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“To welcome a migrant is to welcome God himself”*Pope Francis September 2015*

As we prepare to celebrate the 102nd World Day for Migrants and Refugees, on Sunday, January 17th, 2016, it is important that we come together to remember and pray for all those who have travelled far from their homeland in search of a better life.

“Faced with the tragedy of tens of thousands refugees fleeing death on account of war and hunger and who are traveling toward a hope for life, the Gospel calls us to be ‘neighbours’ to the smallest and abandoned, (and) to give them a concrete hope,” Pope Francis said in September 2015. He continued it is not enough just to say “courage, patience!” because hope “is combative, with the tenacity of those who go toward a safe destination. Therefore the imminence of the Year of Mercy, I make an appeal to the parishes, to religious communities, to monasteries, and sanctuaries of all Europe to express the concreteness of the Gospel, and to welcome a family of refugees.”

In his message, **“Migrants and Refugees Challenge Us. The Response of the Gospel of Mercy,”** Pope Francis reminds us that migrants are “our brothers and sisters in search of a better life, far away from poverty, hunger, exploitation and the unjust distribution of the planet’s resources, which are meant to be equitably shared by all.”

They are seeing the same thing everyone seeks, he said, “a better, more decent and prosperous life to share with our loved ones.” “Unacceptable humanitarian crises” in many parts of the world force greater numbers of people to flee for their lives”, he said. But “indifference and silence lead to complicity whenever we stand by as people are dying of suffocation, starvation, violence and shipwreck.”

“Whether large or small in scale, these are always tragedies, even when a single human life is lost,” the Pope said. “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 a way of responding” with practical works of spiritual and corporal mercy, the Pope said in his message.

Communities who welcome migrants are seriously challenged by the influx, but with proper motivation, management and regulation, they can find ways to integrate newcomers with their different cultures in ways that are mutually beneficial and prevent racism and discrimination, he said.

While newcomers have a right to preserve their cultural identity, they, too, have responsibilities, he said, as they must respect the “material and spiritual heritage of the host country, obeying its laws and helping with its needs.” Greater solidarity, cooperation and a more equitable distribution of the earth’s resources will help eliminate the kind of imbalances that lead people to abandon their homeland, he said.

We hope this Resource Pack will assist you in raising awareness of the challenges facing migrants, in particular, this year we would like to focus on the welcoming of migrants in our parishes. Please join with us in solidarity with migrants and refugees who have been forced to flee their shores and are making Ireland their home.

We encourage you to make use of these resources in reaching out to the people of your parish in relation to this important issue. If the Council for Immigrants can be of any assistance to you in your ministry please contact our offices in Maynooth. We also encourage you to visit our websites: www.catholicbishops.ie/immigrants

MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS FOR THE 102ND WORLD DAY OF MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES (2016)



“Migrants and Refugees Challenge Us. The Response of the Gospel of Mercy”

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In the Bull of indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy I noted that “at times we are called to gaze even more attentively on mercy so that we may become a more effective sign of the Father’s action in our lives” (*Misericordiae Vultus*, 3). God’s love is meant to reach out to each and every person. Those who welcome the Father’s embrace, for their part, become so many other open arms and embraces, enabling every person to feel loved like a child and “at home” as part of the one human family. God’s fatherly care extends to everyone, like the care of a shepherd for his flock, but it is particularly concerned for the needs of the sheep who are wounded, weary or ill. Jesus told us that the Father stoops to help those overcome by physical or moral poverty; the more serious their condition, the more powerfully is his divine mercy revealed.

In our time, migration is growing worldwide. 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 programmes 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 way of responding which, grounded in the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity, find practical expression in works of spiritual and corporal mercy.

In the light of these facts, I have chosen as the theme of the 2016 World Day of Migrants and Refugees: *Migrants and Refugees Challenge Us. The Response of the Gospel of Mercy*. Migration movements are now a structural reality, and our primary issue must be to deal with the present emergency phase by providing programmes which address the causes of migration and the changes it entails, including its effect on the makeup of societies and peoples. The tragic stories of millions of men and women daily confront the international

community as a result of the outbreak of unacceptable humanitarian crises in different parts of the world. Indifference and silence lead to complicity whenever we stand by as people are dying of suffocation, starvation, violence and shipwreck. Whether large or small in scale, these are always tragedies, even when a single human life is lost.

