

ENCOUNTER MANUAL

God Walks With His People



United States Conference
of Catholic Bishops

Migration and
Refugee Services



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Welcoming Christ in the Migrant

We live in an age when some approach newcomers with suspicion and fear.

How are Christians called to respond? 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). A disposition 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."

Pope Francis reflected in his 2024 message on the World Day of Migrants and Refugees (WDMR), that "all of us, God's people are migrants on this earth, on our way to the 'true homeland', the Kingdom of Heaven. Migrants are a contemporary icon of this people on a journey, of the Church on a journey, and at the same time, it is in them and in all our vulnerable brothers and sisters that we can encounter the Lord who walks with us".

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).

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.

The Global Migration Situation

Today [281 million](#) international migrants— those residing in a country other than their country of birth – were accounted for globally at the end of 2020. Increasingly it is vulnerable populations who are [migrating](#): men [represented](#) around 51.9% of migrants, and women around 48.1% . In 2020, UNICEF reported the number of migrant children [increased](#) to 36 million; on the other hand, the organization [reports](#) 40% of the world's refugees in 2023, roughly around 47.2 million.

The challenges that migrants face is 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.

As of [May 2024](#), 120 million people were forcibly displaced because of conflict and other forms of persecution. [According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees](#), this includes another 43.4 million refugees, and another 63.3 million internally displaced, 6.9 million asylum seekers, and 5.8 million people in need of international protection (majority Venezuelan).

Securing resettlement opportunities for those who have been displaced are extremely difficult, particularly as countries become increasingly restrictive. Recently, 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 can better respond to the needs of those who are in difficult situations.

The Church's Call to Action

From the outset of his Pontificate, Pope Francis has been intimately engaged on the issue of migration. Just months 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 become indifferent to the sufferings of marginalized populations, including migrants, who are trying to find a safe place to lay their head. While popes past and present speak 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, from 2003, [Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope](#), the bishops of the United States and Mexico called for a series of reforms to the U.S. immigration system. These include: (1) policies to address the root causes of migration, which includes war and global poverty, (2) reform of our immigration system itself, including an earned legalization program and a temporary worker program with appropriate worker protections, and (3) restoration of due process for immigrants. 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 political situation. It can also provide support as you struggle to figure out an effective and just response to your unique situation.

One of the important consequences of this 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 maintains three primary objectives:

- To educate the public, especially the Catholic community, about Church teaching on migration;
- To create political will for just and humane immigration reform; and
- Advocate for dignified and fair reforms in immigration and refugee laws and policies that reflect the principles enunciated by the bishops.

If you are interested in learning more about the Campaign and brainstorming ways in which something similar to could assist the Catholic Church in your country pursue just and fair migration-related policies, please reach out to us at JFI@uscgb.org

Parishes and individual Catholics are also called to proclaim the Church's message of hope and welcome, create a society that acknowledges the vital contributions of migrants, refugees, and other newcomers to the United States, and seek to gain basic rights and protections for those living and working outside society's mainstream. Among the actions that can be taken to achieve these objectives:

Encourage Conversion of Hearts

- Use scripture readings such as the flight of the Holy Family to Egypt as teachable moments in homilies.
- 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

Express Solidarity with Migrants

- Celebrate National Migration Week in your parish, traditionally observed the week following the Feast of the Epiphany in January.
- Establish a sister or partnerships relationship with a parish that serves immigrant and refugee communities.
- Include prayers on behalf of migrants and refugees in the General Intercessions each week.

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,
- Provide multilingual resources and materials and address the pastoral needs of migrant populations.
- Establish a relationship with the local diocesan refugee or immigration legal services office and volunteer by organizing charitable drives to benefit migrants and refugees.
- 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.

Credit: Getty/Guenterguni



Why Immigrants Should Register With their Parish

Registering in your parish is an important first step to becoming an active member in the local church community. Registration brings with it tangible benefits that can help a person become more fully engaged in the local church and may help immigrants in future immigration law-related matters. Please note that parish and diocesan leadership will not share the registration information with any governmental or law enforcement agency. The registration process is completely confidential. Registering in one's local parish is generally not a common practice for Catholics in Latin America and Europe. However, it is common practice in the United States and therefore important for immigrants too since it offers a variety of benefits. Below are some reasons to register:

