

# God Walks with His People:

## National Migration Week September 23-29

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Humans have been migrating since we walked out of Africa. Migration probably occurred then for the same reasons that people migrate today: conflict, violence, and war; climate change; natural disasters; lack of opportunity; and scarcity of food and the basic needs of life. In the book of Exodus, the Israelites leave Egypt to migrate to the promised land. The journey to the promised land, from slavery to freedom, from oppression to liberation, is also both a journey of hope and celebration and a journey of hunger, despair, and exhaustion.

The Catholic Church celebrates National Migration Week September 23–29, which ends in the 110th World Day of Migrants and Refugees on Sunday, September 29. The technical definition of a refugee is one who has fled their own country because they are at risk of serious human rights violations and persecution there. Some migrants are asylum seekers who are seeking and applying for legal protection as refugees. Migrants may have left their country for work, study, or family reasons. But other migrants have left their country because of poverty, political unrest, gang violence, and natural disasters. The journey of today's migrants, like that of the Israelites, is one of hope but also of struggles and even exhaustion.

Migration is a worldwide phenomenon, with about 286.6 million people (including refugees) living outside their country of nationality. In the United States, 46.2 million residents were born outside the United States (13% of the U.S. population). Of that number, 49% are naturalized citizens and 23% are unauthorized immigrants. The unauthorized immigrants include asylum seekers, Temporary Protected Status (TPS), and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA).

In the United States, the focus is usually on immigration, ignoring the root causes of migration and the push and pull factors causing immigration to the U.S. The U.S. also exhibits and has exhibited xenophobia since the earliest days of the country with prejudice against the various waves of immigrants. Prior to 1965, immigration laws favored white Europeans. The change in the immigration laws in 1965 allowed more immigrants from countries in Asia, Africa, and South America so that the immigration population became increasingly non-white. The inbuilt racism in the U.S. increased the prejudice and scapegoating of immigrants, especially during times of unrest.

What does this mean for Catholics in the United States? National Migration Week and the World Day of Migrants and Refugees is an opportunity for Catholics to engage in prayer, reflection, and action on behalf of our immigrant brothers and sisters. [Pope Francis says:](#)

God not only walks *with* his people, but also *within* them, in the sense that he identifies himself with men and women on their journey through history, particularly with the least, the poor and the marginalized. In this we see an extension of the mystery of the Incarnation. For this reason, the encounter with the migrant, as with every brother and sister in need, “is also an encounter with Christ. He himself said so. It is he who knocks on our door, hungry, thirsty, an outsider, naked, sick and imprisoned, asking to be met and assisted.” ... Every encounter along the way represents an opportunity to meet the Lord; it is an occasion charged with salvation, because Jesus is present in the sister or brother in need of our help.

Catholics in the United States can first learn more about the reality of immigration and the immigrants. Catholics can work against the racism encountered by immigrants and work to dispel the myths about immigration. Catholics can work with their local Catholic Charities and other organizations supporting immigrants, especially newly arrived immigrants. We can find ways to accompany immigrants. Accompaniment involves providing emotional, physical, and spiritual support to people in need and walking in their shoes, recognizing the human dignity and experience of every person.

Take time to explore the information and stories on immigration in the [Sisters of Mercy website](#). Support our sisters and ministries who work with immigrants.

Visit these web sites to get accurate information regarding the latest myths about immigrants and immigration:

- [Dispelling 10 common myths about immigrants and refugees](#)
- [Misperceptions about immigration to the U.S.: What the evidence shows](#)
- [The most common arguments against immigration and why they're wrong](#)