

Dear Friends in Christ,

How well do you know your family roots? When I was a seminarian living in Europe I took on a whole new interest in genealogy. I was aware that most (if not all?) of my ancestors came from Europe to America. I had a hunch that most were from German-speaking lands, but I did not know much more regarding the precise places or the timing let alone the reasons for leaving their homeland or the mode of travel they employed.

I am happy to say that interest in genealogy uncovered many fascinating facts about my various branches of ancestors. I even located ancestors in the parish cemetery where I grew up that my family had forgotten or perhaps never knew had lived so close to our home.

At the same time, there are still many mysteries that may never be known. Sometimes the early histories of my family simply said they came from Germany without saying what part or which city.

I suspect that most of us who make up St. Charles Parish have family members who were immigrants to the United States of America. For some of us, it may be the case that you are now third or fourth-generation American. Still others might trace their roots to those who were living in this part of the world before any Europeans showed up in the 16th century. They would have to work harder to trace their immigration roots back to a time before any Europeans settled here starting in the 16th century.

Here at St. Charles I have been amazed at our richness of having current members born in nations from all around the world—such as The Philippines, Nigeria, Germany, Italy, Vietnam, Trinidad and Tobago, Canada, Thailand, India, and Haiti—just to name a few.

To celebrate our rich fabric of cultures, we are celebrating the **110th World Day for Migrants and Refugees** on Sunday, September 29. This year's theme is **“God Walks with His People.”** This is a reminder that we are all migrants on our way to the heavenly kingdom. In a particular way, the Lord accompanies those most vulnerable. We share the road with others.

The World Day for Migrants and Refugees began in 1914. I was trying to imagine what the world was like and what my own family was experiencing at this point in time. In 1914 Germany declared war on their neighbors in Europe and the Great War or World War I was dividing families. By 1917 the United States entered the war. Tragically, new American immigrants were now being sent back to fight against their family members who remained in the homeland. Peace came in 1918, but it was short-lived. Two decades later, World War II was even more tragic.

For the most part, when my ancestors emigrated to the United States, they lost touch with any remaining relatives in the homeland. But they still brought with them their language, their faith, and their culture.

Recently I reread a history of my hometown, Ottoville that was written in 1995 to celebrate the 150th founding of the village. I learned that up until 1920, the schools used to alternate the language in which the classes were taught—one day German, the next day English. This ended when the nation as a whole distrusted Germans and by law, the instruction had to be in English.

My mom remembers when Fr. Gerwart would preach a Christmas sermon in German. I learned that this was in the 1930's and was the last vestige of immigrants still able to hear the sermon in their native language. I was surprised to learn that it took so long for the community to cut ties with the German-language!

As we look forward to our observance of the 110th World Day for Migrants and Refugees, I hope that you will make time to join us on Sunday, September 29, first and foremost for the special **Holy Hour** from 5:30-6:30 pm. This will build on what we began last year in coming together for Eucharistic Adoration with Evening Prayer, Praise and Worship music and ending with Benediction.

For those who can stay beyond the prayer, the focused theme of migrants and refugees will also spill-over into a **World Potluck**. We invite those able to bring foods that represent your homeland to provide our feast to begin immediately after the Holy Hour at 6:30 pm.

For those who can stay longer yet, we also invite you to stay for **World Games and Music**. You are invited to bring simple and shorter-length games (such as dominoes or cards) that represent your homeland and can easily be taught to others. If you have suggestions for music from your part of the world—whether recorded or that you would perform live—please let us know. We will be forming a “playlist” to share and have a small stage for those who would like to perform.

Please share the word about this with your friends, even beyond our parish. No registration is necessary, but feel free to let us know if you have questions about the day. Oh yes, if you are bringing food for the World Potluck, we ask that you bring it downstairs prior to the Holy Hour. We will have helpers to care for the foods and arrange them so that all is ready at 6:30 when the prayer is complete!