- 1. Establishes evidence of your presence in the United States.** It is not unusual for immigrants, including those who are undocumented, to have to provide evidence to immigration authorities of continuous presence in this country. Registering with your parish is a quick and easy step to help document the number of years you have resided in the U.S.
- 2. Provides proof of sacramental participation.** If a person receives any of the sacraments in a parish, registration provides a clear and straightforward way to keep track of this information. Conveniently, proof of sacramental participation can easily be passed from one parish to the next if one moves.
- 3. Offers spiritual benefits.** After registering with a parish, it is more likely that a person will participate fully in the life of the parish and to find a spiritual family. Families will feel less alone and more supported in times of joy and in times of sorrow. Immigrants will come to know more U.S. citizens on a close basis and feel more secure in this country. In times of difficulty, a parish family can offer crucial material and spiritual assistance. Parishioners will find many opportunities to grow in love of God and of neighbor, and will be surrounded by some excellent role models who will help them navigate the complexities of life in the U.S.
- 4. Demonstrates community involvement.** Registration in the parish provides an opportunity to participate in and become an established member of the local parish community. This has a variety of benefits that extend beyond weekly Mass attendance.
- 5. Becoming involved in the local parish helps one become acquainted with other parishioners and the parish priest.** Should a person experience any immigration-related problems with local or federal law enforcement, the local parish priest and fellow parishioners will be able to provide a letter of good moral character.
- 6. Demonstrates positive contributions to the community.** Through any community involvement that follows, a parishioner can demonstrate the positive ways in which she has served the parish and the local community (e.g., volunteerism at a local soup kitchen). This can function as a useful tool to further demonstrate good moral character and an interest in contributing to the community.
- 7. Provides financial and educational benefits.** Registering in the local parish will often bring with it additional benefits that could help family members. For example, registration could provide a credit or subsidy that can be used for your children at local parochial schools. This could reduce the cost of tuition and help a parishioner's child receive both the educational advantages and spiritual formation that come with attending a Catholic school.
- 8. Demonstrates financial commitment.** Providing regular offerings at the weekly Mass by using the offering envelopes after registration demonstrates a financial commitment to the Church on a weekly basis. It is important to emphasize, however, that registering at the parish does not require a parishioner to give financial contributions; nor are individuals expected to provide large contributions.

Immersion and Mission Trip Opportunities

Learn about the community, and ways to immerse yourself in the culture, history and world of migrants that come to the United States. Immersion trips to the border provide participants with a unique opportunity to engage directly with the realities faced by migrants and asylum seekers. By crossing borders, visiting shelters, and speaking with those on the frontlines, participants gain a profound understanding of the human impact of immigration policies and the historical context driving migration. These experiences foster empathy, challenge preconceived notions, and inspire a deeper commitment to social justice and compassionate advocacy for vulnerable populations.

Here is a list of organizations that host immersion, and mission trip experiences:

[Hope Border Institute, Jesuits of the USA Central and Southern Province, Marist Brothers of the United States and Mexico](#)

- **Location:** El Paso-Ciudad Juarez border
- **Duration:** 4-6 days
- **Activities:**
 - Direct work and encounters with asylum seekers, migrants, or refugees in emergency shelters, detention centers, or through the programs offered by *El Sagrado Corazon (Sacred Heart)*, the Jesuit parish in El Paso.
 - Education on Catholic Social Teaching regarding migration.
 - Discussions on the push and pull factors causing migration from Central America and Mexico to the U.S.
 - Site visits in El Paso, Las Cruces, and optional visits to organizations serving residents in Ciudad Juarez across the border.
 - Evening reflections, prayer, and community living.
 - Visit to the El Paso U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention center.
- **Partnerships:** Hope Border Institute, Jesuits of the USA Central and Southern Province, Marist Brothers of the United States and Mexico.

Contact information: info@hopeborder.org

[Maryknoll Immersion Trips](#)

- **Locations:** Jamaica, Kenya, Bolivia, México City, Guatemala, El Salvador, El Paso/Juarez, South Dakota (Indigenous Peoples), Pilgrimage Retreat to Central America.
- **Duration:** 1-3 weeks
- **Activities:**
 - Professional and ministerial accompaniment and development before, during, and after the trip.
 - Encounters and intercultural relationship-building with individuals, families, and communities.

- Visits to innovative programs addressing challenges in education, healthcare, care of creation, human rights, economic development, etc.
- Exploration of religious, cultural, social, political, and economic contexts.
- Opportunities for prayer, reflection, and faith-sharing.

Contact information: Zahira Sandoval, Coordinator, 773-493-3367 ext. 263

Kino Border Institute

- **Duration:** 3-6 days
- **Activities:**
 - Spend time with migrants and asylum seekers, learn from their stories, and understand the broader context of the border and immigration.
 - Immersion experiences include crossing the border to Nogales, Sonora, to meet migrants and asylum seekers, touring the resource center, accompanying the Kino team in providing humanitarian services, hiking in the desert, conversing with ranchers in rural southern Arizona, visiting organizations in Tucson, and reflecting on legal issues and the immigration system.
 - Focus on humanizing the immigration issue and recognizing its complexity, with an emphasis on accompanying migrants on their journey. Includes reflection spaces and planning for follow-up activities.

