



OFFICE FOR MIGRATION POLICY

Seminar on Human Trafficking

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Prophetic Mission of the Church on behalf of Migrants in England and Wales

An address by Bishop Patrick Lynch

In this introductory presentation I would like to set the scene for the Church's Mission on behalf of migrants in Britain today by focusing on three areas: the changing context of our mission, the principles that inform and shape our mission and some of the very specific challenges we face in our mission.

1. The context of our Mission

To understand the phenomenon of migration we must first try to understand its complexity, its causes and its ever changing nature. It is important to recognize that migration (voluntary and involuntary) is a global phenomenon touching all regions and crossing all boundaries – ecclesiastical and political - with many 'push' and 'pull' factors at work. The Church's concern for those fleeing persecution, conflict, deprivation and natural disasters is rooted in our concern for all who suffer throughout the world. Migration is, therefore, an international phenomenon not just a domestic one – an issue closely linked to international development and peace. That is why the OMP supports the work of Catholic organizations like the International Catholic Migration Commission and Caritas as they work on the international stage restoring dignity to those who need it most and supporting efforts to create structures for a global governance of migration.

Over the last twenty years immigration has transformed the social character of many of the dioceses in England and Wales. Across the country but especially in our cities we have migrants from many parts of the world bringing new vibrancy to our parishes. The Bishops of England and Wales have, in line with *Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi*, spoken both nationally and locally about the 'gift' that migrant communities are to the Church and to society and the importance of creating a 'culture of welcome' in our parishes. Despite a hardening of attitudes towards migrants, Bishops have continued to encourage parishes and schools, local clergy and ethnic chaplains to do all they can to help migrant communities to fully belong to and fully participate in the life of the local Church and society.

The introduction of the 5 tier points system has, however, made it much more difficult for people outside the E.U. to enter Britain today. When presenting the figures for immigration it would be helpful, I believe, if government ministers distinguished more clearly between the numbers of people seeking asylum, those coming from within the E.U., those coming from outside the E.U. (tier 1 and 2) and students coming from outside the E.U. to study at British Universities (tier 4). This latter group (students) is now recognized as the largest group contained in the immigration figures. This issue of overseas students is likely to become even more complicated next year when university fees are set to rise. A serious discussion is needed on the role that British Universities play in educating overseas students and the extent to which that should be developed in the years to come. That discussion is, however, for another day. My point is that numbers of overseas students (tier 4) should be clearly separated from other immigration figures.

Finally, the present economic crisis in Europe has meant a rise in immigration from other E.U. countries. The immigration from Ireland for example isn't anything like it was in the 50's, 60's, 70's and the late 80's but it has risen as has the immigration from Spain and Portugal..

2. The principles that shape our Mission.

In this second part I would like to suggest that the prophetic and indeed pastoral mission of the Church on behalf of migrants is shaped and informed by six key principles of Catholic Social Teaching – principles that are shared by many people and many different organizations.

The principle of human dignity. At the heart of Catholic Social Teaching is the principle that every human being is created in the image of God and is therefore worthy of respect as a member of the human family. This fundamental principle shapes any ministry with migrants – forced or unforced, documented or undocumented. A migrant's legal status is quite separate from his or her human dignity. A human being's worth is defined and determined by their God given dignity not by the papers they do or do not carry. That is why one important objective of our ministry has been especially to support vulnerable groups of migrants especially failed asylum seekers, domestic workers and victims of trafficking.

The right to have a family, to be a family and to live as a family. A family does not cease to be a family because one of its members lives overseas. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (16.3) recognizes the family as “the natural and fundamental group unit of society entitled to protection by society and the State”. Recognizing and re-uniting families is therefore very important. This is the point we made in our recent submission to the U.K.B.A. There should be more flexibility in allowing spouses and dependents not only to come to the U.K. but also to work at least part time in the U.K.

The principle of the common good and the principle of participation. These two principles stress the importance of the social conditions necessary for people to come to their full potential and live in harmony with others. They include ‘respect for persons’, ‘the maintenance of peace, harmony and security’, ‘the right to participate and have access to the economic, social, cultural, networks necessary for human flourishing’. These principles inform our advocacy work as we help migrant communities gain access to the institutions and agencies that provide education, healthcare and housing – all basic human rights. These principles also invite us to reflect on what it means to live in communion with others. In his address for the World Day of Migrants earlier this year Pope Benedict took as his theme “One Human Family”. While he emphasized the importance of respecting the dignity of every human person and therefore of every migrant he also stressed “that migrant communities have a duty to integrate into the host country, respecting its laws and national identity”. The challenge, he added is, “to combine the welcome due to every human being, especially when in need with a reckoning of what is necessary for both local inhabitants and new arrivals to live a dignified and peaceful life”. This is particularly relevant for the Church here in England and Wales at this present time.

The principles of solidarity and subsidiarity. The principle of solidarity reminds us that we are one human family and that as human beings we are interdependent on each other. The task of government at local, national and international level is to find appropriate ways and structures to nurture and express that solidarity especially by helping those most in need. The principle of subsidiarity on the other hand reminds us of the limits of government and the responsibility of local communities. A key challenge for Europe today (in a time of economic crisis and recession) is to create a realistic balance whereby solidarity with the weaker countries is strengthened while subsidiarity is also maintained. Any weakening of the solidarity with E.U. countries in financial difficulty is very likely to lead to an increase in emigration from those countries.

