

## Care for the Vulnerable and COVID-19



“Our response to this epidemic must encompass—and in fact, focus on—those whom society often neglects.”

*UNHCR—The UN Refugee Agency*

In this time marked by COVID-19, people have been encouraged to practice “social distancing” by avoiding public interaction as much as possible in order to care for themselves and those most vulnerable to COVID-19. While “social distancing” is in itself an act that promotes the common good, the Catholic Social Teaching theme of Option for the Poor and Vulnerable reminds us that we must always advocate for people and communities who find themselves at the margins. Dr. Philip Metres, director of the Peace, Justice, and Human Rights Program at John Carroll University, [reminds us](#): “Keep in mind that the most vulnerable of our society and of the world will bear the worst brunt of this, as they always do.”

Many reports describe the populations most at risk for coronavirus as people over 60, the

chronically ill, and those people with underlying health conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, lung disease, and the immunocompromised. Our faith calls us to care for those with the greatest need, and we cannot forget other communities at the margins who are also vulnerable due to social, economic, and political factors. Learn about the unique challenges some of our neighbors experience and action we can take to support them during the global pandemic.

### People Experiencing Homelessness

While people are being encouraged to practice social distancing, that is made difficult or near impossible for people experiencing homelessness, who often depend on food centers for meals or live in shelters that do not accommodate for much personal space. Additionally, many people in this community are older and suffer from chronic health issues that can make them more vulnerable to infection. Lacking access to supplies such as hand sanitizer, disinfectant, or even soap and water can also increase the risk of people without stable housing contracting the virus.

**Learn more:** [Why some people are more vulnerable to catching coronavirus](#) (National Geographic, March 13, 2020)

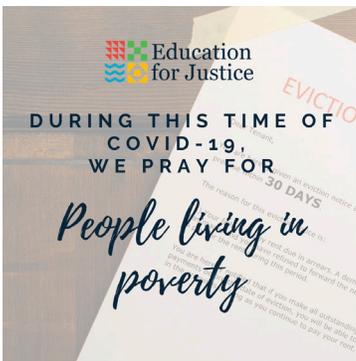
**Pray:** We pray for any person living without the safety and assurance of stable housing during this pandemic. May we respond as we are able to prioritize support for the health of these individuals in the coming weeks and months.

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**Act:** Call a local organization that works with people experiencing homelessness to see if they are in need of any particular donations you might be able to supply.

On the federal level, sign the letter by the [National Alliance to End Homelessness](#) asking Congress to include emergency funds for homelessness in the coronavirus response.

## People Living in Poverty:



People of lower socioeconomic status are more likely to become infected by coronavirus and to die as a result, according to research from the [New York Times](#). Often, people living in poverty are forced to work jobs that put

them at higher risk of exposure. They are also more likely to be affected by a decrease in household income or lack of health insurance. Additionally people living in poverty are ten percent more likely to have chronic health issues such as diabetes and heart disease, which are two major risk factors for COVID-19. According to the Chinese Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, these conditions make the coronavirus ten times more deadly.

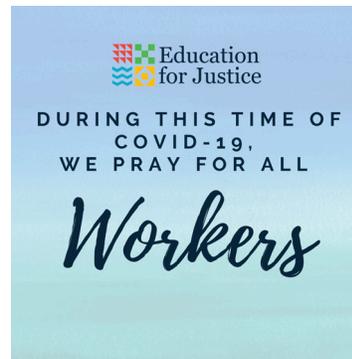
**Learn more:** [As Coronavirus Deepens Inequality, Inequality Worsens its Spread](#) (The New York Times, March 15, 2020)

**Pray:** We pray for those people who are put at a higher risk of infection and death simply because of their socio-economic status. Help us to advocate for programs that provide a social safety net for those people who especially need it in times of uncertainty, such as now.

**Act:** Check to see if your [senators](#) and

[representative](#) voted in support of the [Families First Coronavirus Response Act](#), which includes free coronavirus testing and paid sick leave for workers who need it, and [send a message of thanks](#) if they did.

## Workers, Especially Low-Income:



While some jobs afford the luxury of remote work, many workers need to be present to provide services at this time, including healthcare workers, caregivers, people in food services, retail and grocery store workers, [cleaning](#)

[crews](#), people who deliver packages, rideshare drivers, and hospitality workers. Especially vulnerable are low-income workers who may not have access to paid sick leave or health care and therefore may have more underlying conditions that make them more susceptible to infection. Additionally, as businesses feel the economic impact of coronavirus, these workers are often the first to have their hours cut or to be laid off.

