



JRS and UISG WDRM event, 23 September 2020

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The Church has been celebrating the World Day of Migrants and Refugees (WDMR) since 1914. It is always an occasion to express concern for different vulnerable people on the move; to pray for them as they face many challenges; and to increase awareness about the opportunities that migration offers.

Every year the WDMR is the last Sunday of September; in 2020 it will be celebrated this coming Sunday, 27 September. As the title for his annual message, the Holy Father has chosen “Forced like Jesus Christ to flee”.

Pope Francis urges us this year to discover the reality of internally displaced people (IDPs) more deeply. But at this challenging time for all the human family, he has chosen to broaden the scope: “In the light of the tragic events that have marked 2020, I would like this Message, although concerned with internally displaced persons, to embrace all those who are experiencing situations of precariousness, abandonment, marginalization and rejection as a result of COVID-19”.

Displaced people offer us an opportunity to discover hidden parts of humanity and deepen our understanding of the complexities of our world. Through them, we are invited 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”.¹ We are called to respond to this pastoral challenge with the four verbs the Holy Father designated in his Message for this Day in 2018: welcome, protect, promote and integrate.

The Holy Father augments those four words this year with six pairs of verbs that deal with very practical actions. They are linked together in a challenging way:

1. You have *to know* in order *to understand*.
2. It is necessary *to be close* in order *to serve*.
3. In order *to be reconciled*, we need *to listen*.
4. In order *to grow*, it is necessary *to share*.
5. We need *to be involved* in order *to promote*.
6. It is necessary *to cooperate* in order *to build*.

¹ Pope Francis, Message for the 2020 World Day of Migrants and Refugees, quoting Homily, 15 February 2019.

In each pair, the Pope presents a basic attitude or skill for achieving deeply important human objectives such as reconciliation or growth. He wishes us “the courage to create spaces where everyone can recognize that they are called, and to allow new forms of hospitality, fraternity and solidarity”.²

Now I invite you to watch a video in which the Holy Father explores one of the sub-themes of his message: “To share in order to grow” together, without leaving anyone out. An IDP testifies how sharing makes us more human, makes us believe more in God and feel that we are His children.³

With the encouragement of both the Holy Father and an IDP, let me share two considerations.

Church actors are supposed to work together and share the same objectives in relation to IDPs. Catholic organisations like JRS and many of the religious congregations who are part of today’s event are working with local churches in serving IDPs. Your closeness can promote listening that is more attentive to what IDPs need, hope and aspire to. It can also stimulate the participation of internally displaced persons of all backgrounds and capacities in decisions that affect them and in languages and formats they understand. IDPs should participate in the design and delivery of protection and assistance responses; in planning and implementing solutions that affect them; and in the development of laws, policies and strategies related to internal displacement. The Vatican’s Migrants and Refugees Section has developed, with the support of JRS and others, the Pastoral Orientations on Internal Displacement, which we hope can be of support to this inspiring collaborative work.

While the protection of IDPs is the primary responsibility of national authorities, it requires a system-wide approach and shared efforts. All actors, including local churches, should join efforts to raise the profile of internal displacement as a global issue.

Second consideration: IDPs can be a positive force of change. They demonstrate a remarkable degree of hope, resilience and strength. The determination, skills and capacities with which they rebuild their lives can contribute substantially to enhancing the societies that have become their new homes. Local action to support the internally displaced can contribute towards the well-being of the whole community. Addressing the needs of IDPs and supporting their networks and interactions with local residents will help build community, and move towards recovery, social cohesion, peace, security and development. Because we are close to our IDP brothers and sisters, we are called to reveal the beauty and the capacities they have.

This is the beauty of our Lord Jesus Christ. As the Holy Father expresses very well in his Message: “In each of these people, forced to flee to safety, Jesus is present as he was at the time of Herod. In the faces of the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the sick, strangers and

² Pope Francis, Message for the 2020 World Day of Migrants and Refugees, quoting *Meditation in Saint Peter’s Square*, 27 March 2020.

³ [the link](#) (1 min 23 sec)

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.”