

SAINT MATTHEW CATHOLIC CHURCH



THE JUSTICE HERALD

OUR NOVEMBER 2019 ISSUE IS FOCUSED ON..

SEEING CHRIST IN EVERYONE

Justice and Human Concerns Committee

THE JUSTICE HERALD IS CREATED BY THE ST MATTHEW JUSTICE AND HUMAN CONCERNS COMMITTEE WHICH MEETS THE THIRD TUESDAY OF EVERY MONTH AT 6:30PM AT THE PARISH CENTER. ALL ARE WELCOME. PLEASE COME AND JOIN US. FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT MICHAEL WESTENBERG AT 920-435-6811 OR [MWESTENBERG@STMATTSGB.ORG](mailto:mwestenberg@stmattsgb.org)

SEEING CHRIST IN EVERYONE

One of the areas we are called to continually work on in our faith is expanding our vision of Christ. The Saints provide wonderful examples of lives that are stretched to see God in everyone and everything. St. Francis was stretched to see Christ in the leper on the side of the road, Mother Theresa was stretched to see God in the destitute and dying in India, Dorothy Day in the poor on the American streets. Scripture calls us to push further - to see the image of God implanted all around us - in those whose skin is a different color, those whose immigration status might be questionable, in those who come from lands not our own, in those who speak different languages, have different customs and who pray differently than you or I. In the Jewish scriptures we hear God continually speak through the prophets about caring for the poor, the widows and orphans, and for those who are aliens in the land - all those of questionable legal status or with no legal standing or protection. In the Christian scriptures Jesus tells people that whatever they do to the least in society, they are doing to him. (Matthew 25).

This is difficult and ongoing spiritual work for us - to see Christ in everyone and everything - and to act accordingly. That's the theme held out in this Justice Herald. In this issue we hear a reflection from Fr. Ken DeGroot on his work with immigrant families. We'll hear about the challenges of being immigrants in a new land, and we'll hear about the Open Wide Our Hearts exhibit St. Matthew hosted November 14. In all these reflections we offer a simple challenge and prayer for all of us - as we head towards Advent, how are we being called us to stretch or expand our vision; to embrace Christ's presence in everyone, especially those who are different than us?



MAIKO KATIE THAO

Maiko Katie Thao was born in Long Chieng, the central base where the CIA located in Laos. When the war erupted and Americans started to pull out, Katie's father recruited other Hmong families to leave and flee through the jungles from Laos to Thailand. The migration was dangerous and took months. Her earliest memories are of her father carrying her on his shoulders through mud so thick he had to scrape it off her pants with a machete.

Many Hmong villagers fought alongside US soldiers, yet when they escaped to the the US in 1975, people here often didn't know if they were friend or foe. Katie and her family were sponsored by a local church in Denver, CO and resided in a community with few other Hmong refugees. At age 17, she entered an arranged marriage with Shoua Thao and left Denver to move to Wisconsin to join Shoua's family and clan.

The most important lesson Katie feels she learned from her elders was to never give up. Hmong by nature are survivors. When they came to the US it was either sink or swim. There were no other Hmong people here to help them learn the language or guide them as they adjusted to a new culture in those earlier resettlement days.

Life in Wisconsin has been good, and Katie feels it is a great place to raise a family. The memories and pain she and other Hmong people have had to endure will always be there. Katie's husband still dreams of fleeing through the jungle, war, and trying to find his way. Many Hmong people refuse to speak of the past or to relive the traumatic pain and of the many losses they have endured.

Despite all of that, Katie has continued to move forward. She never took her education for granted, excelling in school, earning her Masters in School Counseling. She tries to preserve her culture while still forging ahead as a role model for other Hmong. She shares her strengths and gifts with students as a counselor at Preble High School, guiding them through the system, and providing career and academic advising.

The early chaos in Katie's life has resulted in her philosophy of taking life as it comes. She feels this perspective is common among other Hmong people who have had to deal with war and its aftermath. This attitude is a gift she shares with her students, encouraging them to accept and face whatever challenges that come their way.



