

Statement on the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Refugees by the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference.

1. Introduction

Recognising the pressing difficulties that face migrants and refugees, the Catholic Bishops of Australia wish to address the issues facing both people on the move and the receiving communities, and provide for their pastoral care. For the remainder of this document, the term 'migrant' includes also those who have come to Australia under the refugee/humanitarian program.

The presence of migrants leaves neither the receiving culture nor the migrants themselves without change.

Purpose

The influx of migrants is a pastoral challenge for the Church. The purpose of this statement is to present principles that motivate the Church's pastoral response to migrants and refugees and to outline proposals and guidelines for implementation in Australia.

Cultural Diversity

As an integral feature of the human race, cultural diversity finds expression in language, religion, social values, customs, and traditions. Some are so fundamental and ingrained as to constitute a people's very social identity. While cultural diversity shows the richness of the human family, it may become the occasion of friction, discrimination, isolation and even conflict. Harmony among culturally diverse people results less from casual circumstance than from careful and progressive planning that includes community education and the creation of structures which foster mutual understanding, acceptance, equality and participation.

2. History of migration in the Australian context.

2.1 Although cultural diversity already existed among the indigenous people of Australia, we became a much more diversified nation with the arrival of the British settlers, and subsequently with the arrival of large groups of migrants and refugees from other parts of the world. We wish to acknowledge here that migration has not always benefited the Aboriginal people.

2.2 After the Second World War, the Australian Government accepted many displaced people from Europe, and later initiated a generous migration program which has since expanded to include people from almost every part of the world. We applaud successive Governments for opening the shores of this rich continent to people from other parts of the world, and particularly for giving protection to refugees.

For the 50-year period from the end of the Second World War, Australia has provided a home to 4.5 million people from over 130 countries. A strong pattern of intermarriage between Australians of different backgrounds has become evident. (cf Australia Today, DIMA, April 1997). In more recent times, source countries have changed, creating new issues and new pastoral challenges.

Along with other Churches and non-governmental agencies, the Catholic Church has played, and continues to play, an important part in the migration program through the provision of pastoral care and through sponsorship and resettlement. The work of many in supporting migrants and refugees is acknowledged - in particular the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference and the former Federal Catholic Immigration Office, the Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office, the Catholic Immigration Offices in the capital cities, Religious Institutes, Church organizations (especially the Society of St. Vincent de Paul), and the dioceses and parishes which have taken initiatives to foster migration and help migrants and refugees.

Benefits brought about by Migration.

2.3 In Australia, we have come to experience through migration that geographical barriers between peoples can disappear and those who were geographically, culturally, politically and religiously far apart from each other can now come to live together and to know each other better. This helps gradually to erode prejudice and historical rivalries built over many centuries.

Benefits to the Catholic Church.

2.4 The Catholic Church in Australia has been strengthened in many ways by the arrival of migrants. They have increased its membership and have enabled the Church to know itself better. Catholic migrants have brought to Australia symbols, practices and devotions which add visible substance to the Church's catholicity. Migrants and refugees enrich the Church's openness to, and inclusiveness of, all peoples and cultures.

Eastern Catholic Churches.

2.5 The arrival of people from the Eastern Catholic Churches has brought into Australia Eastern Catholic communities, and gradually the establishment of the Maronite Diocese and the Melkite and Ukrainian Eparchies, with their bishops and clergy. Their participation in the life of the Church in Australia has been a source of great strength. Their presence enables the people of Australia to have a more complete image of the Catholic Church, of its universality, its historical past, as well as the longevity and richness of its traditions and the colourful variety of its rites.

Difficulties and Dangers of Migration.

2.6 Along with the benefits, migration presents some difficulties and dangers.

The process of migration is a process of uprooting. People moving from one culture to another experience a period, which for many may last for the rest of their life, of:— · loss of the sense of security, for they are abruptly cut off from their familiar social and cultural environment and plunged into one which may be Statement on the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Refugees by the Australian Catholic Bishops

very different from that of their homeland;

- economic hardship, due to the difficulty of finding employment and establishing again whatever is required for living (accommodation, food, health care, children's education, etc);
- religious disorientation, due to the urgent pressures that material needs place on them and to the fact that they may not be able to continue their religious customs and traditions and may find it difficult to adapt to those of their new and very different environment.

