

JPIC Corner

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Coordinator's Note

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The Plight of Refugees

We are all familiar with the migration of the Holy Family to Egypt because of Herod's edict to kill all males ages two and under. Scripture does not reveal how Jesus, Mary, and Joseph fared in the foreign land, or whether the Egyptians received them kindly or with hostility. But we do know they had become refugees, fleeing from conflict.

Not much has changed since the time of the Holy Family and their ancestors. Across the globe today, millions of people are forced to leave their homelands on account of persecution, war, violence, extreme poverty, political instability, social opinions, religious and ethnic discrimination, and even from natural disasters. These people migrate hoping to live a better life with dignity and respect.

Most refugees are poor and cannot afford to have sponsors from other nations to bring them security. Many of them are held in refugee camps for extended periods before they are permitted resettlement. The toll is heavy on these people. Refugees are exiled persons who depend totally on the mercy of others. For refugees, it is a matter of survival rather than development. They must live in restricted places. Although free medical attention and education are required, these cannot provide full service. Additionally, within poorer nations, the refugees can be victims of violence, rape, and abuse. (For an example, see [Refugees: Life in Camps - Part 1](#)). A nation that accepts refugees must remember that it is their duty to accept these exiled and "help them to integrate them into itself as new members." (Pope John

Photo for illustration only.



Can you imagine if you were forced to leave your home, country, job (or school), and friends to escape persecution? We are called to help refugees rebuild their lives.

XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, no. 106.) Doing so is an expression of solidarity where we are all recognized as brothers and sisters in the human family. Pope Benedict XVI affirms that

human brotherhood is the, at times surprising, experience of a relationship that unites, of a profound bond with the other, different from me, based on the simple fact of being human beings.

Continued next page

Did You Know?

- **Worldwide, more than 43 million people are displaced. 15.4 million are refugees.**
- **Developing countries host 80% of the world's refugees. Pakistan, Iran and Syria have the largest refugee populations.**
- **Among industrialized countries, Germany hosts the largest number of refugees.**
- **68% of the 10.55 million refugees under the mandate of the UNHCR have been waiting in exile for five years or longer. (2010)**

Coordinator's, Continued...

Assumed and lived responsibly, it fosters a life of communion and sharing with all and in particular with migrants; it supports the gift of self to others, for their good, for the good of all, in the local, national, and world political communities. All, therefore, belong to one family, migrants and the local populations that welcome them, and all have the same right to enjoy the goods of the earth whose destination is universal, as the social doctrine of the Church teaches. It is here that solidarity and sharing are founded. (*Message of His Holiness Benedict XVI for the 97th World Day of Migrants and Refugees* (2011))

In a certain sense, we can say that we are all refugees, in the spiritual sense of searching for our true homeland which is with God. Caring for the refugees in our world today is thus a way of living out this spiritual reality in a concrete way, by helping the displaced find peace and security in this world.

[See article online](#)



Photo for illustration only

Above: A refugee camp in northern Sudan. Many refugees live in camps for years, waiting to be resettled.

Ideas for Parishes

Raise awareness and promote unity in diversity

- [Suggestions for homilies](#)
- [Ideas for Schools, Religious Education and Youth Programs](#)
- [Bulletin Quotes and Clip Art](#)

Host a drive for frequently needed items

Hosting a drive for items frequently needed by a newly arrived family can make a great project for youth or social ministry groups. Contact the resettlement program in your area and see what items they need most (and have room for), such as linens or personal hygiene items. Then schedule and host a drive for needed items.

The Catholic Church Helps Resettle Refugees

The Catholic Church plays a crucial role in resettling refugees, utilizing a network of over 100 diocesan offices in the United States, Guam and Puerto Rico.

Each year, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops/Migration and Refugee Services (USCCB/MRS), in partnership with its affiliates and the US Department of State/Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, resettles about 30% of incoming refugees. In FY 2010, they helped resettle over 20,000

refugees. The USCCB is also one of two lead voluntary agencies that assist the Office of Refugee Resettlement (a division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families) with the unaccompanied refugee minor program.

Caring for refugees is one way we live out our call to be in solidarity with others. Do you want to get involved with this important work? Use the [interactive map](#) on the USCCB/MRS website to find

out what programs are available in your state. Then contact your local program to see how you can help. Remember, volunteers can make a big difference in the lives of refugees, by welcoming them and helping them transition and settle into their new home.

Read the statement of the US Bishops: [Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity](#)

(Also in brochure format)

Who Is a Refugee?

“A refugee is a person who has fled his or her country of origin because of past persecution or a fear of future persecution based upon race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group.”

