



The friends of Welcome Ministry's Table Talk English as second language conversation group.

Photo: Jeremy Kaercher

IF NOT YOU, THEN WHO? IF NOT NOW, WHEN?

the Rev. Dr. David L. Madsen | Mission Developer

PART ONE

I was recently driving on East Main in El Cajon handing out lunches to people I found on the street. A man standing by some bushes looked at me and we smiled at each other. To be honest, his demeanor was a little odd. Not scary, not threatening. Just “different.” My guess is not that many people smile at him most days. I approached, wearing my COVID-19 mask and keeping the appropriate “social distance.” I offered him a sack lunch and asked if I could pray with him. He said yes, and I did. Short prayer, short encounter. As I was walking back to my car a pickup truck passed by slowly. The driver honked his horn, pointed his finger at me, and shook his head. Clearly, he did not approve. I know the rationale—by sharing a sack lunch and a prayer I was “enabling” an irresponsible person rather than encouraging him to get off the street, get a job, and fit in “like the rest of us.”

But I understood it differently. I was sharing a lunch and my time with a person made in the image of God, a child of God. We both welcomed the other into our own space. Something that is not that easy to do lately; am I right? It felt good and right. I am not inclined to apologize for that.

I have worked with people on the streets in San Diego, Philadelphia, Denver, New York City, and places I cannot even remember without some thought. For some people on the streets, there is a way out. Maybe the offer of a job, or a friend or family member willing to try to help them get to a better place. But there are many on our streets who will never fit in. Sorry to be blunt, but it is the truth. There are people, and I met several of them that day, who will never be able to function in a way that allows them to get off the street without help. Serious help. Some suffer from mental illness. Those who have suffered chronic homelessness for years have developed a lifestyle that seems totally alien to those of us who are housed. They do their best to survive in an environment that is not friendly to them if they violate the accepted “rules of society,” which, of course, they do.



Father Dave Madsen

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I wish the guy in the pickup would take the time and effort to look a little deeper. Does anyone really think the “odd” guy standing in the bushes can simply pull himself up by his bootstraps, get a job, find a place to live, and “fit in” by just trying harder? I do not. Yet, I do believe there is a pathway to housing, to a better life—maybe not for everyone, but for many. What would Jesus do in this situation? A rhetorical question, clearly, because honestly I do not know. It does point me, however, to the shortest verse in the Bible: “Jesus wept.” Me too.

There has been an ongoing “discussion” for years in East County. It goes something like this: “They (i.e. the homeless) need to be housed. And some need to be on medication.” Yes. And maybe. But, you cannot force people to do either. Even if they find housing and a supportive program that will work with them, they may just walk away. It happens.

So we are back to “something has to be done.” Okay, but what? Those who work with the marginalized and people who live with chronic homelessness know this is difficult work. Until the infrastructure in our community is changed, not much will happen. However, we must keep asking questions and maintain the dialogue. The solution may not (will not) be cheap or easy, but we the people of Welcome Ministry want to see things change. We are committed to being agents of change, whatever it takes, to bring mercy and justice for and with the marginalized in East County.

If not you, then who? If not now, when? (Hillel)

PART TWO: HOW DO WE START?

The complex question is what can I do now—if not me, then who?—and how will it be done? Where can I plug in right now to do the work and planning that is at hand? Yes, this work will likely change over time, and my place in this work along with it. Right now it might not be the visionary place we hope to see in the future, but if not now, when? This challenge is directed to all of us, myself included.

Welcome Ministry is always eager for new faces and their skill-sets, time, and resources to join us. What about you? Do you have an idea to share, a place you would like to help with? Look at the article in on page 3 of this newsletter about volunteer opportunities. Welcome Ministry needs people to help with our *Loads of Love* laundry ministry and drivers for our refugee food pantry. We need on-line technology expertise to assist in streaming our worship services for refugees and Welcome Church. We are looking for volunteers to join our *Table Talk* group assisting those from other nations to be conversant in English as a second language. What about you? We welcome you and your ideas and questions. Please contact us.

*Blessings,
Father Dave+*

WELCOME MINISTRY CELEBRATES A NEW PARTNERSHIP

Mary Curran-Downy, a member of Welcome Ministry’s Board of Directors, recently introduced us to an amazing friend of hers. Maureen Roadman is founder of *Explore Solutions*, a local nonprofit whose mission is to “provide an affordable way for high school students and their families to shape a clear, actionable vision of their post-high school path based on individual interests, aptitudes, and financial resources.”

Mary knew that Maureen and her youth love challenges! In fact, the name of the project they embarked upon to help out our Refugee Food Pantry is called *Take the Challenge!* The volunteers are assembling bags of non-perishables—like laundry soap, dish liquid detergent, toilet paper, bath soap and toothpaste—for distribution at Welcome Ministry’s twice monthly food pantry. These items are a welcome addition to the perishable food that

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JOIN US AS A VOLUNTEER!

We rely on the gifts of the Spirit provided us through the volunteers who touch the lives of the many people who rely on Welcome Ministry. In his reflection in this newsletter, Father Dave invited you to join us as a volunteer. Your contributions of time and talents can greatly aid us.