All these difficulties become much greater when compounded with inadequate knowledge of the English language.

These and other difficulties, which may include marginalisation, a sense of personal isolation, discrimination, inadequate public facilities and resources to cater for their special needs, often place Catholic migrants among those people whose faith and religious life is in danger, particularly during the initial stage of their migration experience.

3. Principles

The Old Testament

3.1 The Scriptures teach us to respect the alien. Often, it was through the foreigner that God brought about blessings to people and carried out his plan of salvation. This is particularly highlighted in the promise to Abraham, when he is made father of a numberless nation. The Exodus across the Red Sea, which liberated people from slavery, was the salvation experience of the Israelites. For this reason they must see foreigners living among them as a reminder of that experience. Therefore they must not abuse or oppress the stranger^[1]; they must treat strangers as they treat themselves and must love them as they love themselves.^[2] Foreigners living among the Israelites are recognised also as people in need of help and protection; God commands his people to treat them well and not to discriminate against them, for Yahweh is never partial, and loves the stranger” ^[3].

The New Testament

3.2 Christ's teaching: Jesus identified himself with the humblest and weakest of society, as well as with the stranger^[4]. He was a migrant himself, even a refugee. His approach to foreigners (Samaritans, the Roman Centurion, Naaman, the Syro-Phoenician woman) gives us the lead.

In the last judgement, the way people have treated the stranger will become a measure of the judgement against them and whether they are placed among the blessed or the cursed^[5].

3.3 Pentecost: Of particular significance in the history of salvation is the descent of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the gift promised by Christ and its power is manifested by the fact that Christ's salvation is announced to people of all regions and countries and that everyone hears it in their own language.^[6] People from every nation, from all tribes and languages^[7], were called to form the new chosen people of God, where all racial differences and distinctions have disappeared.^[8] In Christ, there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all are one in Christ Jesus.^[9] Christ has broken down the dividing wall, that is the hostility between peoples, and created in himself one new humanity, thus making peace.^[10]

3.4 Apostles' Teaching: From the very beginning, the Church was diversified in composition. Dissension and dispute in the Church at Antioch resulted from the claim by some Jewish disciples who taught that “unless you are circumcised according to Mosaic practice you cannot be saved”^[11]. This issue was hotly debated. Even the eloquence and the authority of Paul did not succeed in bringing about a consensus. The issue was so important that Paul and Barnabas felt it necessary to go back to Jerusalem and have the matter finally resolved at a meeting of all the Apostles. This was a turning point for the Church. The solution given would determine whether the Church was to remain tied to the Jewish world or to open itself to the whole world. When the faithful of Antioch heard the solution given by the Apostles, they rejoiced (Acts 15:31).

Church Documents

The concern of the Catholic Church in Australia for migrants and refugees is best expressed by the work outlined in 2.2 of this document and by the documents of the Holy Father, the Holy See, and the Australian Catholic Bishops. Of particular importance are the Vatican documents *Exsul Familia* (1952) and *Pastoralis Migratorum Cura* (1969), the documents of the Second Vatican Council, other Vatican documents on Migrants and Refugees, and the Code of Canon Law. These documents establish important principles for pastoral concern; also important are the Australian Catholic Bishops' Pastoral Letter on Migration (11 December 1988) and the 1991 Issues Paper from the Australian Social Justice Council “I am a Stranger: Will you welcome me?”

The Catholic Church maintains i) that the world's resources are for the welfare of all human beings living in the world and that people are entitled to a just share of those resources even if it means migrating to other countries; and ii) that the movement of people, particularly when it involves large numbers, has to occur in an orderly and regulated manner, without detriment to the political, social and economic order of the receiving countries.

Pope John Paul II in his message for World Migration Day 2000 said: How can the baptized claim to welcome Christ if they close the door to the foreigner who comes knocking? 'If anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?' (I John 3:17).

From the Scriptures and Church Documents come the following principles:

1st Principle:

Equal distribution of the world's resources and the right to migration and to its orderly regulation.

