

# message

## OF BISHOP JOSEPH GRECH

FOR THE AUSTRALIA DAY OF MIGRANTS & REFUGEES (2010)



Diocese of Brisbane  
Chancery Office



1 June 2010

Dear Friends,

Peace and blessings to all. Once again the Church in Australia prepares to celebrate Migrant and Refugee Week. This is now the third year we prepare a kit so that all of us can find some ideas and some help during this week to pray, reflect and celebrate as a community the diversified cultural experiences which are so much part and parcel of the everyday multi-cultural richness of the Catholic Church in Australia.

"The Minor Migrants and Refugees" is the theme of Pope Benedict XVI's message on the occasion of the 96th World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2010 that, in most Dioceses in Australia, will be celebrated on the last Sunday in August 2010 (August 29 2010).

This theme is certainly not easy to reflect upon as the reality of child migrants and refugees is a delicate issue that needs much attention both at national and at international level. Migration is studied more from the point of view of adults than it is from the point of view of children and minors in general.

A child migrant and refugee is a human being and also a juridical person carrying values and rights.

To speak of children and minors implies that much consideration needs to be given to the needs of family and the plight for family reunification, the right to education and recreation, the role of parents and community, the multi-cultural project of a society, the knowledge and appreciation of their cultural backgrounds, their family roots and their religious education. Their experience of migration is often a dramatic one. The Pope's message calls the attention also on children left behind by their parents who need to emigrate to other countries; even these are victims of the pains of emigration.

There are various types, so to speak of minor migrants; the difficulties faced by these children are similar, in some respects, but also different from those encountered by adults.

Recent studies by UNICEF ("Children in Immigrant Families in Eight Affluent Countries, August 2009") analyse the presence of immigrant children in countries such as the United States of America, Australia, and six European countries. The study affirms that children born from at least one immigrant parent form a significant part of the total number of the children who live in these countries. 39 % in Switzerland; 33 % in Australia; and 26 %, in Germany, while in the United States and the Netherlands they are the 22 %. These children sum to 17 % in the United Kingdom, 16 % in France, while in Italy are just 10 %.

Some children may emigrate from countries such as Africa or Asia and Eastern Europe. The study notes that in Australia the 10 % (47,311) come from the Philippines and 14 % (62,909) from Vietnam.

Special pastoral concern needs to be given to those children who emigrate because of war, ethnic or religious conflicts and economic necessities and children who are kept in refugees' detention centres. Australia is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 37 of the Convention states that holding children in detention shall be used as a measure of last resort and only for the shortest time possible.

The Pope says: "A particular category of minors is that of refugees seeking asylum, who, for various reasons, are fleeing their own country, where they are not given adequate protection. Statistics show that their numbers are increasing. This is therefore a phenomenon that calls for careful evaluation and coordinated action by implementing appropriate measures of prevention, protection and welcome, as set forth in the Convention on the Rights of the Child" (cf. Art. 31).

Children often become the target of shameful exploitation. It is necessary to undertake and promote the welfare of all of them. Unfortunately, says Pope Benedict XVI in his message, while there is a growing awareness among the general public, there is still the need for timely and effective action to protect minors, as so many are left abandoned and find themselves at risk of exploitation.

Pastoral concern urges us to implement initiatives with the aim to educate the community on the reality of minor migrants and refugees present in our communities, in detention camps and throughout Australia.

I call on Dioceses, parishes, associations and all people of good will to reach out to these minor migrants and refugees, making sure they find open hearts and open doors within our Christian communities.

Our parishes, ethnic chaplaincies and communities are committed to be places of welcome and safe growing for our migrant children, where they can experience the joy of a healthy childhood within our society and our Church.

At the same time, on behalf of the Bishops of Australia, I sincerely thank all those who dedicate their lives in welcoming and supporting migrants and refugees in our country. Thank you, for your generous and wonderful ministry!

And thank you very much to all child migrants, refugees and children of migrants who are such a wonderful part of our communities, and who help us all grow and appreciate the exciting culture of welcoming the differences in our midst.

The Scripture is a fantastic witness of the special preference God has for the "little ones". May we all become an active part of that preference.

Yours sincerely in Christ

Most Reverend Joseph Grech  
Delegate for Migrants and Refugees  
Bishops Commission for Pastoral Life