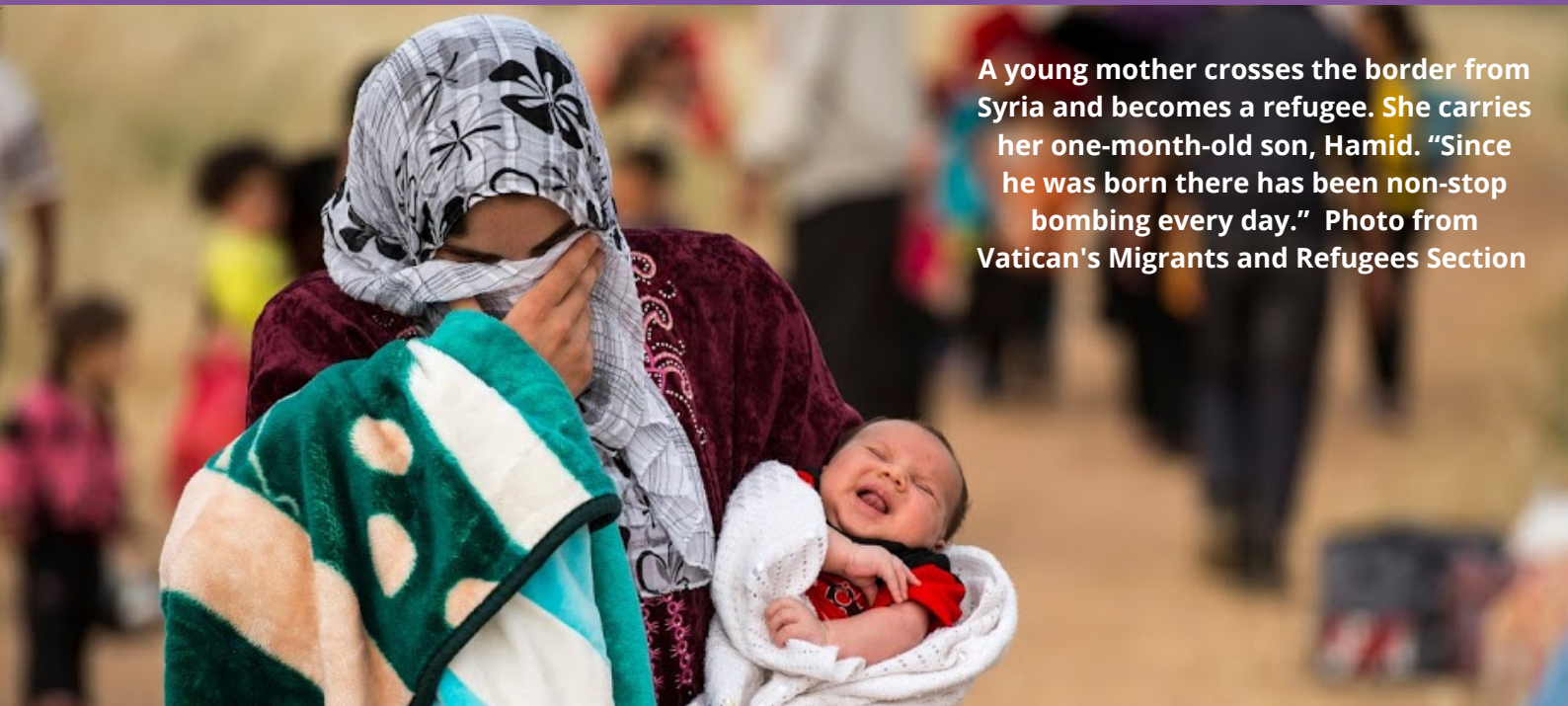


# LENTEN REFLECTION: THE CRISIS FOR PEOPLE SEEKING REFUGE



A young mother crosses the border from Syria and becomes a refugee. She carries her one-month-old son, Hamid. "Since he was born there has been non-stop bombing every day." Photo from Vatican's Migrants and Refugees Section

As we live the season of Lent this year and perhaps think of giving up some of the luxuries in our lives, we might take the time to reflect on those less fortunate than ourselves, people who are without a home or far from home, without basic necessities, living in tents in refugee camps. Those who were forced to leave behind people and places they loved and to travel far on difficult and dangerous journeys seeking safety, hope for a better future and a new place to call home.

