

Catholic Charities and Immigration: FAQs

Catholic Charities is frequently mentioned on the news as helping migrants at the U. S. southern border. What exactly is Catholic Charities doing there?

As Catholic Charities USA has stated, “Our work is humanitarian, not political, and we have collaborated with every [presidential] administration since our founding in 1910.”¹ At the southern border, just like everywhere else Catholic Charities operates, it provides a variety of services to everyone, migrants included. Catholic Charities has established “respite centers” to help address the humanitarian crisis at the U.S.-Mexico border. At these respite centers, migrants can receive food, clean clothing, a place to rest; a shower and hygiene products; social work services; legal aid; medical care where appropriate and connections with healthcare services; and, lastly, assistance to “make sense of their next steps”² after they are detained and processed by the federal government and head to their destination cities to await their day in court.

Catholic Charities does not encourage or coerce people to cross the U.S.-Mexico border. Respite center staff and volunteers are overwhelmed. They are working tirelessly to meet the needs that are presented to them. Why? Because taking care of people, especially vulnerable people seeking lives free from violence and fear, is the right thing to do.

¹ “Immigration Services,” Catholic Charities USA, February 28, 2024, <https://www.catholiccharitiesusa.org/what-we-do/immigration-services/>.

² “And They Shall Know Us by Our Love,” Catholic Charities USA, March 11, 2024, <https://stories.catholiccharitiesusa.org/and-they-shall-know-us-by-our-love/>.

Why is Catholic Charities involved in what is happening at the U. S. southern border?

Simply put, the Sacred Scripture and the Sacred Tradition of the Catholic Church call each of us to welcome the stranger in whatever capacity we are able. The foremost example of this call is found in the Gospel inspiration for Catholic Charities as a whole, Matthew 25:35-40, which states:

“For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.’

Then the righteous will answer him and say, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?’

And the king will say to them in reply, ‘Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.’”³

However, this act of “welcoming the stranger” very specifically refers to those who are foreigners in our lands, in addition to those merely unfamiliar to us. Other references in Sacred Scripture include:

- “You shall not oppress a resident alien; you well know how it feels to be an alien, since you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt.”⁴
- “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. I, the LORD, am your God.”⁵
- “The LORD protects the resident alien, comes to the aid of the orphan and the widow, but thwarts the way of the wicked.”⁶
- “I was a father to the poor; the complaint of the stranger I pursued.”⁷
- “You shall allot it as heritage for yourselves and for the resident aliens in your midst who have fathered children among you. You shall treat them like native Israelites; along with you they shall receive a heritage among the tribes of Israel.”⁸
- “Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all and in all.”⁹

³ Mt. 25:35-40, *NABRE*.

⁴ Exod. 23:9, *NABRE*.

⁵ Lev. 19:34, *NABRE*.

⁶ Ps. 146:9, *NABRE*.

⁷ Job 29:16, *NABRE*.

⁸ Ez. 47:22, *NABRE*.

⁹ Col. 3:11, *NABRE*.

As Christians, we are called to a radical hospitality to those who are poor, vulnerable, marginalized, or otherwise outcast. When Christ came to Earth, He spent His ministry in the company of prostitutes, tax collectors, lepers, and many others who were considered to be “unclean” or otherwise undesirable.

St. John Chrysostom reminds us:

“[Abraham] was a stranger, and [this] stranger entertained strangers: for he was a citizen of heaven. Therefore, not even while he was on earth was he a stranger (to [God]). We are rather strangers than that stranger, if we receive not strangers. He had no home, and his tent was his place of reception. And mark his liberality — he killed a calf and kneaded fine meal: mark his ready mind — by himself and his wife: mark the unassuming manner — he worships and beseeches them. For all these qualities ought to be in that man who entertains strangers — readiness, cheerfulness, liberality.”¹⁰

Does Catholic Charities pay to transport migrants to cities across the United States?

“Migrants or their sponsors are expected to pay for their transportation. Transportation is sometimes funded by social services agencies, such as Catholic Charities, if migrants are unable to pay the necessary travel costs to reach their final destinations.”¹¹ This work is done in close coordination with federal, state, and local authorities. Catholic Charities does not, has not, and will never participate in nor condone the illicit trafficking of human persons into, out of, or within the United States. Such trafficking is a grave sin which offends the dignity of human persons and is condemned by the Catechism of the Catholic Church through paragraphs 2239-2242 and 2414.¹²

What are the differences among refugees, migrants, and asylees?

