

PASTORAL CARE FOR MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES: MODELS

PRE-NOTE:

Last evening's presentation by Isaiah Lahai of his refugee experience as he and his family fled from the civil war in Sierra Leone was both heart-breaking and inspiring.

The response to the plight of refugees by the Australian Bishops' Commission on Migration was for me impressive, edifying, and effective. Undoubtedly, it is a pastoral model for the care of refugees.

Introduction

For this presentation on Pastoral Models for the Care of Migrants and Refugees, I would like to use a process of reflection which the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) uses. It is called the Pastoral Spiral (Cycle) and is another version of the "See-Judge-Act" process.

This is the Pastoral Spiral:

Situation Analysis -----> Faith-Reflection -----> Pastoral Recommendations or Decisions ----->
Planning and Implementation -----> Evaluation

However this presentation will end with Pastoral Recommendations.

I shall treat mostly of "Filipino Overseas Workers" (OFW)

A. The Situation of Migrants

1. OFW Phenomenon

About 5,000 Filipinos leave the Philippines everyday to migrate overseas, either permanently or as temporary migrants.

In 2016 there were 2.2 million OFWs scattered over the globe.

More than half (53%) are in the Middle East, of whom 60,000 are women and 53,300 are men. Saudi Arabia has the most number of OFW's numbering 23,800.

The Philippines is the world's main supplier of seafarers, with 460,000 in 2013. Some 280,000 graduate every years from maritime schools. They serve as officers, engineers, chefs, servers or waiters,

About 19,815 nurses were deployed abroad in 2014. Health workers also include midwives, nurses' aids, and other hospital workers.

Most OFW's are workers under contract or "contract workers." They work for a certain number of years as per contract, return home and re-apply for work abroad.

About 34.4% are skilled workers: administrators, supervisors, engineers, workers in the health profession, teachers, etc. The remaining are in unskilled work such as domestic helpers.

2. Lights

In 2016, the 2.2 million OFW's sent cash remittances to the Philippines amounting to U.S. \$26.9 billion or 9.8 % of Gross Domestic Products. For this reason they are regarded as "heroes."

The economic benefits for their families are far beyond local workers. OFW's provide funds for the education of members of their families, for better homes, better health coverage. In one village in my former Archdiocese of Nueva Segovia, almost family has a member working in Italy. The village itself looks like a European village, with many houses built to withstand snowfall!

3. Shadows

But the situation of dysfunctional families because of prolonged work abroad, despite economic advantages, has to be confronted. The growth and development of children is seriously disadvantaged with the absence of a mother or a father. Broken families often result.

Moreover, because of the prolonged absence of a husband or a wife, "double families" result as loneliness occurs.

The fact that so many skilled workers go abroad is itself a brain drain, particularly in the health services. Rural areas in the Philippines need the services of nurses and trained midwives.

Observers of the plight of OFW's in several countries in Asia and the Middle East have documented the woeful plight of migrant workers in several countries in Asia and the Middle East. This sad plight consists of:

- **Long hours of work,**
- **less than human living conditions,**
- **poor working conditions,**
- **withholding passports so as to prevent OFW's from leaving,**
- **sexual abuse,**
- **physical maltreatment that sometimes result in severe injuries and even death,**

- conversions to another faith for better economic compensation,
- salaries that are much lower than what the contracts stipulate,
- salaries that are lower than that of citizens for the same job,
- collusion between recruiting agencies and places of employment in not implementing salaries promised or contracted,
- discrimination,
- lack of respect for culture.

1,450 OFW's are in prison in Middle East countries. 528 in China mostly for drug trafficking, 1,212 in other Asian countries for the same reason.

The situation of OFW's is sometimes made worse by the lack of concern of government offices whose responsibility it is to be alert regarding abuses against OFW's, provide protection for those threatened, abused, maltreated, or terminated from work at the whim of employers.

On the other hand, among receiving countries, there is a certain fear over refugees, a sense of insecurity and a tendency, if not a reality, to reject migrants. Some reasons are the fear that terrorists might enter in the guise of migrant workers and the fear that migrant workers might take away jobs from citizens. Racial profiling and discrimination result from such xenophobia.

