

1997

Message

A Message to Parishes for the National Day for Migrants and Refugees

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Immigration Sunday has been renamed by the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference. From 1997, it will be called "National Day for Migrants and Refugees". This is in harmony with Pope John Paul's reference to "World Day for Migrants and Refugees" in his annual message. It will be celebrated on Sunday, August 31st, although a few dioceses, for local reasons, have chosen a different date. [2937]

With this letter is a poster. We hope that you will display it in your Church. In this Year of Jesus Christ leading up to the year 2000, Christ is shown embracing a group of people both young and old from various ethnic backgrounds. We should consider his farewell discourse to the disciples at the Last Supper: *"I give you a new commandment: love one another; just as I have loved you, you must love one another. By this love you have for one another, everyone will know that you are my disciples."* (John 13: 34-35). [2938]

During the last year, in the political and public arenas, we have heard statements that do not harmonise with these words of Christ. It is good to recall the opening sentences of the Australian Catholic Bishops' Pastoral Letter of 29th November, 1996 'A Rich and Diverse Australia': *"It is right for the people of Australia to conduct a rational and ongoing discussion concerning the number of migrants who should be allowed to enter the country. It is not right to link this discussion to racist attitudes towards Asians or any other people. It is never right to say or do anything that arouses racial intolerance"*. [2939]

Pope John Paul II, in this year's message for the World Day for Migrants and Refugees, speaks of the importance of proclaiming Christ to Migrants and Refugees: *"The Church's commitment to Migrants and Refugees cannot be reduced merely to organising structures of hospitality and solidarity. . . .At the end of our life we will be judged on love, on the acts of charity we have done to the 'least' of our brothers and sisters (Mt. 25: 31-35, but also on the courage and fidelity with which we have witnessed to Christ"*. [2940]

The Holy Father points out that many refugees and asylum seekers today are people of faiths other than Christian. To them we are *"called to be a living sign of Christ who came that all might have life in abundance"*. (cf. John 10:10)... *This is the Church's missionary path: to go to meet women and men of every race, tongue and nation with friendship and love, sharing their conditions in an evangelical spirit, to break the bread of truth and charity for them.... 1997 will be the first year of the* [2941]

triennium of preparation for the Great Jubilee of the year 2000, during which Christians will be called to focus their gaze particularly on the figure of Christ. To each I renew the invitation to intensify communion with Jesus and, through charity, to make faith in him active (Gal. 5:6), with particular openness of spirit to those who are in need and difficulty.”

Finally, some suggestions for the parish celebration of the National Day for Migrants and Refugees: [2942]

1) A special effort could be made to embrace the various migrant groups in the parish. It would be good for this to continue on a regular basis. Where there are various migrant groups, some readings, petitions and hymns could often be in a language other than English. The involvement of newcomers in all aspects of parish life should be promoted.

2) The work which Migrant Chaplains perform in the diocese should be better understood and appreciated. They have a very important role. We suggest that migrant chaplains be invited to be part of parish celebrations on the National Day, and also on other days, so that their work, and the diverse migrant groups whom they serve, may be highlighted.

3) A social gathering could be planned to emphasize the spirit of welcome and friendship. Many migrants find Catholic parishes unwelcoming. We are reminded of the Holy Father's words that we are "called to be a living sign of Christ".

4) The year-round parish program should emphasize the spirit of hospitality and welcome to all newcomers, be they from other countries or from other parts of Australia.

As the National Office responsible for the coordination of the National Day for Migrants and Refugees, we would be grateful for comments; e.g. Were the poster and message helpful? How did you celebrate the day? Will the celebration influence the continuing life of your parish? Thank you for your assistance, as it will help us with our evaluation of the effectiveness of the National Day for Migrants and Refugees. [2943]

Yours sincerely in Christ

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Director

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