

March 3, 2020

Update from the Migration Task Force

Refugees and other displaced persons face immense barriers to full inclusion in their host communities. Faced with the twin crises of food and housing insecurity, they also live without basic health care, opportunities for education, legal support, and sustaining employment. Many have been victims of trauma and need mental health services. Often host communities know little or nothing about the culture(s) of displaced persons, and they are thus ill-equipped to provide support. What may have begun as a compassionate response to refugees easily devolves into a xenophobic demonization of them as the “other” who are perceived to threaten the host country’s way of life.

The Migration Task Force was assembled with the objective of launching three or more interdisciplinary demonstration projects that link the work of Jesuit Universities to on-the-ground needs of migrants and refugees. Responding to the “otherness” referenced above, the projects are connected by a common purpose of *Creating a Culture of Hospitality and Inclusion*. This expansive theme intersects easily with the Universal Apostolic Preferences and recent GIAN priorities. It also calls urgently for the contributions of many academic partners.

While each of the demonstration projects is site-specific, all models will be adaptable to, and replicable for, other cultural contexts. To date, these models include:

- Providing psychosocial, pastoral, medical, legal and other training for those working in shelters, meal programs, legal clinics, and other refugee-serving projects along the U.S.-Mexico border [emphasis on linking Jesuit university professional programs and teaching to refugee needs];
- Adapting and expanding the *Hospitality* project of the Spanish Province, in which Jesuit universities join with the apostolates of other sectors to provide a stable community, practical expertise, and wrap-around care for migrants and refugees [emphasis on the service dimension of Jesuit universities]; and
- Developing an overview of Catholic attitudes to migrants and refugees, based on race, class, ethnicity, education and income. This would highlight the (dis)continuity between Catholicism’s historic posture toward migrants and current attitudes among white, American Catholics. Knowing what drives negative attitudes toward refugees can be the first step in creating resources for faith communities, civic leaders and others to combat xenophobia [emphasis on the scholarly dimension of Jesuit universities].

The Task Force has developed a preliminary “map” of Jesuit university institutes and projects focused on the needs of migrants and refugees. This serves as an educational tool and a catalogue of colleagues to call upon, as the work proceeds. It should be noted that there is currently no representation from the African schools on the Task Force. We hope to expand the membership, possibly adding one Africa-based demonstration project, in the coming months.