

Introduction and instructions for leaders

These resources from Caritas Southwark can be used in any combination that you feel will work in your parish or community. We suggest that you **follow one of three plans** depending on your parish priorities and levels time, people and energy. The plans and resources available for each are summarised in the table on the web page.

Plan 1

This plan is aimed at parishes wanting to show concern for refugees without taking on a new social justice project. It is focused on bringing people's attention to issues surrounding refugees for a short time, and could result in, for example:

- People feeling able to speak about refugees more positively in their everyday life.
- A one-off fundraising activity for a refugee charity, such as a 2nd collection at Mass for the Jesuit Refugee Service UK (JRS UK).
- Individuals being moved to take action, such as writing to their MP or to consider hosting refugees.
- Including prayers for refugees in the prayers of the faithful or distributing the prayer cards to the congregation on a suitable day.
- Interest in doing something more as a parish community.

Resources for Plan 1 include:

- Posters to display in the church.
- A 20-minute talk and discussion that can be used, for example, during a coffee morning after Sunday Mass.
- Prayer cards which can, for example, be distributed at Mass.

Plan 2

Plan 2 requires more commitment and is aimed at parishes that want to take some simple actions to support refugees as a one-off event or as part of existing social justice projects or groups. Its main feature is a single workshop event of about an hour and a half, after which a group might decide to take action such as:

- Planning a welcoming event in the parish.
- Organising a talk from a refugee charity such as JRS UK.
- Finding out how people can host refugees in their home.
- Fundraising for a refugee charity.
- Connecting with a local charity to provide donations of food, clothes etc.
- A stronger commitment to supporting CAFOD or other charity not specific to refugees but with a related theme.
- Setting up an email list or WhatsApp/Facebook group for interested people to share campaigning activities or plan events.

Resources for Plan 2 include:

- Posters to display in church.
- A short presentation (same as plan 1) to be used e.g. during a coffee morning after Mass to promote attendance at the workshop.
- Agenda and talk for a longer workshop – which could be a stand-alone evening meeting or part of an existing series of events or group meetings.
- Prayer cards for distribution to the whole congregation, to encourage prayer for refugees.
- Optional copies of Love the Stranger (produced by the Bishops' Conference in 2023.)

Plan 3

With plan 3 the expectation is that support for refugees will become a major focus within the parish. We offer extra resources, and you can adapt everything to produce a programme of workshops and meetings, resulting in a working group. We strongly suggest getting an expert speaker from JRS UK or another refugee charity (see list of local refugee charities on the Caritas Southwark website. You can also add to these resources with your own research, prayers etc.

The time investment for plan 3 is greater and therefore should involve a strong commitment to action. By the end of the third meeting, the parish should have formed a working group to co-ordinate future activities.

Action which could follow from plan 3 might be:

- The setting up of a refugee action group in the parish.
- Investigating community sponsorship of refugees.
- Planning activities for Refugee Week (June) or the World Day of Migrants and Refugees (September).
- Regular newsletter notices and short talks at the end of Masses.
- Exploration of a related topic further such as : racism and diversity, slavery and trafficking, climate change, homelessness, peace and justice issues.

Resources for Plan 3 include:

- The presentations from plans 1 and 2, but with guidance on using these flexibly e.g. for three evening workshops.
- Appendices containing extra information, personal stories from refugees, prayers and reflections.
- Posters and prayer cards.
- Copies of Love the Stranger from the Bishops' Conference.

You should also

- Invite someone from a refugee charity, or a refugee known to you, to speak.
- Keep Caritas Southwark aware of your plans and join a wider network of parishes taking action on this issue.

- Connect with other groups in your wider community and make contact with your local council or MP.
- Create your own posters and other materials to promote the ongoing action within your parish.

You are also welcome to create your own plan, using these resources in any way that suits your community.

