



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office



Welcoming Christ in Refugees and Forcibly Displaced Persons: Pastoral Guidelines 7 June 2013 Media Release

On June 6, 2013, the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People together with “*Cor Unum*” published the Document; “Welcoming Christ in Refugees and Forcibly Displaced Persons: Pastoral Guidelines”.

The document sets pastoral guidelines and aims to create awareness of the context of forced migration. The document also highlights the weaknesses and ambiguities of the strategies that the international community and national States have developed to prevent and oppose the phenomenon.

“In regards to refugees and asylum seekers, the document emphatically asserts that *the first point of reference should not be the interests of the State or national security, but the human person*» [n. 58] ” said Fr Pettenà National Director of ACMRO and Consulter of the Pontifical Council.

“The document is particularly timely in an election year where both major parties appear intent on dehumanising asylum seekers for political gain” he said.

The most vulnerable are not simply those who are in a needy situation to whom we kindly offer an act of solidarity, but they are members of our family with whom we have a duty to share the resources we have [n. 10].

“The document also outlines the duty to offer hospitality and welcome especially in societies hostile to them,” said Fr Pettenà “the ecclesial community is called to become a sign of contradiction and promote altruism or even heroic acts when offering hospitality [n. 84]”.

“The document encourages receiving communities to form an authentic culture of welcome, where hospitality is seen not so much as a task, but as a way of living and sharing [n. 82]”.

“We do recognise that there are different attitudes in our community towards welcoming refugees and asylum seekers” said Fr Pettenà “the document, reminds Christian communities that to remain authentic and credible, Christians must look to Jesus Christ as their constant point of reference.”

Blessed John Paul II, reminds us that the words of Jesus “*I was a stranger and you welcomed me*” (MT 25:35-37) are “not a simple invitation to charity, this is a page of Christology which sheds a ray of light on the mystery of Christ (NMI, 49) [n. 84]”.

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