

# NAD NEWS BRIEFS



← The AMFA Peace of Thread Chattanooga sewing class meets before the COVID-19 pandemic forced the group to stop meeting in person. *Pieter Damsteegt*

## REFUGEE CHILDREN'S SUMMER CAMP LEADS TO COMMUNITY LEARNING

**Adventist Muslim Friendship Association helps immigrant and refugee women learn new skills, earn income.**

**E**very summer Adventist Muslim Friendship Association (AMFA), a North American Division-based initiative located near Chattanooga, Tennessee, provides a summer school for children of refugee families in the area. According to AMFA, the goal is to help integrate refugee children into the United States in a godly way.

In 2016, around the same time that AMFA's summer classes for children started, leaders in AMFA began to discuss activity options for the mothers that brought their children to summer programs. That first summer included English and geography classes, hiking, and some crocheting classes for mothers. The following summer, after observing another organization, Peace of Thread At-

lanta, which taught women to sew bags and purses, AMFA expanded the summer program to include sewing classes.

"When we sent out word, we expected maybe a half dozen women to come to the classes," said Nema Johnson, who helped spearhead the sewing program. "By the end of the first week of sewing, I had more women interested in learning how to sew than the number of borrowed sewing machines we had."

After those four weeks of summer classes attended by more than a dozen women, there was much interest in continuing the sewing classes. The group has met every other week since.

The full process from start to finish involves church members and students from the Chattanooga area cutting donated fabric, then, at the

actual biweekly sewing class, the women work with the precut cloth to craft beautiful purses and various bags. Purse parties are held on the weekends around the suburbs of Chattanooga. During the purse parties the refugee women can make money for their families by selling the purses they have crafted.

The sewing class, held every other week, typically starts with discussion and sharing, followed by an opening prayer. Then the women work to learn a new purse design. They either finish the project during that class or take it home to continue to work on their projects until the next meeting time.

"It takes a bit of a learning curve for the women to make high-quality purses. We're not just talking about putting material together and sewing to get money," said Darleen Handal, local area coordinator for AMFA. "We're doing a service. We're creating a piece of art."

### COVID-19 Impact

When the COVID-19 pandemic caused businesses and churches to shut their doors across the state, the women adapted the way they work and socialize as a community. "Initially the whole thing got put on hold [while we were] trying to figure out what to do," said Johnson. "But then we started to meet every week [virtually]."

Shortly after the lockdown began in March, Johnson designed some masks that could be sewn by the women. The first goal of this next endeavor was to ensure that

## An Interfaith, Multiconference “Virtual Freedom Ride” Champions Prayer and Activism

**F**aith leaders, government officials, and activists advocated for prayer, social justice, and community empowerment in response to the national outcry over the death of George Floyd by law enforcement through a “virtual freedom ride.” From June 14 to 21 Miles to Minneapolis took viewers on Facebook and YouTube on the virtual journey from the east coast to the midwest. The “stops” included Columbia, Maryland; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Cleveland and Columbus, Ohio; Detroit, Michigan; Chicago, Illinois; and Minneapolis, Minnesota. The ride ended where Floyd was killed.

Leaders from the Potomac Conference, Allegheny East Conference, Allegheny West Conference, Lake Region Conference, Central States Conference, Minnesota Conference, Mid-America and Lake union conferences, and the North American Division Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Department collaborated to find speakers for the campaign. Every stop featured representatives of different faiths, including Islam, Judaism, and Sikhism. Ministers of various Protestant denominations also participated along with Adventist church leaders.

“Miles to Minneapolis is more than an event. It’s a movement to effect positive change in our communities,” said Debra Anderson, communication director for the Potomac Conference, who also served as the communication director for Miles to Minneapolis.



↑ Adventist pastors and other denominational church leaders address viewers at the first stop of the Miles to Minneapolis virtual freedom ride in Columbia, Maryland. *Screenshot of the Miles to Minneapolis broadcast*

While Miles to Minneapolis was centered on prayer and faith, another instrumental component was encouraging community engagement. This led to the creation of a pledge that leaders at every location were encouraged to share with their viewers. Participants pledged five actions: engage in public service; vote and get counted (through the U.S. Census 2020); become culturally informed; learn a new trade and/or support Black businesses; and take charge of one’s health.

Miles to Minneapolis began as a prompting of the Holy Spirit between three Adventist friends with a history of activism—Yolanda “Yoki” Banfield, Rockefeller “Rocky” Twyman, and Bill Ellis.

Banfield and Twyman looped into their discussions their longtime friend Ellis, who is also passionate about community activism. Ellis was already starting to brainstorm ways of assisting protesters within social distancing guidelines required because of the COVID-19 pandemic. When the three of them spoke, they knew whatever they did needed to center on prayer.

—Mylon Medley, NAD Office of Communication

the women had masks for their families. A disinfecting process was put in place. After they run the donated fabric and materials through a sterilization process, Johnson takes those fabric batches to the women’s homes and leaves them on the porch. The women then disinfect the containers and bags before using the cloth for sewing projects.

“Right now they’re selling the masks on their own, because we can’t have purse parties,” said Handal. “It’s a challenge because we

don’t have people cutting fabric right now.”

The group is still making specialty bags and purses, though the process has been slowed because of the additional steps and safety precautions put in place. “For the most part we are moving forward, so praise the Lord,” said Johnson. “All the women who were meeting before are still meeting [virtually], and we still have a waiting list of other refugee women wanting to join.”

While AMFA isn’t going to host a summer school for kids this year,

they will be trying something new. They will be bringing kits to the children’s families with activities based on Creation, learning about one day of Creation each week.

Peace of Thread Chattanooga, inspired by Peace of Thread Atlanta, hopes to be able to meet in person again. But in the meantime, both they and AMFA will continue to build community virtually by supporting families in Chattanooga in socially distanced ways.

—Pieter Damsteegt,  
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