High School Prayer Pilgrimage on the Refugee Crisis

Welcome and introduction

Leader:
There is a rich history of spiritual pilgrimage within the tradition of the Roman Catholic Church. The idea of pilgrimage is especially powerful in light of the current migration crisis. More people than ever before are now on forced journeys far from home. This pilgrimage is a way for us to show solidarity with all those fleeing war, poverty and persecution in our world. Along the way, we ask ourselves, “Who is my neighbor?”

“We have seen the face of Jesus in the face of every refugee.”
—Archbishop Nikolaos Printezis, Lesbos, Greece
Stage 1: Forced Out By War

Leader:
He led his people through the desert.

Group:
For his mercy endures forever.

Leader:
We have come here to pray in solidarity with the 60 million people in our world who have been forced from their homes by war and persecution. We will go home after meeting here today; they may never see their homes again.

Reader 1:
Amina is living in a camp for displaced people in the Darfur region of Sudan. “I was sleeping when I heard our village being attacked. I didn’t know who was shooting at us or why; their faces were covered. First they came on camels and horses, then they came in heavy vehicles, and then they came on foot. There was so much screaming, people running, and fire everywhere. I was so afraid, I just ran. I didn’t even put my shoes on.”

(Silence)

Leader:
(Hold up world map)
Let’s stop to think about where today’s refugees are coming from. These are the top 10 nations ranked by number of people forced out of their countries by fighting, persecution and human rights violations:

Reader 2:
Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia

Reader 3:
South Sudan, Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo

Reader 4:
Central African Republic, Myanmar, Eritrea, Iraq

Leader:
Meanwhile, the number of refugees who can return home has dropped. This means that many will be stranded for years to come.

Reader 5:
Pope Francis tells us: “They are men and women like us ... seeking a better life, starving, persecuted, wounded, exploited, victims of war.”

(19 April, 2015)
Leader:
We pray for all the places in the world where there is war, where people have to leave their homes because of violence.

Group:
God of mercy,
pour out your peace upon us,
so that nation will no longer lift sword against nation, nor learn to make war.
Amen

Stage 2: Forced Out By Poverty

Leader:
He led his people through the desert.

Group:
For his mercy endures forever.

Leader:
[Hold up loaf of bread]
One in six people will go to bed hungry tonight. Dire conditions for the world’s poorest people are being made worse by climate change, which is hitting them first and hardest. Like Abraham, who was forced on a long journey by famine, people must sometimes move to look for ways to make a living. But others question the right of migrants to seek better lives for themselves and their families.

Reader 1:
Seline Netoi lives on the Carteret Islands in the South Pacific, where rising sea levels mean her whole community must leave before the islands are completely under water. “It’s our home, it will be difficult to leave, but we must. When the King Tide comes, water floods our home. If there is a cyclone or a tsunami, we’ll be swept away. I was a war refugee and now I’ll be a climate one.”

Reader 2:
“The world is a gift which we have freely received and must share with others ... Let us not only keep the poor of the future in mind, but also today’s poor, whose life on this Earth is brief and who cannot keep on waiting.”

(Laudato Si’, 159, 162)

[Silence]
Leader:
We pray for a more equitable distribution of the goods of creation. We pray for a sense of sacred responsibility to hear both the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor.

Group:
O God of the poor,  
help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this Earth,  
so precious in your eyes.  
Bring healing to our lives,  
that we may protect the world and not prey on it,  
that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction.  
Amen

(Laudato Si')

Stage 3: Forced Out By Persecution

Leader:
He led his people through the desert.

Group:
For his mercy endures forever.

Leader:
[Hold up passport]
Groups that seem different because of color, religion or ethnic background are too often pushed aside, or even persecuted and tortured. Persecution is a major cause of migration. Refugees’ official identity is robbed from them as they lose their homes and countries. Yet in God’s eyes we all share one true identity as his children.

Reader 1:
In Myanmar, a Muslim minority is being driven from their homes by violence. The government does not recognize them as citizens. Cardinal Charles Bo of Yangon says, “It breaks my heart to see the rising hatred and religious intolerance in Myanmar. From the depths of my heart ... I cry out two words to my brothers and sisters from all communities in my beloved country: peace and love.”

Reader 2:
We think of all the different faiths and minority groups that are being unjustly persecuted around the world.

[Silence]
Leader:
During his ministry, Jesus is persecuted in his home country. People are out to kill him, and they deny that he is the Son of God.

Reader 3:
They rose up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town had been built, to hurl him down headlong. But he passed through the midst of them and went away.

(Luke 4:29-30)

Leader:
We pray to the God of mercy for tolerance, and the grace to see that we are all his children. In the words of Pope Francis: “No more death! No more exploitation! There is always time to change ... there is always the time to implore the mercy of God.”

(Csidad Juarez, Mexico, February 2016)

Group:
God of all humanity,
In a world full of fear, open our hearts to your love.
Though we walk in desolate valleys,
Open our minds to your hope.
We turn from hatred toward love.
We turn from intolerance toward understanding.
We commit ourselves to compassion.
Together, not alone, we pray for peace.
Through Christ our Lord,
Amen

(Linda Jones, CAFOD)

Stage 4: The Journey

Leader:
He led his people through the desert.