The Department of Homeland Security has a useful glossary for terms used regularly when discussing immigration: [https://www.dhs.gov/ohss/about-data/glossary#:~:text=Immigrant%3A%20Any%20person%20lawfully%20in,101\(a\)\(15\).](https://www.dhs.gov/ohss/about-data/glossary#:~:text=Immigrant%3A%20Any%20person%20lawfully%20in,101(a)(15).)

Additionally, the full law regarding immigration is available through the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services: <https://www.uscis.gov/laws-and-policy/legislation/immigration-and-nationality-act>.

¹⁰ John Chrysostom, “Homily 45 on the Acts of the Apostles,” ed. Kevin Knight, CHURCH FATHERS: Homily 45 on the Acts of the Apostles (Chrysostom), accessed March 11, 2024, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/210145.htm>.

¹¹ “And They Shall Know Us by Our Love,” *FAQs About Our Work*.

¹² *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2019), 540-541, 580.

Some key definitions include the following:

- Alien: “Any person not a citizen or national of the United States.”¹³
- Immigrant: “Any person lawfully in the United States who is not a U.S. citizen, U.S. national, or person admitted under a nonimmigrant category as defined by the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) section 101(a)(15).”¹⁴ There are various kinds of immigrant statuses under the law. The particular status attributed to an immigrant is dependent on a variety of conditions.
- Refugee: “Any person who is outside any country of such person's nationality or, in the case of a person having no nationality, is outside any country in which such person last habitually resided, and who is unable or unwilling to return to, and is unable or unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of, that country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.”¹⁵ The President may also specify individuals as refugees according to a particular procedure which meets the same requirements as those listed.¹⁶ ***A person who is a refugee has legal status in the United States.***
- Asylee: “Person granted asylum under section 208 of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA).”¹⁷ This is a particular kind of refugee; it is someone who already meets the definition previously stated and receives particular protections by obtaining asylum.
- Asylum: “Form of protection provided to noncitizens physically present in the United States who meet the definition of refugee under Immigration and Nationality (INA) section 101(a)(42) and are not otherwise barred from applying for or receiving asylum.”¹⁸ Asylum prohibits the Attorney General of the United States, or other bodies acting under said office’s authority, from removing the alien or returning them to their country of nationality and/or their last place of habitual residence. In addition, it provides authorization for residency and employment within the United States, as well as the ability to travel abroad with permission of the Attorney General of the United States.¹⁹

¹³ *Immigration and Nationality Act, US Code 8 (2024)*, §1101(a)(3).

¹⁴ “Glossary: Homeland Security,” U.S. Department of Homeland Security, accessed March 11, 2024, [https://www.dhs.gov/ohss/about-data/glossary#:~:text=Immigrant%3A%20Any%20person%20lawfully%20in,101\(a\)\(15\).](https://www.dhs.gov/ohss/about-data/glossary#:~:text=Immigrant%3A%20Any%20person%20lawfully%20in,101(a)(15).)

¹⁵ *Immigration and Nationality Act, §1101(a)(42)*.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ “Glossary: Homeland Security,” U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Immigration and Nationality Act, US Code 8 (2024)*, §1158(c)(1).

Are donations to my local Catholic Charities Agency or to the Annual Diocesan Appeal used to fund activities on the U. S. southern border?

No. All donations sent directly to Catholic Charities or raised through the Annual Diocesan Appeal remain within the Diocese of Youngstown and are used within the Diocese.

There are, however, *special collections* at various times which are directed towards a specific cause or purpose which may or may not be within the Diocese of Youngstown. Both the Diocese of Youngstown and individual parishes within it may have special collections. The Diocese of Youngstown has a number of special collections, some of which keep donations within the diocese, send donations overseas, or send them to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) for redistribution to the national Catholic Church, such as:

- The Communications Collection, which directly supports the Diocese of Youngstown and its parishes in communications and media efforts.²⁰
- The Church Overseas Combined Collection, which, as its name suggests, aids supporting the international Church.²¹
- The CRS Rice Bowl Collection, which is the Lenten faith-in-action collection of Catholic Relief Services.²² 75% of all funds raised through this program are sent to Catholic Relief Services, the international anti-poverty program of the USCCB, and the remaining 25% is retained within the Diocese of Youngstown to relieve food insecurity and poverty locally.
- The Seminarian Support Collection, which aids the Diocese of Youngstown's seminarians in supporting their education and formation as future priests for the Diocese.²³

The Diocesan website www.doy.org has more information.

What is Catholic Charities doing for immigrants locally, within the six counties of the Diocese of Youngstown?