Migrants are our brothers and sisters in search of a better life, far away from poverty, hunger, exploitation and the unjust distribution of the planet's resources which are meant to be equitably shared by all. Don't we all want a better, more decent and prosperous life to share with our loved ones?

At this moment in human history, marked by great movements of migration, identity is not a secondary issue. Those who migrate are forced to change some of their most distinctive characteristics and, whether they like or not, even those who welcome them are also forced to change. How can we experience these changes not as obstacles to genuine development, rather as opportunities for genuine human, social and spiritual growth, a growth which respects and promotes those values which make us ever more humane and help us to live a balanced relationship with God, others and creation?

The presence of migrants and refugees seriously challenges the various societies which accept them. Those societies are faced with new situations which could create serious hardship unless they are suitably motivated, managed and regulated. How can we ensure that integration will become mutual enrichment, open up positive perspectives to communities, and prevent the danger of discrimination, racism, extreme nationalism or xenophobia?

Biblical revelation urges us to welcome the stranger; it tells us that in so doing, we open our doors to God, and that in the faces of others we see the face of Christ himself. Many institutions, associations, movements and groups, diocesan, national and international organizations are experiencing the wonder and joy of the feast of encounter, sharing and solidarity. They have heard the voice of Jesus Christ: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock" (Rev 3:20). Yet there continue to be debates about the conditions and limits to be set for the reception of migrants, not only on the level of national policies, but also in some parish communities whose traditional tranquillity seems to be threatened.

Faced with these issues, how can the Church fail to be inspired by the example and words of Jesus Christ? The answer of the Gospel is mercy.

In the first place, mercy is a gift of God the Father who is revealed in the Son. God's mercy gives rise to joyful gratitude for the hope which opens up before us in the mystery of our redemption by Christ's blood. Mercy nourishes and strengthens solidarity towards others as a necessary response to God's gracious love, "which has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit" (Rom 5:5). Each of us is responsible for his or her neighbour: we are our brothers' and sisters' keepers, wherever they live. Concern for fostering good relationships with others and the ability to overcome prejudice and fear are essential ingredients for promoting the culture of encounter, in which we are not only prepared to give, but also to receive from others. Hospitality, in fact, grows from both giving and receiving.

From this perspective, it is important to view migrants not only on the basis of their status as regular or irregular, but above all as people whose dignity is to be protected and who are capable of contributing to progress and the general welfare. This is especially the case when they responsibly assume their obligations towards those who receive them, gratefully respecting the material and spiritual heritage of the host country, obeying its laws and helping with its needs. Migrations cannot be reduced merely to their political and legislative aspects, their economic implications and the concrete coexistence of various cultures in one territory. All these complement the defence and promotion of the human person, the culture of encounter, and the unity of peoples, where the Gospel of mercy inspires and encourages ways of renewing and transforming the whole of humanity.

The Church stands at the side of all who work to defend each person's right to live with dignity, first and foremost by exercising the right not to emigrate and to contribute to the development of one's country of origin. This process should include, from the outset, the need to assist the countries which migrants and refugees leave. This will demonstrate that solidarity, cooperation, international interdependence and the equitable distribution of the earth's goods are essential for more decisive efforts, especially in areas where migration movements begin, to eliminate those imbalances which lead people, individually or collectively, to abandon their own natural and cultural environment. In any case, it is necessary to avert, if possible at the earliest stages, the flight of refugees and departures as a result of poverty, violence and persecution.

Public opinion also needs to be correctly formed, not least to prevent unwarranted fears and speculations detrimental to migrants.

No one can claim to be indifferent in the face of new forms of slavery imposed by criminal organizations which buy and sell men, women and children as forced labourers in construction, agriculture, fishing or in other markets. How many minors are still forced to fight in militias as child soldiers! How many people are victims of organ trafficking, forced begging and sexual exploitation! Today's refugees are fleeing from these aberrant crimes, and they appeal to the Church and the human community to ensure that, in the outstretched hand of those who receive them, they can see the face of the Lord, "the Father of mercies and God of all consolation" (2 Cor 1:3).

