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## WHY DO WE SERVE REFUGEES?

As a signatory of the United Nations Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, the U.S. is legally obligated to provide for the safety of refugees.

Many parishioners throughout the Diocese have asked us why the Catholic Church helps refugees and immigrants. We always direct them to the writings of the Holy Father Pope John Paul II who spoke so eloquently year-after-year on this topic. He continuously reminded Catholics that:

> **"No one should be indifferent to the conditions of multitudes of immigrants! They are at the mercy of events, often with dramatic situations behind them… Christians must above all listen to the cry for help that comes from a multitude of migrants and refugees…The Church is ever mindful that Jesus Christ was himself a refugee, that as a child he had to flee with his parents from his native land to avoid persecution. In every age, therefore, the Church feels herself called to help refugees. And she will continue to do so to the full extent that her limited means allow." *–Pope John Paul II***

As Christians we are called by Christ to "welcome the stranger." By definition of our Catholic faith, ("Catholic" meaning "universal"), we welcome people of all races, nationalities, and creeds to our community. We do not serve because our clients are Catholic or because we desire for them to convert to Catholicism. Rather, we serve because we are Catholic and are called by our Christian faith to serve.

Today, we are more committed than ever to our mission of "welcoming the stranger" into our community. We seek to serve with compassion and provide a supportive environment in which the dignity of each person is respected and each culture celebrated. We believe that it is necessary to address the needs of the body, mind, and spirit of the population we serve to provide them with the tools needed for self-sufficiency and independence in America.

In our service to refugees, we are guided by the following five principles:

- Respect for the dignity of each refugee individual that we serve
- Each refugee is an individual with a personal life experience and a rich cultural heritage
- Refugees are resilient and capable individuals
- We are simply providing tools by which refugees achieve independence and self-sufficiency
- The ultimate goal is the empowerment of the those we serve

To these ends, we provide a comprehensive range of services including:

- Cultural and community orientation
- Counseling and acculturation services
- Provision for all basic needs including housing and furniture during the first 30 days after arrival (depending on familial and immigration status).
- Transportation to necessary appointments at social services, medical offices, schools, etc.
- Referrals to Social Services, health services, public schools, ESOL classes, local places of worship (if requested), and other referrals as needed
- Comprehensive employment preparation and placement services
- Interpretation services
- Immigration services
- Assistance in applying for citizenship

## REFUGEE FACTS

**Who are "refugees"?**
The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) defines a "refugee" as a person who has fled his/her country of nationality (or habitual residence) and who is unable or unwilling to return to that country because of a "well-founded" fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. This definition of a "refugee" excludes those who have left their homes only to seek a more prosperous life.

**What happens to refugees as they flee persecution?**
Many refugees are forced to leave their homes without warning and cannot even bring basic necessities with them. When these individuals flee, they try to get to a country where they will be allowed to stay until they are allowed to migrate as a refugee. For every person who gets to a refugee camp, there is one who does not. Once the individual reaches the refugee camp, he/she is often placed in an overcrowded and under-supplied camp and exposed to disease, crime, and other harsh conditions. The individual usually stays in the camp until the United States or another country accepts his/her application for residency. The wait for acceptance ranges from one month to over twenty. Only ½ -1% of those who apply for refugee status are actually approved to come to the United States.

**How does a refugee become a refugee?**
The process for proving "refugee" status is often very difficult. The asylum seeker must first meet the refugee definition and requirements established by the government of the first asylum country (the nearby country to which the person goes when he/she escapes from his/her home country). If these criteria are met, the refugee is placed on a list of individuals eligible for resettlement. Then, the countries that accept refugees for resettlement examine the lists of individuals and determine if any of these individuals meet their own criteria for resettlement. This process can take a long time; even after a refugee is accepted as eligible for resettlement, there is often a very long wait for an available slot in the country that has accepted his/her application.

**What are the options for refugee resettlement?**
1. Repatriation: Most refugees would prefer to return to their country of origin. They are allowed to return only if conditions stabilize enough so that their safety is guaranteed upon return.

