



## World Refugee Day

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**This communication is coming from the website [Jpic-assumpta.org](http://Jpic-assumpta.org), Little Sisters and Sisters of the Assumption. We choose this one because the World Refugee Day is June 20.**

I once heard a priest describe how simple it was hundreds and thousands of years ago, when families searched for food. These were the first migrants or refugees. They got their berries or killed the animals they needed for food, clothing and shelter. When supplies became scarce, they packed up and went somewhere else. Or they may have had to move because of a natural disaster. Whole communities would protect each other and relocate when necessary.

Then there were borders. Countries formed, economic systems came to be, and families could not easily go to where their need for food, clothing and shelter could be met. It is such a simplistic way of looking at the world. But that is basically the difficulty that migrants and refugees face. Whether it was during the Industrial Revolution when families moved from the countryside to Paris, or the many stories told today of the injustices that migrants and refugees face trying to make a living for their families, the situations are just the same. We have a social obligation to provide the opportunity for families to have the dignity to support themselves financially.

From the book, **Stars Beyond the Storms** [1] by Katherine Burton, Fr. **Stephen Pernet**, the co-founder of the Little Sisters of the Assumption in the 1800's, spent many hours with the boys' club. On Thursdays and Sundays, over two hundred children came there and many were very poor. They needed heartening food more than they needed games. And when he saw how hungry and ill clad these workers' children were, Fr. Stephen Pernet knew how bad things were in the home. Even though things were getting better for the workers, there was no organization to help them defend their rights and conditions were very bad, materially and morally, virtually being buried in factories.

Fr. Stephen Pernet called this the "Malady of the Worker". He was aware that the extreme poverty of the village where he grew up was different than the grinding poverty in Paris. At least there was some security even in the poorest homes where families looked out for one another. In Paris, he heard the sad stories of a father dependent on an employer who dismissed him if work grew slack ; of a mother forced to work outside the home to supplement the scanty income while her children ran the streets, of wages so low that families went hungry even though the parents worked long, hard hours. Since there was little family life, the children, at first insubordinate to their parents, later were insubordinate to the law, and some went to prison. Father Pernet's solution was to found the Little Sisters of the Assumption in order to go in to the homes and strengthen families. Father Pernet was a good friend to the workers even though they did not except his religious suggestions.

In most countries today, workers have rights and are protected from unsafe or unhealthy work environments. There are child labor laws. People are guaranteed their rightful pay. But not for migrants, refugees, undocumented people and even children unlawfully put to work in order to get a small amount

of money. There are still examples of people working long, hard hours and not being paid for their work. They have no recourse if they have no papers.

According to NELP, [the National Employment Law Project](#) in the United States, “immigrant workers, especially the undocumented and short-term guestworkers, face enormous obstacles in their efforts to enforce workplace rights. These workers are often their family’s only source of support in a world of poverty and injustice. They arrive in the US isolated by language, culture and geography. And their immigration status can be used as a club by unscrupulous employers who wish to take advantage of them.

**A 2002 U.S. Supreme Court ruling** resulted in a storm of litigation around the country that has left our system of workplace protections in tatters. For example, undocumented workers are not entitled to compensation when they are fired in violation of their right to organize a union on the job. In some states, the right to workers’ compensation has been curtailed for undocumented workers. And in at least one state (New Jersey), undocumented workers have no recourse for on-the-job discrimination.

The **180,000 low-wage temporary** guestworkers in our country face equally steep barriers, arriving in the country in debt to labor recruiters and traffickers who often lie to them about what they will find here. These workers, frequently housed in isolated labor camps and denied by law the right to change jobs, fall victim to forced labor and labor trafficking.

Through litigation, policy design and support for organizing campaigns, NELP has been a national leader in developing strategies that support the rights of all workers, whether born in the U.S. or abroad. We do so out of the conviction that if labor rights are extinguished for some, those rights are degraded for all. And that if employers who violate labor laws get a free pass, then we only create a larger underground economy, which in the end hurts us all.”

**Labor Day** (in the United States) is an annual holiday to celebrate the achievements of workers. Labor Day has its origins in the Labor Union movement, specifically the eight hour day movement, which advocated eight hours for work, eight hours for recreation, and eight hours for rest. For many countries, Labor Day is synonymous with, or linked with, International Workers Day which occurs on May 1st. International Workers’ Day is the commemoration of the 1886 Haymarket Massacre in Chicago, when Chicago police fired on workers during a general strike for the eight hour workday, killing several demonstrators and resulting in the deaths of several police officers, largely from friendly fire. We pay tribute to workers on this day and the continue fight to protect their rights.

*Sheilah Dooley*

*([International Secretariat for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation](#))*

Voir en ligne : [Global forced displacement tops 50 million for first time in post-World War II era](#)

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## Notes

[1] Burton, K., Stars Beyond the Storms, Benziger Brothers, Inc., 1953

<https://www.assumpta.org/World-Refugee-Day>