Dear brothers and sisters, migrants and refugees! At the heart of the Gospel of mercy the encounter and acceptance by others are intertwined with the encounter and acceptance of God himself. Welcoming others means welcoming God in person! Do not let yourselves be robbed of the hope and joy of life born of your experience of God's mercy, as manifested in the people you meet on your journey! I entrust you to the Virgin Mary, Mother of migrants and refugees, and to Saint Joseph, who experienced the bitterness of emigration to Egypt. To their intercession I also commend those who invest so much energy, time and resources to the pastoral and social care of migrants. To all I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.

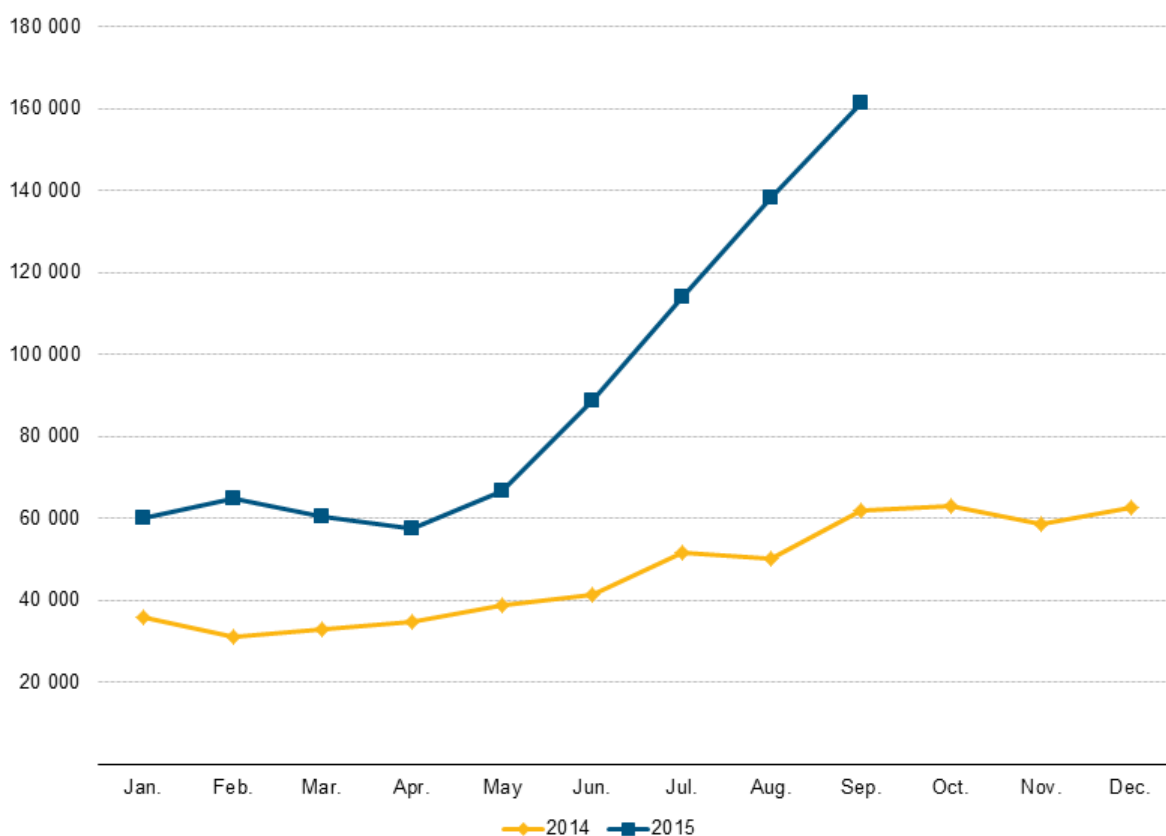
From the Vatican, September 12, 2015, FRANCISCUS

EUROPEAN UNION ASYLUM FIGURES 3RD QUARTER 2015

The number of persons seeking asylum from non-EU countries in the EU during the third quarter of 2015 reached **413,800**. This was 250,400 more than in the same quarter of 2014.

