

Letter to the Churches

Our Mission:

TO WELCOME IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES BY PROVIDING FREE HIGH QUALITY IMMIGRATION LEGAL SERVICE, EDUCATION AND ADVOCACY.



Find a legal clinic:
Immigrants and refugees can make an appointment by calling the office at 515.255.9809 Monday through Fridays from 9 am-5 pm . FREE immigration legal clinics are monthly except June & December at United Methodist Churches:
*Lovely Lane UMC in Cedar Rapids
*First UMC in Columbus Junction
*Wesley UMC in Ottumwa
*First UMC in Decorah
*First UMC in Storm Lake
*Grace UMC in Des Moines

www.iaumc.org/jfon

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BIA-accredited staff are

Laura Mendoza, Grisell Herrera,
Rachael Duang.

Alejandra Menjivar & Lisseth Chavez--Intakes.

Nat'l JFON Board Taps

John Rothlisberger

For the first time since its founding, Iowa JFON has a representative on the National JFON board. John Rothlisberger is the NE District representative on the JFON standing committee and was invited by the national office to join their board. Many thanks to John for accepting this position. UMCOR started JFON in 1999 and strong ties continue. The national office oversees 13 regions and Iowa is one.

New Appointment Hours

With receipt of the federal VOCA grant, JFON has been able to expand the hours of the day and week when prospective clients can make appointments at the free immigration legal clinics around the state. Now clients can call in from 8:30 to 5 any day of the week. It is important to remember that the legal clinics fill up very quickly at the start of each month. Des Moines and Cedar Rapids fill the most rapidly. Call in early in the month for success.

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR NEW BIA-ACCREDITED REPS

We appreciate the efforts of two valued members of JFON's staff who have gone to great efforts to become accredited representatives of the Board of Immigration Appeals. Grisell Herrera and Laura Mendoza were told in August that they had been approved to be BIA-accredited reps. This means that they will be expanding our ability to assist even more clients because they can complete cases without needing the review by the

attorneys. They have shown their expertise by proving their experience to earn the accreditation. Laura says, "I really enjoy working with JFON. I work mainly with victims of domestic abuse and sexual assault. I have heard horrible stories of violence...It is very rewarding to know that these victims will have a better future, thanks to the fact that there are these places (like JFON) that help victims with low resources."

CLIENT STORIES SHARED BY OUR STAFF.

What can happen when a church takes seriously the words of Jesus to “welcome the stranger?” Ann Naffier, an immigration attorney of JFON and Kay Graber, a member of the Mt. Vernon UMC, tell about the relationship of the church with the family of an undocumented immigrant in the Mt. Vernon UMC congregation. Teamwork with JFON resulted in a happy outcome for a family.

Kay Graber explains that, at the motivation of Rev. Bill Daylong, the Peace and Justice Ministry team decided to offer their assistance to Gabriel, from El Salvador, and his American wife, Amy. In Kay’s words, here are some of the ways in which they held the couple and their children in caring arms of the church:

“Support, friendship and prayer were number 1. We listened monthly to their stories, their frustrations, their joys... We held a prayer vigil for all of us and invited others from our church. Their rent was too high for too little space...we helped them buy a house. A community of support was growing as they moved and worked hard on renovating the house. People had them over for dinner. Their sons made friends with youth in our church and throughout the school. People ate at the restaurant where he worked. We shared information from agencies and churches who had services to offer. There were medical problems; we pitched in. We had a Sunday evening dessert time and invited our congregation to hear Gabi’s story. Our support was enlarging.” Kay explained, “The Peace and Justice Ministry

started a fund to pay for the trip that Gabriel and Amy would be required to take to El Salvador for his immigration interview. They planned the prayer service they would eventually hold when they obtained the date of Gabriel’s interview in El Salvador.”

When JFON stepped in to help with a more permanent answer to Gabriel’s (Gabi) situation, attorney Ann Naffier recalls: “They knew that if Amy would apply for Gabi, he would have to return to El Salvador for his visa interview, and they were terrified both of the danger of traveling to El Salvador, and the risk of being denied and being separated from each other for years. But with JFON’s support, they decided to risk it, and started on the long process of filing a family-based petition, creating a book-long application for a “Pardon” for Gabi’s unlawful presence in the U.S., proceeding through additional applications, back-ground checks, financial affidavits, and finally culminating in Gabi’s trip back to El Salvador. Amy went with him to El Salvador, but due to unprecedented delays in getting immigration medical screenings in El Salvador, Amy had to return a month before Gabriel could even get his preliminary exam. However, on August 12th, Gabriel finally successfully obtained his visa and returned home to Iowa.”

Kay Graber relates, “And the good news! Gabi now has his legal status, a full-time job in an automobile body shop right in Mount Vernon with as much overtime as he wants, and will soon be able to get a driver’s license. In four more years, he can seek citizenship. Life is good. God is good!”

Refugee Green Card Clinics

“Hi, my name is Emily Sohn Rebelskey, and I’m the newest staff attorney at JFON. Before accepting the staff attorney position, I served as the Refugee Green Card Clinic Coordinator, helping run the Refugee Legal Clinic this past spring, summer and fall.

The RGCC has been a great success. We eliminate many barriers to permanent residency by connecting refugees with interpreters, trained volunteers and sound legal advice, all in a single appointment. Since June, we’ve helped more than 100 refugees file for permanent residency, citizenship and related benefits. We could not have done it without the help of our partner organizations, American Friends Service Committee, U.S.CRI, EMBARC and Americorps Refugee Rise, as well as 26 volunteers who generously donated their Saturdays.

Through the RGCC, Mohamud and his fiancée, a childhood friend, both fled Eritrea in 2010. While he was relocated to the U.S., she was sent to Australia. Mohamud worked hard stocking shelves at Walmart to save enough money for a visit. All was going well, and Mohamud had nearly achieved his dream. Then he was involved in a terrible car accident in late 2015. To this day he still suffers debilitating pain. Walmart fired him because he could no longer stock shelves. Medical bills drained his savings. JFON is helping him apply for citizenship which will allow him to petition for a visa to bring his fiancée to the U.S. It will ensure that he remains eligible for SSI benefits and Medicaid. With JFON’s help, Mohamud can continue with his recovery, and can pursue his dream of building a family in the U.S.