

## PARISHES ORGANIZED TO WELCOME IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

*A Model for Engaging and Welcoming Migrants in your Community*

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Migration and Refugee Services (USCCB/MRS), along with dioceses across the country, have historically relied upon parishes and other local community groups to carry out the scriptural mandate to “welcome the stranger” personified in refugees, migrants, and other men, women, and children on the move. The Parishes Organized to Welcome Immigrants and Refugees (POWIR) initiative – with generous financial support from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints – seeks to develop a base of support, mentorship, and welcome for the newcomer through local, parish-based ministries of hospitality.

Launched in 2010, the USCCB/MRS POWIR Program supports a selected set of diocesan resettlement programs each year to meet critical needs of newcomers. Since its inception, 52 MRS resettlement affiliates have participated in POWIR, making a difference in the lives of over 31,000 individuals from 50 countries. Thousands of volunteers have walked alongside and supported newcomers with language acquisition, employment, housing, life skills, and cultural orientation.

By offering welcome and hospitality in their parishes and communities, volunteers’ lives are simultaneously enriched through meals shared and friendships formed.

*“Being part of this effort to welcome a refugee family has been like touching the hem of Jesus’ garment.” POWIR volunteer, Archdiocese of Boston*



*A Burundi family purchases their very first home with encouragement from Diocese of Cleveland’s POWIR family mentor program.*

The positive impact of POWIR is significant. Its success has led to the growth of volunteer support and the generation of local cash and in-kind donations. In less than a decade, POWIR sites have recruited over 14,500 volunteers committed to helping newcomers adjust to their new lives. Analysis of POWIR program cycles reveal that diocesan resettlement sites have generated 4 dollars for every 1 dollar of private funding. 2 million dollars invested since 2010 has generated 8.1 million dollars of donations and in-kind services.

Despite the world witnessing the highest number of displaced persons since World War II, and the U.S. facing a record low numbers of refugee admissions, POWIR continues strong. This year’s 23 POWIR grantees are identifying an expanded set of newcomers such as elderly and youth refugees, unaccompanied minors, asylees and asylum seekers and second-generation immigrants. POWIR dioceses also are equipping parishes and community groups with skills to focus on long-term integration as an integral part of refugee and migration ministries.