The Catholic Bishops of Australia have frequently applauded the Australian Government for opening the shores of this rich continent to people from other parts of the world, and particularly for giving protection to refugees. They have encouraged the Government to be generous in setting the quota of the people it plans to receive annually (cf Pastoral Letter on 11 December 1988 to mark the end of the bi-centenary year) and have also encouraged Church cooperation with the Government in implementing some programs (eg. The Community Refugee Settlement Scheme), as well as assisting the most needy migrants in their initial process of settling in their newly adopted country. Statement on the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Refugees by the Australian Catholic Bishops

2nd Principle:

Integration.

Migrants and refugees should be helped to integrate into the host society. It is essential that new arrivals are provided with, or assisted to obtain, a place where they can celebrate their faith in their own culture and language. It is also important that they are given the means to live their faith in the new cultural context of their adopted country. Mutually enriching contacts between Catholics born in and outside Australia should be encouraged.

A cross-cultural Church should be promoted: a collective awareness of the culture of others, a spirit of tolerance, a desire to respect foreign cultures, and a conviction that all people have something valuable to contribute.

3rd Principle:

Migrants are an integral part of the local Church.

Migrants living within a parish are an integral part of that parish. They are active contributors to the life of the local church and not just recipients of pastoral care.

4th Principle:

Migrants should have access to all the resources of the local church which are enjoyed by other parishioners.

Because pastoral care is based on need, migrants may have a greater call on the resources of the local church.

5th Principle:

Migrant clergy are part of the local presbyterate.

Migrant clergy cooperate with the bishop in the provision of pastoral care. They also have the right and the duty to participate in the local church and its various clergy bodies and gatherings, and also to education opportunities and remuneration commensurate with other priests.

6th Principle:

Integration respects the time frame of the migrant and cannot be rushed.

Integration into the host society "will occur surely and effectively if it is done voluntarily and gradually, without any compulsion or hindrance" (Pastoralis Migratorum Cura, Chapter 1).

7th Principle:

Retention of language and culture, with recognition that new circumstances will cause migrant and receiving cultures to evolve.

4. RESPONSIBILITIES OF CHRIST'S FAITHFUL AND PROPOSALS FOR PASTORAL CARE**4.1 All Christ's Faithful:**

- i) Mindful of the dignity of all, Christ's faithful should make every effort to combat discrimination and racist attitudes among people of different national and cultural origins. All have the rights and duties of promoting unity (canon 209), of making their needs and opinions known (c.212), of having access to teaching and sacraments (c.213), of following their own form of spiritual life, providing it is in accord with Church teaching (c.214), and of forming associations (c.215).
- ii) Both migrants and host communities have a duty to work for integration and to encourage mutual learning for the enrichment of the local Church: 'Whoever is going to encounter another people should have great esteem for their heritage and language and customs' (Pastoralis Migratorum Cura). See also Canon 223/1.
- iii) Christ's faithful, including recent migrants, should recognise the special place of the aboriginal people and culture in Australia. While they have to learn to live in an Australian culture largely determined by its British and European connections, migrants need also to respect the dignity and rights of the first inhabitants in the land.

4.2 Bishops

i) The Bishop is entrusted with the flock of Christ in his diocese. He is the one who has to make sure that everyone receives proper spiritual care according to his/her need and to promote different ways and means to achieve this goal.

Vatican Council II, in its decree on the pastoral office of bishops *Christus Dominus* bids the bishops to provide for the welfare of the faithful as their individual circumstances demand. [keeping] themselves informed of their needs in the social circumstances in which they live [...] They should be solicitous for all, whatever their age, condition or nationality, whether they are natives, visitors or foreigners.[12]

Since migrants live outside their cultural environment they belong to the category of people who live in special social conditions, the Council document insists that bishops should show special concern ... for those members of the faithful who, on account of their way of life, are not adequately catered for by the ordinary pastoral ministry of the parochial clergy or are entirely deprived of it. These include migrants, exiles and refugees. Bishops should give due consideration especially to the norms determined by the Holy See, adapting them to their own time, places and people.[13]

