

**WORDS OF WELCOME BY BISHOP SEAMUS HEGARTY, BISHOP OF DERRY,  
CHAIR OF THE IRSIH EPISCOPAL COMMISSION FOR EMIGRANTS.**

‘From Pastoral Care to Public Policy; Journeying with the Migrant’.

Dunboyne Castle Hotel, Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> November 2007.

It is my honour to introduce the President of the Irish Episcopal Conference Archbishop Sean Brady, Cardinal Elect. His willingness to open this Conference on a week where he has so many engagements shows his commitment to the work of the Irish Episcopal Commission for Emigrants.

As I reflect on the theme of our conference and the concept of migration I note the word integration appearing in so many guises. I am eager to learn more about the fabric and nuances of wholesome integration from those who share their wisdom with us. As chairman of IECE I represent a board that wishes to make the necessary changes in order to include an outreach to those who now come to our shores. As a long-standing commission we have a confidence as we reflect on our years of service to Irish Emigrants; however as a commission now charged by the Bishop’s Conference to use our expertise to include the pastoral care of migrants we warmly welcome this occasion of learning and reflection. In this regard we do nothing other than follow the guidance of *Erga Migrates Caritas Christi*, (The Love of Christ for Migrants) This document was promulgated by the Pontifical Commission for Migrants and Travelling People in May 2004 and advises that ‘Our pastoral care must be open to new developments in pastoral structures’. Para 1 that our pastoral structures must be amended to accommodate the presence of migrants to our communities, this includes Episcopal Conferences! Those who come to this island seek our support as they practise their faith and try to maintain their dignity as human beings made in the image of God. This conference is a key part of our strategic development. I thank Archbishop Brady for his support and encouragement in this new era for IECE.

To reflect on the concept of integration solely from the perspective of the integration of migrants into the existing systems of the receiving society is to fall short in our mission. The reflections on the consequences of social and pastoral integration for the social and pastoral structures of the receiving society are critical to wholesome integration. As a receiving society this conference provides us with a unique opportunity to educate ourselves on the implications and challenges for our Church and our nation are if integration is to be more than mere words. We can learn from other nations. We can learn also from the story of our own emigrants some of who still suffer heavily under circumstances where they, for one reason or another, were deprived of opportunities to integrate into their new societies.

The biblical imperative to welcome the stranger is not just a rational imperative; it is an engagement of the host and the visitor and ultimately an engagement of the heart. The imperative holds a great truth for society then and now as outlined in the book of Deuteronomy

‘You shall not deprive a resident alien or an orphan of justice; Remember you were a slave in Egypt’ Duet 24:17-18

In responding to this imperative we are keeping alive the vision of a society that is built on neighbourliness which of itself challenges the self – preoccupying individualism that we can all fall victim to today.

I am confident that those of us who strive to meet the pastoral and social challenges of our time will be enriched and encouraged by our presentations over these days.

I give you Archbishop Sean Brady, Cardinal Elect.