In this short document, we invite you to reflect through the model 'See, Judge and Act' on the difficulties encountered by those who face the devastating reality that their best option is to flee to another country seeking refuge. As Christians this may bring to mind another family, the Holy Family, who were forced to flee soon after the birth of Christ. We might remember that their first years together as a family were spent as migrants, seeking refuge in another country. People seeking hope on farther shores has been a feature of human life throughout history. In times past people left these shores too hoping for welcome and refuge elsewhere. Now that there are others looking to us for welcome, how will we respond? How will you respond?

In Lent, may we be increasingly concerned with "speaking words of comfort, strength, consolation and encouragement, and not words that demean, sadden, anger or show scorn."

(Fratelli Tutti, 223) - Pope Francis, Message for Lent 2021

# SEE - JUDGE - ACT

## See:

According to the UN Refugee Agency, the UNHCR, there were 79.5 million forcibly displaced people worldwide at the end of 2019 as a result of persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations or events seriously disturbing public order. An estimated 30-34 million of the 79.5 million forcibly displaced persons were children below 18 years of age.

The UNHCR have called the period from 2010-2019 'A Decade of Displacement' as at least 100 million people were forced to flee their homes during the last 10 years, seeking refuge either within or outside the borders of their country.

One per cent of the world's population – or 1 in 97 people – is now forcibly displaced.

Source: UNHCR Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2019.

**For I was  
hungry and  
you gave me  
food,  
I was thirsty  
and you gave  
me drink, a  
stranger and  
you  
welcomed  
me.**

(Matthew 25:35)



Caritas Athens runs a soup kitchen and also provides clothes, vouchers for shelter and information for passing refugees and economic migrants. Part of their outreach is to be present at the port to inform arriving refugees before they are taken by smugglers and exploited. The little girl pictured above arrived that morning to Athens. Thousands have fled countries in northern Africa and the Middle East seeking asylum in different parts of Europe. Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and Caritas are scaling up their humanitarian relief efforts to address these growing needs in Serbia, Macedonia and Greece. Pic: Migrants and Refugee Section.



# SEE - JUDGE - ACT

## Judge:

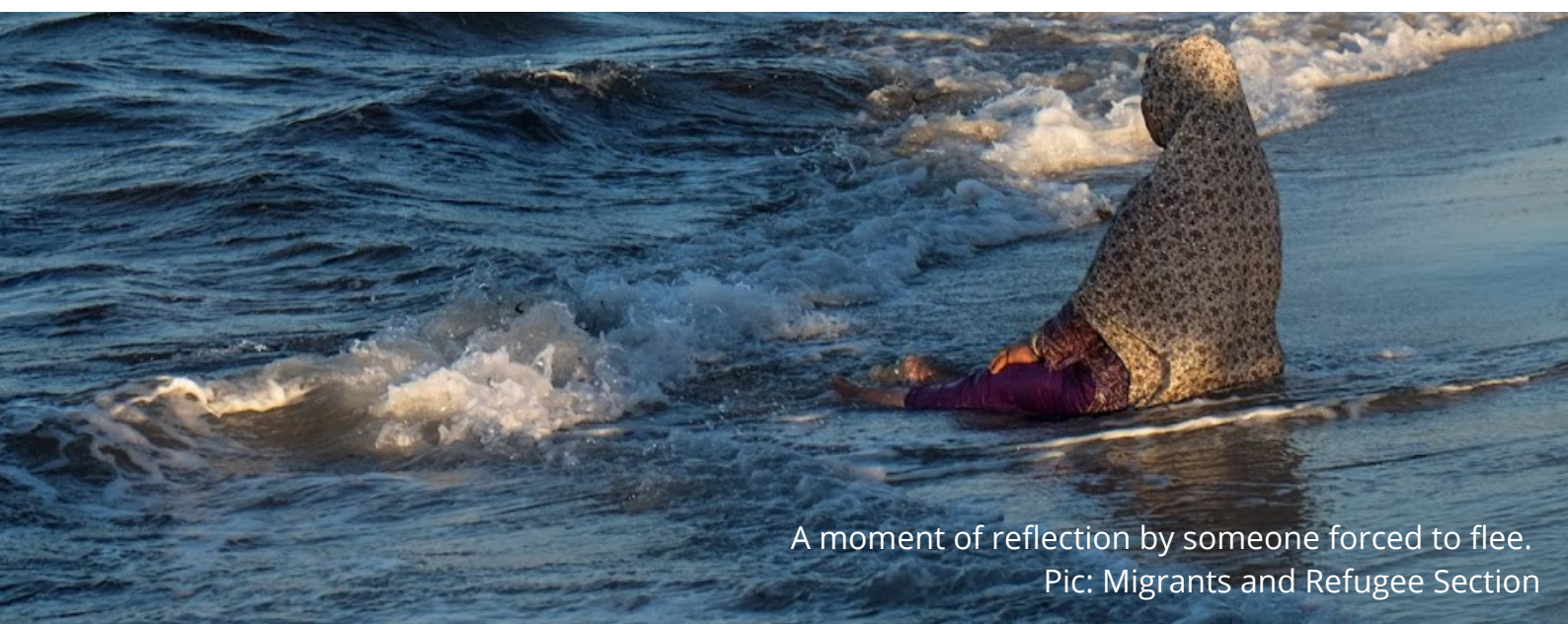
**In each of  
these people,  
forced to flee  
to safety,  
Jesus is  
present.  
POPE  
FRANCIS**