B. Faith-Reflection on the Situation of OFW's

The Social Teachings of the Church are the fruit of a dynamic interplay between changing realities, Sacred Scriptures and the perennial doctrinal and moral teachings of the Church. They are principles of discernment, norms of judgement and directives for action.

Scriptures are clear about the treatment of “strangers” in other lands.

Ex. 23:9 “You shall not oppress an alien; you well know how it feels to be an alien, since you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt.

Lev. 19:33-34 “When an alien resides with you in your land, do not molest him. You shall treat the alien who resides with you no differently than the natives born among you; have the same love for him as for yourself; for you too were once aliens in the land of Egypt.”

Mt. 25: 35 “ for...I was a stranger and you welcomed me.”

In the light of Sacred Scriptures and of the reality in which migrant workers live, the Social Teachings of the Church declare:

- **That immigrant workers are a “resource to development and not an obstacle,” especially when the local work force is not sufficient (CSDC, no. 297).**
- **That institutions in host countries must carefully watch against exploitation of foreign workers, and**
- **That they should be received as persons, their the human dignity and rights guaranteed (*Ibid*, no. 298).**

To prevent the negative side of the OFW situation, the following principles in the Social Teachings of the Church are governing principles:

- **the dignity and fundamental rights of the human person,**
- **the right to life,**

- the right to work abroad and earn a livelihood,
- the right to decent living and working conditions and compensation,
- freedom of religion and worship,
- freedom from abuse and oppression,
- the principle of solidarity,
- the common good

C. Pastoral Recommendation - a Pastoral Model

Observable good practices for the care of OFW's by the government are:

- establishment for the welfare programs for migrant workers and their families
- worker preparation and empowerment through information programs and training before they depart
- Pre-Departure Orientation Seminars (PDOS)
- Supplemented by Pre-Employment Orientation Seminars (PEOS)
- In some destination countries, Post-Arrival Orientation Seminars (PAOS)
- Comprehensive Pre-Departure Program for Household Service Workers
- Providing standard employment contracts
- Forging bilateral agreements with destination countries

On the part of the Church:

- Chaplaincy Service for OFW's: between 500 to 700 chaplains from dioceses and religious congregations, part-time and full time (some under contract with the receiving countries as in Jordan);
- 60 chaplains in Japan gather annually for on-going formation.

- **Collaboration with migrant-oriented NGO's**
- **Transnational links of the Church with dioceses in receiving countries;**

Recommendations:

- **welcoming attitude by receiving dioceses;**
- **special support for children of OFW's**
- **collaboration with other stakeholders**

OFW's in crisis situations – a pastoral model:

