

If Only You Knew Me

There's a story told by a famous psychologist about being on the subway in New York when a father and three children boarded. The children were loud and disruptive and the father seemed unable to control them. First there were raised eyebrows and dirty looks. Next came sighs and finally someone shouted, "Do something about your children!!" The father looked distraught. "Their mother just died," he said. "I don't know what to do." Suddenly anger turned to compassion and many reached out to comfort and help the grieving family.

It makes a difference when you know someone and listen to their story.

There's been a lot of bitterness, fear and even hatred lately for people who are from different countries or of different religions. There's been a mood of isolation, of barricading ourselves in our own little worlds where fear and anger intensify and the one I don't know is the enemy. As Jesus once wept over Jerusalem, I think his heart must be breaking now as he watches his children demonizing each other. I can almost hear him saying, "Stop, listen, look into the eyes of the other and find me there."

At St. Leo's we've been given that chance. We are blessed to welcome, get to know, and become family with immigrants and refugees, the kinds of people so many fear, reject, and want to keep out. Try to imagine your response as you hear some of their experiences.

Think about a successful engineer whose wife was a kindergarten teacher. He and his family were leading a comfortable life when war broke and everything that was familiar changed. There was bloodshed everywhere, familiar buildings were leveled and smoldering. Friends, even family members were dead. They could be next. There was no choice but to leave everything behind to flee to another country where they lived in a refugee camp relying on their faith to carry them through days of unknowing what the future would hold. Wouldn't you want to reach out to help them?

If you saw a mother with an infant on her back running through the jungle as soldiers with raised rifles chased her, wouldn't you want to protect and care for her and her child? As you got to know her you'd learn that this was one of *many* times she has had to flee war and violence. Could your heart hold all the horror she has witnessed?

If you learned that drug gangs were going to conscript or kill the young neighborhood boy who always served Sunday Mass, wouldn't you want to save his life and help

him escape? Wouldn't you ache for the mother who has to let her son go, possibly to death as he sought to save his life by running and leaving everything he knew behind?

How do you think you'd cope if you saw people all around you killed because they belonged to a different tribe? How would you continue living with those images and

the fact that you had survived when so many others were dead?

Putting faces on those we fear and telling their stories not only changes things but also gives us compassionate hearts to care and open spirits to receive the gifts these strangers bring.

Each person is a unique gift of God to the world made in God's image. May we welcome, celebrate, and give thanks for them!

- Angela Anno, Pastoral Associate