Contact information: Inigo Casares, US Education Coordinator, educationcoordinator@kinoborderinitiative.org

CRISPAZ (Christians for Peace in El Salvador)

- **Location:** El Salvador
- **Duration:** 7-10 days
- **Cost:** Around \$1,000 USD
- **Activities:**
 - Learn directly from Salvadorans about issues such as the impact of war, neoliberal economics, U.S. foreign policy, migration, mining, the environment, and a tradition of liberating faith.
 - Visit martyr sites, grassroots organizations, a rural community, and hear from speakers on history, politics, economics, and current issues.
 - Opportunities to shop for fair-trade crafts and engage in cultural activities.
 - Special emphasis on the voices and experiences of the poor and marginalized in El Salvador.

Contact information: Andrea Barrientos, Delegation Program Coordinator: andy@crispaz.org

Hope Community Center

- **Location:** Apopka, FL
- **Format:** In-person, Virtual, Webinar
- **Duration:** 1-2 days or 5 days

- **Focus Areas:**
 - Root Causes of Migration
 - Agro-Ecology and Food
 - Culture and Poverty
 - Youth and Education
 - Racism and White Supremacy
 - Immigrant Rights
 - Intersectionality
 - Power of Storytelling
 - Theory of Social Change
 - Power, Privilege, and Identity
 - Impacts of COVID-19 on Immigrant Communities
- **Partnership:** Catholic University of America (CUA)

Contact information: 407.880.4673

[Catholic Extension Society](#)

- **Focus:** Immersion trips for pastors from urban/suburban dioceses.
- **Activities:**
 - Visits to mission dioceses across the U.S. and internationally.
 - Trips typically take place during weekdays and require two nights away, with expenses covered for participants.
 - Destinations include Native American reservations in the West, African-American parishes in the Deep South, migrant farm worker camps in farmlands, communities along the U.S.–Mexico border, remote missions in Appalachia, and Caribbean islands (Cuba, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands).

Contact information: Natalie Donatello, Director of Parish Partnerships, 312-795-6057, ndonatello@catholicextension.org

[Sisters of Mercy/Hermanas de la Misericordia](#)

- **Focus:** Border immersion trips
- **Locations:**
 - El Paso, Texas/Juarez, Mexico (hosted by the Columban Mission Center)
 - Rio Grande Valley, South Texas (hosted by ARISE and its Mercy associates).

Contact information: justice@sistersofmercy.org

Iglesia Cristo Rey

- **Location:** El Paso/Ciudad Juarez border
- **Activities:**
 - Fellowship at the border fence.
 - Presentations on various social justice ministries.
 - Assisting with the After School Program.
 - Personal accounts of border life.
 - Exposure to Mexican & Mexican-American culture.
 - Tours of colonias (rural settlements) in El Paso.
 - Daily processing and Bible study available.

Contact Information: borderimmersion@gmail.com

Border Servant Corps

- **Focus:** Accompaniment-style immersion experiences
- **Activities:**
 - Educational experiences about border issues through first-hand interactions.
 - Meetings with first-generation immigrants, local organizations working with immigrant populations, and government officials to discuss border protection and law enforcement.
 - Learning about immigration law, and the economic policies and realities affecting people on the border.
 - Emphasis on understanding the complex realities of the borderlands in a polarized society.

Contact information: immersion@bscnm.org

Encuentro Project

- **Focus:** Accompaniment-style immersion experiences
- **Activities:**
 - Meet with migrants, refugees, and immigrants to see and hear their stories
 - Partake in meetings with individuals and organizations who serve in the area
 - Learn through workshops about realities in connection with Catholic Social Teaching
 - Pray and reflect with fellow members regarding the hardships these individuals face.

Contact information: encuentroproject@gmail.com

Welcome Newcomers to Your Community Through Volunteering and Through Creative Events

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) works alongside a nationwide network of Catholic Charities agencies to provide lifesaving assistance to newly arrived refugees and other migrant populations. These agencies often rely on local community members to support newcomers' adjustment to their new lives in the United States. Taking advantage of opportunities to volunteer will provide insights into the lives of migrants, why they came to the United States, and what they want to do with their lives. Your engagement will provide critical support in their becoming American and making their dreams a reality.