Source: [U.S. Citizen and Immigration Services](#)



Photo for illustration only

A child in a camp in Sudan for internally displaced persons.

Quick Facts About Refugees

According to the 2010 Global Trends report, more than 43 million people are displaced worldwide, including 15.4 million refugees. (For an overview of the difference between a refugee, internally displaced person, and an immigrant, please see *Who Is a Refugee: Definitions at a Glance* on page 6.)

It is important to remember that refugees do not voluntarily leave their country of origin. Rather, they are forced to flee because of persecution based on their race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group.

So where do these people who are fleeing persecution go? What countries host them? In 2010, 80% of the world's refugees were being hosted by developing countries, and the countries with the largest refugee populations were Pakistan, Syria and Iran. Pakistan alone hosts 1.9 million refugees. Among industrialized nations, Germany has the largest refugee population at 594,000 people.

After fleeing their country of origin, refugees often have to wait a long time in their host country to find out where and when they can resettle permanently. Many refugees must wait years before they can find a permanent home and start rebuilding their lives. In 2010, 7.2 million (68%) of the 10.55 million refugees under the mandate of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had been waiting in exile for five years or longer, and some refugees have been waiting for 30 years.

Refugees in the United States

Refugees enter the United States legally, after undergoing an extensive screening process. Since 1975, the United States has resettled approximately 2.6 million refugees.

The number of refugees that can be admitted to the United States is set each year by the President of the United States, in consultation with Congress and various federal agencies. The number of refugees who are actually admitted each year varies. After the terrorist attacks on September

11, 2001, there was a drastic decline in the number of refugees admitted, from 94,000 in FY 2000 to only 39,000 in FY 2003. Since then the number of refugees who have come to the United States each year has risen. In FY 2010, a total of 73,311 refugees were resettled in the United States.

About 30% of the refugees who arrive to the United States each year are resettled by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops/Migration and Refugee Services (in partnership with

affiliates and the U.S. State Department). Refugees who come to this country have suffered great loss and are faced with starting over in a new country. They need our help at first, with clothing, food, shelter, employment, English classes, and adjusting to a new community and culture. Helping meet their initial needs makes a long term difference; after only six months in the U.S., refugees tend to have a high rate of employment.

“For I was a stranger and you welcomed me.” (Matthew 25:35)

Want to help? [Find a diocesan office in your state](#) that helps resettle refugees.



Photo for illustration only

Would your teenager be interested in helping organize a “Welcome Kit” drive?

Volunteering doesn't just help others. It can also help us. We often feel a certain sense of joy just by knowing that we were able to positively influence the life of another, and working with people from other cultures can provide many learning opportunities. Above all, volunteering gives us a chance to practice the Catholic Social Teaching of solidarity, and to live out the values of the Gospel in our daily lives.

As parents, we are often concerned about sharing our faith with our children. Volunteering as a family provides an excellent opportunity to discuss the teachings of the Gospels and the Church. Encouraging your children to volunteer is one way to encourage them to live a life based on Gospel values and to come to a deeper understanding of their faith.

Volunteer

Volunteers can make a big difference in the lives of refugees, by welcoming them and helping them settle in to their new home. Yet refugees aren't the only ones who benefit when we reach out to help them. Don't be surprised if you find your own life enriched through your volunteer experience. Below are some ways you might be able to help by volunteering. Please remember that needs may vary, so always check with your local organization (such as Catholic Charities) first.

Teach English

Do you like to help others learn? Helping a newcomer to our country learn English helps that person and his/her family be able to find employment, better navigate essential tasks such as going to the store or taking their children to the doctor, and in general, begin to feel more comfortable and able to participate in their new community.

Help set up their new home

Are you able to help move items or are you interested in home decor? Organizations that resettle refugees, such as Catholic Charities, often need help setting up the home or apartment for a person or family who will arrive soon. Volunteers may be needed to pick up furniture that was donated, unpack and put away dishes and linens, and in general, prepare the apartment so that it is ready and welcoming once the family arrives.

Be a friend

Refugees have to leave their homes, friends, jobs, and often even members of their family behind. They have to adjust to a new country and culture, and often a new language. If you were in that situation, wouldn't you really want a friend? If you are able to commit for a few hours a week for several weeks, consider volunteering to be a friend to a newly arrived family. You can help them practice English, learn how to use public transportation, explore their new community (such as parks, the library, the post office, etc.) and above all, to know that someone cares about them.

