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Statement from the Jesuits of Canada and the U.S. on the Feast of the Holy Family

December 30, 2016 — On December 9th Pope Francis offered his annual blessing of the nativity scene in St. Peter's Square. In his remarks he encouraged the faithful to remember today's migrants when looking at the crèche. He drew a familiar parallel between the experience of a refugee and the birth of Jesus. "In the painful experience of these brothers and sisters, we revisit that experience of the baby Jesus," said the Holy Father, "who at the time of his birth did not find accommodation and was born in a grotto in Bethlehem and then was brought to Egypt to escape Herod's threat."

Today many immigrant families live in vulnerable situations. Like the Holy Family, they face rejection and often have to flee dangerous threats. Many of us come into contact with these families who live in the shadows, fearing separation, detention, deportation and limited participation in our communities. And on this feast we remember that all families are holy in God's eyes.

When we hear of the violence and turmoil that a few have provoked around the world, it is understandable why some seek policies and protective measures to calm such fear. But Pope Francis challenges us never to act solely out of fear. Earlier this year he said, "We must not allow misunderstanding and fear to weaken our resolve ... we are called to respect the foreigner, the immigrant and the people of different cultures as worthy to be listened to." And we witnessed Pope Francis live out this message when he brought three refugee families home with him after a visit to Greece. In so doing, he lived out 1 John 3:18, "Let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth."

The Jesuit parish has always been a home to the immigrant and the foreigner. Many of our churches were built to care for immigrants, and they remain one of the few Jesuit ministries that serve the public on a daily basis.

The provincial assistants for Jesuit Spiritual and Parish Ministry, who serve the nine Jesuit provincials in Canada and the U.S., have convened from across North America to respond to the plight of migrants. On this Feast of the Holy Family they are asking parish communities to take Pope Francis' message to heart and discern how they can best respond to the plight of migrants, remembering that love must be shown in deeds and in words.

There is so much good that a parish can do for the most vulnerable in our communities – from sponsoring refugee families to lifting our voices in the public square, calling for greater protections for our brothers and sisters who are suffering.

As a family united in Christ, please remember refugees and migrants in your prayers and pray that we grow in our awareness of the issue of migration.

In this Christmas season where we continue to contemplate the mystery of the incarnation, let us never stop looking for the face of Christ, particularly in the faces of the poor and alienated.

Be assured of our prayers for you and your family in the New Year.

The Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States.

Founded in 1540 by Saint Ignatius Loyola and his companions, the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) is the largest order of priests and brothers in the Roman Catholic Church. Jesuit priests and brothers are involved in educational, pastoral and spiritual ministries around the world, practicing a faith that promotes justice. In Canada and the United States, there are 30 Jesuit colleges and 80 pre-secondary and secondary schools with a shared goal of developing competent, compassionate and committed leaders in the service of the Church and society. Jesuits minister in parishes and at retreat houses and serve as chaplains at prisons, hospitals, nursing homes and in the military. In Canada and the U.S., the Jesuits are represented by the Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States, headquartered in Washington, D.C. For more information on the Society of Jesus, visit www.jesuits.org.