

ACCOMPANIMENT AND THE CATHOLIC FAITH

WHY WE ARE CALLED TO STAND IN SOLIDARITY



Purpose:

To highlight the importance of accompaniment in Catholic Teaching on migration, demonstrate ways in which you can accompany migrants, and provide a model that can institutionalize this process.

Target Audience:

Individuals, small groups, parishes

IT IS NOT JUST ABOUT MIGRANTS, IT IS ABOUT ALL OF US



INTRODUCTION

The Catholic call to accompany migrants is rooted in Scripture and Catholic Social Teaching. Accompaniment in this context calls us to serve, to aid and support, and to advocate with and for migrants from the start of their migration experience to its end. Accompaniment also encourages greater mutual understanding of migration challenges as well as formation and migrant leadership opportunities for directly impacted communities and community supporters.

The call to accompany and support migrants that is evident in the Catholic faith is based on the rich heritage of Scripture and the Church's teaching. Abraham and his family were nomads who were called by God to in the land of Canaan. They soon after migrated to Egypt, where they suffered oppression and were delivered once again by the hand of God. From this experience comes a deep appreciation for the migrant journey as highlighted in the words of Scripture: "You shall treat the stranger 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 strangers in the land of Egypt" (Leviticus 19:34). Jesus echoes this tradition when he proclaims, "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me" (Matthew 25:35). Throughout the years the Church has remained faithful to this call to care for and have solidarity with migrants of all kinds and has worked to respond accordingly.

The act of providing emotional, physical, and spiritual support to people in need as well as standing in solidarity alongside them is a critical part in recognizing the human dignity and experience of every person. In his 2018 migration day message, Pope Francis spoke of how "the Lord entrusts to the Church's motherly love every person forced to leave their homeland in search of a better future". The Holy Father has repeatedly emphasized the importance of welcoming, supporting, protecting, and integrating migrants as a high priority for the Church. Each of these broad themes, when put into practice, are important ways in which accompaniment can be made concrete.

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GENERAL GOALS OF ACCOMPANIMENT

- 1) To connect migrants and their families to existing community resources that will help these people to comply with their legal requirements. It is important that no one stands alone during this difficult and often trying process.
- 2) To build awareness regarding existing migration policies and their impacts on communities, and promote solidarity and increase public support for new policies that support migrant families and improve local communities.
- 3) To create avenues for education and learning about the diversity of modern Catholic parish life and the centrality of welcoming the newcomer to Catholic Social Teaching. It will also help to form migrant leadership opportunities at the parish level.
- 4) To bridge cultural differences and foster a community of welcome and understanding.



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WAYS YOU CAN GET INVOLVED IN ACCOMPANIMENT

There are some ways that you can get involved in accompaniment in your local community and parish. Accompaniment may entail standing beside someone on their journey and spiritually supporting them throughout that process, but it may also take the form of smaller actions that can assist and provide comfort and support. Daily acts of accompaniment might include:

- Assisting migrants who are required to report to local immigration authorities on a semi-regular basis or the continual support of a migrant family as a family member attends their mandatory immigration hearings and court proceedings.
- Holding/organizing know your rights trainings and information sessions for individuals.
- Helping to arrange legal services and facilitating legal screenings for individuals in need of assistance.
- Holding educational events in your local community where both native-born and migrant community members can attend and hear about each other's experiences.
- Assisting a migrant child and their parents to enroll the child in school.
- Giving a family a ride to a medical appointment or helping an individual receive an identification card.
- Just being present to listen to an individual's stories.
- Offering to pray with individuals and helping to organize a prayer service.

Accompanying an individual through these acts can provide comfort, as well as spiritual and emotional support. It can build solidarity between Catholic volunteers and migrants and their families as well as build bridges of understanding and mutual interest within communities. We recognize that the respective legal systems in your own country will require you to tailor a program like this to the specific realities of your situation, but hope that the above suggestions will provide some inspiration as you move forward in your effort to accompany migrants.



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Source: Allan Gichigi

ACCOMPANIMENT MODEL: THE CATHOLIC ACCOMPANIMENT AND REFLECTION EXPERIENCE (CARE) PROGRAM

Accompaniment helps families stay together and live their lives free from fear or uncertainty and be connected to services that helps them to fully integrate into their local communities. It also helps communities to grow stronger by strengthening the bonds between neighbors and helps Catholics all around the globe to learn more about their faith and the call welcome the stranger. The Catholic Accompaniment and Reflection Experience (CARE) program is a new accompaniment program undertaken by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Office of Migration and Refugee Services (USCCB/MRS) in Fall 2018. The CARE program provides accompaniment to and solidarity with undocumented immigrants and their families throughout the United States while they comply with immigration proceedings, furthering Catholic community support for immigrants at the parish and local community level. CARE aims to empower undocumented and mixed status families and local community supporters to educate about current immigration realities and advocate for change.

Both the Archdiocese of San Francisco and the Archdiocese of Indianapolis were the initial pilot sites for the CARE program. The two archdioceses will also serve as mentors to new sites that are added as the CARE program further develops. Overall, CARE aims to help facilitate a larger accompaniment movement among Catholic parishes across the US to ensure that individuals who attend their check-ins with immigration authorities and local and immigration court proceedings are not going alone and that each person is supported every step of the way. See the [Justice for Immigrants](#) website for more details on the CARE program.



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