

Grace Episcopal Church
Annual Report for 2021- Grace Church Refugee Ministry
Presented at Annual Meeting January 30, 2022

Steering Committee

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January 3, 2022 welcomed our third year with the Faridullah family. The pandemic persists, political upheaval continues, and now with Afghan resettlement underway the Refugee Ministry has additional responsibilities.

As 2021 emerged, online school convened. The five Faridullah students were at home. The school system provided computers and signal boosters to support five students online at once.

- Four year old Ayesha received updated supplies and materials for learning from Grace Episcopal Day School and had two online sessions a day.
- Maiwand was invited to participate in all-day sessions operated for Montgomery County Schools by Bar-T. Onsite monitors took care of the students in person while teachers conducted work online.
- Najat did well handling online learning and is becoming a serious reader.
- Helai quietly did her studies including her religion studies and looked forward to time with friends.
- *Omar proudly graduated from Bethesda-Chevy High School in June.* He had extra attention from the team to remind him of all the tasks to complete high school, take part in special events for seniors, and focus carefully on completing steps for Montgomery College. He also took on some DoorDash activity to help earn money.

The Parents. Mr. Faridullah continued to work at Montgomery Mall addressing deferred maintenance in the buildings. The work was demanding and the team was short-staffed. Mr. Faridullah recently began a job at the Comfort Inn at Shady Grove doing maintenance work. He is relieved to have consistent work hours and more time for the family. Mr. Faridullah continues to have an online English language class each week due to the generosity of a parishioner.

Mrs. Gul Jamala began to work with an English tutor from the Montgomery County Literacy Council early in the year. That worked well until Ramadan (April 12) when her cooking and other family duties overtook classes. We continue to seek language learning options that will work for Ms. Gul Jamala at a time when adult literacy training is in demand.

Fundraising. In 2018, before a refugee family was on the horizon, Grace Church raised funds and trained parishioners to host a refugee family. The Farifullah family arrived early in 2019 and those funds were exhausted in 2021.

Reverend Rich and the Vestry approved fundraising to help support the family as they continue to work toward self-sufficiency. Mr. Faridullah works full time, but the family's monthly expenses exceed his earnings.

Thanks to the overwhelming generosity of the parish, the Grace Church community raised \$27,587 for the family. A portion of the fund was designated to pay the debt owed to the U.S. State Department for the cost of the family's airfare from Afghanistan to the U.S. That means the family will no longer have this monthly expense.

Based on the fundraising, we created, and the Vestry approved a four-year plan in which the church gradually reduces the amount it gives to the family each year.

- In 2021, the family received \$1,000 each month from the church
- In 2022, the amount will be \$750 each month
- In 2023, the amount will be \$500 each month
- In 2024, the amount will be \$250 each month

Self-sufficiency remains a priority for resettlement.

The Faridullah family continues to demonstrate self-sufficiency. For example, the family was grateful to drive a car donated by a parishioner. All recognized that the older vehicle was costly to maintain and would finally reach a point when it could not be repaired. The family was saving for a car and they now drive an energy efficient vehicle that serves them well. Mr. Faridullah uses it for work and the eldest son, Omar, transports family members to appointments.

New Housing. Subsidized housing wait lists are long, but with persistence, the family, guided by Terri Musto, succeeded in obtaining a low income apartment for the family. This move also allows the children to remain in their current school district with school bus transportation. Mrs. Gul Jamala is getting everyone settled into their new apartment.

Family travels and challenges. In May, we were surprised to learn Mrs. Gul Jamala, Maiwand, and Ayesha were traveling to Afghanistan for an extended stay with relatives. They traveled as part of a charter group of local Afghans with plans to come back as school began. As the Taliban took over Afghanistan, the family members in the country had to flee. With cooperation from the State Department and after multiple tries, three Faridullah family members were airlifted to Dubai Qatar, Ramstein Air Base in Germany, and then to Dulles International Airport. A family relative was able to take the same flight and he is now being resettled by the International Rescue Committee.

This episode generated much trauma and worry for this family as well as your refugee committee.

And yet, at the close of 2021, Ayesha happily started Kindergarten at Rock Creek Forest Elementary with Maiwand who is a 4th grader. Najat is excelling in 8th grade at Silver Creek Middle School. Helai attends Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School in person as a 10th grader after never stepping in the building as a freshman. Omar is

taking on-line classes at Montgomery College and available to help take his younger siblings to their doctor and dentist appointments. Overall, this resilient family has become much more self-sufficient, and is now asking for help for their relatives.

On-Going Help Continues

A close relative of the family who is now in the U.S. is seeking resettlement assistance. Work continues to assist other relatives of the Faridullah family who have not yet completed their paperwork or are not yet able to get documents to one of the embassies processing U.S. documents.

A local lawyer has donated services, and State Department officials are knowledgeable and helpful. We deeply appreciate the assistance provided by our elected Senate and House members whose dedicated staff continue to address the urgent needs of refugees.

Episcopal Diocese of Washington Afghan Response

As refugees began to arrive in the U.S. Bishop Mariann Edgar Budde convened an Afghan Refugee Response Team to mobilize parishes to “Welcome the Stranger”. Grace Church was asked to participate in that group based on experience with resettlement. Our parish representative is mentoring other parish groups as they undertake resettlement.