

**Refugee Welcome Cards Project:
Reflection Activity for Pastoral/Finance Councils or Adult Faith Formation Groups**

Time Required: 45-60 minutes

Before Meeting:

- *Decide if your group will spend part of the session making welcome cards **or --***
- *In the case of pastoral councils or other advisory committees, if the group will instead discuss the possibility of inviting the parish community at large to participate in the project*

Materials Needed:

- *Copy of this reflection activity for all participants*
- *Copy of “Welcoming refugees is the Lord’s work” column (a hard copy is in this packet, or access online at <http://catholicstarherald.org/welcoming-refugees-is-the-lords-work/>)*
- *Copies of the Refugee Welcome Cards template*

Opening Prayer:

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit ...

God of our Wandering Ancestors,
Long have we known
That your heart is with the refugee:
That you were born into time
In a family of refugees
Fleeing violence in their homeland,
Who then gathered up their hungry child
And fled into alien country.

Their cry, your cry, resounds through the ages:
“Will you let me in?”
Give us hearts that break open
When our brothers and sisters turn to us with that same cry.

Then surely all these things will follow:
Ears will no longer turn deaf to their voices.
Eyes will see a moment for grace instead of a threat.
Tongues will not be silenced but will instead advocate.
And hands will reach out—working for peace in their homelands, working for justice in the lands
where they seek safe haven.

Lord, protect all refugees in their travels.
May they find a friend in me
And so make me worthy of the refuge I have found in you.
Amen.

Refugees in Scripture Reflection

LEADER: We will listen now to passages throughout Scripture that give very clear instructions about how we should treat the refugee—or “alien” or “stranger”—among us. After a passage is read, we will say together: **Remember, you too were once strangers in the land of Egypt.**

READER: You shall not oppress a resident alien; you well know how it feels to be an alien, since you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt. (Exodus 23:9)

RESPONSE: Remember, you too were once strangers in the land of Egypt.

READER: Cursed be anyone who deprives the resident alien, the orphan or the widow of justice! And all the people shall answer, “Amen!” (Deuteronomy 27:19)

RESPONSE: Remember, you too were once strangers in the land of Egypt.

READER: You shall have but one rule, for alien and nativeborn alike. I, the LORD, am your God. (Leviticus 24:22)

RESPONSE: Remember, you too were once strangers in the land of Egypt.

READER: I will draw near to you for judgment, and I will be swift to bear witness against sorcerers, adulterers, and perjurers, those who deprive a laborer of wages, oppress a widow or an orphan, or turn aside a resident alien, without fearing me, says the LORD of hosts. (Malachi 3:5)

RESPONSE: Remember, you too were once strangers in the land of Egypt.

READER: Listen to my prayer, LORD, hear my cry; do not be deaf to my weeping! For I am with you like a foreigner, a refugee, like my ancestors. (Psalms 39:13)

RESPONSE: Remember, you too were once strangers in the land of Egypt.

READER: So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the holy ones and members of the household of God. (Ephesians 2:19)

RESPONSE: Remember, you too were once strangers in the land of Egypt.

READER: Do not neglect hospitality, for through it some have unknowingly entertained angels. (Hebrews 13:2)

RESPONSE: Remember, you too were once strangers in the land of Egypt.

Reading and Discussion

- Spend 5-10 minutes for participants to read “Welcoming refugees is the Lord’s work” from the *Catholic Star Herald*.
- Discuss the reading using these questions:
 - Have you ever had one of those moments like the author describes when you knew the Holy Spirit was at work right in front of you? What was that experience like?
 - Jesus said, “When I was a stranger, you welcomed me.” What challenge does that quote present to you and to your faith community?

- The author writes that welcoming refugees is the Lord’s work. Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?
- Were there any perceptions you had about refugees that were addressed in the column?

Refugee Welcome Cards Activity (pick one of two options based on your ministry setting)

- a. Create Welcome Cards**
- b. Conduct discernment conversation about suitability of inviting the parish community to participate in the project**

a. Create Welcome Cards option

Meeting Leader: All over the world, millions of people are attempting to find new homes for their families because of violence, war, and persecution. Catholic Charities, Diocese of Camden welcomes and resettles about 100 refugees each year here in South Jersey. This important work is one way our church is following Jesus’s commandment to welcome the stranger. To help our new neighbors feel at home, the diocese is sponsoring a Refugee Welcome Cards campaign.

Using a blank copy of the Refugee Welcome Cards template, write or draw an encouraging message of welcome. As a parish, we will send completed cards to Catholic Charities, Diocese of Camden, which will deliver the cards to individuals and families who have recently moved here from counties like Syria, Burma, Iraq, Cuba, and more.

Write and draw a positive, welcoming message on the cards. You might want to say something like:

- Welcome to New Jersey / South Jersey / the USA!
- I’m glad you’re here in our community.
- We are praying for you.
- Peace be with you.

Distribute welcome card templates to all participants, who will spend some time completing a card; finished cards are collected by meeting leader and turned in to the parish office.

b. Discernment Conversation option

Meeting Leader: All over the world, millions of people are attempting to find new homes for their families because of violence, war, and persecution. Catholic Charities, Diocese of Camden welcomes and resettles about 100 refugees each year here in South Jersey. This important work is one way our church is following Jesus’s commandment to welcome the stranger. To help our new neighbors feel at home, the diocese is sponsoring a Refugee Welcome Cards campaign.

The diocese is providing blank “welcome card” templates for parishioners and people of good will complete. Parishes that participate in the project will send completed cards to Catholic Charities, Diocese of Camden, which will deliver the cards to individuals and families who have recently moved here from counties like Syria, Burma, Iraq, Cuba, and more.

I would like for us to have a conversation about whether or not this project would be suitable for our parish to participate in.

- What would the benefits of participating in such a project be? What might the risks be? Do the benefits outweigh the risks?
- If we decide to participate in the project, what communities within the parish might be interested in participating?
- If we move forward, how might we educate parishioners about welcoming refugees and why it's an important element of discipleship?
- If the Welcome Cards project isn't suitable for our parish, is there another way we could share in the mission of Catholic Charities' refugee resettlement services?

Closing Prayer

Lord of All,
Some of us make our homes on hills, others in valleys.
Some in tall buildings, some on shorelines, some at risk on the street.
And we divide up our patches with lines we scratch into the ground
And call them borders.

Where the lines don't suffice, we build fences.
Where fences fail, we dig moats.
Where moats aren't enough, we erect walls.

But what if we were to look across these borders?
Across fence, moat, and wall
And see you on the other side?

Lord, teach us to reach across all borders,
Fabricated or natural,
To join with all our brothers and sisters
To unify, and not separate.
To honor all who wander
Seeking hope, seeking opportunity—who are seeking you
As assuredly as we seek you

Lord, let no border ring our hearts.
May we find a place within them for all.
Turn our hands from building walls
Toward building justice.
Stretch our arms across fence, wall and moat

To seek out those on the other side
That we might find you in each other's eyes
In each other's hands
In each other's wounds. Amen