



# *Catechetical* **RESOURCE**

## **Understanding Church Teaching on Migration and Refugees**

**Purpose:** faith formation and discussion groups

**Target Audiences:** Youth, Young Adults and Adults

### **How to Use this resource**

1. The group leader should read all the material in advance.
2. Distribute the article by Rhina Guidos to participants in advance of your discussion and ask them to read it.
3. Begin your session with the Prayer for Migrants & Refugees
4. Ask participants to share their reactions to the article.
  - a. Did they learn something new from it?
  - b. Did it improve their awareness of cultural traditions of Catholic immigrants?
  - c. Did it inspire them to reach out to immigrants in their community?
5. Hand out and read with the participants the introduction and article on Catholic Social Teaching on Migration.
6. Review the action suggestions and discuss the ideas that would be most practical to implement in your parish or community.
7. Conclude by identifying next steps and volunteers to implement the action idea(s) you have agreed on.

## **Welcoming the Stranger: Prayer for Hospitality**

Loving God, your Son Jesus said  
your Kingdom is like a banquet:  
a festive gathering for all people  
of every race and color—  
a table at which the lonely find company,  
the hungry savor rich foods and fine wine,  
and strangers enjoy warm family ties.  
Jesus calls us to build this Kingdom here on earth.

Teach us, Lord, the ways of hospitality.  
Give us the spirit of joyful welcome and  
the sensitivity to help people on the move  
to feel they belong.

Grant that our tables at home may draw our  
new neighbors from other lands  
into a loving community  
and that the eucharistic tables in  
our parishes may prefigure that banquet  
in heaven where all are one with you,  
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,  
one God, forever and ever.  
Amen.

Excerpted from *Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers, Revised Edition*.

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## What a Cultural Event Can Teach Us about Welcoming the Stranger

**By Rhina Guidos**

Prior to Christmas each year, enclaves of Latin American communities in the United States continue a practice in which strangers are welcomed into private homes, where they sit down to music, food and prayer.

The intention of these cultural practices called “posadas” is to recall the journey of the Holy Family as they received shelter from danger in their homeland. Shelter is one of the closest translations of the word “posada.”

When you ask, in Spanish, if someone can you put you up, colloquially, you ask if they can “give” you “posada.” You, as the pilgrim, or traveler, or foreigner, ask for shelter from the elements, nothing else. As the host, it has a different meaning.

Having attended dozens of posadas over the years, I’ve noticed that when someone asks another person to host a religious posada, the host feels honored.

It has been astounding to watch over the years, families, many of them Mexican immigrants, open the doors of their homes to strangers of different races and, sometimes, faiths, and served them the best of the modest food they have. They have provided smiles and personal warmth even as they’ve faced a harsher society outside, one that doesn’t always welcome them.

As someone who didn’t grow up with the practice of posadas, I’ve come to think that there’s a lot the posadas can teach us. How would we have treated the Holy Family if they knocked at our door (or country) asking for shelter?

As tensions over immigration rise in Congress, in our communities and in our country, it is fair to begin to ask and reflect on how we have treated others. Have we looked down on others because they cannot communicate with us, because they look a certain way, have jobs that we look down on?

Recently, I spotted in a chapel a copy of something called the *Prayer Book of the Migrant*, a booklet from the church of Santo Toribio Romo in Jalisco,

Mexico, aimed at those who have left or are about to leave their homeland. It’s something that has helped me meditate about the plight of others who come to our country from various parts of the world.

One of the prayers listed gives thanks to God for allowing the supplicant to work that day, to help overcome the loneliness of not being with family and achieving even better work the following day in order to support loved ones who are far away.

Another prayer asks God for protection, for the emotional pain the supplicant feels at leaving the homeland, “not out of egotistical adventure, but out of necessity.”

The prayer I found most interesting is one titled “On the Journey to the North.” It expresses the anxiety of a person (aboard a truck) heading to an unknown land:

“You who knew the bitterness of the desert when with Joseph and Mary you had to seek refuge in a foreign land also understand that my soul is destroyed as I leave my loved ones.”

This pain, loneliness and the circumstances that lead people to leave their familiar surroundings is what Pope Francis has urged us to understand.

“Fleeing from situations of extreme poverty or persecution in the hope of a better future, or simply to save their own lives, millions of persons choose to migrate,” Pope Francis said in his message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees, which will take place on Jan. 19. “Despite their hopes and expectations, they often encounter mistrust, rejection and exclusion, to say nothing of tragedies and disasters which offend their human dignity.”

