

Jesus was a Refugee

By Kristina Hammell, Director of Refugee Resettlement

As I look to Immigration Sunday on January 7, 2018, I also reflect on the Feast of the Holy Family which we celebrated on December 31st. While these two events may seem on the surface to have very little in common, they actually intertwine in the story of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph.

Imagine being a father only wishing to provide for your wife and child, to protect them from harm, to keep them warm and fed. Certainly Joseph, being a loving father, would have had those concerns. The same is true for the fathers of the families we serve in our Refugee Resettlement program. When I talk to them they tell me stories of horror, fear of death, trauma, and a sense of powerlessness to provide for their children. Do they stay or do they go?

This is the choice millions of refugees in Iraq, Syria, Somalia and many other countries around the world must make. A refugee is a person who has been *forced* to flee his or her country because of persecution, war, or violence. Refugees do not want to leave their home, after all home is where they grew up playing with friends, visiting relatives, going to school, but now home only brings terror and possible death for their children and families.

Just as refugees flee to protect their children, Joseph and Mary sought refuge in Egypt in order to protect Jesus. The Holy Family was forced to flee when Herod ordered the slaying of all male Hebrew children under the age of two. Just as we are appalled to think of the terror and death Herod meted out on innocent infants and their heart broken families, we must not forget that there are Herods in today's world.

Everyday refugees throughout the world are forced to flee terrorists and regimes that kidnap, torture, and kill innocent men, women and children. Ignoring their plight is not an option. Called by our faith to have compassion for all and



Just as the Holy Family fled, this young Syrian family fled their home to save their child and were welcomed and cared for by Catholic Charities of Southern Minnesota Refugee Resettlement Program

to welcome the stranger, we must not see the stranger as our enemy or as someone to fear. Rather, we are called to see the face of Christ in the eyes of those seeking refuge and to greet them with kindness and compassion.

Our Refugee Resettlement Program has welcomed refugees from all different walks of life, faith traditions, and ethnicities for the last forty-two years. We reunite families - parents with children, husbands with wives, brothers with sisters. As the only resettlement agency in southeastern Minnesota, our program addresses the most fundamental needs of all new refugees including access to shelter, food, clothing, income, and medical care. Through extensive case management and our effective referral network, we help them secure safe and stable housing, financial literacy, education, and stable employment. These are the key components to building assets and gaining financial independence.

We at Catholic Charities believe that we must not sit back and contentedly accept that we are safe while others struggle. In Christ we who are many are one body, and each member belongs to one another (Romans 12:5). We share with our refugee brothers and sisters the universal truth that, regardless of faith tradition or ethnicity, we all love our children and family and only seek to find a safe place to call home.

As we celebrate Immigration Sunday on January 7th, I encourage you to consider that, both through our faith tradition and our human condition, we have more in common with refugees than we often think.