

112th World Day for Migrants and Refugees

Guide for Parishes and Catechists



“Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me”

Mark 9:37

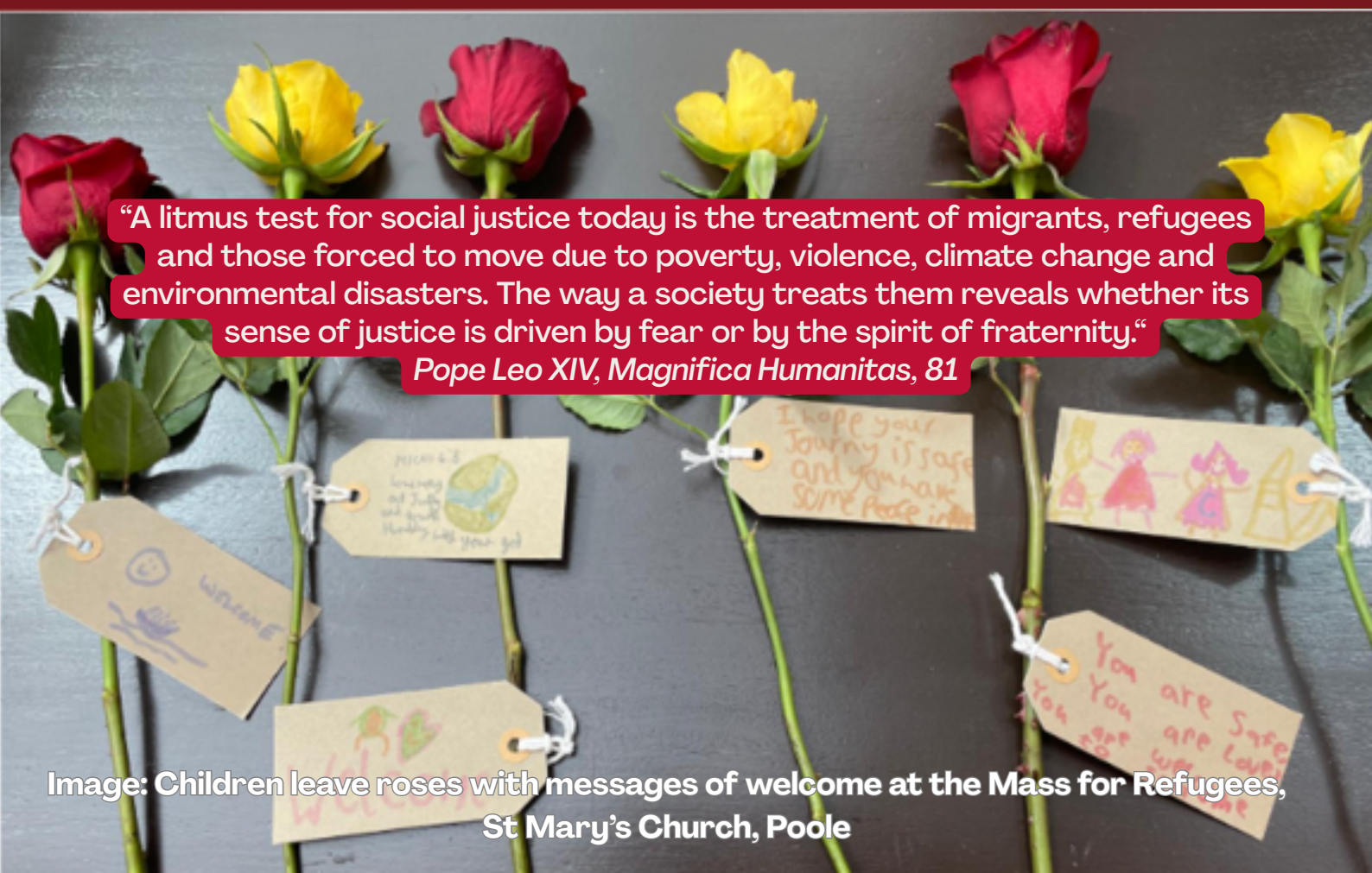
‘Even just one of these children’ is the theme for Pope Leo XIV’s message for World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2026.

