

What Can I Do?

Ways to Help Immigrants Seeking Refuge and Asylum

by The Rev. Janine Schenone of Good Samaritan, San Diego

The bishops of the six Episcopal Dioceses of California urge us to speak out and act on behalf of immigrants seeking refuge and asylum in the United States, and especially detained children. Many people are understandably concerned about the welfare of migrants and seek ways to help. Here are some suggestions for ways you can help.

Advocate

- Speak out to your Congressional representatives as well as local officials. Tell them you oppose the threatened ICE raids and want them to be called off. Urge them to advocate for better conditions in detention centers, the end of child detention centers, and the reunification of families torn apart by family separation policies. If you don't know who your elected representatives are, [find out here](#).
- Work with [Immigrant Families Together](#), which has branches through the nation.
- The Episcopal Public Policy Network offers this suggestion: "Ask your members of Congress to co-sponsor the **GRACE Act: The Guaranteed Refugee Admissions Ceiling Enhancement Act**, S.1088 & H.R.2146.

This bill would ensure that the U.S. maintains its historic commitment to resettling refugees by requiring that the President set the number of refugees the U.S. will resettle in a given fiscal year at a floor of 95,000. The average number of refugees that U.S. presidents have authorized to be resettled in a fiscal year between 1980 and 2017 has been 95,000. Over the past few years, this number has dropped dramatically, such that this year, the President authorized only 30,000 refugees to come to the U.S. The bill would also mandate quarterly reports on refugee admissions, increasing transparency, accountability, and oversight."

March in Protest

Search for protests in your area, such as the many locations worldwide for the international protest on July 12, [Lights for Liberty](#).

Provide Legal Assistance

- Contact your local ACLU, which advises immigrants of their rights and helps them navigate asylum applications as well as other immigration matters.
- Inform both migrants and citizens of their rights regarding searches and raids by asking the ACLU to host a Know Your Rights workshop. Pass out Know Your Rights cards.

- Volunteer with and donate funds to organizations doing immigration law work at the border:

Texas: [RAICES](#)

San Diego: [Jewish Family Services](#), [Casa Cornelia](#), [San Diego Rapid Response Network](#)

Los Angeles: [CHIRLA](#), [CARECEN](#), [Immigrant Defenders Law Center](#)

New Mexico: [Immigration Advocates Network](#)

Arizona: [Catholic Charities](#) works to unite families separated by deportation. [The Florence Immigrant and Refugee Rights Project](#) offers free legal representation to asylum seekers and others. [The International Rescue Committee \(IRC\)](#) in Phoenix is helping asylum seekers and needs donations and volunteers.

- Provide transportation to immigration court hearings.
- Accompany people to their ICE check-ins.
- Help arrange for legal services and advice.
- Sponsor an immigrant: Some immigrants can be released from detention as they await their asylum hearing if they have a sponsor. The sponsor must be a U.S. citizen or permanent resident, and they must provide housing, food, clothing, and other basic necessities as immigrants await their final hearing, which may take 3-12 months. If you are interested in sponsoring someone, contact one of the organizations above that offer legal assistance.

Donate Goods and Money

In addition to giving money all the organizations listed above, you can also donate desperately needed clothing and some food items at the San Diego shelter for asylum seekers, contact [Good Samaritan Episcopal Church](#). To donate money for clothing, phone cards, or travel funds for asylum seekers, send a check to Good Samaritan with “refugee relief” in the subject line, or [donate online here](#) with “refugee relief” in the Tribute field.

Build Relationships with Local Department of Homeland Security Office

U.S. citizens can nurture relationships with [Immigration and Customs Enforcement \(ICE\) Field Offices](#) and [U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services \(USCIS\)](#) community relations officers. This may help to provide important contacts when advocating for individuals, and that is a long-term benefit for one’s work with migrants.

Pray

Pray daily for immigrants and for all the agencies and volunteers working with them. Pray for local, state, and national leaders, for law enforcement agencies, and for immigration courts. Pray for the news media and for the safety and integrity of journalists.