2. Nationalization: The second option for refugees is to remain in their host country or "country of first asylum" (a country near to their country of origin). However, host countries often become overwhelmed by the sheer numbers of refugees arriving and are often unable to permanently support them and therefore, are unable to offer the option of nationalization.

3. Resettlement: The last option is for refugees to resettle in a third country, usually the U.S. or Western Europe. This is the least preferable option as far as the welfare of these individuals is concerned because it brings refugees into a different environment far away from their homelands.

**How many refugees resettle in the U.S. each year?**
The United States limits the number of refugees accepted for resettlement each year. During the year 2008, 60,273 refugees were allowed to resettle in the U.S. This was less than 0.3% of the total refugee population worldwide.

**Who processes the refugee applications in the United States?**
The acceptance of individuals for resettlement in the United States is the responsibility of the Department of Homeland Security. Once the DHS has approved a case for resettlement, responsibility passes to the Bureau of Refugee Affairs of the U.S. Department of State. The State Department oversees programs abroad to prepare refugees for their arrival in the U.S. as well as the allocation of funds and placement of refugees with Voluntary Agencies (VOLAGS) for refugee reception and placement within the U.S. Generally, the State Department contracts with national VOLAG's to resettle refugees in various locations and ensure that immediate survival needs are met and to provide services that will enable the refugees to achieve financial self-sufficiency as rapidly as possible. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Office of Migration and Refugee Services (USCCB/MRS) is one such VOLAG.

**What are the responsibilities of the U.S. concerning refugees?**
Besides moral concern for the safety of fellow human beings, as a signatory of the United Nations Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, the U.S. is legally obligated to provide for the safety of refugees. As such, the U.S. is obligated to uphold the rights of refugees including the basic civil rights, as well as the rights to asylum, access to medical care, education, and employment. In order to fulfill this obligation, refugees in the U.S. are eligible for food stamps, low income housing, and educational services.

**Are refugees "legal?"**
*Yes*, refugees are screened and approved by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the U.S. Department of State for resettlement in communities throughout the United States. They are fully "legal" (documented) and are only accepted for resettlement in the U.S. because their very lives, and those of their families, are in danger in their homelands. Refugees arrive in America with no material belongings apart from the clothes on their backs yet they come full of enthusiasm and hope for new lives America. Refugee resettlement is a State Department mandate but a community initiative.

**What are the responsibilities of refugees in the US?**
Refugees must obey all the laws and regulations of the country in which they reside. In the United States, refugees pay income tax and pay into Social Security.

**How do refugees end up in Northern Virginia?**
The Catholic Diocese of Arlington, Office of Migration and Refugee Services is an affiliate of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Office of Migration and Refugee Services (USCCB MRS). The USCCB serves as the public policy agency of the Catholic Bishops in their service to the Church in this country by "uniting the people of God where voluntary collective action on a broad inter-diocesan level is needed." In addition, the USCCB coordinates the social justice concerns of the Church at the national or "inter-diocesan" level. The Office of Migration and Refugee Services is an office of USCCB. It works closely with U.S. government agencies such as the Department of State, Department of Labor, Department of Health and Human Services, and the Department of Homeland Security. The USCCB conducts most of its resettlement operations through the 103 affiliated diocesan resettlement offices throughout the U.S.

**How many refugees come to Northern Virginia each year? From where do they come?**

Over 1,100 new refugees arrive in Northern Virginia each year. In 2008, CDA MRS assisted over 900 refugee and asylee clients from Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Sudan, Liberia, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Iran, Iraq, Colombia, Cuba, China, Burma, and Vietnam.

**What does a sponsor do?**
After the Department of State assigns a refugee case to an agency, the refugee family or refugee individual is then assigned a sponsor. The sponsor can be a church, family, or the agency itself. The sponsor works with the refugee to ensure that all basic needs (e.g. food, housing, clothing, cultural orientation, English classes, and employment) are met. The goal of the sponsor is to make the refugees self-sufficient as soon as possible. All organizations that work with CDA MRS to assist families in this way are considered "co-sponsors" together with CDA MRS.