CAN YOU HEAR ME THROUGH THIS THING?

By: Nimco Sh. Abdullahi Hassan

I work at Walmart, and I see a lot of people every day. I try to be friendly with everybody because positivity is the way to go. But one day I experienced something I never thought I would experience in America, especially in Green Bay with the wonderful people here.

I was stocking groceries and a lady came up to me. She said, "Hey can you hear me through that thing?"

She was tugging on my hijab.

She said, "I don't think she can hear me! I'm speaking to a wall."

I said, "I hear you well." But the woman ignored me and kept talking.

I didn't know who to feel bad for: myself, or this person who didn't know what she was talking about.

I started crying. There were children laughing. Adults around us were saying, "She is being terrible to you, you should tell someone. She should be banned from the store." But I thought, no, I don't blame this woman. I blame the people who didn't teach her what the hijab means. It wasn't her fault, she didn't know what she was talking about. It was sad, and yes kids were laughing, but I also felt bad for her because she was ignorant.

I get my courage and my calm from my religion. It's how Muhammad (may peace be upon him) taught his people. We believe there are two angels recording what you do, good or bad. If you ignore that beautiful heart God gave you and do wrong, you don't feel good. I don't always do as well as I should, but in this incident I think I did what I've learned from Muhammad's books.

The woman was older. I wanted to be respectful. I couldn't talk back to her. So I tried to give her a little bit of knowledge.

I told her about the hijab and why I wore it and under what circumstances I take it off. She quickly became embarrassed and started crying, too. She said, "Oh my God! I was making fun of you and now you're trying to teach me something. I am so sorry."

CAN YOU HEAR ME THROUGH THIS THING? CONTINUED

She told me, “Now I know why people wear this. I have lived in Wisconsin my whole life, and no one has ever told me what hijab is for. I only know what CNN says. I only know about terrorists. But this is a religious piece.”

She said, “It’s like what Catholic sisters wear.”

In my diversity classes, we talk about discrimination and prejudice and social stratification. This was a real example. The woman just didn’t get the knowledge she should have had.

She said she felt very bad. I told her, “I am feeling bad for myself and for you, so I am trying to give you the knowledge so you can just live, ma’am.”

And she laughed.

The experience was sad for me at first, but it can happen.

That’s what I want to teach my little sisters and the children I will interact with when I am a social worker. I just want to teach positivity. You can’t solve a problem with negativity, you have to be the person who solves it, positively. Reacting negatively takes a lot of talking and energy, and makes things worse. This woman was just telling me what she saw on CNN. She had no right to say what she said, but I feel like how I reacted to it was what she needed.

I was raging on the inside, but I chose positivity. So, I was calm on the outside. I think it was the right thing to do. We both learned something, and that’s why I love people. In my career, I will be working with people from all over the world, and I want to know what makes them happy. People are beautiful and amazing. Instead of getting angry, I think educating people is the right thing to do.

From *The First Winter: Stories of Survival by Experienced Hearts*; a collection of reflections from young Somali women about their experiences as refugees resettling in Green Bay. Used with permission. Copies of this book are available in the Parish Resource center.



A QUOTE FROM POPE FRANCIS ABOUT UNITY AND DIVERSITY..

“Unity does not imply uniformity; it does not necessarily mean doing everything together or thinking in the same way. Nor does it signify a loss of identity. Unity in diversity is actually the opposite: it involves the joyful recognition and acceptance of the various gifts which the Holy Spirit gives to each one and the placing of these gifts at the service of all members of the Church. It means knowing how to listen, to accept differences, and having the freedom to think differently and express oneself with complete respect towards the other who is my brother or sister. Do not be afraid of differences!”

– Address to Catholic Fraternity of the Charismatic Covenant Communities and Fellowship, Oct. 31, 2014

DIVERSITY BLESSING

May the God who created a world of diversity and vibrancy, Go with us as we embrace life in all its fullness.

May the Son who teaches us to care for stranger and foreigners, Go with us as we try to be good neighbors in our communities.

