

World Day of Prayer for Migrants and Refugees

The World Day of Prayer for Migrants and Refugees takes place on 26 September. **Pope Francis** offers a message for World Day of Prayer for Migrants and Refugees 2021 that emphasises a movement toward an ‘ever wider we’.



In the Encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, I wrote: ‘Once this health crisis passes, our worst response would be to plunge even more deeply into feverish consumerism and new forms of egotistic self-preservation. God willing, we will think no longer in terms of “them” and “those”, but only “us”’ (FT, 35) in order to indicate a clear horizon for our common journey in this world.

Salvation history has a ‘we’ in its beginning and a ‘we’ at its end, and at its centre the mystery of Christ, who died and rose so ‘that they may all

be one’ (Jn 17:21). The present time, however, shows that this ‘we’ willed by God is broken and fragmented, wounded and disfigured. This becomes more evident in moments of great crisis, as in the pandemic. Our ‘we’, both in the wider world and within the Church, is crumbling and cracking due to myopic and aggressive forms of nationalism (FT, 11) and radical individualism (FT, 105). The highest price is being paid by those who easily become viewed as others: foreigners, migrants, the marginalised,

those living on the existential peripheries.

We are called to work together, so that there will be no more walls that separate us, *no longer others*, but only a single 'we', encompassing all of humanity each in the midst of his or her own community, to make the Church become ever more inclusive as we carry out the mission entrusted to the Apostles by Jesus Christ: 'As you go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment' (Mt 10:7–8).

In our day, the Church is called to go out into the streets of every existential periphery in order to heal wounds and to seek out the straying, without prejudice or fear, without proselytising, but ready to widen our tent to embrace everyone. Among those dwelling in those existential peripheries, we find many migrants and refugees, displaced persons and victims of trafficking, to whom the Lord wants his love to be manifested and his salvation preached. '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

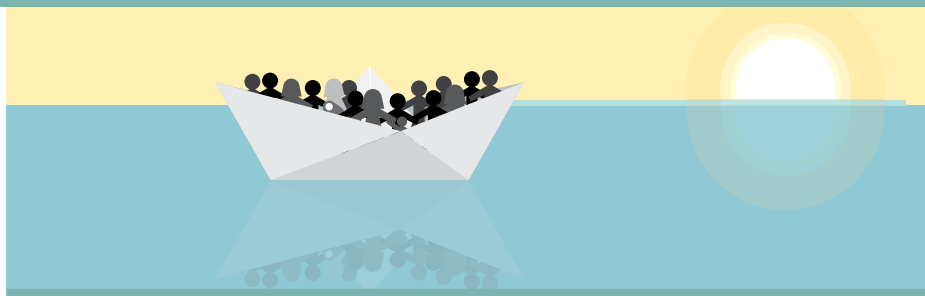
interreligious dialogue' (Address to the National Directors of Pastoral Care for Migrants, 22 September 2017).

To achieve this ideal, however, we must make every effort to break down the walls that separate us and, in acknowledging our profound interconnection, build bridges that foster a culture of encounter. Today's migration movements offer an opportunity for us to overcome our fears and let ourselves be enriched by the diversity of each person's gifts. Then, if we so desire, we can transform borders into privileged places of encounter, where the miracle of an ever wider 'we' can come about.

Prayer

Holy, beloved Father,
your Son Jesus taught us
that there is great rejoicing in heaven
whenever someone lost is found,
whenever someone excluded, rejected
or discarded
is gathered into our 'we',
which thus becomes ever wider.

We ask you to grant the followers of
Jesus,
and all people of good will,
the grace to do your will on earth.
Bless each act of welcome and outreach
that draws those in exile
into the 'we' of community and of the
Church,
so that our earth may truly become
what you yourself created it to be:
the common home of all our brothers
and sisters.
Amen.



Fr Alan Hilliard, a frequent contributor to *The Messenger* and head of Chaplaincy Services at TU Dublin, offers a response to Pope Francis' message for Migrants Sunday 2021.

Like many things the Venice Biennale of Architecture had to be postponed for a year. It now takes place from May – Nov 2021. How will we live together? the theme asks. Following the postponement the contributors were asked if they wanted to resubmit their entries in order to take account of the pandemic. They replied that everything they had already submitted is of relevance to all that has gone on over the last year.

Pope Francis is not the only one raising the 'we' question. He has been doing this for quite a while and for him the plight of migrants tells us that all is not right in the world. There are things going on that are stealing people's livelihoods, their families and their lives.

Sadly, there is no doubt that most migration policy is weighted towards 'propping up Us' rather than providing for a 'better We'. Migration has got more complex and expensive. According to a report in the *Irish Times* (27/01/2021) over 1,088 Chinese

business men have benefited from the Golden Shake since 2012, whereby payments of over one million euro are paid to various businesses and charities to obtain Irish Passports. This scheme is not unique to Ireland.

While this scheme operates, one school in England reports that 7% of its children have parents that are technically illegal immigrants. And as these matters get attention, Australia, who has very strict quarantine rules is creating avenues to reopen back-packer immigration due to a shortfall in employable people to work on farms, bars and restaurants.

These examples show how 'us' is more important than 'we'. Migration policy is used to serve lifestyles more than it is to serve the building of a common humanity. The question 'How will we live together?' is far from being answered. However, it is important that we keep the concept of 'We' before us.

The final line of Pope Francis's Message for the World Day of Prayer for Migrants and Refugees on September 26th was never more apt: If we so desire, we can transform borders into privileged places of encounter, where the miracle of an ever wider "we" can come about. ❤️