

Catholic World Day of Migrants and Refugees

September 24, 2023

*"Free to choose whether
to migrate or to stay"*

Introduction

The Church has been celebrating the World Day of Migrants and Refugees (WDMR) since 1914. It is always an occasion to express concern for different vulnerable people on the move; to pray for them as they face many challenges; and to increase awareness about the opportunities that migration offers.

Every year the WDMR is the last Sunday of September; in 2023 it will be celebrated on 24 September. As the title for his annual message, the Holy Father has chosen **"Free to choose whether to migrate or to stay"**. Pope Francis in his message for the 109th World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2023 wrote: "The decision to migrate should always be free, yet in many cases, even in our day, it is not. Conflicts, natural disasters, or more simply the impossibility of living a dignified and prosperous life in one's native land is forcing millions of persons to leave".



The SVD missionaries have assumed the care of the Migrants and Refugees as a pastoral priority in our last General Chapter 2018. In several countries our confreres and lay partners are helping those who have left their countries in different ways: pastoral care, psychological accompaniment, to get legal documents, teaching local languages, providing temporary shelter, food, and cloth. The aim of our service to migrants and refugees is to help them in their process of integration to the new country which is now their home.



Biblical reflection

You shall treat the alien who resides with you no differently than the natives born among you; you shall love the alien as yourself; for you too were once aliens in the land of Egypt. - (Lev 19:34 NAB)

The decision to migrate is a complex and deeply personal one, often driven by the hardships and uncertainties of life. However, the responsibility for how we receive and treat migrants and refugees falls upon the shoulders of the inhabitants of the lands they seek refuge in. The scripture's words are a resounding call for all humanity, reminding us of the moral imperative to treat those who arrive in our midst with compassion, dignity, and equity.



The biblical passage from Leviticus 19:34 insists that migrants should be accorded the same respect and rights as native inhabitants. In prohibiting any form of discrimination or prejudice based on one's place of origin, the text challenges us to rise above our prejudices and extend a hand of welcome to those in need. In doing so, it recognizes a fundamental truth that every person bears the imprint of the Creator and is, in a profound sense, like Christ himself.

This verse's message is a timeless reminder of our shared humanity and the divine spark that resides within every individual, regardless of their origin. It invites us to see migrants not as strangers to be feared but as fellow travelers on life's journey. In their faces, we are called to recognize the face of Christ, reminding us of the ultimate commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves.



Action Plan

1. Pope Francis offered us a four-point plan of action based on four action verbs: To **welcome** all immigrants; to **protect** people on the move; to **promote** the migrant brothers and sisters and to **integrate** migrants and refugees.
2. Without condoning undocumented migration, the Church supports the human rights of all people and offers them pastoral care, education, and social services, no matter what the circumstances of entry into a country, and it works for the respect of the human dignity of all.
3. Work with other NGOs and encourage States to adopt a national security perspective that fully takes into account the security and human rights of all migrants, asylum seekers and refugees entering its territory.



4. Give them social assistance: dealing with authorities, jobs, housing etc. Be volunteers helping the families: tutoring children, sharing experience in personal hobbies or professions, conversation in the language, guiding in the city, etc.
5. Assist the refugees in helping them to find shelter, food and clothes. Parishioners can assist in finding security, help the women and old to get good health care.
6. The welcome and hospitality that parishes extend to newcomers must include active efforts by all the parishioners. Undertake the special effort necessary to learn about the cultures in their midst and to exchange visits where different cultural groups make their homes.
7. The right to religious freedom – in terms of both belief and practice – should be assured to all migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, independently of legal status. Provide them with this space to have the right to religious freedom.
8. The social and professional inclusion of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees within local communities should be supported by recognizing their freedom of movement and their right to choose where to live.



Prayer for the Catholic World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2023

(Alternate – responsive praying between a Leader and all others)

Merciful God and Father of all,
Millions of our brothers and sisters are on the move
around the world,
Not by choice, but by desperation.

We pray that we may lead the way to bring about
God's vision of peace and justice to all,
And hope and love to those on the move near and
far.

For those forced to flee violence,
We pray they find safety.

For those seeking economic opportunity,
We pray they find secure livelihoods.

For those trying to support and protect their families,
We pray they find communities to embrace them.

For those searching for peace and hope,
We pray that we may be bearers of The Good
News.

We pray that all migrants, refugees and displaced
persons
May find safe and loving communities
And the opportunity to thrive.

We praise you and give you thanks for the family
you have called together from so many people.

We see in this human family
a reflection of the divine unity of the one most
Holy Trinity,
in whom we make our prayer: Father, Son, and Holy
Spirit. Amen.

Adapted from Catholic Relief Services