

WELCOMING CHRIST IN THE MIGRANT



Purpose:

To give Catholics an opportunity to reflect on the issue of migration through Scripture and Catholic Social Teaching Tradition. This resource also provides suggestions for practical ways that individuals can assist migrants.

Target Audience:

Individuals or small group sessions.



INTRODUCTION

We live in an age when some approach newcomers with suspicion and fear. Too often, when we approach the migration issue we make it all about the migrant: Will migrants help or hurt the economy? How will they affect culture of our local community? What we often times do not pay enough attention to is how we as Christians are called to respond in our duty to welcome.

Christ's call is unchanging: we are obliged to welcome the stranger, knowing that "whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me (MT 25:40). An attitude of openness and welcoming to the stranger signifies the same to Christ himself. Pope Benedict XVI highlighted the importance of this dynamic in his first encyclical, [*Deus Caritas Est - God is Love*](#). In it he stressed that "Love of God and love of neighbor have become one: in the least of the brethren we find Jesus himself, and in Jesus we find God." (#15) More recently, Pope Francis observed in his [*2016 World Day of Migrants and Refugees Message*](#) that "Biblical revelation urges us to welcome the stranger; it tells us that in so doing, we open our doors to God, and that in the faces of others we see the face of Christ himself."

Cover Credit: Vatican/Migrant and Refugee Section

MIGRATION IN SCRIPTURE

Throughout the Bible, the theme of migration repeatedly emerges and often signifies a turning point in the life of God's people. Abraham and Sarah are called by God to migrate from the land of Ur to the promised land of Canaan. God tells them "Go forth from the land of your kinsfolk and from your father's house to a land that I will show you... I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, so that you will be a blessing." (Gn 12: 1-2)

In Exodus, Moses leads the Hebrews out of slavery in Egypt, and for forty years they lived as wanderers with no homeland of their own. The Israelites' own migrant experience gave rise to God's command to take special care of the alien: "You shall treat the alien who resides with you no differently than the natives born among you; have the same love for him as for yourself; for you too were once aliens in the land of Egypt" (Lv 19:33-34).

The Gospels begin with Matthew's story of Joseph and Mary fleeing to Egypt because the power-hungry King Herod wanted to kill their newborn son, Jesus. Our Savior and His family lived as refugees because their own land was not safe. Reflecting on the flight of the Holy Family, Pope Pius XII proclaimed that they represent an archetype for all refugee families living in the world today.

Throughout his ministry, Jesus is portrayed as a migrant: a teacher, and healer traveling through Judea and Samaria to share his message of love, welcome, and salvation for all people. He had no place of his own and relied on the hospitality of others for his and his disciples' needs. Jesus establishes the love and care we show for strangers as the standard by which we shall be judged: "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me" (Mt 25:35).

THE GLOBAL MIGRATION SITUATION

Today 258.8 million [international migrants](#) – those residing in a country other than their country of birth – were accounted for globally at the end of 2017. Increasingly it is vulnerable populations who are [migrating](#): children represented about 14% of the international migration population and women, 49%. The challenges that migrants face are multifaceted, including efforts to acclimate to a

new place, integrate effectively into a new community, find employment, and secure decent living conditions.

Of particular concern are persons who, as a consequence of war, persecution, famine, environmental disasters, and other factors are forced to flee their homes for a chance at survival. At the end of [2017](#), 68.5 million people were forcibly displaced as a result of conflict and



Source: CNS, Karen-Pulfer



Credit: Vatican/Migrant and Refugee Section

other forms of persecution. This includes approximately 25.5 million refugees and another 40 million internally displaced. According to the [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees](#) an astonishing one person is displaced every two seconds.

Securing resettlement opportunities for those who have been displaced is extremely difficult, particularly as countries become increasingly limited in the protection

they provide. For example, the United States has significantly scaled back its refugee admissions in the past two years; it is quite possible that your own country has experienced an emergent resistance to welcoming refugees and asylum seekers. It is important that we evaluate the sources of such resistance and determine how we as Catholics can better respond to the needs of those who are in difficult situations.

CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING ON MIGRATION

Drawn from this rich scriptural tradition, Catholic theology has always promoted an ethic that is rooted in natural law and God's revelation. As Catholic social teaching on migration developed, five fundamental principles have emerged to help guide the thinking of Catholics on migration:

I. Persons have the right to find opportunities in their homeland.

All persons have the right to find in their own countries the economic, political, and social opportunities to live in dignity and achieve a full life through the use of their God-given gifts. In this context, work that provides a just, living wage is a basic human need.

