

WELCOMING THE STRANGER

XENOPHOBIA IN SOUTH AFRICA



“When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.”

Leviticus 19:33-34

Buti Tlhagale, o.m.i.

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Pastoral Care for Migrants & Refugees



Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference



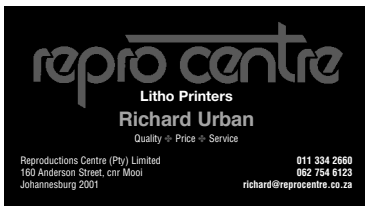
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PREFACE

To date, the office of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference on Migrants and Refugees has, as part of its mandate, organised a significant number of workshops for Pastoral Care workers in the various dioceses. The ambitious plan is to continue to organise training workshops and conferences for parish volunteers and community leaders. These workshops and conferences are networking spaces for community activists who are committed to resolving conflict situations between local people and the people on the move. The workshops serve as platforms of expressing burning concerns of the both the locals and migrants who, in the informal settlements and in the townships, live side by side. The workshops serve as advocacy platforms. They give voice to the people on the move at community level where xenophobia often rears its ugly head. In their own way, these formal coming together forge bonds of community among members of the conflicting parties. Poverty is an unwanted companion of ordinary folks. It does not choose between migrants and refugees and the local people. It is not a law of nature that when material resources are extremely limited, self-respecting people should turn on each other and invoke the law of the jungle. Contrary to the false belief spread by trouble-makers (like Operation Dudula) locals and migrants do business side by side at the informal markets spread around the country.

The training workshops also assist in fostering the learning of the English language for these migrants and asylum seekers who do not speak English. The workshops encourage and organise some help for the various Pastoral Centres to initiate language programmes. The English language helps migrants to communicate and to integrate themselves in the local communities.

The workshops are often an opportunity for migrants to discuss their own social, financial, and legal woes. For example, there is an ongoing raging discussion on whether people on the move should regularise their stay in South Africa. This applies mainly to economic migrants without identity documents. There is a fear that regularising one's stay in South Africa might just be a trap set up by government in order to be able to identify people and only to deport them at a later stage. On the other hand, migrants cannot be without identity documents for ever. Migrants without identity documents expose themselves to demeaning harassment by the

ever=hungry policemen. Migrants are constantly caught up in the vicious circle of paying bribes.

Forging lasting bonds between people on the move and the locals will hopefully enable both parties to stand together and resist together when xenophobia irrupts. Or better still, that their standing together will minimise the chances of xenophobia breaking out and engulfing communities in unnecessary conflict.

This booklet is a welcome addition to the reflection materials now available in order to raise awareness, to promote advocacy work and to create welcoming communities. Migrants and refugees also belong to the human race.

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Coordinator - Migrants and Refugees Office
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FOREWORD

Pope Francis, in his reflections on “*Let Us Dream*”, draws our attention to an urgent need of building a human culture inspired and kept alive by the generosity of the human heart. He cites convincingly an example given by the Prime Minister of Bangladesh. When 600,000 Rohingya people were persecuted and mercilessly driven out of their country, they were warmly received by the Bangladeshis “who gave up a meal each day so that the Rohingya might eat” (Ivareigh A. (Let us Dream, 2020).

The Pope gives this moving example to all the countries that host migrants and refugees. Generosity, compassion and goodwill are part and parcel of the constitution of every human being. Human suffering inflicted on people by other human beings ought to provoke in us not only anger but deep feelings of kindness, comparison and solidarity.

One of the responses of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference to the plight of migrants and refugees is the commitment to help people on the move to regularise their stay in South Africa. Many are on expired temporary visas and face the prospect of expulsion from the country. The Pastoral Care or the Migrant and Refugee offices in all the various dioceses have dedicated computers where migrants can apply online for appropriate visas. The Scalabrini Fathers in La Rochelle, Johannesburg, have opened a centre dedicated to help migrants to apply for appropriate visas online. If many migrants and asylum seekers regularise their stay in the country, then hopefully they will silence their critics who charge that undocumented migrants should be deported.

The reflections in this booklet are intended to challenge Catholics and other communities to reflect on their specific and concrete role as Christians in the face of so much violence and prejudice against migrants, refugees and asylum seekers.

