



Bishop Vincent Long Van Nguyen OFMConv DD
Bishop of Parramatta, Bishop Delegate For Migrants & Refugees

Message From Bishop Vincent Long Van Nguyen OFMConv DD

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Once again, Pope Francis has proved to be the pope of surprises. On his way back to the Vatican from the Greek island of Lesbos recently, he brought with him 12 Syrian refugees, all of whom are Muslim and had their homes destroyed by war. By doing so, he wanted to make a symbolic gesture of welcome to the refugees and encouraged Christians and indeed all people of good will to do the same. Earlier, he had made a joint statement with Patriarch Bartholomew, pledging to work for peace and to promote a humane resolution to the humanitarian crisis in Europe.

This is the international context for this year's Migrant and Refugee Sunday which will be celebrated on August 28th in Australia. Although we are far removed from the crisis, we are challenged to open our hearts to the sufferings of others. Compassion –which literally means to suffer with- is the hallmark of Christianity. In keeping with the Jubilee Year of Mercy, the Holy Father has chosen as its theme: *'Migrants and Refugees challenge us: The Response of the Gospel of Mercy'*.

The Pope acknowledges that often refugees and people who flee their homes in search of a safe and better future challenge individuals and communities, and their traditional ways of life; at times they even upset the cultural and social horizons which they encounter. This has been evident during the Syrian refugee crisis. Many European countries closed their borders because of the overwhelming humanitarian crisis at their doorsteps as well as the potential conflict that the influx of refugees might pose to their societies. Against such a backdrop of fear, Pope Francis encourages us to see refugees and migrants not as a threat but as our brothers and sisters in the human family. Affirming our Christian duty of care for them in the face of rising intolerance, the Pope writes *"Today, more than in the past, the Gospel*

of mercy troubles our consciences, prevents us from taking the suffering of others for granted, and points out way of responding which, grounded in the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity, find practical expression in works of spiritual and corporal mercy".

As Christians, our attitude towards those in need is formed by our own experience of God's love and mercy. We can show them the love and mercy of God precisely because we ourselves are the recipients of the same love and mercy. Our encounter and acceptance of others are intertwined with the encounter and acceptance of God himself. Welcoming others means welcoming God in person! Pope Francis admonishes us: *"Do not let yourselves be robbed of the hope and joy of life born of your experience of God's mercy, as manifested in the people you meet on your journey."*

Friends, we stand united with one another, with men and women of good will in working for the coming of the Kingdom. We stand united with Pope Francis who has given us a strong leadership on the care of asylum seekers and refugees. His words and gestures at Lesbos inspire us to speak and act in favour of God's poor for whose cause we will be judged. *"As you did it to the least of these, you did it unto me"* (Matthew 25:40). These words of Jesus teach us to see the face of the Incarnate God in our asylum seeking brothers and sisters. It is our duty, as Pope Francis says, to replace indifference with compassion, ignorance with respect and suspicion with love.

With many newly arrived migrants and refugees in our midst, I encourage you to enact the culture of encounter, welcome and acceptance in practical, personal and communal ways. Many parishes and organisations are actively assisting the 12,000 additional refugees from Syria and Iraq. It is a great opportunity for us to make a difference and to influence government policies in relation to refugees and

asylum seekers.

As Christians, we cannot remain content with the status quo, especially when that status quo is less than what God wants for us as individuals and as a community. Australia is a wonderful country but where it is in terms of its treatment of asylum seekers should galvanise us into action. We cannot be his disciples if we ignore the plight of the marginalised and the vulnerable. We cannot be salt and leaven if we allow our Christian conscience to be desensitized by the inequality, injustice and inhumanity in our society and in the world.

With the men and women of goodwill, let us build a better Australia and a better world. May our endeavour to replace the culture of fear and indifference with that of encounter and acceptance be brought to fulfilment in accordance with God's vision of the fullness of life for all humanity.

In this kit you will find various resources to assist parishes, schools and individuals to prepare for Migrant and Refugee Sunday.

Following on from last year's article on Blessed John Baptist Scalabrini, who was declared by Pope St John Paul II as universal father to migrants and refugees, this year we have included an article about St Frances Xavier Cabrini, universal patron to immigrants. In the lead up to the centenary of her death in January 2017, we have taken this opportunity to present a synopsis of her life and her influence to immigrants travelling to the United States of America. In fact much of her influence is still present with schools and streets named after her in New York City.

I would like to encourage all communities and schools to adopt both Blessed John Baptist Scalabrini and St Frances Xavier Cabrini as patron saints to intercede for us whenever we gather as communities to pray for and with migrants and refugees.

Also included are reflections on the Psalms of Mercy by priests, religious and lay people working in the field of pastoral care for migrants and refugees. These are for use in the week prior to Migrant and Refugee Sunday in schools and parishes, for private or communal prayer and reflection.

You will also find an interview with Archbishop Nona, Chaldean Bishop of St Thomas in Australia. Archbishop Nona, before being appointed to Australia, was the last Archbishop of Mosul in Iraq. Here he tells us of the situation in Iraq as well as how this is the first time in two thousand years that there are no Christians on the Nineveh Plains

in Iraq, a truly sad and poignant moment in the history of Christianity.

To assist with Mass on Migrant and Refugee Sunday, a set of prayers of the faithful have been provided as well as a reflection on the readings for Migrant and Refugee Sunday by Fr Gabriele Bentoglio, Under-Secretary of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People.

I hope that the contents of this Kit will provide a source of reflection within our communities for this upcoming Migrant and Refugee Sunday 2016.

Bishop Vincent Long OFMConv
Bishops' Delegate for Migrants and Refugees