



## Religion and Resettlement Project

Parishioners at St. Sharbel Maronite Church, a mission chapel on the grounds of the Catholic Community of St. Francis of Assisi in Raleigh, N.C., attend the ordination of a subdeacon. The parish has welcomed many refugees from Iraq and Syria in recent years. Credit: CNS/Chaz Muth

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Department of Migration and Refugee Services has launched a new, multi-year partnership with Princeton University's Office of Religious Life that focuses on the intersection between on religion, resettlement, and refugee integration. About 70% of refugees are resettled in the United States by faith-based organizations, yet there has been little effort to document the intersection between religion and resettlement in their lives. Refugees rely on religious organizations for resources, use religious language to narrate their experiences, and find community in religious spaces.

We hope to document the religious experiences of all refugees—from devout to agnostic—and create a comprehensive resource of best practices, academically oriented research, and oral histories of refugees. The best practices will provide guidance to local community organizations and individuals involved in resettlement as to how they can engage refugees in a way that will take into account the role of religion in refugee's lives. Academic research will help to fill gaps in our understanding of this process and engage institutions of higher education on this important topic. Oral histories will take into account the refugee's own experience and in their own words. and preserve them for future scholars and others interested in this topic. The oral histories will be held and maintained by Princeton's library system in an open-access archive.

Through the oral history project, we aim to:

- Showcase and advocate for the positive benefits refugees bring to our communities.
- Preserve histories at a time when numbers of refugees being resettled in the United States are being significantly rolled back and the future of the resettlement program is unclear.
- Provide an opportunity for further civic participation with and for refugees.
- Enhance spaces of dialogue, listening, and chaplaincy within communities along intercultural and interfaith lines and across the country.
- Educate students about the lives of refugees and the civic and moral significance of religion in their lives, and to train students in the practices of oral history making.

As a component of this initiative, the Religion and Resettlement Project brings together refugee resettlement offices from across the United States for symposia to explore the role of religion in the lives of refugees. At these symposia, refugees speak about the role of religion in their resettlement experiences, religious leaders reflect on the role of refugees in their communities, and non-profit leaders explain how they work in interfaith communities.

USCCB/MRS plays an integral role in the planning of these symposia with the aim of improving the way refugees are resettled and integrated into the United States. We engage in research activities related to the program. In collaboration between refugees, scholars, and resettlement agencies, we seek to strengthen the effectiveness of resettlement processes and learn from the experiences of refugees.

Whether religion is marginal or central to the life of any given refugee, we believe it is of the utmost importance to learn from the experiences of resettled refugees and promote an active conversation on how religion affects the resettlement process. For more information on this important project or to learn how you can become engaged on it, please reach out to Todd Scribner at [TScribner@usccb.org](mailto:TScribner@usccb.org)



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