

2004

Message

**On Refugee and Migrant Sunday 2004**

*Bishop Joseph Grech, D.D., Chairperson  
Bishops' Committee for Migrants and Refugees*

19 June 2004

Dear Friends,

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On Refugee and Migrant Sunday - 29th August 2004 - we should thank God for the diversity of peoples in our nation and celebrate this diversity. The Church, like the nation, is made up of peoples from many different countries, with different languages and customs. In 2004/2005, Australia's immigration (non-humanitarian) program will allow for 120,000 people from many countries (an increase of 6000 from the previous year). This includes 42,000 close family members and 78,000 skilled people, in the same period, the Refugee/Humanitarian program will allow for 13,000 people, who will include those granted refugee status in Australia (an increase of 1000 places from the previous year). The regional priority for the refugee program will continue to be Africa, the Middle East, and South West Asia to assist people in the greatest need of resettlement as recommended by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

This year, I wish to bring three points to your attention:

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**1. Pope John Paul II's message for World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2004.** The theme is *Migration with a view to peace*. "I deeply hope" the Holy Father says "that every Ecclesial Community, made up of migrants and refugees and those who receive them and drawing inspiration from the sources of grace, will untiringly engage in the construction of peace. May no one let injustice, difficulties or inconvenience be a discouragement! If the 'dream' of a peaceful world is shared by all, if the refugees' and migrants' contribution is properly evaluated, then humanity can become more and more of a universal family and our earth a true 'common home'".

**2. The Australian Catholic Bishops' Statement (14th May 2004) on Refugees and Asylum Seekers.** In this statement we, the Catholic Bishops of Australia, said that we were heartened by a small increase in the refugee program for 2004/2005. But we expressed the hope that these numbers would increase further in coming years and that Australia would be always ready to respond promptly to crises that produce refugees. We called for the nation's response to asylum seekers to be just, compassionate and consistent with Australia's obligations under International Law. We pleaded the cause of refugees and asylum seekers again (as we had done in 2002) because the Gospel compels us to do so. We remained hopeful that hearts and minds would change so that treatment of refugees and asylum seekers in Australia might be more humane, more respectful of human dignity. Finally we called for alternatives to mandatory detention for unaccompanied minors and for children who accompany their parents. Such alternatives must respect the importance of family

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unity and family reunion.

**3. A National Conference for those people who provide special pastoral care [3134] for migrants and refugees in Australia priests, religious and lay workers.** This National Conference will be held in Sydney in November 2005. By way of preparation, State Conferences will be organised by the Catholic Immigration Offices in the capital cities in the first half of 2005. If you provide pastoral care for migrants and refugees as a priest, religious or lay worker, I hope that you will respond to the invitation to participate and that your parishes and communities will assist you to do so.

In the Gospel for Refugee and Migrant Sunday (29th August -22nd Sunday of [3135] Ordinary Time, Year C), Jesus gives two parables which emphasise placement at table and hospitality, important issues for us as we learn to build our future together with people who are refugees, migrants and asylum seekers who are now desiring to call Australia home and put down roots here.

We need to ask ourselves with regard to refugees, migrants and asylum seekers “are [3136] we creating situations where we are not being true and accountable to the Gospel, especially the teaching as outlined by Jesus today in the two parables from Luke. Are we, as Christians, as the Church, as the parish or community, living out these parables in our actions today”?

I hope and pray that the spirit of Refugee and Migrant Sunday remains with us always.

Yours sincerely in Christ.

**Most Reverend Joseph Grech, D.D.**

Chairperson  
Bishops' Committee for Migrants and Refugees

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

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