



IRISH CATHOLIC  
BISHOPS' CONFERENCE  
COMHDHÁIL EASPAG CAITLICEACH ÉIREANN

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**From Pastoral Care to Public Policy - Journeying with the Migrant**  
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Dunboyne Castle Hotel

**PROPOSAL FOR THE OPENING ADDRESS**  
**BY ARCHBISHOP SEAN BRADY**  
**PRESIDENT OF THE IRISH CATHOLIC BISHOP'S CONFERENCE**

## **Introduction**

Your Excellency, Brother Bishops' Reverend Fathers, Sisters, ladies and gentlemen. It gives me great pleasure to open this Conference entitled 'From Pastoral Care to Public Policy – Journeying with the Migrant'. I wish to thank our speakers who come to us with great expertise. I welcome Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio from the United States Catholic Bishop's Conference, Professor Desmond Cahill from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT), Mr. Francis Davis from the Von Hugel Institute, Dr. Patricia Kennedy, Department of Social Policy, UCD all here present and Mr Peter Sutherland who will address us on Friday. I extend a special welcome to Minister Conor Lenihan Minister of State with special responsibility for Integration Policy at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, Education and Science and Justice, Equality and Law Reform and I wish him every blessing with this most important brief. I welcome all of you that are attending this conference. We have representatives from the public, voluntary and private sectors and I also welcome those of you that are involved in the Church's mission to migrants. This occasion provides us with an opportunity to discuss the topic of migration which is one of the most welcome challenges facing us in Ireland today.

## **Irish Chaplaincy in Britain.**

This Conference marks fifty years of ministry to Irish Emigrants in Britain. The words Irish and Emigration are synonymous. Regardless of where you are in the world the reputation of our Diaspora has blazed a trail of goodness and affection to the extent that on Saint Patrick's Day every year it is said that there are two groups of people; those who are Irish and those who wish

they were Irish. Since the 1950's I can say with some level of satisfaction that the pastoral care of the church has never been far behind those who migrated from this island. Today I pay tribute to those who served with the chaplaincy. These women and men who ministered in the chaplaincy over these last fifty years provided invaluable and prophetic service to our people at a time when there were few opportunities in Ireland. May I also pay tribute to the many people who opened their homes and hearts to newly arriving neighbours, family members and friends as they stepped off the boat and faced their first days in a new and unfamiliar environment. The informal supportive welcome expressed in neighbourliness and kindnesses are invaluable. Indeed I am sure that we have many memories of journeys where we met such kindness and goodness; to this day those memories fill our hearts with warmth.

I remember many of my own neighbours, friends and family people that left my home town of Laragh, in County Cavan. We all have our own memories of people leaving rural parts of Ireland only to find themselves thrust onto the enormity of big cities like London or Birmingham. This must have been a frightening experience. Thankfully the majority of emigrants found a new life and meaningful work. They married, had families. They integrated into the local Church and Civil society and became active citizens in their communities.

Sadly some emigrants did not share such good fortunes. The pain of emigration was overwhelming, the casual, piecemeal structures meant insecurity; and insecurity became the norm; the cost of which is still borne to this day. I wish to acknowledge the efforts of Irish community groups and

our Chaplaincy in Britain who every day try to serve those who are in greatest need. At this juncture I wish to express my gratitude for the contributions made to the SIA( Supporting Irish Abroad ) campaign between 2004 – 2006 which continues to allow us develop strategic outreaches to the most vulnerable of our Irish people abroad . I wish also to acknowledge the increased resources that the Irish Government have placed at the disposal of those who care for our communities abroad. We who grew up in Ireland when emigration was at its height know that we owe those that emigrated a great debt, a debt not of charity but of justice as they generously provided for us from abroad.

### **Pastoral Care of Migrants**

Within the Irish emigration experience one of the real learning's for us is the importance of pastoral care; kindly and good shepherds that walk with migrant people: offering Mass, hearing confessions and providing culturally sensitive ritual at a time of loss or transition. Such support provided a window on the lives of people in need of unique care. This care that started at the altar rails slowly, carefully and methodically extended to every aspect of their lives. We are aware that any journey can be hazardous. A transition to a new land is filled with many unknowns and can leave a person vulnerable. The quality of the welcome received by the migrant helps ease their fears and addresses their anxieties. Among the most important forms of welcome are the formal supports that a nation has in place. The ability to access to information regarding one's rights and services that ease transition and integration are proving to be not only helpful but necessary.

The ministry to the migrant emphasises the importance of pastoral and social structures that hold before the world of the dignity of the migrant in the face of increasing globalisation. Any form of human exploitation has to be challenged and hopefully eliminated. Yes we have a right to the goods of this world; yes we have the right to the benefits of economic progress, but not at the expense of our fellow human beings.

### **The Migrant Family**

Migrant care reinforces the importance of family life. To have those we love us by our side when circumstances weaken the body or soul is invaluable. In January this year His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI made reference to the importance of the migrant family for the 93<sup>rd</sup> World Day of Migrants and Refugees. ‘The Family of Nazareth’, he said, ‘reflects the image of God safeguarded in the heart of every human family, even if disfigured and weakened by emigration.’ He continued ‘If the migrant family is not ensured of a real possibility of inclusion and participation, it is difficult to expect its harmonious development.’ Any law that places divisions between a family goes against basic human rights. There are occasions when families have to be apart for short periods of time as they face change and relocation. There is a growing trend globally in the laws governing migration that has as its consequences the separation of parents from children and spouses from each other. In the context of the Churches mission to the family and indeed for the common good the opportunity in migration law for family reunification is an imperative.

