



Ideas for Schools, Religious Education, and Youth Programs

UTILIZING THIS RESOURCE

How can this resource help our parish, and why is it important?

Many schools, religious education programs, and youth programs are facing a large influx of young people from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds and are attempting to find a faith-inspired response to the changes in their midst. This resource is designed to help parishes and schools in this endeavor.

The U.S. bishops' pastoral statement *Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity* calls us to welcome new immigrants and to help them join our communities in ways that are respectful of their cultures and in ways that mutually enrich the immigrants and the receiving church. It calls us to move beyond the anti-immigrant stance, to reject racism, and to promote laws and policies that respect the human dignity of all people. This important message is not only for adults, but also for children and youth as they, too, face these challenges. Instilling these values as part of our parish and school education programs will enable our children to develop into adults who will welcome all newcomers into their parishes and communities; assist their neighbors regardless of race, culture, or creed; and advocate for fair and just laws for all persons.

This resource contains many useful educational activities and ideas that can be infused into existing lesson plans for schools (grades K-12) or religious education programs. It also offers a myriad of ideas that can be incorporated into Catholic Youth

Organization (CYO) activities or be used in youth group retreats and meetings.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

The following activities should be adjusted to each classroom situation and can be expanded with creativity, time, and initiative. Additional activities and expanded resources for grades K-12 can be found in the curriculum manual *Who Are My Sisters and Brothers? A Catholic Educational Guide for Understanding and Welcoming Immigrants and Refugees*, publication no. 5-006, available from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) at 800-235-8722.

For younger children

When working with younger children, the most important thing is to teach children to accept and love differences. The teacher's role in leading the students through these activities is critical to achieve the desired objectives. By conducting these exercises with a spirit of enthusiasm and welcome, the teacher will find these activities popular with young children.



- The Good Samaritan parable illustrates how Jesus wants us to respond to those in need who may be different from us. Talk about simple ways that children can be welcoming and neighborly to immigrants, refugees, and migrants.
- Read the story *Swimmy*, by Leo Lionni, to the children. Discuss how all the fish worked together for the good of all. Explain the need for families, parishes, and schools to work together so that all people may have a better life.
- Discuss the many reasons that immigrants and refugees come to the United States: lack of food, work, or shelter in their homeland; persecution for religious or political reasons; war; violence; famine; drought; and family separation.
- Create handouts with a picture of a backpack. Ask the students to imagine that they arrive home from school and are told by their parents that their entire family is leaving in one hour. They may take only what they can carry in their backpacks. On the handout, have students make a list of the items they would bring. What did they leave behind? What and whom will they miss the most?
- As an exercise in empathy and understanding, ask children to write poems or prayers for refugees. (See “A Refugee Child’s Questions” on this page.)
- Ask the children to share life experiences regarding newcomers the children personally know. Initiate a discussion with questions such as these: Have you learned anything special from a person of another culture? Do you know any words or songs from another language? Have you ever eaten food from another culture?
- Play cultural bingo with the class. Create a bingo sheet with twenty-five squares. Fill the squares with questions about different cultures or experiences children have had with different cultures. Here are some sample questions: Who has taken part in a *posada* (Hispanic Christmas celebration)? Who is wearing something made in another country? Who can name at least six Native American tribes? Who knows what symbol is on Japan’s flag?

A REFUGEE CHILD’S QUESTIONS

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“Will it be scary, Mommy?”

“Yes, dear.”

“Will it be cold, Mommy?”

“Yes, dear.”

“Will it be dark, Mommy?”

“Yes, dear.”

“Will it be dangerous, Mommy?”

“Yes, dear.”

“Will we be tired, Mommy?”

“Yes, dear.”

“We won’t get caught, will we, Mommy?”

“No, dear.”

“Will God desert us?”

“No, dear.”

“Are you sure, Mommy?”

“Yes, dear. I am.”

- Have children learn greetings from different cultures, such as saying “Ni hao ma” (pronounced “nee how mah” in Chinese), pressing one’s hands together and saying “Namaste” (“nah mas tay” in India), saying “Hujambo” (“hoo jom bo” in Swahili), saying “Qué tal” (“kay tal” in Spanish), and saying “Chao” (“chow” in Vietnamese). Where applicable, be sure to include gestures as well as the foreign language greetings.
- Place six clear containers in the front of the classroom. Fill three containers with water and add food coloring to make a red, blue, and yellow container. Ask students to mix equal parts of the yellow and blue in a fourth container. Ask another to combine yellow and red in the fifth and another to combine blue and red in the sixth. Discuss the effects of mixing colors, emphasizing the new possibilities when colors are mixed.
- Discuss welcoming newcomers. Ask the students to brainstorm simple ways they can show hospitality to a new classmate or neighbor. Some ideas include smiling; sharing a book, game, or food;

allowing them to go first in line; inviting them to play; inviting them home to meet your family; and offering to help them with homework.

