December Quote:

“Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses, yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore, send these, the homeless tempest-tost to me. I lift my lamp beside the golden door.”

-Emma Lazarus

Welcoming Syrian Refugees

The current refugee crisis in Europe is reminiscent of some pivotal moments in history, including a seasonally appropriate story of a Middle Eastern family fleeing persecution. Like Jewish refugees during World War II, today refugees across the world are fleeing violence from Central America to Syria.

The European refugee crisis that started late this summer has received international attention, encouraging some countries to open their doors and help relieve these migrating families, many fleeing the Syrian Civil War.

The U.S. has agreed to accept 10,000 refugees, low when viewed against how many Germany, Canada and other countries have agreed to take in. For comparison, in 1975, following the Vietnam war, the U.S. accepted 120,000 refugees (Time Magazine, Sept. 15, 2015).

To make matters worse, the tragic attacks on Paris and San Bernardino have created a backlash against Muslims as well as refugees seeking asylum. Governors, including North Carolina’s Pat McCrory, have declared that they do not want refugees to be relocated in their states. However, people of faith and conscience ask how we can refuse women and children who are fleeing civil war and death.

Greensboro is known for being a welcoming city and residents are living up to the reputation. AFSC took a lead role in organizing a press conference to declare welcome to refugees and immigrants during FaithAction International House’s annual multicultural Thanksgiving feast held at First Presbyterian Church in November.

More than 350 residents came out and showed their support for the cultural and ethnic diversity for the immigrants and refugees in Greensboro. This powerful event inspired similar ones in Raleigh and Charlotte.

Despite the anti-refugee messages from the governor and many members of congress, local communities are demonstrating that they want to welcome refugees, not reject them.

“We have a moral obligation to open our doors to refugees and immigrants,” stated AFSC’s Lori Khamala. “We hope to send a message to our elected officials that immigrants make our communities diverse and strong.”

Church World Service (CWS) in Greensboro, another partner on the event, will continue to work with the government to resettle Syrian refugees in the area, reaffirming the city’s long history of welcoming refugees.

Syrian-American Zane Kusebi, who volunteers with CWS resettlement efforts, spoke directly to policymakers at the press event about a recent vote to make it harder for refugees to get here. “We want to be treated fairly and frankly, last week we were not treated fairly.” Speaking to Congressman Walker, who was present at the event to listen, he said, “We want you to be the one Republican who says ‘No’ [to this treatment].”

-Chitlaly Mora, AFSC Intern
Local Groups Delve into Immigrant Detention

On November 17, the Immigrant Rights Working Group, in which AFSC staff members play a key role, presented an outstanding forum on immigrant detention at Holy Trinity Church in downtown Greensboro. Over 120 local residents attended the League of Women Voters (LWV) of the Piedmont Triad’s luncheon.

Four panelists presented research and personal stories on immigrant detention, the growing incarceration crisis, and the impact on people of color in our country.

There is a federal quota requiring 34,000 beds to be filled at all times in immigrant detention centers. However, the process sweeps up more than just criminals.

There are also privately run “family detention centers” which house mothers and children. Elon Humanitarian Law Clinic attorney Heather Scavone shared her personal experiences of visiting families in such centers, where arbitrary rules are regularly imposed with no obvious purpose and detainees are denied due process.

People of color and immigrants are being criminalized in many ways. Using certain language and negative stereotypes incites fear and creates an image of a new type of criminal. Criminalizing immigrants allows local law officials to track down, lock up, imprison and deport immigrants because they are deemed scary and violent.

Jorge Gama shared his personal experience spending 15 months in immigrant detention after getting into a fight. You can see his story at www.tinyurl.com/StoryofJorge.

Guilford College professor Krista Craven is collaborating with AFSC to conduct a survey of immigrants who have been detained. She presented some initial findings, including that most detainees have children impacted by their detention.

Another professor, Barbara Lawrence connected immigration detention with Prison Pipeline system that targets mostly African-American, Latino and other minority groups.

