



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office



Look Upon Asylum Seekers with Compassion and Mercy Christmas 2013

In the spirit of Christmas, the Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office encourages the Australian people to look upon asylum seekers with compassion and mercy.

“Whilst policy is becoming more restrictive and punitive, we ought not lose sight of the fact that on the boats there are people” said Bishop Gerard Hanna, Australian Catholic Bishops Delegate for Migrants and Refugees.

“When people turn up unexpectedly, or when people are despised, we honour their humanity; for they are human persons made in the image of God” said Bishop Hanna.

“At Christmas, our eyes and our hearts gaze upon Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus. The Gospel story tells us that they sought refuge in a manger because there was no room for them at the inn (Lk 2:8)” he said.

“Many asylum seekers now live in our community without work rights and receive merely 89 per cent of any relevant government benefits forcing them to live below the poverty line. They live precariously with no possibility to be reunited with their family and are prevented from making an application for any permanent visa or to undertake refugee status determination” said Fr Maurizio Pettenà, Director of ACMRO.

“This year over 6000 asylum seekers will spend Christmas in immigration detention facilities” said Fr Pettenà “It is part of the mission of Christ’s faithful to ensure no one is excluded from the community (cf. EG 59).”

“The early childhood of Jesus was marked by the experience of exile caused by the tyranny of those who were seeking to kill Him. The Holy Family must seek refuge in a foreign land” said Fr Pettenà.

At Christmas we are reminded that *the almighty and most merciful God decreed that His only Son, “being made like unto men and appearing in the form of a man,” should, together with His Immaculate Virgin Mother and His holy guardian Joseph, be in this type too of hardship and grief, the firstborn among many brethren, and precede them in it (EF Introduction).*

As we continue to debate how to respond to asylum seekers who turn up at our shores, Christians should not forget that when hatred and systematic, even violent, exclusion of ethnic or religious minorities from society cause civil, political, ethnic conflicts, the flood of refugees overflow (cf. EMCC 1).

It would, therefore, be necessary to guarantee adequate protection for those who flee from violence and social disorder, even when these are caused by non-State agents, and grant them “subsidiary protection status” (WCRFDP 57).

Hence, in responding to asylum seekers and refugees, *“the first point of reference should not be the interests of the State or national security but the human person”. This implies full respect for human rights as well as safeguarding the “need to live in community, a basic requirement of the very nature of human beings” (WCRFDP 58).*

For media enquiries, please contact Joe Moloney (02) 6201 9848

Sources: EG Evangelii Gaudium; EF Exsul Familia; EMCC Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi; WCRFDP Welcoming Christ in Refugees and Forcibly Displaced People.