

JONATHAN HOUSE

Two Churches, One Home

There had been a stirring at Awaken Covenant Community in St. Paul, Minnesota, about refugee ministry. Associate pastor Jenna Daniels met with International Association for Refugees (IAFR) president Tom Albinson and his wife, Donna, both longtime Covenanters and current members at Awaken. “As Tom spoke about his work with refugees, it felt as though he had been reading my diary,” says Daniels. “Everything I had been holding, discerning, and praying about as it related to outreach at Awaken was addressed—like all of the rivers were joining.”

IAFR wanted to start a housing ministry for asylum seekers called Jonathan House, and Daniels was convinced that Awaken could help. Knowing it was a radical amount to ask for, Daniels submitted a request of \$10,000 for Jonathan House. The young church was not yet in a position to approve such funds, so she wasn’t surprised when she did not receive the funding. A week later, however, a family from Awaken’s church plant, Awaken East, said they had been planning a home renovation for many years, but felt that God was leading them to give that money—\$10,000—to support Jonathan House.

Daniels then met with Anne Vining, senior pastor of First Covenant Church in St. Paul, who had seen a growing interest in outreach to refugees in her church. First Covenant had already approved funding to renovate their two-bedroom parsonage for an incoming staff person. The new hire did not need housing, however, and the parsonage was unexpectedly available. Within two weeks Daniels and Vining gathered leaders from IAFR and the two churches to share dreams and ideas for the parsonage to be used to house asylum seekers. With the support of their congregations, the churches formed a partnership with IAFR and Jonathan House became a reality.

“Jenna has been providing leadership to her congregation as their vision for ministering to asylum seekers continues to grow. She brought three entities together,” says Vining. “We’ve had to just hold on as God’s Spirit leads the way for volunteers, resources, a common heart to serve ‘the foreigners in our land,’ and a newly renovated parsonage—to all come together to address the critical need of housing for displaced people.”

Jonathan House, with space for up to four men, opened in November. Residents from Liberia, Lebanon, and Palestine are learning more about each other’s stories and figuring out how to do life together. One of the men has been attending First Covenant for some time, and since January, one of his Muslim housemates has been joining him.

“There’s this budding partnership between two congregations—one 144 years old and the other eight years old—joining together to respond to God’s call to befriend the foreigner,” says Daniels. “Too often we forget that the people of God throughout the biblical narrative are displaced people—Hagar, David, Israel, Jacob. We belong to each other and to God. Might we remember our roots in the midst of this refugee crisis where displacement for many is real life.”



Gabriel from Liberia moved into Jonathan House in November.

AWAKEN COVENANT COMMUNITY CHURCH

St. Paul, Minnesota

WEEKLY ATTENDANCE: 450

ORGANIZED: 2010

WEBSITE: awakencommunity.com

FIRST COVENANT CHURCH

St. Paul, Minnesota

WEEKLY ATTENDANCE: 250

ORGANIZED: 1874

WEBSITE: first-covenant.org