Amid increased detention and deportations, and scarce federal funding, immigration ministry has had to adapt. Episcopal churches and ministries continue to "welcome the stranger." They've had to pivot, like St. Bede's Episcopal Church in Atlanta did recently by canceling its Fiesta Latina because of "numerous immigration enforcement threats in the area."

"We care for our members and neighbors and do not wish to put anyone in harm's way unnecessarily," the church said in the cancellation.

To keep lifting up people from other countries who are facing poverty and oppression, Episcopal ministries in Middle and North Georgia are adapting. Small actions can make a big difference now more than ever.

The need is growing nationally. Each week, 300 leaders and volunteers will attend calls in English and Spanish led by Episcopal Migration Ministries (EMM) who shares policy updates and effective responses. Pivoting can mean accompanying someone to immigration hearings or picking up groceries for someone afraid to appear in public.

"The Episcopal Church does have people on all sides of every issue, but regardless of personal politics, I think that The Episcopal Church agrees and really lives into the respecting the dignity of every human being," EMM Director Rev. Sarah Shipman told ECF. "Even when our politics aren't the same, we are still caring for our neighbor."

Aid Refugees and Immigrants Already Connected to Your Church

A church doesn't need to start a new ministry for immigrants and refugees; instead, consider those being served by nearby churches and their specific needs. Several Atlanta area parishes are pivoting by investing more time and recruiting more volunteers. For those serving, this extra work produces more profound spiritual experiences.

In Athens this fall, St. Gregory the Great Episcopal Church joined the March of Faith in Resistance to Mass Deportation. In Atlanta, All Saints' Episcopal Church recruits and supports volunteer teams who are essential partners to 65 refugee families. And at St. Dunstan's Episcopal Church in Atlanta has a team of six core volunteers who support a family of 12 from Cameroon. The parish has extended a six-month commitment to a year after discovering the family's pressing needs mastering English.

"Every now and then the team would say to each other, 'This is hard. This is more than what we bargained for,'" said team lead Suzanne Johnson. "But nobody wanted to bail, and the interest from our broader congregation also remained high."

A weekly Zoom conversation with a refugee learning English, or a car donation, can make a big difference to refugees. Advocating politically is also important, Johnson said.

"This is what we are called to be as Christians — especially in this bleak time in our country," Johnson said. "We have the great fortune of being where we can make a big difference, not for millions of people, but for these 12 people, and we are changing their lives."

Educate and Inspire Your Parish for Immigration Ministry

Mindset matters, too. At St. Dunstan's, ministering to refugees is an opportunity, and the team is sharing their knowledge with others. Outreach leaders from St. Anne's Episcopal Church in Atlanta shadowed the St. Dunstan's

refugee team and met the Cameroon family's neighbors: a large family from Burundi with no community sponsorship. Despite lacking language skills, St. Anne's volunteers stepped in using Google Translate.

A QR code in St. Anne's monthly newsletter raised funds for store gift cards so the family could buy clothing. The parish promoted the refugee parents' work skills, to help them find jobs. St. Anne's also hosted speakers from refugee ministries, and invited everyone to "come learn how we can live into the Gospel call to welcome the stranger."

Resources & Church-Wide Survey

- EMM serves dioceses, parishes, and Episcopalians working directly with immigrants and refugees. Find out more here.
- ECF grants support partnerships and projects related to refugees and immigrants in Middle and North Georgia. More information here.
- The Episcopal Diocese of Atlanta offers these immigration resources.
- Help ensure inclusion, support, and shared ministry with immigrants throughout The Episcopal Church by responding to this survey by January 2, 2026. It aims to help churches recognize the presence of immigrants in their congregations without focusing on their immigration status.

Michelle Hiskey (she/her) is an experienced writer and journalist whose work has appeared in the New York Times, Washington Post and AJC, and earned four Pulitzer Prize nominations. She ghostwrote two business books related to negotiation strategies, and coaches writers including Emory faculty. Michelle is a member at St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church.

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