

1992

Message

**Church Must be 'Neighbour' to All**

*For World Migrants' Day*  
*John Paul II*

31 July 1992

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

[1250]

1. The daily news almost always tells us about the movement of poor peoples towards wealthy countries, the drama of refugees turned back at the borders, of migrants who are discriminated against and exploited. Such events cannot fail to have an effect on the conscience of Christians who have made the acceptance in solidarity of those in difficulty a distinguishing characteristic of their faith. Emigration has troublesome implications both because families are separated and uprooted from their culture and those who are forced to leave their own land face an uncertain future.

In this context World Migration Day, which all particular Churches are asked to observe on a Sunday determined by the national Episcopal Conference, offers everyone the opportunity to reflect on these problems, to become familiar with their critical aspects and to promote a campaign of sensitization and solidarity.

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2. By their concern Christians testify that the community in which the migrant arrives is a community which loves and accepts the stranger with the joy of one who is able to recognize Christ's countenance in that person.

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There are many different situations found in the phenomenon of migration today. There are migrants who have been living and working in their adopted society for some time already. These are people who, in the majority of cases, have decided against returning to their native lands and are waiting to be recognized as an integral part of the society whose fortunes and commitment to economic and social development they share. Hastening their complete integration is an act of justice. No matter where they live, human beings have the right to a country in which they can have their own home and find fulfillment in a context of security, trust, harmony and peace.

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Specific provisions are needed in this regard to promote and facilitate procedures for reuniting families, and for adopting juridical norms which will assure an effective equality of treatment with native-born workers.

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Another factor of great importance will be the environmental and social rehabilitation of decaying neighbourhoods in which the immigrants are often forced to live in marginalization. No one can fail to see how it is necessary, by overcoming problems related to unemployment, to work for the elimination of all types of discrimination in the search for a job, a home and in access to health-care.

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3. Much more difficult is the status of undocumented immigrants who are hoping to replace legal migrants as the latter climb the social ladder. No one can deny that the work by which the undocumented aliens participate in the common effort of economic development is a de facto form of membership in a society. It is a question of giving legitimacy, scope and dignity to this membership through the adoption of appropriate measures. [1256]

Not all undocumented immigrants, however, find a job in the rich, diverse context of the industrialized societies. Their adaptation to conditions of hardship is a further confirmation of the humiliating situation to which poverty reduces them in their country. People used to emigrate in order to create better possibilities of life; today people emigrate from many countries merely to survive. [1257]

Such a situation also tends to blur the distinction between the concepts of “refugee” and “migrant” to the point that the two categories are merged under the common denomination of “necessity”. Even though developed nations are not always able to assimilate all those who emigrate, nonetheless it should be pointed out that the criterion for determining the level that can be supported cannot be based solely on protecting their own prosperity, while failing to take into consideration the needs of persons who are tragically forced to ask for hospitality. [1258]

Migration is on the increase today because there is a growing gap in the economic, social and political resources between rich nations and poor ones; there is a smaller number of the former and a growing number of the latter. In this scenario those who succeed in overcoming “national” barriers can, in a certain sense, consider themselves fortunate because they have been allowed to enjoy the crumbs which fall from the table of today’s “Diveses”. However, who can begin to count the number of poor “Lazaruses” who cannot benefit from them? [1259]

As I mentioned in the Encyclical *Centesimus annus*, wealthier nations are invited to take a new look at this very serious problem, conscious that, corresponding to their moral duty to use all their energy to contribute to the solution is the precise right to development enjoyed not only by individuals, but by whole nations (cf. n. 35). [1260]

4. It is evident that the citizens of the developing countries are called to exercise a role of primary importance in this task. They must not expect everything from the more favoured countries, but should rather see themselves as the instruments of their own liberation. In every field they should have a spirit of initiative, establishing special development programmes to give the greatest possible latitude to their own freedom and prospects for progress, with priority attention paid to literacy and basic education (cf. *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, n.44). [1261]

Underdevelopment is not inevitable. In order to overcome it, however, it is necessary to call upon the natural and human resources with which every people is endowed. A very important role obviously falls to the young people who are completing their scientific education in industrialized countries. Because of their capacity to blend tradition and change, they are the key to an improved economic and social future for those countries. [1262]

Migration related to underdevelopment is a challenge which we must face with [1263]

courage and determination, since it involves the defence of the human person.

As I mentioned in speaking to the participants in the Third World Congress for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, which was held in the Vatican last October, “experience shows that when a nation has the courage to open itself to immigration, it is rewarded with increased prosperity, a solid social renewal and a vigorous impetus toward new economic and human goals” (L’Osservatore Romano English edition, 14 October 1991, p.9) [1264]

5. Such an observation is best substantiated by the experience connected with the great event of the fifth centenary with the great event of the fifth centenary of the evangelization of America. Without a doubt the countries of the Americas owe the prestigious role which they have today in the concept of nations to their openness to migration. [1265]

The celebrations of Columbus’ endeavors recall our attention to the contribution of work and learning made by the migrants who throughout these 500 years were welcomed in those lands whose history is closely interwoven with that of migration. If today the Western and American worlds are to some degree a part of the same reality, this is due to the spiritual affinity created by migration. [1266]

It is in the name of this brotherhood that, following my Message for Lent this past year, “Called to share the table of creation”, I chose to establish the Populorum Progressio Foundation to serve the Indios and campesinos of America as a “sign and witness of the Christian desire for fraternity and... solidarity” (L’Osservatore Romano English edition, 15 April 1992, p.4). I hope that it may find a generous reception and active response on the part of individuals and institutions, especially within the Catholic world, taking into consideration Catholicism’s great importance in the countries of this vast geographic area. [1267]

6. Migration has frequently given the particular Churches the opportunity to authenticate and strengthen their own Catholic sense by accepting various ethnic groups and especially by creating communion with them. The Church’s unity does not stem from her members having an identical origin, but rather from the Spirit of Pentecost, who makes all nations a new people whose goal is the kingdom, whose condition is the freedom of sons and daughters, and whose statute is the law of love (cf. Lumen gentium, n.9). [1268]

The Church’s commitment to be the “neighbor” of all people is a response to the will of the heavenly Father who embraces everyone in his love. The one goal to which she tends is to call all people to greater solidarity in the new brotherhood in Christ in the family of God. [1269]

May the Virgin Mother, who always shows her concern for those in need and is therefore sensitive to all those who personally experience the hardship of migration, comfort and help all those who live far from home and inspire others to sentiments of understanding and acceptance in their regard. [1270]

With these wishes I gladly impart to all those who promote the noble, urgent cause of migrants my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of abundant heavenly favours. [1271]

From the Vatican, 31 July 1992, the fourteenth year of my Pontificate.

**Joannes Paulus PP.II**

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