Bishop Joe Kizito

Liaison Bishop for Migrants and Refugees

Southern African Catholic Bishops’ Conference

INTRODUCTION

A pressing sign of our times is the hurried movement of peoples across the globe. Wars have still not come to an end. Swords are yet to be beaten into ploughshares (Isa. 2:4). Unconverted hearts spread mayhem and untold human suffering. African people die in the sea north of Africa fleeing persecution, hunger, political persecution, the drastic impact of climate change or the lack of opportunities. Large numbers of people are displaced in many countries. South Africa is no exception. The prolonged wailing and moaning about foreign nationals stealing jobs of the local people is a wee bit misplaced. It seems as if in every nation or in every generation, there are those who appear to enjoy inflicting pain on others or those who stand on the sides and do nothing. This is undoubtedly the worst part of our humanity – to stand, and watch, and not be moved by the pain of other.

In the present era, an unquestionable sign of the times is human mobility and the unbearable human afflictions that accompany it. To a people with a Christian conscience, this situation is dire and calls for a radical reorientation of our mindset and a re-prioritising of values we have come to hold dear. Something has clearly gone wrong in the way human beings treat each other.

The crisis of human mobility, forced migration, in this case, has become regrettably endemic. Forced migration has become a new territory of mission, of evangelisation. But so too the cold hearts, the indifferent hearts, the hearts of stone of the unwelcoming, hostile people of lands where migrants and asylum seekers flee to in search of refuge, protection, and human understanding. The new mission territory summons all of us to gather resources in order to alleviate the pain and suffering of people on the move. It summons us to interpret anew in the present demanding context, Christ's solemn command: "go therefore and make disciples of all nations... teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you and behold I am with you all days even unto the consummation of the world" (Jn. 20:21). Go, love one another, especially those who are most in need, the least of my brothers and sisters (Mt. 25:40). Migrants, refugees and asylum seekers are among the intended precious beneficiaries of this kind, warm and great love.

This new mission is set to be demanding, for it is “like treasure hidden in a field” and demands that we marshal all resources in order to make refugees and asylum seekers to feel at home. (Mt. 13:44).

The new mission of welcoming, protecting, and integrating migrants into our communities, our countries, will simply continue unabated until humankind increasingly recognises that all people bear the likeness of God, until those of us who claim to be Christian acknowledge that we are members of the same body of Christ’s church. The gathering together of God’s children is at the heart of the new mission. This new evangelisation is a prophecy yet to be fulfilled. It is a vision that transcends national boundaries, race, class, gender and religion. It is a prophecy that affirms that: “It pleased God to call men to share in his life and not merely singly, without any bond between them, but he formed them into a people, in which his children who had been scattered were gathered together” (Vatican II, Decree on The Church’s Missionary Activity no. 2: Jn. 11:52). Migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers are members of this new gathering. We are all urged to be the driving force that ushers in the new dawn of humanity. This mandate derives from the baptism of each and every Christian (Vatican II, The Church, no. 11).

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THE VIRTUE OF HOSPITALITY **IN THE BIBLICAL TRADITION**

One way of combatting xenophobia is to treat other people the same way as we would like them to treat us. But this is a theoretical statement. It expresses a wish. It may however find meaning within the efforts of groups or communities faced with the predicament of labelling people and then turning against them. Our aspiration should be to create welcoming communities. Such communities should be trustworthy and dependable and not fickle, whimsical or prone to being swept in all directions by howling mobs of people. Welcoming communities should consciously seek to provide places of healing, safe places and places of refuge. But we should also be careful that history should not repeat itself. Parish churches in Ruanda in 1994, became places of death. We should avoid this at all costs. Those who generously host people in need are generally better persons. They put others first. They possess the quality of the Good Samaritan, the compassionate Samaritan who welcomed and hosted a beaten-up stranger (Lk.10.29). To become better persons with a human heart is the vocation of every human being. This is not just a fleeting sentiment; it is the stuff of which genuine human beings are made.

LEARNING FROM TRADITION

The reckless, senseless and at times even cruel violence meted out against immigrants and refugees nudge us strongly and even compel us to revisit the traditions and wisdom of our ancestors in the faith concerning human relationships, hospitality and the love of neighbour.

ABRAHAM'S KINDNESS

In the book of Genesis, we read a compelling narrative about Abraham's attitude towards the three visiting strangers. Abraham and Sarah were open, welcoming, warm and hospitable. They embodied the spirit of *ubuntu*. They understood that "*isisu somhambi asingakanani, singangesinyoni*" (with little food, a traveller can go far). The strangers were welcomed with water to wash their feet, and bread to refresh and energise themselves. It gradually dawned on Abraham that these strangers could be the emissaries of God. Abraham's sheer humanity, his heart of gold and his attractive virtues of kindness, generosity and hospitality were strengthened by his unshakable faith in God. In the

words of Abimelech to Abraham: “God is with you in all you are doing” (Gen.21.22). All human beings potentially possess this gift of grace that needs to be rekindled from time to time so that it shapes and directs our attitude towards other human beings (Gen.18. 1-15).