II. Persons have the right to migrate to support themselves and their families.

The Church recognizes that all the goods of the earth belong to all people. When persons cannot find employment in their country of origin to support themselves and their families, they have a right to find work elsewhere to survive. Sovereign nations should provide ways to accommodate this right.

When war, natural disaster, famine, or crushing poverty causes mass migration, the lands that receive these displaced people may feel threatened, with the citizens of the host nation fearing that newcomers will take scarce jobs, land, and resources. As the Gospels make clear, it is God's will that the abundance of the earth be shared in love by all of His people. Reflecting on this spiritual imperative.

III. Sovereign nations have the right to control their borders.

The Church recognizes the right of sovereign nations to control their territories but rejects such control when it is exerted merely for acquiring additional wealth. More powerful economic nations, which can protect and feed their residents, have a stronger obligation to accommodate migration flows.

IV. Refugees and asylum seekers should be afforded protection.

Those who flee wars and persecution should be protected by the global community. This requires, at a minimum, that migrants have a right to claim refugee status without incarceration and to have their claims fully considered by a competent authority.

V. The human dignity and human rights of undocumented migrants should be respected.

Regardless of their legal status, migrants, like all persons, possess inherent human dignity that should be respected. Often, they are subject to punitive laws and harsh treatment from enforcement officers from both receiving and transit countries. Government policies that respect the basic human rights of the undocumented are necessary.



Source: Andrew McConnel



Source: CNS, Paul Haring

THE CHURCH'S CALL TO ACTION

From the outset of his Pontificate, Pope Francis has been engaged on the issue of migration. Shortly after his election and in his first trip outside of Rome, Pope Francis celebrated [Mass](#) on the Island of Lampedusa and warned us not to fall prey to a culture of comfort that distracts us from the needs of those around us. He challenged us not to become indifferent to the sufferings of marginalized populations, including migrants. While popes have for a long time spoken for the universal church as a moral voice on this issue, the Catholic Church in each country is obligated to respond to the needs of its local situation. Translating the moral call into concrete action is not always easy, but we can learn from each other as we move forward in our efforts to do so.

In their joint pastoral letter [Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope](#), the bishops of the United States and Mexico called for a new approach to migration. They emphasized the importance of addressing root causes of migration, including war and poverty, forming migration policy that reflects Catholic social teaching, and providing pastoral care to migrants. Although the political challenges addressed in the pastoral letter might differ from those in your own country, the moral framework presented therein can provide insights into your country's current situation.

One of the important consequences of the 2003 pastoral was the launch of a national campaign by the Catholic Church in the United States – [The Justice for Immigrants Campaign](#). The campaign is currently active in over one hundred and seventy dioceses and seeks to:

- Educate the public, especially the Catholic community, about Church teaching on migration.
- Create political will for just and humane immigration reform.
- Advocate for dignified and fair reforms in immigration and refugee laws and policies that reflect Catholic social teaching.

If you are interested in learning more about the Campaign and brainstorming ways in which something similar could assist the Catholic Church in your country, please contact us at JFI@usccb.org.

Parishes and individual Catholics are called to proclaim the Church's message of hope and welcome, and create a society that acknowledges the vital contributions of migrants, refugees, and other newcomers to the United States. Among the actions that can be taken to achieve these objectives:

Encourage Conversion of Hearts

- Use scripture readings as teachable moments in homilies such as the flight of the Holy Family to Egypt.
- Insert quotes from pastoral letters on migration in your parish bulletin.
- Include multi-cultural awareness activities in parish youth programs and activities.
- Sponsor a parish migration education program.
- Include prayers on behalf of migrants and refugees in the General Intercessions each week.



Credit: Vatican/Migrant and Refugee Section

Develop a "Parish Welcoming Plan"

- Distribute welcoming packets for newly arrived parishioners.
- Host welcoming events such as international dinners or just take a moment to visit newcomers to the parish community.
- Plan multicultural liturgies, sacramental services, and intercessions, outreach and training for members of all ethnic groups as parish ministers.
- You can help the successful integration of migrants into their host country by hosting job fairs, offering English language tutoring, or planning a parish service day in migrant and refugee neighborhoods.
- Help keep parishioners informed on current public policy issues, coordinate letter-writing campaigns and visits with legislators, and assist in recruiting local attorneys to provide legal services and advice on immigration matters.

Source: stock