



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC MIGRANT & REFUGEE OFFICE

News

The newsletter of the Australian Catholic Migrant & Refugee Office

www.acmro.catholic.org.au

Special Interest

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Tribute to Bishop Joe Grech from Fr Maurizio Pettena CS, Director of the Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office.



On December 15, up to 50 asylum seekers, thought to be from Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan drowned off Christmas Island, at the end of a perilous journey from the Middle East.

Bishop Joe Grech was the first Australian Church leader to respond to the tragedy in a media statement, where he said unapologetically that asylum seekers do not come to Australia for a holiday and that we need to do more to extend our hearts and welcome them.

Bishop Joe went on to extend his prayers in what now proves to be a providential choice of words: "Our hearts and prayers go out to these people and their families who remain. To make the arduous journey by boat and to lose their lives just short of safety is tragic. This just puts into perspective the incredible risks taken by people to escape their homelands." Just two weeks later, Bishop Joe has come to the end of his own earthly journey. After a short illness has gone home to God and this loss for those of us who remain is keenly felt. Like those asylum seekers two weeks ago Bishop Joe in these days has suffered and died, and now we know he is with his Lord. *Continued on page 4*

97th World Day of Migrants & Refugees

Migrant & Refugee Week 22—28 August 2011

AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE



Labour Agreement Team Update

The past year has seen many changes: additional staff to administer the labour agreement, the end of one agreement and the commencement of another, new procedures and forms, the distribution of a new sponsor manual, the introduction of a database tailored to administer the labour agreement, and, most significantly, the unexpected loss of Bishop Joe Grech.

LA team members would like to express their sincere appreciation for the interest and support that Bishop Joe as the Bishops' Delegate for Migrants and Refugees extended to us, particularly his engagement with the team to expand the staff and develop a labour agreement that has aimed to meet the Church's needs.

We would also like to express our appreciation to the majority of sponsors who adapted well to the many changes demanded of them over the past year – changes that often required a quick response. We understand the level of work that sponsors invest to prepare visa applications and we are happy to report that there has been an improvement in the standard of visa applications received over the past year or so.



Picture: ACMRO Team

The introduction of our new database will contribute greatly to the care of visa applications after they have been received at our office. We now have an IT tool tailored to assist us with the unique demands of administering a labour agreement and managing multiple visas.

Through our labour agreement we have assisted 98 congregations and 27 dioceses to prepare visa applications. With our new database and new labour agreement in place we look towards October 2013 – the life of the current agreement – and feel confident that 2011 will prove the best year yet for congregations and dioceses to sponsor pastoral workers through the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference. We have begun to plan seminars that will be held throughout Australia with the aim of meeting our sponsors face-to-face and assisting them with the visa application process.

We look forward to working with Dioceses and Congregations in 2011 in our collaborative effort to provide pastoral care to Australians, particularly refugees and migrants.

97th World Day for Migrants and Refugees

This year the 97th World Day for Migrants and Refugees will be on the 28th of August after a week of celebrations beginning on the 22nd of August. For several years now ACMRO has been providing a resource kit to help Australians learn more about migrants and refugees, hear their stories and understand the challenges involved in moving to a new home. This year the theme will centre on the family. During 2009-10 over 60 000 family migrant visas were granted to families from around the world to enable them to start a new life in Australia (DIAC Annual Report 2009-10). Migrant and refugee week provides an opportunity for us to reflect as a community and to celebrate the positive contributions made by migrants and refugees.

This year the Holy Father has introduced the theme of 'One human family' to celebrate the 97th World Day of Migrants and Refugees. The theme, one human family, reflects a common relationship that all people share as beloved children of our Father in heaven. His Holiness Benedict XVI reminds us that as children of God, we are called to recognise each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. As members of the one human family, we all share the Holy Eucharist, "an inexhaustible source of communion for the whole of humanity".

"One human family"

The Pope's message begins with a clear call to follow Christ "As I have loved you, so you should love one another". The call to open our hearts to Christian welcome is one of compassion and empathy. Australians are blessed with peace and prosperity and it can be difficult to empathise with the migrant or refugee journey. Often there is a feeling that those fleeing persecution somehow contributed to the conflict and don't deserve our protection. Often there is a tendency to deny help because it is seen as someone else's responsibility. As Christians, we must look beyond our own self interest and hear the cry of those in need.