The number of first time asylum applications in the European Union (EU) increased by more than **150 % in the third quarter of 2015** compared with the same quarter of 2014 and almost doubled compared with the second quarter of 2015.

First time asylum applicants, EU-28, January 2014 – September 2015 –



Source: Eurostat ([migr_asyappctzm](#))

WHERE DO THEY COME FROM?

Citizens of 149 countries sought asylum for the first time in the EU in the third quarter of 2015. Syrians, Afghans and Iraqis were the top 3 citizenships of asylum seekers, lodging around 138,000, 56,700 and 44,400 applications respectively.

Syrians (98,000 more applicants compared to the third quarter of 2014) added most to the overall increase in first time asylum applicants in absolute terms, followed by **Afghans** (46,700 more) and **Iraqis** (40,400 more). Asylum applicants from Iraq (11 times more) recorded the most substantial relative increase in the EU in the third quarter of 2015 compared to the same quarter of 2014 followed by Albanians (nearly 8 times more), Afghans (almost 6 times more), Pakistanis (4 times more) and Syrians (3 times more).

Of the 138 000 Syrians who applied for the first time for asylum in the EU in the third quarter of 2015, more than three quarters were registered in three Member States: **Germany** (53,100), **Hungary** (35 800) and **Sweden** (18 100). Of the 56 700 Afghans seeking asylum protection for the first time in the EU during the third quarter of 2015, half (27 600) applied in Hungary, while 85% of the 26 500 Albanians applied in Germany (22 400). Syrians were the main citizenship of asylum seekers in 11 EU Member States.

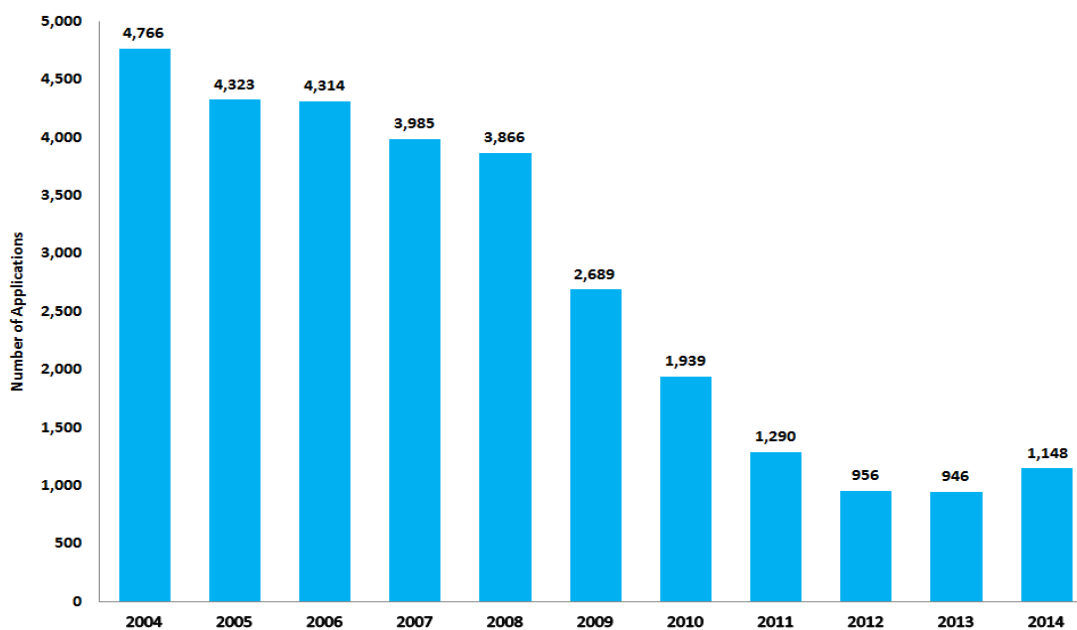
MAIN DESTINATION COUNTRIES

The highest number of first time asylum applicants in the third quarter of 2015 was registered in Germany and Hungary (both with slightly over 108 000 applicants, or 26% each of total applicants in the EU Member States), followed by Sweden (42 500, or 10%), Italy (28 400, or 7%) and Austria (27 600, or 7%). These 5 Member States together account for more than 75% of all first time applicants in the EU-28 (Table 2).

