

# PARISH SOCIAL MINISTRY

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE PARISH SOCIAL MINISTRY SECTION | DECEMBER 2017

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*Working to Reduce Poverty in America.*



**By Collen Mayer**

On September 19, 2016 world leaders met at a United Nations Summit in New York to address a global crisis: record-breaking numbers of migrants and refugees being forced to leave their countries, as they flee violence, persecution, and poverty and travel to new lands seeking a better life for themselves and their families. Speaking in advance of the gathering, the UNN Secretary-General said, "Above all this is not just a crisis of numbers, it is also a crisis of solidarity."<sup>1</sup> At the Summit world leaders committed to a compassionate response and reception to these migrants and refugees that was "people-centered, sensitive, humane, dignified, gender-responsive, and prompt."<sup>2</sup> This was a landmark gathering where leaders from many nations came together to speak to our obligation as a human family to welcome migrants and refugees.

In his message for the 2018 World Day of Migrants and Refugees, Francis encouraged people of faith to take action in support of the United Nations' work.<sup>3</sup> In his address, the

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Pope highlights the rich teachings of the Catholic Social Tradition which urge the Church to act in solidarity with refugees and migrants, insisting on practices which uphold their dignity at all costs. Specifically, the Pope calls people of faith to adopt four concrete practices-

- 1) **Welcome:** Francis asks the global community to simplify the process of opening borders to those fleeing humanitarian crises, so that they can access basic services and find safety. Francis recalls Pope Benedict's admonishment that the principal of human dignity requires that we must prioritize the individual safety of those in need even over national security.
- 2) **Protect:** Francis calls on countries to defend the rights and dignity of migrants and refugees, regardless of their legal status, ensuring they have access to the basic requirements for a dignified life. This includes opportunities for employment, health-care, housing, and communication with their families.
- 3) **Promote:** Francis also insists that we must go beyond just providing for subsistence needs. Migrants and refugees should be given the possibility to thrive in their new homes, through freedom of religion, employment that pays a living wage, and a community that welcomes and supports them.
- 4) **Integrate:** Francis suggests that integration is not "an assimilation that leads migrants to suppress or to forget their own

cultural identity." Rather to integrate migrants is to enter into "a lengthy process that aims to shape societies and cultures, making them more and more a reflection of the multi-faceted gifts of God to human beings". Francis suggests that as a Church we must build a "culture of encounter" in which people of faith form hospitable communities that warmly welcome migrants and refugees and all are mutually enriched by the encounter.

Motivated by Catholic Social Teaching, we pray that parishes and faith communities across the world may heed Pope Francis' call to welcome, protect, promote, and integrate our migrant brothers and sisters. ■

*Collen Mayer is Social Services Department Director for Catholic Charities of Tennessee*

<sup>1</sup> "Refugee Crisis about Solidarity, Not Just Numbers, Secretary-General Says at Event on Global Displacement Challenge," <https://www.un.org/press/en/2016/sgsm17670.doc.htm>

<sup>2</sup> "Migrant flows to Europe continue as U.N. convenes summit in New York," [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/migrant-flows-to-europe-continue-as-united-nations-convenes-summit-in-new-york/2016/09/16/0702af5a-7ab7-11e6-8064-c1ddc8a724bb\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.696173be01db](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/migrant-flows-to-europe-continue-as-united-nations-convenes-summit-in-new-york/2016/09/16/0702af5a-7ab7-11e6-8064-c1ddc8a724bb_story.html?utm_term=.696173be01db), accessed 11/8/17.

<sup>3</sup> "Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the 104th World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2018," [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/migration/documents/pa-pa-francesco\\_20170815\\_world-migrants-day-2018.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/migration/documents/pa-pa-francesco_20170815_world-migrants-day-2018.html).





# Getting Started in “Welcoming the Stranger”

By Sr. Betsy Van Deusen, CSJ

Parishes across the country are hearing news accounts of the refugee and immigration crisis in the world and wondering what they can do, are beginning to do some things, or are leading efforts to make a difference in their communities.

The short answer to how do we get started is – pray, become educated, gather with like-minded people, and take advantage of the many resources available.

Many helpful resources can be found on the Share the Journey campaign website ([www.sharejourney.org](http://www.sharejourney.org)), a two-year international effort to raise awareness of the needs of migrants and refugees. Share the Journey was inaugurated by Pope Francis and is sponsored by Catholic Charities USA and partners around the globe. The website features videos, prayers, advocacy materials, migrant stories, curricula, and a parish toolkit.

