Our Efforts To Welcome Asylum Seekers

Earlier this week, I wrote to you about threats made to Catholic Charities workers and others who provide aid to refugees and migrants. At that time, while I asked that you exercise prudent caution, I also encouraged you to continue and expand your efforts to welcome our brothers and sisters in need. Your generous and creative outreach has been heartwarming.

While we are working at the parish level to offer assistance, it is important for you and your parishioners to know how the Archdiocese of Chicago (AOC) and Catholic Charities (CCAC) have together responded to the challenges of welcoming nearly 20,000 asylum seekers to our communities.

Since the fall of 2022, we have been working closely with parishes, community partners, the State of Illinois, and City of Chicago to respond with compassion to new arrivals. In addition to the Archdiocese's Welcome the Stranger program, CCAC has been asked by the Illinois Department of Human Services to join the State's initiative to transition families out of shelters into stable housing. I have personally met with city officials to assure them of our willingness to be of service and partner with them, but also to offer concrete proposals on how best to achieve those goals.

You should also know that City of Chicago, county, and state representatives have repeatedly toured archdiocesan properties that could be used as temporary housing for asylum seekers. Many of these are former parish facilities. Those officials continue to work with us to determine which locations are appropriate for this purpose and to remove administrative barriers to their use.

Additionally, the following information can be shared with your parish communities to give them an idea of the scope of our efforts in the face of increasing need:

- All of the persons, who came through Chicago's new arrivals hub, starting in August 2022, were welcomed by CCAC team members.
- CCAC has assisted with the long-term resettlement of more than 8000 migrants, since August 2022, including:

2200 migrants arriving to Chicago have been reunited with loved ones in other states;
2,000 migrants in State of Illinois shelters who have moved into apartments since January 2023; and,
4100 migrants in City of Chicago shelters who have been moved into apartments since April 2023.



- CCAC's long-term resettlement work continues at a rate of more than 1000 persons per month.
- In addition, CCAC social workers and staff, together with the AOC and parishioners from many parishes are accompanying families in their resettlement and integration into new communities;

58 migrant families are currently part of the CCAC Parish Family Sponsorship Program for accompaniment; and we estimate that another 30-40 families are being independently accompanied by various parishes.

- More than 200 new arrivals are joining community suppers nightly in the city and suburbs, conducted by CCAC in partnership with local parishes and supported by volunteers.
- The AOC's Immigration Ministry, and many of our parishes, have joined other volunteers in visiting police stations to offer accompaniment to the migrant families who are sleeping in the stations (e.g., providing meals and clothing, spiritual and personal accompaniment, translation services).

As you share this information with your parishioners, I ask that you offer a robust message of the Gospel imperative to welcome the stranger. This message is particularly timely as we celebrate the Feast of Thanksgiving, when, centuries ago, refugees from oppression were sheltered and saved from starvation by indigenous people.

We must clearly counter those voices in society which speak in dehumanizing ways about the newcomers and attempt to divide us as a nation. We must remind our people that the Holy Family once fled their home-land to safeguard the infant Jesus. By proclaiming our true Catholic values: the dignity of all persons, love of neighbor and the call to give what we have to our brethren, children of God made in His image we demonstrate our reverence for life.

Thank you for being lights in our troubled world and for your continued work in Jesus' name.

Sincerely yours in Christ,
Cardinal Blase Cupich