

# **Catholic Charities of Newark Archdiocese to welcome Syrian refugees in January**

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**The church will settle refugees from Syria and other war-torn regions despite political opposition.**



Homs, Syria, in February. The Archdiocese of Newark will begin resettling refugees from Syria and other countries in New Jersey in January.(Photo: Hassan Ammar, AP)

The Archdiocese of Newark will begin next month to resettle refugees from Syria and other war-torn nations, coming down on the opposite side of the governor and president-elect on a heated political issue.

Gov. Chris Christie and President-elect Donald Trump have objected to accepting refugees from Syria. Despite a lengthy vetting process by the federal government, both say terrorists could be allowed to slip into the country.

But the archdiocese is proceeding with plans to welcome at least 51 refugees in 2017. They will come from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, said Maria Biancheri, senior grants specialist with the Catholic Charities organization of the archdiocese.

The refugees will begin arriving in late January and will be settled in Essex and Hudson counties, she said.

“There is no political agenda there; this is just what the church does,” archdiocese spokesman Jim Goodness said.

Churches from throughout the archdiocese, which is one of the largest in the country and includes Bergen County, will be enlisted to help with the efforts, Biancheri said. “We’re hoping to get some parishes involved to almost adopt a family,” she said.

Retiring Archbishop John J. Myers has been very supportive of the plan, which is expected to have another supporter in Cardinal Joseph Tobin of Indianapolis, who will take the helm in Newark on Jan. 6. Last year, Tobin disregarded an order from Indiana Gov. Mike Pence, now the vice president-elect, that barred the resettlement of Syrian refugees in Indiana.



The Cathedral Basilica of the Sacred Heart in Newark. (Photo: Associated Press)

The refugees' arrival will coincide with Trump's inauguration in late January. It is unclear what will happen after his inauguration, but Trump said during his campaign that he would reduce the flow of refugees from Middle East for fear of terrorism. But State Department officials have said the refugees undergo a strict vetting process that can last two years.

Goodness said the application to host the refugees, through the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, has been in the works for some time. The bishops in the United States have resettled about 30 percent of all refugees in the U.S. and have 100 resettlement offices nationwide, including Newark.

## **Global strife**

With civil war raging in Syrian and other violence in the Middle East and elsewhere, the world is in the throes of what is the largest dislocation of people since World War II. The State Department has estimated that there are as many as 60 million refugees worldwide.

Rep. Bill Pascrell Jr., D-Paterson, on Thursday praised the archdiocese resettlement plans, saying they should “be a message to all this holiday season: New Jersey has room in our inn for those seeking refuge.”

Christie closed the state’s refugee resettlement office and the process is now coordinated by non-profit groups, including Catholic Charities. Christie’s office did not respond to a request for comment.

The Obama administration had hoped to take in at least 110,000 refugees, including 10,000 from Syria, this year. There have been 582 refugees resettled in the state this year, including 355 from Syria, according to information from the State Department provided by Pascrell’s office.

Biancheri said her group is lining up apartment and job prospects for the new arrivals and will tap into the archdiocese’s network of churches across North Jersey.

“We welcome people who are fleeing oppression, poverty and war,” said Monsignor William Reilly, pastor of Most Holy Name Church in Garfield, who has worked extensively with the immigrant community. “We’re a church of immigrants.”

## **Pope's request**

While the refugees settled in the Newark Archdiocese will likely go to urban areas, planning is underway in western New Jersey for the arrival of a Syrian family at an apartment on the grounds of the Shrine of the St. Joseph in Stirling, said Rev. Dennis Berry, director of the shrine.

An ecumenical group in the area has been working to prepare the apartment and welcome the family, Berry said.

“Pope Francis requested that every Catholic institution in the world take in a Syrian refugee,” Berry said. “This is Jesus’ teaching on reaching out to refugees and strangers in the service of God.”

*Staff Writer Monsy Alvarado contributed to this article.*

<http://www.northjersey.com/story/news/essex/2016/12/08/newark-archdiocese-settle-syrian-refugees/95141792/>