



Archdiocese of Winnipeg

Office of the Archbishop

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September 11, 2015

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In recent days we have all been affected by the tragic images of refugees flowing into Eastern Europe from the Middle East. The wars and violence throughout Syria, Iraq and beyond have displaced millions of innocent people and the prosecution of minorities has reached an extreme level of brutality. As we watch the latest news reports we should also remember that the refugee crisis has been increasing throughout the world to the extent that there are approximately 60 million people now fleeing their homelands seeking safety and among them countless children and elderly.

Shortly after his election to the Papacy, Pope Francis drew the world's attention to this problem by making his first trip outside Rome to the Italian Island of Lampedusa, the place of refuge for thousands of boat people from Africa forced to flee their homes. Pope Francis said on that occasion:

These brothers and sisters of ours were trying to escape difficult situations to find some serenity and peace; they were looking for a better place for themselves and their families, but instead they found death. How often do such people fail to find understanding, fail to find acceptance, fail to find solidarity. And their cry rises up to God!

As our world and our country debate how best to respond, we as Catholics are very well aware of our duty towards our neighbor in need. Jesus reminds us that whatever we do to the least of our brothers and sisters, we do to Christ Our Lord (cf. Matthew 23:40). Our Holy Father has recently asked all Catholic communities in Europe to sponsor and welcome a refugee family. What can we do, as Catholics in Canada, to respond to this tragedy?

Archbishop Paul-André-Durocher, President of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, has recently published a pastoral letter addressed to all Catholics in Canada, listing a number of ways that we can help in this international crisis. I have placed the entire letter on our Archdiocesan Website and I encourage parishioners to consider the proposals which are listed.

In the Archdiocese of Winnipeg, we have had enquiries regarding how to make donations to assist refugees. There are ways of doing this and I list them as follows:

Donate. Our Church in Canada is blessed with several aid and development agencies which do outstanding international work and are deeply involved in assisting Syrian and other refugees and displaced persons. Their work is only possible through the generous donations and support of many Catholics as well as other people of good will. For more information on each organization, and how you can contribute, contact:

- Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace, <http://www.devpc.org/>
- Aid to the Church in Need – Canada, <http://www.acn-aed-ca.org/>
- CNEWA Canada, <http://www.cnewa.ca/home.aspx?ID=26&pagetypeID=12&sitecode=CA>
- Canadian Jesuits International, <http://www.canadianjesuitsinternational.ca/project-theme/refugees/>

Some parishes have inquired about the possibility of sponsoring refugees. For information on this question, I invite you to contact our Social Justice Coordinator, Ms. Patti Fitzmaurice at 204-589-5393. Additional information on sponsorship will be available in the near future.

Finally, but not least of all, we are called to be a community that prays and makes intercession for those in need. This moment of crisis in the international community is a time to deepen our faith, extend our charity and to be messengers of hope. Our prayers must constantly be focused on peace, on end to war and violence and for the well-being of people who have fled their homes and their traditional way of life.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Richard Gagnon". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

✙Richard Gagnon
Archbishop of Winnipeg