News

A Ukrainian refugee at North Railway Station in Bucharest, Romania, cries as she says goodby

A Ukrainian refugee at North Railway Station in Bucharest, Romania, cries as she says goodbye to a family member March 14, 2022, following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. (CNS photo/Edgard Garrido, Reuters)



by Catholic News Service

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WASHINGTON — The church's charitable outreach to people fleeing war, political instability, poverty and other threats is a requirement for followers of Jesus, the Administrative Committee of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops said in a March 17 statement.

"Some may question why and how the church supports refugees and migrants, regardless of race, creed or color, but the simple truth is that Christ identifies with those in need: 'For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me,'" the committee said, citing Matthew 25:35.

Led by Los Angeles Archbishop José H. Gomez as USCCB president, the committee said various challenges have forced people to flee in search of safety and security and that their plight requires a Christian response.

"This means that when people are hungry and knock at our door, we feed them. When they come to our door cold, we clothe them. And when someone who is a

stranger comes, we welcome him or her. The church does this everywhere she exists," it said.

The statement comes as the efforts of U.S.-based church agencies in ministering to migrants and refugees have faced rising challenges from those who say doing so encourages more people to come to the United States, especially from along the southern border.

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One organization, CatholicVote, a political advocacy group, filed a lawsuit Feb. 4 against the Biden administration seeking information about how the government and church-affiliated groups, mainly in the Diocese of Brownsville, Texas, have gone about "facilitating a record surge in illegal immigration."

The suit was filed under the Freedom of Information Act with Judicial Watch.

The Administrative Committee, which met in Washington March 15 and 16, operates as the USCCB's board of directors. In addition to Archbishop Gomez, its membership is made up of the USCCB's other officers, chairmen of its standing committees, as well as a representative from each episcopal region of the United States.

The various challenges people face around the world "is why the numbers of people on the move, refugees and people being displaced are at historically high levels," the committee said.

It also reiterated the "urgent need for a comprehensive reform of our country's immigration system."

"The U.S. immigration system is overly complex and unjust, often keeping family members apart; it must be fixed. The church does teach that a country has the right to regulate its borders. At the same time, people have the fundamental right to migrate in order to preserve their lives and families," the statement said.

It called for recognizing that "each and every person, including the newcomer, is a brother or sister to us all and a blessing to welcoming communities when given the opportunity to integrate."

The committee also urged that the inherent dignity of immigrants be acknowledged and for society to embrace their "contributions and potential."

The statement encouraged that the "ministry given to us by Jesus" is embraced and that "contemporary forces of division that temps us with a false choice between security and our humanity" be rejected.

"Our great nation is capable of safeguarding both our humanity and our security," it concluded.