



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

MEDIA RELEASE

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WISCONSIN BISHOPS URGE SUPPORT FOR AFGHAN GUESTS AT FORT MCCOY

Wisconsin's Catholic bishops have issued a statement in support of those displaced from Afghanistan and residing at Fort McCoy, Wisconsin. In welcoming the Afghan refugees, the bishops noted the trauma, deprivation, and chaos these individuals have endured. To help the refugees navigate this dramatic transition, the bishops are providing a \$30,000 donation to Catholic Charities of the Diocese of La Crosse, which has led Fort McCoy assistance efforts among the state's five Catholic Charities agencies. The bishops also urged Catholics to make donations at <https://cclse.org/afghanistan-refugee-assistance/> or by supporting similar diocesan and parish collections.

Catholic efforts to serve Wisconsin's new, temporary Afghan community are being led by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) Migration and Refugee Services (MRS), which has long served as a federally recognized refugee assistance and resettlement agency. The USCCB has partnered with local Catholic Charities agencies and other Catholic partners to serve Afghan families temporarily housed on military bases around the country. Here in Wisconsin, the USCCB is the agency responsible for providing on-base legal assistance and social engagement for women and children, which it does with support from the U.S. State Department. Wisconsin Catholic Charities agencies are the principal source of volunteers and material donations to those living on base.

Of the near 13,000 Afghans living at Fort McCoy, 55% are male and 45% female, but almost 50% are age 18 or younger and many are part of large extended families. All guests receive vaccinations and are vetted to avoid security threats. Medical needs are met by army personnel and those serving at local area hospitals.

While many Afghan guests are eager to return to a normal way of life, it will likely be several more months before all will be able to relocate. "To get all these individuals the legal filings and documentation necessary to move to their new homes is a massive undertaking," noted Chris Hennemeyer, USCCB MRS Consultant, "one that isn't even a month old."

He added, "It's why providing socialization, wellness, and recreation, as well as legal assistance is so critical."

The USCCB and Catholic Charities are seeking more volunteers to aid in this mission. Volunteers will assist women and children through the base's four social centers, aid in legal advisory services, and support the learning center. The social centers alone require up to 20

volunteers per day. Individuals must be able to commit to at least two weeks of volunteering, though longer commitments are preferred. On-base shifts occur during the business day, and while food and lodging can be provided off-base, the limited availability of accommodations surrounding Fort McCoy make those who live close to the base ideal volunteer candidates.

Interested persons should contact their local Catholic Charities agency, which will help review and forward on candidates to the La Crosse Catholic Charities for further assessment and processing. To gain base access, individuals must submit to a criminal background check, complete required forms, obtain COVID-19 vaccination, and provide a copy of a valid driver's license.

“This is demanding work,” said Karen Becker, Marketing Director of La Crosse Catholic Charities. “We’re looking for a mix of men and women up to the challenge of dealing with people consigned to shared living spaces after a very traumatic experience. Volunteers must be good at working under pressure.”

Families at Fort McCoy continue to need donations as well, especially shoes, clothing, and personal care items. Team Rubicon, a humanitarian aid agency composed primarily of veteran and first responder volunteers, has been designated nationally to manage donated goods and set up donation points for collections and distribution. Visit <https://teamrubiconusa.org/resettlement> to learn more about needed items and to see a video of the National Guard Armory donation center in Sparta, Wisconsin.

The Wisconsin bishops noted in their statement that a reported 400 Afghan immigrants are likely to remain and settle in the state. Catholic Charities for the Diocese of Green Bay is one of the entities that may be called upon to assist this population with the longer resettlement process. As the bishops noted, “...the needs of this community will continue for months and years to come.”

The bishops concluded their statement by asking for God's blessing on those at Fort McCoy and reiterating that “Even more than material goods, these men, women, and children need to find friendship and security. They need to be shown that there is great hope for their futures and that their presence is welcome in our beautiful state.”

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For more information, contact the Kim Vercauteren at 608-257-0004. A copy of the [Bishops Statement](#) is attached. Photos of Operation Allies Welcome at Fort McCoy are available at <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/6834858/task-force-mccoy-hosts-womens-town-hall>.