“We couldn't do refugee resettlement without our volunteers. They are a lifeline for our newcomer families. It is how refugees start growing roots in their new city or town.”

Catholic Charities, Diocese of Oklahoma City Refugee Services

Parishes Organized to Welcome Immigrants and Refugees (POWIR), an initiative led by USCCB, seeks to develop a base of support and mentorship for newcomers through local, parish-based ministries of hospitality. Each year, USCCB partners with a select set of Catholic Charities agencies to expand their outreach to parishes eager to extend a supportive hand to refugees and immigrants.

While each POWIR program is different based on local needs, common service opportunities include providing initial hot meals and groceries, preparing and furnishing apartments for arriving families, enrolling children in school, and greeting newcomers at the airport. Many POWIR programs also offer opportunities to equip refugees with vital skills thru English language and job readiness coaching, computer literacy, cultural orientation, school tutoring, financial literacy, and more. Most importantly, POWIR parish volunteers provide guidance, friendship, and valuable connections to local community resources.

Is your parish interested in volunteering with POWIR?

Use USCCB's [POWIR map](#) to contact your nearest office. If there is no POWIR program close to you, no worries! Many additional Catholic Charities agencies, along with other resettlement organizations throughout the country, depend heavily on community members to serve as volunteers. Click on your state in the [Office of Refugee Resettlement's interactive map](#) to locate organizations in your area that are resettling refugees. We encourage you to ask about opportunities for you to partner with their program

Welcome Newcomers to Your Community Through Welcome Corps

Welcome Corps empowers everyday Americans to play a leading role in sponsoring refugees arriving through the [U.S. Refugee Admissions Program](#) by fully supporting their resettlement and integration independently of local resettlement agencies. Refugees arrive through Welcome Corps with [Refugee Status](#), a durable legal status which carries with it a pathway to citizenship.

This deep level of engagement involves groups of five or more community members coming together in solidarity with the world's most vulnerable in search of safety and freedom. As a Welcome Corps parish, you will have an essential role over a 90-day period in helping a refugee family by securing initial housing, enrolling children in school, assisting with job readiness, signing up for health care, accessing benefits, and facilitating other core support services essential to successful integration.

Sponsors are also responsible for raising funds and finding in-kind donations to assist a newcomer household. Your parish may start a GoFundMe, collect donations, or pick out winter coats, pots and pans, and mattresses, all to ensure the family has the best possible start in their new community.

Parishes who serve as private sponsor groups are not alone. Each group is paired with an organization that helps them through the entire process. Welcome Corps is designed to provide sponsors with all of the tools and guidance they need.

There are two ways that parishes can Welcome through Welcome Corps:

- You can be matched with a refugee family you do not know who needs support from new neighbors like you and has been screened, vetted, and approved to start a new life in the United States.
- You can apply to sponsor a refugee you already know such as a parishioner's family member or friend

Is your parish interested in the Welcome Corps?

Please visit [USCCB's Migration and Refugee Services Website](#) to learn how to participate. You can also email welcomecorps@usccb.org to ask any questions about the program or the application process.

The Welcome Corps is a program of the U.S. Department of State, administered by a consortium led by the Community Sponsorship Hub with funding provided by the U.S. government. USCCB does not receive funding from the U.S. government for the Welcome Corps.

Host a Cultural Dinner!

Other ways to engage with the newcomers is by hosting a cultural dinner for migrant communities in your parish. It is a wonderful way to foster connection and celebrate diversity. Here is a *step-by-step* guide to help you plan and execute this event:

Please keep in mind this is meant to be used as a guide, some dinner ideas may not be so complex, or need extensive planning.

1. Understand the Communities

- **Identify the Communities:** Research the different migrant communities within your parish to understand their cultural backgrounds, languages, and dietary preferences. Where is the migrant community from? What language do they speak?
- **Engage with Leaders:** Connect with community leaders or representatives to get their input and ensure the event is culturally sensitive and inclusive.
- **Opening Prayer and Meal Blessing:** Coordinate with a priest to come by (or stay the whole time) to bless the food, and individuals coming together. Include an opening prayer in the native language of the community and encourage someone from the community to lead in prayer! It can be helpful to include scripture, and a reflection to set the tone for the dinner, perhaps you create some guided questions to help navigate the conversation.

2. Form a Planning Committee

- **Diverse Representation:** Include members from various migrant communities in your planning team to ensure their voices are heard.
- **Assign Roles:** Delegate tasks such as food preparation, venue setup, invitations, entertainment, and cleanup.

