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Inspiring changes: training, informing, and making aware on human mobility

Annual Meeting of Bishops and Delegates in charge of the Pastoral Care of Migrants
Stockholm, Sweden, 13-15 July 2018

Migration is not just an economic, social, demographic, cultural, and political issue. Precisely because it has become an increasingly politicized topic, only through communication one can understand today the reasons for this global human movement, and the presence of migrants and their integration into European societies. So, firstly, how can we communicate, inform people, and train the Catholic faithful to a correct perception of the migration issue? What tools to use? How can we witness to how much good is being done in Europe also through the Catholic Church? How to fight the numerous "fake news" that populate the virtual squares and distort reality? These are the questions faced by those in charge of the pastoral care of migrants of the Catholic Bishops' Conferences in Europe, who met in Stockholm (Sweden) from 13 to 15 July.

Migration within the European continent has been and still is healthy for the faith, because many Christians who came from Eastern Europe, the Middle East, or Africa have maintained and live their faith in the host countries, often marked by a strong process of secularization. On the other hand, a wrong management or the conscious manipulation of the migratory issue through the social media have often generated misunderstandings, or even hostile attitudes in receiving communities. This is what maintained **Prof. Fr. José María La Porte**, Dean of the Faculty of Institutional Social Communication of the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross (Rome), while introducing the theme, *Immigration and public opinion: the dynamics of information*.

Il Consiglio delle Conferenze Episcopali d'Europa (CCEE) include le attuali 33 Conferenze Episcopali Europee, rappresentate dai loro Presidenti, dagli Arcivescovi del Lussemburgo e del Principato di Monaco, dall'Arcivescovo di Cipro dei Maroniti, dal Vescovo di Chişinău (Rep. Moldova), dal Vescovo eparchiale di Mukachevo e dall'amministratore apostolico d'Estonia. L'attuale presidente è il Cardinale Angelo Bagnasco, Arcivescovo di Genova, i Vicepresidenti sono il Cardinale Vincent Nichols, Arcivescovo di Westminster, e Mons. Stanisław Gądecki, Arcivescovo di Poznań. Il Segretario Generale del CCEE è Mons. Duarte da Cunha. Il Segretariato ha sede a San Gallo (Svizzera).

In fact, the participants emphasized that in times of economic crisis, the perception in public opinion grows that national governments should first take care of their own citizens rather than migrants. In the media debates, migration is only dealt with from an economic or political perspective, and the result is evident: people forget about the inalienable right to the dignity of every human person. Moreover, the media do not always deal with the complex issue of human mobility with due competence. Thus, the role of communication in the narration of human mobility in its tragedies but also in its beauty and wealth appears to be a crucial responsibility of the Church too. In this same line, the participants have highlighted the urgency for those in charge of the pastoral care of migrants to connect ministry to communication, by investing in the training of communicators and the use of social media.

Too often, in fact, there is a risk of uncritically using categories 'borrowed' from other institutions or other areas such as politics, sociology, or economy that generate confusion and fear. On the contrary, narrating in an appropriate way human mobility is an urgent challenge that requires a renewed commitment on the part of the Church. This does not always translate in an increase of public interventions or new media tools, but rather in returning to the simple but clear expression of the principles that underlie the activity of the Church, such as the dignity of every person. In this line, the testimony of the Church will appear much stronger if the various pastoral areas in charge of human care will bear witness to this desire to protect the person. One cannot be in favour of defending the dignity of life of migrants and against the defense of life or the family; and, vice versa, one cannot defend life from the moment of its creation to its natural end, and not defend the life and dignity of migrants.

On Saturday 14 July, the participants had a dialogue with representatives of Caritas Sweden, ICMC, and the Migrants and Refugees Section of the Vatican Dicastery for Integral Human Development on: *How the Church uses the media to discuss the issue of migration and how the Church trains and informs her faithful about the issue of migration.*

In Europe, the national Caritas sections have focused on a concerted and interconnected commitment, carrying out the same media campaigns on various social networks but adapting them to the specific features of the individual national contexts. This is particularly evident in the *#whatishome* campaign aimed at making users aware of the "home" issue and creating an engagement among them. Working together, in collaboration with other players of civil society - but without ambiguity - can be important to promote the culture of the encounter and to correct the erroneous image advocated by the numerous "fake news" circulating in the Web. Together with the Vatican representatives, they have explored the educational and evangelizing role of the activities of the new Dicastery. Training and informing the faithful, and promoting collaboration among the various Church bodies operating in the field of the pastoral care of migrants is the focus of its mission. Through various collaborative experiences, the Dicastery testifies how it is possible to construct a positive narrative. For its part, ICMC (the International Catholic Migration Commission) is committed to promoting, with various projects all over the world, the guidelines indicated by Pope Francis and summarized in the words, "Welcoming, protecting, promoting, and integrating."

All the working sessions have provided for a long time for dialogue, thus allowing for the sharing of experiences that help to witness to the world what the Church does and thinks about migrations, as well as the identification of some communication challenges in the field of migration both inside and outside the Christian community.

In their conclusion, **Msgr. Duarte da Cunha**, CCEE General Secretary, and **Fr. Luis Okulik**, Secretary of the CCEE Commission for the Pastoral Care of Social Issues, underlined the following points. Importance of communicating how beautiful the Church is. The urgency of an appropriate use of the language used when talking about human mobility. To clearly frame individual events, too often dealt with out of their context. To challenge the common narrative, first by accepting the encounter with others, loving them not in abstract terms, but in the concreteness of everyday life. In the field of migration, deeds have more strength than many words, often inadequate to account for the tragedy and the solitude experienced by so many people who live far from their homeland.

The sharing and the daily celebration of the Eucharist also allowed to bring into the participants' hearts and prayers the problems and the suffering of the numerous migrants coming from beyond the borders of the Continent, especially the Christians persecuted in the Middle East and in Africa. But also, and in a special way, of the many Ukrainians displaced or forced to emigrate from their country because of the war. Despite their many difficulties, the Church is grateful to them for their witness in living the Gospel of Christ and for proclaiming it in their land of destination.

During the meeting, the participants had the opportunity to meet and appreciate the hospitality of various communities of migrants, coming from the Middle East and Latin America, who live in the local diocese. The meeting ended on the morning of Sunday, July 15, with the celebration of a Mass attended by the migrant communities in the Church of St. Eugenia in Stockholm, and a visit to the Abbey of St. Brigida in Vadstena.

The annual meeting of bishops and delegates in charge of the pastoral care of migrants of the Catholic Bishops' Conferences in Europe took place in Stockholm, Sweden, from 13 to 15 July at the invitation of the local bishop, **Cardinal Anders Arborelius OCD**, Head of the Migration Section of the CCEE Commission for the Pastoral Care of Social Issues.