3. Some specific challenges of our Mission today.

In this third section I would like simply to mention a number of specific challenges faced by the Church in England and Wales today with regard to immigration. The first is to continue to reach out to and support vulnerable groups of migrants. The second is to enable migrant communities to become fully part of the Church and the local community and the third is to continue to nourish an attitude and spirituality of welcome in our dioceses, in our parishes and in our schools.

There are three groups of vulnerable migrants I would like to mention in particular: failed asylum seekers, domestic workers and victims of human trafficking. The Reports of Independent Asylum Commission (in 2007) highlighted a number of deficiencies in the asylum system and made a number of very practical

recommendations. There is now thankfully better training for case holders and there is better information regarding countries of origin. However, decision making could be further improved, I believe, if information from Church organizations (eg justice and Peace groups) in countries of origin were taken into account. The opening of the new family centre under the supervision of Bernardo's should eliminate child detention. Nevertheless, the destitution faced by failed asylum seekers is still appalling and the lack of access to legal advice is now making the situation much worse. The OMP continues, therefore, to support and encourage parishes to support accredited organizations and groups working in this area eg the Jesuit Refugee Service.

Domestic workers. For years domestic workers have been coming to the U.K. using domestic worker visas. On occasions they have been treated so badly that they are forced to leave their domestic dwelling. Up until now the arrangement has been that in such situations domestic workers were free to find work with another employer until their visa expires. The Government is now thinking of closing this option. This will result in more suffering for domestic workers and also in sweeping the problem of their treatment under the carpet. It is important that domestic workers from overseas are protected and are treated with dignity and respect.

Victims of human trafficking. The Annual Report of ICMC for 2010 sums up very well the tragedy of human trafficking in our world today: "Enticed by false promises of well-paying jobs, separated from their families, and tricked, exploited and abused in innumerable ways, an estimated 2.4 million men, women and children around the world each year suffer terrible violations of their human dignity at the hands of traffickers". Just recently His Excellency Silvano Tomasi wrote a strong letter to the U.N. stressing the importance of prevention, protection and prosecution. Today we welcome Sr. Eugenia who on behalf of many Religious Orders of women has played a key role in helping the Church to recognize and respond to the tragedy of human trafficking in the world today. Here in this country the prophetic ministry of the Medaille Trust and Woman at the Well has led the way in showing what can actually be done.

A second challenge facing the Church is that of building communion within the Church and within society. Our mission is to build unity while respecting diversity - to build integrated communities not separate ones. Integration does not mean assimilation whereby one loses one's cultural, social and religious identity and is absorbed into the host culture. Integration is a process - often extending over two generations - that begins when the host community reaches out to welcome the immigrant community and help people to connect with, belong to and participate in the life of the local church and local community. If people don't feel welcome they can't fully belong and if they don't feel they belong it is difficult to participate and integrate. Churches and in particular parishes and schools often serve as the first point of entry into society and civic engagement. It is in parishes and schools that migrant communities experience a sense of being welcomed and belonging. It is through the parishes that immigrant families make new friends, receive practical help and advice and develop the basic skills that enable them to connect at a deeper level with the wider community and society. It is through the schools especially that parents begin to see the realization of their dream for a better life for their children.

The Church recognizes the importance of culture in the process of integration by the way it affirms the gifts, the faith, the spirituality, the devotion and devotions of immigrant communities. We must respect other cultures, dialogue with other cultures and learn from other cultures. Integration, however, involves not only appreciating diversity but also nurturing unity. The Church also affirms the need to promote unity in faith amidst a diversity of cultures - a unity that is rooted in our shared faith in the Risen Lord, our shared sense of belonging to the local Church, our shared experience of prayer and especially the Eucharist and our shared commitment to build God's Kingdom.

Finally, I would like to say that there is also an ongoing challenge of nurturing an attitude of welcome in our parishes and our schools. That spirituality of welcome and hospitality is beautifully encapsulated in the Gospel story of the Journey to Emmaus. The story begins as the two disciples are leaving Jerusalem and traveling to Emmaus. They have been devastated by the recent events in Jerusalem - the arrest, the trial, the torture and the death of Jesus. They had hoped that he would have been the one to set Israel free but like many migrants their hopes have been dashed by the reality of life. The Emmaus story is a description of what accompaniment or walking with people actually involves. It involves listening to others and sharing with others. It involves listening to their stories, their struggles, their anxieties and their hopes but it also involves sharing with others

– a sharing of wisdom, a sharing information and advice, a sharing of faith and last but not least the sharing of a meal. Finally, accompaniment gives way to empowerment as the two disciples return immediately to Jerusalem with new heart and new hope. At the beginning of the story the two disciples see Jesus and treat him as a stranger but through the warmth of his welcome, the wisdom of his knowledge and through the fellowship of a meal they gradually see him not as a stranger but as a brother and they see that their mission is to bring hope to the community that they have left in Jerusalem. Likewise our own experience with migrants and their families teaches us that welcoming and walking with always lead to empowering so that as people grow in knowledge and skills, in confidence and in hope they themselves – individually and collectively - are inspired and empowered to reach out to and work for justice for their fellow migrants.