

**TALK TO CHAPLAINS OF MIGRANTS AND MIGRANT COMMUNITIES
(Australia, May 2011)**

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President

Dear Chaplains and Members of migrant communities,

It is indeed a great joy for me to be here with you today to share our common joys and struggles for the benefit of all those who are involved in the “striking phenomenon” of migration, both voluntary and compelled.

As you may know, the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People is part of the Roman Curia that aids the Holy Father in exercising his supreme pastoral office for the good and service of the whole Church and of the local Churches. In particular, it is entrusted with the task of bringing the pastoral concern of the Church to all those who are not living in their homelands or those who have none, so that their specific needs may receive the attention they deserve. You, dear Chaplains and Pastoral Agents, are our arms in addressing directly these needs, and you, dear members of the various communities, offer them concrete and moral support and share in their mission.

1. The right not to emigrate

Any form of migration, in fact, inevitably involves some kind of suffering because of the uprooting that it entails. This may simply be because in another country people have a different mentality, other ways of doing things, speak another language or even serve a different kind of food at meals. How much more if migration is an impelling necessity! For this reason, already almost half a century ago, way back in 1963, Pope John XXIII, in his great encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, affirmed the right of every individual *to remain in their own country* (cf. *PT* 25; see also *EMCC* 29).

In 2004, Pope John Paul II acknowledged every person’s *right not to emigrate*. He defined this as “*the right to live in peace and dignity in one’s own country*”,

adding that “*it is possible for every country to guarantee its own population, in addition to freedom of expression and movement, the possibility to satisfy basic needs such as food, health care, work, housing and education*”. He also cautioned that “*the frustration of these needs forces many into a*

position where their only option is to emigrate” (Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2004, no. 3).

This is a first area where you can get involved. Prevention is worth much more than a cure, it is always said, but Governments do not always realize or respond to this challenge. You know where migrants in Australia come from. It would be important to see what can be done to help potential migrants cope with the situation in their own countries so that it will not be necessary for them to leave. Responses to the situation could range from projects that fight poverty, to training and assistance towards gainful employment, from health and sanitation education and services to housing programs, from peace-building projects, the struggle to stop violence and work for reconciliation, to information and aid in getting access to opportunities, etc. This requires a durable commitment in a long process, but I can assure you it is worth the effort.

In the area of information, it is important to provide potential migrants with accurate information regarding the situation of their destination countries, the real opportunities that exist and do not exist, as well as the very real dangers that they have to face. Many potential migrants are fed with erroneous information in this regard. For these reasons, it is necessary to build bridges with their countries of origin, if possible, and for Catholics, with their local Churches, and establish some form of cooperation with them.

2. The right to emigrate and to immigrate

Unfortunately, present hardships and ongoing wars and violence drive people out of their countries. Indeed there are times, and quite often in our days, when it becomes necessary to leave one’s homeland.

This, too, is a human right, stated in the International Bill of Human Rights: “*Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.*” (art. 13; see also *EMCC* 29). However, whereas the right to emigrate is recognized by civil instruments, this is not so for the right to enter another country where they expect to find a more suitable life for themselves and their families. The only exception in the civil arena consists of those who are fleeing from persecution, stated in art. 14 § 1 of the International Bill of Human Rights: “*Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.*” Obviously this excludes flight from criminal prosecution (cf. art. 14 § 2).

However, this year, in his Message on the occasion of the “*World Day of Migrants and Refugees*”, Pope Benedict XVI reflected on the right to emigrate, stating that “*the Church recognizes this right in every human person, in its dual aspect of the possibility to leave one’s country and the possibility to enter another country to look for better conditions of life*”. At the same time, however, he affirmed that “*States have the right to regulate migration flows and to defend their own frontiers*”

provided that guarantees are always granted for “*the respect due to the dignity of each and every human person.*” He also added that it is the immigrants’ duty “*to integrate into the host Country, respecting its laws and its national identity*” and therefore, the challenge for all of us “*is to combine the welcome due to every human being, especially when in need, with a reckoning of what is necessary for both the local inhabitants and the new arrivals to live a dignified and peaceful life.*”

3. Welcome and solidarity

Hence, the Church considers it an obligation of the more prosperous nations, “*to the extent they are able, to welcome the foreigner in search of the security and the means of livelihood which he cannot find in his country of origin*” (CCC 2241). This is in consonance with the universal destination of goods.

However, the Church does not expect welcome for the migrants only on the part of the government and various institutions, but from its own ranks first of all.

The Instruction *Erga migrantes caritas Christi* in fact affirms that “*the entire Church in the host country must feel concerned and engaged regarding immigrants. ... With the help of social and pastoral workers, the local population should be made aware of the complex problems of migration and the need to oppose baseless suspicions and offensive prejudices against foreigners. ... Suitable means must be found to create in the Christian conscience a sense of welcome, especially for the poorest and outcasts as migrants often are. This welcome is fully based on love for Christ, in the certainty that good done out of love of God to one’s neighbour, especially the most needy, is done to Him*” (no. 41).