Bishops Committee for Migrants and Refugees

ii) Given the extent of migration in Australia and the pervasive impact it has on all levels of the Church's structures and institutions, proper care of migrants cannot be taken individually by each bishop. A common approach is necessary by all the Bishops of Australia. For this purpose the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference has established the Bishops' Committee for Migrants and Refugees to make recommendations to the Conference about the pastoral care of migrants and refugees. This Committee is assisted by the Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office Statement on the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Refugees by the Australian Catholic Bishops (ACMRO). This Office liaises with the Diocesan Immigration/Multicultural offices and also with the various groups in the Church that are concerned with providing pastoral care to migrants and refugees, and with appropriate Government agencies.

Diocesan Immigration Offices

iii) A number of dioceses already have a Catholic Immigration Office with the special task of dealing with migrant and refugee issues. In other dioceses where the number of migrants warrants it, a similar office should be set up or coordinator appointed.

Clergy and Religious Formation

iv) It is the duty of Bishops and Religious Leaders to prepare the diocesan clergy and religious during their formation years so that they are properly instructed and equipped to minister in an ever-changing multicultural environment. It is appropriate that candidates to the priesthood and religious life be given courses on the social and pastoral issues connected with the presence of migrants and refugees, including the history of the ethnic communities, their culture and their religious traditions.

v) Seminarians and religious should be encouraged and given the opportunity to learn other languages, so that in their ministry they may be better prepared to work among people of those particular languages.

vi) Attention should be given to the Eastern Catholic Churches, their history, their structure, their rites and symbols, primarily in the seminaries and houses of religious formation. Similar information should be given in Catholic schools and other educational institutions.

Contact with Overseas Churches

vii) The Bishops should seek to form contacts with the Bishops of the countries of origin of migrants and refugees, creating collaboration between the Church of departure and the Church of arrival.

viii) Bishops should seek to provide locally, or from the country of origin of migrants, priests and/or religious who dedicate their ministry to migrants in their own language and culture.

vii) Bishops should encourage diocesan priests to acquire sufficient knowledge of the language and culture of one or more migrant groups present in their dioceses, and even encourage priests to spend some time in the countries of origin to become better acquainted with different languages, customs and cultures. For this purpose overseas exchanges for diocesan priests are to be encouraged.

Migrant Chaplains

x) The particular form of providing pastoral care for migrants that the Australian Bishops have found to be appropriate and fruitful has been through the appointment of Migrant Chaplains. The Bishop should take particular care that priests appointed for the first time as migrant chaplains, especially if they come from overseas, are introduced to their specialised ministry under appropriate direction and for an adequate period of time.

There should also be opportune links with other priests of the diocese and with parish communities.

vii) It is the duty of the Bishop or Religious Superior to ensure that newly-arrived migrant pastoral workers (priests, religious sisters and brothers, and lay people) are given the opportunity to learn English so that they will be properly equipped in their ministry and will not remain isolated from the local Church. The Bishop should appoint a Director of Migrant Pastoral Workers or, if he deems it appropriate, an Episcopal Vicar for Migration.

viii) Bishops should have a proper and clear policy of financial remuneration for the ministry of Migrant Chaplains within or across dioceses.

Other considerations for Bishops.

xiii) Documents of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and of the Diocesan Bishops which are directed to all the faithful need to be issued, as well as in English, in at least the major community languages of Australia or of the diocese concerned.

xiv) In their ministry, bishops should take every opportunity to encourage people to work in harmony and to be builders of unity and to condemn any form of racism and discrimination based on ethnic origin.

4.3 Religious Superiors

Religious Superiors should take note of the above proposals for Bishops where they are applicable to them, especially iv, v, and xi.

