Lumen Christi CATHOLIC COMMUNITY

We are called to be the Light of Christ in the World.

Immigration

Parishioner Stories

Parishioner Mike Harley & His Wife Shanaz Padamsee Share Their Thoughts

Mike Harley and **Shanaz Padamsee** are married. Mike is the Executive Director of the nonprofit Environmental Initiative. Shanaz Padamsee is a Special Needs Teaching Aid at Battle Creek Elementary in St. Paul.

We see ourselves as a family of immigrants.

I, Shanaz, grew up in India and came to this country for the opportunity to attend college, as did each of my three sisters. We left home not to flee hardship, but for a liberal arts education that would not be available in India. I am a naturalized American citizen, and each of us are working to serve the communities in which we live, as teachers, as a business owner and as a scientist.

I, Mike, come from a family with strong roots in Ireland and Italy, with grandparents and great grandparents that immigrated through Ellis Island. I am a citizen of both Ireland and America, and have traveled back to meet my father's cousins. My mother's Italian heritage shows through my cooking and in the holiday traditions we observe. On both sides, my family left Europe to find prosperity in place of poverty.

It is easy for us to identify with stories of immigrants coming to our country today, whether for opportunity or to escape hardship. America always has been made stronger for welcoming the immigrant. It's part of what makes us feel like we are truly at home here, and that's something that we would hope for every other new immigrant who seeks to find a home in our midst.

Continued on page 2.

Lumen Christi CATHOLIC COMMUNITY

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Immigration

Parishioner Stories page 2

Immigration, Thoughts from Martha Skold

Leviticus 19:34 *"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."*

"My mom is an alien," was one of my favorite quips growing up. I'd have her pull out her green card to prove it to my friends and we would giggle at her very serious face, awkwardly imposed over the explanation of her immigration status.

"We are *all* American citizens," was the line I found myself repeating over and over again in frustration when I traveled overseas with Hmong American friends in my twenties. *They* were asked to pull out passports and sometimes bribes, to prove it to immigration officials, hotel clerks, and police officers. I never was. This, I found no humor in.

"We all belong here," was my response last Fall, when my good and kind neighbor tearfully apologized for her undocumented status and handed me the paperwork to help protect her children, should she be deported. Her eyes brimmed with the fear of losing her home, her husband, her children, her life. We cried a lot.

These are just a few of the immigration stories that have informed my views on immigration, but that more importantly, have formed my understanding of who "the alien" is. It is always Christ. On my best days, I remember to love him.

"And who is my neighbor?" by Tim Murphy

I imagine that you are often challenged by the Gospel – much as I am almost every Sunday. I want to share a quick story about immigration and how it impacted me. The story is of a boy of 14 whose mother gave him $25 and told him to cross the border with his brother to San Diego. Over time – he fell in love with my niece and today they are married with three children.

I always marveled at my nephew and how resourceful he was – he certainly was not prepared to either work legally here nor to become a US Citizen when he arrived. He was in great need of help.

It was my brother-in-law who responded to this need, to get legal representation for my nephew who uprooted his young family to return to Mexico to apply for legal work status. It was costly, it was uncertain and it was scary for everyone involved. In the end, my nephew now legally works here and can care for his family without fear of living outside the law.

Like the parable, we are challenged with what is right in front of us – what we are called to do. The response of the Good Samaritan illustrates an overwhelming generosity and compassion for his neighbor.

My view of immigration is formed in the same way – the example of my brother-in-law, like the Good Samaritan, challenges me to ask the question **how am I called** to respond to one in need.

Jesus answered, "The one who treated him with mercy. Go and do likewise." - Luke 10:29-37

Continued on page 3.

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Immigration

Parishioner Stories

Annice Gregerson Reflects on her Experiences Working with Immigrants

Working for St. Paul-Minneapolis Catholic Charities in the 1980s, my job involved helping refugees from Thailand, Viet Nam, Cambodia, and Laos to find employment. Our goal then, as it is for today's refugees, was to help them avoid dependence on public assistance and become self-sufficient.

They faced major challenges. Many had little formal education, few work skills and very basic English. The men had been farmers or soldiers; the women, wives and mothers.