Staff and volunteers of Catholic Charities agencies that are members of CCUSA are encouraged to join the Immigration and Refugee Services Community of Practice which offers resources webinars, workshops, and advocacy and networking opportunities. Those interested should contact Jim Kuh, CCUSA's Senior Director of Immigration and Refugee Services, at [jkuh@catholiccharitiesusa.org](mailto:jkuh@catholiccharitiesusa.org).

The Migration and Refugee Services (MRS) of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops offers extraordinary resources for education, prayer, homily preparation, and more. Their Parishes Organized to Welcome Refugees (POWR) newsletter <http://www.usccb.org/about/resettlement-services/parishes-organized-to-welcome-refugees.cfm> is a wealth of information and resources and The Parish Refugee Resettlement Ministry Manual, available online at <http://tinyurl.com/y75k438w>, is an essential ministry primer.

Finally, Fairfield University's Center for faith in Public Life has created a “Strangers as Neighbors” toolkit to provide a “new model for bringing people together on contentious issues such as immigration reform within a faith-based framework.” The toolkit offers parish resources and is available at <http://digitalcommons.fairfield.edu/strangersasneighbors-toolkit/>. ■

*Sr. Betsy VanDeusen, CST, is Director of Community Partnerships with Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Albany.*

## WEBINAR: Welcoming New Americans Through Parish Social Ministry

This December 5 webinar, sponsored by the Catholic Charities USA Parish Social Ministry Leadership Team, features five different models of parishes to adopt when welcoming immigrants and refugees.

A recording of the webinar may be found at this [link](#); the webinar's slide show may be [accessed here](#). They may also be requested at [psm@catholiccharitiesusa.org](mailto:psm@catholiccharitiesusa.org)



Share the  
Journey #  
#sharejourney

## FOCUS ON THE PARISH:

# Immaculate Conception and St. Joseph, Chicago, IL

By **Shelia Herlihy**

The people of Immaculate Conception and St. Joseph's parish in Chicago were primed to help those in need. The words and example of Pope Francis and Cardinal Cupich had already inspired many in this unified parish to consider how they might reach out to migrants and refugees. Last fall, anticipating Advent, several parishioners ordered a sign saying "Immigrants and Refugees Welcome" with a picture of the Holy Family, and placed it prominently outside the church. Putting these high ideals into practice seemed a greater challenge, though. A group of four parishioners came together, shocked by the great outpouring of Syrian refugees, and overwhelmed by the plight of more than 50 million refugees worldwide. Together, they drafted a plan for their parish to partner with Catholic Charities and sponsor a refugee family to come to the US.

With the pastor's blessing, they met with representatives of Catholic Charities, and another parish that had participated in POWR (Parishes Organized to Welcome Refugees). Betty Woodward, one of the original team, emphasizes that it was never a bureaucratic committee. The whole process was very organic, with parishioners rising to answer the needs as they came up, and a lot of guidance from Catholic Charities. From a practical perspective, they needed to raise at least \$8,000 to help with the initial costs of settling a family. During Lent, they implemented a two-pronged approach of Mass announcements and bulletin announcements, always acknowledging parishioners' concerns and inviting them to become volunteers. In two weeks, the parish had raised, not the minimum of \$8,000, but over \$20,000! The training process began (with both cultural competency and safe environment training), and at the end of March, several parishioners were waiting at the airport to welcome an Afghani refugee family.

That moment of meeting is still fresh in the mind of Betty Woodward. She knew the family would be exhausted from travelling to a new country. They would have no picture of their welcoming committee, nor would they speak the language. Still, she says, "I told everybody, 'You're going to be amazed how you can talk to people without using words.' The smiles, the hugs... somebody even made welcome signs." The bond was instantaneous, and the relationships continue to grow.



## Other CCUSA Resources

- [Prayer for Refugees and Migrants](#)
- [Charities USA Spring 2017](#)  
For I Was a Stranger and You Welcomed Me: Immigration and Refugee Services



Two more families have come to the Chicago area sponsored by Immaculate Conception and St. Joseph's parish: one in May and another in October. With each family, the parish has put together a team of about eight who visit and befriend that family. They also host events where the whole community can come together, such as a clothing drive. Today, the parish knows that the true accomplishment is not just the generosity of money or of time. This parish has truly found new members of their families, and it has enriched the entire community. ■

*Sheila Herlihy is coordinator of Justice and Peace at Church of the Incarnation in Charlottesville, VA*