All Australians can agree that family unity is of immeasurable importance. The right to family unity and to family life are the basis of a stable society and need to be protected and promoted both domestically and internationally. Our Christian welcome must include provisions to allow family re-unification for all migrants and refugees.

The Church teaches that every human person has the "right to leave one's country and the possibility to enter another country to look for better conditions of life" (Benedictus PP. XVI). Countries also have the right to regulate migration flows and immigrants have a duty to integrate into the host country. The challenge is to balance the interests of the state while still upholding the respect and dignity of human beings. The Holy Father suggests that we should reflect on what is "necessary for both the local inhabitants and the new arrivals to live a dignified and peaceful life". We may wish to reflect on how Australia welcomes those in greatest need of our protection. How would our Father in heaven view our policy of detention?

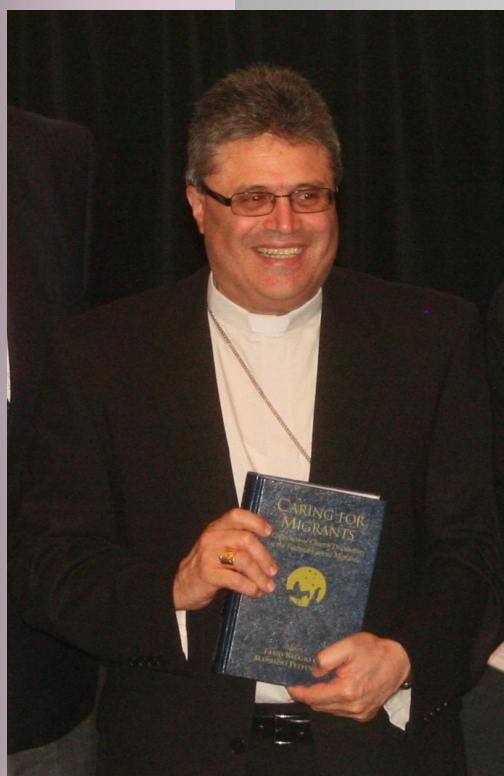


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"Through a torrent, his soul passed through waters that threatened to swallow him up. Our soul has been delivered like a sparrow....Our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth."(Psalm 124 – Feast of the Holy Innocents).

There is a profound sense of tragedy of losing one so young. All who met Bishop Joe would attest that he seemed in the prime of his life, with so much energy, charisma and love to share. Indeed, this has caused shock and sadness in the Australian Catholic Community.

We take our only comfort knowing that he is meeting Jesus Christ whom he loved so much, and indeed, we believe he will meet with those 50 asylum seekers on whose behalf he so compassionately advocated.



Maltese-born Bishop Joseph Angelo Grech was appointed as the Australian Bishops' Delegate for Migrants and Refugees just a few years ago, and in the past year alone has spoken out numerous times in media releases, interviews and pastoral statements on the need for a more compassionate and just approach to the situations facing migrants and refugees.

The Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office (ACMRO) has lost its Episcopal mentor and the migrant and refugee community has lost one of its most compassionate advocates. He was a man imbued with an evangelical mission of proclaiming the love of Christ to all he met, and living in the spirit of Christ toward those he served, in particular toward migrant and refugee communities in the Dioceses in which he worked.

Bishop Joe was not just the Bishop in charge of the pastoral care of migrants and refugees, Bishop Joe loved migrants and refugees with a sincere passion. Migrant priests and seminarians were particularly close to his heart and in times of difficulty and cultural adjustment, they would often call upon him for support and spiritual strength.

***"the migrant
and refugee
community
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Bishop Joe, perhaps fittingly, died on the feast of the Holy Innocents. In the Gospel of the day, we read of the flight out of Egypt, in which Jesus, Mary and Joseph sought asylum from King Herod. These words speak with so much relevance for us today. Bishop Joe's death at this time is a symbol of this relevance. One commentary on this feast day reads "Our Christmas Joy is tempered with sadness." Indeed, more and more, the revelations of the significance of Bishop Joe's life and death will enter our hearts in prayer. He arrived and came to the Lord at exactly 3pm, the hour that is known as the hour of mercy, the time of the Lord's death. For now we mourn a man who accompanied so many with grace and joy.

May he rest in peace.





