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Migration - a pastoral response

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The motif on the cover of *The Furrow* is from Jeremiah 4:3, which reads in the Vulgate:

Novate vobis novale
Et nolite serere super spinas.
Yours to drive a new furrow,
Nor sow any longer among the briers.

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Migration
— *a pastoral response*

Alan Hilliard

The faces in our pews are changing. We are all too aware of the 'greying' of our church-going population but some of the gaps in the benches are being filled. The sight of young adults occupying the top half of the Church is a welcome one; their confident Catholicism warms our hearts. On a Sunday while noticing the number of immigrants present in the worshipping community I find myself at times thinking of what used to be. Memories of young enthusiastic attendances at folk Masses. Rip-roaring efforts at relevancy as we tried to hold on to so many young hearts. It's getting more difficult to think of a future. We hear the same old litany of cause and effect; resources, shortage of priests, busy lives, it goes on. The future is often staring us in the face; we just have to wake up to it.

Whatever our personal view on immigration the evidence worldwide is that migrants grace a receiving Church. I celebrated Mass in Kilburn on Saint Patrick's Day last year. The Church that was once mostly populated by Irish people is now a rich multi-cultural tapestry of faiths. The parish is alive and vibrant. The United Sates describes itself as an immigrant Church. The American experience tells us that between the early eighteen hundreds and the early nineteen hundreds the Catholic population of the United States went from 7% to 20%. This fact made the Catholic Church in the US a force to be reckoned with at a national level but more importantly at the local level it generated dynamic, committed faith communities that inspire us to this day. The National Life Survey taken up in Australia in 2001 surveyed 86,368 Mass goers. The majority of Australian born Mass goers were over 60 while for overseas Mass goers the average age was between 40 and 59. The single group that held best attendance

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rates were Catholic women born overseas. The evidence is clear. Immigrants *when welcomed* make a positive contribution to the faith community they belong to. This is supported by *Erga Migrantes* in para. 96 when it says 'the migrant *thirsts* for some gesture that will make them feel welcome, recognized, acknowledged as a person. Even just a simple greeting is one of these.' The Church is equipped to provide this welcome. This is supported by secular studies into integration. The Church as a universal reality provides familiar signals for the immigrants who are away from their native place and seeks solace and support in a structure that they can understand and connect with. We cannot leave people disappointed. To do so echoes the welcome that the infant about to be born to Mary and Joseph was met with. There are many ways of saying 'we have no room'. And in doing so we may close a door on our future.

Ireland now has 10.4% of its population who are foreign born.[1] Considering we have had net immigration only since the mid nineties this is extraordinary. The UK census with its long history of immigration reveals that their foreign born are 8.3% of the population. As we read these statistics we know that Ireland is changing. As pastoral ministers we may be in awe of the challenge before us. Migration is a reality in today's world. The local Church has to accept the new pastoral demands and challenges that migration brings. Fortunately we are given a wonderful blueprint in the document published by the Pontifical Commission for Migrants and Travelling People in May 2004 entitled *Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi.*

MIGRATION AND EXILE – RESTORING BALANCE

A term that most Irish people are familiar with is 'Buailte isteach' or 'runner in'. It is a term used in country towns and villages and even in inner city areas. It used to put the visitor on his or her guard. Borders, boundaries, wealth and influence are built on the often false precepts of a superior race setting itself above what it deems to be an inferior race.

It was this atmosphere that brought about the Exile. God had to remove his people from the situation where societal and religious norms created an environment where people were thriving on notions of superiority. He brought them to Babylon so they could look one another in the eye and realize that as God's people they shared a variety of gifts and talents but in essence they were all equal before him. Exile reformed the people of God. They learnt not to rely on external belief and practice but on the God who held the flame of hope before them. They were imbued with the hope

1. CSO 2004.

of a new future where they had the opportunity to start off afresh and reformulate the world which they hoped to occupy. Exile restored a balance for a people who had lost a sense of perspective on life and more profoundly on God. The whole of creation craves balance and harmony and there are many ways in which our attention is being called to this fact. However one of the greatest mechanisms at work in our world today to correct imbalance is migration. Our history in Ireland is a testament to this.

