



Welcome to Your New Home

by Joya Colon-Berezin

Students of Middleton UCC's Very COOL Sunday School (VCSS) showed their commitment to putting their faith into action recently during their "*I've Got it to Give it*" Service Project Day. These days are designated for students to consider more deeply what it means to share the gifts God has given us. Together they created a banner that will be used to welcome newly arrived refugees who are resettled in this country. The banner – an outward sign of God's love - reads "Welcome to Your New Home."

Creating the banner was the culmination of several weeks devoted to learning about the plight of refugees, and the ministry of welcoming displaced people regardless of religious or ethnic background. To help deepen their understanding, VCSS invited a refugee family from Iraq, Raphael Al Rubaye and his two daughters (Yosser, age 7 and Shaimah, age 3) to share a bit of their personal journey, and answer questions. "I've never really met anyone that was a refugee before," reflected Sophie Pop-Vicas, a VCSS student in 5th grade. "Talking with them helped me learn more about them. It was hard for them to leave everything behind and come to the U.S. And I think God was there too, helping us, and encouraging us to be with each other. It was fun. It makes me feel good to make other people feel welcome!"

And that's not all. VCSS families spent several weeks collecting items for a "*Refugee Welcome*" Bathroom and Kitchen Supply Drive. These supplies will be donated to a local refugee resettlement agency, Lutheran Social Service of Wisconsin. This agency works tirelessly to ensure that new refugees arriving in Madison area have all the things they need to make a new home and a fresh start. "As the children packed supplies, they sang the theme song for their service project, which includes the lyrics 'I've Got it to Give.' It is about the love and peace they hope to share," said Janet Ruszalla-Coughlin, Children's Music Director. MCC is also gearing up to collect a Christmas offering to support refugees. All the money collected will be passed on Church World Service, to support their life saving work of advocacy and relief to refugees worldwide.

In times of despair the light of hope shines ever more brightly. And sometimes it is the youngest among us who are holding the candles.