

19th June 2005

Dear Friends,

On Refugee and Migrant Sunday – 28th August 2005 – we are reminded to thank God for the diversity of peoples in our nation and celebrate this diversity. The Church, like the nation, is made up of peoples from many different countries, with different languages and customs. In 2005/2006, Australia's Immigration (non-humanitarian) program will include between 130,000 and 140,000 people from many countries (an increase of more than 10,000 from the previous year). This includes 32,500 close family members and around 97,500 skilled people. In the same period, the Refugee/Humanitarian program will provide 6000 places for the resettlement of refugees referred by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and 7000 places for the Special Humanitarian Program and protection visas in Australia. Importantly, 10.5% of the refugee category will continue to be allocated to Women at Risk and their families. The Government will also increase humanitarian settlement in suitable regional areas of Australia. Our priority will continue to be Africa, the Middle East, and South West Asia to assist people in the greatest need of resettlement as recommended by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

This year, I wish to bring three points to your attention:

- 1) **The late Pope John Paul II's message for World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2005.** *The theme is Intercultural Integration.* The Holy Father said "In the recent Instruction *Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi* (The love of Christ towards migrants), integration is not presented as an assimilation that leads migrants to suppress or to forget their own cultural identity. Rather, contact with others leads to discovering their 'secret', to being open to them in order to welcome their valid aspects and thus contribute to knowing each one better. This is a lengthy process that aims to shape societies and cultures, making them more and more a reflection of the multi-faceted gifts of God to human beings. In this process the migrant is intent on taking the necessary steps towards social inclusion, such as learning the national language and complying with the laws and requirements at work, so as to avoid the occurrence of exasperated differentiation".
- 2) **National Conference: One in Christ Jesus: Pastoral Care in a culturally diverse Australia.** This National Conference, under the auspices of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, will be held on 17/18 November 2005 at the Randwick Racecourse Function Centre, NSW. It will study many of the issues raised by the Holy Father in his 2005 message. The Conference will provide an opportunity for participants to:
 - a) Understand the Church's teaching on the welcome and care of migrants, as outlined in *Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi*
 - b) Acknowledge, affirm and celebrate what has been done, and is being done in Australia in the pastoral care of migrants and refugees
 - c) Study and discuss specific issues
 - d) Identify future directions in the pastoral care of migrants and refugees in Australia

Registration forms will be available in the near future. Everyone is welcome to attend.

As preparation for the National Conference, State Consultations are being organised at

this time by the Catholic Immigration/Multicultural Offices in the capital cities. A list of relevant contact information is provided on an accompanying page. If you provide pastoral care for migrants and refugees as a priest, religious or lay worker, I hope that you will respond to the invitation to participate in the National Conference and in these consultations, and that your parishes and communities will assist you financially to do so.

3) **Changes to laws concerning Mandatory Detention and Temporary Protection Visas.**

As I write this letter, the Prime Minister has just announced amendments concerning mandatory detention of asylum seekers and Temporary Protection Visas. These amendments have come about due to the efforts of the Honorable Petro Georgiou and a group of Government members who wished to bring about more compassion in our treatment of those people who come to Australia seeking our protection. I thank them for their concern and effort. The changes embrace many, but not all, of the proposals put forward by the Australian Catholic Bishops on a number of occasions.

The changes include:

- The detention of families with children (including fathers) will be able to take place in the community
- Decisions on protection visas for asylum seekers must occur within three months. Likewise, reviews by the Refugee Review Tribunal must take no longer than a further three months
- Assessment of all current applications for permanent residence by Temporary Protection Visa (TPV) holders must be completed by October 31st 2005. It seems that these TPV holders will now have a greater chance of gaining permanent residence.

The three readings for this year's Refugee and Migrant Sunday (22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A) invite us to respond to the word of God by changing our way of life and our way of thinking. (Jeremiah 20:7-9; Romans 12: 1-2; Matthew 16:21-27). To be a follower of Christ, we need to listen to the Word of God and start thinking in God's way. Perhaps the greatest cause of division is dwelling on one another's differences. On the cross, Jesus' outstretched arms embraced everyone. All human beings are equal in God's sight, making it wrong to discriminate against people on the basis of nationality, race or religion. We are all created in the image and likeness of God. The challenge for us as followers of Christ is to recognise the dignity of every person, and to welcome and help all cultural and ethnic groups to feel at home in this great country of ours.

I hope and pray that the spirit of Refugee and Migrant Sunday will remain with us always.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

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Chairman
Bishops Committee for Migrants and Refugees