Trends in number of asylum applicants vary from country to country in the third quarter of 2015. Hungary with nearly 100 000 more first time asylum applicants saw its number of asylum seekers jumping notably by 13 times compared to the same quarter of 2014, while Finland recorded 15 times more asylum seekers (or 15 100 more).

Germany (58 400 applicants more) continued to record increasing numbers of asylum applicants, while Austria (20 300 more applicants, or 4 times more) was the country with the third largest absolute and relative increase in the number of asylum seekers in the EU in the third quarter of 2015.

NUMBER OF APPLICATIONS FOR ASYLUM IN IRELAND, 2004 - 2014



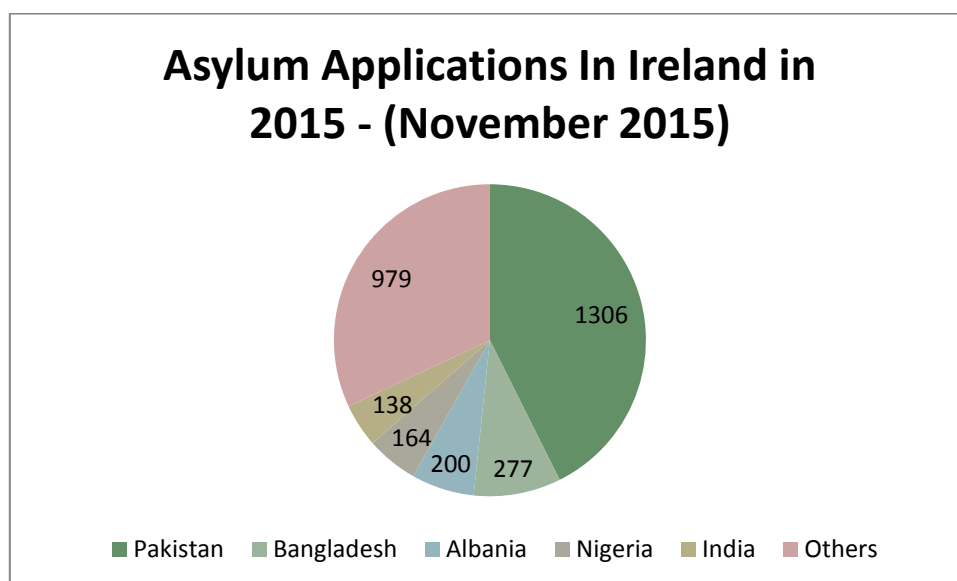
Source: Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner

NUMBER OF APPLICATIONS FOR ASYLUM IN IRELAND, 2015

From January to end of November 2015, there was a total of 3,064 asylum applications lodged in Ireland.

The top 5 Nationalities were :

1. Pakistan
2. Bangladesh
3. Albania
4. Nigeria
5. India



IRISH REFUGEE PROTECTION PROGRAMME

As part of the Government's response to the migration crisis in central and southern Europe, on 10th of September, 2015 the Government established the '**Irish Refugee Protection Programme**' (IRPP) to provide a safe haven for persons seeking international protection. Ireland will accept up to **4,000 persons** under this programme and this overall figure is likely to increase as recognised refugees may apply for family reunification.

Key figures:

- **2,900** persons to be relocated from Hungary, Greece and Italy
- **600** persons to be relocated from Italy and Greece
- **520** programme refugees to be resettled from outside the EU

Key Features of the Irish Refugee Protection Programme:

- Network of **Emergency Reception and Orientation Centres** to be established
- **Integration measures** including English language training to be provided
- Special priority will be given to the **plight of unaccompanied minors**
- **Gardaí to liaise with EU and international policing bodies** to ensure appropriate vetting arrangements put in place for all new arrivals
- **Irish Red Cross and other agencies to assist in harnessing offers of support from the public**, including offers of accommodation

Source: Department of Justice, Irish Refugee and Protection Programme

Mary Most Holy, you, together with St. Joseph and the Child Jesus, experienced the suffering of exile.

