

# Creating a Culture of Encounter



National Migration  
Week 2017

## MERCIFUL AND LOVING FATHER,

We beseech you, open our hearts  
so that we may provide hospitality and refuge  
to migrants who are lonely, afraid,  
and far from their homes.

Give us the courage to welcome every stranger  
as Christ in our midst,

to invite them into our communities  
as a demonstration of Christ's love for us.

We pray that when we encounter the other,  
we see in her the face of your Son,  
when we meet a stranger,  
that we take his hand in welcome.

Help us to live in solidarity with one another,  
to seek justice for those who are persecuted  
and comfort for those who are suffering.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

## Welcoming the Stranger U. S. Bishops Challenge Us to Create a Culture of Encounter

For nearly a half century, the Catholic Church in the United States has celebrated National Migration Week, which is an opportunity for the Church to reflect on the circumstances confronting migrants, including immigrants, refugees, children, and victims and survivors of human trafficking. The theme for National Migration Week 2017 draws attention to Pope Francis' call to create a culture of encounter, and in doing so to look beyond our own needs and wants to those of others around us. In the homily given at his first Pentecost as pope, he emphasized the importance of encounter in the Christian faith: "For me this word is very important. Encounter with others. Why? Because faith is an encounter with Jesus, and we must do what Jesus does: encounter others."

With respect to migrants, too often in our contemporary culture we fail to encounter them as persons, and instead look at them as others. We do not take the time to engage migrants in a meaningful way, but remain aloof to their presence and suspicious of their intentions. During this National Migration Week, let us all take the opportunity to engage migrants as children of God who are worthy of our attention and support.



## All Are Welcome at St. Leo's

It's always Pentecost at St. Leo's with its wonderful mix of Anglos, African Americans, immigrants from Latin America and refugees from Africa all praising God together. There are often readings and songs in English, Spanish, and Kirundi. We may have different backgrounds and languages, but we are one family of faith when we gather—what a privilege it is to be part of this faith community!

From its earliest days, the Church has welcomed people of different backgrounds. St. Paul recognized that Gentiles as well as Jews belonged. Jesus set the example of reaching out to those often marginalized and excluded—the Samaritan woman, tax collectors, prostitutes, and sinners—and including them. As followers of Jesus we strive to do the same.

Like the United States, St. Leo's has always welcomed people who came fleeing oppression and seeking a better life for their families. 130 years ago it was German immigrants who founded the parish. Over the years the faces and nationalities have changed but the spirit of acceptance, hospitality, and welcome has remained the same.

Today our newest parishioners are from Burundi, Rwanda, the Republic of Congo, Cameroon, Guatemala, and Mexico. They have come seeking a community of faith and all are welcomed as brothers and sisters.

The journey here wasn't easy. Many of them fled drug gangs, the violence of war, extreme poverty and hunger. They came with only what they could carry, making sure to find room for ragged well-used prayer books. Material possessions didn't matter when soldiers with rifles were chasing them. Education, though important, was deferred. Saving one's life and that of their families was their first priority. And painful as it was, sometimes family members had to be left behind. The future there was grim and death was at their doorsteps.

They came, knowing that they would be safe and welcomed at St. Leo's. As their needs surfaced, we joined with our partners to help provide ESL classes, food, translators, help negotiating health care and other systems, tutoring, access to Catholic education, housing, and employment. As they got settled, our new parishioners were eager to get involved, serving as lectors and Eucharistic distributors and members of pastoral council.

What a gift they are! Their deep faith and trust in God is an example to all of us. "God takes care of us. There is no reason to worry," we hear. "God tells me I need to forgive so I choose to forgive those who killed my family," an elderly widow says. A pregnant mom worries about how she will care for another child, "but God will give me strength," she says. When asked if she knew whether her baby would be a girl or a boy, another woman replied, "If it is a boy, I will say 'thank you, God.' If it is a girl, I will say 'thank you, God.'"

We have become godparents to each other's children, visit each other's homes and celebrate special occasions together. Special highlights each year include the Latino Fest in July and the parish-wide Thanksgiving dinner.

Being part of such a wonderfully diverse faith community is truly a blessing. What a privilege it is to be here!



## Refugees on the Flight Into Egypt

## Restoring Order And Human Dignity

A presentation on Catholic Social Teaching and migration, featuring an exploration of the current system and a personal witness from a local Guatemalan immigrant.

**Monday, January 9, 2017, 7:00 pm**  
**Our Lady of the Visitation Parish**  
**Church Hall**

**3172 South Road, Cincinnati, OH 45248**

Immigration is at the forefront of conversation in our country, particularly as we move into a new administration. Join us to learn what the Church says about immigration and to reflect on how we are called to respond. Offering the presentation will be Sr. Tracy Kemme of the Catholic Social Action Office and M. Pedro Bernardo, a St. Leo's parishioner who migrated here from Guatemala. Don't miss it!

