

Understanding the atmosphere of deep insecurity currently facing our refugee and migrant neighbors is essential. However, it's easy to feel overwhelmed when headlines about U.S. immigration are often confusing and constantly shifting.

[The Rev. Mark S. Johnson](#) has navigated this world as an immigration attorney for 20 years. While he is also an Episcopal priest in the Diocese of Atlanta, he views the current crisis through the lens of a legal expert who sees the daily fallout of policy on human lives. In a world of shifting laws, he advises that the most powerful thing everyone can offer is a “hello” and a commitment to see the person behind the headline.

Navigating the Climate of Fear for Refugees and Migrants

The most significant change in recent years isn't just a specific law. It's a pervasive sense of insecurity affecting every category of refugee and migrant. In the past, those with legal status felt a level of certainty; today, that has largely evaporated.

“The current environment has made all immigrants, and even people who were really no longer immigrants—people who have green cards, people who are naturalized citizens—has made them feel insecure,” Johnson said in a recent interview with ECF.

“Afraid for their future, for their families. You know, ‘What’s going to happen if I go to the grocery store, am I going to get picked up? If I take my kids to the school, am I going to get picked up?’”

This insecurity affects many types of people: professionals, essential workers, and families who have lived in Georgia for decades. Even those whose children are essentially American teenagers.

Where Legal Support Reaches Its Limit

Attorneys handle courtrooms and paperwork. But Johnson said the community is best positioned to clear some of the vast practical hurdles:

- **Food Scarcity:** Many neighbors are now afraid to visit grocery stores, leading to a huge jump in visitors to local food pantries.
- **Acclimation:** Refugees and immigrants often lack the basic community connections needed to find a doctor or enroll children in school.
- **Navigating Essentials:** Simple guidance on catching the bus or explaining local economic and cultural systems can be life changing.
- **Isolation:** [Labels](#) like “asylee” often strip away the humanity of the individual, making them feel like a number rather than a neighbor.

Deep Listening: A Tool for Reconciliation

Meaningful action starts with “deep listening,” an acquired skill that requires presence over the urge to fix issues.

Johnson noted that this means hearing someone's story without forcing them into uncomfortable areas or applying

assumptions based on their status. Allow the other person to lead the conversation and ask open-ended questions. By doing this, you validate their humanity and meet a basic human need. Racial reconciliation work often leans into deep listening.

Fighting Insecurity and Taking the First Step

Everyone can do something. Consider opportunities like volunteering at a food pantry or assisting with English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) instruction. Johnson suggests reaching out to established service organizations to see what they need. He offers [Georgia Asylum and Immigration Network](#), the [Latin American Association](#), and [New American Pathways](#) as some examples.

“You’re much more likely to become invested for the long term when you know people who are personally affected,” Johnson said. “By getting to know people and getting to know their stories, you go beyond that into something that not only affects them, but affects you at a personal, at a spiritual and emotional level.”



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