Since mid-March every aspect of our outreach programming was affected by public health requirements related to the coronavirus. We have maintained as many elements of our ministry as possible. Many of our volunteers unfortunately have not participated as they had prior to COVID-19 because of health vulnerabilities either to themselves or others in their households. We look forward to welcoming our full volunteer corps back when we can resume the full range of our ministry.

Right now we have several areas of ministry where we need assistance. Here are some current volunteer opportunities with Welcome Ministry that we now have or would like to offer for your consideration (facial coverings are required and safe distancing is always practiced):

- **Loads of Love, Laundry Ministry** — occurs every Tuesday morning at Eco Laundry on Main Street near First Street in El Cajon. This is a chance to get to know our clients who are homeless one on one. Many caring friendships begin through this ministry:
 - register those wishing to wash their laundry, and
 - hand out quarters and laundry soap for coin operated washers.
- **Joy Force Refugee Food Pantry.** Opportunities to bag food supplies and hand them out to clients

as they pass through the line. A great way to greet others and listen to their stories.

- Join a rotation of volunteers **driving our truck to San Diego Food Bank** on the first and third Tuesdays of the month. **Requires lifting boxes of food while loading/unloading our pickup truck.**
- **Table Talk:** Welcome Ministry volunteers meet with refugees living in East County who are learning and improving their reading and conversational English skills. The group meets weekly.
- **Assist “newcomers” to our country** from different cultures throughout the world helping them understand how to file tax returns, enroll in school, open and maintain banking accounts, etc.
- **Legal assistance** for immigrants who are not acquainted with our laws.
- **On-line technology skills** are needed assisting in our livestream and recorded tele-productions of our bilingual English/Arabic worship services and other on-line ministry opportunities .
- We have **opportunities for writers** to prepare material for our newsletter, on-line media, and other communications. We are also seeking an experienced, successful grant writer.
- During the winter months volunteers **help us collect and distribute** new socks and new and gently used clean coats, sweaters, and blankets.
- We invite individuals, churches, and community groups to help us **prepare personal hygiene kits** for distribution to our neighbors who experience homelessness.

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WELCOME MINISTRY CELEBRATES A NEW PARTNERSHIP | continued

we offer through our affiliation with the San Diego Food Bank.

The youth are quite creative with raising funds for this project so that they can make their purchases. One group wrote a successful grant proposal. Another asked friends and relatives to give whatever they would like to contribute. One of the teen volunteers said, “My best friend’s little brother handed me a big wad of dollar bills.” With a smile, we’ll bet.

We would like to thank Mary, Maureen, and the energetic young scholars of **Explore Solutions** for their amazing partnership with Welcome Ministry.

WELCOME MINISTRY IN A TIME OF COVID-19

Christ is present even with social distancing and facial coverings! During the pandemic even though we cannot now worship at Wells Park our **Welcome Church** leadership team have made and distributed brown bag lunches twice a month on Sunday afternoons.

Table Talk volunteer leaders organized themselves and our refugee guests to participate in Zoom and Duo teleconferences for renewed fellowship and continued practicing of their English proficiency as they had occurred previously at St. Alban's church (**see important announcement below**).

The **Joy Force food pantry** continues to distribute free perishable food and non-perishable items to clients, most of whom are refugees. on the first and third Tuesday mornings of each month.

People experiencing homelessness need clean clothes – the pandemic makes that even more important. Our **Loads of Love Laundry ministry** has continued to operate every Tuesday morning.

Our twice-monthly **bilingual English/Arabic Mass** was suspended at the end of February. We will introduce a bilingual on-line worship experience beginning in November on the first and third Tuesdays each month.

As revised state and county health restrictions permit, Welcome Ministry will resume activities that are now suspended because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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JOIN US AS A VOLUNTEER | *continued*

We occasionally work with **clients who require special financial assistance**. While we do our best to partner with area non-profit agencies and service providers, they sometimes are unable to help. We currently have such a scholarship opportunity. A male client recently came off the street because of his health needs. His monthly benefits income is limited, meaning

that with the high cost of living in San Diego County he struggles to maintain his housing. We have assisted him, but Welcome Ministry has limited funding available to help him and others in his situation. Could you help?

For information about these (or to learn of other opportunities as they occur) please contact Father Dave Madsen by email at padredavid1@gmail.com or call him at (646) 753-1771.

Announcements...

- Our **TABLE TALK** English as second language conversation group **is meeting again** Wednesday mornings at 9:00 in the shade of the trees at St. Alban's Episcopal Church. Social distancing is observed, and facial coverings are required.
- **CORRECTION:** In some issues of our Spring 2020 newsletter Welcome Ministry Board member Sheila Buska was incorrectly identified as a member of St. Luke's Episcopal Church. She is a member of The Church of St. Luke Catholic Church.
- Will you help us help our neighbors in the continuing mission of Welcome Ministry? We welcome your tax-deductible donations through our on-line giving portal at **welcomeministryec.org** or by mail.

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WELCOME MINISTRY OF EL CAJON

is a Synodically Authorized Worshipping Community of the



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