



BUILD A BETTER FUTURE TOGETHER

Migrant and Refugee Sunday this year invites us 'to build a better future together'. It adds the realistic qualification: 'wherever we might be right now'. It recognises that more refugees than ever before are now being driven from their homes and displaced by war, famine, drought and fear for the future. They rely on the support of other nations many of which are determined to shut them out, not to offer them hospitality. 'Where we are now' includes the challenge we face of handling and recovering from Covid, of economic challenges that demand great changes, and of threatening rifts in international relationships.

A SPACE OF POSSIBILITY

In Australia, however, where we are now is in a space of possibility. With the change of government and a softening of language and actions concerning refugees, both they and people who care for them have dared to hope for a more compassionate policy. The sympathy expressed for the Nadesaligam family and subsequent grant of permanent residence, the release from long-term detention of many vulnerable

people, and other small changes have encouraged hope of a policy based on compassion and not on deterrence.

World Migrant and Refugee Sunday encourages us to ask how we can build a better future together. As with other large goals such as addressing climate change this can seem overwhelming. The task is enormous and the resources are few. We need to find a patch of rock at which we can chip away and go from there. As in all worthwhile human enterprises small is beautiful. There are many ways in which we can give to refugees our time, our resources, our voice and our heart.

GIFT OF OUR HEARTS

The most important gift is of our heart. We can take refugees into our heart by reading their stories, listening to them speak, allowing time to imagine what it is must be like to flee from Ukraine fearing for your life and desperate to find food and a night's shelter for your family, or what it must be like to be locked in a Melbourne hotel room, able to see people living normally outside but unable to join them. We can also pray for refugees, ensure that they are prayed for in our parish

Masses and we can make opportunities to meet them and to fit faces and stories to the word refugee.

If our heart is moved, the way we spend our time will naturally follow. We can take time to write to our local member of Parliament, to attend meetings of support, to visit and support impoverished refugees in our local area, and join advocacy groups.

ADVOCACY IS VITAL

Migrant and Refugee Week this year focuses on advocacy and settlement. They also invite us to give our voice and our resources. In Australia no lasting move from a cruel to a compassionate policy can happen unless the majority of Australians support it. Advocacy is vital. The most important form of advocacy is personal – the conversations we have with friends and family, over morning tea at work or in the pub. As we speak up for refugees we naturally come to know more about their situation and their treatment, and join passionate people in their advocacy.

PRAYER AND ACTION

As we look at the extreme conditions of people languishing in detention and in immediate flight from war and famine we may easily overlook people in the Australian community who have waited for a long time for a response to their appeal for protection. They lack income support and often suffer from mental or physical illness. They need people to befriend them and help support them in other ways. We can do this by taking time for both prayer and action.

This year, the Catholic Alliance for People Seeking Asylum (CAPSA) will focus their National Week of Prayer and Action (25-30 September) on things we can do now, that will help build the future we want: an Australia that welcomes people seeking asylum and treats them with humanity and compassion. Through using our voice, heart, time and resources – we have the opportunity to connect with and advocate alongside people seeking asylum and refugees to build this future. For further information and to get involved visit: <https://events.humanitix.com/nwpa2022>

Adapted from Fr Andy Hamilton CAPSA

CLIMATE DISPLACED PEOPLE

In 2021, the Dicastery for Integral Human Development issued the document *Pastoral Orientations on Climate Displaced People* in response to the increasing numbers of people who are forced to leave their homes because of the impact of changes in climate.

In Australia the effects of floods, fires, droughts and increasing temperatures are forcing people from their

homes and into lives of poverty and often into homelessness. Torres Strait Islanders and our neighbours in the Pacific such as Tuvalu, Kiribati and the Marshall Islands are already experiencing sea level rise where ocean flooding has washed saltwater into agricultural lands and inundated sources of drinking water.

In the Preface to *Pastoral Orientations on Climate Displaced People*, Pope Francis comments that the climate crisis has been slowly unfolding since the Industrial Revolution. He continues:

*We are engulfed by news and images of whole peoples uprooted by cataclysmic changes in our climate, forced to migrate. But what effect these stories have on us, and how we respond – whether they cause fleeting responses or trigger something deeper in us; whether it seems remote or whether we feel it close to home – depends on our taking the trouble to **see** the suffering that each story entails in order "to become painfully aware, to dare to turn what is happening ... into our own personal suffering and thus to discover what each of us can do about it" (Laudato si' 19).*

When people are driven out because their local environment has become uninhabitable, it might look like a process of nature, something inevitable. Yet the deteriorating climate is very often the result of poor choices and destructive activity, of selfishness and neglect, that set humankind at odds with creation, our common home.

When we look, what do we see? Many are being devoured in conditions that make it impossible to survive. Forced to abandon fields and shorelines, homes and villages, people flee in haste carrying just a few souvenirs and treasures, scraps of their culture and heritage. They set out in hope, meaning to restart their lives in a place of safety. But where they mostly end up are dangerously overcrowded slums or makeshift settlements, waiting on fate.

Those driven from their homes by the climate crisis need to be welcomed, protected, promoted and integrated. They want to start over. To create a new future for their children, they need to be allowed to do so, and to be helped.

Welcoming, protecting, promoting and integrating are all verbs of helpful action. Let us remove, one by one, those boulders that block the way of the displaced, what represses and sidelines them, prevents them from working and going to school, whatever renders them invisible and denies their dignity.