

*Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family,*you did it to me." - Matthew 25: 37-40 NRSV*

I was a stranger, and you welcomed me.

Throughout the Bible, we hear stories about people who are from different places. Ruth followed Naomi into a new land. The children of Israel spent 40 years in the desert, searching for a permanent home. Daniel was among the Israelites living in exile in Babylon. Sometimes the stories call these people foreigners and other times they are called strangers who are just passing through. There are stories about people who are forced to leave their homes and other stories about people looking for a better life.

But what about today? Who are these "strangers" living among us?

The Pacifques fled from war in Democratic Republic of Congo, where more than 5.4 million people died, to nearby Zambia. They tried setting up a new home and leading a "normal" life, but they never felt safe. Eventually, the Pacifques were chosen to be resettled to the United States with the help of Church World Service. CWS helped them find a place to live and helped find good jobs and schools. None of this could have happened without the support from the area faith community, who helped get the family to appointments, enroll their children in school and furnish their house.

Mariela Shaker is an accomplished violinist from Aleppo, Syria. She graduated from the Arabic Institute of Music in Aleppo, from which she graduated in 2004. Now in the United States, Mariela recently performed and spoke at the White House. She says she is worried for her family in Aleppo and her friends who are in the United States with pending asylum statuses.

Randy Muth and his family were among the many thousands of Cambodian refugees who were resettled in the United States during the 1980's. He is the founder and CEO of Angkor Resource Center, Inc, a nonprofit dedicated to assisting Asian Americans and other minority groups in south metro Atlanta to adjust socially and economically by providing education, information and developmental services to improve their overall health and well-being and ultimately help them become self-sufficient.

We have so many opportunities to welcome the stranger into our community – it is the strangers we welcome who give us the chance to know and to serve Christ.

Today we have an opportunity to provide hope to many families. Our church is taking a special offering to help provide warmth and shelter, comfort and privacy and healing and hope.
Today we stand for welcome.

Please give generously. Thank you.

