

Template for Church Response to Refugee Crisis

The migrant thirsts for some gesture that will make them feel welcome, recognised and acknowledged as a person.
Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi (EMCC para 98)

This document was prepared by Fr. Alan Hilliard as a resource for parishes and communities who are making faith based responses to the present Refugee Crisis. The document aims to help people in their initial discussion by providing a pastoral and theological framework and by providing suggestions for some practical initiatives.

Guidelines for the response:

- The response of the Church aims to build fraternity and communion between migrants and the local community EMCC 102.
- Actions are inspired by dialogue and mutual respect, 'the living testimony of love and welcome' EMCC 99.
- At no time are the actions of the Church an attempt to proselytise or convert as the Church only seeks to support others, especially those in need 'by respecting differences and practising solidarity, in their ethics of meeting others'.
- From the perspective of the local Church with refugees and migrants it is necessary to encourage meetings and structured dialogue that support the community as they strive to 'overcome prejudices and biases' further allowing that same community to glimpse the 'multi-ethnic, intercultural and multi-religious nature of our ever changing world' EMCC 100.
- The Churches' response must distinguish between what EMCC describes as 'first welcome' and strategies that aid further integration in Ireland while at all times holding forth the possibility of a person's return to their homeland.
- Regardless of the State's response, the Church has a duty to respond to the needs of refugees and migrants as 'The love of Christ towards migrants urges us (cf. 2 Cor 5:14) to look afresh at their problems, which are to be met with today all over the world' EMCC 1.

Advance Preparations:

- Contextualising Migrant/ Refugee care within the Churches' Mission in a theological framework for use in parishes and communities.
- Handbooks with English and Syrian/ Eritrean/ Arabic to help those arriving and those providing assistance to understand one another.
- Handbooks that describe the cultural customs of Irish/Syrian/ Eritrean and Afghani peoples. Items to include, dietary customs, religious customs, educational progression, climate, health services, rules of the road, shopping customs and facilities, trading, bodies that accredit qualifications, social activity, sport, family life, etc.
- Volunteer handbooks that include catechetical statements on the Churches mission to migrants and refugees, training modules and proposals for action. The handbook should also outline professional standards and boundaries.

- National collection/ appeal by the Church to support its outreach to refugees.
- Establish professional links between agencies and organisations responsible for resettlement by Church representatives and agencies at Diocesan and National level

Program Options:

(These options acknowledge the duty of the state to process refugees and undertake health checks etc. However the duty of the state in this regard does not imply that refugees have to become institutionalised as in the past.)

- Parishes can sponsor a family or families from centres.
- The support group in the parish receive appropriate training in advance.
- Provide clothing and other items specific to the needs of the sponsored family.
- Share time with the sponsored family over weekends.
- Allow sponsored family cook and prepare meals and use washing facilities.
- Attend local schools with sponsored family.
- Provide intensive language training in parishes schools.
- Ensure women engage in English language training.
- Share holiday time with the family.
- Identify suitable property for the sponsored family to settle into once they have been duly processed.
- Provide orientation for those who are newly arrived e.g. shops, doctors, recreation facilities, travel and transport etc.
- Provide facilities in local schools/ GAA halls for the celebration of family birthdays, religious feasts and cultural celebrations.
- Identify local counselling trauma support groups that can provide ongoing care and support for families and individuals.
- Fund raise to assist the sponsored family relocate to their homeland should the opportunity arise in the future.
- Provide a safe haven for families should the State facilities undermine human dignity and value.

Today no one in our world feels responsible; we have lost a sense of responsibility for our brothers and sisters. We have fallen into the hypocrisy of the priest and the Levite whom Jesus described in the parable of the Good Samaritan: we see our brother half dead on the side of the road, and perhaps we say to ourselves: "poor soul...!", and then go on our way. It's not our responsibility, and with that we feel reassured, assuaged. The culture of comfort, which makes us think only of ourselves, makes us insensitive to the cries of other people, makes us live in soap bubbles which, however lovely, are insubstantial; they offer a fleeting and empty illusion which results in indifference to others; indeed, it even leads to the globalization of indifference. In this globalized world, we have fallen into globalized indifference. We have become used to the suffering of others: it doesn't affect me; it doesn't concern me; it's none of my business!

Pope Francis Visit to Lampedusa 8/7/13