



# Refugee Summit Addresses Challenges of Immigrants

By Ellie Bogue, Communication Coordinator, St. Joseph Community Health Foundation

The Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ and The St. Joseph Community Health Foundation have a strong legacy of serving refugees and immigrants in the Fort Wayne community. In the 1960s, Poor Handmaids at their St. Vincent's Villa children's home raised many Cuban refugee orphans who came to Fort Wayne as part of the Pedro Pan Operation. The St. Joseph Community Health Foundation ministry has continued to support refugee work. Most notably, the large influx of refugees from Burma in the late 1990s prompted the Foundation to respond by opening a Community Resource Center for Refugees. This modeled the PHJC principles of how disciplined collaboration with 12 agencies enabled the ability to scale or magnify impact. The Foundation sponsored Center grew into a new ministry, Catherine Kasper Place, which together with the Foundation and community partners, provided more than 58,000 services in job training in three languages: Burmese, Karen and English. Twenty-seven thousand items of food, clothing and furniture were also distributed to refugee families while the center was in operation.

Recently, the Foundation has focused on helping existing community agencies develop



*Refugee Summit Keynote speaker, Rev. Jennifer Riggs addresses crowd.*

trained interpreters and translators to reduce the barriers keeping so many from accessing services. In the past 10 years, the Foundation invested \$1,559,467 to help refugees and immigrants, and re-granted \$3.1 million in state and federal contracts to support local agencies who provide refugee services. Below is the story of a recent effort, a 2016 Refugee Summit, focused on health that the Foundation provided vital support both in organizing and staffing the event.

Addressing nearly 200 people on September 21, 2016 Refugee Summit keynote speaker, Rev. Jennifer Riggs, described the perilous journey refugees travel to gain asylum in the United States. "For most it will take years, dividing families and leaving their homelands forever; while many will never get here," Riggs said.

The event focused on health,

mental and physical. The goal for the daylong conference was to provide education on serving the unique challenges of refugee populations. Local healthcare specialists, agencies, local and state health department officials addressed these topics.

The Foundation was one of the two major underwriters, serving as the fiscal agent and primary staffing support for the conference. The event was a collaboration with Catholic Charities, Amani Family Services, the Department of Health and several professionals. Fifteen presentations covered the refugee experience, cultural challenges, healthcare provider experiences and local resources. Fourteen grantee/ community partner agencies attended to learn about current, local refugee health

*The* ST. JOSEPH  
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issues. Foundation Executive Director Meg Distler and Fort Wayne Mayor Tom Henry opened the meeting followed by Health Commissioner Dr. Deborah McMahan. The Foundation's Communications Coordinator Ellie Bogue emceed the event.

Five ethnic restaurants prepared the lunch buffet and most attendees surveyed after the event reported enjoying the diversity of the food. Sister Germaine Hustedde, PHJC and Sister Nora Hahn, PHJC attended the event with healthcare workers from the Mishawaka area that serve refugees. Sister Germaine commented that the opportunity to sample the ethnic foods was a nice, unique feature introducing many to the wonderful food traditions from around the world.

Area nursing students from six local colleges were given scholarships to attend, shedding light on international refugee and immigrant work. Post event surveys showed participants learned a lot, and one advised it transformed how they work with immigrants, noting they will "Listen more carefully, cultivate patience, and appreciate other cultures."

Meg Distler advised, "This Refugee Summit was an opportunity to underscore our commitment to serve refugees and immigrants, and more importantly to help the local health and social services communities learn how to most effectively use their resources to assure the poorest among us our being served."



*Top: Director of Liturgy and Music, Andrew Jennings, conducts the Ancilla Children's Choir at "A Community Gathering: An Evening of Prayer for Unity and Dignity" Sunday, November 6, 2016. Center left: Sister Judith Diltz carries the torch in the Indiana Bicentennial Torch Run Tuesday, October 4, 2016. Center right: Ancilla College Men's Soccer staff celebrate their run for the National title. Bottom: Members of the New Millennium Duo perform at The Center at Donaldson on Sunday, November 13, 2016.*