He calls us to reflect on the experiences that young migrants and refugees go through, and to avoid making calculations but instead to see the inherent dignity of each child and person [1].

This guide outlines what Catholic social teaching says about migration and a catholic approach to solidarity with migrants and refugees.

It highlights the urgent problems facing migrants and refugees – with a particular focus on children – in our communities as a result of increasing hostility and proposed changes to policies and laws.

And it invites Catholics to take action – individually, in their churches, and at the institutional level – to stand alongside children and all those on the move in order to build a more dignified life for themselves and their families.



“A litmus test for social justice today is the treatment of migrants, refugees and those forced to move due to poverty, violence, climate change and environmental disasters. The way a society treats them reveals whether its sense of justice is driven by fear or by the spirit of fraternity.”

Pope Leo XIV, Magnifica Humanitas, 81

Image: Children leave roses with messages of welcome at the Mass for Refugees, St Mary’s Church, Poole



A Catholic approach to migration

3

As Catholics, we are called to recognise and affirm **that all people - whatever their place of birth, faith or ethnicity - are created in the image and likeness of God.** From this starting point, we are called to uphold the sanctity of life and fundamental dignity of all people.

St John Paul II explained that *“God gave the earth to the whole human race for the sustenance of all its members, without excluding or favouring anyone.”*^[2]

This means that nobody should be inhibited from enjoying the fruits of the earth simply because of where they were born. People must be allowed to move in search of a more dignified and fulfilling life. Neither do they need to earn the right to a dignified life.

Catholic social teaching also helps us to understand how huge inequalities in access to wealth, sustenance and safety – forms of **structural sin** – can force people to migrate internationally who may otherwise want to stay.

And at the national level, Catholic social teaching helps us to understand how people’s status as a migrant or refugee makes it harder for them build a future for themselves and their families. It also shows us how injustices such as poverty pay, exploitative work and extortionate rents make living a dignified life a struggle both for those who have migrated to the UK and those who were born here. These systems tie us together.

In this context we are told to care for people on the move, to treat them as our brothers and sisters. **We are called to act in solidarity with them** – both by recognising how our lives are intertwined with theirs through economic and political systems, and by choosing to be *“entrusted to each other, so that each of us may take responsibility, as best we can, for the lives and wounds of our brothers and sisters”*.^[3]

In this vision, we work with our brothers and sisters to **transform exploitative systems that tie us together** – economic and political systems that concentrate power and wealth for a minority – into **new relationships of care**, so that everyone’s dignity is upheld.

“Solidarity arises precisely when we decide not to remain indifferent to what happens to our neighbor but instead to transform unavoidable bonds — economic, cultural and technological — into paths of sharing, cooperation and mutual care, embracing the idea of ‘thinking and acting in terms of community’”

Pope Leo XIV, Magnifica Humanitas, 74



A story of scarcity and fear

4

But we live in a time where we are told a different story and offered a different vision of the future by some parts of the media and some public figures.

We are told that when we welcome others to the UK, we do so at the expense of our depleted communities and overstretched public services. We are told that those who migrate or seek refuge in the UK are a threat not only to our economic security but also to culture in the UK – and even to Christianity itself.

This story is being used to justify increasingly **hostile and punishing immigration policies** against adults, families and children – especially the poorest. It stigmatises and singles out migrants and refugees, motivating acts of violence against our neighbours from migrant backgrounds and undermining trust within communities.

This is a dangerous story that has been used throughout history in order **to generate and exploit fear**, and to justify nationalist political agendas that exclude and dehumanise particular groups of people.

It is not the story of the gospel, which is a story that calls us into communion with Christ and one another. And it is not the wisdom of Catholic social teaching, which warns against the exploitation of fear to divide people from one another.

In some host countries, migration causes fear and alarm, often fomented and exploited for political purposes. This can lead to a xenophobic mentality, as people close in on themselves, and it needs to be addressed decisively”.