May the Spirit who breaks down our barriers and celebrates community, Go with us as we find the courage to create a place of welcome for all.

- Clare McBeath and Tim Presswood



THEY CALL GREEN BAY HOME

On Tuesday, November 6th, Na Lee Vant and Yeng Lee welcomed us into their home.

They came to Green Bay as a young couple September 7th, 2004. They resettled here with the help of Catholic Charities of Green Bay's Refugee, Immigrant and Family Strengthening Services Case Manager So Thao.

They were among the last group of Hmong refugees admitted to the U.S. from Wathamkrabot Temple in Thailand. Those remaining refugees from this camp were forced to return to Laos.

NaLee told us that they lived with an uncle for the first year. They had one child at the time. They began looking for a bigger home as their family grew and Veng was employed. He works at a cheese factory in Little Suamico. Na Lee said his lack of proficiency in English is NOT a barrier and his job provides benefits and good wages. They now have 7 children. Peter, the youngest, is 3 years old and was home during our visit but he is very shy and didn't appear except once in a while. He would peek around a corner when his curiosity got the best of him. They are again looking for a bigger home – one with more bedrooms more than one bathroom.

The other children range in age from 9 to 16. Na Lee said they are doing well in school. She requests a Hmong translator when there are school or medical conferences/visits. Her English is good but Veng struggles to learn it. The children are fluent in English. Na Lee told us she and Veng were very young when they got married. In Hmong culture marriage is usually arranged and girls marry before the age of 18. After that they are considered too old – “only good for being a second wife” Na Lee said. The Hmong community members who have settled in this area gather to celebrate their New Year and other days of importance to them. They wear the traditional garb and prepare special Asian foods. It is also the Hmong language that they are trying to preserve along with the customs. However they are also active in their local areas and believe it's important to be part of the larger civic community. Our conversation turned to Asian foods and restaurants and delis in Green Bay where they are found. Na Lee said she makes egg rolls that are very popular with her family and neighbors.

They love Green Bay. It's clean, has good schools and they like their neighborhood. They find Green Bay welcoming for the most part and are pleased it call it home.



SEEING THE FACE OF CHRIST IN EVERYONE

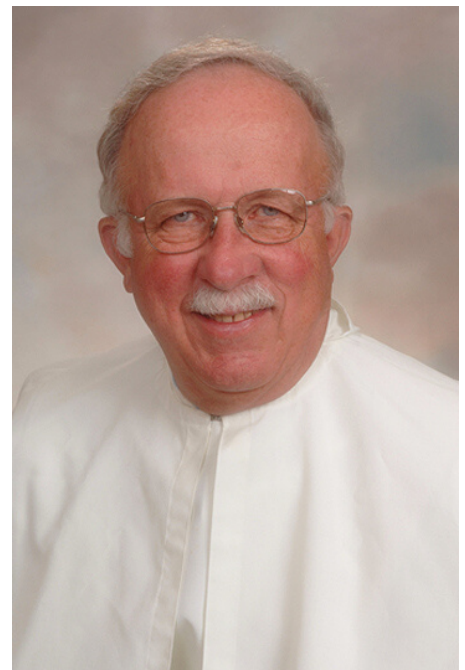
By: Fr. Ken DeGroot

Recently after I finished celebrating Eucharist in Sts. Peter and Paul Parish in Institute, Wisconsin, the Sister in charge of this activity told me about a young lady who had just come up from the border after being arrested seeking refugee status. She and her two small children voluntarily submitted to being arrested as they were trying to escape the violence in their own country. They were released and have a court date pending in several months. I discovered that her husband is in jail. They came from Guatemala with not much more than the clothes on their backs. As I spoke to her I saw the anxiety, the fear, the uncertainty of their future that she bravely bore in her small body.

The small Hispanic community that lives and works in that part of Door County were helping as best they could. The children are in school. She has a cleaning job that pays for the rent of a small apartment. We have put her in touch with a lawyer, but the uncertainty of the future is constantly with her.

