

TOGETHER

a monthly bulletin insert from the archdiocese



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REPORT ON THE ARCHDIOCESAN LISTENING SESSIONS FOR THE CONTINENTAL SYNOD

The North American Continent assembly for the Synod on Synodality is a virtual event, held at various times in December 2022 and January 2023, with each assembly lasting approximately 2.5 hours.

The bishop of each diocese in Canada and the USA can appoint delegates to attend one of the virtual assemblies.

The delegates for the Archdiocese of Dubuque are: 1) Cassie and Josh Bird 2) Cathy and Deacon John Stierman 3) Sr Pat Doody, OSF 4) Dave Cushing 5) Elliot Meyer, and 6) Kim Hermesen.

Each delegate is assigned to a small group of 6-8 people, with one of them designated as facilitator for the small group, and another as representative to the larger assembly.

Each member of the small group is allotted 3 minutes to share the fruit of her/his prayerful discernment. Back in the full assembly, each small group representative is allotted 3 minutes to share 2 or 3 themes from her/his small group discussion.

Someone in the full assembly writes down the common themes mentioned by the small group representatives, which are then forwarded to the Vatican Synod Office.

To prepare our delegates for the North American Continent assembly, a listening session was held in each deanery (except New Hampton, cancelled due to weather, but people were invited to write in comments). There were also 2 sessions in Spanish.

The listening sessions were limited to 1 hour in the evening; a limit was imposed in order to respect people's time, but not to control or restrict interventions.

Approximately 400 people prayed, spoke

and listened respectfully, were grateful for the opportunity, and offered comments in response to the 3 questions:

1. What attracts you to the Catholic Faith and to be active in your parish?
2. What Church teaching or practice makes you feel unwelcome, alienated or angry?
3. What topics should the Pope discuss and decide at the October 2023 Synod?

All the responses to these questions were recorded. Of particular interest are the themes proposed for the Pope to discuss and decide at the October 2023 Synod assembly; we want our delegates to share these during the Continental assembly.

Therefore, due to the number of dioceses/delegates (267/1500+) involved, and brief time delegates have for sharing, we had to synthesize the responses to Question 3:

The teachings of the Catholic Church: Some people ask the Pope to hold the line against pressure to change teaching (read: the German bishops), saying that not all change is good. But others see a need for change, and ask the Pope to re-examine Church teachings on divorce and remarriage, birth control, LGBTQ issues, and women's ordination. Some also ask that the Church's social teaching be given more attention. We need to find a way to preserve Catholic teaching, while finding a way to be more welcoming, accepting of diversity.

The liturgy of the Catholic Church: The Mass and Holy Communion are important and attractive to Catholics. Not all however are on the same page with regard to whether or not anyone should be publicly refused Holy Communion, or regarding the present Mass vs. the pre-Vatican II Mass, and about the use of contemporary music at Mass or Gregorian chant in Latin. The Pope should consider teaching about the Mass in a way that people in the pews can understand. There was also appreciation expressed for the importance of the Sacrament of Confession, and the need to promote it more.

Ministry in the Church: We need to be more intentional about praying for priestly vocations, and inviting young people to discern a call from God. Some ask that there be further discussion about ordaining women to the diaconate and priesthood, as well as allowing married men to be ordained priests.

Those who are authorized to preach need to receive good instruction, and be better prepared before they get into the pulpit.

Being missionary disciples: People are concerned that, after the pandemic, attendance at Sunday Mass is less than before, and fear that it will become even less in the future because of the small number of young people at Mass. It's said that young people are looking for something worth living and dying for, so they need to be offered the full Gospel as preached by the Catholic Church. Parents need formation on how to pass on the faith to their children in a Catholic home, as well as the Church's help by providing Catholic schools and faith formation programming. We need to be more intentional about building a community of Catholic believers, especially being more welcoming to minorities, people on the peripheries (such as gays, divorced and remarried), those who are alienated from the Church, and those who are searching.

People who made comments for the deanery listening sessions might not recognize their comments in this synthesis, but they were heard, and what they said is somehow included, as far as that was possible.



THE GIFT OF A LIFELINE: THE STORY OF AFGHAN EVACUEES

By Cassie Bird

For the Afghan evacuees seeking a legal pathway to remain in the United States, time is of the essence. Catholic Charities' Immigration Legal Services is working hard to assist them in their journey to remain here in the United States.

At the time of writing, there are more than 200 Afghan evacuees in the Archdiocese of Dubuque living in Cedar Rapids, who arrived last fall following the removal of US troops in Afghanistan and the fall of the Afghan government to the Taliban. The evacuees are men, women and children; some of them

had worked alongside the US government in Afghanistan for 20 plus years.

In order to expedite their arrival, the US government granted them "humanitarian parole", a two-year status that will expire in the fall of 2023. Over 94% of the 70,000 Afghan evacuees brought to the United States have been processed under the Operation Allies Welcome (OAW) humanitarian parole program. Even with this parole status, there is no clear, built-in pathway to permanent residency (aka green card) and citizenship. The parole status offers limited benefits compared to other more permanent legal status.

A small percentage of Afghan parolees who could prove they worked for the US government, would be eligible for Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) status. However, there is not yet a clear pathway for a majority of Afghans who are not eligible for SIV status. Due to the time restrictions and the backlog of federal immigration processes, most Afghans are not guaranteed a pathway to permanent legal status. Instead, they will need to apply for asylum. In the past, when this designation has been used in dire cases such as following the Vietnam War, provisions were then made by the U.S. government to provide a pathway forward.

