

Essay by Killian Finn

My involvement in the St. Patrick Catholic Church Refugee Outreach Program has had and continues to have a profound impact on my life. Each Sunday, I spend 1 and ½ hours spending time teaching, socializing with, and/or volunteering for the refugees of my parish. In the past, I have acted as a babysitter for the younger children while their parents and siblings attend English classes. I have also spent time sorting through donations and organizing them so that parents could find clothing and other items for their families. Over the past two years, I have taken on more responsibility as a classroom assistant. I assist with the teaching refugee children or adults the lesson of the day, whether it be working one on one with a student struggling with a concept or writing out lessons on the board. Whatever the task may be, the Refugee Outreach Program continues to act as a constant source of hope and light in my life.

The time I've spent so far at St. Patrick's has been transformative. It has altered the way I view others and how am I called to treat and love each one of God's children. The love and true joy the refugees have shown me, even in the face of all the hardships they experience daily, has transformed how I live my life. I am not called to live a life searching material wealth, approval of my peers, or instant gratification. Instead, I am called to live one that serves others, embodying the spirit of Serviam. The refugees are truly joyful because they aren't focused on earthly goods; instead, they are truly joyful because they have honest, ever evolving relationships with Christ and with one another.

My volunteering at St. Patrick made a difference in the refugee community by showing the refugees how welcomed they are into our parish and helped them adjust with unfamiliar American customs and tasks. I have welcomed them into our parish not as outsiders from another country, but just as Catholics going to Mass. It is important to show them that as Catholics, we are all one and we are blessed to have them in our parish. Secondly, more practically, I have helped numerous refugees with their English development, get closer to achieving citizen status, or even just allowing them to attend class by watching their children. These tasks have helped improve the quality of life of many refugees.

I attended St. Patrick Catholic School from Kindergarten through 8th grade. In 7th grade, my religion teacher suggested we all start volunteering at the refugee outreach program. Since I already attended Mass every Sunday, I thought, "Sure. Why not? I'll be doing the refugees a favor by showing up." That thought, while it propelled me to get involved with the program, couldn't have been further from the truth. Every single Sunday, no matter what mood I'm in, the refugees show up, smiling, eager to learn. They have shown me God's love despite having experienced things beyond my wildest nightmares. They have taught me to be so grateful for every blessing in my life. But more than that, they have taught me how service can alter your worldview. Now I know what it means to stand in solidarity with your brothers and sisters in Christ. I know what it means to love one another, no matter economic status or wealth. The Refugee Outreach Program has continually shaped who I am as a person, how I view others and challenges me to truly make a difference.