



World Refugee Day

June 20, 2020

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A Moment of Grace

A Prayer for Refugees

God of our Wandering Ancestors,
Long have we known
That your heart is with the refugee:
That you were born into time
In a family of refugees
Fleeing violence in their homeland,
Who then gathered up their hungry child
And fled into alien country.
Their cry, your cry, resounds through the ages:
“Will you let me in?”

Give us hearts that break open
When our brothers and sisters turn to us
with that same cry.
Then surely all these things will follow:
Ears will no longer turn deaf to their voices.
Eyes will see a moment for grace instead of a threat.
Tongues will not be silenced but will instead advocate.
And hands will reach out—
working for peace in their homeland,
working for justice in the lands where they seek safe haven.
Lord, protect all refugees in their travels.
May they find a friend in me
And so make me worthy
Of the refuge I have found in you. AMEN

- Prayer courtesy of CRS



CNS photo/Baz Ratner, Reuters

Sample Prayer Intentions

- For all refugees who are forced to flee from their homes, that God might bring them to a place of peace and safety, we pray to the Lord.
- For refugee children, who have been separated from their families due to difficult circumstances or death, that God will provide his protection, we pray to the Lord.
- For our bishops, that they will continue in their commitment to lead Catholic social service agencies and encourage parishes in their dioceses to both support lifesaving assistance for refugees around the world and to be active partners in refugee resettlement and provide in their communities a place of welcome, we pray to the Lord.
- For Christian faithful and all people of good will, that they might find the compassion to walk in solidarity with refugees and the courage to advocate on their behalf, we pray to the Lord.
- For U.S. and world leaders and elected officials, that they might work together to end the strife and persecution that gives rise to refugee crises, provide care and protection for refugees forced to flee, and share responsibility in helping them build new lives, we pray to the Lord.

Commonly Asked Questions About Refugees

Who is a refugee?

Under U.S. law, a [refugee](#) is a person who is forced to flee his or her home country due to persecution or a well-founded fear of being persecuted on account of his or her nationality, race, religion, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. Refugees do not voluntarily choose to migrate but instead do so out of immediate necessity – often in the context of civil unrest, armed conflict, or other violence motivated by one of the five factors listed above and carried out by a state actor, an individual colluding with the state, or an individual whom the state cannot control.

What is the current state of the refugee system internationally?

Current levels of displacement are some of the highest ever recorded. Worldwide, there are 68.5 million people who have been forced out of their homes (with an estimated 34,000 people displaced per day). While the majority of forced migrants remain in their home countries, [25.5 million](#) have been forced to flee and seek refuge in other countries. Over half of these refugees are under the age of 18.

The United States has traditionally been at the cornerstone of the international humanitarian system that protects refugees who so desperately need help. Many nations have each generously welcomed an average of more than 1 million refugees. However, more than 86% of the world's refugees live in countries which struggle to afford access to basic needs for their own people. And, humanitarian needs have only increased in the last year. Since late 2017, more than 650,000 people have fled Rakhine State for Bangladesh, and over one million people have fled Venezuela.

Supporting refugees around the world by ensuring protection of funding for international humanitarian and development assistance expresses our solidarity with them and with the generous nations that welcome them. When we educate refugee children, we give them a chance to contribute to their communities and reduce their vulnerability to human trafficking. When we help parents provide for their families, we reduce the likelihood that they will turn to child labor or early child marriage. Supporting refugees also helps diminish the strain on host communities. It's vitally important that we protect funding that supports refugees, internally displaced persons, and asylum seekers overseas, and funding that addresses the root causes of migration.

Only those individuals who are considered to be the most vulnerable are referred for resettlement in a third country. Despite the extent of global displacement, less than 1% of refugees are submitted for resettlement worldwide. The United States traditionally resettles over half of these individuals. In Fiscal Year 2016, the United States [resettled](#) just over 53,000 refugees, with the most coming from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burma, Ethiopia, Syria and Iraq. In recent years, there has also been an increased flow of refugees from Central America to the United States.

How does the processing system work?

The international community has traditionally promoted three durable solutions to displacement situations: (1) voluntary repatriation, (2) integration into the country of first asylum, or (3) resettlement into a third country. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) works to find the best solution for each displaced person on an individual basis.

UNHCR is generally responsible for identifying and designating individuals as refugees. UNHCR assists in ensuring

the safety and well-being of refugees as they await a placement determination. However, temporary protection for refugees remains a challenge for the international community. Not only do refugees often have to endure life-threatening conditions in order to arrive at their first host country, but, once there, they usually live in confined refugee camp sites or in urban settings, sometimes for as long as a decade.

How Does Refugee Resettlement Work in the United States?

