



# How Do We Welcome the “Stranger” in Our Parishes?

A Resource for Building Unity in Diversity

## DEAR PASTOR AND PARISH LEADERS:

**M**any of us in Catholic dioceses, parishes, schools, and organizations are currently asking, “As our Catholic community becomes increasingly diverse, how do we embrace this diversity so that our parishes remain strong?” This parish resource kit, based on the U.S. bishops’ 2000 pastoral statement *Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity*, is designed to address that question and to help pastors and parish leaders find ways to welcome and include newly arrived and culturally diverse persons in the life of the Church.

“For I was . . . a stranger and you welcomed me” (Mt 25:35). *Welcoming the Stranger Among Us* informs us that to fully realize our communion in Christ, we as the Church must be one in our efforts to reach out to newcomers and culturally diverse persons in our dioceses, parishes, and communities, and to be inclusive in our liturgies, religious education programs, and social gatherings. According to the bishops, “immigrants will experience the Church’s welcome most personally at the level of the parish. Pastors and parish staff, accordingly, must be filled with a spirit of welcome, responding to a new and perhaps little-understood culture” (*Welcoming the Stranger Among Us*, p. 43).

## Is This Parish Kit for Me?

This kit offers practical guidance for building more welcoming and inclusive parishes. If you are wondering if this kit will benefit you, take a moment to reflect upon the following questions:

- Is your parish becoming increasingly diverse?
- Is your parish home to more than one ethnic or cultural group who exist side by side with little mutual interaction or understanding?
- Even if your parish is not experiencing a significant demographic change, is your parish looking for an opportunity to practice what our Catholic faith teaches by
  - engaging concretely and personally in the corporal and spiritual works of mercy?
  - acting in solidarity with immigrants, migrants, refugees, and newcomers?
  - becoming a more welcoming parish for all people?



If you answered *yes* to any of the above questions, this kit should prove to be a valuable resource to you.

The components offer many suggestions that can be adapted into existing structures and programs within a parish. While it is understandable that parishes will not incorporate all of the suggestions within this kit, acting upon even a couple of them will make a significant difference within your parish.

Please copy and distribute to your staff and leaders the enclosed materials, which include the following:

- A copy of *Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity*, a statement of the U.S. Bishops
- Two copies of the brief, user-friendly **brochure** *Called to Welcome the Stranger Among Us*. One is an attractive two-color version that can be ordered from the publishing office of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) by calling 800-235-8722. The other is a black-and-white camera-ready version that you may photocopy. The brochure is designed for wide distribution throughout the parish. Include them in bulletins, hand them out at parish events, or use them as discussion starters for small groups.
- **Planning Ideas for Parish Staff, Leaders, and Parish Councils**. This resource, contained in this insert, lists suggested parish activities as well as resources for “Planning a Multicultural Celebration” and for “Developing a Welcoming Plan for the Parish.”
- **Ideas for Liturgists and Prayer Leaders and Suggestions for Homilists**. These resources are intended to enhance liturgical and prayer celebrations so that the unity of the Church is not only expressed but also actualized.
- **Ideas for Schools, Religious Education, and Youth Programs**. This resource is intended to be copied and distributed to school, religious education, and youth leaders for developing their curriculum and programs.
- **A Guide to Understanding Catholic Social Teaching on Immigration and the Movement of Peoples**. This guide is intended to help parish educators, catechists, and social ministry leaders to educate, lead discussions, and promote action around social justice issues.
- **Bulletin Quotes and Clip Art**. This piece is designed for use in parish bulletins as well as handouts prepared for classes, retreats, or prayer services.
- **Resource Bibliography**. This is a list of related book titles, websites, and other resources, categorized by topic for use by all parish leaders.
- **Prayer Card**. This prayer for hospitality is intended for distribution at Mass or for use during prayer services, classes, or parish programs focused on the theme of “Unity in Diversity.”
- **Flier and Order Form**. This insert can be used to order additional copies of the *Welcoming the Stranger Among Us* pastoral statement, brochure, parish resource kit, and prayer cards.



Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Rev. Nicholas A. DiMarzio  
Bishop of Camden  
Chairman, Committee on Migration

### Promote a Conversion of Minds and Hearts

- Choose a time within the liturgical year when the readings focus on migrants/refugees and “welcoming the stranger” (the Holy Family as refugees, the Exodus accounts, the Beatitudes, etc.) and distribute the *Called to Welcome the Stranger Among Us* brochures and prayer cards at all Masses and parish gatherings.
- Include quotes from *Welcoming the Stranger Among Us* in your bulletin and use your “Pastor’s Corner” article to focus on the statement’s message. (See enclosed resource *Bulletin Quotes and Clip Art*.)
- Share this teaching from the pulpit, in your classrooms, and in community meetings; talk about the Church’s rich heritage of welcome and ministry to migrants and challenge the anti-immigrant sentiment so prevalent today. (See enclosed resource *Suggestions for Homilists*.)
- Invite local Church experts (e.g., directors of ethnic ministries, refugee resettlement programs, social ministry, immigrant legal services) to lead a panel discussion on the rights and dignity of migrants and refugees. (See enclosed resource *A Guide to Understanding Catholic Social Teaching on Immigration and the Movement of Peoples*.)
- Focus an in-service day or faculty meeting for parish school teachers or catechists on the statement’s message and how it can be woven into school and religious education activities. (See enclosed resource *Ideas for Schools, Religious Education, and Youth Programs*.)
- Seek out “immersion” activities that will expose community members to people whose lives differ from theirs; for example, engage in community service in a neighborhood that is culturally diverse or economically disadvantaged relative to others.
- Create opportunities for immigrants, migrants, and refugees to share their stories in parishes, schools, and community meetings.

### Strive for Greater Communion Among Groups

- Encourage diverse ethnic communities to work together on joint projects or initiatives such as planning a multicultural appreciation day, a Marian feast day, or a diocese-wide reconciliation service. (See section in this insert entitled “Planning a Multicultural Celebration” and the resource *Ideas for Liturgists and Prayer Leaders*.)
- Develop a “welcoming plan” for your parish to provide active outreach and services to newly arrived persons and groups. (See this insert’s section “Developing a Welcoming Plan for the Parish.”)
- Host intercultural communication classes in your parish or encourage parish leaders to attend diversity and multicultural training programs available in the area.
- Model “inter-Church” cooperation by proactively reaching out to other organizations that work with immigrants, migrants, and refugees.
- Promote National Migration Week in your parish, traditionally observed in January. (See enclosed *Resource Bibliography* to obtain information and complimentary National Migration Week materials.)

### Express Solidarity with Immigrants, Migrants, and Refugees

- Include special prayers in the General Intercessions at Mass that focus on the needs and rights of migrants and refugees. (See enclosed resource *Ideas for Liturgists and Prayer Leaders*.)
- Use your newsletters and bulletins to publicize pertinent information sent to you from immigrant and refugee advocacy organizations; organize advocacy efforts that support the human rights and dignity of all migrants and refugees.
- Establish a “twinning” relationship with a parish that serves poor and immigrant communities.
- Foster “volunteerism”; encourage people in your community to host a new refugee family, organize community drives, and tutor immigrant children.

## PLANNING A MULTICULTURAL CELEBRATION

Noemi Castillo, director of the Archdiocese of San Francisco's Office of Ethnic Ministries, views multicultural celebrations as opportunities "to promote unity and collaboration among local ethnic groups and to build rapport with them." She offers the following advice for achieving a successful celebration:

1. **Build relationships and rapport with the ethnic groups.** Because this is essential to cooperation, the person officially appointed to coordinate the multicultural celebration should be skilled in this area.
2. **Involve each ethnic group in the conceptualization, development, and implementation of the celebration.** No ethnic group should dominate the process, and each group should feel important and valued.
3. **Remind ethnic groups that a multicultural celebration is an invitation to share their stories, gifts, and cultures with each other,** so that together they can discover God's action in each story, gift, and culture. A multicultural celebration is not a competition.
4. **Walk patiently in friendship, collaboration, and kindness with the ethnic groups.** The coordinator must be available to give the necessary support and encouragement to each group.