All of the programs and services Catholic Charities offers can be accessed by people in need in accordance with established program guidelines and availability of funding. We will not deny critical services because someone may be undocumented, just as we would not deny services to someone if they were not Catholic or professed no faith at all. If we see a person who is hungry, we will feed them. If we see someone who is homeless, we will help them find shelter. Jesus did not ask for proof of legal status before he healed the sick, comforted the afflicted, and forgave sins, so

²⁰ Can be found at: <https://doy.org/communications-collection/>

²¹ Can be found at: <https://doy.org/events/church-at-home-combined-collection-956/>

²² Can be found at: <https://doy.org/catholic-relief-services-rice-bowl/>

²³ Can be found at: <https://doy.org/collection-for-seminarian-support/>

who are we to determine whether a person is “worthy” of our charity? A person is deserving of our assistance simply because they are human beings created in the image and likeness of God.

Additionally, the Diocese of Youngstown maintains a contract with the Diocese of Cleveland to provide immigration legal services for people living in our six counties. Last year, attorneys working in the Diocese of Youngstown provided family-based immigration legal services to 129 people representing 32 different countries.

What should I be doing as a faithful Catholic?

When considering “hot-button” social issues like immigration, one ought to first focus on what it means to be a *faithful citizen*. The Catechism of the Catholic Church²⁴ and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) provide a wealth of information, including a resource on what it means to be a faithful citizen in the United States: <https://www.usccb.org/offices/justice-peace-human-development/forming-consciences-faithful-citizenship>. Generally, to be a faithful citizen, one ought to be influenced by the themes of Catholic Social Teaching, particularly:

- Human Dignity
- The Common Good
- Subsidiarity
- And Solidarity

When it comes to the immigration issue, one ought to discern what he or she is capable of doing. Below are some suggestions:

- Advocate for reforms in our immigration system. As anyone who has experience with it can tell you, it is fundamentally broken in many ways and needs comprehensive legislation in order to repair it; and to do so in such a way that respects not only our national sovereignty and security, but also the dignity of the foreigner and the common good overall.
- Pray for migrants and all of those impacted in some way by our broken immigration system. Prayer can bring about a change in the hearts and minds of men and women through the Grace of God.
- Support efforts that assist newcomers and/or provide opportunities to encounter and accompany newcomers on their journey. Such engagement with others invites the presence of Christ and helps to bring about the Kingdom of God.

²⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2019), 540-542. Note: There are other, disparate paragraphs which help inform the duties of a Catholic citizen; these pages are merely a reference to the wider discussion.

Where can I get more information?

Useful Links:

1. CCUSA

- a. General: <https://www.catholiccharitiesusa.org/>
- b. Immigration Services: <https://www.catholiccharitiesusa.org/what-we-do/immigration-services/>
- c. And They Shall Know Us by Our Love – Stories of Immigration
<https://stories.catholiccharitiesusa.org/and-they-shall-know-us-by-our-love/#section-HOME-KdvgtcfMUt>

2. USCCB

- a. USCCB Subcommittee on Pastoral Care of Migrants, Refugees, & Travelers:
<https://www.usccb.org/committees/pastoral-care-migrants-refugees-travelers>
- b. Welcoming the Stranger, Letter from the USCCB on Immigration:
<https://www.usccb.org/committees/pastoral-care-migrants-refugees-travelers/welcoming-stranger-among-us-unity-diversity>
- c. <https://www.usccb.org/offices/justice-peace-human-development/forming-consciences-faithful-citizenship>
- d. The Office of Justice, Peace, and Human Development:
<https://www.usccb.org/offices/justice-peace-human-development>
- e. Catholic Social Teaching 101: <https://www.usccb.org/offices/justice-peace-human-development/catholic-social-teaching>
 - i. CST on Immigration:
<https://www.usccb.org/committees/migration/immigration>
 - ii. And more CST on Immigration: <https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/immigration/catholic-teaching-on-immigration-and-the-movement-of-peoples>
- f. CCHD: <https://www.usccb.org/committees/catholic-campaign-human-development>

3. The Vatican

- a. Encyclical Letter from Pope Francis, Fratelli Tutti:
https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html
- b. Pope Francis on World Day of Migrants and Refugees:
<https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/migration.html>
- c. World Day of the Poor 2023 Homily:
<https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2023/documents/20231119-omelia-giornatamondiale-poveri.html>
- d. Catechism, Paragraph 2241:
<https://www.usccb.org/sites/default/files/flipbooks/catechism/543/#zoom=z>