

TIMELY TOPICS



DIocese OF COLUMBUS, OFFICE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND CATECHESIS

Migrant and Refugee Week

Christmas Day is behind us, but we still are celebrating the season of Christmas, a time for remembering the great mystery of the Incarnation and the amazing gift of God’s love for us. Among the many lovely stories, customs and traditions of the season, there is one, somewhat less-lovely story that we sometimes forget. That is the story in Matthew 2: 13-23 known as “The Flight to Egypt.”

In this account, Mary, Joseph and the child Jesus are portrayed as refugees, fleeing for their lives into a strange land. Even when the immediate danger had passed, they feared returning to their original home in their own country, but instead settled in an unfamiliar region in order to be more secure.

January 8 – 14, 2012, is designated “**National Immigration Week**” by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. This is both an invitation and a challenge to us, to realize and respond to the plight of the approximately 14 million **refugees** (people fleeing for their lives from war, persecution and natural disasters) and countless thousands of **migrants** (people seeking a more humane life for themselves and their children) in today’s world. And their number is growing in the Diocese of Columbus.

The theme for this year’s observance is “**Welcoming Christ in the Migrant,**” using a

theme from Christ’s life following his resurrection – the disciples meeting and welcoming the “stranger” on the road to Emmaus. In the words of Archbishop José Gomez of Los Angeles, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ (USCCB) Committee on Migration, “Just as on the road to Emmaus, Christ’s disciples met him in the guise of a stranger, this year’s theme helps remind us that Christ makes himself present to each of us in the lonesome traveler, the newcomer, and the migrant... We are called to open our hearts and provide hospitality to those in need, especially for migrants who find themselves far away from home and in vulnerable situations.”

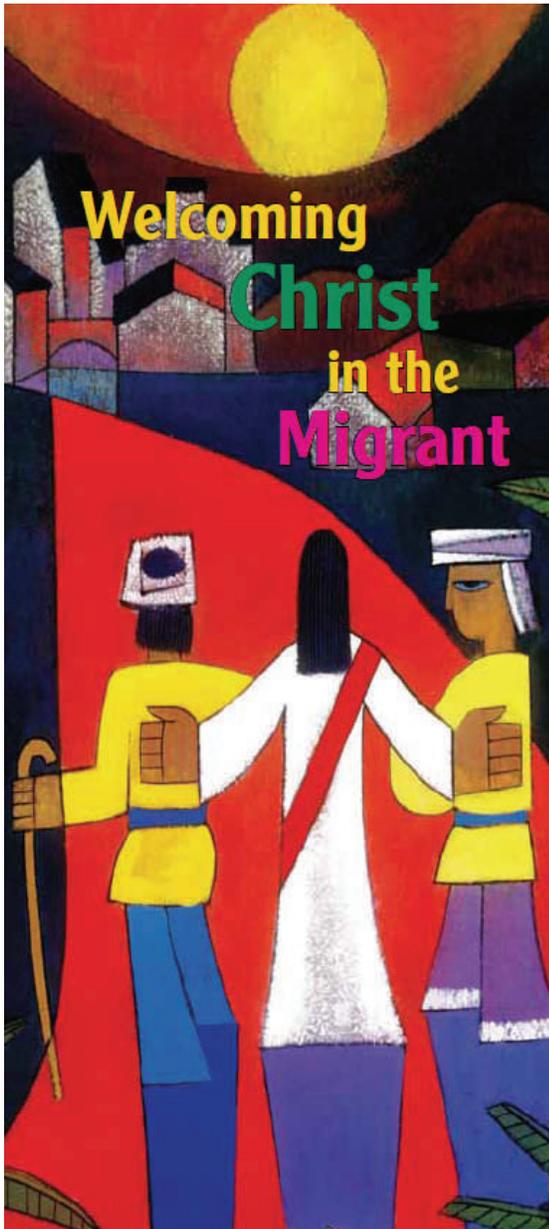
“REMEMBER ALWAYS TO WELCOME STRANGERS, FOR BY DOING THIS, SOME PEOPLE HAVE ENTERTAINED ANGELS WITHOUT KNOWING IT”
(HEB 13: 1-2)

