December 6, 2021

To: Pastors of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee

From: Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee

RE: Afghan Refugee Humanitarian Aid Coordinated Catholic Response

Humanitarian aid for the Afghan people who were airlifted from their home country to the safety of the U.S. is being coordinated by local Catholic Charities in Wisconsin from the dioceses of La Crosse, Milwaukee, Green Bay, Madison, and Superior under the guidance of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. This is a historic statewide collaboration to “welcome the stranger”.

**USCCB Role**

On August 17, 2021, the USCCB responded to the widespread humanitarian crisis unfolding in Afghanistan, after the Taliban swiftly seized control of the capital. Thousands of people who worked as interpreters, translators, and in other capacities alongside the United States military over the past twenty years, including Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) applicants, found themselves and their families in danger.

Since the arrival of the Afghan refugees in the U.S., the USCCB Migration and Refugee Services team has worked with government agencies and local organizations, including Catholic Charities, to provide humanitarian aid while they await resettlement. Of the 30,000+ refugees airlifted to safety in the U.S., about 400 are expected to be resettled in the state by various agencies including Catholic Charities of Green Bay.

**Wisconsin Catholic Charities**

Catholic Charities agencies are mobilizing personnel, volunteers, and resources to provide refugees with a welcoming atmosphere, a break from the confines of temporary housing, and relief from their difficult journey. Among the services provided are on-base legal assistance, social engagement for women and children, and learning centers. The women’s centers provide a quiet and clean place for mothers to bond and play with their children and develop friendships. The children’s area is a place for children to gather and create arts and craft projects, build puzzles, play games and be sociable. Volunteers are crucial to keep the centers running smoothly and safely.

The USCCB and Catholic Charities are seeking more volunteers to aid in this mission. Volunteers will spend time at one of the three Women and Children Centers, two Sewing Center or Learning Center. Each of the centers requires between 6-10 volunteers to operate. Individuals must be able to commit to at least a week of volunteering, though longer commitments are preferred.

**Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee**

While the call to *Welcome the Stranger* is familiar to many Catholics supporting refugee resettlement, at Catholic Charities Milwaukee, our Refugee and Immigration Services goes beyond welcoming and instead calls upon people in Southeastern Wisconsin to *build lasting relationships with their refugee neighbors through integration*. Integration is an on-going process in which people, both new refugees and long-time residents, get to know each other in order to develop strong economic, social, cultural, and civic connections. These lasting connections give all of us the sense of belonging that is critical for making our communities more secure, vibrant, and cohesive.

Catholic Charities Milwaukee develops programs in partnership with refugee and immigrant communities and the Refugee Community Advisory Board (RCAB), the only multi-ethnic refugee leadership group in Wisconsin, to promote social bridges and bonds, develop desired skills and cultural knowledge, and encourage US citizenship. We offer a spectrum of learner-centered trainings so that refugees build the real-life knowledge, attitudes, and skills that they want to achieve success. People who flee their homelands and start over in Milwaukee as refugees lose the deep network of friends and families they had in their home country. Our integration education program builds their networks and their resiliency by connecting them with volunteers from outside their language and cultural group. When long-time residents get to know newly arrived refugees, they discover shared interests and beliefs; both participants become trusted people in the other’s life.

For information about volunteer opportunities or donations, contact:

Andrew Ruesch, Afghan Project Coordinator, Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee: aruesch@ccmke.org / 414-769-3543