Pope Francis, Fratelli Tutti, 39

We are called to **discern the root causes** of the felt sense of abandonment of communities and individuals, and the fear of the other. Rather than repeating a story that blames migrants, we are called to name the economic and political systems that lead to the concentration of wealth, power and resources for the few, and the creation of social hierarchies that justify this distribution. And we are called to work for their transformation into **new systems that put care for each other at the centre** alongside those of all religions, ethnicities and nationalities.

While the world’s wealth has grown in absolute terms, it is increasingly concentrated in fewer hands, widening inequalities both within and between countries. “There are a few who have too much, and too many who have little, that is the logic of today.”

Pope Leo XIV, Magnifica Humanitas, 161



Politics that deny dignity and divide communities

Over the past few years, **new anti-refugee laws and policies** have made it harder for people to seek safety in the UK. They have punished people for how they arrived in the UK, with some people being barred from seeking asylum altogether under new 'inadmissability' rules.. And they have stigmatised and singled out refugees and migrants, driving violence against people who are migrants or perceived to be migrants on the street, in community spaces, and in their homes.

Now a whole new set of sweeping changes have undermined people's ability to seek safety with dignity in the UK as refugees. Families separated by war and violence are unable to reunite due to the **removal of the refugee family reunion route** [4]. Refugee status in the UK has been made temporary, with refugees having to apply every 30 months **leaving people to live in limbo** and in fear of being returned to the country they have fled.

The 'one-in-one-out' scheme has sped up the process of expelling people from the UK, leaving children and adults facing the **trauma of immigration detention and forced removal** [5], while new proposals intend to make it easier to remove families by allowing the handcuffing of children. These plans also intend to **restrict crucial safety nets** designed to prevent the destitution of individuals and families whose asylum applications are denied, and limit local councils' ability to safeguard asylum seeking children who face destitution [6].

Further changes under '**Earned**' **settlement** proposals - some of the most significant changes to settlement rules in decades - have been designed with the explicit aim of making life harder for all migrants seeking to build lives for themselves and their families. They dramatically lengthen the time it takes for people to get the basic security that comes with settled status. **They will make it harder for families to stay in their homes, to find work free from exploitation, and to stay out of debt and poverty** [7].

They will leave many people to live on temporary visas for 15 years or more without essential safety nets such as child benefit due to 'No Recourse to Public Funds' conditions. These policies will drive people deeper into poverty. and create a second class status in society for those from a migrant background [8].

On top of this, **new proposed legislation - the Immigration and Asylum Bill - is going through parliament**. Among other changes, the bill intends to:

- Narrow the definition of the 'family' so that only relationships between spouses or between parent and children count when people apply to stay in the UK on human rights grounds
- Make it harder for people who have been trafficked or experienced modern slavery to get protection and support [9]
- Charge people for the accommodation and support they received while banned from work and waiting for the Home Office to make a decision on their asylum case



Migrant children and their futures' at risk

"Even just one of these children calls each one of us, in our personal lives, to open our eyes and heart to a profound listening to his or her story, fears and dreams, overcoming that detachment which reduces the human person to a statistic that does not directly concern us.

It is an invitation to recognize the dignity of each child, even before considering the condition of being a "migrant," and to safeguard his or her fundamental rights: the right to life, education and a standard of living that enables full physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development."

Pope Leo XIV, Message for 112th World Day for Migrants and Refugees

Pope Leo XIV's message for World Day for Migrants and Refugees calls us to pay particular attention to the experiences of children and young people, who are particularly vulnerable as they are unable to protect themselves from harm.

The church is called regard these children as it's own, and recognise that it is joined with those of all faith and beliefs in a **shared humanitarian and spiritual responsibility for young people**.

We are asked to engage with the concrete realities of each one of them, valuing them as 'full members of the ecclesial family, fostering new educational and spiritual paths'.

Yet the UK government's immigration policies and laws treat migrant children as a problem to be managed. They are already causing serious harm to children trapped in immigration detention, and new proposals will **entrench poverty and exclusion** that will follow children into adulthood.



Deepening child poverty

Children born to parents who have migrated to the UK are already much more likely to grow up in poverty than those whose parents were born in the UK – they make up 40% of all children living in poverty [10]. Plans to dramatically lengthen routes to settlement will deepen this inequality, making it harder for parents to find and keep secure work free from exploitation.

