

## **St. Patrick's Day – March 17, 2010**

# **Bishop Seamus Hegarty calls for Support for undocumented Irish in America**

A Phobal Dé,

Guím rath, séan agus beannacht oraibh uilig ar ócáid Lá le Pádraig, Aspal Éireann. Inniu tá ár n-imircí ó Éirinn scaptha i ngach aird na cruinne go mór in ár smaointe agus in ár nurnaí.

On this the Feast of our St Patrick, I send warm greetings to Irish people at home and abroad and to all who join in the celebration of our national feast, including the many immigrants to our own shores.

The Irish Diaspora forms an integral part of St Patrick's legacy. Thus it is only fitting that on this the Feast of our National Apostle, we again seek to highlight the needs of the many Irish emigrants spread throughout the world.

Mindful that St Patrick was himself a migrant, we as a people are called to build a society that is truly inclusive, a society that is welcoming and respectful of people of different cultures, languages and traditions. While the number of immigrants coming to our country has decreased in recent times, our welcome and support for the new Irish living among us must continue unabated.

On this day I wish to commend the work of our emigrant chaplaincies and all who provide support to Irish emigrants. The Irish chaplaincies in Britain, the United States and Australia provide an essential pastoral outreach. The ongoing work and engagement with the more isolated and vulnerable members of the Irish community makes manifest the best qualities of our Irish heritage and makes real the example of our national Patron.

In these challenging economic times, emigration has changed Irish society in ways not seen since the 1980's. While our primary focus must be to ensure that we prevent another lost generation, we must also ensure that for those who decide to emigrate, they are neither abandoned nor forgotten. The Irish government has maintained its support to organisations seeking to provide direct outreach and assistance to our emigrant population. In spite of economic pressures, I urge them to continue this important outreach.

I am particularly conscious this St Patrick's Day of the undocumented Irish in the United States. While hopes may have dimmed that comprehensive immigration reform will occur this year, they have not been extinguished. It is only by addressing this issue that people may be brought in from the margins of society, enabling them to integrate and contribute fully to their host community. I urge the Irish Diaspora to continue to work together in the spirit of charity and compassion to ensure the welfare of all Irish emigrants.

While acknowledging the inherent right of every nation to determine immigration policy, I encourage lawmakers and all people to remember the words of the late Pope John Paul II:

“The illegal migrant comes before us like that ‘stranger’ in whom Jesus asks to be recognised. To welcome him and to show him solidarity is a duty of hospitality and fidelity to Christian identity itself.”  
(*Undocumented Migrants*, Message of Pope John Paul II for World Migration Day, 1996, 6.)

The work of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in highlighting the ongoing difficulties facing people without proper documentation and indeed the efforts of all individuals and groups, must be acknowledged. My prayerful good wishes to all who will be attending the Mass and Rally, 'March for America: Change Takes Courage and Faith,' on 21 March in Washington D.C. May their efforts bear fruit and empower change.

On this day too it is important to highlight an especially vulnerable group of emigrants – Irish people imprisoned overseas. The Irish Council for Prisoners Overseas (ICPO), under the auspices of the Irish Episcopal Council for Emigrants continues to work tirelessly on behalf of prisoners overseas and their families here in Ireland. This year, 2010, marks the twenty-fifth year of ICPO's service. At a time of increasing outward migration, the role of organisations like the ICPO, take on a special importance.

“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”. (*Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi*)

### **Notes for Editors**

- Bishop Seamus Hegarty is Bishop of Derry and Chair of the Council for Emigrants of the Irish Bishops' Conference.

### **Bishops' Commission for Migrants**

The Commission for Migrants comprises a Council for Immigrants and a Council for Emigrants. The pastoral outreach for this new Commission is guided by the norms as set out in *Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi*.

### **Council for Emigrants**

The Council for Emigrants is the response of the Episcopal Conference to the needs of Irish emigrants prior to and following departure. It shows the caring face of the Church and is particularly committed to the needs of the vulnerable involuntary emigrant. It is a significant voice on behalf of emigrants - condemning involuntary emigration and seeking rights and adequate services for them. It provides services for potential emigrants and, in conjunction with the host church responds to the needs of the Irish as an immigrant community.

### **Further information:**

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