You were forced to flee to Egypt to escape the persecution of Herod.

Today we entrust the men, women and children who live as migrants and refugees to your maternal protection.

Grant us the grace to welcome them with Christian hospitality, so that these brothers and sisters of ours may find acceptance and understanding on their journey.

Teach us to recognise your Son

in the migrant who labours to bring food to our tables

in the refugee seeking protection from persecution, war and famine

in the man, woman and child who are victims of human trafficking

in the asylum seeker imprisoned for fleeing without documents

May all those who are far from their place of birth find in the Church a home where no one is a stranger.

We ask this in the name of your blessed Son, Jesus, our Lord, Amen.

Introduction (by the Presider)

In communion with Christ and one another we pray:

1. For a spirit of welcome and hospitality.

Lord, there are many Gospel stories which show us the importance of hospitality, making people feel welcome, whoever they are and wherever they come from. Help us to follow your example, reaching out to people who are newcomers to our area. Help us to be creative in imagining ways that will put us at ease, and allow us to share the best of ourselves in our stories and traditions. We pray that we may recognise your presence amongst us as we grow in mutual respect and friendship.

Lord in your mercy....

2. For families.

Lord, we are all sons and daughters of God, members of the same human family. We think of our own families, our joys and sorrows, hopes and fears. We try to imagine what it must be like for those who have had to leave their families and loved ones behind them, who are far from home and everything they're used to. We pray today for all migrant and refugee families, especially those who have become our neighbours here in Ireland.

Lord in your mercy....

3. For those who are suffering.

Lord, we have seen and heard of so many heart breaking stories in recent months, of the suffering and despair of people in Europe and in so many parts of the world who have been trafficked and exploited. Open our eyes to see where abuse and discrimination also exist in our own society. Give us the courage not to remain indifferent and to denounce what we know in our hearts to be wrong. May we encourage, and support through our prayer and practical action, the organisations that are working to create a more just and loving society where all of us can live in peace.

Lord in your mercy....

4. For our decision-makers and leaders.

Lord, we know the numbers of migrants and refugees in our world today are a sign of a much deeper crisis where hatred and violence have taken the place of love and solidarity. In their search for a way forward we pray that our decision-makers and leaders may be inspired by the example of your life. Whatever challenges they face may they never tire of working for peace and reconciliation and the greater good. Open our hearts Lord, so that whoever we are and whatever our circumstances, we may join with you in building a better and more just world for us all.

Lord in your mercy....

God of mercy and compassion, we pray to you in faith. Be near to us as we pray and be close to us as we work in your service. Grant this through Christ our Lord, **Amen.**

Sr Moira MacDowell, November 2015

“Migrants and Refugees challenge us. The response of the Gospel of Mercy.”

Thoughts towards a homily.....

“The quality of mercy is not strain’d.
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath: it is twice bless’d;
It blesses him that gives and him that takes:
‘Tis mightiest in the mightiest: it becomes
The throned monarch better than his crown;...

But mercy is above this sceptred sway,
It is enthroned in the hearts of kings.
It is an attribute of God himself...”

William Shakespeare: The Merchant of Venice.

As I put these thoughts together towards the end of November 2015, the civilised world is still trying to come to terms with the horrific events in Paris on Friday 13 November, and in the days immediately afterwards. There has been much said this week about the radicalisation of young Muslims and about the admission of refugees of Muslim background into Western Europe. There have been calls to close all our borders or, at the very least, to be more circumspect and vigilant about who goes where and when. Statements have been made about attacks on European culture and lifestyles, following not so long after well documented attacks on the ancient cultures and civilisations of parts of the Middle East. Some of our European neighbours have talked about the challenge an influx of (mostly) Muslim refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants will pose to our Christian heritage, our beliefs and our modes of worship.