Other ideas

Remember, there are many ways that you might be able to help, and specific volunteer opportunities will depend on the needs of your local community. Some organizations may also need people to help newly arrived refugees prepare for their first job, assist school age children with their homework, and much more.

How We Can Help Welcome Refugees



Helping make sure that a newly arrived family has all the basic household items is one way of saying, "Welcome."



Why not give a refugee family a housewarming gift? Consider donating needed items, such as cookware or linens. (Please check with your local resettlement service agency first.)

Create a "Welcome Kit"

By definition, a refugee is someone who has "fled his or her country of origin because of past persecution or a fear of future persecution based upon race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group." So it should come as no surprise that a refugee generally enters his or her new country with few or none of the things we take for granted, such as bedding, cleaning supplies, towels, shampoo, toothbrushes, kitchen utensils, dishes, etc.

You can help welcome a new family by putting together a "welcome" or "good neighbor" kit. Host a drive for needed items through your parish, youth group or school club, or as a family activity. Be sure to contact your [local organization](#) to find out what items they need so you can plan your drive accordingly.

Even if you don't think you can put together an entire kit, you may be able to host or participate in a drive for frequently needed items (such as toiletries, towels, and pots and pans.)

Most organizations also accept individual donations, so next time you're shopping for toiletries or cleaning supplies, consider picking up a few extra and donating them. "For I was a stranger and you welcomed me." Together we can live out the Gospel message and help our new neighbors feel welcome.

Care for an Unaccompanied Minor

Could God be calling you to open your home to a refugee child?

It is probably difficult for us to imagine having to leave our home suddenly, spending months or, more likely, years in a refugee camp, and then moving our family to a new country. Now imagine if you were still a child and were all by yourself.

Sometimes there are refugee children who are eligible for resettlement in the United States but who do not have a parent or relative to care for them. The Unaccompanied Refugee Minors Program was developed to help these children by providing foster care services. Since 1980, close to 13,000 minors have entered this program.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops is one of two lead voluntary agencies that assist the Office of Refugee Resettlement (a division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families) with the Unaccompanied Refugee Minor program. Refugee foster care programs are currently located in Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, New York, North Dakota, Pennsylvania, Texas, Utah, Virginia, Washington and the District of Columbia. If you would like more information, check out the links below.

- [USCCB/MRS Children's Services](#)
- [Program Overview](#)
- [Frequently Asked Questions](#)

Who Is a Refugee? Definitions at a Glance

According to the 2010 Global Trends report, more than 43 million people are displaced worldwide. Not all people who are displaced from their homes are considered refugees. Do you know the difference between a refugee and an internally displaced person or someone who is seeking asylum? If you aren't sure, check out the definitions below.

Who is an Internally Displaced Person?

"Someone who has been forced to move from his or her home because of conflict, persecution...or because of a natural disaster or some other unusual circumstance of this type. Unlike refugees, however, IDPs remain inside their own country."

For instance, in the United States, people who were forced to leave their homes (and often their home towns or cities) due to Hurricane Katrina, but stayed within the borders of the United States would be considered internally displaced persons.

Who is a Refugee?

"The 1951 Refugee Convention describes refugees as people who are outside their country of nationality or habitual residence, and have a well-founded fear of persecution because of their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion. People fleeing conflicts or generalized violence are also generally considered as refugees, although sometimes under legal mechanisms other than the 1951 Convention."

Who is an Asylum Seeker?

"Someone who has made a claim that he or she is a refugee, and is waiting for that claim to be accepted or rejected. The term contains no presumption either way - it simply describes the fact that someone has lodged the claim."

So what is the difference between a refugee and an asylum seeker?

The difference has to do with how applications are processed. For instance, people apply for refugee status outside the United States. People already present in the United States apply for asylum.

Who is an Immigrant?

An immigrant is "someone who takes up permanent residence in a country other than his or her original homeland." Note that this definition is very broad, does not distinguish between entering the country legally or illegally, and includes refugees and people granted political asylum.

Who is a Migrant?

Migrant is "A wide-ranging term that covers most people who move to a foreign country for a variety of reasons and for a certain length of time (usually a minimum of a year, so as not to include very temporary visitors such as tourists, people on business visits, etc)."

[Source: Protecting Refugees and the Role of the UNHCR](#)

Ask an MSC

Have questions about your faith?

Ask one of our members.

www.ask.misacor-usa.org

Tell us what you think!

What can you do to help refugees in your area?



Email Br. Warren at jpac@misacor-usa.org.

Please Join Us in Prayer

Please join us in prayer for everyone who has been forced to flee their homes. May we fulfill the Gospel's call to welcome the stranger.

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