

2000

Message

Refugee and Migrant Sunday

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The theme set by the Holy Father for 2000 is “I was a stranger and you welcomed me”. [3034] His message provides food for thought as we celebrate Refugee and Migrant Sunday. He says: *“In celebrating the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, the Churchhears the suffering cry of all who are uprooted from their own land, of families forcefully separated, of those who, in the rapid changes of our day, are unable to find a stable home anywhere”. The Holy Father continues “At the same time, States with a relative abundance tend to tighten their borders under pressure from public opinion disturbed by the inconveniences that accompany the phenomenon of immigration. Society finds itself having to deal with the ‘clandestine’ men and women in illegal situations, without rights in a country that refuses to welcome them”.*

The Holy Father’s words direct us to think about our own attitudes. They challenge those [3035] people in Australia, even in our parishes and schools, who lack awareness or compassion towards refugees, especially towards those who come to Australia and seek asylum in our country. In keeping with the Holy Father’s thoughts, the Catholic Church in Australia has questioned measures which penalise “unauthorised arrivals” (e.g. boat people), even when they are found to have valid refugee claims. These measures are intended to deter other asylum seekers from coming to Australia in the same way. The Church has also stated that it stands ready to assist with an increased refugee program. In future, Catholics may be asked to open their hearts and doors to refugees, following the example of those who are already doing so.

Australia’s Refugee/humanitarian program for 2000/2001 will remain at 12,000 places. [3036] 8,000 places will be for people who make application outside Australia, and 4000 for those who will be given temporary protection in Australia. The Honourable Philip Ruddock, Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, has stated that Australia cannot afford to have a larger humanitarian program. That is why the Australian Catholic Bishops’ Conference has told him that “the Catholic Church stands ready to assist with an increased refugee program”. It is a call to all of us to show Christian generosity and compassion.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

Rev. John J. Murphy
Director

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