Group:
For his mercy endures forever.

Leader:
Look down at what you are wearing. If you have a bag, think about what’s in it. Now close your eyes. Imagine you are being forced to leave your home by the sounds of fighting. You can’t pack; you just leave as you are. These clothes and the few things in your bag are all you will have for many weeks. You don’t know if you will ever come home.
**Reader 1:**
Tiba is a Darfuri woman forced out of her village by heavy fighting. She now lives in a displaced people’s camp. “Early in the morning, when the men with guns were saying prayers, we quickly made our departure. I didn’t let this purse out of my sight, I kept it hidden inside my garment. It holds two important things: my identity card and my mobile phone. My ID card is proof that I am a citizen of Darfur, and my phone will one day bring me news of peace in my village. On that day I will return.”

[Silence]

**Reader 2:**
“When they had departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you. Herod is going to search for the child to destroy him.” Joseph rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed for Egypt.”

*(Matthew 2:13-14)*

**Leader:**
The journeys made by migrants and refugees are long and dangerous. Traveling in locked shipping containers or flimsy dinghies, they risk their lives in the hope of finding a safe place.

**Reader 3:**
Aza is a 21-year-old mother with an infant son. She crossed to Greece in a boat after fleeing Syria: “They told us that there would be 35 people in our boat, but when we arrived, there were more than 200. We were in the sea and the engine stopped. It was full of smoke. My son was vomiting and he couldn’t breathe. I was praying to God so he could save us. I saw lots of people pray. All of them were crying. And all of them were scared.”

[Silence]

**Leader:**
For refugees on long journeys, we pray for safe passage, hearts filled with courage, strength to support children and the weak, and at the journey’s end, a true welcome.

**Group:**

*Lord, you walked alongside those who suffer. Give us mercy in our hearts, to pour balm on the injured feet of those who walk.*

*(adapted from Pope Francis’ address to the bishops of Mexico, 2016)*

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*This activity was generously shared through international partnership with CAFOD for use by Catholic Relief Services.*
Stage 5: Lost Family

Leader:
He led his people through the desert.

Group:
For his mercy endures forever.

Leader:
Please hold up your photo of family and friends. It can be on your phone.

[Pause]
Forced migration rips apart families and communities. Some are left behind because they are too weak, or there is not enough money to pay for their passage; some get lost or die on the way. Imagine being forced to choose between members of your family—who to take, who to leave.

[Silence]

Reader 1:
Khawle is a Syrian mother of four who is now in a refugee camp in Lebanon. She looks at a photo of her family taken in the camp. “I couldn’t bring all the members of my family with me. The youngest is with my mother. The bombs stopped us from being together … I don’t have anything to be happy for, just to live like this, here in our tent. I feel sad to be here without all my children. A photograph speaks of family happiness, everyone smiling together. This photograph is full of tears.”

[Silence]

Leader:
Our Church teaches how important it is for families to be able to stay together. As the bishops of the United States have said: “A merciful immigration policy will not force married couples or children to live separated from their families for long periods.”

(United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, On Immigration and the Movement of Peoples)

Reader 2:
“Migrants are our brothers and sisters in search of a better life … Don’t we all want a better, more decent and prosperous life to share with our loved ones?”

(Pope Francis, Message for World Day of Migrants and Refugees, January 17, 2016)

Leader:
Please take the hand of the person next to you and form a circle.

Reader 3:
“As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ … If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy.”

(1 Corinthians 12:12, 26)
Leader:
We pray for families and friends separated by the trauma of conflict and migration, that they may soon be reunited.

Group:
We are one body, different parts,  
One family, spread throughout the world.  
We feel one hurt  
as war and injustice force loved ones apart.  
Living Christ, work through us,  
as we open our hearts to all those in need  
So that there may be  
one hope, one joy, one welcome in you.
Amen

Stage 6: Welcome—or Rejection

Leader:
He led his people through the desert.

Group:
For his mercy endures forever.

Leader:
What will happen to migrants at their journey’s end? Most refugees—nearly 9 out of 10—are taken in by poor countries, not by wealthy nations like ours. We think of them in camps, in detention centers, waiting to hear if they will be allowed to stay, hoping to be joined by their families. Those who make it here, after unimaginable difficulties, may face hostility and long periods in detention or destitution, rather than finding the security they so badly need.

Reader 1:
“These migrants are like cockroaches ...”
(Katie Hopkins, The Sun, April 17, 2015)

Leader:
As people of faith, we believe the Earth was given by God equally to all, so we can speak with loving hearts, with welcome, without fear.
Reader 2:
Pope Francis asks us to examine our hearts. “A merciful heart is able to be a place of refuge for those who are without a home or have lost their home; it is able to build a home and a family for those forced to emigrate; it knows the meaning of tenderness and compassion. A merciful heart can share its bread with the hungry and welcome refugees and migrants.”