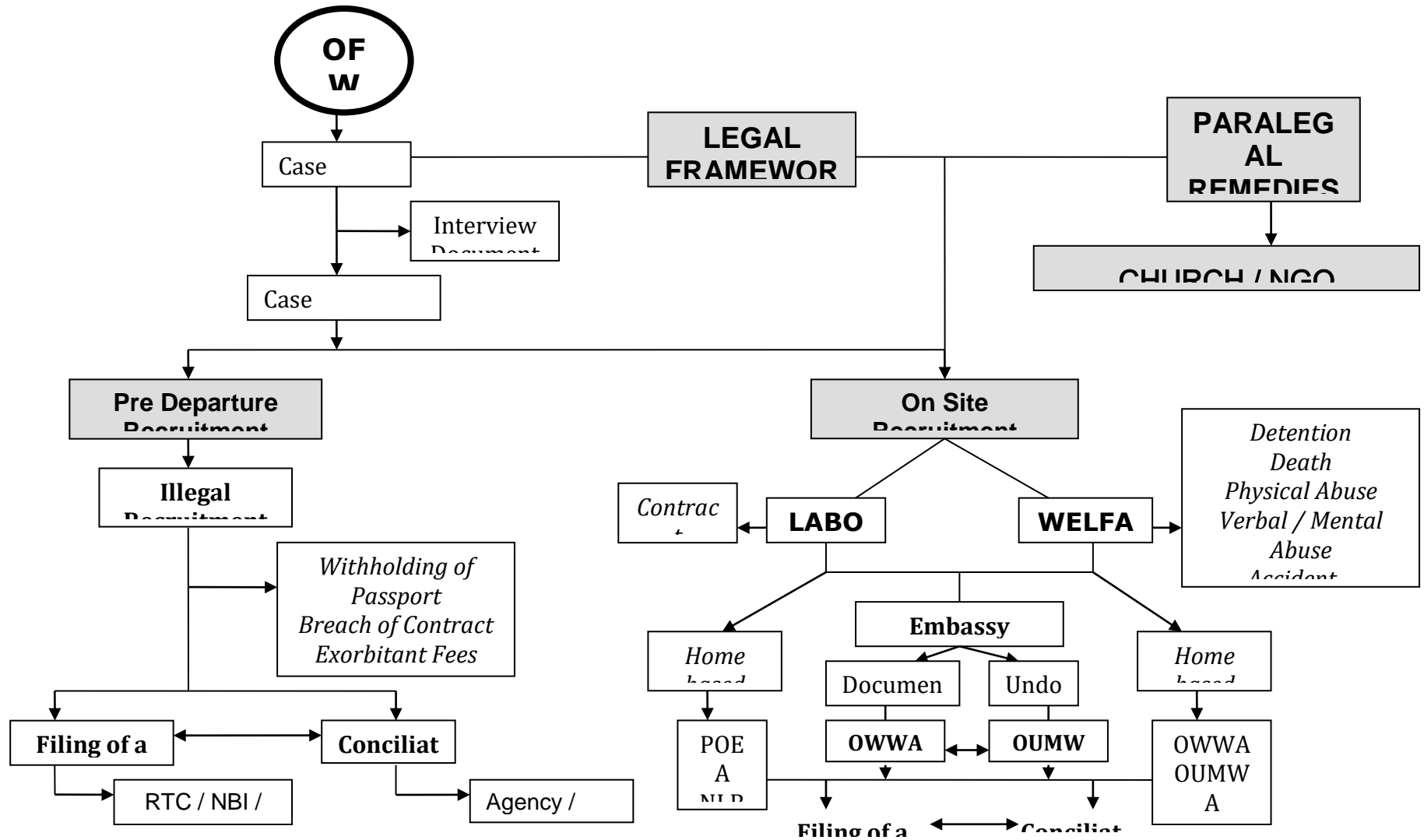
In the light of the OFW situation as reflected upon through the optic of Sacred Scriptures and the Social Teachings of the Church, the following can serve as a pastoral model for the care of OFW's in crisis situations:

This model consists of the structural framework of the CBCP (Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines) Episcopal Commission for Migrants and Itinerant Workers in order to respond to the needs of OFW's in Crisis Situation.

The Formation Program is directed to the on-going formation of Chaplains and others caring for migrants.