With support from Twin Cities employers, however, they took on entry-level jobs: bus boys, kitchen workers, hotel maids, manual laborers and factory workers. They enrolled their children in schools. Progress was slow, but expectations were high.

We knew that our efforts would yield benefits, but that it would be gradual and have a long range impact. Today, we see the results of Minnesota's welcome and the refugees' response. Those same refugees are now community leaders, elected officials and accomplished professionals. They have written books and plays about their immigrant experience, enriching American culture.

Their success became vivid to me recently when, at a routine medical appointment, I learned that the nurse caring for me was the daughter of refugees. Clearly, what we had worked and hoped for did in fact happen: the families of refugees had, through education and work, established their place in mainline professions and in our community.

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Immigration

Parishioner Stories

Eleanor Daly Shares Her Experience with a Vietnamese Family during Resettlement

I was a single parent, working full time trying to support five children and pay tuition at St. Luke's. One Sunday morning I went to Mass and they announced that the parish had been asked by Catholic Charities to resettle a Vietnamese family (just post that war). I thought, "Well, at least that's one committee I won't have to join." A few hours later the children came home from Mass, very excited, and said, "Guess what, Mom, there's a new committee at church to help settle a family and we all signed up!" My first thought was, "Oh, no! They'll be taking the bedding and food and who knows what from here." --and as I paused I thought how can I tell them we don't have enough to share. So, I didn't. We all joined the committee.

As it turned out, the Vietnamese family had five children from teenagers to a handicapped girl about seventh grade. My youngest was in sixth. While I was at work, she would sometimes walk the half-mile to their home and help that girl with her English and play games with her. The family had been in a re-settlement camp in Vietnam for some time and the father stressed to the older children--mostly boys--how important it was for them to learn to speak English. He was a pilot and had flown with the Americans there. As he and the family were fleeing Vietnam, someone shot into their car and killed their only other girl. Nothing to do but continue on.

My only son was seventeen and I had bought a used car for him so he could help with transporting my girls around to their part-time jobs. So, sometimes on weekends my son and I would each drive over to the Vietnamese family and my family would take them to do typical Sunday things, like

going to a park, or the State Fair, or take them with us to visit my Mother in a retirement home. (I'm sure they had heard stories about Americans not taking care of their old people.") As months went on, the Vietnamese family became more involved in their own lives and we diminished our involvement. Months later, on Christmas Eve, the wife appeared at our house door with a huge pan of egg-rolls for us. For many years after we had ceased specifically working with them, she would appear on Christmas Eve with egg rolls.

Three years later when the parish was asked again to resettle another family, we were the first to sign up. We haven't all been working specifically in resettlement, but later on I was asked to teach ESL and have worked in "my spare time" with many on learning English or simply learning how to live as an American. I have done volunteer work in other countries. Amazing how a split second decision to help changed a lot of my life, from "we don't have enough" to "we'll share what we have." -- Eleanor Daly

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Immigration

Parishioner Stories

IMMIGRATION: Aster & Alem Kidane Share the Story of their Journey as Refugees to Lumen Christi

When teenager Aster Kidane left Eritrea for Sudan in 1982, she was fleeing the country's war for independence from Ethiopia. In such a situation, she said: "You go wherever you get a chance." After two months in a refugee camp, a friend hid her in the back of his truck and smuggled her to the capital city of Khartoum – the beginning of a journey that would eventually take her and her sister Alem to Saint Paul.

The stories of Aster and Alem, longtime Lumen Christi parishioners, highlight how refugees rely on others for help, yet are willing to endure personal sacrifice in search of freedom and a better life.

With a forged passport purchased on the black market, Aster traveled to Rome, where she went to a Catholic church for help. She lived in a convent for eight months while the Catholic relief organization Caritas helped her secure proper travel papers from the U.S. Embassy. With those papers in hand, the U.S. government flew her to New York; and she made her way to Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) carrying only eight dollars.

She called an Eritrean friend in Houston, Texas, and with the help of INS she flew there and immediately got a job as a hotel gift shop cashier.

