

# Refugee Ministry

A Validated Ministry  
of the  
American Baptist  
Churches  
of  
New York State

TABERNACLE  
BAPTIST  
CHURCH OF

Rev. Dr. Mark S. Caruana,  
Pastor

*A Community of  
Faith and Love*



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The Refugee Ministry of Tabernacle Baptist Church was formed in late 2000 to help the congregation minister to the first ethnic Karen refugees to arrive in Utica from the Burma-Thai border. In 2004, with the presence of several African families from Sudan, The Republic of Congo, and Liberia, the ministry's focus expanded. We try to be helpful and welcoming to all the refugees in our midst, but we give special attention to newcomers and those who have limited English.

**THE KARENS:** the Karen Community at Tabernacle now numbers 36 families with approximately 175 individuals. All are refugees who have fled the persecution of the brutal military regime that rules Burma (Myanmar). Although there are other Christian and Buddhist Karens

in Utica, Tabernacle has become the spiritual, social and cultural center for the core of the community. Working with the Mohawk Valley Resource Center for Refugees, we have welcomed 102 newcomers in 2004 and expect another large influx in 2005.

**PASTORAL CARE:** the Reverend Dr. Augustus Spurgeon, an ethnic Karen pastor from Burma, currently residing in Rochester, provides pastoral care to the Karen Community three weekends per month. In the early 1990's Pastor Spurgeon completed his doctorate at Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School in Rochester. He then returned to Burma where he served as an executive minister with responsibility for a large association of churches. Because of his work with IDP's (internally



displaced persons) and proclamations on human rights, he came under the scrutiny of Burma's intelligence services. In 2004, Dr. Spurgeon and his family fled their native land. They eventually made their way to Rochester. Tabernacle is presently working with a coalition of regional and national denominational partners, local congregations, and concerned individuals to raise the support necessary for Dr. Spurgeon to move to Utica and begin ministry to the Karen Community on a more consistent basis.

**THE CARING CORNER** exists to supplement the church's spiritual care with a program ministering to the physical needs of refugees. Clothing, household items and small furniture in good condition are donated by church members and community friends. These are stored, sorted and displayed in the Sanctuary balcony. Through a partnership with Compassion Coalition (a local food pantry ministry) we purchase bulk quantities of food, toiletries, paper goods and diapers at a minimum cost. Since only edibles can be purchased with food stamps, these items are both necessary and highly prized.

**HOME MAINTENANCE COURSE:** A grant received from American Baptist Churches/USA One Great Hour of Sharing in 2004 enabled us to provide 24 hours of instruction for twelve refugees in basic home repair and maintenance. In addition, we presented each student with a set of basic tools upon completion of the course.

**TELLING THE STORY:** The Karen Community is eager to share its story of trial, perseverance, and faith. The Karen have an especially rich tradition of beautiful music and dance. The Refugee Ministry has assisted the Karen Community in presenting programs at the 2002 Biennial Meeting of the American Baptist Churches of New York State, the Children's Museum of Utica, the Schweinfurth Art Center in Auburn, a Summer Union Worship Service in Hamilton, and at the World Concerns Fair sponsored by First Baptist Church, Hamilton. In 2005, the Karen Community will share its story at the Mohawk/Oneida Baptist Association Annual Meeting, the Iroquois Baptist Association Annual Meeting, Tully Community Church, and the Schweinfurth Art Center.

**VALIDATED MINISTRY:** In 2004, the American Baptist Churches of New York State designated this outreach a *validated ministry* of the 329 member church region. This designation recognizes that the ministry with refugees Tabernacle Baptist of Utica is spearheading has significance beyond its local community. It also enables local American Baptist congregations to financially support the ministry through the ABC/USA mission support process.

## How Can I Support The Refugee Ministry?

- **VOLUNTEER**— Volunteers are needed for a wide variety of tasks: assisting in the Caring Corner, transporting furniture and household goods, accompanying refugees to appointments, introducing refugees to a new culture, teaching English language skills, and simply being a friend in a new country.
- **DONATE**— Items needed include: clothing for men, women, teens, children, and babies; outerwear; furniture; household items; tableware; cooking pots and utensils; working televisions and vcr's; car seats; and automobiles. Donations are tax deductible.
- **GIVE**— The need always far exceeds our budget! Your gifts of financial support will make a difference in the lives of some of the most recent arrivals in our community. Make your check payable to: *Tabernacle Baptist Church — Refugee Ministry*. All gifts are tax deductible. You will receive a confirmation of your contribution for tax purposes.
- **HELP SPREAD THE WORD**— If you are a member of an American Baptist congregation, encourage your church to add the Refugee Ministry to its mission budget. If you are a member of a charitable or service organization, encourage your organization to support the Refugee Ministry.

**For more information, please contact:**

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