This call is rooted in the mandate to the ancient Hebrews, to respect and care for the needs of widows, orphans and “the stranger,” or “alien” (cf. Ex 22: 20-21; Lev. 19: 10; Deut 10: 18-19; 24: 19; 26: 12), since they themselves had once been aliens in a foreign land. Later, in the Christian Letter to

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the Hebrews, we are reminded to “remember always to welcome strangers, for by doing this, some people have entertained angels without knowing it” (Heb 13: 1-2). Today in North America, unless we are the children of Native Americans, we, too, have all come from somewhere else. At some point our families have been the foreigners and aliens seeking shelter and welcome, struggling to build a life in a strange place.

Our faith calls us to reach out, to extend hands of welcome to “the other.” The bishops’ website, www.usccb.org/about/migration-and-refugee-services/national-migration-week, provides many resources/materials to support us in responding to this call.

From the USCCB website:

“The observance of National Migration Week was begun over a quarter century ago by the U.S. bishops to provide Catholics an opportunity to take stock of the wide diversity of peoples in the Church and the ministries serving them. As the face of the local church continues to change, educational materials produced for National Migration Week have become increasingly important. They can be used throughout the year by individuals, families, schools and parishes to learn about the complex issues surrounding migration.”

Resources for National Migration Week can be found on the USCCB website (<http://www.usccb.org/about/migration-and-refugee-services/national-migration-week/>). Posters, prayer cards and booklets can be ordered through the USCCB publishing service at <http://www.usccbpublishing.org> or by calling 800-235-8722. Additionally, the U.S. bishops continue to encourage advocacy efforts by the Catholic community on comprehensive immigration reform. Visit the Justice for Immigrants Campaign website for more information: www.justiceforimmigrants.org.

Pope Benedict’s message for World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2012 can be found at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/migration/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20110921_world-migrants-day_en.html. You can read the entire Press Release at <http://www.usccb.org/news/2011/11-240.cfm>.✿

In-Service

Needs: paper and pencils for each participant; several Bibles with the passages (below) marked for readers

Ex 22: 20-21

Deut 10: 18-19

Matt 2: 13-15, 19-23

Lev. 19: 10

Deut 24: 19

Lk 24: 28-32

Deut 26: 12

Heb 13: 1-2

- ⊙ What do you know about the arrival of your ancestors/family in North America?
 - ⊙ Jot down any cultural customs/traditions/foods that your family still treasures and observes.
 - ⊙ Share with one other person.
- ⊙ Listen as each Scripture passage is read aloud*, with a few moments' pause for silent reflection between each one.
- ⊙ Reflect on these questions as you listen --
 - ⊙ As I hear these readings, what do I sense is God's invitation to me?
 - ⊙ What difference might this make in my life?
- ⊙ Conclude with the prayer that follows;
 - ⊙ Think about how we might observe National Migration Week in our school/parish/PSR/specific group of learners.

**(Variation: Scripture passages also could be assigned one day at a time, for a week before in-service)*

Welcoming the Stranger: A Prayer for Hospitality

Loving God, Your Son Jesus promised

That in Your kingdom we will find a great banquet:

a festive gathering for all your family, for all people of every race and color –

a table at which the lonely find company,

the hungry savor good food, and strangers enjoy the warmth of family.

Teach us, Lord, the ways of Your hospitality.

Give us the spirit of joyful welcome and the compassion

to help those who have been uprooted to feel that they belong.

Grant that our tables at home may draw our new neighbors from other lands

into a loving community and that the Eucharistic tables in

our parishes may prefigure that banquet in heaven where all are one with you.

Amen.

(adapted from USCCB, 2001)

Correlation to the Graded Course of Study & National Standards

Religion Graded Course of Study

Content Standard IV: Discover and recognize the development of the Christian person and experience the baptismal call to dignity, relationship, moral decision-making and service.

