Syrian Refugees

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Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the essence of the Syrian Refugee issue in connection with Saint Patrick Parish and Hudson, Wisconsin?

Over 10,000 Syrian refugees are to be resettled in the United States as part of our national response to the greatest humanitarian crisis since World War II. This U.S. pledge represents a small share of the more than 4 million Syrians who have fled their homeland as part of the 5 yearlong devastating civil war. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has agreed to resettle a portion of the Syrian refugees as part of their Migration and Refugee Services; the USCCB has recently contacted Saint Patrick Parish with a request to sponsor 21 Syrian refugees who desire to settle in the Hudson area. Saint Patrick Parish is currently evaluating this request by speaking to our parishioners, local civic and governmental officials, area resource agencies and the public in general about this opportunity to welcome and assist these families in need.

2. What do we know about these refugees? Why Hudson?

At this time, we do not have detailed information about these 21 refugees, due to privacy regulations and the fact that we are not at this time contracted with the USCCB. We have been told there are five family units (4 sets of mother/father/children and one single adult female). As far as we know, three of the families are related to each other. They have indicated a desire to relocate to Hudson because they are related to a Hudson resident whom we believe to be their aunt. We have requested further information about the aunt and family members from the USCCB so that we can contact the aunt and obtain her permission to share further information. Because Hudson does not have a local Catholic social services agency such as Catholic Charities, the USCCB is coming directly to Saint Patrick Parish for assistance.

These refugees are currently living in a refugee camp in Turkey and have been there for many months. They have already been cleared by the US government for travel to the US. Refugees who are selected for resettlement in the US go through a many-layered review by the United Nations, FBI, Homeland Security and the State Department before they are accepted. This is a very different process than the millions of Syrian refugees who departed Syrian for Europe and crossed European Union borders without any background checks. Our federal government specifically examines prospective refugees for the possibility of infiltration by terrorists prior to clearing them for travel. Individual states do not have the ability to opt out of the federal resettlement program.

3. How will this be decided and what are the timelines?

The Parish is investigating what would be necessary to fulfill this request and is listening to concerns of parishioners and the wider community about the pro’s and con’s of this request. If the Parish moves forward, a contract will be signed with the USCCB outlining the services to be provided/COORDINATED by the Parish as well as expectations for the USCCB to provide training and expertise. The Parish is under no obligation at this time and will continue to pursue due diligence in examining all aspects of this request. We are currently meeting with Parish leadership, discussing this as a Parish and beginning to reach out to other community leaders for their input. We do not have a firm timeline for a decision, but we do know the USCCB desires to move these families here by the May/June timeframe to avoid the possibility of their current security check and other clearances expiring.

Fr. John Gerritts’ homily of October 23rd, 2016, and his letter to the Holy Father on this topic are available on our web site at stpatrickofhudson.org/faithleaders
4. What sorts of services will these refugees need?

The USCCB expects a receiving agency (or in our case a parish) to provide the following services, in the form of case management and connections to local resources: airport pickup, temporary and permanent housing, initial food and clothing, home visits, transportation, assistance with finding employment, cultural orientation and English classes, enrollment in schools for school age children, assistance with accessing health services and application for public assistance where necessary. Our parish would serve as the coordinating entity for these activities and will draw on relevant local resources, including other faith communities and civic organizations.

5. What has Pope Francis and the Wisconsin Catholic Bishops said about the faith issues involved?

Leaders of the Catholic Church have spoken with one voice regarding the Gospel message to welcome the stranger, clothe the naked and feed the hungry; these words of Jesus Christ are directly relevant to the issue of resettlement of refugees fleeing the horrors of war. The Catholic Church’s two thousand year tradition of performing corporal acts of mercy is an outward sign of fidelity to Christ’s teachings.

Pope Francis, in his address on World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2016, urged the nations of the world to be accepting of those refugees forced to flee violence and bloodshed in search of a better life. We are challenged to welcome and support them, even if this makes us uncomfortable and upsets our daily life:

> Refugees and people fleeing from their homes challenge individuals and communities, and their traditional ways of life; at times they upset the cultural and social horizons which they encounter. Increasingly, the victims of violence and poverty, leaving their homelands, are exploited by human traffickers during their journey towards the dream of a better future. If they survive the abuses and hardships of the journey, they then have to face latent suspicions and fear. In the end, they frequently encounter a lack of clear and practical policies regulating the acceptance of migrants and providing for short or long term programs of integration respectful of the rights and duties of all. Today, more than in the past, the Gospel of mercy troubles our consciences, prevents us from taking the suffering of others for granted, and points out ways of responding which, grounded in the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity, find practical expression in works of spiritual and corporal mercy.

