

Catholic Refugee Ministry

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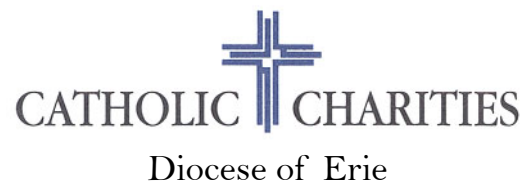
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Providing Help,

Creating Hope



CATHOLIC REFUGEE MINISTRY

The number of refugees in the world is growing. Over fifteen million people have fled war, terrorism, torture, slavery, starvation and oppression in their homeland. Most languish in camps with no hope of a durable solution to their plight. In the aftermath of September 11th, less than 40,000 refugees will be admitted to the U.S.A.—even though Congress had already approved 70,000 admissions for the year 2002.

In response to the growing presence of refugees in our communities, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, in November 2000, published a pastoral statement, *Welcoming the Stranger Among Us—Unity in Diversity*. Our bishops want us to see refugees as sisters and brothers in Christ—no matter what their faith tradition—as people with both needs which we can help fulfill and with gifts to share with us.

Since most of the refugees in the Erie Diocese reside in the City of Erie, Bishop Trautman, in January 2001, appointed an Erie pastor to serve as Coordinator of Pastoral Outreach for Refugees. This apostolate was placed under the aegis of the Office of Catholic Charities in July 2002 and is now known as Catholic Refugee Ministry.

The Catholic Diocese of Erie offers a multitude of services through its many organizations—Diocesan Offices, parishes, Parish Care and Concern groups, religious education. The Office of Catholic Refugee Ministry serves to connect refugees with appropriate Diocesan resources to enable them to attain self-sufficiency and to become actively contributing participants in the life of our religious and civic communities.



GOALS

- ◆ Educate people throughout the Erie Diocese about the ideas found in the U.S. Bishops pastoral letter, *Welcoming the Stranger Among Us—Unity in Diversity*.
- ◆ Coordinate pastoral outreach efforts to serve the religious needs of refugees.
- ◆ Involve parish staff and volunteers in reaching out to welcome refugees.
- ◆ Recruit, screen & train volunteers to help refugees.
- ◆ Appeal for the material needs of refugees. (The “Kitchen-in-a-Box” project asks parishioners to donate various kitchen items to be given to newly arrived refugees. Special needs appeals are sent out to parishes on occasion.)
- ◆ Celebrate a monthly Mass for the Sudanese and the Vietnamese in Erie.
- ◆ Conduct a pastoral needs census for Catholic refugees so pastoral ministers may provide religious education and sacramental celebrations.
- ◆ Motivate Catholics to advocate for the rights of refugees.
- ◆ Assist refugees to identify with a Catholic parish (or a congregation of their own faith tradition)
- ◆ Encourage faith communities (parishes, schools, religious communities) to be extra-hospitable in loving outreach.
- ◆ Facilitate catechesis, sacramental preparation, marriage validations, worship experiences
- ◆ Assist native-born Americans to know refugees personally
- ◆ Develop a “traveling choir” of refugees to visit some of the large suburban parishes in Erie
- ◆ Conduct group meetings for the Sudanese Youth to deal with life issues.
- ◆ Organize an inter-faith celebration of the annual National Migration Week. (This nationwide event is sponsored by the USCCB every January).
- ◆ Organize Thanksgiving Day & Christmas dinners for refugee groups.
- ◆ Solicit free summer educational and recreational opportunities for refugee children.
- ◆ Provide a forum for refugee leadership groups to meet and plan for their communities.
- ◆ Participate in an ecumenical group of volunteers serving refugees in order to coordinate efforts.
- ◆ Facilitate housing arrangements for refugees.
- ◆ Reinforce the connection of refugees with agencies that serve their special needs (International Institute of Erie, Hispanic-American Council of Erie, ESL & GED programs).

***“Welcoming
the
Stranger Among Us”***

