

From Many, We are One...

I've been present when many of our refugee parishioners have become US citizens. It's an exciting day and I'm always impressed by their commitment to learn and become active citizens in their communities. I remember the look of pride on the faces of some of our older parishioners when I took them to vote for the first time and how they smiled as they received their "I voted" stickers. They had fled their native lands and family, friends, and possessions due to war and violence and were grateful to have an opportunity to contribute to their new home land.

Like my grandparents who came through Ellis Island more than 100 years ago and were welcomed by the words on the Statue of Liberty, they came not speaking the language, with few marketable skills and fewer possessions. What they, like millions of immigrants before them did bring was a willingness to learn and work hard, a desire for a better life for their children, and love of faith and family.

Survival was the primary focus for our refugee families. In the midst of war education was often interrupted. One mom told me that both her parents were killed in the war in Congo and her neighbor took her in. Though her neighbor's children were sent to school that wasn't an option for her. Both she and her husband cannot read or write in their native tongue and are slowly learning English. They know the value of education and impress that on their children. Housing was often make-do in refugee camps. One young man related how he helped his father build a house made of sticks. Work was primarily manual labor and dad's hands are calloused from years of toil. Their future in the camps was bleak with likelihood of disease and early death, often not enough food, erratic schooling, medical and pastoral care and always the threat of war and little chance of peace. The opportunity to immigrate to a safer place was truly seen as a gift from God.

At St. Leo's we have had the wonderful privilege of welcoming them to our parish family, helping as any family would, and cheering them on as they get steady jobs, save money, buy homes, become citizens and watch their children complete high school, and some go on to college. Though they come from Africa and Latin America they share the same faith and dreams and work hard to achieve them, trusting always that God will be their guide.

Unfortunately, like the Irish, Italian, Polish, and German immigrants before them, these new immigrants are often feared, face prejudice, are taken advantage, sworn at and sometimes even told to "go back where you came from."

I am blessed to live in a neighborhood which is increasingly becoming more and more diverse. We choose to celebrate and not be afraid of people who don't look like, talk like, pray like, or share the same backgrounds as we do. Instead of focusing on the differences, a group of neighbors decided to pay attention to the things we share in common. And that approach has caught on. This has led to more collaboration between community groups and churches, renewal of the business district, and many opportunities for neighbors to get together have fun, and get to know each other---and even pray together and celebrate



our diversity at an annual culture fest.

This year our community has been challenged to "prepare to get uncomfortable" and to do the things necessary to make our neighborhood a more welcoming place for ALL the people who live here. This means being willing to honestly face the unspoken things that often get in the way of deepening relationships, like talking openly about racism and how we need to change. Shortly after Easter, there was discussion of what needs to be resurrected in ourselves and in our neighborhoods. In June we talked about immigration.

Going out of our comfort zones and stretching ourselves is hard work but the fruits more than compensate for the effort. It is like St. Paul said "we are many parts but we are all one body." The motto of our country says the same: "*e pluribus unum*"—from many we are one.

Let us celebrate and give thanks for the wonder of God's great diversity and look for ways to welcome into our lives and get to know the refugees and immigrants in our midst. —Angela Anno

You Are Invited to Join Us for St. Leo's

CULTURE FEST

Saturday, July 6, 2019

1:00 - 9:30 pm

6:00 pm Mass

Featuring Music, Munchies, Merriment,
and Much More!

Music Provided By Musicians from
St. Leo and others.

Featuring a variety of Guatemalan, Mexican
and Salvadorian cuisines.

Be daring and try the Frutá with the special
seasoning! It's delicious and refreshing.

OUR FESTIVAL ISN'T ABOUT MAKING MONEY. IT IS ABOUT BRINGING OUR FAITH AND A SPIRIT OF GRATITUDE AND THANKSGIVING TO GOD INTO OUR PARKING LOT AND ONTO THE STREETS AND NEIGHBORHOOD. IT IS ABOUT INVITING OTHERS TO COME AND GIVE THANKS WITH US AS WE SHARE OUR CULTURES WITH THEM.