IRISH EMIGRATION: OBSERVATIONS

There are hundreds and thousands of stories and songs of Irish emigration that would occupy us for hours. Let us rather highlight a number of lessons that we have learnt from Irish emigration that helps us understand migration and more particularly the migrant.

—Migration is essentially a *journey of the heart.* There is no getting away from the emotional wreckage that emigration caused. We thought it would solve some people's problems but as the poet Horace reminds us, 'Those who change their sky don't change their soul' or as an AA member told me once, 'The first person you meet coming off the boat is yourself.'

—The next point follows from this, namely that it is very hard to measure monetary returns against *social cost.* This is particularly true when we speak about emigrants' remittances.

—Migration is not just the engagement of people with another land; it is the *engagement of nations.* We find that nations do not take this responsibility seriously. This is why the biggest issue in today's world is not the issue of refugees and asylum seekers but of internally displaced people. People who live in a country without status or recognition. As someone recently commented the issue with migration in the past was homelessness now its homelessness and statelessness.

—*Cultural sensitivity is supportive of integration.* Coincidentally apart from migrant chaplains many Irish priests and religious chose to serve in countries abroad and they provided accompaniment to Irish people in a strange land. Without knowing it they were providing culturally sensitive support. Their support helped overcome the sense of isolation that one inevitably feels in a new land.

—The option that best suits the employer or the economy is *usually workable in the sort term and detrimental in the long run.* We constantly see the consequences of 'the lump' among the elderly Irish in the UK. The issue of the undocumented in the US is particularly unjust because the United States tolerated this situation. A pool of cheap labour is provided with little regard for the nation's responsibility to that labour force.

—Migration highlights the *importance of religious belief and practice*. For some individuals migration is an opportunity to lapse from oppressive religious practices that one interprets as limiting human freedom. For most Irish, however, their faith sustained them. For most their dependence on the God that nourishes and watches over his people was the key to keeping hope alive. The local Church provided a common space for inclusion and growth. As happened in the biblical Exile, faith and religion were redefined in the new context.
—One other important point is that *integration cannot be forced*. One can offer help and assistance but it cannot be forced. Integration of Irish people took place over generations not over night.
—The majority of emigrants did not wane in their *commitment to their homeland*. This commitment may have had an adverse affect on their ability to make their new land their 'home'.

The reason I mention these points is that they are obvious to us. However, I was delighted when I started reading *Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi* (EMCC) to see so many of these ideas alive on its pages. The document gave expression to the story of the migrant that few others are prepared to tell. It holds before the world its duty towards the humanity of the migrant. The fact that there were over 190 million migrants in 2005 and that at least half of these are in Europe is a challenge and an opportunity.

THE CHURCH SPEAKS

In August 1952 the Church promulgated a document entitled *Exsul Familia* which is considered to be the 'Magna Carta of the Church' thought on migration' (EMCC, 20). It was issued following the massive dislocation of people following the Second World War. Anything written prior to this focused on chaplains and norms for local clergy dealing with migrants, e.g. *Ethnografica Studia* in 1914. From the early part of the twentieth century the Church has issued norms and guidelines for the care of migrants based on the needs of migrants and those who serve them. The latest document, *Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi* was approved by the Holy Father on 1 May 2004, the Feast of St Joseph the Worker. It was issued by the Pontifical Council for Migrants and Travellers on 3 May of that year.

It is a document that is essential reading for any one who is interested in the issues affecting migrants. It is the fruit of praxis so cannot be condemned as idealistic in its overall ethos. The model emerging in the document reflects the pastoral practice of the Irish Church. Send out the shepherds, follow the sheep and reflect on what is happening in their lives. On occasion it is quite

directive and challenges us to act. It is a document that is providing a basis for further thought as the consciousness of the world changes. As recently as 15 September this year the International Catholic Migration Commission (www.icmc.net) made a submission to the United Nations High Level Dialogue on Migration and Development on the theme of Migration and Rights. The core elements of this submission have their origins in EMCC. As the submission said, we are at 'a moment of choice with regard to migration: to choose the path from chaos to coherence'.[2] If we reflect on the document and indeed our own history of emigration we can discern the signs of hope offered towards a more coherent approach to migration and the migrant.

