

PASTORAL ORIENTATIONS ON INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE

EXCERPTS

Migrants & Refugee Section,
Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development

Preface

In his 2020 greeting for the New Year to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See, Pope Francis explicitly addressed the urgent needs of internally displaced people, and his compassionate concern serves as an excellent introduction to the new Pastoral Orientations on Internally Displaced People. Wherever there is intense and protracted violence,

there is a need to encourage initiatives to foster fraternity among all local cultural, ethnic and religious groups [...]. Situations of conflict and humanitarian crises, aggravated by climate change, are increasing the numbers of displaced persons and affecting people already living in a state of dire poverty. Many of the countries experiencing these situations lack adequate structures for meeting the needs of the displaced. ...

... Internal displacement takes place in very many different contexts. Main triggers include armed conflicts, situations of generalized violence, human rights violations, sudden onset disasters as well as disasters that develop slowly. Development investments, such as large infrastructure or urban renewal projects, can also cause displacement on a large scale. Increasingly, most internally displaced persons live in situations of protracted displacement or face chronic displacement risk. ...

Welcome

... the Catholic Church is called to ... Call upon pastoral workers, particularly parish priests, to promote a positive view of internally displaced persons in their communities, so that they respond to their Christian vocation to welcome the people knocking on their doors, recognizing in them the presence of God. "Offering hospitality grows out of an effort to be faithful to God, to listen to His voice in the Sacred Scriptures and recognize Him in the people around us" (*Welcoming Christ in Refugees* [2013], 83).

Protect

Assistance and programmes for internally displaced persons rarely give special attention to the most vulnerable, including people who have escaped from armed conflicts, unaccompanied or separated children, child soldiers, abused women and children, disabled persons and members of discriminated ethnic groups. To respond to this challenge, the Catholic Church is called to: Advocate for policies which protect the family and that prevent family separation... Advocate for the direct application by the competent authorities of the principle of the *Best Interest of the Child*... Promote awareness and education campaigns to avoid the abuse of internally displaced women and children...

Promote

Programmes for internally displaced persons often focus on material needs and neglect the relevance of the religious and spiritual dimension for internally displaced persons' resilience and empowerment. This dimension is essential to the integral human development that is supposed to be the ultimate goal of every programme addressing internally displaced persons.

Integrate

Confronted with IDPs' ethnic, cultural, linguistic and ritual differences and their special vulnerabilities, local Churches often struggle to develop mechanisms aimed at effectively including Catholic internally displaced persons in local parishes. To respond to this challenge, the Catholic Church is called to: Provide Catholic internally displaced persons, especially during their initial settlement, with spiritual care that respects their traditions, customs and rites. Further, the inclusion of IDPs themselves in providing pastoral care to their communities could be particularly effective.

Message of Pope Francis, *Like Jesus Christ, Forced to Flee,* for the 106th Day of Migrants & Refugees

EXCERPTS

... I would like to start with the image that inspired Pope Pius XII in his Apostolic Constitution *Exsul Familia* (1 August 1952). During the flight into Egypt, the child Jesus experienced with his parents the tragic fate of the displaced and refugees, “which is marked by fear, uncertainty and unease (cf. Mt 2:13-15, 19-23). ... In the faces of the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the sick, strangers and prisoners, we are called to see the face of Christ who pleads with us to help (cf. Mt 25:31-46). If we can recognize him in those faces, we will be the ones to thank him for having been able to meet, love and serve him in them. Displaced people offer us this opportunity to meet the Lord, “even though our eyes find it hard to recognize him: his clothing in tatters, his feet dirty, his face disfigured, his body wounded, his tongue unable to speak our language” (Homily, 15 February 2019). We are called to respond to this pastoral challenge with the four verbs I indicated in my Message for this Day in 2018: welcome, protect, promote and integrate. To these words, I would now like to add another six pairs of verbs that deal with very practical actions and are linked together in a relationship of cause and effect.

[1] You have *to know* in order *to understand*. ... When we talk about migrants and displaced persons, all too often we stop at statistics. But it is not about statistics, it is about real people! If we encounter them, we will get to know more about them. And knowing their stories, we will be able to understand them. ...

[2] It is necessary *to be close* in order *to serve*. ... Fears and prejudices – all too many prejudices – keep us distant from others and often prevent us from “becoming neighbours” to them and serving them with love. Drawing close to others often means being willing to take risks, as so many doctors and nurses have taught us in recent months. This readiness to draw near and serve goes beyond a mere sense of duty. ...

[3] In order *to be reconciled*, we need *to listen*. ... In 2020, silence has reigned for weeks in our streets. A dramatic and troubling silence, but one that has given us the opportunity to listen to the plea of the vulnerable, the displaced and our seriously ill planet. ...

[4] In order *to grow*, it is necessary *to share*. ... God did not want the resources of our planet to benefit only a few. This was not the Lord’s will! We have to learn to share in order to grow together, leaving no one behind. The pandemic has reminded us how we are all in the same boat. Realizing that we have the same concerns and fears has shown us once more that no one can be saved alone. ...

[5] We need *to be involved* in order *to promote*. ... Sometimes the impulse to serve others prevents us from seeing their real riches. If we really want to promote those whom we assist, we must involve them and make them agents in their own redemption. The pandemic has reminded us of how essential co-responsibility is, and that only with the contribution of everyone – even of those groups so often underestimated – can we face this crisis. ...

[6] It is necessary *to cooperate* in order *to build*. ... Building the Kingdom of God is a duty common to all Christians, and for this reason it is necessary that we learn to cooperate, without yielding to the temptation to jealousy, discord and division. In the present context it should be reiterated: “This is not a time for self-centredness, because the challenge we are facing is shared by all, without distinguishing between persons” (Urbi et Orbi Message, 12 April 2020). To preserve our common home and make it conform more and more to God’s original plan, we must commit ourselves to ensuring international cooperation, global solidarity and local commitment, leaving no one excluded.