What’s the Difference?
Migrants, Refugees, and Travelers

**Refugees** are individuals who have fled their countries of origin and who meet the United Nations' criteria of having a "well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion."

Each year the President of the United States authorizes the admission of a certain number of refugees into the country. This determination is based on a consultative process between Congress, the President and various federal agencies. In recent years, the US has accepted between 50,000 to 75,000 refugees per year. Before admission to the US, each refugee undergoes an extensive interviewing, screening and security clearance process.

Refugees, having suffered great loss, including loss of their homes, livelihoods, possessions and oftentimes families, need assistance starting over in a new country.

Their initial needs are many: food, clothing, shelter, employment, English language training, and orientation to a new community and culture. In partnership with its affiliates, the United States Catholic Bishops' Migration and Refugee Services department resettles approximately 30% of the refugees that arrive in the US each year. The Catholic refugee resettlement network includes over 100 diocesan offices across the country and in Guam and Puerto Rico. Resettling refugees provides an extraordinary opportunity for countless Americans to take an active part in offering a caring and supportive environment for refugees as they begin new lives. Without volunteers and resources from the community and parishes, MRS and its affiliated diocesan resettlement offices would be unable to accomplish the tremendous task of giving refugees new hope and the opportunity to begin again.

**Migrants and travelers** include people like migrant farmworkers, circus and race car workers, seafarers, and others whose work and lifestyle necessitate frequent travel. These "people on the move" may be unable to participate actively in a local parish community year round. Yet they and their families have the same needs for religious formation, preparation for and the reception of the sacraments, opportunities to deepen their relationship with Christ, and a need to be welcomed by Catholic parishes when they are in local communities.

The Catholic Church's concern for people on the move expresses itself primarily in a ministry of pastoral accompaniment coordinated by the Secretariat for Cultural Diversity in the Church.

**Catholic Social Teaching on Immigration**

Why Do We Care?

The Catholic Church in the United States is an immigrant Church with a long history of embracing diverse newcomers and providing assistance and pastoral care to immigrants, migrants, refugees, and people on the move. Our Church has responded to Christ’s call for us to “welcome the stranger among us,” for in this encounter with the immigrant, the migrant, and the refugee in our midst, we encounter Christ.

A rich body of Church teaching, including Papal encyclicals, Bishops’ statements and pastoral letters, has consistently reinforced our moral obligation to treat the stranger as we would treat Christ himself. In the 2001 pastoral statement, Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity, the Bishops of the United States called upon the Catholic faithful to a conversion of minds and hearts, imploring us to communion and solidarity with diverse newcomers, and entreat us to find new and meaningful ways to welcome our immigrant sisters and brothers into our parishes, schools and communities. In 2003, the Bishops of the United States, together with the Bishops of Mexico, in the pastoral statement, “Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope” / “Juntos en el Camino de la Esperanza Ya no Somos Extranjeros” acknowledged that the current immigration system is badly in need of reform and offered a comprehensive set of recommendations for changing U.S. laws and policies to bring about a more humane and just immigration system in the United States.

[Information from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Presented by SMM Catholic Life Issues Committee]