Faced with the tragedy of tens of thousands of refugees who flee death from war and hunger, and who have begun a journey moved by hope for survival, the Gospel calls us to be “neighbours” of the smallest and the abandoned, and to give them concrete hope. It’s not enough to say, “Take heart. Be patient”.... Christian hope has a fighting spirit, with the tenacity of one who goes toward a sure goal.

Therefore, as the Jubilee of Mercy approaches, I make an appeal to parishes, religious communities, monasteries and shrines throughout Europe, that they express the Gospel in a concrete way and host a refugee family. A concrete gesture in preparation for the Holy Year of Mercy. May every parish, every religious community, every monastery, every shrine of Europe welcome one family, beginning with my Diocese of Rome.

I address my brother bishops of Europe, true pastors, that in their dioceses they endorse my appeal, remembering that Mercy is the second name of Love: “What you have done for the least of my brothers, that you have done for me” (cf. Mt 25:46).

Source: Pope Francis, Angelus, 6 September 2015.



A moment of reflection by someone forced to flee.  
Pic: Migrants and Refugee Section

# SEE – JUDGE – ACT

## Act:

### Case Study of Clane and Rathcoffey Parish's involvement in the Community Sponsorship Programme

Fr Paul O'Boyle visited Syria in 2009 and 2010 and fell in love with the country and its warm and welcoming people. Then, some years later, when he saw the plight of the people fleeing war in Syria, he felt compelled to act. He saw a programme on television which showed how a group of people in Dunshaughlin, Co. Meath, decided to act very practically to help migrants and refugees and become involved in the Community Sponsorship Programme. From then on he was inspired to do the same in his own parish of Clane, Co. Kildare.

His Christian faith was critical to this decision, a faith he describes as a practical faith with basic humanity and decency at its very heart. He reflected on the question: 'Who is my neighbour' and on Pope Francis' request that every parish would accompany a family in need of refuge. He asked himself the simple question – can we help here? Community Sponsorship was one thing he felt they could do that could be so important for a family fleeing conflict, something practical, human to human, reaching out in solidarity.

He gathered a small group around him from the local community with good local links and knowledge of education, healthcare and other areas that would be important. The one thing that linked them together as a group was a simple desire to be of help. They then embarked on a period of hearing more about Community Sponsorship, developing the group, engaging with others who had been involved in the Programme and the support organisation that would guide them through the process.

They gently introduced Community Sponsorship to the local parish over time with interested people, rather than through large public meetings. They realised that the Programme was an opportunity for people to live out their faith through action and, in their own local context, to help in some way the enormous numbers of migrants and refugees whose suffering was relayed daily on the news. The Programme also provided an opportunity to reach out to other people in their community, including some who spoke Arabic, and who were interested in helping if they could.

There were naturally some challenges, such as sourcing accommodation and negotiating the processes involved, as well as managing expectations and roles in a group. However, after much preparation, they were finally told that a family were coming and that was worth the wait for the whole group!