This may seem strange but this experience is another gift from God for me. Whenever Jesus was asked what a person had to do to gain heaven He always said: "Feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, visit those in prison, welcome the stranger, etc..... wherever you did these things to the least of your brothers and sisters you did it to me." My working with the young lady from Guatemala was a very clear example of seeing the face of Christ in the face of another. This happens to me daily in my work at Casa ALBA Melanie. I am thankful for all.

We all live in a community that is becoming more and more diverse. In the fairly near future the white skinned person will no longer be the majority in our churches, in our schools, in our neighborhoods, in our communities. The only way to find Jesus Christ in our lives is when we see him in the faces of all. And Jesus gives us innumerable times in our lives to see Him, Jesus is the Lord of diversity. Let us not ignore Him.



SEEKING ASYLUM

In July 2016, my husband, two daughters and myself left Mexico seeking for Asylum. It was a very sad time to leave our family, our people, our house that was so hard to build and ripped our daughter out of all this.

When I said goodbye to my brothers, and I did not know when I would see them again. I felt so much sadness, for we have a relationship of much love, respect and communication that my mother had left us.

It hasn't been easy living here. Gradually, we have been establishing ourselves to this new life. It's been hard to get here with nothing, empty hands.

The reason we had to leave our people, our Mexico, is because of the deaths that keep happening. But the biggest reason we made the decision to give up everything was because my husband's friends were being killed and their relatives were being threatened. We we're not going to wait for something terrible to happen to my husband, my daughters or myself.

We work very hard here to pay rent, bills and everything else. This country is very nice. I like it very much but, I miss my family in Mexico. When Christmas comes, there are times when we get melancholy. We miss our Christmas dinner together as a family, and now there's only four of us. At first, my daughters cry a lot and said: "Let's go back home, we miss our family."

I told them:

"Soon, very soon we will return at home. We will be alive and all together."
It hurt to see their tears run down their eyes. It broke my heart.

Today, seeing their performance in school and hearing that they are already speaking English so well; we get the strength to continue fighting in this country.

God has opened the doors for a new life. Thank God and Father Ken who prayed for us, the asylum was approved! God never abandons us. He sees our heart and comes when we need it most. I never get tired of giving thanks and glory to God!



THE JUSTICE HERALD

OPEN WIDE OUR HEARTS EXHIBIT



On November 14, St. Matthew Parish was pleased to be the first parish to host the Open Wide Our Hearts photo exhibit – a traveling exhibit from the Diocese of Green Bay that shines a light on the experiences of people of color within the Catholic Church of our area. The exhibit was created by Peter Weiss – Peter works for the diocese as the Living Justice Advocate and is a long time member of St. Matthew. Below is a summary of what Peter writes about the exhibit....

Last November, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) released “Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love — A Pastoral Letter Against Racism.” This letter, the first conference-wide document on the issue of racism since 1979, was written because, “Despite many promising strides made in our country, racism still infects our nation.” While the document touches on several themes of Catholic social teaching, the issue of racism is framed in the context of the church’s teaching on the life and dignity of the human person: “As bishops, we unequivocally state that racism is a life issue.”

Inspired by the pastoral letter, the Open Wide Our Hearts photo exhibit features people of color from across the Diocese of Green Bay, representing the diverse races and ethnicities present in our parishes and schools. This project shines a light on their experiences specifically within the Catholic Church and asks us to consider whether we, as a church, are truly a place of welcome for all people.

The purpose of the Open Wide Our Hearts photo exhibit is to provide the opportunity to listen to people of color and to understand what their experience of the Catholic Church has been. Through this listening, we hope that we will be inspired to start a conversation about issues of race, diversity, discrimination, and inclusion within their parishes and schools. Ultimately, we hope that these conversations will lead to concrete actions so that the Catholic Church in the Diocese of Green Bay will truly become a place where all people are welcome, regardless of race, ethnicity, culture, or background.

If you didn’t get a chance to see the exhibit, we hope to have it back in January as part of our Generations of Faith program. Watch the bulletin for more information or check out other places and times to see the exhibit by visiting www.gbdioc.org/openwideourhearts