Moreover, in this year’s Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees, Pope Benedict XVI affirmed that migrants and local populations, which welcome them, belong to one family and therefore all have the same right of enjoying the goods of the earth. This is the foundation of sharing and solidarity.

In a particular way, regarding refugees, “*welcoming ... and giving them hospitality is for everyone an imperative gesture of human solidarity, so that they may not feel isolated because of intolerance and disinterest*” (Discourse of Pope Benedict XVI at the General Audience of 20 June 2007).

4. Irregular migration

Severe immigration laws and restrictive immigration policies, including a limit to migrants’ access to social services, have not discouraged international migration which, in fact, continues to grow. Such measures have actually helped increase irregular migration.

When it is difficult to cross a border legally and there is an impelling need to do so, people do not hesitate to attempt unauthorized migration even at considerable risk, including turning to smugglers of persons. They could end up becoming victims of trafficking in human beings, exploited in prostitution, indentured labour, slave-like services or even the extraction of organs.

Migrants in an irregular situation are vulnerable. No one guarantees their human and labour rights. It is easy to exploit and abuse them while enjoying economic gains at their expense. Protecting the rights of irregular migrants, therefore, would be an important step forward in stopping migrants' abuse and exploitation.

Even under these conditions, they conserve the dignity and rights rooted in their humanity. They need to be helped to live and, when possible, to regularize their status. If a community gives shelter to migrants in irregular situations, the aim is not "*civil disobedience*" but the defence of people whose dignity and rights may have been violated or who have not been properly treated before the law.

5. A mixture of traditions, cultures and religions

Migration, however, does not only cause problems. It is also an opportunity. The intermingling of cultures, religions and beliefs caused by migration could be enrichment, although it has also caused tension which has persisted, even considerably, in some cases. Antidote to this tension is dialogue which leads to the recognition of values that are in common and an attitude of respect for differences (cf. *EMCC* 34-36; 56-59; 69), as long as the "*cultural practices which immigrants bring with them ... do not contravene either the universal ethical values inherent in the natural law or fundamental human rights*" (Pontifical Message for the World Day of Peace 2001, 13; see also *EMCC* 34-36).

In this context I would like to recall the Message for the Day of Migrants and Refugees in 2005. The theme was "intercultural integration", presented not as an assimilation "*that leads migrants to suppress or to forget their own cultural identity*" but as "*contact with others that leads to discovering their 'secret', to being open to them in order to welcome their valid aspects and thus contribute to knowing each one better*" (no. 1). If properly done, this can shape societies and cultures into "*a reflection of the multi-faceted gifts of God to human beings*" (*ibid.*).

The Church has a special role in this process. In our experience, the first step for migrants to "integrate" into the local Church is to make sure that they feel at home there, meaning that they can be themselves in language, spirituality and particular traditions. Civil societies, that are struggling with their inter-cultural challenges, can learn from the teaching and experience of the Church.

"The passage from monocultural to multicultural societies can be a sign of the living presence of God in history and in the community of humankind, being a providential opportunity to fulfill God's plan for a universal communion. We are all ... called to a culture of solidarity ... so as to achieve together a real communion of persons" (*EMCC* 9).

6. Evangelization

Today's migration phenomenon has also led the Church in Australia, like other Churches in countries where Christians are a majority, to a new experience. People who know nothing of Christ,

or who have an inadequate understanding of him, are settling in your country. This is a new possibility for the spread of the word of God (cf. *Verbum Domini*, 105).

The Synod Fathers at the Twelfth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (Vatican, 5-26 October 2008) affirmed that “*migrants are entitled to hear the kerygma*” (*Ibid.*), which is certainly not to be imposed on them, but should however be proposed.

Conclusion

In his Encyclical Letter *Caritas in veritate*, Pope Benedict XVI defined migration as “*a social phenomenon of epoch-making proportions that requires bold, forward-looking policies of international cooperation if it is to be handled effectively*” (no. 62). He also affirmed that these policies require a close collaboration between the migrants’ countries of origin and their countries of destination since no country can address the problems related to the phenomenon by itself. Such collaboration is evidently also necessary between the migrants’ Church of origin and the receiving Church. This collaboration is particularly entrusted to you, chaplains and pastoral agents of migrants, with the special support of the communities of migrants present in your country.

If our migrant brothers and sisters receive adequate welcome and attention and are touched by the Good News, “*they will be able to be heralds of God’s word and witnesses to the Risen Jesus, the hope of the world*” (*Verbum Domini* 105).