

## **Immigrants and Refugees in South St. Louis Sr. Paulette Weindel C.PP.S.**

These days some former refugees resettled in South St. Louis around St. Pius V Parish call Sr. Paulette

***“I can’t breathe!”***

... my cousin and her infant baby boy were killed in the massacre at the maternity hospital in Kabal. The twin baby girl has been burned and needs treatment in Pakistan. The Father keeps calling me for help, I have no money to help them ...PLEASE! The baby died in Pakistan. He must bring the baby back for burial. Now his little five-year-old has COVID. No hospital! He can get an IV for her, but must pay up front. She now weighs 31 pounds. What can I do? PLEASE help!! How much is the IV? Who will take her? The father will carry her as he has no money for transportation. Her big sister age 7 has COVID too. She cries that her mouth is burning. PLEASE help? They are hungry! No food!

***“I can’t breathe!”***

...my aunt needs to bring her sick husband to Uganda. He needs medical help! There is too much killing in South Sudan. She cannot get food nor medicine. They are pulling people from the busses. They are old. PLEASE help me get them to Uganda. The uncle got treatment, but after several weeks. Now my aunt wants to go back to South Sudan to be with her brothers. It’s dangerous! She has no money. PLEASE, please help me

***“I can’t breathe!”***

...my children keep calling me from Congo. They are sick, they are hungry. I have no money to help them. I have been laid off from work here, and cannot pay my bills. My children! My children! PLEASE help!

***“I can’t breathe!”***

...my son got arrested...my child is being harassed at school...my wife is sick....would you like to come to the Buddhist temple...my husband was assaulted on the street...come to my daughter’s wedding...celebrate a birthday with us...my Grandma is in the hospital...

I have known, loved and walked with these families for many years. It all began about thirty years ago when I began to meet refugees being resettled in neighborhoods around St. Pius V Parish. I soon joined with others who have been accompanying refugees from many countries. The refugees were able to come to the USA so they could **“breathe”** in peace and freedom. Other challenges met them right away as they were trying to survive in this complex part of the world. They were often resettled in poor high crime neighborhoods and at times with hostile resistance from the native born.

**“I can’t breathe”.**

The people have names, have families, have stories, have gifts to share; and continually worry about family and friends in harm’s way in their home country. To me, all of a sudden: Vietnam, Uganda, Iraq, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan, Liberia, Bosnia, Burma, Togo, Angola, Somalia, South Africa, Ivory Coast, Syria....became much more than a news report!

I have met so many caring, generous, competent, compassionate advocates along the way that constantly restore my own hope in the goodness of people and the faithfulness of God. I have learned people’s stories of faith in their experience of torture and trauma and unending hope. I have heard more than once: “*God is in control*”. I have learned more about the complexities and complicities of life. I have learned to rejoice and repent!

I am blessed and grateful to be here in this place at this time. My hope is that “they” and “we” become one, **breathing** the air of peace, justice, freedom. I hope that one day there will be no more hyphenated Americans, just Americans, and in “faith language” that we will know deep in our being that we are truly all ONE.

In the meantime, during this pandemic, this part of my extended family come bearing gifts of Vietnamese, Sudanese, Afghan, Eritrean, Somali food. They come to help Sister Grandma **“breathe”** in God’s care and compassion and generosity.

May we all take a deep **“breath”** of gratitude that now and in the future “all will be well”.

Thank you, Sisters and Partners, for the graced opportunity to be “*your continuing presence*”!

*Reflection questions for the Sisters and Partners:*

Have you had similar experiences of listening to another and being changed by that experience?

What is your thinking/feeling about the phrase hyphenated Americans:  
(i.e.) Burmese-American, Afghan-American, Liberian-American, German-American?

Did you notice that we usually say African-American, Asian-American, and we usually do not say European-American?