**All the different terms for immigrants can be confusing!**
**Here are a few simple definitions to help you determine the differences.**

## Refugee

A person outside of the United States who seeks protection on the grounds that he or she fears persecution in his or her homeland. To attain refugee status, the person must prove that he or she has a "well-founded fear of persecution" on the basis of at least one of five internationally recognized grounds. Those include the person's (1) race, (2) religion, (3) membership in a social group, (4) political opinion, or (5) national origin. Refugees generally apply in refugee camps or at designated processing sites outside their home countries. In some instances, refugees may apply for protection within their home countries. If accepted as a refugee, the person is sent to the U.S. with permission to stay and receives assistance through the Refugee Resettlement Program.

## Asylee

A person who has already entered the United States, and who fears persecution if sent back to his or her country, may apply for asylum here. Like a refugee, an asylum applicant must prove that he has a "well-founded fear of persecution" based on the same grounds.

## Immigrants

A foreign-born individual who has been admitted to reside permanently in the United States as a legal permanent resident (LPR) or green card holder. Typically, a foreign-born individual seeking to become an LPR chooses to leave his or her country for economic reasons. Application can be made through two programs: (1) family-sponsored immigration and (2) employment based immigration

## Unaccompanied Minor

**The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) defines unaccompanied refugee minors (URM) as children who are separated from both parents and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible to do so. In the Resettlement Program, URMs are children under age 18 who are resettled alone in the United States, without a parent or relative able to care for them.**

## Naturalization

Lawful permanent residents are eligible to apply for U.S. citizenship through a process called Naturalization. To qualify, applicants must reside in the U.S. for 5 years, demonstrate knowledge of U.S. history and government, show they have paid taxes and have committed no serious crimes, and demonstrate that they understand, speak and write English.

## Illegal Alien/Undocumented Immigrant

An illegal alien is the same as an undocumented immigrant, a person who is present in the United States without the permission of the U.S. government. Undocumented immigrants enter either: (1) illegally without inspection or with false documents or (2) legally with a temporary visa and then remain in the US beyond the expiration of the visa. Four out of ten undocumented immigrants enter the U.S. legally.

-- Courtesy of USCCB MRS

## A REFUGEE'S JOURNEY TO NORTHERN VIRGINIA

**Refugee Flees Homeland due to "well-founded" fear for his/her life**
(Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, etc.)

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**United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees considers:**
Repatriation (refugee to be sent back to mother country)
Nationalization (refugee to stay in the country to which they fled)
Third Country Asylum or Resettlement (less than l% of refugee population)

↓

**U.S. Department of State/Department of Homeland Security**
Conducts interview at a Migration Processing Center with refugee
to determine resettlement eligibility for resettlement and to for clearance to ensure that the individual
does not pose a security risk to the United States

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**Allocation to Domestic Resettlement Agency**
United States Catholic Conference of Bishops, Office of Migration and Refugee Services
(USCCB MRS)

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**Allocation to Resettlement Site**
Catholic Diocese of Arlington, Office of Migration and Refugee Services (CDA MRS)

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**Allocation to Field Office**
CDA MRS Arlington, Alexandria, Fredericksburg or Chantilly Field Offices

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**Refugee Notified of Resettlement Site in the U.S..**
Refugee prepares to enter last stage of processing before arrival in U.S.:
medical examination, processing, other clearance checks.
If there are medical complications, they are put on medical hold

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**Processing Completed**
Flight Booked. CDA MRS notified of the date of arrival. Usually given 1-2 weeks notice.

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**CDA MRS Prepares for Arrival of Refugee**
CDA MRS Associate Director assigns caseworker to the case
Volunteer Coordinator assigns mentors to the family
If present, co-sponsor is notified of pending arrival of refugee
Housing is secured, donated furniture and household items is collected and placed in house, kitchen is
stocked with culturally appropriate food staples (Refer to U.S. Department of State "Operational
Guidance" at the end of this manual)

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**Refugee(s) Arrive in Northern Virginia**
Caseworkers/sponsor family greet refugee(s) at National or Dulles airport.
Bring them to their new home.