Message of His Holiness Benedict XVI For the 97th World Day of Migrants and Refugees (2011) "One Human Family"

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The World Day of Migrants and Refugees offers the whole Church an opportunity to reflect on a theme linked to the growing phenomenon of migration, to pray that hearts may open to Christian welcome and to the effort to increase in the world justice and charity, pillars on which to build an authentic and lasting peace. "As I have loved you, so you also should love one another" (Jn 13:34), is the invitation that the Lord forcefully addresses to us and renews us constantly: if the Father calls us to be beloved children in his dearly beloved Son, he also calls us to recognize each other as brothers and sisters in Christ.

This profound link between all human beings is the origin of the theme that I have chosen for our reflection this year: "One human family", one family of brothers and sisters in societies that are becoming ever more multiethnic and intercultural, where also people of various religions are urged to take part in dialogue, so that a serene and fruitful coexistence with respect for legitimate differences may be found. The Second Vatican Council affirms that "All peoples are one community and have one origin, because God caused the whole human race to dwell on the face of the earth (cf. Acts 17:26); they also have one final end, God" (*Message for the World Day of Peace*, 2008, 1). "His providence, His manifestations of goodness, His saving design extend to all men" (Declaration *Nostra aetate*, 1). Thus, "We do not live alongside one another purely by chance; all of us are progressing along a common path as men and women, and thus as brothers and sisters" (*Message for the World Day of Peace*, 2008, 6).

"As I have loved you, so you also should love one another" (Jn 13:34)

The road is the same, that of life, but the situations that we pass through on this route are different: many people have to face the difficult experience of migration in its various forms: internal or international, permanent or seasonal, economic or political, voluntary or forced. In various cases the departure from their Country is motivated by different forms of persecution, so that escape becomes necessary. Moreover, the phenomenon of globalization itself, characteristic of our epoch, is not only a social and economic process, but also entails "humanity itself [that] is becoming increasingly interconnected", crossing geographical and cultural boundaries. In this regard, the Church does not cease to recall that the deep sense of this epochal process and its fundamental ethical criterion are given by the unity of the human family and its development towards what is good (cf. Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Caritas in veritate*, 42). All, therefore, belong to one family, migrants and the local populations that welcome them, and all have the same right to enjoy the goods of the earth whose destination is universal, as the social doctrine of the Church teaches. It is here that solidarity and sharing are founded.

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, that is to say, the community of peoples and nations, in such a way as to shape the earthly city in unity and peace, rendering it to some degree an anticipation and a prefiguration of the undivided city of God" (Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Caritas in veritate*, 7). This is also the perspective with which to look at the reality of migration. In fact, as the Servant of God Paul VI formerly noted, "the weakening of brotherly ties between individuals and nations" (Encyclical *Populorum progressio*, 66), is a profound cause of underdevelopment and – we may add – 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; it supports the gift of self to others, for their good, for the good of all, in the local, national and world political communities.

Venerable John Paul II, on the occasion of this same Day celebrated in 2001, emphasized that "[the universal common good] includes the whole family of peoples, beyond every nationalistic egoism. The right to emigrate must be considered in this context.

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" (*Message for World Day of Migration 2001*, 3; cf. John XXIII, Encyclical *Mater et Magistra*, 30; Paul VI, Encyclical *Octogesima adveniens*, 17). At the same time, States have the right to regulate migration flows and to defend their own frontiers, always guaranteeing the respect due to the dignity of each and every human person. Immigrants, moreover, have the duty to integrate into the host Country, respecting its laws and its national identity. "The challenge 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" (*World Day of Peace 2001*, 13).



In this context, the presence of the Church, as the People of God journeying through history among all the other peoples, is a source of trust and hope. Indeed the Church is "in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race" (Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, 1); and through the action within her of the Holy Spirit, "the effort to establish a universal brotherhood is not a hopeless one" (*Idem*, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, 38). It is the Holy Eucharist in particular that constitutes, in the heart of the Church, an inexhaustible source of communion for the whole of humanity. It is thanks to this that the People of God includes "every nation, race, people, and tongue" (Rev 7:9), not with a sort of sacred power but with the superior service of charity. In fact the exercise of charity, especially for the poorest and weakest, is the criterion that proves the authenticity of the Eucharistic celebration (cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Mane nobiscum Domine*, 28).



The situation of refugees and of the other forced migrants, who are an important part of the migration phenomenon, should be specifically considered in the light of the theme "One human family". For these people who flee from violence and persecution the International Community has taken on precise commitments.

Respect of their rights, as well as the legitimate concern for security and social coherence, foster a stable and harmonious coexistence.

