been devastating. Most of them work in the food and hospitality industry. Many clients have been out of work for months, with little prospect of returning to pre-pandemic employment levels. Most of these clients do not qualify for Federal stimulus benefits, unemployment insurance or public benefits like SNAP and Medicaid. Some have been infected by COVID, and forced to quarantine with their entire household. Sadly, we have lost clients to COVID. The lives of their families are changed forever by a virus that took over the world.

Our clients face unprecedented need right now. We have assisted clients by leveraging our resources to acquire grants and gifts in excess of \$620,000 for our local immigrant community. Our profound thanks to the Illinois COVID Response Fund, the Illinois Department of Human Services, the Illinois Coalition of Immigrant and Refugee Rights, United Way of Champaign

County, the Community Foundation of East Central Illinois, area faith based organizations and our generous donors for their confidence in our organization. Through these funds, we were able to give clients direct assistance checks for rent and utility bills, as well as gift cards for food and other basic needs. In spite of the generous response of our community, the need for future assistance remains urgent.

From education and conversation to walking with and serving our neighbor, let us live and let us love. Someday soon we will embrace again and our eyes will be opened to the Christ in our midst.

Peace,

Rev. Dr. Rachel Matthews, Mission Coordinator

Let us keep all our mission partners in our prayers, those who are waiting to go back to their place of ministry and those who are able to work where they are. Listen for God's call to you in their ministry.

Our PC(USA) Mission CoWorkers:

Mark Adams and Miriam Maidonado Escobar (Mexico)
Farsijanna Adeney-Risakotta (Indonesia)
Jeff and Christi Boyd (Central Africa)
Bob and Kristi Rice (South Sudan)

Our regional and global mission partners:

Kemmerer Village (and Camp Carew)
Lifeline Pilots
Marion Medical Mission
Mission Aviation Fellowship
Opportunity International
Friends of Presbyterian Education Board in Pakistan Presbyterian Cuba Partnership
Special Offerings of the PC(USA)
Theological Education Fund
Young Adult Volunteers

Here in Champaign – Urbana:

CU at Home
CANAAAN S.A.F.E. HOUSE
CANTEEN RUN
COURAGE CONNECTION
DREAAM

eEMPTY TOMB, INC
FAITH IN ACTION
JESUS IS THE WAY PRISON MINISTRY
THE REFUGEE CENTER
RESTORATION URBAN MINISTRY
SALT & LIGHT

Here at First Presbyterian Church

FPCC Amateur Preachers
FPCC Environmental Committee working with Faith in Place
FPCC Presbyterian Women
FPCC ESL
FPCC Children, Youth and Families
FPCC Mission Possible/Go and Serve
FPCC Mission Team, World Mission and Community Mission Deacons



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