

## **Alexandra Stephens, Refugee Resettlement Leader, All Saints-Redding**

Alexandra co-founded Redding Refugee Sponsor Circle, an interfaith group in Redding, to address the needs of refugees. Here is her story.



*I'm Alex Stephens from All Saints' in Redding, one of the founders of an interfaith group focused on local refugee resettlement. Almost exactly two years ago, a member of my church, Bill Rich, planted the seeds of our mission when he presented a workshop examining the global issue of migration and displacement. Our small group was horrified by the images we saw and the stories we heard; recalling that Jesus, Mary, and Joseph were refugees in Egypt, we asked ourselves what we could do. It was then that Bob Wohlsen, who had been attending our meetings, mentioned that groups all over the country were beginning to form sponsor circles – community partnerships designed to welcome and resettle newcomers fleeing from danger and persecution in their own homelands. We looked into this option, and with God's help, what began as a small group of 8 grew within a few months to a sponsor circle of 44 community members coming from a variety of faith backgrounds. Since our founding, we've successfully assisted 23 newcomers from Ukraine and the Middle East in finding housing, medical care, education, transportation, and friends in Redding -- and we are planning to keep the momentum going by welcoming a new family later this year. Although my fellow group members and I have put in some long hours and suffered some sleepless nights, we've also witnessed miracles and experienced mountaintop moments of joy in our work – and we derive strength from knowing we can lean on one another and on our faith when times get tough. The Holy Spirit is busy in this group! Another source of inspiration is scripture, particularly this passage from John 16:23-24 : “Very truly I tell you, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.... Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.” Beyond the many hours of planning and hard work, It takes courage to reach out of your comfort zone to create a sponsor circle, but there is no greater joy or inspiration than encountering Christ in the people we serve.*

