



We Are Called: Accompanying those forced to flee

We are pleased to share *We Are Called: Accompanying those forced to flee*, adapted selections from Pope Francis’ message for the 106th World Day of Migrants and Refugees, which will be celebrated on September 27, 2020.

In his message, Pope Francis laments the plight of internally displaced persons forced to flee from war, violence, dire poverty, natural disasters, and the effects of climate change. Such persons often live with chronic stress and insecurity in their daily lives, circumstances which have only been exacerbated by COVID-19. And so Pope Francis urges us to recognize the presence of Jesus in each of these persons and to love and serve our Creator by accompanying our migrant and refugee brothers and sisters.

This piece is comprised of six brief excerpts from Pope Francis’ entire message in which

he explores six verb pairs describing the actions we are called to take in order to effectively “welcome, protect, promote and integrate” migrants and refugees. In taking up this call with compassion and faith, then, we are truly accompanying our brothers and sisters.

Throughout this piece, the men and women of Holy Cross and their ministry partners who accompany migrants and refugees highlight ways in which they personally witness Jesus’ presence in their daily lives and share why they answered the call to accompany those forced to flee. Together

with Francis’s message, we find these personal reflections to be both thought-provoking and energizing, and we trust you will too. We welcome your reflections and feedback. Please share your updates, questions and commentary with us at

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I heard Jesus whispering into my heart to do the small things I am able to do.

I came to realize that even just my presence touches their hearts. Just being able to share their own stories brings inner healing, and I feel touched and blessed too.

Semerita Mbambu, CSC
Sisters of the Holy Cross

Essentials from Pope Francis' Message for the 106th World Day of Migrants and Refugees, 27 September 2020

In the light of the tragic events that have marked 2020, I would like this Message, although concerned with internally displaced persons, to embrace all those who are experiencing situations of precariousness, abandonment, marginalization and rejection as a result of COVID-19. (*paragraph 4*)

In each of these people, forced to flee to safety, Jesus is present as he was at the time of Herod. In the faces of the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the sick, strangers and prisoners, we are called to see the face of Christ who pleads with us to help (cf. Mt 25:31-46). If we can recognize him in those faces, we will be the ones to thank him for having been able to meet, love and serve him in them. (*paragraph 5*)

We are called to respond to this pastoral challenge with the four verbs I indicated in my Message for this Day in 2018: welcome, protect, promote and integrate. To these words, I would now like to add another six pairs of verbs that deal with very practical actions and are linked together in a relationship of cause and effect. (*paragraph 6*)

To know in order to understand.

Knowledge is a necessary step towards understanding others. ... When we talk about migrants and displaced persons, all too often we stop at statistics. But it is not about statistics, it is about real people! If we encounter them, we will get to know more about them. And knowing their stories, we will be able to understand them. We will be able to understand, for example, that the precariousness that we have come to experience as a result of this pandemic is a constant in the lives of displaced people. (*paragraph 7*)

See Pope Francis' [brief video](#), "To know in order to understand."

I see immigrants from Mexico who have fled poverty and violence, people currently excluded and limited because of poverty, immigration status, rejection by others. Working with them to improve laws, access, and opportunities, I also get to see them grow as persons, developing skills for public life and leadership.

John Korcsmar, CSC
Congregation of Holy Cross

To be close in order to serve.

Fears and prejudices – all too many prejudices – keep us distant from others and often prevent us from “becoming neighbours” to them and serving them with love. Drawing close to others often means being willing to take risks, as so many doctors and nurses have taught us in recent months. This readiness to draw near and serve goes beyond a mere sense of duty. Jesus gave us the greatest example of this when he washed the feet of his disciples: he took off his cloak,

knelt down and dirtied his hands (cf. Jn 13:1-15). *(paragraph 8)*

See Pope Francis' [brief video](#), "To be close in order to serve."

To be reconciled, we need to listen.

A love that reconciles and saves begins with listening. In today's world, messages multiply but the practice of listening is being lost. Yet it is only through humble and attentive listening that we can truly be reconciled. In 2020, silence has reigned for weeks in our streets. A dramatic and troubling silence, but one that has given us the opportunity to listen to the plea of the vulnerable, the displaced and our seriously ill planet. Listening gives us an opportunity to be reconciled with our neighbour, with all those who have been "discarded", with ourselves and with God, who never tires of offering us his mercy. *(paragraph 9)*

See Pope Francis' [brief video](#), "To listen in order to be reconciled."

Now more than ever we are called to help and serve immigrants and refugees from all over the world. This work is not easy as there are many who do not share our call of service. We are called by Jesus ... to love our neighbor and we welcome them. We seek to see the face of Jesus in each person we serve.

Shaula Lovera
Catholic Charities Archdiocese of New Orleans
(Marianite of Holy Cross Marjorie Hebert,
president/CEO)

To grow, it is necessary to share.

God did not want the resources of our planet to benefit only a few. This was not the Lord's will! We have to learn to share in order to grow together, leaving no one behind. The pandemic has reminded us how we are all in the same boat. Realizing that we have the same concerns and fears has shown us once more that no one can be saved alone. To grow truly, we must grow together, sharing what we have, like the boy who offered Jesus five barley loaves and two fish... yet they proved enough for five thousand people (cf. Jn 6:1-15)! *(paragraph 10)*

See Pope Francis' [brief video](#), "To share in order to grow."

To be involved in order to promote.

Sometimes the impulse to serve others prevents us from seeing their real riches. If we really want to promote those whom we assist, we must involve them and make them agents in their own redemption. The pandemic has reminded us of how essential co-responsibility is, and that only with the contribution of everyone – even of those groups so often underestimated – can we face this crisis. We must find "the courage to create spaces where everyone can recognize that they are called, and to allow new forms of hospitality, fraternity and solidarity" ([Meditation in Saint Peter's Square](#), 27 March 2020). *(paragraph 11)*

See Pope Francis' [brief video](#), "To involve in order to promote."

To cooperate in order to build.

Building the Kingdom of God is a duty common to all Christians, and for this reason it is necessary that we learn to cooperate, without yielding to the temptation to jealousy, discord and division. ... To preserve our common home and make it conform more and more to God's original plan, we must commit ourselves to ensuring international cooperation, global solidarity and local commitment, leaving no one excluded. (*paragraph 12*)

See Pope Francis' [brief video](#), "To cooperate in order to build."

Suggested Reflection Questions

1. To which of these verb pairs/videos are you most attracted? Why?
2. Which personal or professional experiences resonate with this message?
3. To which actions is this message calling us?

Suggested Action

Having reflected on this material, including the personal reflections shared, spend some time writing about where you see Jesus in the lives of those who have been forced to flee? In what ways might you personally answer this call to being present (e.g. in prayer, artistic expression, volunteerism, advocacy, etc.)? Identify one action you can personally take—now or in the future—to respond to this call.

If not me, then
who?

What would Jesus
do?

Of course,
I have to do this.

Pauline Maurier, CSC
Sisters of Holy Cross

Closing Prayer

Merciful God, protect and aid those forced to flee their homes, that they may find peace and security wherever they may be. Open our eyes, O Creator, that we might recognize your presence in the face of our neighbors. Awaken our hearts that we might serve you by showing our migrant and refugee brothers and sisters loving acceptance and compassion. Amen.

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