Hands down, the U.S. is the largest jailer in the world, reports the American Civil Liberties Union. From 1978 to 2011 America’s prison population rose 408%. The latest arrest trend documents women of color are being targeted for arrests. The private prison industry is expected to continue to grow—a system clearly for profit at the expense of human lives, which is simply criminal.

Following the presentation, one LWV member commented, “People don’t know about the reality of this issue. It needs to be taken out into the streets so everybody can know!”

-Letitia Benitez, AFSC Intern and Toni Etheridge, AFSC Program Associate

Leticia Benitez Visits AFSC’s Miami Program

We often share via our newsletter some of national work that we take part in. In this particular article, I would like to highlight some of the amazing work happening in the American Friends Immigrant Service (AFIS) office in Miami, FL.

Unlike our NC Immigrant Rights Program, the AFSC Miami office does not only do advocacy work to empower immigrants but also offers legal services to underrepresented immigrants for preparing and filing their legal cases as well as court representation. Lucio Perez-Reynozo, Area Program Coordinator, and Marie Jean mostly work on the legal services provided by AFIS. I spoke with both about their work and some of the challenges faced particularly in the state of Florida.

The community organizing, policy work, and empowerment of immigrants is just as important and is coordinated by Paul Andre Mondesir and Lis-Marie Alvarado. I had the opportunity to participate in a Citizenship Celebration honoring individuals who participated in AFIS’ Citizenship and Civil sessions and who are now proud U.S. citizens. While the majority of the event was held in Haitian Creole, I was able to hear some wonderful stories of individuals who persevered after unsuccessful attempts. The energy in the room was, without a doubt, something you have to experience in person: all their hard work paid off, and they will now be able to exercise their right to vote and other perks of being citizens.

As for the newest staff member of AFIS, Lis-Marie, I am excited to see all the wonderful work she has in mind for Florida’s immigrant rights movement. This will be a busy legislative session for Florida as they have five anti-immigrant bills already introduced to their 2016 Legislative Session. We hope to continue staying in touch with our office in Florida to continue working on national work but also to find ways to support each other’s local work.

-Letitia Benitez, AFSC Immigrant Rights Fellow
On November 16th, AFSC was proud to be a part of the opening ceremony for Robert Shetterly’s Americans Who Tell the Truth exhibition held at the International Civil Rights Museum in downtown Greensboro.

Shetterly’s project is committed to displaying “models of courageous citizenship” in which leaders across generations, of different identities, and with diverse methods of change are painted and displayed along with a quote from the respective leader.

During the opening ceremony a performance art piece brought leaders such as Harriet Tubman, Mohammed Ali, and Mark Twain to life with songs, poems and monologues. *Americans Who Tell the Truth* is a wonderful representation of artistry in the movement for change.

The exhibition will be on display through February 14. There are also 10 portraits available for viewing free-of-charge at Guilford College Hege library.

AFSC invites supporters to visit the exhibit on January 23rd, 2016 from 2-4:30pm. Come learn about the current initiatives of AFSC while also enjoying a special guided tour through Americans who tell the Truth, as well as, Truth Tellers Speak!, the youth portrait exhibit.

-Femi Shittu, AFSC Intern

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**College Campus Protests Erupt**

A month ago, the University of Missouri system’s president, Timothy Wolfe, resigned under pressure from students, professors, deans, and football players who alleged he had not done enough to deal with multiple racist incidents at the flagship campus, in Columbia, MO.

The ouster made waves nationally; and has sparked a movement among college students. Students from over 70 colleges and universities across the nation have submitted lists of demands with the purpose of dismantling systematic and structural racism on their campuses. North Carolina is not exempt from the movement, students at Guilford College, Duke University, UNC-Chapel Hill and UNC-Greensboro have submitted a list of demands. Students are seeking an increase of diversity in administrative positions and faculty, better funding for departments serving minorities, administrative positions with the purpose to address inequities, acknowledgment of racism from the institutions, removal of symbols and icons of white supremacy, and mandatory diversity training, among others.