There are a few pieces of legislation currently in the works to help alleviate some of the backlog of this process, as well as attempts to help alleviate the strain on certain industries that are hurting for workers with legal status in our nation.

One pivotal piece is the Afghan Adjustment Act. This bi-partisan bill would provide a pathway to permanent status for Afghan evacuees, and those eligible and vetted could apply immediately for legal permanent resident (LPR) status. This proposed bill would also advance the efforts still going on to protect individuals left behind in Afghanistan by expanding the number of Afghan military personnel and their direct family members who would be eligible for the Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) status.

In the meantime, the Afghan evacuees in Cedar Rapids are required to present themselves to the federal US asylum office in Omaha, Nebraska, to attend interviews in order to apply for asylum. Catholic Charities' Immigration Legal Services is helping with this process, as it often presents many barriers, not just for preparing for the actual interview, but also lodging and transportation logistics. The timeline is very tight as well for all of these interviews to take place - many of them are facing a status expiration of their humanitarian parole status in September or October of 2023. Once interviews take place, they are told to expect an average 5-6 month waiting period to hear back about approval or denial, which as of right now, they must be approved in order to remain here unless the US government grants an extension of their temporary status.

But even if they are approved for asylum, there is not a clear, short path to citizenship from

there. After approval for asylum, they must wait a year until they are able to apply for legal permanent resident status (aka green card). And then once they have had their green card for 5 years, only then may they apply for US citizenship. The road there is long, slow, and expensive, and if there is any violation of their status, they may not be able to continue.

When they first arrived in Cedar Rapids, the Afghan evacuees were placed in temporary housing at a local hotel. From there, the Catherine McCauley Center in Cedar Rapids has a program called the Refugee and Immigrant Services Program that assists with refugee resettlement services. They have been assisting to place the evacuees in housing, as well as providing rental assistance, helping with health insurance, etc. However, come January 2023 the evacuees will no longer be eligible for this program, and will require additional financial assistance and resources from elsewhere, like Catholic Charities, who is providing assistance not only with immigration matters, but also financial assistance to help pay rent, utilities and other expenses, along with long-term case management to ensure individuals do not fall between the cracks.

With their humanitarian parole status, the Afghans are able to lawfully work and be employed to help pay for their basic necessities, as well as send money back home in many cases to assist family members. Many of these individuals are having to select jobs where they are able to work even with a language barrier, which is limiting, and often forces them to take positions that are outside of the job skillset that they would have utilized back home. However, after taxes, the cost of housing, food, transportation, etc., as well as sending money back home, there is very little left over. This is one of the reasons that Catholic Charities' Immigration Legal Services is such a vital program - without them, many of the evacuees would be unable to afford the necessary legal representation to advocate for their immigration and asylum cases.

Saadat Ahmadi is an interpreter/navigator helping to provide language and case management services for clients in the Cedar Rapids office. Not only that, but Saadat was one of the thousands of Afghans evacuated in 2021. He joined the Catholic Charities team in March of 2022 to help others, even as he is trying to start a new life himself.

Saadat was raised in a southern province of Afghanistan. After high school, he competed and was selected to enter the Afghan Air Force Academy. Upon graduation from the Airforce Academy, Saadat became an air force officer, and then subsequently he received a scholarship from the Afghan military to obtain further pilot training in the Republic of Slovakia. While there, he found out that the Afghan government fell into the hands of the Taliban.

There were concerns about returning home, but then they received word that the U.S. government was going to help in their evacuation to the United States. Upon arrival,

Saadat spent four months at Fort Pickett, Virginia waiting for his documents to be processed before being resettled in Iowa.

"Once we got informed that we cannot go back to our country because there is a danger to our lives, it was hard for us to leave behind our families, our relatives, our friends and having to come to a new country to start a new life, it was really difficult for us," said Saadat.

As for the next part of Saadat's journey, he is continuing through the process of applying for asylum. He will have an interview with an asylum officer, which could last anywhere between one and six hours. During the interview, asylum-seekers are questioned about their background and asylum application, including an affidavit that they prepared with the help of their immigration attorney. This affidavit helps to create a strong asylum case by compiling their background, life experiences, necessary documents, and details about why they fear going back to their home country.

After the interview, he will be told that he should hear back somewhere within 150 days about whether his request for asylum is approved by the US government. From there, if approved, he will wait for another year until he is able to apply for legal permanent residency.

When asked about the most rewarding part of his work as an interpreter and navigator, Saadat said, "When you work with the refugee communities, you get to know people's stories and what they have gone through. And then do what you can to help."

The problem is that many of the Afghan evacuees are here alone, with their families back in Afghanistan suffering under Taliban rule. It may be years until they are able to reunite with them and bring them to the United States. This is why the Afghan Adjustment Act is so important - it not only provides a pathway to lawful permanent residency for the Afghan population already here, but drastically improves the length of time in which they can begin to reunite and bring their family members to the US.

Your support for Catholic Charities' Immigration Legal Services through an ArchdioceseOne contribution is a lifeline for Afghans, like Saadat. As these individuals worry about their futures, their families, and adjusting to life in a new country, your support is helping to eliminate a significant obstacle of being able to afford the legal services necessary to allow them to begin a new life in safety here in the United States.

ArchdioceseOne Update

Thanks to your sacrificial gift, over \$13.1 million has been raised for the ArchdioceseOne special appeal. Over \$6.4 million of this amount has been left unrestricted, and over \$1 million has been restricted to Immigration Legal Services.