PHARAOH’S GENEROSITY

In the intriguing story of Joseph, son of Jacob, the Canaanite, Pharaoh the King of Egypt, encourages Joseph, a foreign national working as an administrator in Egypt, to invite his brothers and their father to Egypt. The land of Canaan experienced a severe famine. Pharaoh gave the Canaanite immigrants in Egypt, “the best the land of Egypt offers” (Gen.45.18). Pharaoh’s kindness, generosity and hospitality were clearly in recognition of Joseph’s administrative efficiency, loyalty and generosity of heart. For Pharaoh had asked his ministers, “Can we find any other man like this, possessing the spirit of God?” (Gen.41.37). Recognition of the spirit of God in others is a critical element of the “things that make for peace” (Lk.19.42). In today’s world, migrants are found in every single country. They bring along with them their precious talents, their goodwill, generosity and the spirit of God. They are selfless in their contribution to the advancement of their host countries. The Pharaoh of Egypt recognised this exceptional gift in Joseph, the Egyptian immigrant from Canaan. An honest and shameless recognition of the sterling contribution of members of the immigrant community by members of the host country would radically alter hardened attitudes, dissipate unfounded fears and pave the way towards the spirit of mutual acceptance way beyond a climate of mutual tolerance.

THE KINDNESS OF BOAZ

The story of Naomi and Ruth tell us about the tenacity of families and the deep longing to be together. Families are uprooted from their land of birth largely not of their own doing or choice. Families are often compelled to cross borders, at times several borders, due to circumstances beyond their control. Families cling together. For many migrants and refugees, the story of Ruth is essentially their own story. The words of Ruth captures adequately their own sentiments:

*“Wherever you go, I will go
Wherever you live, I will live
Your people shall be my people*

*And your God, my God
Wherever you die, I will die". (Ruth.1.16).*

At times, host countries make it difficult for families to join members of their families, thus causing untold harm on families that are already burdened with the challenges of migration.

Ruth's story also highlights the kindness, the generosity and the welcoming spirit of Boaz, the owner of the field where Ruth had gone "to glean and gather the ears of corn after the reapers" (Ruth 2.7). Boaz went out of his way to instruct the workers not to molest her. He told her that she could drink the water drawn from the well by his servants. Ruth was moved by Boaz' kindness to her "even though I am a foreigner" (2.11). Unbeknown to Ruth, her reputation had gone ahead of her. She is the woman "who has been on her feet from morning till now" (2.7). She has been kind and supportive of her mother-in-law since her husband died. The story of Ruth puts in relief the virtues of kindness, generosity and hospitality of Boaz. This is in stark contrast to the attitudes of some South African farmers who exploit migrants and refugees and even South Africans who work on their farms. Their workers live in sub-human conditions. They are paid slave-wages and can be dismissed from work at the drop of a hat. The dignity of workers as human beings counts for nothing.

The welcoming and generous attitude of Boaz shines the spotlight on employers who are driven by greed. Greed is the single vice that push heartless employers to hoard the profits of labour. Ruthless companies amass wealth which should be used for the upliftment of all people. It is this greed that keeps the African Continent in chains. It is this greed that compels the poor to leave their countries in search of more welcoming countries. In this regard, South Africa has been found to be hopelessly wanting.

DAVID'S KINDNESS

I would like to insert here the story of David and Meribaal for it highlights in a striking manner, the virtues of kindness, humility and gratitude. King Saul and his son Jonathan, died in the battle against the Philistines on Mount Gilboa (1 Sam.31. 1-6). David was most distraught at the death of the two people he admired greatly. So saddened he was that he ordered the messenger, "the son of a resident alien" to be killed (2 Sam.1.15).

This may sound odd and even contradictory when raised within the context of highlighting David's virtue of kindness. David went on to seek out any surviving relative of Saul and Jonathan in order to show them God's kindness. David found Meribaal, the son of Jonathan. He showed him kindness by restoring all the land of Saul to him and invited him to eat always at his table. This kindness and generosity shown to Meribaal by David was in honour of the memory of Saul who's "sword never returned idle" and in honour of Jonathan whom David called brother:

"Very dear to me you were, your love to me more wonderful than the love of a woman." (2 Sam.1.26).

We glean from David's generosity and kindness to Meribaal that a good turn deserves another, that the impact of the memory of a favour, a kindness once received in the past may inspire one to seek to replicate acts of human kindness. The cruel and hostile attitude of South Africans towards the members of migrant communities is ample evidence that South Africans have largely forgotten that they were "once slaves in Egypt", that they were once the "scum of the earth" under the brutal apartheid system. They have conveniently forgotten the miracle of liberation and the restoration of their own human dignity. They incessantly complain about the severe lack of employment and the faltering economy. The book of Job has a poignant reminder: "If we take happiness from God's hand, must we not take sorrow too?" (Job 12-10).

