

# World Day of Migrants and Refugees

**Migrant and Refugee Week**

**21-27 August**

On Sunday 27 August 2017, the Catholic Church in Australia observes Migrant and Refugee Sunday.

The theme chosen by Pope Francis for this year's World Day of Migrants and Refugees is "Child Migrants, the vulnerable and voiceless." As Christians, we are called to reach out to and pray for all migrants to emphasise the unity of the human family and the Gospel values of acceptance, hospitality and love of neighbour.

Sunday's Gospel (Mt 16: 13-20) teaches us that at the heart of the mission there must be an inter-personal relationship. This is most true for the mission to migrants, refugees and people who are on the move for many different reasons.

Roger Manalo CS

## **MESSAGE from POPE FRANCIS      Child Migrants, the Vulnerable and the Voiceless**



I ask everyone to help those who, for various reasons, are forced to live far from their homeland and are separated from their families.

Children are the first among those to pay the heavy toll of emigration, almost always caused by violence, poverty, environmental conditions, as well as the negative aspects of globalization. The unrestrained competition for quick and easy profit brings with it the cultivation of perverse scourges such as child trafficking, the exploitation and abuse of minors and, generally, the depriving of rights intrinsic to childhood as sanctioned by the International Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Childhood has unique and inalienable needs. Above all else, there is the right to a healthy and secure family environment, where a child can grow under the guidance and example of a father and a mother; then there is the right and duty to receive adequate education, primarily in the family and also in the school, where children can grow as persons and agents of their own future and the future of their respective countries. Indeed, in many areas of the world, reading, writing and the most basic arithmetic is still the privilege of only a few. All children, furthermore, have the right to recreation; in a word, they have the right to be children.

Among migrants, children constitute the most vulnerable group, because as they face the life ahead of them, they are invisible and voiceless: their precarious situation deprives them of documentation, hiding them from the world's eyes; the absence of adults to accompany them prevents their voices from being raised and heard. In this way, migrant children easily end up at the lowest levels of human degradation, where illegality and violence destroy the future of too many innocents, while the network of child abuse is difficult to break.

Very often the scarcity of financial resources prevents the adoption of adequate policies aimed at assistance and inclusion. As a result, instead of favouring the social integration of child migrants, or programmes for safe and assisted repatriation, there is simply an attempt to curb the entrance of migrants, which in turn fosters illegal networks; or else immigrants are repatriated to their country of origin without any concern for their "best interests".

## Listen to the cries of children

*"I do not want to live anymore."*

The words were written by an 8 year old girl on her notebook and passed to her volunteer tutor during a session.

*"I don't want to leave Australia. I love Australia. Australia is good and helpful. I am safe in Australia... In my country they kill kids. In my country they can make me go in an army. In my country I don't know what will happen to me...I will come back to Australia. One day, I will come back. I love Australia..."*

This is just one story of a young person. It reflects a lifetime of challenges and a situation that none of us should have to face, let alone the children of our world.

Michelle Pereira, St Vincent de Paul Society, Victoria



## How do we respond to this reality?

**You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him**, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt (Ex 22:21)

**Love the sojourner** therefore; for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt". (Deut 10:19)

**No one is a stranger in the Christian community**, which embraces "every nation, tribe, people and tongue" (Rev 7:9).



### UNICEF Report December 2016

**An estimated 535 million children live in countries affected by conflict or disaster, often without access to proper medical care, quality education, proper nutrition and protection.**

We are no longer able to sit in silence when confronted with these realities. We therefore need to become informed and also become engaged. There are many individuals and organisations who do amazing and inspirational work in this field, who quietly go about their work. We need to join in solidarity with them, and at a grassroots level begin to bring about concrete change.

Bishop Vincent Long, Bishop Delegate for Migrants and Refugees

**Jesus asked: "Who do you say I am?"** When Simon replied, "You are the Christ.", Jesus changed Simon's name to Peter, thus marking the beginning of a new identity for the old Simon, calling him to a new mission.

"Who do you say I am?" is a question that challenges us: **as Christians, we are called to create interpersonal relationships that, by promoting every human person, can bring all to the encounter with Christ recognised as "the Son of God".**

Roger Manalo CS



### A Prayer for Refugees and People Seeking Asylum

Loving Jesus, open our hearts and fill them with the boundless love of God. Help us to overcome our fear and selfishness. Show us how to welcome all those who seek safety and freedom in our world.

Teach us to be generous to all who want to be reunited with their loved ones. Guide us as we strive to be advocates of fairness and compassion. In a world torn apart by violence and fear, division and selfishness, let your loving hearts show us the way to bring healing and hope. Amen.

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