

# Migration week encourages welcoming newcomers

WASHINGTON - Though there has been little movement on the political or government policy fronts to improve the situation of immigrants to the United States, the Catholic Church is encouraging a weeklong observance focused on welcoming newcomers.

National Migration Week, Jan. 6-12, is intended to raise awareness about the causes of migration and the situations in which migrants find themselves. The 2008 theme is "From Many, One Family of God."

The 27th observance of National Migration Week by the Catholic Church in the United States typically involves a wide assortment of local activities organized by dioceses and parishes.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops includes suggestions for prayer and worship, as well as educational and service activities in a packet of materials sent in November to every diocese, parish and Catholic school in the United States.

In a letter accompanying those materials, Bishop John C. Wester of Salt Lake City, chairman of the USCCB Committee on Migration, notes that "rather than embracing newcomers to our land whose circumstances have compelled them to seek new lives among us, we too often respond in fear and harbor attitudes of resentment and suspicion."

He referred to the New Testament story of the loaves and fishes, when Jesus' disciples wanted to send away a crowd who had come to listen to him, because the disciples feared there was not enough food.

"In the same way, we are tempted to turn away migrants, fearing that our nation does not have enough resources - jobs, schools, housing, medical care and other necessities - to accommodate those who have made their way to this abundant land," Bishop Wester wrote. "The miracle of the loaves and fishes is God's promise not only to the disciples but to us as well. If we fail to minister to the needs of these

newcomers, we fail Our Lord himself.”

The letter went on to quote the passage from Matthew in which Jesus answered the question “Lord, when did we see you a stranger ... and not minister to your needs,” with the response, “What you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me.”

Possible activities suggested in the USCCB materials include multicultural liturgies, sponsoring a refugee family, organizing an ethnic food festival or hosting a screening of a migration-themed film, such as the recent documentary “Posada” about children who enter the United States unaccompanied by a parent or guardian.

More information is available on the USCCB Web site at: [www.usccb.org/mrs/nmw/prayer.shtml](http://www.usccb.org/mrs/nmw/prayer.shtml).