



Tasks of the Parish (local church)

Bringing the Church's teaching down to practicalities at a personal and parish level, the tasks can be spelled out in terms of offering welcome, hospitality, solidarity and assistance at many different levels:

- Alerting and forming parishioners to say "NO" to silence and indifference
- Continuing education against xenophobia
- Offering welcome, hospitality and solidarity
- Forming volunteers to initiate and continue this ministry
- Making personal contacts
- Providing "sensitive" pastoral care, which takes into account the language and culture of migrants
- Enabling the sojourners to become agents of evangelisation themselves
- Instilling "*respectful behaviour*" and an attitude of "*openness*" on their part to the host country. Cooperation on this issue is essential
- participating with specialised agencies and other parish groups with similar programmes

There may also be need for:

- Defence of rights of individuals and groups. It may be helpful to liaise with groups that do this
- Denunciation of injustices
- Action for laws guaranteeing protection
- Provision of scholarship funds
- Provision for Counselling or the "*healing of memory*"
- Provision of emergency funds (Pontifical Council No 82 - 124)

Conclusion

We have become accustomed to immigrants coming to Ireland during the past forty years. The year 2015, however, saw massive movements of peoples - particularly into Europe. Much of this has been caused by "*forced displacement*". Dramatic scenes have appeared on our television screens.

In advocating on behalf of immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers, we are aware of the challenges which are posed to the host societies – including Ireland. There is need for motivation, management and regulation.

Our position as Catholics, however, is based on Bible teachings – Old and New Testaments – as well as on the consistent social teaching of the Church.

"... whoever does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?"

John 4:20

Society of African Missions (SMA)



The Sojourners

Immigrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers



Part Two: The Teaching of the Church

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WHAT DOES THE CHURCH SAY? Catholic Social Teaching emphasises the fundamental dignity of each and every human being. **“Every person is priceless; human beings are worth more than things”**. (Pontifical Council for Migrants & Itinerant People and Cor Unum: Pastoral Guidelines: Welcoming Christ: June 2013, No. 25.)

Immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers have rights and duties. All countries must ensure that these rights and duties are respected, to the same extent as for their own citizens. **“The gauge of the values any institution (or country) holds is whether it threatens or enhances the life and dignity of the human person.”** (Pontifical Council).

Catholic Social Teaching also emphasises *solidarity* as a fundamental principle. The Christian understanding of solidarity goes beyond a vague feeling of compassion for the troubles of people (near and far). It is *“persevering determination and action”* to promote the good of each and all – a commitment to the common good. **“Solidarity calls us to stand together, especially with the poor and the powerless”**. (The Pontifical Council... No. 29).



As conflicts are one of the main causes of forcible displacement, the church consistently calls on the international community to show this solidarity by being involved in addressing the *root causes* of such conflicts.

Love (charity) is at the heart of the Gospel message. Every Christian has the responsibility to respond to the call to *globalize* love and solidarity, and be a primary actor in this regard. All of us need to feel responsible for *“the weaker person.”* We must be ready to help them. (The Pontifical Council... No. 31).

All of us must say: **“No to silence and indifference”!** By our words and actions, we can prevent immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers from becoming scapegoats for the ills of society.

We must refuse to accept the exploitation of immigrants. This is particularly important when their presence is being exploited to distract attention from serious domestic problems.

We must reject deliberate attempts to promote xenophobia.

With Reference to Immigrants

The Church recognises the right of a sovereign nation to protect and control its borders in the service of the common good of its citizens.

However, this too is not an absolute right. Nations also have an obligation to the *universal* common good – to accommodate migration to the greatest extent possible in a safe, orderly and dignified manner. (Cf. John XXIII: *Pacem in Terris* 1963. *Gaudium et Spes*: 1965: No. 87)

Persons who enter a nation without proper authorization or who over-stay their visa, should be treated with respect and dignity. They should not be detained in bad conditions, shackled by their feet or hands, or abused in any manner.

With Reference to Refugees

Persons who flee their home countries because of fear of persecution must be afforded safe haven and protection in another country. (Pontifical Council for Migrants, Itinerants, Refugees and People on the Move: 1992.)

“Protection” must not be limited to a guarantee of physical integrity. It must be extended to all conditions necessary for a full, dignified life.

This will include food, clothing, housing, education, access to medical care, freedom to practice their own faith and traditions – as well as the gradual assumption of responsibility for their own lives. On the question of refugee camps, experience shows that significant problems can arise: e.g. overcrowding, claustrophobia, restrictions on movement, factionalism, insecurity, relations with local communities, competition for scarce resources, no control over one’s own destiny.

The reunification of refugees with their families should also be promoted.

Persons found in danger at sea, in distress and in need of help require (by International Conventions) that they be given help and conducted to a place of safety. Only after this can requests for asylum be examined

With Reference to Asylum Seekers

A person applying for asylum should not be interned unless it can be demonstrated that he/she presents a real danger to the community or fails to report to the competent authorities.

A person applying for asylum should be helped towards a rapid and just legal procedure.

A person applying for asylum should be given access to work as soon as possible. He/she not only has needs; they have gifts.

Church teaching strongly opposes forced repatriation. No one should be sent back to a country where he/she fears discriminatory or life-threatening situations.

Families should enjoy personal and family privacy, and the possibility of family reunification in the country of asylum. It is a foundational principle of Catholic Social Teaching that the family is *“the vital cell of society”* and is a necessity for the proper growth and harmonious development of the human person. (Cf. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*: 2005: Numbers 209 - 254.)



“Although dealing respectfully and generously with their material problems is the first duty to be fulfilled, one must not forget their spiritual formation, through specific pastoral programmes which take into account their language and culture.” (Pontifical Council No.36)

Any form of proselytising is to be deplored.