[Silence]

Leader:
Our Church believes the decision to welcome refugees must be based on justice, mercy and the common good, not on self-interest.

Reader 1:
Leila has been a refugee twice. A Palestinian, she was a refugee in Syria until fighting forced her on a frightening journey to the United Kingdom. When she arrived at age 21, she felt weak, fearful and completely alone. She slept in parks and railway stations for a long time. But somehow she found her way to the Cardinal Hume center, where she was welcomed with a room. She now has a part-time job, and is learning English and work skills. “The staff are so good here,” she says. “They are not like officials—they are friendly and respect you. I started to feel safe.”

Reader 2:
We think of the words of St. Paul: “Do not neglect hospitality, for through it some have unknowingly entertained angels.”

(Hebrews 13:2)

[Silence]

Leader:
Let us say together, in response to the suffering of so many:

Group:
In your compassion and mercy, Lord, have pity on us ... cleanse us from our sins and create in us a pure heart, a new spirit. May we be the beating heart and the accompanying feet of the Church that opens her arms and sustains.

(Pope Francis’ homily, Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, February 17, 2016)
Stage 7: Cross of Compassion, Prayers for Mercy

Leader:
He led his people through the desert.

Group:
For his mercy endures forever.

Reader 1:
A rough cross made of driftwood stands today in the chapel at Catholic Relief Services headquarters in Baltimore, Maryland. It was created by Sicilian carpenter Francesco Tuccio, who made the first such cross from the wreckage of a boat that sank off the island of Lampedusa.

Reader 2:
The boat was carrying 500 refugees from Eritrea and Somalia when it capsized and 349 people died. The local carpenter carved and offered crosses to survivors as a symbol of their rescue and a sign of hope. This cross serves as a reminder of the ongoing struggles and sacrifices made by refugees in our world.

Leader:
[Hold up a picture of the cross.]

Reader 3:
“How much these people have suffered!” declared the pope while in Lampedusa. “And their cry rises up to God! … Has any one of us wept because of this situation and others like it?”

(Pope Francis’ homily, Lampedusa, July 8, 2013)

Reader 4:
St. Paul himself was a shipwreck survivor who experienced the kindness of strangers. Chapters 27 and 28 of Acts describe his journey. Following is an excerpt of that story: “Neither the sun nor the stars were visible for many days, and no small storm raged. Finally, all hope of our surviving was taken away … In all, there were 276 of us on the ship … Once we had reached safety we learned that the island was called Malta. The natives showed us extraordinary hospitality; they lit a fire and welcomed all of us because it had begun to rain and was cold.”
**Leader:**
We ask our heavenly Father to make us merciful as he is merciful:
[Sing or say the Kyrie]

**Leader:**
Kyrie eleison
[The group repeats]

**Leader:**
Christe eleison
[The group repeats]

**Leader:**
Kyrie eleison
[The group repeats]

**Leader:**
Please respond with ‘Have mercy on us.’
[After each call from the leader, the group repeats Have mercy on us.]

Jesus, bringer of mercy and justice ... Have mercy on us.
Jesus, protector of the migrant ... Have mercy on us.
Jesus, voice against violence ... Have mercy on us.
Jesus, courage for the lowly ... Have mercy on us.
Jesus, closest to the poor ... Have mercy on us.
Jesus, source of light and hope ... Have mercy on us.

**Leader:**
In the hope of God’s mercy, we now come together in prayer.
[Pause]

**Leader:**
Please respond with ‘Grant us your mercy.’
[After each call from the leader, the group repeats ‘Grant us your mercy.’]

For the grace to care for the suffering ... Grant us your mercy.
For the grace to feed the hungry ... Grant us your mercy.
For the grace to welcome the stranger ... Grant us your mercy.
For the grace to stand in solidarity ... Grant us your mercy.
For the grace to reject injustice ... Grant us your mercy.
For the grace to love ... Grant us your mercy.
Leader:
We remember those lost on journeys and we celebrate those who have survived. Let us reflect and pray silently about all we have heard, and write our prayers or messages of hope for refugees and migrants.

[Gather the group back together after they have had time to write their messages, and ask them to place the message half of their card with the other symbols—map, bread, passport, photos.]

Leader:
“He gives power to the faint, abundant strength to the weak ... They that hope in the Lord will renew their strength, they will soar on eagles’ wings; they will run and not grow weary, walk and not grow faint.

(Isaiah 40:29, 31)

Group:
“From the depths of the mystery of God, the great river of mercy wells up and overflows unceasingly. It is a spring that will never run dry, no matter how many people draw from it. Every time someone is in need, he or she can approach it, because the mercy of God never ends.”

(Misericordiae Vultus, Pope Francis)

Leader:
As we prepare to leave this place and to go back out into the world, let us commit to do all that we can to be merciful, as our Father is merciful, and to reach out a hand of welcome and compassion to our neighbors in need. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all on our journey through life and forever.

Group:
Amen
Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic, Myanmar, Eritrea, Iraq