



## WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

### **MEDIA RELEASE**

**August 30, 2021**

### **WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CHARITIES COORDINATE AID FOR AFGHAN ARRIVALS, REQUEST HELP**

As Afghanistan faces a humanitarian crisis, United States officials have helped thousands of Afghan families flee danger, including those who have worked alongside U.S. military. Many families have been transported to Fort McCoy, Wisconsin, and an assortment of international, national, and local partners are on-hand to assist with care and processing, including the state's Catholic Charities agencies.

“When we learned families would be coming to Fort McCoy, which is located within our Diocese, we knew we could help,” said Karen Becker, Development Director for Catholic Charities of the Diocese of La Crosse. “We immediately went into action collecting donations. Most of our help is focused on providing basic care and comfort to those who will be living at the base for the weeks and months to come.”

All five Wisconsin Catholic Charities agencies are collaborating with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) Migration and Refugee Services (MRS). The USCCB will address legal, morale, and wellness concerns on base, as well as the immediate basic needs of Fort McCoy's newest residents.

#### **Afghan Families are in Wisconsin Temporarily**

Many people have reached out to Catholic Charities agencies with offers of help. “We are already receiving calls with offers of housing and employment,” reported Ricardo Cisneros, Chief Operating Office of Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee. “What many don't realize is that very few arriving at Fort McCoy will remain in Wisconsin permanently.”

After security vetting, health checks, and transit to the U.S., there remains a legal process that Afghan refugees or visa applicants must complete before permanently relocating within the country. The families at Fort McCoy will remain there as they complete this process, but afterwards, most will go to places where they can join other family members or an existing Afghan community. As part of their current remote placement program, Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Green Bay is one of the agencies that may be called on to assist with local resettlement.

#### **Personal Care Items and Donations**

Afghan arrivals are housed in the base's barracks and meals are provided by the U.S. military, but beyond food and shelter, there are still a number of ways people can help. Newly-purchased items like child and adult diapers, wipes, masks, sweat pants, socks, rain ponchos, and infant bodysuits (onesies) and sleepers are all needed. La Crosse Catholic Charities has created

Amazon and Target charitable donation lists on its Afghanistan Refugee Assistance website, <https://cclse.org/Afghanistan-refugee-assistance/>. Donors are encouraged to check this website and their local Catholic Charities' website often to receive updates on emerging refugee needs.

Monetary donations are also needed, but Catholic Charities leadership stresses the importance of making “unrestricted” donations that allow agencies to purchase items as needs arise or meet operational costs, like transporting care items, staff, and volunteers to Fort McCoy. To make an unrestricted donation, do not include language such as “for refugee resettlement” with a monetary gift. Such donations could be viewed as being restricted to relocation efforts, which have yet to begin at Fort McCoy.

### **Volunteers Needed**

Chris Hennemeyer, USCCB MRS Consultant, reports that Catholic partners will soon begin programs to provide legal assistance and operate child-friendly spaces on the base. There will also be social and wellness activities for Afghan women. Those with legal, social work, counseling, education, and immigration or refugee experience are encouraged to volunteer. Volunteers will need to go through security and background checks, as well as comply with COVID-19 mitigation measures, including vaccination. Therefore, Charities agencies are asking volunteers to make at least a one or two-week commitment. Catholic Charities for the Dioceses of La Crosse (<https://cclse.org/Afghanstan-refugee-assistance/>) and Green Bay (<https://catholiccharitiesgb.org/afghan-assistance>) have websites where interested individuals can sign up to volunteer.

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