In order that our pastoral responses do not become short-sighted actions we must come to terms with what we believe about migration and in particular the migrant. We cannot look at the issues that are live for us today without first contemplating the bigger picture. Neither can we be tempted to view immigration to Ireland through the eyes of the Irish immigrant as we then might see immigration as a debt we owe to others because we got a start in other countries! Those who arrive, those who migrate have rights that go far beyond our romantic philanthropies. The story of Irish emigration can be helpful but it does not in any way provide a platform for a balanced approach to migration trends today.

ERGA MIGRANTES

I intend to reflect on the contents of the document under three headings:
—Migration
—The Migrant
—The role of the local Church

Before we consider these headings let us acknowledge that the Church has every right to be involved in the migration debate. The Church is involved at the operational level across the world with the care of migrants and refugees. It is well placed to see the movement of peoples. At a parish level it responds sensitively to demographic fluctuations. We see this in Ireland when urban parishes empty for the summer and those in seaside resorts have to expand their services. Simple reactions like this are measuring and monitoring the migratory patterns of people. These movements of people are observed by the world-wide gaze of the Church and the reasons behind these movement are examined. The changing demography among Irish people is changing the

2. *Human Rights is the Bridge*. ICMC Position for the UN High Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development. UN General Assembly, NY, 14-15 September 2006.

fabric of parish and diocese in the greater Leinster area. In paragraphs 10 and 11 of *Erga Migrantes* the parallels between domestic migration and international migration are noted. Maybe we see the two as mutually exclusive. What we are asked to consider in urban migration and in migration generally is that we give 'loving attention to people on the move and to their need for solidarity and friendship' (10). The document tells us that the movement of peoples domestically calls for 'well designed forms of welcome and pastoral activity that is continuous, thorough and adapted as closely as possible to the actual situation and needs of the migrants' (11). From its operational base the Church sees the movement of peoples and reflects on changing consequences for the local Church.

MIGRATION

When we consider the reasons for migration we can reflectively ask what are the intrinsic differences between people moving from the border counties to the cities or from the over-populated cities to quieter sylvan settings and the reasons given by Bishop François Gayot of Haiti as to why his people move to the United States? Haiti has population of eight million with an estimated two million living abroad. The first reason he offers is survival; the need to provide for one's family at an economic level. Second, a life project: this is about quality of life and opportunity, Third, for peace, to escape troubled areas.

Despite the huge movement of peoples in the past the document alerts us to the fact that 'today's migrations constitute the greatest movements of persons, if not peoples of all time (96). We are told that what we have before us in every instance is 'the birth pangs of a new humanity' (12). As in any birth there is challenge, there is fear. The Church is forthright in saying that migration is a phenomenon that has to be embraced. This is not just a sociological phenomenon but is a very strong part of our faith tradition. 'The journey from monoculture to multicultural societies can be a sign of the living presence of God in history and in the community of humankind' (9). We also note that when God established covenants with his people it was always while they were on a journey. We have Moses, Abraham and, as we are aware, the Last Supper was in the context of the journey into Jerusalem.

THE MIGRANT

The main reason the Church involves itself in the debate on migration is that it is concerned about the migrant. Rather than highlighting the discriminatory and unjust practices of the world the document highlights the contribution that migrants make to their

host nation. The Church is in no way naïve regarding the misery that can befall those who are migrants. In many forums the Church reminds the world that migration is about migrants; human beings who seek a hope-filled future yet can be the subject of exploitation. The Church challenges host societies to be just in the way it embraces the migrant. This policy is not only for the benefit of the migrant but for the society, in the longer term. Bishop Nicholas Di Marzio who sat on the UN Commission for Global Migration put it succinctly when he said 'that when migrants are given the necessary social status they do integrate'.[3] This is building on the emphasis in *Erga Migrantes* which reiterates 'that foreign workers are not to be considered merchandise or merely manpower (5).

