

Widows, children who have lost their fathers, people alone and lonely, strangers in a strange land. These words describe many of the Afghan refugees currently living in our community. Other words? Persecuted by the Taliban government for aiding the U.S. in the Afghanistan war, brought to the U.S. legally because of their service to U.S. forces, grateful, kind, hard working, struggling to make better lives for themselves and their families.

Through New Hope Connection, volunteers from Shepherd of the Hills, along with volunteers from approximately 15 other San Antonio area churches, are assisting these refugee families in a wide range of ways, from helping them meet their basic, essential needs to providing them advice and assistance in obtaining employment, enrolling in school, and negotiating the various bureaucracies they face; from helping them learn English to helping them learn the culture and customs of America; and helping them in a myriad of other ways. I'll share one small example.

"B" is a widow whose husband was killed by the Taliban. She has five children, ages 21, 15, 9, 7, and 6. "B" works long hard hours in a frozen food packaging plant, her 21 year old daughter works at a fast food restaurant, her 15 year old daughter is a sophomore in high school, and her three young boys attend elementary school. I recently brought "B" a used sewing machine, kindly donated by my brother-in-law, who scours the flea markets looking for sewing machines to donate. The sewing machine caused quite a celebration in the family. You see, sewing machines are one of the most requested items by refugee families. Sewing machines allow families to sew not only their own clothing and other needed items, but also clothing and items that they can then sell to bring additional income into the home. A sewing machine, a small item to us, can be a life changing item for many refugee families.

In his word, Jesus tells us that the second greatest commandment is to love our neighbors as ourselves. In addition, in his great commission, he instructs us to go and make disciples of all nations. I am thankful God has provided me the opportunity to do both, for refugees who are in dire need of both. We show God's love and we speak God's love because we know our refugee friends will never know true joy until they know and trust God's plan for their salvation through his Son, our Savior and Redeemer, Jesus.