**Learn more:** [The Workers Who Face the Greatest Coronavirus Risk](#) (The New York Times, March 15, 2020)

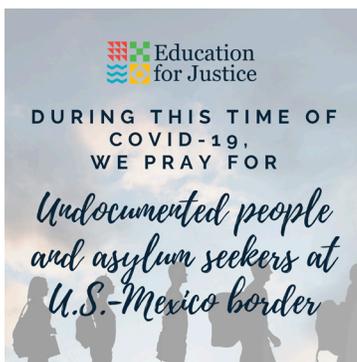
**Pray:** We pray for all workers feeling the economic impact of coronavirus and for anyone whose job puts them at greater risk of infection. May we advocate for policies that uphold the rights of workers, especially those most vulnerable to job loss during periods of economic depression.

**Act:** Send a message of thanks to any workers you know who are put at greater risk due to their occupations. Also, check to see if your [senators](#)

# REFLECTION

and [representative](#) voted in support of the [Families First Coronavirus Response Act](#), which includes free coronavirus testing and paid sick leave for workers who need it, and [send a message of thanks](#) if they did.

## Undocumented People and Asylum Seekers at the U.S.-Mexico border:



Undocumented workers do not have access to social services such as healthcare and can be fired without receiving unemployment benefits. In the United States specifically, the added fear of deportation has led

some experts to believe that many people will not seek out medical attention even if they do get sick. Additionally, there is a growing concern that deportations from the United States and Mexico could spread coronavirus to Central America and put an undue burden on healthcare systems in the region. Currently, deportations to [Guatemala](#) have been stopped. Even after the lockdown in California, Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers [continued to arrest people](#) in some of the areas hardest hit by the virus. Finally, detention centers (as well as prisons) in the United States are also at a [higher risk of spreading infection](#) due to overcrowding and a lack of medical services.

**Learn more:** [We're Petrified: Immigrants Afraid to Seek Medical Care for Coronavirus](#) (The New York Times, March 18, 2020)

**Pray:** We pray for all people who are undocumented and seeking asylum at this time. We pray that politicians will uphold the dignity of their lives by addressing any situations that currently put them at greater risk for exposure.

**Act:** Read this [joint statement](#) from Catholic Charities USA, the USCCB Committee on Migration, Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc., and the Catholic Health Association of the United States to learn what actions they are requesting the Department of Homeland Security take to remove barriers to healthcare for immigrants during the global pandemic.

## Migrants and Refugees



Due to high numbers of people living in close proximity and a lack of comprehensive sanitation infrastructure in most refugee or displacement camps, experts are worried that if coronavirus reaches large groups

of displaced people across the globe, there could be devastating health outcomes at a rapid spread. Additionally, limited access to health care in many of these areas makes their situations especially precarious. Many support services that provide language classes, food assistance, or job search support have been closed or suspended, limiting access to resources even for refugees who have been resettled.

**Learn more:** [10 Things You Should Know About Coronavirus and Refugees](#) (Norwegian Refugee Council, March 16, 2020)

**Jesuit Refugee Service Mission Continues Amid Coronavirus Outbreak** (Ignatian Solidarity Network, March 17, 2020)

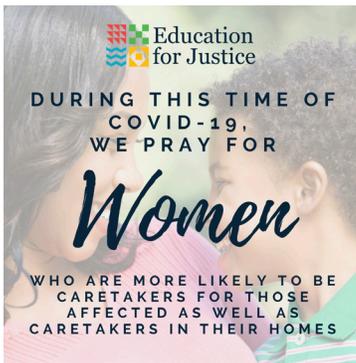
**Pray:** We pray for all people who are forced to leave their homes and journey through uncertainty and risk—heightened amidst the coronavirus pandemic. We pray that communities and nations

# REFLECTION

may continue to uphold Jesus' call to welcome the stranger, even in the face of fear.

**Act:** If you are able, [donate](#) to UNHCR—The UN Refugee Agency, which will use funds to prepare refugees in camps around the world for the potential influx of coronavirus.

## Women:



Since women make up over half of healthcare workers, specifically nurses who are in closer and more sustained contact with patients than doctors, they are more likely to experience exposure to the virus. Women around the world

are often primary caretakers in the home when illness occurs and care for children when they are not in school, again putting them at higher risk for exposure. They also make up the majority of the part-time and informal economy and will feel the economic impact of a recession, as is the case with all part-time and low-income workers.

**Learn more:** [Why Women May Face a Greater Risk of Catching Coronavirus](#) (NYTimes, March 12, 2020)

**Pray:** We pray in thanksgiving for the women who care for the sick in the medical field as well as in their own homes. Keep them safe as they continue to care for the most vulnerable in our society.

**Act:** Take time to reach out to a woman you admire and thank her for her work.

## Other ways to act:

- Even if you feel healthy, practice social distancing to prevent the spread of the virus.
- Follow [CDC guidelines](#) for best practices on how to keep yourself and loved ones healthy.
- Food Banks are seeing a [drop in volunteers and supplies](#). Contact a local food bank in your area to see if they have safe ways to donate supplies if you are able or learn more about [Feeding America's COVID-19 Response Fund](#) to help food banks across the country during the pandemic.