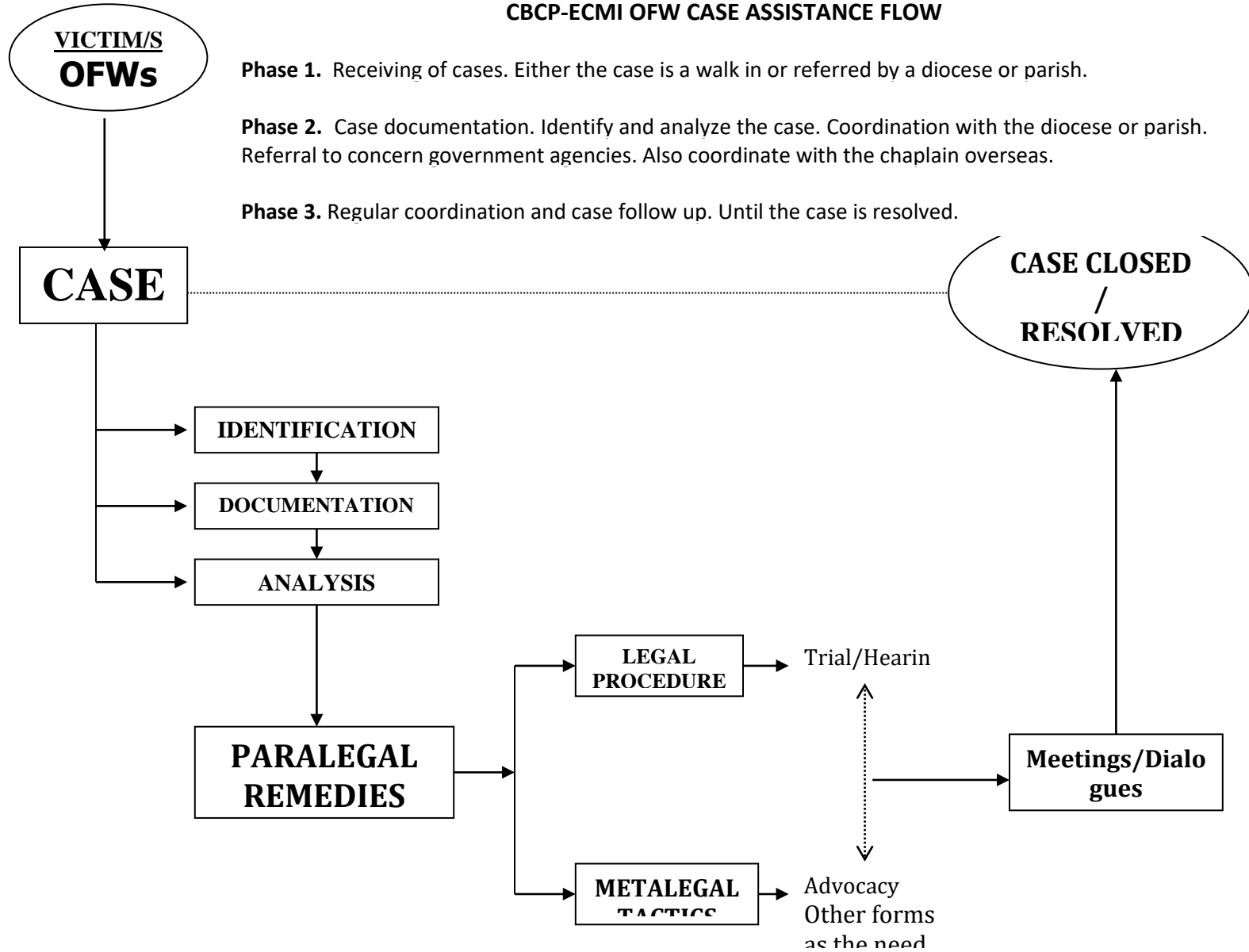
1. Framework of Collaboration in Crisis Situations.

ECMI OFW CASE FLOW CHART

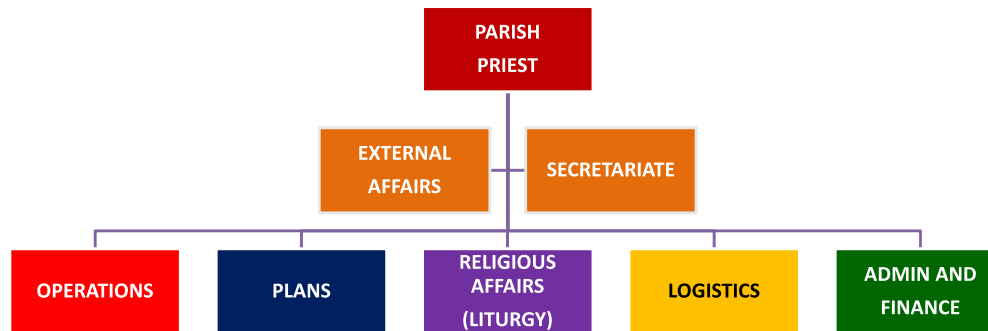


CBCP-ECMI OFW CASE ASSISTANCE FLOW

2.



CRISIS MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE



3. Formation Program for Chaplains and others caring for Migrants

EXODUS: CBCP-ECMI FORMATION PROGRAM FOR THE PASTORAL CARE OF MIGRANTS AND ITINERANT PEOPLE

The Program -

After almost four decades of Filipino labor export, the psycho-social costs that come with migration remain the most sensitive issue that confronts the overseas Filipinos and their families. Institutions, such as family, school and the church in the country have varied perception and understanding of migration. Many Filipinos are not familiar with its complex reality, hence intervention for their problems is given less importance.