## DEVELOPING A WELCOMING PLAN FOR THE PARISH

Developing a welcoming plan for the parish can be an effective way to enhance a sense of community, better integrate newcomers and culturally diverse groups, and meet the spiritual and human needs of newly arrived persons. Below, Fr. Andre Pierre, pastor at the Shrine of the Sacred Heart in Washington, D.C. (a large multicultural parish serving many immigrant and ethnic groups), describes some of the greatest challenges faced by "newly arrived" persons

(i.e., immigrants, migrants, and refugees) today and explains how establishing an active plan for welcoming newcomers can help address these needs in a parish. This is followed by a suggested model for developing such a plan.

### Greatest Challenges Faced by Newcomers to the Church in the United States

1. **Cultural shock:** This includes adjusting to a whole new system (transit, money, technology, etc.). Worship is different, too; newcomers may find Mass in U.S. parishes "fast and cold" when the liturgy does not incorporate dance, song, and other cultural elements.
2. **Distance of community from newcomers:** Many newcomer ethnic groups are from a tradition where Church is integral to community life; here, however, they may feel marginalized and rejected, as established community members "fear" them, and as anti-immigrant attitudes exist even within the Church.
3. **Strained relationships with other ethnic groups:** Often there is competition for parish resources, which causes social tension among ethnic groups.
4. **Priests and parish ministers who are not familiar with the cultural backgrounds of ethnic groups:** Although newcomers do not expect that the local priest and ministers will know their language, they do expect them to value their culture. Pastors and ministers who wish to serve "whoever approaches the altar" may lack the experience or models to reach out to the newcomers.

### How a Parish Welcoming Plan Addresses the Needs of Newcomers

1. **Newcomers become better oriented to parish and community life in the United States:** As a result of personal outreach, the cultural, spiritual, and human needs of the newcomers are better understood and thus better addressed by the parish community.
2. **The parish becomes a more welcoming and inclusive place:** Stereotypes and misunderstandings that lead to fear and anti-immigrant sentiment are diminished as parish members have more contact with one another. Newcomers feel personally encouraged to participate in all parish

activities and leadership; as a result, parish recruitment and retention rates increase.

3. **Cooperation among ethnic groups is enhanced:** Distinct ethnic and cultural groups are encouraged to work together to solve common problems. Established members of ethnic communities have leadership roles in reaching out to the newly arrived.
4. **Communication, dialogue, and mutual understanding between pastors/parish staff and newcomers is enhanced:** Priests, staff, and parishioners gain important knowledge about newcomers' backgrounds and the changing demographics of their parish, thus becoming more capable of integrating and of serving the needs of all their parishioners.

#### Developing a Parish Welcoming Plan

Any parish welcoming plan should address four primary areas of concern: hospitality, pastoral care, resettlement and social services, and advocacy. Parishes may create new structures to address some concerns, and they may carry out other functions through pre-existing parish structures, such as the following:

- **Hospitality functions**—a group of lay volunteers who may already be previously engaging in outreach and hospitality
- **Pastoral care functions**—the liturgy committee
- **Social service and resettlement services**—the parish social concerns committee, refugee resettlement committee, or parish charitable organizations
- **Advocacy issues**—a parish social justice group

It is essential that pastors and parish leaders give the support and resources needed to develop and implement a successful welcoming plan and promote a diverse membership on the committees that carry out the work. The following suggested activities for each of the four main functions will assist in formulating a welcoming plan.

#### HOSPITALITY GROUP

##### *Responsibilities:*

- Providing welcoming and outreach activities
- Registering new parishioners
- Providing general information and referrals

1. **Prepare and distribute “welcome packets” and “welcome baskets” (baskets to help newcomers set up their new home/living arrangements) for newly arrived parishioners.**
2. **Greet parishioners at the beginning and end of weekend liturgies.** Provide special outreach to newcomers and invite them to participate in an upcoming activity; follow up with a call or visit (see below).
3. **Host regular “welcoming events,”** such as a “Welcome Coffee” or “International Dinner” where newcomers can meet other parishioners in a friendly environment.
4. **Make home visits to newly arrived persons in the parish or community.** Also, visit newly arrived migrants or highly mobile persons in their camps, ports, parks, or temporary living arrangements.
5. **Organize outreach activities directed towards migrant or mobile populations in your community.** Post an invitation to the parish—including Mass times—in truck stops, tourists spots, or ports; invite migrant or mobile groups (such as migrant farm workers, circus and carnival workers, or seafarers) to a special social event at the parish.
6. **Host National Migration Week activities in the parish.**