## **Global Migration.**

If we choose to see ‘Irish Emigration’ in isolation it will be to our great loss as a nation. The issues that we see in the lives of Irish people abroad are present in every migrant. The journey of hope that carries with it the pain of departure; of leaving behind familiar places and people and the initial fear upon arrival that eventually grows into quiet confidence are present in most migrant journeys. The vulnerability of every step that seeks a foothold that may eventually become home is a sound that echoes across our globe. When hearing the voice of an undocumented person the anguish is the same whether that voice is spoken in Ireland or the United States. Being an alien or transient is the reality for many people in our world today. At least 175 million men, women and children are estimated to be living outside their country of origin; this includes economic migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. However, the majority of the world's displaced persons are now found within their own countries, sometimes having to move seasonally.

More than ever before, migration is a structural phenomenon of society and a bitter reality of the human condition. In the light of this reality it is imperative that we have policies in place that educate not just the migrant but also to educate the citizens of the host nation. This Conference provides an opportunity for us as a host nation to reflect on the dynamic of migration and to develop those strategies that will make this new era in Irish society one of enrichment. This gathering and others like it provide an occasion to move in a direction that encourages healthy integration and social cohesion. The President of the Pontifical Commission for Migrants and Itinerant People; Cardinal Renato Martino, alluded to this point at a meeting for the European National Directors for the Pastoral Care of Migrants when he said

‘It is the task of Governments to regulate the magnitude and form of migration flows. They should however take common good into consideration, so that immigrants would be worthily welcomed, and the population of the receiving countries would not be put in a condition that would lead them to reject the newcomers’

### **Immigrants**

The duty to protect the common good falls on all including the immigrant. Education, language courses and programmes of welcome are necessary so that the immigrant can understand the cultural values and practices of the host nation. Whereas one has the right to observe the customs and practises of one’s country of origin the migrant is asked to commit to the building of a harmonious civil society in their new homeland. It was in this spirit that Pope Benedict spoke at the Angelus on the 4<sup>th</sup> of November last when he said.

‘I desire that the relations among the migrant populations and the local populations develop in the spirit of that high moral civility that is the fruit of spiritual and cultural values of every people and country. May those who are in favour of security and hospitality know how to use the appropriate means to guarantee the rights and duties that are the foundation of all true common life and encounters among people.’

For my part and on behalf of the Catholic Church in Ireland I wish to pay tribute to the immigrants that now bless our shores and who avail of the opportunities offered to them to work for a better future for their families and foster the seeds of a secure and hospitable society among their communities.

## **Ireland –Challenges Today.**

I wish to acknowledge those who are actively involved with immigrant groups in Ireland. I am aware that we have over one hundred Catholic services in place throughout our island. To those who specifically minister to immigrants in Religious services with sensitivity to language and culture I offer my thanks and that of the Church. To you that provide invaluable support at many other levels to immigrant groups and individuals I wish to express my deepest appreciation and admiration. In fostering good relations between the migrant and the local populations you are offering a service that has the common good at heart.

There is no doubt that our schools are at the front line in the work of supporting immigrants. They experience on a daily basis the challenge and risk of integration. I am delighted that these issues will be explored in this meeting. I feel that the challenge faced by schools and indeed in society at large are summarised in the words of Professor Des Cahill who will address us later today;

‘What we need are reflective inter-religious identities with a global view who are fully committed to their faith tradition, able to clarify and defend its values and attitudes but able to reflect on the essential nature of religious activity and expression and wish to dialogue with and participate with members of other faith groups.’

As an Irishman and as a Churchman I am proud of the welcome provided by so many communities of faith throughout this island. You have indeed responded to the biblical imperative to ‘welcome the stranger’. I see this goodness and vibrancy in every parish and school I visit. This goodness is

indeed Good News; it is the Gospel alive and well amongst us. We can be further encouraged by the words of today's Gospel reading for the feast of; The Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary: 'Look here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, my sister and my mother.' Mt12:50.

### **Conclusion**

I conclude by acknowledging the many initiatives of the Chair of IECE Bishop Seamus Hegarty and his predecessor Archbishop Michael Neary and all the Board members and loyal servants of IECE. This conference is evidence of their commitment and openness to study and interpret the signs of the times in the light of Gospel as we have been encouraged to do in the Vatican II document 'Gaudium et Spes'. I wish him well as he leads the restructuring of the mission of IECE in the light of the changing migration patterns in Ireland. May I wish you well in your deliberations over the next few days. Let us pray that our outcomes from this event constructively inform public policy for migrants as suggested by the theme of our conference.

I conclude on this feast with the prayer from the document Erga Migrates Caritas Christi. This document is a wonderful road map for those of you committed to the human dignity of the migrant and the good of the sending and receiving societies.

*May the Virgin Mother, who together with her Blessed Son knew the pain of emigration and exile, help us to understand the experience,*

*and very often the drama, of those who are compelled to live far from their homeland, and teach us to serve them in their necessities, truly accepting them as brothers and sisters, so that today's migrations may be considered a call, albeit a mysterious one, to the Kingdom of God, which is already present in His Church, its beginning (cf. LG 9), and an instrument of Providence to further the unity of the human family and peace. Amen.*