In receiving countries of migrants the local churches have responded to their needs to the best of their abilities. Initially, such response generally was to provide religious services in the language of migrants mostly through the missionaries already present in the Church. They then organized other forms of assistance for their various needs. Over time Churches have deepened the awareness that the care of migrants characterizes the way of being Church today. In his message for the 2001 World Day of Migration, His Holiness John Paul II expressed it well by calling the pastoral care of migrants *“a way to accomplish the mission of the Church today.”* In his message for the 2003 World Day of Migrants and refugees, the Holy Father reminded us that this mission is a “basic expression of evangelical love,” which has been manifested by the Church’s *“ecclesial heritage of practical service to immigrants and displaced people.”*

In various forums, laypersons, religious and priests working with migrants and migrants’ issues have expressed the need to know more about the various dimensions of the migratory phenomenon,

the teaching of the Church on migration, and how to assess Church programs and personal experiences in the care of migrants.

To respond to this request, the CBCP's Episcopal Commission on the Pastoral Care of Migrant and Itinerant People has been offering the *"Exodus: A formation seminar on migrant ministry"*. This program aims to facilitate dialogue among missionaries involved in the same activity in various countries, and in the process, provide an opportunity to deepen their understanding of the care of migrants and of being Church.

Resource persons are drawn from the academe, the Church, and the NGO community to provide contextual information on the complexities of the phenomenon. However, the program will be participatory. Therefore, participants are expected to share their experiences and these will be an important basis for discussing programs and directions in the pastoral care of migrants.

Place and Time

In previous years the Exodus seminar was held for a week once a year in a suggested place in the Philippines. As some of the previous participants originated from overseas, the same program was requested to be brought to Australia, Japan, Korea and Malaysia. The program is normally timed according to the availability of the busy schedule of many migrant pastoral workers. Albeit in its abbreviated version now, the seminar will still continue to provide the very basic modules in understanding and appreciating migration and the ministry.

Contents and Scope

The program is divided into six important modules:

- **Understanding international migration**
- **Migration and the Bible**
- **The Catholic teachings on migration**
- **The response of the Philippine Church**
- **The care for other migrants**
- **Networking and planning future programs on the care of migrants**

Liturgy

Each day a liturgy is organized on migration themes, using relevant passages in the Scripture, and prepared by the participants based on their experiences. Participants are divided into groups who will then animate the daily prayers and liturgy.

Invitation to participate

The ECMI is seeking participants who are actively engaged in the care of Filipino migrants overseas or to their families left behind in the Philippines who intend to deepen their commitment to their

work. Lay leaders, religious missionaries and the clergy preparing to work with migrants are expected to benefit from this seminar. Participants from other continents involved with Filipino migrants are also welcome.

Interested applicants must confirm their participation by submitting the completed registration form (enclosed) on or before March 30, 2017 to the following address:

CBCP-ECMI

CBCP Bldg., 470 Gen. Luna Street, Intramuros, 1002 Manila

☎(632) 527-4142 & 527-4135

☎(632) 527 9568

☎ ecmi.cbc@gmail.com

Note: The following papers were useful in preparing my presentation --

- 1. Michael A. Blum, S.V.D., "Migration in the Social Doctrine of the Church," in People on the Move, nos. 88-89, April-December 2002, Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care for Migrants and Itinerant People.**
- 2. Sandie Cornish, "Catholic Social Teaching on Refugees - What are the Basic Teachings?" (<https://social-spirituality.net>)/Catholic Social Teaching.**
- 3. Graziano Battistella, "The Teaching of the Church in Asia," in Baggio F. and Patten M (eds) 2009, Caring for Migrants. Strathfield, NSW. St. Pauls Publications, pp. 1103-1108.**

4. F. Baggio, "Filipino International Migration: Pastoral Challenges and Responses," Paper presented at PACM, Cagayan de Oro, 3-4 February 2006.

5. U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Welcoming the Strangers Among Us: Unity in Diversity," Washington, D.C., 2000.

6. CBCP-ECMI papers on caring for migrants in crisis and on the *Exodus* Formation Program.

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