For youth

- Read the following Scripture verses: Ex 23:9, Lv 19:33-34, Dt 10:17-19, Is 58:7, Lk 10:29-37, Mt 2:13-15, and Mt 25:34-40. What does God say through Scripture about the ways we are called to respond to immigrants? Our faith tradition has a long history of hospitality and respect for the stranger or alien. The flight into Egypt describes the Holy Family as refugees fleeing from the wrath of King Herod. Have you ever thought of the Holy Family in this way? What could you do for a refugee family today? Do you see the face of Jesus when you meet people who are hungry, thirsty, or in need of clothing and shelter?
- Have youth define the terms “immigrant,” “refugee,” and “migrant.” Discuss how closely their definitions match the following: *immigrant*—a person who moves to a country to take up permanent residence; *migrant*—a person who moves within his/her country or into another one; and *refugee*—a person who is forcibly uprooted by circumstances beyond his/her control and is forced to flee his/her country.
- Have the class write a bill of rights by which they would want to live. Compare these rights with the rights (or lack thereof) for migrants, refugees, and immigrants.
- Have the class compare the **United States Bill of Rights** (National Archives—www.nara.gov/exhall/charters/billrights/billmain.html), the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees—www.unhcr.ch/udhr/index.htm), and the Church’s teaching (Scripture or other texts as noted) on the rights of all people (strangers, aliens). Which is more encompassing? Stress that the Gospel alternative to the present situation is that all people would have equal access to resources to meet their basic human needs.
- Invite young immigrants or foreign exchange students to present their personal stories. Ask children to note similarities and/or differences between their lives and those of the newcomers.
- In history or current events classes, have students bring in newspaper and magazine articles about immigrants, refugees, or migrants. Make a collage of pictures. Explain how many of these stories depict the hardships that immigrants encounter in everyday life. Analyze the approaches taken in the articles to see how racism, prejudice, stereotyping, fear, and xenophobia (anti-foreigner sentiment) were either fostered or discouraged. For an action response, have students write letters to the editor.
- Study the immigration history of the United States. Note how immigrants have been welcomed or reviled depending upon the economy and political climate in our country. Refer to the **U.S. Census Bureau** (www.census.gov) or the **National Immigration Forum** (www.immigrationforum.org) websites for graphs on recent immigration. Engage in a broader discussion of world events such as war, famine, natural disasters, political instability, and religious persecution that cause worldwide migration.
- Research the top ten countries from which the United States receives legal immigrants. Research the top ten countries from which the United States receives refugees. Study the reasons why immigrants and refugees are coming from these countries. Discuss the Catholic social teaching principle of solidarity and how this principle



challenges us to respond to our brothers and sisters around the world. Refer to *Called to Global Solidarity* (USCCB publication no. 5-118). Refer to the **Catholic Relief Services** website (www.catholicrelief.org) for important information on how the Catholic Church responds to the call for global solidarity.

- Continue the above activity by referring to *One Family Under God* (USCCB publication no. 5-270) for the Church's teaching on the right and obligation to speak on behalf of migrants, for insight on how Christ's view of the neighbor challenges us to broaden the scope of common good and solidarity, and for information on how the Church acts as a guide for social law and policy as well as for individual attitudes and behaviors.
- Contact your diocesan office or refer to the **U.S. bishops' Office of Migration and Refugee Services (MRS)** website (www.usccb.org/mrs) to learn about special concerns of migrant youth.
- Refer to statistics provided by the **United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees** (www.unhcr.ch) website on migration. Note the significant number of refugee women and children. Find out why women make up a large number of refugees and what are their special issues.
- Hold a cartoon contest in which the students illustrate unjust treatment of immigrants, migrants, or refugees throughout U.S. history.
- Hold a poster contest illustrating current examples of U.S. immigration laws that negatively affect immigrants or migrants, such as California's Proposition 187, Cuban refugee policy, and the 1996 immigration laws.
- Write letters to the U.S. Congress regarding just immigration laws.
- Have students research the requirements for becoming a citizen. For an action response, have youth volunteers at local agencies help immigrants prepare for citizenship tests.

- Prepare bulletin boards or posters on the costs of the benefits that immigrants receive in the United States. Compare these costs with the taxes immigrants pay and the contributions that they make in the United States. Refer to the **National Immigration Forum** (www.immigrationforum.org) website for information.
- Have a special liturgy or prayer service on or around November 13, the feast day of Mother Cabrini, the patroness of immigrants.
- In autumn, celebrate the harvest and thank those who work under difficult conditions, in the fields, to bring this bounty to our tables. In Jewish tradition, it was customary for the widows, orphans, and aliens to glean the harvest (pick the leftovers for themselves) as a way for the community to care for its vulnerable members (Ru 2). Inquire with the diocesan social action office to find a program in which your students can participate to bring food to the hungry in your area.

