

Working group on Refugees, Immigration & Sanctuary under the care of BYM Peace & Social Concerns Committee

Across the Baltimore Yearly Meeting, many Monthly Meetings and individuals are responding to the crisis of immigration, migration and asylum seekers in the wider world and in our communities. In September 2017, representatives from a dozen Meetings agreed to form a “working group on refugees, immigration and sanctuary”.

Those who agreed to serve are: Bette Hoover (Sandy Spring), Lauren Brownlee (Bethesda), Jim Bell (FMW), Annette Breiling (Frederick), Maria Brown (Stoney Run), Roselle Clark (Midlothian), Kathy Fox (Maury River), Deb Hurley (Patapsco), Sheila Kryston (Goose Creek), Erinn Camp Mansour (Sandy Spring), Will McCabe (Goose Creek), Erin Murphy (FMW), Jon Nafziger (Charlottesville), Linda Rabben (Adelphi), Anna Rubin (Patapsco).

An email address refugees@bym-rsf.org was set up for the group by BYM office staff. Working group members are encouraged to use this as a means to communicate with each other. Initially our stated intention was to 1.) share what we are doing at our Meeting(s) 2.) get inspired from what others are doing and 3.) build a network across our Yearly Meeting on issues of immigration. Although a web based site for sharing documents and information was suggested, this has not yet materialized.

In the DC Metro area, many of us have participated in rallies, marches and actions in the past months. This photo was taken on December 6th, 2017, on the East steps of the Capitol in Washington DC. The rally to support Dreamers/DACA was organized by United We Dream and CASA de Maryland (aka WeAreCasa). Those of us arrested (197 people) carried pictures of Dreamers that included their real life stories. Undocumented young people were among those arrested for the civil disobedience and seemed fearless as they spoke up loudly and clearly.



Several of us make regular visits to Maryland Detention Centers with the organization DCDetentionVisitation.org. The detention centers/prisons in Howard, Frederick and Worcester Counties house upwards of 500 people on any given day. The stories we hear are depressing and unjust and there seems so little we can do to help. Those detained are so appreciative of our Friendly visits for they get to talk with someone from the “outside”.

Several of our Meetings are members of sanctuarydmv.org and DMVSanctuary Congregation Network, a part of the PICO network (akleinmayer@piconetwork.org) These networks offer workshops on accompaniment, know your rights trainings and keep us informed. Sandy Spring, Adelphi, FMW, Bethesda and Herndon are among the Meetings in the network. (Even if your Meeting has not yet decided to become a part of the network, individuals or committees - like a Peace Committee - could sign on.)

Friends Meeting of Washington has offered events and workshops that included immigration attorneys, Detention Visitation training and others.

Baltimore Meetings (Stoney Run and Homewood) continue to care for refugee families and are part of an immigration network that supports their work. Syrian, Eritrean, and Somali families benefit from their efforts. Patapsco Friends have a network of members and attenders supporting a Syrian family.

Midlothian, Richmond, and Charlottesville meetings have been actively involved with the Central Virginia Sanctuary Congregation Network (CVSN), which is connected to the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy (VICPP). There is a lot going on with the General Assembly, and Friends volunteer as "witness at the capitol" observers. In addition, many Friends are planning to attend the Day for All People at the General Assembly on Jan. 23.

Midlothian Friends Meeting has decided to focus on their immigrant students. They are investigating the circumstances under which the public schools might collaborate with ICE. So far, they have not uncovered any major offenses, but it is hard to find out information due to confidentiality. They have reached out to Legal Aid, the ACLU, and the school system for more information.

The School Board of Broward County, FL has approved a resolution designed to protect immigrant students (read about it in AFSC), and thus, Friends are using that resolution as a model for what they want to see in Chesterfield schools. (Btw, AFSC has been offering a series of webinars on Sanctuary Everywhere). Midlothian Meeting is trying to educate the community and will be showing the movie, Documented on March 3 to give a face to the immigration struggle.

The new clerk of the sanctuary committee at Richmond Meeting is Ellen Arginteanu: ellenandjulesarginteanu@yahoo.com.

This report is just a snippet. There is so much more work in process among us. Let's meet at BYM Networking Day on March 24th at Friends Meeting School to continue this conversation. In the meantime, you can email me, Bette Hoover bette@justpeacecircles.org or send a message to the group refugees@bym-rsf.org.