

MESSAGE FROM BISHOP HANNA

Dear Friends,

Peace and blessings to all.

Once again the Church in Australia prepares to celebrate Migrant and Refugee Week as an expression of our multicultural richness. This is now the fourth year we have prepared a kit to help celebrate as a community, the diversified cultural experiences which are so much part and parcel of the Catholic Church in Australia. "One human family" is the theme of Pope Benedict XVI's message on the occasion of the 97th World Day of Migrants and Refugees that will be celebrated on Sunday the 28th August 2011.

The theme of one human family invites us to reflect on our sense of unity in the world. The global migration phenomenon today reflects the increasingly interconnected world we live in. Globalisation reveals many inconsistencies; open markets but not frontiers; no boundaries for information and capital, but restrictions on the circulation of people (EMCC, 4). Australia too reveals inconsistencies in our migration policy; free movement between Australia and New Zealand, essentially open borders for the highly skilled and tourists, but enforced mandatory detention on a number of asylum seekers who are left with no other option than a boat in order to find a sustainable livelihood.

We also witness global inequality in the standards of living afforded to different nations and between people within nations. This element is a significant factor contributing to the flow of both voluntary and forced migrants. However, the phenomenon of migration in promoting labour market efficiencies and increasing remittances has a large role to play in creating more equality and unity in the world. In addition, through their abilities and experiences, migrants actively contribute positively to Australia's cultural riches and economic prosperity.

Every Sunday, Mass in Australia is celebrated in over 30 languages. Recent estimates find that 29% of Church attendees in Australia are from non-English speaking backgrounds.¹ This figure is testament to the success that Australian parishes are having in welcoming migrants into their community. Perhaps the success achieved in Australia can be attributed to a strong sense of mateship which the Australian people have always extended to those in need and those seeking a new life.

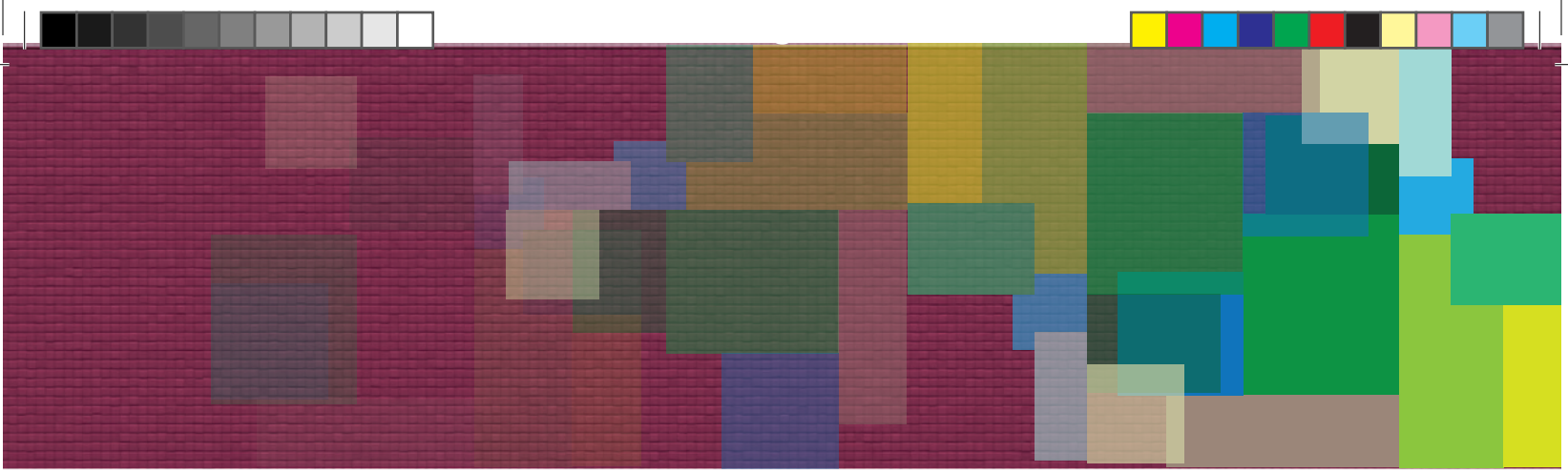
We can all be very proud of our nation and of how far it has come. From our traditional owners to the first fleet, to the multicultural society we see today. Those who have arrived first have always had to welcome others. The demographics of our Nation have changed very much and will continue to change in the future. By protecting values which uphold the dignity of human life for all, we will ensure Australia remains prosperous and peaceful for future generations who will visit and reside here. We are in the hands of God.

Our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI reminds us of the "profound link between all human beings" whereby our Father in Heaven calls on us "to recognise each other as brothers and sisters in Christ".

This is the truth behind migration; when we welcome migrants, we welcome our brothers and sisters; when we lock up asylum seekers, we lock up our brothers and sisters; when we exclude foreigners, we tell our brothers and



¹ Reid, Stephen, Dixon, R. & Connolly, N. (2010). See, I am doing a new thing! A report on the 2009 survey of Catholic Religious Institutes in Australia. Mulgrave: John Garratt Publishing.



sisters we would rather they live out their lives in misery, than live among us. Would we respond to our own family members the same way if they were in the same precarious situation?

We cannot look upon the tragic circumstances which befall other members of the human race feeling sorrow and despair without doing anything. ... We are all witnesses of the burden of suffering, the dislocation and the aspirations that accompany the flow of migrants" (CV, 5). To be part of one human family will sometimes require us to walk beside those who suffer and share our land and our wealth. As children of God we are called to ease the suffering of our brothers and sisters.

"Solidarity means taking responsibility for those in trouble. For Christians, the migrant is not merely an individual to be respected in accordance with the norms established by law, but a person whose presence challenges them and whose needs become an obligation for their responsibility. "What have you done to your brother?" (cf. Gn 4:9). The answer should not be limited to what is imposed by law, but should be made in the manner of solidarity."²

Much media attention is given to irregular maritime arrivals; the question we have to ask is why asylum seekers have become such a disruptive issue for Australians? Indeed, all this attention is on a very small number of people, but blown out of proportion due to common misconceptions and because they present a valuable arena for political parties to gain or lose votes.

Often these asylum seekers seem to have become the "ready to use" scapegoat to proclaim a sense of national security with the consequent duty to protect our borders from them. Let us reflect as a nation; where do we find our sense of national identity? Is it to be found in the protection of borders and at what cost? Or is it to be found by actively promoting justice and truth for those who cross our seas in search of refuge?

The United Nations report that where a person is born is the single most significant determinant of human development outcomes.³ Yet we do not choose where we are born. We can thank God for the privilege to live in Australia. It is a blessing given by God that is not granted at the exclusion of all others, but rather one which can be used for the benefit of all.

By God's grace our nation has been blessed by the numerous people who have made Australia home. As we look at one another, we know that behind each one, there is a journey. A journey always begins with hope: of a better life, of a new land, of new possibilities, of new relationships. We Disciples of Christ have the mission to keep this hope alive in the heart of all those who seek new heavens and new earth (Rev 21:1). This migrant and refugee week is a celebration of a journey of people from the most varied and diverse countries, cultures, and life experiences, living in solidarity as one human family.

Yours sincerely in Christ

Most Rev Gerard Hanna DD
Delegate for Migrants and Refugees
Bishops Commission for Pastoral Life

² UNDOCUMENTED MIGRANTS Message of Pope John Paul II for World Migration Day, 1996 (2010).

³ United Nations Development Programme Human Development Report 2009.