Columban Mission Institute

The LANTERN SERIES

EVANGELISATION Witnessing Christ in the World

No. 7

This Lantern offers points for reflection and discussion on the impact of migration on the Australian Church and society.

Migrants and Refugees

"I was a stranger and you made me welcome"

Matt 25:35

Insiders and Outsiders

Twenty years of pastoral work in Western Luzon, the Philippines, provided many opportunities for making friendships among the Aeta, Zambal, Ilocano and Tagalog peoples. As an 'outsider' I was always welcome among my people.

For the last twelve years, I have been engaged with the Chinese Catholic Community of Western Sydney. (Chinese is now the second largest language group in Australia after English). Because I have been an outsider, I easily relate to the new arrival and I always make a point of welcoming them. Their difficulties are many. They have to find work or a place to live. Often people are looking for protection visas because persecution and harassment of Catholic people and others are stark realities in China. Sometimes there are problems with just wages. People working for their own language group can be ripped off. "Yes, we can fix it up – meet me at … on Saturday night!!!" is not uncommon.

The icing on the cake is when wives and children come to join their husbands and fathers and start to settle in. Australia is the better for their coming.

Fr Paul McGee co-ordinates the Columban Centre for Promoting Communion with the Church in China.

A Shattered Dream

Siti-Aniyah came from Indonesia to Taiwan as a domestic worker to care for a couple's two year old twins with polio. Her dream was to earn enough money to better her family's future. Her husband worked for a meagre wage in the rice fields so the family could have one meal a day. In tears she left her newborn son in her mother's care.

At first her employers were kind, but then they became violent and she suffered physical and mental abuse. She was rescued and taken to the Columban run Hope Workers Centre. She was black and blue with a patch over one eye after her employer poked her in a fit of rage. This has left her nearly blind. Siti-Aniyah's only avenue for justice was, with the help of the Hope Workers Centre, to sue her employer. The legal path was long and tortuous and hope was waning.

At one stage Siti-Aniyah and other abused migrant workers from the Centre joined a protest demanding the government introduce a human rights based contract for migrant domestic workers.

Finally her employers were found guilty and imprisoned. She returned to Indonesia only to find a situation common to some migrant workers: her husband had remarried and had a child. Siti-Aniyah couldn't bear this pain. She now lives with her parents on the family farm and cares for her son.

The Hope Workers Centre supports foreign workers in Taiwan

Specific care of migrants should be deeply integrated into the pastoral care of particular churches
Erga Migrantes Caritas #89.

Mission is one and undivided, having one origin and final purpose… Looking at today's world, we can distinguish three situations…First, peoples, groups and social-cultural contexts in which Christ and his Gospel is not known…secondly, Christian communities (where) the Church carries out her activity and pastoral care…Thirdly…where entire groups of the baptised have lost a living sense of faith… in this case what is needed is a 'new evangelisation'or 're-evangelisation'.

Redemptoris Missio, Pope John Paul II, 1990, # 31-33
www.vatican.va/edocs

The three faces of the one Church Mission: Witness | Pastoral Activity | New Evangelisation

Migration is at its greatest level in history. In Australia, there are economic migrants, reunited families, students, temporary workers, tourists and professional people. People migrate internally eg Aboriginal and rural people. There is human trafficking as well as refugees and asylum seekers. Globalization, poverty, population pressure, conflict and climate change will only increase the numbers of people on the move. Issues need to be addressed such as identity, fear, insecurity, legality, education, work, working conditions, family and safeguarding the integrity of the host community. All this can create tensions.

A spirit of openness and welcome helps break down the barriers of discrimination, language and cultural differences. Standards of treatment should be measured against human rights law and Catholic Social Teaching.

All Christians, by baptism, have a responsibility to respond to the resultant opportunities and challenges in justice and compassion.

Our Judeo-Christian scripture is the great narrative of migrants and refugees: the Hebrews, freed from slavery journeyed to the Promised Land; Jesus fled as a refugee and his ministry was one of constant movement.

Many in the Church speak out for the rights of asylum seekers and refugees. But **migrants and refugees are the Church**, not ethnic groups or objects of charity. God's grace is to be shared with and through these people and through the richness of liturgy and culture. They are the way to a wider Church. Studies in the nature of mission in the Church in Catholic universities and seminaries, specialized training for pastors, and inculturation of churches would enable faith communities to be a light to the world in "not remaining prisoner of one exclusive, national way of living and expressing the faith". *Erga Migrantes Caritas # 77*

How can the baptised claim to welcome Christ if they close the door to the foreigner who comes knocking?

Pope John Paul II, World Migration Day Message 2001

We tell our stories, speak about our joys and sorrows, relate our religious experiences and together denounce actions which oppress, and structures which dehumanise.
....John Prior svd

Prayer

God of all pilgrims, you remind us that the foreigner is your messenger, the one who interrupts us and breaks into the regularity of our daily lives.

The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. Lev 19:34

It is impossible to go through life without trust: That is to be imprisoned in the worst cell of all, oneself.
Graham Greene, *The Ministry of Fear*

Learn More @

Read

- ***Erga Migrantes Caritas: The Love of Christ Towards Migrants,*** **Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant Peoples, 2004**
- ***Who is my neighbour? Australia's Role as a global citizen*** **– 2007 Social Justice Sunday Statement Australian Catholic Social Justice Council** www.acsjc.org.au
- ***The Call to Hospitality*** **Sandie Cornish, No 44, Catholic Social Justice Series ACSJC** ph 02 9956 5811

Find out about:

- ***Trafficking in Persons Clearing House*** www.goodshepherd.com.au/justice/traffickingprojects.html
- **Abuses of Temporary Work Visa 457 ACTU** www.actu.asn.au/Campaigns
- ***Jesuit Refugee Service*** www.jrs.org.au
- ***Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office*** www.acmro.catholic.org.au
- ***Environmental Refugees*** **Edmund Rice Centre** www.erc.org.au

Chat Points:

Discuss

- Australia's refugee policy in relation to alienation and mental trauma.
- How can migration be a factor for peace?
- What stops you making the first move in reaching out to foreigners?
- Why are there enclaves of different ethnic Catholic communities?
- What is the obligation of Australia to the countries of origin of foreign workers?
- Discuss: "Workers are not merchandise!"
- Who are environmental refugees?

What Can I Do?

Build personal ties with local migrant communities eg. create a community garden, a choir, a regular meal.

Ensure your parish/school/community celebrates Migrant and Refugee Week www.ncca.org.au/cws/refugees

Get involved in the groups named in "Learn More".

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