

In Gian Carlo Menotti's operetta *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, we meet a poor shepherd boy whose life is upended by the visit of the Magi as they make their way to the newborn babe. The boy suffers from a lame leg and uses a rough stick to get around. The story offers hope and miracles, ending with the boy accompanying the Magi with the intention of offering his walking stick to Jesus as his gift of love.

Gifts of love are universal, finding their way into lives and hearts around the world, through many cultures, on many days of the year. As Christians, the great gift-giving comes at the celebration of the Incarnation of God, the birth of the Messiah, whose gift of love reaches out to every corner of the earth. Next week the Church will celebrate the Feast of the Epiphany, whose story of guests from afar remind us of God's limitless invitation to hope.

St. Mary of the Lake has offered this hope to guests from afar as well. JPOC (Justice, Peace, and Outreach Commission), with its Refugee Working Group and the Refugee Mentors, has accompanied seven Afghan refugees these past months. We have, I know, given hope to those whose lives have been upended by war and who miss their families, still in the clutch of the Taliban. Our Circle of Welcome provides structure for our many activities, from helping bring a baby home from the hospital to providing transportation to the food shelf. The rings in the circle are many. Those closest to the center demand time and availability to respond to the needs of our friends. However, there are outer circles that require simple things; help in moving furniture, finding a bicycle, organizing a collection of diapers, including immigrants and refugees in one's daily prayer. One ring that needs immediate attention is the [Afghan Adjustment Act](#), now awaiting a vote in Congress. Call your representatives and notify your friends and relatives in other states to do the same. Go to the St. Mary's website ([stmarys-wbl.org](http://stmarys-wbl.org)), find Refugees under Mission to learn more.

The birth of a child brought salvation to the world. Rebirth and hope are hanging in the balance for these seven Afghans. May we encircle them with the love we know from our good and gracious God.