It is in the midst of this economic reality that the Church speaks for the migrant. It is the duty of the Church to 'give loving attention to "people on the move" and to their need for solidarity and fellowship' (11). Acting in this manner the Church highlights the fallacies that exist in some of the arguments placed before society for restrictionist polices. Falling birth-rates, aging populations continue to pose problems for developed nations yet we increase the restrictions on the migrant. The fact is that 'many nations would not be what they are today without the contribution made by millions of immigrants' (5).

In drawing out all these facts the Church is fulfilling its duty to put common sense into the migration debate. The duty of a host nation is to provide policies that 'carefully avoid every possible discrimination' (29). The document highlights that 'migration meant and still means enormous hardship and suffering for the migrants' (5) and goes on to say that 'often migrants are deprived of their most elementary human rights, including that of forming labour unions' (5). The Church promotes the protection of families and the rights of minors who are often overlooked by policy makers and highlights in this same paragraph that human trafficking has no conscience when it comes to the weak and the vulnerable. Particular reference is made to the rights of women and children.

However, the one thing that is not taken account of and which we discover is important is the study of 'the migrant heart'. As far back as 1836 the Evidence to the Royal Commission on the Irish Poor relates 'that the Irish often complain about the heart in an indefinite manner, without sufficient ground'.[4] And on another occasion it tells of the Irish that 'they frequently complain about

3. Challenges for the Future of Global Migration. Address to the International Catholic Migration Commission, 3 July 2006, Casa Bonus Pastor, Rome, Italy.
4. 'The Very Pests of Society': The Irish and 150 Years of Public Health in England. Gabriel Scally, *Clinical Medicine*, vol. 4, no. 1 Jan./Feb. 2004.

the heart when the heart is not affected'. We are slowly taking account of the unspoken trauma associated with migration. We know the damage to the human psyche when one does not give expression to pain and loss. We need to use the language of the heart and be aware that when a person leaves their home place no matter how much money they earn or how much better the circumstances are, there is a chance that that there is a pain of exile that may be summed up in the term 'culture shock'. When a country welcomes a person with restrictive legislation, when it removes the right to work, when it divides families the fallout for the migrant is immense and the social cost is incalculable. Those of us who have travelled are fools if we think it is all about bright lights and distraction. There is the personal journey that needs to be taken account of. One of our workers abroad told me that what they see at times is permanent grieving, being in one place and looking to another. To occupy this place is a torment; however it is the place of the Christian, as *Erga Migrantes* tells us, 'to follow Christ means to walk behind him and be in transit in world because "there is no eternal city for us in this life"' (Heb. 13:14). The believer is always a *paroikas*, a temporary resident' (16).

THE CHALLENGE FOR THE LOCAL CHURCH

As a society that is now receiving people we have to build on the experience of other Churches and believe that we already are and will be further graced by those who come to our shore. There is an inherent challenge that is hope-filled. 'The foreigner is God's messenger, who surprises us and interrupts the logic of daily life, bringing near those who are far away' (101). Though we crave order, God often works in the chaotic. There is a part of God that uses change to motivate us into action and push us out of complacency. The image used throughout the document is that of Pentecost: 'Pentecost does not abolish the various languages and cultures but recognizes them in their identities' (37) and earlier describes Pentecost as an event 'where differences are harmonized by the spirit and charity becomes authentic in accepting one another' (18).

The document offers firm advice as to how the local Church responds to migrants in order to bring forth their gifts and talents. The methodology may be summed up in the observation that is based on the experience of the people in Exodus where 'faith finds in migration an exile in which every goal reached in fact is relative'(13). This is a wise observation. Parishes find that migrant groups are transitory. The old notion of a house for life, as would have been the case in previous generations, is less apparent. We find more fluidity in life and this fact does affect the way we think

and plan in parishes. So where do we start? How do we make sense of life and ministry? Paragraph 36 points out that 'fluidity' of cultures creates opportunities for the proclamation of the gospel. As a starting point the document introduces the very rich concept of inculturation which we are told starts with the fine art of listening, the purpose of which is getting to know those we minister to. 'Getting to know the other is to build up bonds of mutual respect; mere 'tolerance is not enough' (36). The challenge is to dialogue with people of different faiths not just to find common ground but to share our vision for a world that is focused on the role and presence of the infinite being we call God. We have to be united in hope against the threat of religious extremism which often undermines the fabric of the faith tradition it purports to serve and represent.

