

Accompanying the Refugee

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Living in a secure nation, it is hard to imagine being without the protection of a country.

Pope Francis knows well the instability and fear faced by the millions of refugees around the world. Since his first months in office, he has advocated for refugees in word and action. In his 2020 encyclical *Fratelli tutti* (“On Fraternity and Social Friendship”), he states that the response to migrating peoples should be “welcome, protect, promote and integrate” (129). Through these actions, he writes, people can take a journey together.

The Catholic Church’s concern for refugees can be traced to the law that God gave Moses: “When an alien resides with you in your land, do not mistreat such a one. You shall treat the alien who resides with you no differently than the natives born among you; you shall love the alien as yourself; for you too were once aliens in the land of Egypt. I, the LORD, am your God” (Leviticus 19:33–34).

From the Gospel, the Church recognizes that the Holy Family were refugees. When King Herod, feeling threatened by a messiah, put out a search to kill Jesus, an angel told Joseph, “Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt” (Matthew 2:13).

More than 26 million people across the globe live as refugees, unable to call a nation their home. Each June 20 communities around the globe mark World Refugee Day, which the United Nations has designated to highlight the situation of those who live outside of their country due to a fear of persecution based on his or her race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group,” according to the 1951 Refugee Convention, article 1 (a).

The Church’s regard for refugees is reflected in the prayers of the Mass for Various Needs and Occasions, For Refugees and Exiles. In the collect, we pray:

O Lord, to whom no one is a stranger
and from whose help no one is ever distant,
look with compassion on refugees and exiles,
on segregated persons and lost children;
restore them, we pray, to a homeland,
and give us a kind heart for the needy and for strangers.

As the largest resettlement agency in the world, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Migration and Refugee Services department works to make that prayer a reality. The agency assists 30 percent of all refugees who enter the United States each year to resettle and start a new life. The outreach of caring Catholics, as well as the work of partner agencies, accomplishes this mission. For this work, Migration and Refugee Services depends on parishes. “The first place for the Church’s attention to refugees remains the parish community, which has the task of sensitizing its members to the plight of refugees, exhorting them to welcome as Jesus taught: ‘I was a stranger and you welcomed me’ (Matthew 25:35),” states the document *Refugees: A Challenge to Solidarity*.

Parish communities may wish to sponsor a refugee or supply clothing or household items to agencies that house refugees. Parishes may choose to celebrate the Mass for Refugees and Exiles found in *The Roman Missal* under Masses and Prayers for Various Needs and Occasions and find ways to dialogue with refugees. World Refugee Day offers many possibilities for parishes to understand the challenges faced by refugees and to provide protection and care.

For more information on how parishes can be involved with the bishops’ work for refugees, visit the Committee on Migration site <https://www.usccb.org/committees/migration> or the USCCB site Justice for Immigrants <https://justiceforimmigrants.org>.



As World Refugee Day approaches, parishes may want to consider ways to support refugees, such as gathering donations of food and supplies in their community.