Each year, the President of the United States authorizes the admission of a certain number of refugees into the country. This number, described as the “Presidential Determination” is based on a consultative process between Congress, the President, and various federal agencies, including the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the U.S. Department of State (DOS). A refugee is typically referred to the United States by UNHCR, an embassy, or an authorized non-governmental organization (NGO). A government-funded Resettlement

Support Center (RNC) then facilitates the application process by completing application paperwork and gathering biometric and biographical information needed for the determination and vetting process. During this application process, which typically takes 18 to 24 months to complete, the prospective refugee remains outside of the United States.

Prospective refugees to the United States undergo a rigorous and thorough [screening process](#) that includes vetting through databases held by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Department of Defense, DOS, and DHS. [iv] In addition, the refugee is interviewed by a highly-trained U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) officer to determine eligibility to the U.S. resettlement program and admissibility to the country. Further review is conducted if an individual’s application raises safety or national security concerns and, ultimately, he or she will not be resettled in the United States if such concerns are not resolved. Once USCIS conditionally approves the applicant, he or she must complete a medical examination. Those individuals who receive approval for resettlement undergo a final screening by the U.S. Customs and Border Protection prior to entry into the country.

Admitted refugees are assigned to an experienced resettlement agency in the U.S. prior to arrival in order to help ensure their welcome and successful integration into our country. Once in the United States, refugees engage in cultural orientation, English lessons, medical evaluations, and other forms of social support through the resettlement community and other organizations.

What is the Catholic Church’s teaching on refugees?

It is a core Catholic teaching that every human being is created in the image of God and is therefore entitled to dignity and respect. The Catholic Church views assisting those in need as a fundamental Christian duty that is derived directly from the life of mercy of Christ, who himself was a migrant and a child of refugees. We as Christians are called to welcome our new neighbors with the same love and compassion we would want ourselves to be shown in a time of persecution. We are also called to provide support and care for refugees overseas who remain in refugee camps and other tenuous situations.

What is the Catholic Church’s Role in Supporting Refugees around the World?

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Migration and Refugee Services (USCCB/MRS) seeks to fulfill the teachings of the Church in the arena of migration. USCCB/MRS is one of nine NGOs in the United States that resettles refugees and advocates for the refugee community. Through cooperative agreements with the federal government, USCCB/MRS works in coordination with partner agencies around the United States to welcome and ensure that the basic needs of each arriving refugee are adequately met. USCCB/MRS also engages in [assessment trips](#) to regions with large refugee populations.



Sample Talking Points

1. Jesus calls us to welcome refugees and immigrants, and says that when we extend a helping hand to them, we are meeting him face-to-face.
2. The Catholic community supports supports refugees around the world by advocating to protect U.S. foreign aid and a refugee program that is safe for refugees and for the communities that welcome them.
3. Today, more than 65 million people around the world have been forcibly displaced from their homes, over 22 million of these individuals are refugees.
4. The United States has traditionally been at the cornerstone of the international humanitarian system that protects refugees who so desperately need help. We must maintain our leadership position and protect lifesaving U.S. development and humanitarian assistance, which helps to meet the basic needs of refugees and vulnerable migrants and addresses the root causes of migration and displacement.
5. The U.S. refugee protection and resettlement program has enjoyed bipartisan support for over 30 years, and is a life-saving program that protects vulnerable refugees and helps to unite families fractured by forced migration.
6. Refugees are the most thoroughly vetted individuals to enter the United States, going through a series of [security screenings](#), including biographic and biometric checks, medical screenings, forensic document testing, and in-person interviews with highly trained government officials. The information examined to confirm a refugee's identity is checked against law enforcement and intelligence databases, including those of the National Counterterrorism Center, Department of Defense, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Department of State, and Department of Homeland Security. If there is any doubt about whether a refugee is a security risk, he or she will not be admitted to the United States.
7. Once resettled, refugees contribute to their new communities as friends and neighbors, taxpayers, workers, business owners, doctors, and students.

Letters to the Editor

Writing a letter to the editor (LTE) is the perfect way to offer a rebuttal, add another perspective, or express your appreciation for an already-published article or commentary piece. Please let us know if your letter to the editor is published! We'll deliver it to elected officials and promote it on our social media. Completing this final step in the letter to the editor process helps ensure that your letter's impact is even greater. Email us at jfi@uscgb.org with a link to your published LTE.

Letter to the Editor Writing Tips

- **Keep it short** (150-250 words) – If you don't edit your LTE, the news outlet might edit it for you. It's best to write something both punchy and brief.
- **Speak in your own voice.** Tell why the article matters to you. Talk about your faith, professional experience or knowledge of migration and refugees. Be personal and authentic.
- **Think local.** Editors are generally more interested in letters that highlight local impacts. Relate the issues raised in a national piece on refugees to issues impacting your own community. This provides a good opportunity to discuss the work of a local Catholic Charities office in your community
- **Get personal.** Refugees are people fleeing persecution. Personalize your perspective with a story about people who are refugees or people you know affected by migration- a family member or someone you know from your church.
- **Utilize all outlets.** Consider submitting your letter to your diocesan newspaper and your parish newsletter for publication.