# SEE – JUDGE – ACT

## Act:

### Case Study of Clane and Rathcoffey Parish's involvement in the Community Sponsorship Programme (continued)

#### The Arrival

The family arrived just before the Christmas period, on a wet and windy day, a mother, father and their two little girls. Fr Paul remembers that they were exhausted and unsure but one of his most important memories from that night is bringing the little girl in her carrier into the house where they had a fire and food ready for the family. He remembers: 'She was asleep while I carried her in and I imagined her in years to come, a grown women, educated and confident. And me being able to tell her, I was there, I carried you into your first home in Ireland that night. And to tell her about the courage of her parents, bringing their family here, doing all of this for them'.

They had a rota system for the group coming into seeing them, making sure they had enough fuel, food and other basic necessities. The family were happy at the beginning just to rest and to be by themselves after all that they had been through.

Fr Paul and the group invited them to the Christmas carol service in the local church and, while there, people in the community were anxious to shake their hands and welcome them in. The resonance with the Christmas story was not lost on Fr Paul who reflects: 'At Christmas we remember the Holy Family as refugees who had to flee their home and so to welcome this family into our community at Christmas was wonderful.'

People in the local community were so welcoming and kind and for the whole group it was a very humbling experience to think that you can actually help another human being, another family. As Fr Paul puts it: 'This was our way of reaching out across the distances on a map to say to migrants and refugees who are suffering, we are with you at this time. If I could imagine an Irish family having to go to Syria, then wouldn't it be wonderful to think that the local Muslim leader in a little town somewhere would organise the community to try to help them? When you look at it like that, you realise that it is our common humanity that connects us together and that we are all the same, no matter where we are from or what religion we practice.'

'The Good Samaritan story still happens in little ways all over the country and the world today. Crossing the road to help others. It's never gone away, it's still so relevant to our lives'.

**Fr Paul O'Boyle is a parish priest in Clane and Rathcoffey, Co. Kildare.**



# A PRAYER FOR THOSE FORCED TO FLEE

Father, you entrusted to Saint Joseph what you held most precious: the child Jesus and his Mother, in order to protect them from the dangers and threats of the wicked.

Grant that we may experience his protection and help. May he, who shared in the sufferings of those who flee from the hatred of the powerful, console and protect all our brothers and sisters driven by war, poverty and necessity to leave their homes and their lands to set out as refugees for safer places.

Help them, through the intercession of Saint Joseph, to find the strength to persevere, give them comfort in sorrows and courage amid their trials. Grant to those who welcome them some of the tender love of this just and wise father, who loved Jesus as a true son and sustained Mary at every step of the way.

May he, who earned his bread by the work of his hands, watch over those who have seen everything in life taken away and obtain for them the dignity of a job and the serenity of a home.

We ask this through Jesus Christ, your Son, whom Saint Joseph saved by fleeing to Egypt, and trusting in the intercession of the Virgin Mary, whom he loved as a faithful husband in accordance with your will.

Amen.



This prayer was shared by Pope Francis in his message for the World Day of Prayer for Migrants and Refugees 2020. Introducing the prayer, Pope Francis said, "I would like to conclude with a prayer suggested by the example of Saint Joseph at the time he was forced to flee to Egypt to save the child Jesus."

# RESOURCES

## WORLD DAY OF MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

The Church has been celebrating the World Day of Migrants and Refugees (WDMR) since 1914. It is always an occasion to express concern for different vulnerable people on the move; to pray for them as they face many challenges; and to increase awareness about the opportunities that migration offers. Every year the WDMR is the last Sunday of September; in 2021 it will be celebrated on 26 September. As the title for his annual message, the Holy Father has chosen Towards an ever wider “we”. Find out more at: [www.migrants-refugees.va/world-day-of-migrants-refugees/](http://www.migrants-refugees.va/world-day-of-migrants-refugees/).



## COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP

Community Sponsorship is an alternative resettlement stream to the traditional state-centred model of resettlement. More information for ROI can be found here: [www.integration.ie](http://www.integration.ie) or for NI here: <https://resetuk.org/>.



## ABOUT THE COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE

The role of the Council for Justice and Peace is to support the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference in promoting the social teaching of the Church and to advise on issues of social concern, both nationally and internationally. Established in 2005 by the Irish Bishops' Conference, the newly formed ICJSA, as the Council was formerly known, combined the Bishops' Council for Social Welfare and the Irish Commission for Justice and Peace.

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