While some colleges and university have hosted different open forums to discuss the demands, very few have taken immediate action steps to answer them. In the case of Guilford College, there have been several changes in the student affairs division of the college, and the vice-president of marketing publically apologized for misrepresenting the stories of black students.

Student activists plan to continue the movement until colleges and universities fully commit and start dismantling systematic and structural racism.

-Jose Oliva, AFSC Intern

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**AFSC Exhibition Day**

Quakers, Youth Groups, and other AFSC partners are invited to join AFSC NC in viewing the powerful new exhibit on display about courageous Americans that stand for peace and justice. View the main exhibit plus a youth portrait exhibit “Truth Tellers Speak”, learn about current AFSC initiatives and share your own stories.

**Date:** Saturday, January 23, 2016  
**Time:** 2:00-4:30 pm  
**Location:** International Civil Rights Museum 134 S Elm St, Greensboro NC

$8 Exhibit Admission  
(Additional cost to view the rest of the museum)

AFSC is offering limited scholarships upon request.

For more info, contact AFSC:  
336-854-0633, TEheridge@afsc.org
AALBA Continues Bridging Gaps with Youth

On December 5, American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) staff and interns hosted a discussion with a group of fifteen YMCA young people of high school age and YMCA adult mentors. AFSC staff member, Toni Etheridge, opened up the session by introducing the work of AFSC and its Quaker values.

I led the “Step Up” activity. I read aloud some traits (for example: “Can you see a doctor whenever needed?”) and if the individual members felt the trait was true to them, they stepped up. Everyone began in the same place but ended up in different areas of the room. Most of the group consisted of varying shades of black, brown and tan skinned people. The group recognized that though black people are frequently generalized as a homogeneous group, each person was standing in a different place based on their individual experience.

The AALBBA (African American Latino Bridge Building & Awareness) project was introduced by AFSC Fellow Leticia Benitez. The group discussed stereotypes and diversity among Latino and African Americans. When asked if anybody has friends who don’t look like them, many hands were raised. A YMCA mentor reflected, “Growing up in the 70’s and 80’s felt like a black and white world, but now youths are dealing with more diverse racial issues.”

The YMCA was already working with the concept of “putting oneself in another’s shoes,” so AFSC held that message up as a way for them to connect to the case study activity. Leticia discussed a situation in which the individual in the case study is undocumented and had to make one of three choices as to what to do in a constrained future. After the groups made their choices, AFSC and the YMCA members discussed why they chose the answers they selected.

When the presentation ended, one participant said, “I wish it was longer” and that it was interesting to see the generation differences within the group.” Another YMCA Member said, “Very informative. The more we talk about these issues, the more we can understand.”

-Allison Stalberg, AFSC Intern

Upcoming Events

Sat., Jan. 9th: New Garden Friends Meeting invites you to join 10 am-12 pm to learn about how to help refugee families. 801 New Garden Rd., G’boro.

Mon., Jan. 18th: Walk with AFSC in the MLK Parade to commemorate Martin Luther King Jr.’s birthday. Downtown Greensboro.

Sat., January 23rd, 2016, 2pm-4:30pm: AFSC Exhibit Day at the Americans Who Tell The Truth exhibit at International Civil Rights Museum, 134 S Elm St, Greensboro NC. $8 Exhibit Admission (Additional cost to view the rest of the museum). Please RSVP, 336-854-0633, TEtheridge@afsc.org.

Sat., Feb 13th, Moral March on Raleigh: Join AFSC in the NC NAACP’s annual Moral March on Raleigh and HK on J People’s Assembly.

Welcome New Intern!

Jose Oliva was born in Guatemala and moved to Greensboro, NC in 2011. He is currently a junior, Bonner Scholar majoring in Political Science and Economics at Guilford College. He spends most of his time serving immigrants and refugees through different college access initiatives. He currently serves as the Secretary of the International Advisory Committee, and Vice-Chair of the College Commission.

AFSC wishes you all happy holidays and a happy New Year!