Best Practices

- 1) Reference a recent article in the publication to which you are writing the LTE. Your letter is most likely to be published if it responds directly to the newspaper's recent coverage of a specific issue. Mention the article you're responding to by its headline and date.
- 2) Send your LTE in the body of your email, and as an attachment.
- 3) Include your relevant information, such as: your full name, contact information, location, and profession or expertise in the email as well. (The paper will not print your contact information.)
- 4) Be timely – Try to submit your LTE within 1-3 days after the relevant article was published.

Sample Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor:

Your recent article, [name of article], discussing the issue of refugees/refugee resettlement was alarming [or reaffirming (depends on tone of article)]. [name of State or community] has a proud history of welcoming newcomers, refugees, and newly naturalized citizens. Our community has benefited from refugees; they contribute to the local economy through hard work and entrepreneurial spirit (if responding to a negative article you can, for example, emphasize the secure nature of program, which is ensured through an established set of in-depth security and medical checks). It is imperative that our communities continue to provide a warm and welcoming presence to newcomers, so that they can feel a part of the community and contribute to its ongoing prosperity. Additionally, our community supports protecting foreign aid which is vital to supporting refugees around the world and addressing the root causes of migration and displacement.

Sample Social Media for World Refugee Day

Twitter

Today we celebrate #WorldRefugeeDay. Let everyone know that you support and protect the right for #RefugeesWelcome in the United States. #ShareJourney

On #WorldRefugeeDay we pause and remember the 25 million people who have had to flee their countries in search of safety for their families. #ShareJourney

#Refugees are people looking for the same thing that everyone wants: happiness and a safe home for their families. #WorldRefugeeDay #ShareJourney

On #WorldRefugeeDay we remember the sacrifice those who have been forced from their homes make to seek safety for their families #ShareJourney

Don't know any #Refugees? Here are some you may know: Albert Einstein, Gloria Estefan , Henry Kissinger, Madeline Albright. #WorldRefugeeDay #ShareJourney

Facebook

On #WorldRefugeeDay take a moment and remember the 25 million people who have had to flee their homes and countries in search of safety for their families and loved ones. #ShareJourney

Sample Image:



World Refugee Day Advocacy: Community Engagement Ideas

Engage your Elected Leaders and Advocate for Refugees

- *Participate* in the [calls to action](#) produced by the [Justice for Immigrants Campaign](#), [Catholics Confront Global Poverty](#), [Share the Journey](#), and [Catholic Charities USA](#) to make your voice heard by your members of Congress.
- [Organize or participate](#) an in-district visit to your member of Congress' local office or attend one of their townhall events so that you can express your opinion on these issues.
- *Join* the [Justice for Immigrants Campaign](#) and [Catholics Confront Global Poverty](#) so that you can learn about further advocacy related activities in which you can participate.

Become Active in Your Local Community and Parish

- *Celebrate* a Mass or prayer service in your local parish on or around World Refugee Day. Focus on migration in the readings and in the intentions of the prayers of the faithful.
- *Hold* an information session or speaker panel with a refugee or immigrant member of your community or parish. Please use our [background resources](#) on refugees
- *Present* on [Catholic Social Teaching and Migration](#) to youth and church groups.
- *Write* a letter to the editor to promote education on refugee resettlement and the need to support refugees by providing lifesaving international development and humanitarian assistance.
- *Volunteer* to teach English to newcomers. Contact your [local Catholic Charities](#) to find out if such an opportunity exists in your community.
- *Hold* a refugee simulation event using this [guide](#) from the from Jesuit Refugee Service or the [Refugees Seeking Safety tool](#) from Cabrini University.
- *Post* on social media using our materials; post pictures of your event on social media. Sign up for UNHCR Refugee Day [updates](#).
- *Pray* for [protection for refugees](#) as well as for personal transformation as we face the needs of refugees everywhere.
- *Send* a message of hope and solidarity by writing a postcard to a refugee. Visit [anyrefugee.org](#)
- *Ask* your local Catholic school recognize World Refugee Day in some way (an announcement in the morning bulleting, reciting the WRD prayer at the end of the school day before dismissal, assigning school children to discuss with their parents the Holy Family as refugees and writing about the discussion.).
- *Become* a [foster parent](#) for an unaccompanied child! USCCB/MRS currently provides foster care to unaccompanied children in the following locations: Texas, Michigan, Arizona, Virginia, New York, California, Washington, Mississippi, Florida and Utah. For more information email migratingchildren@usccb.org.
- *Become* involved in your local [Parishes Organized to Welcome Refugees Program](#), if you have one, or through your local parish organize a group who will provide support for newly arriving refugees.

BE SURE TO LET US KNOW WHAT YOU DID TO CELEBRATE WORLD REFUGEE DAY 2019!

Let us know by email at JFI@usccb.org



CNS photo/Gregory A. Shemitz