The entire message is available at w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/migration/documents/papa-francesco_20150912_world-migrants-day-2016.html

The Wisconsin Bishops, in a letter strongly supporting the resettlement of Syrian refugees, has stated:

> As Catholics, we are called to protect the life and dignity of every human being and to welcome the stranger. As Americans, we witness to the fact that a nation of exiles, of “huddled masses yearning to breathe free,” can continue to offer hope and opportunity to the world. Americans have been immensely blessed. We must be generous in sharing these blessings with others.

The entire letter is available at www.wisconsincatholic.org/WI_Bishops_on_Syrian_refugees_1.pdf (PDF download)

6. Are there security concerns regarding resettling Syrian refugees in the United States?

Some have raised sincere concerns about the safety of communities welcoming refugees. The most common concern is the fear that Syrian refugees cleared for resettlement in the US contain terrorists or terrorist sympathizers who intend to do harm in the US. These fears are mostly based on misinformation. First, the US-bound refugees undergo a rigorous background check with the US government (see Question 2 above). Second, problems reported in Europe regarding certain refugees are not analogous to the situation in the US because those refugees in Europe spilled over national borders during a mass exodus. As a result, proper vetting of their backgrounds did not take place. Media reports of terrorist connections in the European context must be reviewed with care because some sensational reports come from biased sources and/or have been exaggerated and lack factual substance. We encourage questions about the security of the US-bound refugees to be openly discussed and based on facts.

A recent 60 Minutes show segment was focused on this very topic and can be accessed at www.cbsnews.com/news/60-minutes-the-u-s-screens-syrian-refugees/
7. What exactly is being asked of Saint Patrick Parish? Will this be a financial burden on Saint Patrick Parish?

Saint Patrick Parish would be a coordinating entity to rally all the varied resources necessary to support this project. The Parish cannot do it alone and will engage willing partners in the community and greater Hudson area. The Parish will not be expending parish operating funds in this activity and this does not represent any kind of financial obligation to support these families. US government funds earmarked for direct Refugee assistance will be disbursed by the Parish to the refugees and then reimbursed by the USCCB. The Parish will receive a small stipend at the end of the project to cover the in-kind provision of services by parish staff and volunteers. In essence, Saint Patrick Parish is being asked to be the “point person” on the delivery of basic case management and initial placement services, on behalf of the USCCB.

8. What resources are available in this area? Will this be a financial burden on the county and state?

It has been pointed out that Hudson does not have many desirable infrastructure features such as an abundance of low income housing, public transportation, or employment opportunities for non-English speakers. However, we know from discussions with other Wisconsin communities that creative solutions can be found to welcome refugees and use existing resources and connections of the community to provide the necessary opportunities for successful resettlement of refugees. We have seen examples of Hmong refugees finding a welcoming home here in Western Wisconsin and successful integration for them and their children and grandchildren. The settlement of 21 Syrian refugees in this area, as part of the national response to this crisis, should not be a financial burden on the county and state; we hope over time this project could pay intangible benefits in terms of welcoming hard working families who will contribute to the common good.

9. How can I make my opinion known? How can I help?

There will be opportunities for input along the process. Please feel free to contact our Pastor, Fr. John Gerritts, and continue to check for updated FAQs. We are committed to full transparency in how this project will be evaluated and if we go forward, how it will be implemented. There will be a tremendous need for volunteers with all kinds of skill sets and we will let the public know about those opportunities when we get to that stage.

In the meantime, we encourage you to join with Saint Patrick Parish in the following activities:

- Pray for the victims of war everywhere, and in particular pray for the refugees of the civil war in Syria.
- Pray for those who are involved with assisting refugees. Pray for Saint Patrick Parish as we discern all the issues involved in this decision.
- Challenge yourself to speak with charity and civility when discussing the issue of refugee resettlement.
- Educate yourself on the facts surrounding the plight of the Syrian refugees and the world’s response to this huge humanitarian crisis.
- Show your gratitude for the blessings of liberty and prosperity by sharing your gifts of time, treasure, and talent with those less fortunate and suffering, here at home and abroad.

10. How can I stay updated on the facts and process?

Saint Patrick Parish will continue to disseminate information as we move through the decision-making process. Please continue to check the church website for updates: stpatrickofhudson.org/syrianrefugees. We are committed to transparency and welcome all input. All websites found on these pages plus more can be accessed through our website also.

11. Where can I go for more information on the Syrian Refugee crisis?

There are many official and non-governmental organizations involved. Here are just a few:

- US Department of State: www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2015/11/250005.htm
- World Relief: www.welcomerefugees.com/faq/
- USCCB: www.usccb.org/about/migration-and-refugee-services/

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