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 and, for the Catholic faithful, members of the Mystical Body of Christ: in fact we find ourselves depending on each other, all responsible for our brothers and sisters in humanity and, for those who believe, in the faith. As I have already had the opportunity to say, "Welcoming refugees and giving them hospitality is for everyone an imperative gesture of human solidarity, so that they may not feel isolated because of intolerance and disinterest" (*General Audience, 20 June 2007: Insegnamenti* II, 1 [2007], 1158). 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.

"Welcoming refugees and giving them hospitality is for everyone an imperative gesture of human solidarity"

Lastly, I would like to address a special thought, again accompanied by prayer, to the foreign and international students who are also a growing reality within the great migration phenomenon. This, as well, is a socially important category with a view to their return, as future leaders, to their Countries of origin. They constitute cultural and economic "bridges" between these Countries and the host Countries, and all this goes precisely in the direction of forming "one human family". This is the conviction that must support the commitment to foreign students and must accompany attention to their practical problems, such as financial difficulties or the hardship of feeling alone in facing a very different social and university context, as well as the difficulties of integration.

In this regard, I would like to recall that "to belong to a university community... is to stand at the crossroads of the cultures that have formed the modern world" (John Paul II, *To the Bishops of the United States of America of the Ecclesiastical Provinces of Chicago, Indianapolis and Milwaukee on their ad limina visit*, 30 May 1998, 6: *Insegnamenti* XXI, 1 [1998] 1116). At school and at university the culture of the new generations is formed: their capacity to see humanity as a family called to be united in diversity largely depends on these institutions.

Dear brothers and sisters, the world of migrants is vast and diversified. It knows wonderful and promising experiences, as well as, unfortunately, so many others that are tragic and unworthy of the human being and of societies that claim to be civil. For the Church this reality constitutes an eloquent sign of our times which further highlights humanity's vocation to form one family, and, at the same time, the difficulties which, instead of uniting it, divide it and tear it apart. Let us not lose hope and let us together pray God, the Father of all, to help us – each in the first person – to be men and women capable of brotherly relationships and, at the social, political and institutional levels, so that understanding and reciprocal esteem among peoples and cultures may increase. With these hopes, as I invoke the intercession of Mary Most Holy, *Stella Maris*, I cordially impart the Apostolic Blessing to all and, especially, to migrants and refugees and to everyone who works in this important field.

From Castel Gandolfo, 27 September 2010

BENEDICTUS PP. XVI

The Freilich Foundation and ANU Centre for European Studies summer school 2011

On the 16th to 19th of January, on behalf of ACMRO I attended the Freilich Foundation and ANU Centre for European Studies summer school on Refugees and Asylum Seekers. The focus of the summer school was on who is responsible for refugees and asylum seekers. The summer school was an excellent opportunity to hear from several key experts on the legal, demographic, community and often tragic situations involving refugees and those in refugee like circumstances. This short report will only cover a fraction of what was explored during the four days.

Indeed, given that the latest estimates report **over 15 million refugees worldwide**-establishing responsibility is an interesting question. The summer school provided an extensive understanding of what the legal refugee status involves. Refugee status was established by Article 1A (2) of the Refugee Convention 1951. The convention was written after WWII and developed to protect people from fear of persecution relating to race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership to a particular social group. This definition forgets several other categories that were not particularly prominent after WWII, but are today. People effected by natural disasters (for example Haiti) and people effected by extreme poverty or social development are not included as 'refugees' under the convention. The central focus of the convention is the protection of the refugee. This obligation is important to remember particularly in the Australian context, where much emphasis is placed on protecting borders rather than refugees. The summer school also discussed the Subsidiary Protection Regime in the European Union and potential for Australia to adopt a similar policy. Subsidiary protection provides adequate protection for those who do not fit the exact definition of 'refugee' but nonetheless are in desperate need of protection and help.

The summer school also highlighted the complex situation of refugee camps. Displacement is the predominant result of conflict and it is estimated that **over 27 million people are currently in refugee like situations**. However, the majority of refugees are not held in camps. This is due to several reasons. Unfortunately, camps are not particularly safe from outside militia and are quite dangerous inside particularly for women who suffer high rates of sexual assault. Conditions inside temporary camps are highly congested with poor access to basic services, medical care, food and clean water. In addition, there are many restrictions on movement and no opportunities to work or to advance your personal situation. Camps are often set up on the least useable land available and held close to the border to ensure the host can return the refugees if and when stability is achieved in the origin country. Interestingly, the summer school discussed how political and international support for camps tends to diminish as time goes by which can make the situation worse.

