

**ADDRESS OF HOLY FATHER FRANCIS  
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE PLENARY OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL  
FOR THE PASTORAL CARE OF MIGRANTS AND ITINERANT PEOPLE**  
*Clementine Hall*

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*Your Eminences,  
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,  
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

I am pleased to welcome you on the occasion of the Plenary Meeting of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People. It is the 20th since Blessed John Paul II raised the former Pontifical Commission to the rank of Pontifical Council 25 years ago.

I congratulate you on having reached this goal and thank the Lord for all he has enabled you to achieve. I greet with affection Cardinal Antonio Maria Vegliò, your President, and I am grateful to him for having conveyed your common sentiments. I greet the Secretary, the Members, the Consultors and the Officials of the Dicastery. Thank you for the attention you pay to so many difficult situations in the world. Dear Cardinal, you mentioned Syria and the Near East, which are ever present in my prayers.

The theme of your Meeting is "The Pastoral Solicitude of the Church in the Context of Forced Migration". It coincides with the publication of the Dicastery's Document, entitled *Welcoming Christ in Refugees and Forcibly Displaced Persons. Pastoral Guidelines*. The Document draws attention to the millions of refugees, evacuees and stateless persons, and also touches on the scourge of trafficking in human beings which ever more frequently concerns children, involved in the worst forms of exploitation, who are recruited in armed conflicts.

I reaffirm here that the "trade in people" is a vile activity, a disgrace to our societies that claim to be civilized! Exploiters and clients at all levels should make a serious examination of conscience both in the first person and before God! Today the Church is renewing her urgent appeal that the dignity and centrality of every individual always be safeguarded, with respect for fundamental rights, as her social teaching emphasizes. She asks that these rights really be extended for millions of men and women on every continent wherever they are not recognized. In a world in which a lot is said about rights, how often is human dignity actually trampled upon! In a world in which so much is said about rights, it seems that the only thing that has any rights is money. Dear brothers and sisters, we are living in a world where money commands. We are living in a world, in a culture where the fixation on money holds sway.

You have rightly taken to heart the situations in which the family of nations is called to intervene, in a spirit of brotherly solidarity, with programmes of protection, often against a background of dramatic events that affect the life of so many people almost every day. I express my appreciation and gratitude and I encourage you to

continue on the path of service to the poorest and most marginalized of your brothers and sisters.

Let us remember Paul VI's words: "For the Catholic Church, no one is a stranger, no one is excluded, no one is far away" (*Homily for the closing of the Second Vatican Council*, 8 December 1965). Indeed, we are a single human family that is journeying on toward unity, making the most of solidarity and dialogue among peoples in the multiplicity of differences.

The Church is mother and her motherly attention is expressed with special tenderness and closeness to those who are obliged to flee their own country and exist between rootlessness and integration. This tension destroys people. Christian compassion — this "suffering with", compassion — is expressed first of all in the commitment to obtain knowledge of the events that force people to leave their homeland, and, where necessary, to give voice to those who cannot manage to make their cry of distress and oppression heard. By doing this you also carry out an important task in sensitising Christian communities to the multitudes of their brethren scarred by wounds that mark their existence: violence, abuse, the distance from family love, traumatic events, flight from home, uncertainty about the future in refugee camps. These are all dehumanizing elements and must spur every Christian and the whole community to practical concern.

Today, however, dear friends, I would like to ask you all to see a ray of hope as well in the eyes and hearts of refugees and of those who have been forcibly displaced. A hope that is expressed in expectations for the future, in the desire for friendship, in the wish to participate in the host society also through learning the language, access to employment and the education of children. I admire the courage of those who hope to be able gradually to resume a normal life, waiting for joy and love to return to brighten their existence. We can and must all nourish this hope!

Above all I ask leaders and legislators and the entire international community above all to confront the reality of those who have been displaced by force, with effective projects and new approaches in order to protect their dignity, to improve the quality of their life and to face the challenges that are emerging from modern forms of persecution, oppression and slavery.

They are human people, I stress this, who are appealing for solidarity and assistance, who need urgent action but also and above all understanding and kindness. God is good, let us imitate God. Their condition cannot leave us indifferent. Moreover, as Church we should remember that in tending the wounds of refugees, evacuees and the victims of trafficking, we are putting into practice the commandment of love that Jesus bequeathed to us when he identified with the foreigner, with those who are suffering, with all the innocent victims of violence and exploitation. We should reread more often chapter 25 of the Gospel according to Matthew in which he speaks of the Last Judgement (cf. vv. 31-46). And here I would also like to remind you of the attention that every Pastor and Christian community must pay to the journey of faith of Christian refugees and Christians uprooted from their situations by force, as well as of Christian emigrants. These people need special pastoral care that respects their traditions and accompanies them to harmonious integration into the ecclesial situations in which they find themselves. May our Christian communities really be places of hospitality, listening and communion!

Dear friends, let us not forget the flesh of Christ which is in the flesh of refugees: their flesh is the flesh of Christ. It is also your task to direct all the institutions working in the area of forced migration to new forms of co-responsibility. This phenomenon is unfortunately constantly spreading. Hence your task is increasingly demanding in order to promote tangible responses of closeness, journeying with people, taking into account the different local backgrounds.

Upon each one of you I invoke the motherly protection of Mary Most Holy, that she may illuminate your study and your action. For my part I assure you of my prayers, closeness and also admiration for all that you are doing in this area, while I bless you warmly. Many thanks.