

WE SAVED REGINA!

Regina and David Bakala have asylum!

Celebration of Thanksgiving!

Sunday, April 15, 2007, 3:30 P.M.

St. Mary Church, 9520 W. Forest Home Ave., Hales Corners

Update, April 4, 2007

On Monday, April 2, 2007, at precisely 10:29 a.m., Immigration Judge O. John Brahos turned to David and Regina. "I'm pleased to grant your joint application for asylum and I hope you will have a long and happy life in the U.S." He added that one year from this day they should apply for permanent residency and five years later, they would be eligible for naturalization as U.S. citizens. The Congolese couple broke into tears – as did all of us in the courtroom. As they hugged each other, we in the gallery broke into applause.

I (Sister Josephe Marie) cried for sheer relief. Tracy Borgardt and Bob Mutranowski of the Save Regina Committee stepped aside, encouraging me to be the first through the courtroom gate to hug them. Within moments, everyone was part of the happy, tearful, hugging melee. Throughout the hour-long proceedings, Judge Brahos had worn a gentle smile. After I went to the bench to thank him, he said, "Happy Easter, Sister!" I leaned in closer, "Your Honor, this is it – this *is* Easter!"

As we stepped outside onto busy Monroe Street with the noisy EL rumbling over nearby Wabash, Milwaukee's TV cameras were rolling. That night, Channel 12 led their 6 o'clock newscast with Regina and David throwing up their hands and laughing, "We're home! We're home!" (You can read the Milwaukee Journal's coverage at: <http://www.jsonline.com/story/index.aspx?id+585306>.)

Our first phone call was to St. Mary's School to ask the principal, Jeanne Siegenthaler, to tell first-grader Lydia and kindergartener Christopher that their Mommy and Daddy could stay in America. Plans were quickly made for a 2:15 celebration in church and the media was notified. Lydia got the privilege of distributing 400 American flags to the children and many classes made banners as well. As the kids filed across the gathering space into church, we stood far to one side in a corner. When Lydia caught sight of her Mommy, she ran across the gathering space and leapt into her arms, wrapping arms and legs around her.

Christopher was more subdued, even sober. But the next morning, he asked, "So, it's over now?" "Yes, Christopher, it's over," said Regina. "We're going to stay together, all of us, right here in the United States." His eyes got huge. He twirled into dance and began singing. Mr. Mutranowski later saw Lydia walking into school. "Hey, Lydia, how's it going?" The usually somber little girl swirled around. "I'm just great!" she grinned.

Please come on Sunday, April 15, to celebrate with all of us!