

U.S. CATHOLICS JOIN WITH POPE FRANCIS IN CAMPAIGN TO “SHARE THE JOURNEY” OF MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

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The Holy Father's worldwide two-year campaign supporting the displaced kicks off Sept. 27

WASHINGTON—Today, several dozen bishops across the United States are joining Pope Francis as he launched the two-year "Share the Journey" campaign, holding events and reaching out to support migrants and refugees in their own dioceses as the campaign aims to raise awareness about their plight worldwide.

Kicked off around the world by the global Caritas network, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and Catholic Charities USA (CCUSA) are sponsoring the campaign in the United States. Both CRS, working in more than 100 countries around the world, and CCUSA, the Catholic Church's domestic agency, are members of Caritas Internationalis, the Church's worldwide charity organization that is the overall sponsor of the campaign.

"This campaign is both spiritual and practical," says Cardinal DiNardo of Galveston-Houston, who is president of the USCCB. "The Pope is asking us to pray and reflect and to use the awareness we build to take action, both personally and publically. To our Church, this campaign is an embodiment of the Biblical command to love our neighbor."

Pope Francis kicked off "Share the Journey" at the Vatican today with a symbolic gesture of reaching out to those displaced from their homes, who now number some 65 million around the world, the biggest such crisis since World War II. That will be followed by a week of prayer and action for migrants and refugees in Catholic churches and parishes around the world from Oct. 7 to Oct. 14.

"The Holy Father wants us to feel this personally," says Sister Donna Markham, OP, PhD, President and CEO of Catholic Charities USA. "Each of us must work to encounter the migrants and refugees who are all around us. All too often, they seem invisible to us. We need to hear their stories, literally share their journeys, and see them as our brothers and sisters."

From Seattle to Miami, bishops are holding masses, prayer vigils and events with local migrants and refugees. Two dioceses in Florida, for example, illustrate the support the Catholic Church is lending to the campaign. The Basilica of the Immaculate Conception in Jacksonville, part of the St. Augustine diocese, is working through its local Catholic Charities to invite refugees and migrants to a special 7 p.m. mass where they will be welcomed to share their stories.

In Venice, the diocese is launching a photo exhibition and slideshow focused on the issue, along with a video about a young woman, the adult child of migrant workers, who is now Program Director for Catholic Charities Guadalupe Social Services in Immokalee, FL. The campaign also calls for governments and international organizations to take responsibility for caring for forced migrants, most of whom are fleeing disasters – war, famine, violence – beyond their control.

"At CRS, we work with both the internally displaced and refugees around the world," CRS President Sean Callahan says. "We know firsthand that these are innocent victims, that they should be treated with respect and dignity, that they are the people the Bible calls us to love. By heeding Pope Francis' call to share their journey, we can all come to understand that."

More information about "Share the Journey" is available on sharejourney.org . . .