

Final document after 5th World Congress on Pastoral Care

PASTORAL CARE OF MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES AT THE BEGINNING OF THE NEW MILLENNIUM IS A SPECIAL FORM OF EVANGELISATION: FINAL DOCUMENT AFTER 5TH WORLD CONGRESS ON- PASTORAL CARE FOR MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

Vatican City (Fides Service) "The Church cannot remain indifferent in the wake of the present plight of migrants and refugees. She wants to share their joys and grief, there where they are, and be with them in their search for a better and safer life, worthy of being children of God". This is a passage from a Final Document issued after the Fifth World Congress on the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Refugees organised in Rome, 17 - 22 November 2003, by the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Refugees on the theme "Starting afresh from Christ. Towards a new pastoral care of migrants and refugees."

Keynote speeches, statements, round tables, and working groups enabled the participants of the Congress to make an inventory of the present situation of migrants and refugees all over the world taking into account global, regional and local specificities. The Congress then discussed the challenges facing the Church in this field and considered pastoral care taking into account multicultural, inter-religious and ecumenical dialogue, as well as the promotion and protection of human rights closely connected with evangelisation. Migrants and refugees have spiritual as well as material needs to which the Church is called to respond: the departure point of this ministry is understanding their situation in all its dimensions - personal, social and political in the light of the Word of God and the Catholic Church's Social Teaching. The more concretely migrants and refugees are involved in pastoral work, the deeper their own understanding of their situation and more fruitful their spiritual life: many in fact have been and still are valid evangelisers in hosting countries, often countries with secularised societies or not of Christian tradition.

The Congress noted that the tragedies of migration, forced and voluntary, are increasing everywhere in the world and it is difficult to develop adequate responses which give priority to people affirming their dignity. While recognising the right of nations to regulate the migratory flow the Congress expressed concern for the lack of respect for human rights. Keeping in mind that migratory flows always lead to the formation of multicultural and multi-religious societies, it underlined the importance of more dialogue between cultures and religions and also between Christian Churches and Church Communities. In any case, dialogue with other presupposes partners in dialogue aware of their own cultural identity and well formed in their religion.

The Congress formulated a series of recommendations for the Church's mission in this pastoral sector: firstly the care of migrants and refugees in the first years of this millennium is an essential part of new evangelisation, which is realised through liturgical celebrations, catechetical instruction, valorising popular elements. Migrants and refugees are a resource for and can contribute to Church and society. Thus, they should be respected and appreciated by the local population. A special effort must be made to provide appropriate care to migrants and refugees who live in countries where the public expression of faith is hampered or not allowed. The Day of the Migrant and the Refugee, sometimes extended to a week, should be celebrated in all Dioceses and utilized as an occasion to deepen the understanding of the various dimensions of migration. The Message of the Holy Father released on such an occasion should be given proper publicity. It should be made available in all the

languages spoken by the migrants and refugees in the local Church, at least when translations are available. In consideration of the relevance migration has for the life of the Church and for the world, suggestions were expressed that an Encyclical Letter on migration be issued. A proposal for an Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on migration to be convened was also presented.

The Final Document finale closes with a series of appeals: to recognize migrants and refugees as a sign of our times when God calls His Church to live more fully her Catholic dimension and her vocation as pilgrim Church; to ratify as soon as possible the UN Convention for the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.. The Congress appeals to Governments, legislative Bodies and International Organizations to respect and protect the human dignity and human rights (especially the freedom of conscience, cult and religion) of migrants and refugees, be they in a regular or an irregular situation, and not to make international terrorism a pretext to reduce their rights; to give special attention to migrant children, young people and women, and institute heavy sanctions against their exploitation; to admit that policies which are only repressive and restrictive towards. The Congress appeals to all migrants and refugees to appreciate the cultural origins of every person, and respect different cultural practices, as long as they do not contradict the universal ethical values inherent in the natural law or in human rights; for those who are Christians, to be true witnesses of their faith, particularly in countries where Christians are a minority; to be protagonists in building a society which grows in mutual respect and in the recognition of the inalienable dignity of each human being; to appreciate the receiving country and respect its laws and cultural identity. (S.L.) (Fides Service 10/12/2003)

See document in Italian only:

http://www.evangelizatio.org/portale/adgentes/db/pcpmi_01.html