The posadas, in this sense, can help us understand how to be better hosts, mostly by getting rid of the “suspicion and hostility” that Pope Francis says accompanies “the arrival of migrants, displaced persons, asylum seekers and refugees.”

*Guidos is an editor at Catholic News Service*

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## Excerpts from *Welcoming Christ in the Migrant*

USCCB Department of Migration & Refugee Services, 2011

### INTRODUCTION

The Gospels begin with Matthew's story of Joseph and Mary fleeing to Egypt because the power-hungry King Herod wanted to kill their newborn son, Jesus. Our Savior and his family lived as refugees because their own land was not safe. Reflecting on the flight of the Holy Family, Pope Pius XII proclaimed that they represent an archetype for all refugee families living in the world today.

Throughout his ministry, Jesus is portrayed as a migrant: a teacher and healer traveling through Judea and Samaria to share his message of love, welcome, and salvation for all people. He had no place of his own and relied on the hospitality of others for his and his disciples' needs. Jesus establishes the love and care we show for strangers as the standard by which we shall be judged: "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me" (Mt 25:35).

### CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING ON MIGRATION

Drawn from this rich scriptural tradition, Catholic theology has always promoted an ethic that is rooted in natural law and God's Revelation. As Catholic social teaching on migration developed, three fundamental principles came to inform Church teaching on this issue:

- 1) People have the right to migrate to sustain their lives and the lives of their families.
- 2) A country has the right to regulate its borders and to control migration.
- 3) A country must regulate its borders with justice and mercy.

Although the first two of these principles may seem to contradict each other, they are put into context by the third. People of faith must seek a way of balancing their valid security needs while at the same time striving to meet the basic human needs of others, including those who are foreign born. It is in achieving this balance that we can embrace each of the principles of Catholic social teaching on migration.

When war, natural disaster, famine, or crushing poverty causes mass migration, the lands that receive these displaced people may feel threatened, with the citizens of the host nation fearing that newcomers will take scarce jobs, land, and resources. While recognizing these fears, the Church teaches that people have the right to migrate to sustain their lives and the lives of their families. As the Gospels make clear, it is God's will that the abundance of the earth be shared in love by all his people. Reflecting on this spiritual imperative, Pope Benedict XVI observed that "those who have to leave everything, sometimes even their family, to escape from grave problems and dangers . . . [should find] the Church as a homeland where no one is a stranger" (Angelus, June 19, 2005). At the same time, the second principle of migration acknowledges that a country has the right to regulate its borders and to control migration. Individuals have the right to move in search of a safe and humane life, but no country is bound to accept all those who wish to resettle there. Ordinarily, people migrate because they are desperate, and the opportunity for a safe and secure life does not exist in their own land. Migrants and refugees endure many hardships, and most would prefer to return home under more favorable circumstances. As American Catholics, we should work to alleviate the conditions that force people to leave their homeland while protecting their rights when they reside among us.

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The third principle calls upon nations to regulate their borders with justice and mercy, seeking the common good above self-interest. Family reunification must be at the center of all government migration policies, thereby allowing families to remain intact as much as possible and avoiding periods of prolonged separation.

## **ACTION SUGGESTIONS**

Catholics in the United States observe National Migration Week each year beginning on Epiphany Sunday. Review with the group the activity suggestions below and discuss ideas that could be implemented in your parish or community.

- Celebrate National Migration Week in your parish
- Establish a “twinning” relationship with a parish that serves poor and immigrant communities.
- Include prayers on behalf of migrants and refugees in the General Intercessions each week.
- Sponsor a parish migration education program.
- Develop a “Parish Welcoming Plan” to include:
  - a) Distribution of welcoming packets for newly arrived parishioners
  - b) Welcoming events such as international dinners
  - c) Visits to newcomers to the parish community
  - d) Outreach activities directed toward migrant populations in the community.
- Plan multicultural liturgies, sacramental services, intercessions, outreach, and parish ministry training for members of all ethnic groups; provide multilingual resources and materials; and address the pastoral needs of migrant populations.
- Establish a relationship with the local diocesan refugee resettlement and immigration assistance office and volunteer by organizing charitable drives to benefit migrants and refugees, hosting job fairs, offering English-language tutoring, or planning a parish service day in migrant and refugee neighborhoods.
- Help keep parishioners informed on current public policy issues, coordinate letter-writing campaigns and visits with legislators, and assist in recruiting local attorneys to provide legal services and advice on immigration matters.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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