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A Brief Statement

**Immigration Sunday
4th February**

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On this, the 29th annual commemoration of Immigration Sunday, it seems well to recall that the Bishops' statement for the first Immigration Sunday, in 1950, contained an appeal to all Catholics "to view with each other in welcoming and helping Australia's new settlers of whom many had suffered much from attacks upon their Faith and their spiritual and physical freedom". Now, almost 30 years later this same appeal for asylum and security has to be renewed, with no lessening of validity and urgency. Across our world of nowadays and notably, in neighbouring countries to our North, there are, at latest estimate, some 13 million refugees; fellow men suffering persecution and oppression, in a denial of human rights or, having escaped, at much personal risk, seeking protection and a home. Alleviation of the plight of these unfortunate millions of human beings, represents a demand which the world community cannot disregard. Their condition of personal distress, destitution and helplessness, is a summons to prompt and positive action, a stark challenge to Christian compassion. [2905]

Commendation is accorded, deservedly, to the Australian Government and Instrumentalities for an equitable sharing of the refugee problem; approbation too for the Government's temperate and merciful handling of the difficult situation created by the attempted illegal entry of the "boat people". Despite, however, all that is being done, there remains much more to be done by more of us, in assisting the world's desperately needy people with whom we have an oneness in origin from the hands of God the Father and Creator of mankind. [2906]

In terms of practical assistance and relief for migrants and refugees, the specialised organisations of the Church, nationally, in day to day operations, provide nominations, reception services, resettlement, accommodation, work search, immediate personal and domestic needs and a continuing supervision towards the nominees acquiring self sufficiency. Internationally, the Catholic Migration Commission at Geneva, in full collaboration with Governmental and non-Governmental instrumentalities, negotiates the exit and entry of emigrating people and, for a great proportion, advances interest-free travel loans and completes all departure arrangements. In this particular activity the Catholic Commission in the past twenty-six years has granted loans for 223,000 persons for a disbursement of 47 million Dollars, of which Australia's portion has been some 14 million Dollars. In the current Indo-Chinese exodus the Commission through its affiliates, principally United States, France, Canada and Australia, has found homes and jobs for almost 125,000 persons. [2907]

Here in Australia, the Parish Councils who increasingly are responding to the Bishops' appeal for each parish to settle a refugee family, are assured, that in so acting, they portray a quality of friendship and helpfulness that truly reflects the essential oneness of mankind in God the Creator, and a real conformity with God's Commandment of love of neighbour. They, and all of us, may well recognise in the migrant seeking resettlement or the refugee craving freedom and security, figures of human dignity and courage, truly deserving of mutual respect and generous support. [2908]

Today, then Immigration Sunday, let us pray for all people in need and for refugees particularly, that they may be comforted and encouraged as they tread the world's highways in search of freedom, security and Peace — God's Peace. For the Australian Episcopal Conference Commission for Social and Charitable Works. [2909]

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Source: Archives of the Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office (ACMRO), Canberra, Australia.
