



PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE PASTORAL CARE OF MIGRANTS AND ITINERANT PEOPLE

**ADDRESS TO THE BISHOPS OF AUSTRALIA**

(May 11, 2011)

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*President*

Your Eminence,  
Your Excellencies,

It is an honor and a privilege for me to address this distinguished assembly to share the Church's concerns regarding the phenomenon of human mobility, so that we may move forward in our work together in response to the challenges that every form of migration offers to present society, specifically here in Australia.

When my predecessor, Cardinal Stephen Fumio Hamao, came in November 2005 to address the "Australian Conference for Pastoral Agents of Migrants and Itinerant People", a Filipina who moved to this country at a very young age shared her migration story. As she described her experiences and her perceptions, she made a very telling comment: "But when do we stop being migrants?" After years of a seemingly well-integrated life in Australia she felt she had not stopped being a migrant. She continued feeling, or perhaps being treated, like a migrant.

This story indeed makes us reflect and leads us to realize that migration is not an easy option. Even the most voluntary human mobility implies a certain degree of uprooting: a person leaves his usual environment and enters a new one, where people may speak a different language, and do things differently, where customs, traditions, culture, mentality, even food are unfamiliar, where the newcomer is considered, under the best hypothesis, different...

This experience is certainly not unique, and considering that it comes from a successful migration story, we can only imagine what it could be for those who are forced to chance the journey in boats, fleeing from violence, war, violation of human rights or persecution. They risk their lives, only to end up in detention camps maybe on Christmas Island or, perhaps on the peripheries of Darwin.

I believe one cannot overstate the physical, emotional, psychological and moral pains and suffering that accompany departure from one's native land, especially if displacement or flight becomes the only available option.

**AUSTRALIA, A LAND OF MIGRANTS**

The website of the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade proudly presents Australia as a land of immigrants. It states: "There are more than 21 million people resident in Australia. They come from a wide range of backgrounds: Indigenous peoples who have inhabited Australia for up to 60,000 years, descendants of the British who set up colonies on the Australian continent in the 1700s, Europeans and others who migrated to Australia as the colonies grew, formed a federation in 1901 and the new nation evolved, and more recent immigrants from

Asia, Africa and the Middle East.” It also affirms that “Australia’s immigration policy is global and does not discriminate on racial, cultural or religious grounds. Each year, Australia welcomes more than 120,000 migrants and resettles around 13,000 people under its humanitarian program.”

According to the latest available data from the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) Continuous Reporting System on migration (SOPEMI), published in *International Migration Outlook 2010*, permanent immigration in Australia increased in 2008 compared to 2007. The country received 502,800 long-stay or permanent migrants. Over a third of these were in reality already in Australia as international students or skilled temporary migrants. In 2009, incoming migrants were mostly those who were sponsored by employers or practitioners in the healthcare and engineering sectors. The top five migrant source countries were United Kingdom (18%), India (15%), China (13%), South Africa (9%) and the Philippines (5%). Other OECD countries provided 31.1% of arrivals. On the other hand, 224,600 persons emigrated from the country. In 2008-2009, 13,500 visas were granted under the Humanitarian Program. These were given to applicants under the offshore resettlement component (82%) and under the on-shore protection/asylum component (18%).

While some OECD countries have offered channels for undocumented foreigners to acquire residence permits, unfortunately, Australia has not followed suit. In fact, its law can be quite tough for people who are found in its territory with no regular documents. It requires the detention of all non-citizens without a valid visa. These include those who arrived without a visa and those who stayed on after their visa had expired or been cancelled. No distinction is made between the detention of adults and children.

It has even come to the point of excising some territories to prevent those who reach these areas, without authorization, to apply validly for a protection visa.

## THE CHURCH’S DOCUMENTS

What is the attitude of the Church in relation to the phenomenon of the movement of people across communities, cultures and lands? There has always been solicitude, on the part of the Catholic Church, for those who have left their homelands, or indeed who have none. The Apostolic Constitution *Exsul Familia* (1952) gives a brief review of what the Church has done in this area through the centuries. This historical review is recalled in the Pontifical Council’s Instruction *Erga migrantes caritas Christi* (EMCC)<sup>1</sup>, which also pays special attention to the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council<sup>2</sup>.

As Bishops’ Conferences, and their specific Commissions in charge of migration, were being formed and consolidated, the pastoral care for migrants was renewed and reorganized leading to the publication, in 1969, of Pope Paul VI’s *Motu Proprio Pastoralis Migratorum Cura*, and the publication of the Congregation for Bishops’ corresponding Instruction *De Pastoralis Migratorum Cura* (“Nemo est”), which implemented the teachings and directives of Vatican II in this area.

