The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO THE NATIONAL DIRECTORS OF PASTORAL CARE FOR MIGRANTS
OF THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCES OF EUROPE (CCEE)

Clementine Hall
Friday, 22 September 2017

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am pleased to welcome you here on the occasion of your meeting, and I thank the Cardinal President for his kind words on your behalf. I am very grateful to all of you for the great effort you have made in recent years to help the many migrants and refugees who knock at Europe's doors in search of a place of safety and a more dignified life.

The complex and varied phenomenon of continued migration has overwhelmed existing immigration policies and measures for the protection of migrants ratified by international agreements. In the face of this crisis, the Church is committed to remain faithful to her mission "to love Jesus Christ, to adore and love him, particularly in the poorest and most abandoned" (*Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees*, 2015).

The Church's maternal love for these, our brothers and sisters, must be concretely shown at every stage of their journey, from start to finish, in such a manner that ecclesial communities and organizations at every step of the way take an active part in this one mission, each to the best of its ability. Seeing and serving the Lord in these members of his "pilgrim people" is a responsibility that unites all the particular Churches in the effort to provide a constant, coordinated and effective outreach.

Dear friends, I cannot fail to express my concern about manifestations of intolerance, discrimination and xenophobia that have appeared in various parts of Europe. Often this reaction

is motivated by mistrust and fear of the other, the foreigner, those who are different. I am even more worried about the disturbing fact that our Catholic communities in Europe are not exempt from these defensive and negative reactions, supposedly justified by a vague moral obligation to preserve an established religious and cultural identity. The Church has spread to all continents thanks to the "migration" of missionaries convinced of the universality of the saving message of Jesus Christ, meant for men and women of every culture. Throughout the history of the Church, there have been temptations to exclusivity and cultural rigidity, but the Holy Spirit has always helped overcome them by ensuring constant openness to others, viewed as a positive opportunity for growth and enrichment.

I am sure that the Holy Spirit also helps us today to maintain a confident attitude of openness, capable of surmounting every barrier and breaking down every wall.

In listening attentively to the particular Churches in Europe, I sense a deep unease about the massive influx of migrants and refugees. That unease needs to be acknowledged and appreciated in the light of this moment of history, marked by an economic crisis that has left deep wounds. It has also been aggravated by the sheer size and makeup of the continuing waves of migrants, the general unpreparedness of the countries that receive them, and by often inadequate national and community policies. But the unease is also indicative of the limits of the process of European unification, and points up the obstacles hindering the concrete application of universal human rights and the expression of that integral humanism which is among the finest fruits of European civilization. For Christians all these factors must be interpreted, in opposition to a self-enclosed and secularist mentality, in the light of the unique, God-given dignity of each human person.

From a distinctively ecclesiological perspective, the arrival of great numbers of our brothers and sisters in the faith offers the Churches in Europe yet another opportunity to embody fully its catholicity, which, as we profess in the creed each Sunday, is a fundamental mark of the Church. In recent years, many dioceses in Europe have already found themselves enriched by the presence of Catholic immigrants who have brought with them their devotions, and their liturgical and apostolic enthusiasm.

From a missionary perspective, the current influx of migrants can be seen as a new "frontier" for mission, a privileged opportunity to proclaim Jesus Christ and the Gospel message at home, and to bear concrete witness to the Christian faith in a spirit of charity and profound esteem for other religious communities. The encounter with migrants and refugees of other denominations and religions represents a fertile ground for the growth of open and enriching ecumenical and interreligious dialogue.

In my Message for the 2018 *World Day of Migrants and Refugees*, I suggested that our pastoral response to the challenges of contemporary movements of migration can be expressed by four

verbs: *to welcome, to protect, to promote and to integrate*. *Welcoming* means expanding legal and secure programmes of reception for those who arrive, as well as offering suitable and dignified accommodations that guarantee their personal safety and access to basic services. *Protecting* involves offering trustworthy and verified information to migrants and refugees prior to their departure, defending their basic rights independent of their legal status, and watching over the most vulnerable, the young children. *Promoting* essentially means ensuring the conditions for the integral human development of all, migrants and natives alike. *Integrating* entails expanding opportunities for intercultural encounter, fostering mutual enrichment and promoting active citizenship.

In the same Message, I also emphasized the importance of the global agreements that States have committed themselves to draft and approve by the end of 2018. The Section for Migrants and Refugees of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development has prepared twenty action points that various local Churches can utilize, integrate and develop in their pastoral outreach. The points are based on the "best practices" that characterize the Church's tangible response to the needs of migrants and refugees. These points can also prove helpful for discussions that various ecclesial institutions can have with government authorities in view of these global agreements. I would encourage you to familiarize yourselves with these points and to promote them through your episcopal conferences.

Those action points also make up a "paradigm" of the four verbs I mentioned above, a paradigm that can serve as a criterion and yardstick for the pastoral practices of the local Churches and an aid in updating and improving them. May the spirit of communion in reflection and action be a source of strength for all of you, since challenges faced alone always appear more daunting. May your interventions continue to be timely and prophetic, and, above all, the fruit of actions consistent with, and inspired by, the principles of Christian doctrine.

Once again, I express my appreciation of your generous commitment to the complex and urgent work of offering pastoral care to migrants. I assure you of my prayers for your intentions, and I ask you, please, not to forget to pray for me.

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