In Ireland, and in most of our neighbouring European countries, we've grown somewhat used to the presence of "strangers" in our midst – people who look different, who speak differently, who act differently, who live differently, and who worship differently. Have we learned that, as the saying goes, "a stranger is a friend we haven't met yet"? Perhaps we've made an effort to reach out to the stranger in our midst, to offer the hand of friendship, to invite them around to the house, to help them speak our language, understand our culture and our history, to help them find a job, to show them how to fill out forms, to ask them to accompany us to our place of worship. I hope we have done so, to the best of our ability, just as I hope our efforts have been welcomed by the stranger, our new friend, our new neighbour, our new colleague, our new classmate, our new fellow citizen. And if our efforts have been rejected, I hope it hasn't put us off the challenge to try again with the most recent arrivals among us.

Of course, with the numbers of people fleeing Syria and other troubled spots of the Middle East and Africa, arriving in their thousands at the borders of the European Union – those who survive the journey, especially the crossing of the Mediterranean – we're faced with a different scenario altogether. Thousands of non-Europeans, non-Christians, non-whites, speaking languages we've never learned or felt the need to learn. Arriving as refugees!! Arriving as strangers about whom we know nothing at all. Welcomed at an official level in ways that some people living in Ireland for many years now can only dream of from the "comfort" of their holding centres.

Pope Francis has, since taking up office in March 2013, consistently and regularly preached the God of love and mercy, and has called on the Church to embrace his invitation to celebrate the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy from 8 December 2015 until 20 November 2016, and is challenging us today to respond to the plight of our new (and future) neighbours in the light of the "Gospel of Mercy".

The Gospel, the Good News, is Jesus among us. Jesus, "the Face of Mercy" challenges us to know that indifference is not an option. Silence and inaction are not options for Christians. We are challenged to see in the stranger the face of Jesus, and to recognise and acknowledge them as a brother or a sister, and to know, as Hebrews tells us, "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." (13:1)

Our French friends have reminded us recently of their noble tradition of "Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité". We know, as Christians, that we are all brothers and sisters, that "Fraternité" is second nature to us, that the stranger is always to be welcomed. But perhaps "not in my

back yard”. This NIMBYism is perhaps behind the call to, on one hand, say the stranger has the right to a home, a job, a livelihood while, on the other hand, proclaiming that it would be much better if they could stay in their own country where we can throw money at them and encourage them to sort out their differences among themselves.

But they’re here!! Or, at least, they’re coming. They’re on their way. The Gospel of Mercy challenges us to see the face of Jesus in each one of them, to seize the opportunity to play our part in ending their woeful experience of poverty, violence, persecution and whatever other atrocities they’ve suffered.

We’re invited during this Jubilee year to enter through the Holy Door of Mercy, either in Rome or in our local cathedral church. However we are as we go through that door, the challenge is to come out the other side merciful, intent on putting the Gospel of Mercy into action.

Fr Pat O’Hagan, November 2015

PARISH ACTIONS AND TIPS FOR REMEMBERING MIGRANTS ON WORLD DAY OF MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES



Invite people to bring forward the names of family member who have emigrated and invite new members of your parish to bring forward the names of family members they have left behind in their home country. Leave these names in the sanctuary area and include them in prayers for mass.



Have a map of the world in the church and invite people to stick a pin with a name flag on the spot where their loved one is or where they have come from.



Organise a migrant coffee morning where families affected by emigration can come together with families who have moved into your parish to share a cup of tea and exchange experiences.



Celebrate cultural diversity of our communities - for example through using hymns and prayers from the languages of your congregation to celebrate national feast days throughout the year e.g. Independence Day, Poland (11 November 2016) or St. Patrick's Day (17 March 2016)



Acknowledge refugee or migrant backgrounds of parishioners: for example, by asking a member of your parish to talk about their journey to live in Ireland



Pray for peace - a long lasting solution to people fleeing their homeland due to conflict or economic reason will only be achieved by solutions that address underlying causes.



Support service to refugees and migrants - for example by asking people who work as volunteers to resettle refugees and migrants to talk about their work.



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