In order to show our respect for those who come amongst us, *Erga Migrantes* highlights the right of people to have services in their mother tongue This is the way people have come to know the infinite and it is part of the continuing journey (38). People have a right to 'express mentality, thought and culture, and spiritual life in the tradition of their Church of origin'. In case anyone from the receiving Church protests against the setting-up of a ghetto the aim of this service is stated quite clearly which is the 'progressive integration and self sufficiency of the migrant' (77). As I pointed out earlier when reflecting on the experience of the Irish immigrant, integration cannot be forced. The provision of such services is truly the language of welcome. The fact that people are uprooted from their home country should not be worsened by the loss of their spiritual identity and the neglect of their religious rituals. In this regard the document observes that pious practices are very important to migrant people. Some of these practices may not hold much attraction for us but as *Erga Migrantes* informs us, 'we must also bear in mind that for many migrants it is a fundamental link with their Church of origin and with their ways of understanding and living the faith' (46).

CONCLUSION

Providing the necessary services for the migrant is in keeping with the rich scriptural tradition of welcoming the stranger. This is not just the duty of the Christian but part of the dynamic of God's revelation. The new-born child changes the relationship in the home so the stranger, the presence of so many new members in our churches poses the greatest challenge of all which is beyond the provision of language and mere listening. Fundamentally, it is the challenge that we too must change. There is hope and opportunity if we have the courage to extend our borders, boundaries

and hearts to receive the stranger. It is now time, as some one said to me recently, to be less Irish and more Catholic. Maybe this is an unreasonable request or expectation. However, the story of revelation is a succession of unreasonable requests, from Sinai to Horeb; from Bethlehem to Calvary. George Bernard Shaw said that all change comes from unreasonable requests because those who make reasonable requests are people who expect the world to carry on as it always has.

No craven obedience. There can be few clergy (and even fewer faithful clergy) who have never been hoodwinked by the clever conman. In most cases, the cause is an entirely honourable anxiety that this particular request – implausible and far-fetched as it may seem – might in fact be utterly genuine. There is no shame attached to this. A lack of concern is a greater defect of character than any naïve gullibility. What may happen, in terms of duping, to the individual pastor may happen also to the institutional church. Perhaps at times it should happen. But the church must nevertheless have a clarity about its relationship to the world around it. If it is ever to regain the trust of the Irish people, it must show that its love is unconditional and not a masquerade for the regaining of control. The church must never again seek the craven obedience of the Irish people; such obedience will in any case never again be forthcoming. But the church must nevertheless seek to develop a new relationship to the culture in which it is set.

—+RICHARD CLARKE, *A Whisper of God* (Dublin: The Columba Press) p. 65

Pandemic Flu

– *the role of the Church*

Nick Donnelly
Jim McManus

In the field of health and pastoral care, 2006 has been a significant year due to the growing concern among scientists, health professionals, and politicians, that the influenza virus A/H5N1 has the potential to mutate into a strain that could cause a worldwide pandemic, to which most humans will probably have limited resistance.

In light of the seriousness of the threat posed by H5N1, the World Health Organization (WHO) made the following statement in November 2005, 'The world is now closer to another influenza pandemic than at any time since 1968, when the last of the previous century's three pandemics began.'[1] The concurrent declaration of WHO alert phase three means we have entered the 'Pandemic Alert Period'. We are now two phases removed from the declaration of a pandemic.

But there is a consensus among public health officials that public services, businesses and especially voluntary organizations are not prepared for the effect pandemic flu may have on them.[2] There is also a consensus that these agencies will need the resources of the Church to provide for a pandemic, such as clergy, in their roles as community leaders, re-inforcing government health guidance, reassuring a frightened public and clergy and volunteer laity visiting the sick.

1. World Health Organization (2005) *Influenza pandemic preparedness and response* (Geneva: World Health Organization). Accessible at http://www.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/EB115/B115_44-en.pdf
2. J. Kaiser (2004), 'Influenza: girding for disaster. Facing down pandemic flu, the world's defenses are weak', *Science*, 15 Oct. 2004, vol. 306, no. 5695, pp. 394-7.

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