Families will also be hit by direct costs of visas, with an estimated total cost to a parent and child of £40,000 on a 10 year route, preventing families from saving for the future, pushing poorer families into debt, and pushing settlement out of reach for many [11].

Increasing traumatic detention of children and forced removal from the UK

As of May 2026, at least 141 age-disputed young people children had been held in immigration detention centres in traumatic conditions due to new policies aiming to speed up the removal of people seeking asylum from the UK [12]. Proposals to handcuff children and separate them from parents in order to speed up the removal of families from the UK will cause extreme psychological harm.

Separating children from parents, wider family members and carers

The removal of refugee family reunion has left children separated from their parents, including leaving children in refugee camps, exacerbating the trauma of journeys to find safety and preventing families from beginning the work of rebuilding their lives. Proposals to restrict the definition of the ‘family’ in human rights law will separate children from other important family members, and isolate parents who would otherwise be sharing caring responsibilities and working to build hopeful futures for children.

Extending housing insecurity and homelessness

With most migrant families in rented housing, and landlords less willing to rent to those on short-term visas, children will increasingly grow up at risk of homelessness or in precarious housing situations under proposals to extend routes to settlement. This precarity has impacts on the ability of parents to put down roots in communities and to make plans for their children’s futures, including schooling [13].

Worsening social exclusion and fracturing communities

Under new rules, many children will now spend most of their lives with temporary immigration status. In addition to the impact of financial precarity and being barred from safety nets, this temporary status has a social exclusion effect. Children are acutely impacted by the psychological and economic effects of having temporary status, which divides them from their friends and neighbours [14].



A concrete commitment to action

8

It is at times like this – where government policies create fear in our communities and allocate dignity based on people’s immigration status – that our faith is truly tested. Pope Leo XIV calls the treatment of migrants ‘a litmus test’ of social justice [15].

We are called to see the infinite dignity of every adult and every child – *even just one of these children* – in the face of increasing hostility, violence and blame directed towards migrants. And we are called to speak out together with all those of good faith:

“Therefore, when the dignity of our brothers and sisters is violated, when politics fails to address the tragedies of humanity, when the economy turns against the person... the Church — together with other Christian denominations and believers of other religions — must make her voice heard, not in order to dominate, but to promote communion”.

Pope Leo XIV, Magnifica Humanitas, 27

For the 112th World Day for Migrants and Refugees, Pope Leo XIV has called for us to take concrete action as **individuals**, as **churches**, and at the **wider institutional level**.

PRAY FOR A STRENGTHENING OF RELATIONSHIPS OF SOLIDARITY WITH MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

Encourage your congregation to pray for migrants and refugees at home and around the world on the 27th September, including children and young people. Consider including migrant and refugees in your bidding prayers.

REFLECT WITH YOUR CONGREGATION ON CATHOLIC TEACHING ON MIGRATION

At a time where there is increasing hostility towards people on the move, it’s important for Catholics come together to reflect on what our faith teaches us. Consider creating space for conversation with others how Catholics might affirm the inherent dignity of every person and child, whatever their place of birth.

- Use [Love the Stranger](#) or [Love the Stranger – Youth Version](#) to explore the 24 principles guiding a Catholic approach to migration
- Prayerfully read and reflect on paragraph 81 of Pope Leo XIV’s first encyclical [Magnifica Humanitas](#)
- Read [Sister Patricia’s reflection](#) on meeting children in immigration detention



A concrete commitment to action

8

“Even just one of these children, in the context of civil institutions, calls us to reaffirm the principle of the best interests of the child. Public and private institutions are bound to prioritise the protection and dignity of every single child and adolescent. This requires the adoption of effective legal instruments of protection, the promotion of family reunification, and the prevention of the trauma caused by separation.”

Pope Leo XIV, Message for 112th World Day for Migrants and Refugees

MEET WITH YOUR MP TO URGE THEM TO COMMIT TO UPHOLDING THE DIGNITY OF MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

With the Asylum and Immigration bill going through parliament this Autumn, and new ‘earned’ settlement proposals under consideration, it is essential that Catholics speak out to ensure the dignity of every child, adult and family is protected.

