

FEBRUARY 26

“My name is not ‘refugee.’” She spoke with confidence, with certainty.

“My name is not ‘refugee,’” she said. “Call me by my name. My name is Grace.”

We sat in the airy and bright atrium of a hotel, engaged in an interview that started mildly but soon became a tour de force. A declaration. A stand. My colleague, the communications manager for Episcopal Migration Ministries, and I stood convicted. This vibrant, strong young woman, in one deft and powerful phrase, shifted our thinking, our approach, our language.

Language matters, this young woman was saying. She was uniquely qualified to know this, fluent as she was in a half dozen languages—not uncommon for many refugees. Language matters a great deal. We live into what we say. Words are self-fulfilling prophecies. When we call a person “refugee,” we attach layers and categories to the word and the person. We assign vulnerability and not strength, needs and not resources, weakness and not agency.

When we call someone “stranger,” we “other” them. When we call someone “refugee” or “immigrant,” we forget that we too were strangers in the land of Egypt. That Jesus, our Lord and God, when he was but a child, lived as a refugee too.

When next you find yourself inclined to see someone you don’t know as stranger, take a moment’s pause. Perhaps wave in greeting. Perhaps say hello and ask, “How are you?” A small bit

of kindness, a small gesture of welcome, may go a long way—not only for the person you greet but for your own soul. You may, in fact, begin to find your understanding of neighbor shifting and growing. You may begin to see and find God in places you did not look before.

—ALLISON DUVAL