National Certification Standards for Lay Ecclesial Ministers

Standard I: Personal and Spiritual Maturity

Core Competency 1.6: Relate respectfully with a diversity of persons, age groups, and cultures

Specialized Competency 1.10PCL: Give witness to compassion, justice and charity in personal and pastoral relationships

Standard III: Catholic theology

Core Competency 3.7: Know and integrate into ministerial practice a theology of the moral life, including

Catholic social teaching for the transformation of church and society

Standard IV: Pastoral Praxis

Core Competency 4.3: Understand and appreciate the gifts diverse cultures bring to the faith community

NOTE: A new competency for cross-cultural/multi-cultural praxis is included in the revision, currently underway, of these standards.

GDC: The Six Fundamental Tasks of Catechesis

- III. **Moral Formation** which provides the bases for “the moral formation which is most necessary today...” and which “...offers not only the proclaimed word but the lived word too. This moral testimony, which is prepared for by catechesis, must always demonstrate the social consequences of the demands of the Gospel.” (*General Directory for Catechesis*, #85)

Ideas for All Ages

Adults/RCIA/Teens*

- ☞ Use ideas from In-Service (above), sharing stories of ancestors' arrivals in North America and the Scripture readings.
- ☞ Research the Seven Principles which are the basis for the Church's teachings on social justice. Which one(s) can be applied to the situation of migrants and refugees?
- ☞ Read and discuss Pope Benedict's Message for [World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2012](#).
- ☞ What is the challenge to us, as Christian Catholics who are serious about living our faith? Research what provisions are available in our diocese for assistance to migrants and refugees. How might you support them?
- ☞ Research US immigration policy, also the process of asylum for refugees. In what aspects do these policies line up with Catholic social teaching? In what do ways do they not? What group-action might you undertake in response to your learning?

Young Children*

- ☞ Find out how many different ethnic/cultural groups are represented in your class. Ask children to discuss with parents and be prepared to share special customs, foods, celebrations that the family enjoys. Responses can be oral, written, musical or through visual arts.
- ☞ Read the Scriptural account of the disciples trying to turn away the children, and Jesus' response (Mark 10: 13-16). Discuss what Jesus' message is to us. Discuss: how can we be more welcoming? Concrete actions?
- ☞ Baptism brings us into God's family. What does that mean for us? If we are all brothers and sisters in Christ, how should we behave toward each other? Responses can be oral, written, musical (rap?), or through a mime/skit or the visual arts.

***N.B.** Be sensitive to the possible presence of persons who may be newcomers themselves, or part of a family that is in the US illegally.

Resources

RESOURCES from OFFICE of RELIGIOUS EDUCATION and CATECHESIS

- VTE 2434** "Who Are My Sisters and Brothers?" (*Immigrants/refugees*) 9-12, Adult
- VTE 2349** "People" (*Diversity*) All
- VTE 1904-VTE 1915** "American Cultures for Children" series: (12 videos featuring different cultures within America, e.g., Central American, Arab-American, Native-American, Vietnamese-American, etc.) Pre-K-Gr. 4
- DVD 1041** "Dying to Live: A Migrant's Journey" (*Experience of the migrant*) 11-12, Adult
- DVD 1046** "Can Anything Good Come out of Nazareth?" (*Diversity in the Church*) Adult

Committee on Migration, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. *Asian and Pacific Presence: Harmony in Faith*. Washington, CD: USCCB, 2001

Migration and Refugee Services, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. *Who Are My Sisters and Brothers? Understanding and Welcoming Immigrants and Refugees*. Washington, DC: USCCB, 1996

Hall, Suzanne, Ruth Narita Doyle, Peter Tran, eds. *A Catholic Response to the Asian Presence*. Washington, DC: National Catholic Educational Association, 1990

Kuykendall, Crystal. *From Rage to Hope: Strategies for Reclaiming Black & Hispanic Students*, 2nd ed. Bloomington, IN: National Educational Service, 2004

Law, Eric H.F. *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb: A Spirituality for Leadership in a Multicultural Community*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 1993