Hospitality and Accompaniment for Immigrant Families

Thank you for your interest in supporting the recently arrived immigrant families.

Families are arriving in great numbers; many are fleeing violent and destabilized communities in Central America. The USCCB Committee on Migration and some of our staff recently traveled to Central America to see first-hand the conditions in these sending communities, to meet with our Church partners, with other stakeholders, and with families to find out what is driving the increasing number of children and youth and now families to make the decision to migrate. Our report is available here.

All of these families will be processed and placed in what are called Immigration Removal Proceedings; this is the legal process, whereby their individual cases are reviewed by a Judge at a court hearing and they have the opportunity to request asylum or some other protective immigration status. ***It typically takes about one year to complete an asylum case; those who agree to support migrant families should commit to supporting these families throughout the duration of this process.***

Hospitality takes many forms, and these families have both immediate and long term needs.

Immediate: The Department of Homeland Security, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is processing the families along the U.S. Border; the number of families is unprecedented, and so the conditions of these temporary facilities are lacking in even the most basic services and conditions. Those families who have relatives in the U.S. are being released; but they must make their own way to their relatives.
If you are near the border, please consider reaching out to your local Catholic Charities; material donations like clothing, hygiene products, food, and cash for bus tickets are needed. Volunteers are also needed to distribute the goods.

Long term: As you would imagine, there are a number of families who do not have relatives here in the U.S. As June 13th, **ICE told us there are several hundred families, over 700 people**, in this situation. ICE intends to detain these families while they wait for their immigration hearings or pass preliminary asylum finding (Credible Fear). Several years ago, ICE detained families and the impact on the families was devastating, as detailed in a 2007 LIRS/WCRWC report. The facility was closed, and families have not been detained, until now.

To their credit, ICE may be open to releasing families who exhibit Credible Fear and who do not have relatives ***to other community sponsors or hosts, who can be located anywhere in the US.*** USCCB is currently piloting a small, self-funded "Alternative to Detention" project for adult migrants under an agreement with ICE. We will now be supporting several of the most vulnerable families through this pilot.

We are asking other Catholic and faith-based organizations to host some of the other families and those who may come in the future, so that they are not detained. Below we suggest some ways that families could be hosted and supported in your community, and provide some tips on supporting the families.

Community Living:
· Could one or more families live in community with you?
· Is there a long-term shelter or transitional-living program that one or more of these families would be able to join?
Individual Family Hosting:
· Are there individual families in your network willing to host a single family in their home?
· Could other members of your network help with financial or material support to the host family?
Financial Support for Independent or Group Living:
· Could your organization or network provide housing to one or more of these families in an existing residential property or through rental of housing?
Financial Support, Material and In-Kind Donations:
· Perhaps you cannot provide housing, but others in your community can; could you assist in meeting the material needs of the families?

Please review the anticipated needs outlined below, and consider how you and your organization can meet some of these needs for families residing in your community—either hosted or living with their own relatives.

Tips for Supporting Families

Safety Information

- Because these families include children, we recommend that you follow the Safe Environment protocol for all volunteers and hosts. More information about the Safe Environment protocol can be found here.
- Families will be composed of parents and children; most will be single mothers but others may include both parents (men are likely being separated and repatriated). Some of the children are very young, including infants and toddlers, but there may also be adolescents and teens. Please consider and let us know if you can house men, and the age range of children that are appropriate for your housing options.
- The parents will be the legal custodians of their children; no one should attempt to seek guardianship or take custody of the children.
- If you intend to house multiple families together (i.e. dormitory, convent etc.), please review your local code and zoning regulations for group homes, shelters etc.

Financial Support

- In most cases, the adults will not have permission to work legally (Employment Authorization Document); they will likely need financial support for several months.
- Most social service programs in the U.S. exclude immigrants (i.e. TANF, SNAP, and Medicaid), one exception is WIC. Consider enrolling mothers with young children in WIC. Refer families to food banks, food pantries, and faith based charitable programs that do not exclude immigrants.

Transportation

- Families will likely need assistance with transportation, or information about local public transit options.

Medical Care

- The journey to the U.S. is dangerous and very difficult; the detention conditions on the border are currently alarming. It is likely that the families will need at least some basic medical care. We suggest enrolling children in CHIP programs if there are no exclusions based on immigration status; refer the families to free and low cost community health care providers.

Mental Health Care

- As noted above, and in the attached reports, many of these families have experienced or witnessed extreme violence in their home communities and on the journey to the U.S.; the process of detention, applying for asylum, and the prospect of deportation are very stressful and can be overwhelming. Family separation and "homesickness" can also compound feelings of depression and anxiety, because familiar supports are absent. Families should be referred to mental health services, such as counseling and perhaps even psychotropic medications, and pastoral services.

Education

- While it is now the summer, all school aged children present in the U.S. have the right to education. Once school is in session, parents of school aged children should be assisted with registering and enrolling their children in school. Consider referring parents of young children to programs such as Head Start; ESL classes are good resources for parents.

Immigration Court Process

- The families will likely want to pursue asylum or some other protective immigration status; the families should be connected with immigration legal services, such as *pro bono* attorneys, legal aid, or law school legal clinics. Check with the local CLINIC affiliate (a searchable directory is here) for assistance.

Enforcement

- The families will be released from ICE custody with some form of release order; this order will include reporting requirements (regular in-person or telephonic). They will likely have an Immigration Court hearing scheduled. Hosts or community sponsors will have no legal obligation to enforce ICE or Immigration Court Orders; will have no reporting requirements (i.e. if the family leaves the area); should not pay bonds.

Next Steps

Please prayerfully consider how your community can help these vulnerable families. Below are suggested next steps.

If you are near the border

□ Contact your local Catholic Charities affiliate to learn about their material/volunteer needs (directory here)
□ Consider how your network can assist with
    □ the donation of needed items, including clothing, hygiene products, food, and cash
    □ provision of volunteers to distribute goods

For those who cannot host families

□ Share this resource with your networks
□ Consider how you can provide support to host families within your community (provision of material or financial support, volunteering with local Catholic Charities affiliate, etc.)

Please be aware that some of these families may be released to relatives residing in your community, and will have the same needs listed above. Please contact your local Catholic Charities to inquire about opportunities to help.

For those who can host families

□ Contact USCCB (Hilary Chester: hchester@usccb.org, Jessi Pore: jpore@usccb.org) to discuss next steps. Please let us know the number, gender(s) of individuals you can host. Please indicate the age range of children appropriate for your housing.

To prepare for families, please consider the following:

□ Review the Safe Environment protocol
□ If you will be accepting multiple families, review local code/licensing guidelines for group homes, shelters

It may be useful to gather information/referrals for resources, such as:

□ Local food banks, food pantries, and faith-based charitable programs who serve immigrants
□ WIC (list of state agencies)
□ CHIP (information)
□ Free/low-cost community health care providers
□ Free/low-cost mental health care providers (counseling and medication)
□ Pastoral care resources
□ Head Start (Office of Head Start website)
□ Local ESL classes
□ Local immigration services (CLINIC affiliate directory)

Thank you for your continued prayers and support for these vulnerable members of our human family!

Contact

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