

# Welcome House provides refugees temporary haven

Welcoming the stranger is a biblical injunction, and St. Andrews Lutheran Church in Columbia takes it seriously.

A staunch supporter of Lutheran Services Carolinas refugee services program, St. Andrews members not only support LSC financially but in a very tangible way.

When the church decided to discontinue using a parsonage on its grounds, the congregation recognized an opportunity to partner with LSC by transforming the building into a home to provide housing to newly arrived refugees. Called Welcome House, the home provides refugees with a place to live on a short-term basis while LSC arranges permanent housing.

Welcome House is a real home. There are dishes,

bedding, curtains, a computer, and even a playground for the children.

Welcome House has been a temporary haven for people of many different nations, including Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Myanmar, and Congo, says the Rev. John Trump, pastor of St. Andrews. Trump recalls one remarkable instance in which a Muslim family fleeing Christian persecution was living in Welcome House at the same time as a Christian family fleeing Muslim persecution.

The congregation of St. Andrews has been very supportive, Trump says. Besides maintaining the house, members invite residents to events at the church, especially those involving food, and church members often deliver toys and meals to the families who live there.

“Our job is to supply the house,” Trump says, adding that other churches do the longer-term work of sponsoring the families who transition through Welcome House. Trump wants to encourage other churches with a vacant parsonage to use Welcome House as a model.

Occasionally, Trump admits, he finds himself reminding church members that “ministry is messy.” He says he’s sorry that the current political climate has cast a shadow over resettlement efforts by confusing fear for facts. Despite both political and practical challenges – like the inescapable need for repairs and renovations – welcoming refugees is profoundly rewarding for a congregation, he says.

