

CATHOLIC CONFERENCE OF OHIO

Letter Supporting Migration & Refugee Services Catholic Bishops of Ohio

January 2016

To Elected State & Congressional Leaders:

The Catholic Bishops of Ohio gratefully acknowledge your dedicated service to our state. Public service is an important vocation and one of the highest forms of charity. We thank you for your commitment to seeking the common good.

Today, we urge your support for refugee resettlement services. We write to you on behalf of refugees throughout the world. Far too many women and unaccompanied children from countries including Syria, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Sudan are in desperate need of refugee resettlement services. In 2015, a delegation from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops travelled to the Middle East to visit our Church's Migration and Refugee Services programs. They reported on the dire crisis facing millions of Syrian refugees. "Without more international support," one observer noted, "Syrians fleeing extremists [are] being turned away from countries in the region and forced back to danger." The group told horrific stories describing the persecution of Christians, Yazidis, and other religious minorities. Religious extremists have killed thousands of Christians and forced tens of thousands to flee from their homes, a development that threatens the very existence of these ancient Christian communities.

We well understand the need to balance the safety of society with the human needs of extremely vulnerable persons and families. Terrorism is a real threat. In light of the recent terrorist attacks, balancing public safety and charitable response can be challenging, but it is not insurmountable. Our country must be vigilant in examining and revising security measures. At the same time, our country should maintain its resettlement programs in order to welcome and aid those men, women, and children who are in desperate need and who have been extensively vetted by procedures that have been carefully reviewed and implemented.

In partnership with its affiliates, the United States Catholic Bishops' Migration and Refugee Services department resettles approximately 30 percent of the refugees who arrive in the U.S. each year. The Catholic refugee resettlement network includes over 100 diocesan offices across the country, including ones in Cleveland, Cincinnati, and Dayton. Many Catholic parishes and diocesan offices also work in collaboration with other refugee resettlement programs in Ohio. These programs have resettled refugees from all over the world, including a small number from Syria.

Varying state and federal resolutions call for an end to the resettlement of Syrian refugees. Should that occur, many non-threatening Syrian survivors of violence, torture, and terrorism would be denied needed humanitarian aid. An unintended result from denying such resettlement may be the scapegoating of all refugees. Increasing calls to end all refugee resettlement programs in our country trouble us. Such action would be tragic for both our country and those innocent families living in refugee camps with no place to go.

Welcoming refugees has been an important part of our American heritage and a fundamental principle of faith communities. The words in Scripture, “I was a stranger and you welcomed me” (Matthew 25:35), challenge each of us to see the image of God within all people. We recall that Jesus and his family were once refugees. During his visit to the United States, Pope Francis implored all Americans to remember the Golden Rule and to help refugees rather than viewing them as a problem:

“Our world is facing a refugee crisis of a magnitude not seen since the Second World War. This presents us with great challenges and many hard decisions...We must not be taken aback by their numbers, but rather view them as persons, seeing their faces and listening to their stories, trying to respond as best we can to their situation. To respond in a way which is always humane, just and fraternal. We need to avoid a common temptation nowadays: to discard whatever proves troublesome. Let us remember the Golden Rule: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” (Mt 7:12). (Speech to U.S. Congress, 9/24/15).

Thank you for this consideration.

The Catholic Bishops of Ohio

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- Most Rev. Joseph R. Binzer
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- Most Rev. Richard G. Lennon
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- Most Rev. Jeffrey M. Monforton
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