3. Choose a Venue

- **Size and Accessibility:** Ensure the venue is large enough to accommodate everyone and is accessible to all community members. Maybe hosting it in your parish can be a convenient location with access to bus routes, metro, highway access.
- **Decor:** Consider using decorations that reflect the cultures of the communities involved, such as flags,

traditional fabrics, or art. Be mindful to not display decorations that promote harmful stereotypes. Ask members from the community if they have decorations they would like to bring!

4. Plan the Menu

- **Cultural Foods:** Work with members of the migrant communities to prepare traditional dishes from their cultures. Consider a potluck-style dinner where each community contributes a dish.
- **Dietary Considerations:** Be mindful of dietary restrictions and preferences (e.g., vegetarian, halal, kosher).
- **Cooking Assistance:** If needed, provide a communal kitchen, or help for those preparing the food.
- **Financial Assistance:** See if your parish/community can help cover the funds for individuals bringing their own food or provide compensation for their spending. Consider having most of the food available, so people from the community don't have to spend so much money to provide meals for a large number.

5. Cultural Entertainment

- **Music and Dance:** Include performances of traditional music, dance, or other forms of cultural expression from the different communities.
- **Storytelling and Speeches:** Allow time for community members to share stories or say a few words about their culture.

6. Invitations and Promotion

- **Inclusive Invitations:** Make sure invitations are extended to all members of the parish and migrant communities.
- **Multi-Language Invitations:** Create invitations and promotional materials in the languages spoken by the migrant communities.

7. Logistics and Setup

- **Seating Arrangements:** Create a seating plan that encourages mingling between different communities.
- **Serve the Food:** Consider having volunteers serve the food to ensure a smooth flow and to explain the dishes to attendees.

8. During the Event

- **Welcoming Atmosphere:** Ensure there is a welcoming atmosphere where everyone feels included and respected.
- **Cultural Sharing:** Encourage attendees to share stories, traditions, and the significance of the dishes they brought.
- **Photography and Documentation:** Capture moments from the event to share with the parish community afterward.
- **Questions:** It is normal to run out of things to talk about, it might be helpful to have some guided questions, reflections, or scripture to help navigate your conversation with individuals.

9. After the Event

- **Thank You Notes:** Send thank-you notes to all participants, especially those who contributed food or entertainment.
- **Feedback:** Gather feedback from attendees to learn what went well and what could be improved for future events.
- **Share the Experience:** Share photos and stories from the event in the parish newsletter or on social media to highlight the success of the gathering.

- **Closing Prayer and Blessing:** Create or search for a closing prayer in the native language of the community and see if someone is up to reading it! Maybe try to have a priest come by to the event for final blessings and concluding prayers.

These are some ways you can create a memorable and meaningful cultural dinner that celebrates the diversity of your parish community and strengthens the bonds between diverse groups. Ensure you include leaders and/or members of the community, encourage parishioners that are not part of the migrant community to learn more about the culture of the fellow parishioners, and create opportunities for engagement.

During your time with the community, it might be a wonderful opportunity to create a cultural ministry, organize a calendar for a quarterly, monthly, or bi-annual event, and explore other ways the community wants to be involved. This opportunity opens the door for more ways to encounter one another, encouraging migrant communities to take the lead on parish initiatives and see what this community might need. This gathering can inspire other tasks for the parish such as starting a food pantry or food/clothes drive, assistance with basic needs (food, shelter, legal aid), or capacity skill-learning activities. It is important to foster an environment of safety and welcoming.

Closing Reflection

As Joseph and Mary were refugees during their flight to Egypt, escaping violence, and fleeing to safety, mirrors the experiences of countless families forced to flee their homes due to war, persecution, danger, and other root causes. Just as the Holy Family fought to protect their unborn child, Jesus in a foreign land, many refugees and migrants today journey to a foreign land into the unknown looking for a safe future. This invites us to see Christ in the faces of those displaced, challenging us to respond with compassion, solidarity, and hospitality. By reflecting on the Holy Family living once as refugees, we are called to recognize the sacredness and dignity of every person's life and are called to advocate for a world where we can all find refuge and peace in our siblings through Christ.

Thank you for reading our Encounter Manual, highlighting the themes of National Migration Week 2024. We are working hard to develop resources useful to your community or parish.

We welcome feedback and comments on how we can improve, or other needs you might have in your parish. Email us at JFI@uscgb.org.

Here you will find a collective book titled “A Collective Book of Prayers for Migrants”, where you will find prayers for Migrants, Children, and Families.

Check out our Justice for Immigrants page on www.justiceforimmigrants.org to learn about our programs, learn more about our work, and engage in E-learning platforms!