Tips on preparing for and running the meetings

1. Talk to your parish priest, and other key people in the parish (e.g. SVP, Justice and Peace, CAFOD Rep). Together decide which plan to follow. Reassure your priest that he doesn't need to do anything except support the promotion of the events and actions.
2. Find a small team to help you organise the event.
3. Let Caritas Southwark know you are using these resources email: caritassouthwark@rcaos.org.uk or call/message: 07521 525400. They could connect you with someone in a nearby parish who could come and talk or provide valuable information. Ask them for prayer cards for your congregation. Ask the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales for copies of *Love the Stranger*. Email liga.pare@cbcew.org.uk or download from cbcew.org.uk/love-the-stranger.
4. Promote the event through all means possible to as diverse a range of people as possible.
 - Inform relevant parish groups including young adults group, women's group, and the local Catholic schools (6th form students, along with the chaplain or a relevant teacher, could be invited)
 - Ask your priest to inform others at a deanery level – these resources are ideal to be used borough- or district-wide.
 - There are two posters in the resources, and one has space for you to write the details of the meetings.
 - If following plans 2 or 3, consider holding the short talk e.g. after Mass during a coffee morning as a taster.
5. Invite people with lived experience (a refugee or someone who has hosted a refugee) to speak but do not press them if they don't want to. Take a look at the guidelines for inviting a speaker here: bit.ly/CoSguidance. Or invite a speaker from JRS UK or another charity. Contact JRS UK by emailing uk@jrs.net. A list of refugee charities in the diocese can be found on the refugee resources page of the Caritas Southwark website
6. Read through the presentations (script and slides) and adapt these to your own style and your audience. Ask different people to lead parts of the session and adapt to include your speaker or information about a local situation (such as an asylum hotel). Cut other bits out if it feels too long, ensuring plenty of time for discussion and interaction. Note that the talks can be done without the PowerPoint slides – although if this is the case you may want to print out some of the slides as hand-outs or to help prompt discussion.
7. Check the tech – projector, screen, laptop – check it all works together. Can you connect to a speaker to listen to a talk from the Archbishop? – is there WiFi in the hall or do you need to download this talk?
8. Plan refreshments. You could even do a bring-and-share dinner and make it a celebration of diversity.

9. Use visuals, such as a map or a globe, a Lampedusa cross, icons, candles.
10. During times of discussion, encourage people to practice a synodal listening style giving everyone time to speak uninterrupted before general discussion.

A word on tone of voice

With these resources we are aiming to empower Catholics to counter the hostile narrative about people who are seeking asylum or are refugees which is prevalent in much of the media and among many politicians.

We are telling a different story so we use different language. In these resources, you will not see the words “small boats” or “illegal routes”, even to refute these ideas. We always talk about “people” rather than legal categories. The phrase “People seeking Sanctuary” is a term that avoids any negative connotations that have built up around other terms, and which doesn’t define anyone by a legal status. (The longer presentation includes an optional section on terminology in case people are confused.)

We will not get into Politics, although a few desirable changes to policies are mentioned. Political discussions may come up during the meetings but try to move people on to using positive language. As the Pope has said, we are talking about people to be welcomed, not problems to be solved.

Emphasise that all ideas and actions coming out of these meetings, stem from the Social Teaching of the Catholic church. We start from the example of Christ and the saints and prophets. These resources can be used to complement a programme of formation that your parish may have. They are also a tool for evangelising in the wider community by showing the unconditional love of God.

In the Bishops' document “Love the Stranger”, and across Catholic Social Teaching we are told continually that each refugee or migrant is an individual with their own story. The reasons why people leave their home countries are many and varied and are tied up with global social justice issues. People are to be welcomed not just out of Christian duty, but because they bring enrichment to our own lives.

We do not support refugees because they are needy, but because they are industrious, resilient and full of potential. We do not welcome strangers and offer to teach them our ways and our culture, unless we are also willing to learn about their culture and to be changed and enriched by the encounter.

Lets get away from divisions between “us” and “them” and towards, as the Pope has put it **“an ever wider We”**.