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Letter of the Cardinal Secretary of State to Cardinal Sebastiano Baggio

May the Pastoral Ministry Amongst Migrants Make Ever More Progress

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Secretary of State*

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From the beginning of Advent, Migrant's Day is celebrated in the local Churches, at successive moments of the Liturgical Year. For these celebrations, the Holy Father John Paul II, continuing the happy practice established by Paul VI, has had the following message sent to Cardinal Baggio, President of the Pontifical Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant Peoples.

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Lord Cardinal,

As his late Predecessor Paul VI was accustomed to do, Pope John Paul II is happy to give his support to the celebrations for Migrant's Day, fixed by the Episcopates at different moments of the liturgical year. And the Holy Father carries out this act also in memory of Pope John Paul I, the son of migrants and particularly sensitive to the needs of all migrants, for whom he showed his deep affection even if the shortness of his pontifical ministry did not enable him to testify to it with official acts.

The situation of all those who are obliged for a living and work outside their own country, is well known to His holiness. Throughout his episcopate, he often visited communities of emigrant Poles, very flourishing Catholic communities in spite of the frequent difficulties they meet with. Emigration abroad is now a permanent fact. Whole generations, who keep an admirable attachment to their original ethnical roots, are the evident proof of this.

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Referring to the appreciable number of interventions of the Roman Pontiffs and of the Apostolic See in this field of migration, one cannot but note the clear-sightedness of the Church, concerned to promote good understanding among peoples and groups of different original culture, in conformity with the fundamental concept of unity in plurality and plurality in unity.

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This basic principle always inspires the action of the Church in all its extent and must guide all those who are called to exercise an apostolate among emigrants: priests and laity, religious men and women. In a world moving towards its unification and which feels more and more the need to overthrow barriers of race, culture and nationality, the evangelizing action of the Church in all the realities of the phenomenon of migration, takes on ever greater value. But this aspect, which is certainly very important, contributes to highlight the deep nature of the mission of

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the Church, and to make her advance towards increasing clarity and authenticity.

The apostolate of emigrants has brought forth recently a set of valuable experiences [913] which have found expression, so to speak, in the Instruction *De pastoralis migratorum cura*, issued by the Congregation for Bishops (AAS 61, 1969, pp. 614-643) and in the recent Letter to the Episcopal Conferences "Church and human mobility", published by the Pontifical Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant Peoples (AAS 70, 1978, pp. 357-378).

This apostolate is an apostolate of the Church and of the whole Church. The [914] particular elements, which the concrete situations require, not only do not exempt any of the ecclesial communities from their duties but emphasize their common responsibility.

This year, it seems useful to stress the necessity of qualitative and quantitative [915] progress priestly ministry among emigrants.

The World Congress which was to have taken place at the beginning of the month [916] of October, if the sudden death of Pope John Paul I had not made it necessary to postpone it, had very opportunely been entrusted with the task of studying the responsibilities of Bishops and priests in the present situation of emigration.

Preceding, therefore, his joyful meeting with the future participants in the Congress, [917] which will take place in the Vatican, the Holy Father proposes already to the reflection of the People of God some very simple ideas on the subject of the Congress.

"The harvest is abundant, and the workers are few:" if the number of diocesan [918] priests and religious, dedicated to the service of emigrants, has providentially increased, it does not yet meet the pastoral needs. It is necessary to make more fertile the ground of the apostolate of migrants. The Christian communities affected by their exodus must, therefore, develop their sensitiveness with regard to those who have had to depart. It is important that the Christian communities in the host country should look for missionaries and open wide their arms to them. The conviction must become deeper in everyone that emigrants cannot be deprived of those whose mission it is to break the bread of God's Word, taking into account the habits and language corresponding to their mentalities.

Missionaries of migrants must become more and more aware of their specific [919] priestly mission. They are sent by Christ, through the call of the Church. Their task is a very difficult one. It calls for deep and continual concern with their priestly identity and the specific character of their pastoral work. The instructions of St. Gregory the Great, recalled by John Paul I to the clergy of Rome, suit them perfectly: the pastor of souls must continually be in dialogue with God without ever forgetting men, and he must dialogue with men without ever forgetting God.

That is the secret which also makes it possible to share, deeply and effectively, all [920] the concerns and all the aspirations of our brother migrants, in order to be their support, their comfort, their sure guide, and thus contribute to their social

advancement.

The Holy Father assures all those who have emigrated all over the world, especially [\[921\]](#) children and the aged, of his feelings of deep affection. He prays for them, hoping that they, too, will pray for him and for his ministry as supreme Pastor of the Church. He is glad to impart his fatherly Blessing to all.

Happy to transmit this message to you, I beg you to accept, Lord Cardinal, my cordial devoted regards in Our Lord.

Jean Card. Villot

Source: Letter from the Cardinal Secretary of State on behalf of John Paul II, to the President of the Pontifical Council for Migrants and Itinerant People, "May the Pastoral Ministry Amongst Emigrants Make Ever More Progress." *On the Move*, 9:25 (1979): 161-164.
