



MESSAGE FROM BISHOP VINCENT LONG

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The Holy Father, Pope Francis, in his message for the 101st World Day of Migrants and Refugees, 2015, has chosen the theme “Church without frontiers, Mother to all”. It is part of our Christian mandate from Jesus Christ to care for others and in particular the most vulnerable (c.f. Mt 7:12 and 25:35-36). The Holy Father, wishing to draw attention to and remind us of this, has chosen this theme. He wishes us to go beyond ourselves, to live an authentic Christian life, and show compassion and solidarity to those at the furthest fringes of society. In particular, Pope Francis has identified migrants and refugees to be in need of our special attention and care, as they are our brothers and sisters “*who are trying to escape difficult living conditions and dangers of every kind.*” (Message, 2015).

The Holy Father mentions that, “*from the beginning, the Church has been a mother with a heart open to the whole world, and has been without borders.*” (Message, 2015). We need to continue this tradition and welcome our brothers and sisters who are in most need of our assistance, in particular, those who have come from distant lands seeking a better life. Whilst the plight of refugees is often present and visible on our television screens, let us not forget the difficulties faced by the many migrants who have come to call Australia home. Often their hardships are not evident, but nonetheless still present.

In this message, I would like to draw your attention to the on-going conflict in the Middle East and the issues closer to home faced by asylum seekers, as well as the often-unseen difficulties faced by migrants in our communities.

Over the past year, we have seen on our television screens, our Christian brothers and sisters in the Middle East continue to suffer the ruthless barbarity of extremism under ISIS. Many men, women and children are being forced to flee from their homes for fear of their lives. We have constantly seen the atrocities at the hand of ISIS, which can often lead us to question human solidarity (care for our neighbour), and not to mention sometimes our faith. How can it be, that fellow human beings can inflict such acts of torture and barbarity on one another? It is precisely now that the message of the Gospels needs to be proclaimed from all corners of the world and in every state of life. The Holy Father, quoting the Message for 100th World Day of Migrants 2014, says, “*this is precisely where the Church contributes to overcoming frontiers and encouraging the ‘moving away from attitudes of defensiveness and fear, indifference and marginalisation...towards attitudes based on a culture of encounter, the only culture capable of building a better, more just and fraternal world’.*” (Pope Francis, Message 2014).

As a result of on-going conflicts in the Middle East, UNHCR estimates that there are now over 2 million refugees in the region, as well as over 7 million internally displaced persons. (*Population of Concern to UNHCR, UNHCR Global Appeal Update 2015*). An increase in conflict in this region will inevitably result in an increase of our brothers and sisters seeking safety and asylum. This is a time to heed the Holy Father’s words and once again show Christian solidarity to those in need. Where migrants

and refugees are concerned, the Church and her various agencies ought to avoid offering charitable services alone; they are also called to promote real integration in a society where all are active members and responsible for one another's welfare, generously offering a creative contribution and rightfully sharing in the same rights and duties. (Pope Benedict, Message 2013).

Pope Francis says, *"the courage born of faith, hope and love, enables us to reduce the distances that separate us from human misery. Jesus Christ is always waiting to be recognised in migrants and refugees, in displaced persons and in exiles, and through them he calls us to share our resources, and occasionally to give up something of our acquired riches."* (Pope Francis, Message, 2015).

This is an important opportunity for solidarity and to welcome these persecuted peoples into our own home, Australia. As a refugee myself, along with several members of my family, seeking shelter and security, Australia has always been generous. It is now again the time to show the same kind of generosity that was shown to the Vietnamese refugees 40 years ago, to our Middle Eastern brethren as well as those in our Asia-Pacific Region seeking asylum from separate, but no less important, conflicts.

Fear of the unknown, a true and real fear, can often unnecessarily guide our decision-making. It is time to turn to our Christian roots, with ever more trust in God, and move beyond fear towards charity and express solidarity with those who suffer. The Holy Father, ever attentive to the failings of the human nature notes that, *"Often, however, such migration gives rise to suspicion and hostility, even in ecclesial communities, prior to any knowledge of the migrants' lives or their stories of persecution and destitution. In such cases, suspicion and prejudice conflict with the biblical commandment of welcoming with respect and solidarity the stranger in need."* (Message, 2015).

Closer to home, migrants too in our local and parish communities can sometimes be looked upon with suspicion. Migrants in our communities often go through challenges and difficulties that are unseen, but are no less real and difficult. Simple things, which many of us either growing up or living in Australia for a long time, often forget or simply don't notice, can be a challenge for new migrants. Things such as language, culture or customs can bring about hardship and anxiety. It is precisely here, in these everyday situations, that Christ is calling us to move beyond ourselves, and express solidarity to our fellow brothers and sisters. To lend a helping hand, just saying hello or even just a simple smile. This is the beginning of 'encounter'. From here we can move together in solidarity. Many of us may never change the world, but let us not forget that we can change the world around us.

I understand that often this is not such an easy thing to express. How often, due to the weakness in our nature, can we *"be tempted to be that kind of Christian who keeps the Lord's wounds at arm's length"* (Evangelii Gaudium, 270). The call to be a catholic, a radical and counter cultural call, at its deepest core, urges us not to stand on the sides but to become involved in bringing about a more just society. So I would call upon parishes, and most importantly, individuals to look at the little opportunities in our own lives where Christ is calling us to express charity and solidarity to migrants and refugees.

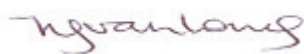
Included in this Kit is the life of the Blessed Bishop John Baptist Scalabrini, whom Pope St John Paul II defined as the *"Father of Migrants and Refugees"* and offered to the veneration and intercession of the entire Church. Blessed Scalabrini dedicated

his life in the service of migrants from Europe to the Americas. He identified the unique pastoral care necessary for these communities, the difficulties and realities faced, as well as the pastoral sensitivities required when providing assistance. I would encourage all reading this Kit, but in particular my brother Bishops and fellow Priests, Religious Sisters and Brothers and all who offer pastoral care to migrants and refugees to read his life and encourage his devotion and pray through his intercession in their Dioceses and Parishes, in particular during Migrant and Refugee Sunday. Through the intercession of Blessed Scalabrini, I would hope that we may achieve a fruitful pastoral service of communion.

2015 also marks the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office (ACMRO), in its present form. To commemorate this milestone and as a pastoral tool, we have included an article on 20 years of teaching on migrant and refugee issues. The timeline looks at migration policy in Australia in conjunction with the response of the Universal Catholic Church and the Catholic Church in Australia. I hope that this timeline graphic can be used as a tool to reinforce the work, advocacy and pastoral care that the Church has strived to provide on a national and international level. The timeline has been included as a central page in the middle of the Kit for it to be detached and placed in the church foyer; an electronic copy will also be available on the ACMRO website.

To conclude, I would like to encourage all Dioceses and Parishes to celebrate and commemorate the unique contribution that migrants and refugees have and continue to provide to our communities. “The Church sees this entire world of suffering and violence through the eyes of Jesus, who was moved with pity at the sight of the crowds wandering as sheep without a shepherd (cf. Mt 9:36). Hope, courage, love and “‘creativity’ in charity” (Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, n. 50) must inspire the necessary human and Christian efforts made to help these brothers and sisters in their suffering” (Pope Benedict, Message 2005). The phenomenon of migration today is a providential opportunity for offering more opportunities to broaden our understanding and vision of the world as well as moving forward together in solidarity towards a better and more just world.

God Bless



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