

Church is committed to people on the move - Bishop Hegarty

Press Release – Thursday 12 April 2007 –

Fr. Alan Hilliard to address rally for Families of the Undocumented

A rally for the families of the “undocumented Irish” in the United States takes place on Saturday, 14 April next, in Jury’s Hotel, Ballsbridge, Dublin. The Irish Episcopal Commission for Emigrants (IECE) is supporting the rally which has been organised by the US based Irish Lobby for Immigration Reform (ILIR). On 7 March last a rally in Washington for the undocumented was addressed by Fr Alan Hilliard, IECE Director.

Speaking in advance of Saturday’s rally, the Bishop of Derry and Chair of the Irish Episcopal Commission for Emigrants, Dr Séamus Hegarty, said: “The Church is committed to people on the move. The latest Church document on migration *Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi* informs us that migration is not a passing event but rather a ‘structural phenomenon’ of today’s world. While the demand for workers increases across the globe, host countries should be mindful to both embrace what a person has to offer as well as to respect the dignity and wellbeing of that person. The undocumented Irish in the USA are an example of this reality.”

In May 2005 Bishop Hegarty helped raise awareness of the plight of the estimated 50,000 undocumented Irish in the USA, as well as the challenges facing their families back home, by specifically focusing the Irish Bishops’ “Supporting Irish Abroad” campaign on those missing from our family occasions as they are unable to travel from the US to Ireland (see www.catholiccommunications/sia).

When Bishop Hegarty visited Washington and other cities on the East Coast in 2005 he expressed his concern, and that of the undocumented Irish, that so few were able to make their voices heard. Bishop Hegarty said: “The Irish Lobby for Immigration Reform is helping to fill this vacuum. The many meetings which have taken place across the US have empowered people to the extent that the undocumented have now become the driving force for reform.”

Bishop Hegarty remarked: “I welcome the opportunity, given by Saturday’s meeting, to update families on our campaign for legislation reform. It is important that we all understand that the lack of certainty regarding comprehensive reform. Notwithstanding some hopeful signs, we are not under any illusion regarding the challenges that lie ahead.”

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Notes for Editors

➤ Fr Alan Hilliard, Director of the IECE, is available for media interviews.

- For information updates please visit www.usairish.org and register for the online newsletter. The ILIR public meeting takes place in Jurys Hotel in Ballsbridge, Dublin, between 1pm and 4pm on Saturday 14 April 2007.
- The acronym SIA is an Irish word meaning ‘longer’ or ‘farther’. The objective of the SIA campaign has been to raise awareness of our responsibility - as individuals and as a nation - to Irish people abroad especially those who have fallen on hard times. Please find a brief summary of projects that have benefited from SIA funding by clicking the access link “SIA Expenditure” on the website www.catholiccommunications.ie/sia
- The SIA campaign is the responsibility of the Irish Episcopal Commission for Emigrants. The IECE was established by the Irish bishops in 1957 to co-ordinate support and pastoral care for the many Irish people travelling to work and live in the UK. In 2004, Bishop Séamus Hegarty, Bishop of Derry and chair of the IECE, launched the three year SIA awareness and fund raising campaign at a function in the Irish Centre, Camden Town, in London.
- The annual themes of the SIA awareness campaign were:
for **2004**: ‘Emigrants built the Ireland we enjoy today – Don’t forget them’;
the **2005** campaign focus supported those living furtive lives because of their undocumented status;
in **2006** the challenge was to keep in contact with (by mail, telephone or by visiting) a relative or friend who has either long since – or recently – emigrated from Ireland to live abroad.
- The IECE is based in Maynooth, Co Kildare. The IECE has established outreach (chaplaincy) services in the UK; Germany; the USA (New York, Boston, Chicago, San Francisco, Philadelphia); and, Australia. The Irish Apostolate is the service provided by the Irish and American Catholic Bishops to support the pastoral needs of Irish immigrants in the United States. Please see www.usairish.org

Further information:

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