Thirty-five years later, in 2004, a new Instruction – the aforementioned *Erga migrantes caritas Christi* – was issued by our Pontifical Council, a Dicastery of the Roman Curia specifically charged with issues related to human mobility. The document “urges us to look afresh at [the migrants and refugees’] problems”<sup>3</sup> and invites all Catholics “to respond to this challenge ... [for] it is not just a matter of good will or the personal charisma of a few”<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> no. 20

<sup>2</sup> EMCC 21-23.

<sup>3</sup> EMCC 1

<sup>4</sup> EMCC 3

In his Message on the occasion of this year's "World Day of Migrants and Refugees", Pope Benedict XVI considered the right to emigrate, stating that "the Church recognizes this right in every human person, in its dual aspect of the possibility to leave one's country and the possibility to enter another country to look for better conditions of life". At the same time, however, he affirmed that "States have the right to regulate migration flows and to defend their own frontiers" provided that "the respect due to the dignity of each and every human person" is guaranteed. He also added that it is the immigrants' duty "to integrate into the host Country, respecting its laws and its national identity" and therefore, the challenge for all of us "is to combine the welcome due to every human being, especially when in need, with a reckoning of what is necessary for both the local inhabitants and the new arrivals to live a dignified and peaceful life."

## THE RESPONSE OF THE CHURCH

*Erga migrantes caritas Christi* outlines the responses that the Church offers to the challenges and risks presented by today's migration phenomenon. This response is at several levels.

Essentially, the Church wishes to be there where the migrants are, to share with them the joys and the hopes, as well as the grief and the pains of migration<sup>5</sup>. Humanitarian aid and solidarity, social action and advocacy, training and Christian formation are all part of the Church's ministry among those involved in human mobility. However, all these are but various expressions of its fundamental mission: the proclamation of the Good News that God is love and, out of love, He became man, and by His death and resurrection, He restored man's lost unity with God. In doing so, He also gave back to every person the dignity of being a child of God and confirmed every human being's worth, by the fact that humankind received such a great Redeemer<sup>6</sup>. Hence there are profound links between evangelization and human promotion.<sup>7</sup>

### a. *Welcome and solidarity*

Concretely, migrants, refugees, internally displaced persons or poor foreign students may find themselves literally in situations where they need food, clothing and shelter. Further, they may need medicine and medical care. The Church seeks to welcome them, through the proper channels, by establishing a *culture of welcome* in its communities, and being in solidarity with them<sup>8</sup>.

However, welcoming people on the move is not exhausted by "performing acts of fraternal assistance or even by supporting legislation aimed at giving them their due place in society while respecting their identity as foreigners"<sup>9</sup>. An authentic *culture of welcome* accepts "the truly human values of the immigrants over and above any difficulties caused by living together with persons who are different"<sup>10</sup>. As Christians, we are called to a truly fraternal welcome for "one another ... as Christ welcomed [us] ..., for the glory of God" (Rm 15:7)<sup>11</sup>. This sense of welcome must grow deeper in the Christian community, especially through religious instruction and catechesis<sup>12</sup>.

For the Church, an authentic *culture of welcome* does not make any distinction between migrants, refugees or other displaced people, whatever may be their nationality, color or creed. Our welcome for them "is fully based on love for Christ, in the certainty that good done out of love of God to

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<sup>5</sup> cf. Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 1.

<sup>6</sup> cf. Pope John Paul II, Encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*, nos. 9-10.

<sup>7</sup> cf. Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, nos. 29-39 and Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, no. 12.

<sup>8</sup> cf. EMCC 39-43.

<sup>9</sup> EMCC 39.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> EMCC 40.

<sup>12</sup> cf. EMCC 42.

one's neighbour, especially the most needy, is done to Him"<sup>13</sup>. Of course, pastoral care is respectful of differences and, therefore, there is necessarily a difference in the kind of religious attention given to Catholics of the Latin and the Eastern rites, to members of other Christian Churches and Ecclesial Communities, and to those who profess other religions<sup>14</sup>.

### ***b. Advocacy***

When migrant's rights are trampled on, the Church defends them, sometimes advocating on their behalf<sup>15</sup>. When human dignity is not respected and human rights are violated, the result is a moral suffering that harms the human family. As the Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms, "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights"<sup>16</sup>. Any inequality in this sense, therefore, cannot be accepted.

In this context, *Erga migrantes caritas Christi* states that migrants are "often victims of illegal recruitment and of short-term contracts providing poor working and living conditions". Often they are subjected to "physical, verbal and even sexual abuse" and are obliged to "work long hours, often without the benefits of medical care and the usual forms of social security". In some cases, they are forbidden from forming "labor unions". The local population may regard them "with suspicion and even consider them a danger and a threat", often provoking "manifestations of intolerance, xenophobia and racism"<sup>17</sup>.

Migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers are also in perennial danger of becoming "victims of the sad phenomenon of human trafficking, which no longer spares even children"<sup>18</sup>. This and other problems are linked with the increasing "feminization of migration". Women and girls are increasingly part of the phenomenon, and in many cultures, their dignity and rights are not safeguarded, if recognized at all. In this context, women migrants' rights, therefore, need to be safeguarded twice: as migrants, refugees or asylum-seekers and as women.

At this point, it is also necessary to mention the human rights of migrants in an irregular situation. In spite of their condition, they, too, are endowed with human dignity and rights. This is why the ratification or accession to the International Convention for the Protection of the Rights of All Migrants Workers and the Members of their Families is of utmost importance<sup>19</sup>, and we urge you to encourage your country's political leaders to do it.

### ***c. Preparing potential migrants and refugees***

The Church is also called to accompany potential migrants in their decision-making process and to prepare them for migrant life abroad. Naturally, the formation of a migrant starts very much before he/she decides to migrate: from the cradle at home, to his lessons at school, in catechism classes, in the parish, in the ecclesial groups, associations and movements he might choose to follow, etc. Already at this stage of the potential migrant's and the future refugee's life, the Church wishes to be present, to serve.

Then when the person starts thinking about the idea of migrating, it is important to provide them with correct information regarding the possible destination countries: their laws, and not only labor legislation, their customs, religious traditions, the existing condition regarding freedom and

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<sup>13</sup> EMCC 41.

<sup>14</sup> cf. EMCC 49-69.

<sup>15</sup> cf. EMCC 6.

<sup>16</sup> art. 1.

<sup>17</sup> EMCC 6

<sup>18</sup> EMCC 5

<sup>19</sup> cf. EMCC 6.

democracy, etc. Since employment agencies or even relatives and friends are not always dependable or objective sources of information in this regard, it is important for the Church, through its networks, to be able to furnish reliable pre-departure data.

It may be more difficult to determine who are potential refugees or asylum-seekers. However, providing information regarding potential destination countries' humanitarian laws and those governing refugee protections could be of great importance.

When a person finally decides to migrate or seek asylum, then it is necessary to encourage him/her to contact the Church and its related structures and organizations in the destination country, where it is possible to avail of pastoral care, including social and legal assistance, if necessary.

#### ***d. Dialogue***

In the world of human mobility, dialogue at many levels is a must. The intermingling of cultures, religions and customs as a consequence of human mobility could be an enrichment, but it has also caused tension in the past, which has persisted, and considerably, in some cases. Antidote to this tension is dialogue at all levels: ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue, as well as dialogue with those who do not have a religious creed, and inter-cultural dialogue. This is a process that leads to the recognition of values that are in common and an attitude of respect for differences<sup>20</sup> without losing one's own identity<sup>21</sup>.

Certainly, the most common and most direct way of doing dialogue is through the so-called "dialogue of life", with simple everyday gestures of respect, solidarity, fraternity and love, among people who belong to different Churches and Ecclesial Communities, religions and cultures. This can produce an authentic change in interpersonal relationships, which is capital.

In his Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees in 2005, Pope John Paul II affirmed the need "for a dialogue between people of different cultures in a context of pluralism that goes beyond mere tolerance and reaches sympathy" and to "encourage ... a mutual fecundation of cultures. This implies reciprocal knowledge and openness between cultures, in a context of true understanding and benevolence."<sup>22</sup>

However, he also said that "dialogue must not hide, but exalt, the gift of faith"<sup>23</sup>. A dialogue of welcome and mutual openness allows people to know each other better and discover that the various religious traditions often contain precious seeds of the Word of God (*Semina Verbi*)<sup>24</sup>. This could certainly be a way to enrich dialogue.

Thus, dialogue and evangelization are not opposed to each other. *Erga migrantes caritas Christi*, in fact, recommends a "great respect and attention for the migrants' [religious] traditions and culture" that we are called to show as Christians. At the same time we have "to bear witness to the gospel of love and peace in our dealings with them and also to proclaim the Word of God explicitly to them so that the blessing of the Lord, promised to Abraham and his descendants forever, may reach them."<sup>25</sup> "There is nothing more beautiful than to be surprised by the Gospel, by the encounter with

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<sup>20</sup> cf. EMCC 34-36; 56-59; 69.

<sup>21</sup> cf. Pope John Paul II, Message for the World Day of Peace 2001, nos. 14ff.

<sup>22</sup> no. 3; See also EMCC 9, 36.

<sup>23</sup> Pope John Paul II, Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees in 2002, no. 4.

