



CARDINAL'S OFFICE
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October 23, 2023

Dear Monsignor / Father:

I write to you today to speak about a major humanitarian and societal crisis that is building in the State of Massachusetts and within our Archdiocese. Please take the time to review this letter with your parish staff and prepare your parishioners to be ready and willing to assist. The challenge is the fate of immigrants arriving daily in Massachusetts, and in need of basic shelter and compassionate care and welcome.

First, allow me to give a brief explanation of the crisis that we are currently facing, but which is sure to become much larger. Next, I will outline what we have done and what we are doing. Finally, I will ask for specific help, so that we can act now before the need becomes overwhelming.

I. The Situation: Presently there are 7000 families being cared for in state sponsored shelters (approximately 20,000 individuals); by October 31st the expectation is that 7500 families will be with us. Governor Healey and Lieutenant Governor Driscoll have been deeply committed and determined to care for a rising immigration population, but they have also been honest in saying that the Commonwealth faces a mounting crisis beyond its capacity to respond effectively.

II. What we have done: The Archdiocese, through Catholic Charities, St. Mary's Center for Women and Children and the Archdiocesan Planning Office for Urban Affairs has worked closely with the Healey-Driscoll Administration and with other non-profit agencies even as the flow of immigrants has increased geometrically in the last few months. All three of those agencies have expanded capacity to address both the short and long-term needs for housing and supportive services. Over these past months, we have offered the State the use of 8 of our buildings, which we hope it will be able to authorize and use. In addition, some of our parishes have already received new shelters and people into their communities as the Commonwealth has greatly expanded its shelter capacity. The Archdiocese has offered assistance to those parishes, and we will continue to offer help to any parishes and communities we are not yet aware of needing assistance. As noted above, our three Archdiocesan affiliated agencies are deeply engaged in this crisis. Our relationship with the Healey-Driscoll administration has been constant and consistent. Recently, we have partnered with our very effective Saint Vincent de Paul Society to plan for how we can prepare for the cold weather coming; most of the recently arrived families are from warmer climates.

III. How can each and every parish help: The challenge is a local one in the sense that only some of the neighborhoods and parish communities will deal with shelters in their areas; however, the challenge is for all of us as an Archdiocese. The Saint Vincent de Paul Society has the appropriate storage and ability to collect and distribute items directly to those in need. Therefore, my request is that you work with them in your parishes/collaboratives for a drive this November prior to the cold weather.

Accordingly, I am asking parishes to consider the following:

1. If you do not have a St. Vincent de Paul bin in your parish, I urge you to please contact their vendor directly, CMRK, which delivers their bins to parishes. Simply call (508) 351-9000 and ask for Patrick to schedule a delivery.
2. Announce this invitation and the reason for it to your parishioners and invite them to donate winter coats, boots, socks which will be picked up on November 18 just prior to Thanksgiving.
3. The St. Vincent de Paul Society will pick up the clothing, store it at its facility in Stoughton, and then distribution will be made to those in shelters throughout the Archdiocese.
- 4 In addition to winter clothing, other resources which can be donated at the same time and in the same bins include the following items: diapers, toothbrushes (adult and child size), toothpaste, soap, deodorant, mouthwash, combs, lotion, shampoo, washcloth, and Kleenex tissues.
5. Beyond these immediate actions, there may arise a time when all shelters are filled to capacity and weather conditions require immediate assistance for families in the New England winter. If this occurs, offering short-term critical care and shelter in the biblical sense of “welcoming the stranger” will be the appropriate response from the Archdiocese as a whole. If you have buildings for this short-term purpose, please contact Fr. Bryan Hehir’s office at (617) 746-5738 or (617) 746-5733.

I stress that this is a crisis but is only going to expand. I offer this invitation in the spirit of Pope Francis who has asked us as Catholics to watch the “peripheries” of society where suffering is located. In our time, migrants and refugees are among the most vulnerable individuals and families in the United States. It is my hope and desire that as a Church we respond generously and effectively.

With the assurance of my prayers and gratitude for your service to the Church,

Devotedly yours in Christ,



Cardinal Seán O'Malley