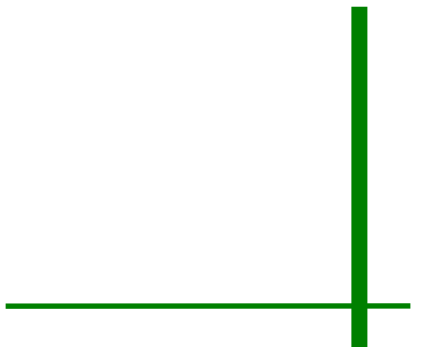




Parish Resource 4



*What Catholic Social
Teachings tells us
about Migration*





Catholic Social Teaching on Immigration

The Catholic Church has a long history of welcoming and assisting migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in need of immediate and long term assistance and, on the other hand, of providing a wealth of documents, teachings and indications aiming at creating a culture of affective and effective welcoming. The Catholic Church makes her voice heard on the matter of the pastoral care of migrants through various documents issued from the universal magisterial service, i.e., the Pope's Messages, Apostolic Letters and Constitution and various documents issued through the decades by what is now known as the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People as well as through the diocesan offices and religious orders and various Church organisations. These embrace a wide range of interventions motivated by various needs; they range from responses to immediate needs to pastoral dictates from theological and ecclesiological reflections to specific interventions at the policy level; from advocacy to pastoral care programmes.



A Pilgrimage: From the Migrant Christ to Migrant Brothers and Sisters

The Constitution *Exsul Familia* (1952) constitutes a milestone in the Church teaching on migration. It opens with a classical icon: the exile into Egypt of Mary, Joseph and Jesus. Moving from this icon, the Constitution recognizes that this exile is due to tyranny: the Holy Family had to flee because their life was in danger. The Constitution highlights the Church's awareness of old and new tyrannies manifested in political persecution and pressing economic needs. As it was the case for the Holy Family, the same manifestation of tyranny is at the root of massive forced migration in our present times.

As the Church journeys on the path of the human experience of migration, it becomes clear that this is a growing complex phenomenon and is composed of various elements: "... they are made up of workers and managers, of young students and of skilled technicians, generous volunteers, refugees and deportees" (*De Pastoralis Migratorum Cura* (DPMC), 15



The Instruction recognizes that such a panoply of causes and effects needs a specialized pastoral care by properly committed priests and religious and that “... due to the magnitude of the problem” there is need for the “... full collaboration of religious and lay people” (DPMC, 15).

As migration assumes more global dimension, this becomes in itself an icon through which the Church sharpens her self understating: “Emigrants, on account of the peculiar nature of the Church [that of being the pilgrim people of God], are not outsiders” (Church and Human Mobility (CHM), 23). The pastoral care of migrants is, therefore, a responsibility of the Church where these choose to live. “The local Church where they arrive is therefore where the principal onus of pastoral responsibility for immigrants falls (CHM, 23).

Various interventions occasioned by the Pope’s Message for World Migration Day, as well as the Pontifical Council for Migrants and Itinerant People show an ever present attention on the part of the Church to sufferings, injustices, violence, abuses and struggles people have to endure constantly in certain areas of the world and from which they are forced to escape.



The Church raises her voice, through her Universal Magisterium, for and on behalf of migrants, aware of the causes behind the hurts and the struggles. What is the growing breadth and depth that one can discover in approaching the most recent documents and, particularly, but not solely, *Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi* (EMCC)? They convey a growing sense of conceptual conversion: from the migrant as a problem to the migrant as a gift and resource; from the migrant Christ to the migrant brothers and sisters. This becomes clear from the terms chosen to express concepts such as sign of the times, image of the Pentecost, cultivating a culture of welcoming and solidarity, and dialogue among others. This concern towards the person rather than the phenomenon that is shown in the variety of approaches and pastoral models stressing the need for a common conceptual understating sourcing from the Word of God and a common pastoral plan as response.

It stems from the experience of the Pentecost which provides the basis for developing a culture of welcome and solidarity as a common task of all the faithful, and the special responsibility of laypeople in the mission among migrants.



Nevertheless, such a mission constitutes an essential part of the ministry of clergy and religious people. From this derives the importance of conducting interdisciplinary studies on migration in order to better understand the problems and be more proactive in their solutions.

To foster a culture of welcome, the document underlines the importance of “incultured liturgies” and “popular pieties” in the pastoral care of migrants. *Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi* also calls on the faithful to be agents of pastoral work because of the ecclesiological principle of communion and mutual charity, in both the home and host Churches. The Churches of the sending countries and the ones of the receiving countries are enjoined to cooperate with each other. Each one of them is invited to give migration issues a specific place in the theological and pastoral formation of the clergy and laity in general.

“Unity in diversity” is the concept underlying the pastoral structures which are supposed to address a real and practical response to the distinctive needs of migrants, which can assume different models: the ‘*Missio cum cura animarum*’, personal ethnic-linguistic parish, ethnic-linguistic pastoral service and pastoral units. A special mention is reserved to some very specific structures dedicated to animation and formation in the field (EMCC,



The conclusion of *Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi* proposes a missiological interpretation of the pastoral care of migrants and itinerant people. Particularly, the document calls for the discovery of the “seeds of the Word” ('Semina Verbi'), which are planted in different cultures and religions; it invites us to carry on a dialoguing mission among migrants, reaffirming the universal Church as a sign of hope.

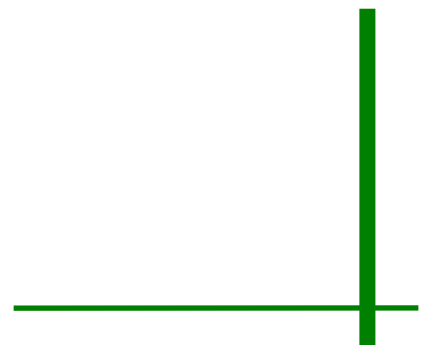
A Sure Sign of Hope

The interventions of the Universal Magisterium show that migration is at the heart of the Church. In more than one case (the United States and Australia, just to mention two), the Church continues to grow and is visible and alive because of the presence of migrants. The documents at the universal level underline that a concern for migrants cannot simply be left to the good will of persons, rather it calls for a dialogue in charity of the different members of the one Body of Christ. These documents also underline the need for national pastoral planning on the care of migrants that should be realized in the formation programs of priests, religious brothers and sisters, and lay pastoral workers in order to understand the phenomenon of migration, to appreciate its biblical foundation and to uphold its ecclesiological significance.



It serves to recall that, “Migrations offer individual local Churches the opportunity to verify their catholicity, which consists not only in welcoming different ethnic groups, but above all in creating communion with them and among them. Ethnic and cultural pluralism in the Church is not just something to be tolerated because it is transitory, it is a structural dimension. The unity of the Church is not given by a common origin and language but by the Spirit of Pentecost which, bringing together men and women of different languages and nations in one people, confers on them all faith in the same Lord and the calling to the same hope” (John Paul II, Message for World Migration Day, 1988).

(Scalabrini Migration Center, 2009: Caring for Migrants – A collection of Church Documents on the Pastoral care of Migrants)





The Irish Episcopal Council for Immigrants is a pastoral resource available to parishes. It provides parishes and migrants with pastoral support, information and assistance for parishes involved in welcoming the stranger into the life of our faith community.

Irish Episcopal Council for Immigrants

A Council of the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference

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