Internationally, refugees and displaced people represent an enormous challenge. Why then, does Australia only accept little over 13 000 per a year? Several speakers commented on how such small numbers on an international scale and also in terms of Australia's overall migrant intake could feature so prominently in Australian media. Several accounts remarked on how various misconceptions have developed which link refugees to other political concerns. One example given was how Australia's population increases annually by over 240 000 people, but concerns about infrastructure were associated with been swamped by refugees; clearly the 240 000 increase from natural births and migration were the bigger issue.

The summer school also provided excellent presentations on how community involvement has initiated highly successful projects aimed at welcoming and settling asylum seekers into Australia. These projects included innovative schools such as Dickson College in the ACT and settlement support programs in regional Australia.

For more information about the Freilich Foundation please visit <http://freilich.anu.edu.au/>

Australia

On the 7th of January DIAC announced changes to the refugee determination process in response to the High Court decision on the 11th November 2011. From the 1st March 2011 asylum seekers arriving in excised offshore places will have access to judicial review in cases involving procedural unfairness. Applicants will also have the opportunity to respond to information that may be detrimental to their asylum claim. However, excised offshore applicants still do not have access to the fairer Refugee Status Determination process governed by the Migration Act that applies on the mainland. These applicants will also not be granted access to the Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT) which has the power to review the merits of their application. This is particularly concerning in light of the recent Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed by Australia, Afghanistan and the UNHCR. The MoU paves the way for unsuccessful Afghan asylum seekers to be returned to what is still currently a dangerous situation in Afghanistan particularly for Afghan minorities. The concern is that applicants are being processed under a system found by the high court to be unfair and have no access to the RRT to have the merits of their case reviewed.

Greece

Under pressure, Greece is currently investigating over 52 000 asylum seeker claims. Greece shares a land border with Turkey and this provides entry for asylum seekers into the EU. However under the Dublin II Regulations which govern EU member states response to asylum seekers; the first EU member state to receive asylum seekers should be the one to assess any claims. This system places greater demands on EU Countries on the border, particularly Greece. The ECRE reports that Greece has the lowest recognition rate for asylum seekers in Europe. In 2009, roughly 99% of claims were rejected. The UN remarks that asylum seekers in Greece have great difficulty obtaining access to asylum procedures and endure very poor conditions in detention.

Iraq

Since the 31st October 2010 attack on a Catholic church in Baghdad, Christian communities have begun an exodus from Iraq. Syria received over 300 Iraqi Christians following the attack and Jordan has registered over 260. In addition, over 1000 displaced Christian families have fled to other parts of Iraq including the Kurdistan Regional Government Region and Ninewa plains. UNHCR has repeated their appeal to the international community to provide protection to fleeing Iraqis particularly those belonging to religious minorities. UNHCR reports that parts of Iraq remain volatile with high levels of violence and human rights violations. Reuters report there was once about 1.5 million Iraqi Christians, however the latest estimates suggest this number has fallen to under 850,000 out of an estimated population of 30 million.

Yemen

Yemen continues to receive Somali refugees seeking to escape ongoing violence and persecution in war torn Somalia. The UNHCR report there are more than 170,000 Somali refugees in Yemen, all of whom were granted refugee status automatically on arrival. The situation in Somalia has recently escalated due to worsening drought conditions forcing many to leave their homes. Many Somalis risk a dangerous journey across the Gulf of Aden to arrive on Yemen's shores. On the 4th of January 40 asylum seekers died when their boat capsized while attempting the journey. Meanwhile, Yemen is enduring its own internal tension between the Saleh government and the Houthis, the southern secessionists, and other tribal forces. Successive conflicts since 2004 have resulted in internal displacement of nearly 300,000 Yemeni civilians.

South Africa

It is estimated that around 1.5 million Zimbabweans are currently living in South Africa after years of social and economic instability under the Mugabe regime. The IOM report an agreement was reached back in September 2010 between South Africa and Zimbabwe to register all Zimbabweans currently residing in South Africa. Any Zimbabweans who failed to apply for legal residency status by the end of December; risked deportation. IOM estimate roughly 1 million Zimbabweans could face deportation from South Africa.

