



News Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Missouri Catholic Conference Joins Other Religious Organizations in Call to Accept Syrian Refugees

December 3, 2015 JEFFERSON CITY, MO – The Missouri Catholic Conference (MCC) has joined with other religious and advocacy groups in urging the U.S. and the state of Missouri to accept for resettlement refugees fleeing war-torn Syria and neighboring countries.

In a press conference held at the State Capitol on Thursday, December 3, the MCC was joined by representatives from Mid-Missouri Fellowship of Reconciliation, Missouri Faith Voices, Empower Missouri and several Jefferson City churches, including the Disciples of Christ, the First Baptist Church and First United Methodist.

MCC's Executive Director, Mike Hoey, warned that the goal of terrorists is to create terror. "If we close our doors to these refugees, ISIS wins. We let them define who we are." Even after the horrific November 13 attack in Paris, France is accepting the refugees from Syria, Hoey said.

Hoey noted that the Statue of Liberty is a gift from the people of France to be a beacon of liberty: "Despite these dangerous and tragic times, may we continue to say 'Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me/I lift my lamp beside the golden door.'"

A Jewish American who emigrated from France to America in the aftermath of World War II, Aline Kultgen, also spoke at the press conference. Her father was killed by the Gestapo, but after the war she emigrated to America.

Kultgen recalled her welcome in America and noted: "I fervently hope we will give this same opportunity to the victims of civil war and ISIS."

Other religious leaders reminded the audience that the Holy Family fled violence in the Holy Land for a safe haven in Egypt. "God calls us to be part of the solution to the refugee problem. Our response should be guided by compassion," said Rev. Daniel Hilty, Pastor of First United Methodist Church of Jefferson City.

The recent mass shootings in Colorado Springs, Colorado and San Bernardino, California have put Americans on edge. Hoey said it is natural for people to be cautious about taking in refugees, but he pointed to the extensive vetting process Syrian refugees must undergo.

That vetting process includes security checks by the FBI, the National Center for Counterterrorism, the Department of Homeland Security and the State Department. The process can take several years to complete and only then are refugees cleared for resettlement.

In a recent statement the Catholic bishops of Missouri acknowledged the need to consider security concerns but concluded that the current screening process is rigorous. The bishops called on Governor Nixon and all public officials to work with federal officials to keep citizens safe while allowing refugees to settle in Missouri.

Both nationwide and in Missouri the Catholic Church plays a major role in resettling refugees. Catholic Charities of Central and Northern Missouri (CCCNMO), for example, resettled some 170 refugees last year and expects to resettle over 200 for the year 2015. No Syrian refugees have been resettled by CCCNMO as yet and it may be several years before this occurs.

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The Bishops of Missouri, speaking together on matters of public policy, form the Missouri Catholic Conference