4.4 Priests and Pastoral Workers.

All priests are members of the local presbyterate, cooperating with the Bishop in the provision of pastoral care. They should be aware of the above proposals for Bishops (4.1). The presence of migrants has increased demands on the ministry of priests and pastoral workers. Not only have they to minister to people of different languages, with whom communication can often be minimal, but they are also faced with different religious traditions and customs. These traditions and customs, often very different from those of the Australian environment, can be difficult for the priest, his co-workers in the parish, and his parishioners to accept. And while "it is easy to understand that it is not possible to fulfil this pastoral care if the spiritual patrimony and the special culture of the migrant is not taken into due account ... it is

not always easy to avoid that these diversities and adaptations in accordance with the various ethnic groups, even though legitimate, result in harm to that unity to which all are called in the Church.."[14] It is therefore important that priests, especially Parish Priests, and pastoral workers:

- i) Be aware that they are entrusted with the spiritual care of all the faithful within their parish, and that migrants living within their parish are an integral part of their flock[15].
- ii) Avail themselves, as far as possible, of the migrant chaplains' ministry in order to provide migrants in their parish with the pastoral care that they cannot give.
- iii) Ensure that migrant chaplains and their communities have access to all resources in the parish (spiritual and material) which are enjoyed Statement on the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Refugees by the Australian Catholic Bishops by other parishioners. It is important that the parish church, hall, classrooms, meeting rooms, and other parish facilities be available whenever possible to the chaplains and their communities
- iv) Establish financial arrangements with migrant chaplains for the pastoral care which they provide, reflecting the local diocesan and parish customs and practice. This will promote the ministry of migrant chaplains and encourage them to participate in parish activities and initiatives.
- v) Be open and hospitable to migrant chaplains, particularly to those who have come from overseas. Most chaplains are migrants themselves and are experiencing the same difficulties of adjustment to the new social and religious environment as the people whom they serve. It is important that the local clergy appreciate the chaplains' ministry and make them feel part of the local presbyterate.
- vi) Recognize the desire of migrants to organise themselves in groups and associations and to have religious and social functions of their own, for it is in living together that faith is preserved and grows. It is equally important that opportunities be fostered when unity in diversity can be manifested on a general parish occasion.
- vii) Encourage migrants to contribute to parish liturgies, and encourage the English-speaking community to seek opportunities to experience the liturgy and culture of the migrants.
- viii) Endeavour to ensure that migrant groups are represented in other areas of parish life, for example on consultative and decision-making bodies.
- ix) Make every effort to combat any form of discrimination and racist attitudes among people of different national and cultural origin, and take advantage of every opportunity to promote understanding, harmony and unity. When anti-migration sentiments re-surface, it is appropriate that the priest speak to his parishioners.
- x) Be aware that the arrival and settlement of new migrants and refugees may challenge a local community comprised of older and, at times, already integrated migrant groups.

Comment:

The danger is to attempt to hurry the time needed for adjustment, without respecting the fact that the seed sown in the ground has to be allowed to grow in its own time; and different seeds spring at different times and in different seasons. We should not forget St. Paul's exhortation: "Let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up"[16].

4.5 Diocesan Organisations and Receiving Communities.

- i) Catholic Schools and Catholic Education Offices on every level should strive to make Catholics (especially children and young people) more conscious of the broad range of cultures in the Church. This should not be limited to history, but related also to the present day situation.
- ii) Leadership positions in Church agencies/organisations should be open to people of all ethnic backgrounds who are canonically eligible and qualified.
- iii) All Church agencies/organisations should respect the diverse traditions of their clients and be responsive to their special needs.

4.6 Migrant Chaplains and other Migrant Pastoral Workers

- i) The Priests who are appointed by the Diocesan Bishop to minister as Migrant Chaplains, and other persons designated as Migrant Pastoral Workers, are entrusted to carry out a special diocesan ministry and they are always accountable to the Bishop for the way in which they exercise their ministry.
- ii) Newly arrived Migrant Chaplains and Pastoral Workers need to become familiar with the history, traditions and pastoral approach of the Church in Australia and with the dispositions of the local Bishops. It is essential therefore that they dedicate an appropriate period of time to this purpose, and adequate time to learn English, if required. They must realise that without an adequate knowledge of the local language they will remain isolated from the local church and clergy, and will not be able to carry out fully the task with which they are entrusted.
- iii) As people to whom a specialised ministry is entrusted, Migrant Chaplains and Migrant Pastoral Workers should see themselves as builders of bridges between the migrants and the local community. Therefore they should keep in contact with the local clergy, particularly with those of the parishes where they most frequently carry out their ministry to migrants.
- iv) Often Migrant Chaplains and Migrant Pastoral Workers have also to be bridges of reconciliation and unity among the people entrusted to their care, helping them to heal and overcome historical factions and rivalries. They should encourage them to appreciate that the new environment provides a golden opportunity to leave behind past ethnic and political rivalries and to rediscover, and work towards, unity in Christ "who has come to heal the wounds of sin and division"[17].
- v) Migrant Chaplains should take part in the various meetings of the diocesan clergy, to demonstrate that their ministry is an integral part of the ministry of the local church. They should bring migrant issues to the attention of the other clergy.
- vi) Migrant Chaplains and Migrant Pastoral Workers, particularly where their number warrants it, should also have regular meetings of their own, under the responsibility of a Diocesan Director or an Episcopal Vicar for Migration, to find mutual support and to deal with issues of concern to them.