#### PASTORAL CARE GROUP

##### *Responsibilities:*

- Planning multicultural liturgies and sacramental services
  - Organizing formation and leadership development classes for multicultural ministers
  - Identifying and developing multilingual, multicultural resources and materials
  - Addressing the pastoral needs of migrant or transient populations
1. **Plan liturgical and non-liturgical multicultural celebrations.** Celebrations could be organized around feast days (such as Epiphany or the parish saint's day).
  2. **Arrange for leadership development and pastoral ministry training** for representatives from the diverse ethnic communities in the parish.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES ON DEVELOPING A WELCOMING PLAN

- **Hospitality or Pastoral Care Group**—Contact your diocesan director for ethnic/multicultural ministries or social ministry; or contact the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) Migration and Refugee Services (MRS) Office for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Refugees at 202-541-3230 or [www.usccb.org/mrs/pcmr](http://www.usccb.org/mrs/pcmr). Contact the MRS National Migration Week office at 202-541-3385 or [www.usccb.org/mrs/nmw.htm](http://www.usccb.org/mrs/nmw.htm).
- **Resettlement/Social Services Group**—Contact your diocesan director for refugee resettlement or Catholic Charities or contact the MRS Office for Refugee Resettlement at 202-541-3170 or [www.usccb.org/mrs/refprog.htm](http://www.usccb.org/mrs/refprog.htm).
- **Advocacy Group**—Contact your diocesan director for migration advocacy, peace and justice, or social ministry; or contact the MRS Policy Office at 202-541-3208 or [www.usccb.org/mrs/mrp.htm](http://www.usccb.org/mrs/mrp.htm).

3. **Form teams of volunteer lay ministers of various ethnic and linguistic backgrounds** to assist parish leaders with pastoral duties such as shut-in visits, Eucharistic ministry, or religious education in multiple languages.
4. **Conduct fundraising drives for multicultural and multilingual materials** such as multicultural songbooks and catechetical materials or Bibles in other languages.
5. **Include local migrant or mobile populations in pastoral ministry plans.** Send Eucharistic ministers to migrant camps or seaports regularly; hold special liturgies in which established parishioners and members of migrant and mobile populations can worship together.

## RESETTLEMENT AND SOCIAL SERVICE GROUP

### *Responsibilities:*

- Coordinating pre-arrival planning for and reception of newcomers
- Providing orientations
- Assisting newcomers with finding housing, medical services, and employment
- Providing education and tutoring services
- Organizing other social service activities

1. **Establish a relationship with your diocesan refugee resettlement office and volunteer to resettle refugees.** Your diocesan resettlement office will provide information about pre-arrival planning and family sponsorship.
2. **Organize charitable drives to benefit immigrants, migrants, and refugees in your area.** Ask parishioners to gather household items that refugees or immigrants need to set up an apartment, or ask them to gather items for seafarers or local migrant workers.
3. **Find “partner” families for the newly arrived** who will help to orient them to parish life and ease their transition.
4. **Establish a parish tutoring program** for immigrants, migrants, and refugees.
5. **Organize a job fair** for the newly arrived.
6. **Plan a parish service day** in a neighborhood where new immigrants, migrants, and refugees live.

## ADVOCACY GROUP

### *Responsibilities:*

- Staying current on public policy issues
  - Organizing educational activities to inform parishioners of social justice issues
  - Developing and maintaining a grassroots advocacy network
  - Coordinating letter-writing campaigns
  - Visiting with policy makers
1. **Establish contacts and collaborate with national, diocesan, and local Catholic social justice groups** that advocate for the rights of immigrants, migrants, and refugees. Make sure these issues are given focus within social justice groups in your parish.
  2. **Publicize pertinent information that affects the rights of immigrants, migrants, and refugees** (e.g., in Mass announcements and in the parish bulletin).
  3. **Encourage congressional visits and organize parish participation in demonstrations** to promote and defend the rights of immigrants, migrants, and refugees.
  4. **Recruit local attorneys to provide pro-bono services and advice on immigration matters.**