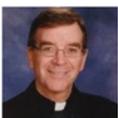




Over the past two weeks cheers and jeers have greeted every presidential tweet, appointment, and executive order. This new reality clearly reflects the deep polarization of the divided country in which we now live. People are filled with new fears and uncertainty of what will come next. This all becomes a cause not just for words and protest, but also for reflection, prayer and dialogue. Perhaps the extreme measures that our new president has taken towards immigrants and refugees will, in the end, effect more positive change among our citizens. Perhaps we can become an even more welcoming country, not just tolerating immigrants and refugees, but seeking to integrate them more fully into our communities, neighborhoods, and our churches.

St. Mary's Refugee Welcoming ministry is part of our Social Justice Committee and has been working for years with Catholic Charities to help resettle and befriend newcomers to the Worcester area. And yes, these families comprised of husbands and wives and children come from Nepal, Buhtan, Iraq and Syria. One family spent 19 years in a refugee camp before being resettled in Worcester. Through the dedicated efforts and leadership of Cecile and Jerry Cote and the support of many parishioners, we have assisted 40 families with a total of 101 members. More important than the material goods that are donated to set up an apartment is the relationships that begin. Helping a refugee from a war-torn country learn English, providing transportation to a medical appointment, tutoring children or taking a family to the park on a [Sunday](#) afternoon are some concrete ways in which parishioners have "welcomed the stranger".

Our country and our Church have been enriched through the years with the arrival of immigrants and refugees. Our parish welcomes all newcomers as we celebrate the richness that comes from our diversity. Our Christian faith is put into action when we remember the words of Jesus in Matthew 25, "for I was a stranger and you welcomed me". Perhaps during the next 3-4 months, while the temporary travel ban is in effect, we could all find some small ways to help reassure and affirm a newcomer. We already know them and see them at school and work, in the neighborhoods where we live.



Msgr. Michael Rose
Pastor
St. Mary's Parish