- Use [this tool from The Joint Council for Welfare of Immigrants](#) to write to your MP expressing your concerns about the Immigration and Asylum bill and the ‘earned’ settlement proposals
- Use [this guide to engaging with politicians](#) produced by Caritas Brentwood to prepare for a meeting with your MP with others in your congregation

SHOW PRACTICAL WELCOME TO MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

Consider what your church congregation might do to show practical solidarity and share a ministry of welcome with migrants and refugees in your church and parish.

In your church

- Find out all the different languages spoken by members of your congregation and create a multi-lingual welcome sign
- Organise a [Mass for Migrants](#) to celebrate the history of migration that makes up the Catholic church today
- Organise a [Refugee Mass](#) to send a message of welcome to new arrivals who are seeking sanctuary in the UK

In your wider community

Contact your local migrant and refugee support centre or immigration detention visitor group and ask how your church might meet practical needs. This might include:

- Collecting essential items for families and individuals in temporary accommodation or detention
- Hosting community lunches or school holiday activities
- Offering English conversation clubs



Prayer for people on the move

Lord Jesus, when you multiplied the loaves and fishes, you provided more than food for the body, you offered us the gift of yourself, the gift which satisfies every hunger and quenches every thirst!

Your disciples were filled with fear and doubt, but you poured out your love and compassion on the migrant crowd, welcoming them as brothers and sisters.

Lord Jesus, today you call us to welcome the members of God's family who come to our land to escape oppression, poverty, persecution, violence, and war. Like your disciples, we too are filled with fear and doubt and even suspicion. We build barriers in our hearts and in our minds.

Lord Jesus, help us by your grace,

To banish fear from our hearts, that we may embrace each of your children as our own brother and sister;

To welcome migrants and refugees with joy and generosity, while responding to their many needs;

To realize that you call all people to your holy mountain to learn the ways of peace and justice;

To share of our abundance as you spread a banquet before us;

To give witness to your love for all people, as we celebrate the many gifts they bring.

We praise you and give you thanks for the family you have called together from so many people. We see in this human family a reflection of the divine unity of the one Most Holy Trinity in whom we make our prayer: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Amen.



References

1. **Pope Leo XIV**, Message for 112th World Day of Migrants and Refugees
2. **St John Paul II**, Centesimus Annus, 31
3. **Pope Leo XIV**, Magnifica Humanitas, 74
4. **Safe Passage International (2025)** The suspension of Refugee Family Reunion explained
5. **JRS UK (2026)** Age disputed Children detained under one-in-one-out scheme: briefing note
6. **CSAN (2026)** CSAN expresses grave concerns about government proposals on asylum support and family returns
7. **CSAN (2026)** CSAN's response to the Earned Settlement Consultation
8. **APPG on Migration and APPG on Poverty and Inequality (2026)** The effects of recent changes to immigration, asylum and refugee policy on poverty and inequality
9. **Medaille Trust (2026)** Medaille Trust calls for withdrawal of modern slavery provisions in Immigration and Asylum Bill
10. **Institute for public policy research (2026)** Making the Child Poverty Strategy Work for Migrant Families
11. **Migration Observatory (2026)** Q&A: Immigration Fees in the UK
12. **JRS UK (2026)** Age disputed Children detained under one-in-one-out scheme: briefing note
13. **APPG on Migration and APPG on Poverty and Inequality (2026)** The effects of recent changes to immigration, asylum and refugee policy on poverty and inequality
14. **APPG on Migration and APPG on Poverty and Inequality (2026)** The effects of recent changes to immigration, asylum and refugee policy on poverty and inequality
15. **Pope Leo XIV**, Magnifica Humanitas, 81

Caritas Social Action Network (CSAN) shares in the mission of the Catholic Church, committed to tackling the causes of poverty, promoting justice and restoring dignity, specifically by convening and animating alliances of member charities involved in the social mission of the Church, leading on the formation of those involved in social action, and raising a prophetic Catholic voice in the public arena. Find out more information at csan.org.uk

Find CSAN members who work in the field of migrant justice, refugees, modern slavery and migrant labour exploitation at csan.org.uk/member

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