GENERAL SUGGESTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

Familiarize yourself with the U.S. bishops' pastoral statement *Welcoming the Stranger Among Us* and the companion brochure that summarizes it. Decide what are realistic goals, in your unique situation, for weaving this message into your educational programs. Make use of existing resources such as the Bible, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, resources from the U.S. bishops' Office of Migration and Refugee Services, and publications and websites listed throughout the above activities and in the enclosed *Resource Bibliography*.

Infuse the message of *Welcoming the Stranger Among Us* into what you are already doing:

- Have students include petitions for immigrants, refugees, and migrants when preparing for liturgies for children and youth. Ask the students to remember them in their daily prayers.

- Weave the theme of welcoming newcomers into class discussions while covering other topics. The following subjects lend themselves to enhancing positive attitudes towards immigrants, refugees, and migrants: immigration history of the United States; citizenship requirements in civics; and customs and cultures of other countries in geography, music, art, and foreign language classes.
- Seize opportunities that present themselves in current events to discuss the Church's position on welcoming the stranger. Note that the Church's position often contrasts with U.S. governmental policies on immigrants, migrants, or refugees.
- Encourage students and their parents to appreciate that the Gospel is asking us not only to provide food and shelter to immigrants, refugees, and migrants, but also to advocate on their behalf for just laws and policies. Provide opportunities for reflection on what we, as Catholics, need to do to change attitudes and laws to provide for all marginalized and vulnerable people.
- Encourage students and their parents when performing service projects for immigrants, refugees, or migrants to reflect on our Catholic belief in the human dignity of all persons and their right to have all their basic human needs met.



SUGGESTED RESOURCES

Many resources (in boldface) have been mentioned throughout the above activities. We encourage you to make use of the wealth of information available. In addition, the following are excellent resources:

National Migration Week materials: A booklet and poster published yearly from the U.S. bishops' Office of Migration and Refugee Services. To order, call 202-541-3353, fax 202-722-8805, or send e-mail to nmw@uscgb.org.

Excerpts from *Sharing Catholic Social Teaching materials*: Contain the seven themes of Catholic social teaching highlighted by the U.S. bishops: Life and Dignity of the Human Person; Call to Family, Community, and Participation; Rights and Responsibilities; Option for the Poor and Vulnerable; Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers; Solidarity; and Care for God's Creation. Available on colorful cards (USCCB publication no. 5-315, \$0.20) and posters (USCCB publication no. 5-318, \$1.50). Call 800-235-8722.

***A Catholic Call to Justice: An Activity Book for Raising Awareness of Social Justice Issues*:** A social justice lesson plan, designed for use with persons ages 14-22. The activities center around the themes of Catholic social teaching mentioned above. USCCB publication no. 5-239, 16 pp., \$1.95. Call 800-235-8722.

***Human Rights, Refugees and UNHCR: A Teacher's Guide*:** A teachers' kit, designed to help teachers prepare lessons that demonstrate the relationship between refugee protection and human rights. The kit includes posters and articles to prompt class discussion as well as teaching plans for children. Target group: ages 9-18. Available for free from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' Public Information Section, CP 2500, 1211 Geneva 2 Depot, Switzerland; send e-mail to hqpi00@unhcr.ch. Also available online at www.unhcr.ch.



From the Ground Up: Teaching Catholic Social Principles in Elementary Schools: Published by the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA), this guide includes a process for faculty development and sample activities for sharing the seven key themes of Catholic social teaching in grades K-8. To order a copy, call 202-337-6232.

Today's Immigrants and Refugees: A Christian Understanding: A collection of articles on a variety of crucial issues related to the pastoral care of immigrants and refugees in the Catholic Church in the United States. USCCB publication no. 204-7, 156 pp., \$6.95. Call 800-235-8722.

From Newcomers to Citizens: All Come Bearing Gifts: Written to commemorate National Citizenship Day, this document emphasizes the bishops' commitment to immigrants and addresses recent congressional initiatives that raise the bar for naturalization, urging reasonable standards that ensure that applicants embrace this country's values and laws. USCCB publication no. 5-363, 12 pp., \$1.50. Call 800-235-8722.

Refugees: A Challenge to Solidarity: From the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People and the Pontifical Council Cor Unum, this publication aims to stimulate international solidarity especially regarding the causes of the inhumane living condition of refugees. USCCB publication no. 576-3, 16 pp., \$1.95.

WEBSITES

www.culturalorientation.net: The Cultural Orientation Project established by the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) has created a website geared towards cultural orientation trainers overseas and in the United States. The site provides information on cultural orientation training activities, cultural backgrounds of refugee populations, and links to related websites.

www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/migrants/ Refer to the Vatican's website for additional information on the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People.