The Great Migration
In Search for a Better Life

"I was a stranger and you welcomed me." (Matt 25:35)

The Catholic Church and the bishops of the United States have expressed their serious concern for the political and humanitarian crisis in Syria. In the past five years, at least four million Syrians have fled their country as a consequence of the civil war and the rise of ISIS. Most have fled to surrounding countries, especially Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey, and according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), so far this year almost 600,000 migrants are estimated to have arrived by sea to the European shores with the hope of finding a place of peace and safety, although exact numbers are unclear as some may have passed through borders undetected. Many attempt the crossing in overcrowded and unseaworthy boats, leading to scores of deaths due to drowning and starvation: 3,092 people have died in the Mediterranean in 2015 according to the IOM. The number of Syrians fleeing the ongoing conflict in their country far outweighs those who have made the difficult journey to Europe, but the ongoing violence in Afghanistan, abuses in Eritrea, as well as poverty in Kosovo have also caused people to look for new lives elsewhere.

Pope Francis and the Catholic bishops through the voice of Archbishop Joseph Kurtz, Archbishop of Louisville, KY, and President of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), have called on the U.S. government and the international community to provide support to both Syrian refugees fleeing violence and to countries that have been at the forefront of this humanitarian effort. Pope Francis keeps reminding us to seek "respect for the sacredness of every human life, of every man and every woman, the poor, the elderly, children, the infirm, the unborn, the unemployed, the abandoned, those considered disposable because they are only considered as part of a statistic." The Pope and U.S. Bishops asked all efforts been made to:

- Ending the conflict in Syria and Iraq
- Building an inclusive and lasting peace to allow Syrian refugees—also including those who are ethnic and religious minorities—to return home and rebuild their countries.
- Providing humanitarian assistance to Syrian refugees who have fled to neighboring refugee countries.
- Providing development aid to refugee host countries near Syria so they are able to properly welcome and care for the refugees.
- Providing 100,000 annual resettlement slots for the most vulnerable refugees fleeing the Syria conflict.
- Designating an additional 100,000 refugees to be resettled in the U.S. from other countries.

Our world is facing a refugee crisis of a magnitude not seen since the Second World War. This presents us with great challenges and many hard decisions. On this continent, too, thousands of persons are led to travel north in search of a better life for themselves and for their loved ones, in search of greater opportunities. Is this not what we want for our own children? We must not be taken aback by their numbers, but rather view them as persons, seeing their faces and listening to their stories, trying to respond as best we can to their situation. To respond in a way which is always humane, just and fraternal. We need to avoid a common temptation nowadays: to discard whatever proves troublesome. Let us remember the Golden Rule: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” (Mt. 7:12). (Pope Francis, 9/24/15, Speech to the US Congress)
“Migrants and Refugees Challenge Us. The Response of the Gospel of Mercy”

(Excerpts from the Message from His Holiness Pope Francis for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2016, full text available at www.vatican.va)

…..In our time, migration is growing worldwide. Refugees and people fleeing from their homes challenge individuals and communities, and their traditional ways of life; at times they upset the cultural and social horizons which they encounter. Increasingly, the victims of violence and poverty, leaving their homelands, are exploited by human traffickers during their journey towards the dream of a better future. If they survive the abuses and hardships of the journey, they then have to face latent suspicions and fear. In the end, they frequently encounter a lack of clear and practical policies regulating the acceptance of migrants and providing for short or long term programs of integration respectful of the rights and duties of all…..

The tragic stories of millions of men and women daily confront the international community as a result of the outbreak of unacceptable humanitarian crises in different parts of the world. Indifference and silence lead to complicity whenever we stand by as people are dying of suffocation, starvation, violence and shipwreck. Whether large or small in scale, these are always tragedies, even when a single human life is lost…..

The presence of migrants and refugees seriously challenges the various societies which accept them. ……How can we ensure that integration will become mutual enrichment, open up positive perspectives to communities, and prevent the danger of discrimination, racism, extreme nationalism or xenophobia? 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……

There continue to be debates about the conditions and limits to be set for the reception of migrants, not only on the level of national policies, but also in some parish communities whose traditional tranquility seems to be threatened. Faced with these issues, how can the Church fail to be inspired by the example and words of Jesus Christ? The answer of the Gospel is mercy…. Mercy nourishes and strengthens solidarity towards others as a necessary response to God’s gracious love, “which has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit” (Rom 5:5). Each of us is responsible for his or her neighbor: we are our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers, wherever they live…..From this perspective, it is important to view migrants not only on the basis of their status as regular or irregular, but above all as people whose dignity is to be protected and who are capable of contributing to progress and the general welfare…..

The Church stands at the side of all who work to defend each person’s right to live with dignity, first and foremost by exercising the right not to emigrate and to contribute to the development of one’s country of origin. This process should include, from the outset, the need to assist the countries which migrants and refugees leave. This will demonstrate that solidarity, cooperation, international interdependence and the equitable distribution of the earth’s goods are essential for more decisive efforts, especially in areas where migration movements begin, to eliminate those imbalances which lead people, individually or collectively, to abandon their own natural and cultural environment. In any case, it is necessary to avert, if possible at the earliest stages, the flight of refugees and departures as a result of poverty, violence and persecution…..

At the heart of the Gospel of mercy the encounter and acceptance by others are intertwined with the encounter and acceptance of God himself. Welcoming others means welcoming God in person!…..

What Can You Do

PRAY that God provides his protection to Syrians and all other refugees displaced by violence and persecution.

WRITE to President Obama, urging him to expand U.S. resettlement efforts of Syrian refugees who are fleeing unspeakable atrocities and violence.

ADVOCATE to your member of Congress for providing urgently needed development aid for refugee host countries near Syria that have heroically borne the brunt of the Syrian refugee crisis.

DONATE to the National Catholic Fund for Migration and Refugee Services to help sponsor newly-arriving Syrian and other refugees and provide for their critical needs.

Life, Charity & Justice News

Texas Bishops Urge Medicaid Expansion

“As integral to the right for life…is the right to basic health care”

The Texas Catholic Conference of Bishops has called upon Governor Greg Abbott and other state leaders to end a political standoff and reconsider the state’s refusal to expand Medicaid coverage for an estimated 1.3 million uninsured Texans. The Bishops’ concern focuses on adult Texans caught in a “Medicaid coverage gap” where they earn too much to be eligible for Medicaid, but are unable to secure health insurance on their own or through their employer. Lawmakers have declined to expand Medicaid for these poor, even though the federal government has offered some $100 billion to subsidize the expansion over the next decade.

Life, Justice and Charity Activities at St. Mary’s

- Oct. 17 to 25 in the church: Baby Crib Drive for baby items for the Good Samaritan program of Catholic Charities and The Elizabeth House Maternity Home;
- Oct 31 to Nov 1 in the church: filled Baby Banks are due back;
- Sunday Nov 1 in the lounge: sale of Fair Trade chocolate and coffee at the Fair Trade Coffee House;
- Oct 31 to Nov 19 in the church: St. Vincent de Paul Thanksgiving Food Drive;

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