<sup>24</sup> cf. EMCC 96.

<sup>25</sup> EMCC 100.

Christ,” Pope Benedict XVI attested, and continued, “There is nothing more beautiful than to know Him and to speak to others of our friendship with Him.”<sup>26</sup>

#### ***e. Cooperation***

Furthermore, the response of the Church obviously requires cooperation among local Churches<sup>27</sup>, a fundamental pillar of the guidelines expressed in EMCC. Thus, while it is the task of the Church in the destination country to offer pastoral care to all the faithful in its territory, it is important for migrants, refugees, asylum-seekers and other displaced people to be accompanied by priests and/or other pastoral agents who are from, have a cultural background linking them with, or have carried out missionary activities in their country or area of origin. This cultural and linguistic closeness is of great importance in helping them live and grow in the faith and as Christians, face, all the difficulties, challenges and opportunities they encounter in their life in the host country, in this case Australia. This is indeed why close collaboration between the Church of origin and the Church in the host country is necessary.<sup>28</sup>

Such collaboration will also help migrants, asylum-seekers, refugees and all displaced people little by little, to become part and parcel, of the local Church, where no one is a foreigner, and where everyone is welcome, because Jesus Christ died for each and every person without any distinction. Then the Church in the destination country will also become a model of a truly inter-cultural society, where everyone is really an integral part of it, where differences are not a reason for conflict but are truly enrichment for all. Then, universal brotherhood, where all people are members of one family, and the earth is truly a home for all, will no longer be a beautiful dream but will start becoming a reality.

### **THE RESPONSE OF THE CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA**

You know more than I do how active the Church in Australia is in responding to the challenges that immigration and asylum-seeking in this country offer. Specifically through the Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office (ACMRO), you have identified the needs of migrants and refugees and responded with concrete support and pastoral care, you protested against perceived injustice, you have spoken in solidarity with those who have not had regular documents, including those who are in detention camps, you have contributed to forming public opinion and gaining sympathy for them, you have not shied away from public debate, you have sought to influence politicians and policymakers by lobbying.

Allow me to thank you, on behalf of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People and on my own behalf, for courageously defending these people who are truly in need, and of whom Christ affirmed, “whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me” (Mt 25:40).

The appointment of Fr Maurizio Pettenà as a consultor to the Pontifical Council for the pastoral care of Migrants and Itinerant People gives the Church in Australia a further opportunity to contribute to the international dialogue on issues facing Migrants and Refugees. The appointment is a privilege and an honor for Fr Pettenà and for the Episcopal Conference of this nation. The Council looks forward to an increasing collaboration with the Australian Catholic Bishops’ Conference in this regard.

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<sup>26</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Homily during the Holy Mass for the inauguration of the Pontificate: *L’Osservatore Romano*, 25 April 2005, p. 5.

<sup>27</sup> cf. EMCC 28.

<sup>28</sup> cf. EMCC 70; Juridical Pastoral Regulations, art. 1 §3, art. 16-18.

Let me take this opportunity to mention two persons, who are no longer with us, who have played a significant role in building awareness and being responsive to the plight of migrants, refugees and all displaced people in your country. I am referring to Bishop Joe Grech, for a long time Delegate for Migrants and Refugees in your Bishops Commission for Pastoral Life, who has gone back to the Father, and Rev. John Murphy, for several terms director of ACMRO, who is now enjoying his well-earned retirement. Our Pontifical Council has been privileged to receive their active and warm collaboration. To them both we owe a debt of special gratitude.

## CONCLUSION

Allow me to conclude with the words of Pope Benedict XVI, in his Message for the last World Day of Migrants and Refugees:

“In an increasingly globalized society, the common good and the effort to obtain it cannot fail to assume the dimensions of the whole human family ...” (*Caritas in veritate*, 7). This is also the perspective with which to look at the reality of migration. In fact ... ‘the weakening of brotherly ties between individuals and nations’ (*Populorum progressio*, 66) ... has a major impact on the migration phenomenon. Human brotherhood is the, at times surprising, experience of a relationship that unites, of a profound bond with the other, different from me, based on the simple fact of being human beings. Assumed and lived responsibly, it fosters a life of communion and sharing with all and in particular with migrants....

Also in the case of those who are forced to migrate, solidarity is nourished by the "reserve" of love that is born from considering ourselves a single human family ... This means that those who are forced to leave their homes or their country will be helped to find a place where they may live in peace and safety, where they may work and take on the rights and duties that exist in the Country that welcomes them, contributing to the common good and without forgetting the religious dimension of life.

May we be instruments in the realization of this one human family, “an anticipation and a prefiguration of the undivided city of God” (*Caritas in veritate*, 7).

Thank you.