vii) Migrant Chaplains, who extend their activity regularly in more than one diocese, should have their ministry authorised by the bishops of each diocese where they do regular ministry.

Migrants and Migrant Communities

i) Migrants should see themselves not only as the recipients of the Church's care, but also as active contributors to its mission. While the Statement on the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Refugees by the Australian Catholic Bishops Church tries to alleviate the difficulties they encounter in living their commitment to Christ in a new environment, particularly at the initial stage of their settlement, it encourages them to be involved in the life and the mission of the Church.

ii) Migrants may form groups and communities of their own, to continue their culture, their religious traditions and devotions, always in communion with the larger Catholic Community. These groups and communities become havens where the newly arrived find support and encouragement in their Christian commitment, and gradually help them to feel an integral part of the local Church of which they are living members.

iii) People who come from countries or regions beset by long rivalries and conflicts should make every effort to leave behind the past and work together towards reconciliation and unity.

iv) Although retaining their language, culture and traditions, migrants and refugees should become acquainted with the culture and traditions of their new country and of the local church. They should make every effort to be involved in the various programs and pastoral initiatives of the local Church, although adapting them to their own particular circumstances.

5. Conclusion

5.1 The future of the Church's mission in Australia is strongly linked with the presence of migrants. It is important that efforts be made to:

- i) dispel attitudes, stereotypes and prejudices which are harmful to individuals and to the community as a whole; and
- ii) present a vision of our Church community where linguistic, cultural, ethnic and racial differences are seen as an enrichment of the Church and beneficial to the life of its members and of the whole community.

5.2 The unity and harmony we are called to form by the Lord Jesus, and towards which we strive everyday, will be a powerful way for us to announce Christ to all those who have landed in this country with a different faith, particularly to those who in their country of origin have experienced discrimination, ethnic and racial hatred and persecution. Christ himself teaches us: "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.[18]"

12/5/2000

[1] Exodus 22:20

[2] Lev. 19:34.

[3] Deut. 10:17-18.

[4] Mt 25:31-46

[5] Mt 25:35; 25:43

[6] Acts, 2:6.

[7] Rev. 7:9

[8] Acts 11:12; 15:7

[9] Gal 3:28

[10] Eph 2:14-15

[11] Acts 15

[12] *Christus Dominus* no. 16.

[13] *Ibid.* no. 18

[14] Paul VI: *Motu proprio Pastoralis Migratorum.*

[15] *Pastoralis Migratorum Cura* 30.3

[16] Gal 6:9

[17] Liturgy of the Eucharist, Penitential Rite.

[18] John 13:35

Other Statements

Opening Statement to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration Migration Legislation Amendment Bill (No.2) 2000

[24th May, 2000](#)

Submission on behalf of ACBC , Committee for Migrants and Refugees and Committee for the Family and for Life to the Joint Committee on Migration Inquiry into the Migration Legislation Amendment Bill (No.2) 2000

[4th May 2000](#)

Statement on the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Refugees by the Australian Catholic Bishops

Opening Statement to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Reference Committee on behalf of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, Committee for Migrants and Refugees, and Committee for the Family and for Life.

[13th August 1999](#)

Submission on behalf of the ACBC, Committee for Migrants and Refugees and the Committee for the Family and for Life to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Reference Committee.

[18th June 1999](#)