The war continued, and in 1989 Alem, an Eritrean freedom fighter, also fled the country. "We just ran, with the bullets flying behind us," she said. She found distant relatives in Sudan who helped her. She obtained Aster's U.S. address, and contacted her. With Aster's sponsorship, she traveled to the U.S. Embassy in Nairobi, Kenya, and from there to the United States in 1991.

Alem's first stop was Portland, Oregon, she was pregnant when she arrived and her daughter Rim was born 3 months later, 3 months premature. The INS helped her improve her English and learn how to interview for jobs. She landed one with the U.S. Postal Service. Needing to get out of a difficult marriage she decided to move to St. Paul, because she knew some Eritrean residents here.

Alem again found a position with the Postal Service on the night shift. She earned an associate degree as a dental assistant and, for 10 years, worked both jobs to put her two children, her daughter Rim and son Aron, through school. Rim attended Highland Catholic, Cretin-Derham Hall, St. Mary's University and earned her Masters from the University of St. Thomas. Her brother Aron attended Highland High School and is a graduate of UFM.

Continued on next page

Immigration

Parishioner Stories

Aster & Alem Kidane Share the Story continued

In 1996 Aster decided to move to St. Paul with her son Sammy. Aster became a nursing assistant, and now works at Fairview Hospital on the West Bank of the University of Minnesota. Sammy is a graduate of Highland High School and attended St. Cloud State University.

Alem and Aster talk fondly of the help they have received from Minnesotans. Alem met Bob Spangenberg at the Postal Service. He was a Lumen Christi parishioner and became "Grandpa" to her children. After she finished her overnight shift, he would give her a chance to sleep by taking her children to Mass, breakfast, and to museums and other attractions.

Today, Aster's son Sammy is 28 and works for the Postal Service. Alem's daughter Rim is 26 and works in Human Resources for Select Comfort. Her son Aron, 25, works for Smyth Company.

They say their biggest challenge has been the "culture shock" of moving to the United States. "In Eritrea, we all left our doors unlocked, and easily visited one another's homes like family," Aster said. "Here, you don't go into someone else's home without an invitation."

In the warmth of Eritrea, they generally "lived outside," Aster said. "Not here," she said with a smile.

Alem became a citizen in 1998; Aster, in 2005. Their parents in Eritrea died several years ago. One brother, also a freedom fighter, was killed in the war. Another brother and sister, however, are still in Eritrea and Alem and Aster returned to visit them in 2003.

Having overcome so many challenges, when asked what they're proudest of the sisters said nothing about themselves. "We're proudest of our kids," Alem said. As native-born Americans, those children are now following their mothers' examples, building successful lives and contributing to their communities. — *Patrick Hirigoyen*

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Immigration

Parishioner Stories

O'Halloran Family Story

Welcoming Vietnamese Refugees

I am happy to tell the story of how Thomas and François Nguyen came to be part of the O'Halloran family.

In early June of 1975, I read a six line item in our local paper stating that 142,000 Vietnamese Refugees were coming to the US. It said that three agencies were to be involved in their resettlement, one was Catholic. It just seemed to John and I that we could do that, so I called Catholic Charities and, in my quirky way of speaking, said that we could take two or three of anything. By that I meant, we could take men, women, kids or a small family. We had our present house with our young family of an under three year old and a three month old and could take that many.

In looking back, I realize how simple the whole process was. This was the first wave of the many refugees that were to come in the following years. We all just dove in and did what we could.

Very soon after my call, I received a call saying that two brothers were arriving the next day at 6:00 pm, and would we receive them.

Of course, we did.

There was a scramble for beds and linens, but, indeed, we went out to the airport and met Thomas and François and brought them home, their new home.

At that time, Thomas was 21 and had been in the military service and François was 19 and had been a student.

Each day was full as we got to know each other. There were language issues which were dwarfed by other needs such as bikes, schooling, clothing and for me, dinner every night.

We just tackled each day with our young children connecting naturally with the new situation. We went on to the normal events of getting to school, first jobs, first cars. Thomas and François lived in our house for a year, then moved to an apartment near us. Eventually, there were graduations, dating, marriage, babies, houses, a sad loss of a child, a move for Thomas to Texas.

Thomas and François are very bright, very hard working, good men. We love them. They are family.

We have been blessed and received way more than we gave.