THE SCOURGE OF DROUGHT

Famine was one of the major scourges of the Israelites as they traversed the desert with the Promised Land in mind. Famine led many to apostasy. They elevated the forces of nature and idols to a divine status in search of an alternative provident god. It was famine that drove the brothers of Joseph to leave Canaan and go to Egypt to purchase grain (Gen.41.56). It was famine that drove Naomi and her family to leave Bethlehem in order to settle in the country of Moab (Ruth 1.1).

In our day and age, the scourge of drought and famine on the African continent has left in its trail widespread poverty. Poverty in turn has driven many to leave their countries of origin in search of better opportunities. But on the African continent, famine is not the only scourge. There are serious challenges of undiluted greed on the part of many who rule the people and those who manage the savings of the

poor. Self-aggrandizement has become a stubborn vice in the ailing fabric of society. Maladministration, the lack of accountability, the dearth of ethical leadership and the pervasive corruption have all conspired against the welfare of the people and have virtually reduced the economy of South Africa to junk status.

THE WIDOW OF SIDON

It was again the severe absence of rain that led the prophet Elijah to Sidon where he experienced the hospitality of a widow who had only “a handful of meal in a jar and a little oil in a jug” (1 Kings 17.12). The widow prepared a meal and all three of them ate to their satisfaction. For God had prophesied through Elijah that:

“jar of meal shall not be spent
jug of oil shall not be emptied
before the day when Yahweh
Sends rain on the face of the earth”
(1 Kings 17.14).

JEWISH HOSPITALITY

In the Jewish tradition and culture, the virtue of hospitality was highly cherished. In the Gospel Luke, Christ reproached his host, a Pharisee who had invited him for a meal. According to custom, the host was expected to offer him water to cleanse his feet, to give him a kiss of greeting and oil for anointing his head. But Simon, the host, failed in observing the revered acts of hospitality (Lk.7.44-47. Jn.12.3).

Rituals of hospitality are deeply embedded in people’s cultures because they are a significant statement in themselves. They underline the spirit of mutual acceptance, of a friendly disposition and good neighbourliness. Acts of hospitality are acts of reassurance. They manifest human warmth. They promote peaceful human relationships. Rituals of welcoming people, and ordinary greetings of peace are an antidote to the evil of conflict among people.

The biblical tradition has these compelling stories about hospitality, kindness and compassion. The ordinary characters of the stories are shown to have practised hospitality to a heroic degree. This welcoming attitude is an integral part of the human constitution. The virtues of kindness and hospitality, the fruits of the Spirit, are to be nurtured and

developed so that they may become the defensive rampart against narrow nationalistic attitudes. The vice of xenophobic prejudice ought to be replaced by the virtue of hospitality. Unlike the fruitless effort of Sisyphus (Greek Mythology) efforts to build welcoming communities are a worthwhile undertaking.

INTEGRATION OF COMMUNITIES

The integration of migrants and refugees into local communities is the ideal. Integration has its challenges. It means getting a steady job and a reliable address. A welcoming community, parish, school or club, facilitates integration. In rural communities where the members of migrants and refugees are limited, integration takes place without any major obstacles. It is quite common that migrants who now own small businesses have actually hired local people in their businesses. The arrival of some migrants and refugees in some communities means that there is a wider pool of talents to draw from. They enhance the cultural diversity of local communities. Those who have been in South Africa for many years are already fluent in some local languages. This is a great advantage for it makes them feel at home. Language helps break barriers. Language creates community. A conscious celebration and promotion of the virtues of hospitality and community go a long way towards healing the memories and scars inflicted upon those who ultimately decided to leave their own countries. Some have left under traumatic circumstances. To migrate from one's country is at times a singular act of courage and an extraordinary act of self-liberation. An appreciation of the circumstances that promoted migration in the first instance might render an act of hospitality much more valuable. St. Paul's advice is handy: "While we have the chance, we must do good to all" (Gal.5 1-10).

In some of the urban areas the challenges of integration are far more glaring. Migrant communities tend to congregate together. Even if they belong to the same parish with the local people. Their loyalty appears to be torn between their own group and the local people. For example, the St. Anne's Women's Sodality of Zimbabwe maintain their uniform and have meetings of their own even though some of them have been in these local parishes for more than a decade. They seek to maintain their identity as Zimbabweans. Ideally, a balance must be found between maintaining one's identity, one's interests and one's sense of belonging to

the host community. It is important for the migrant communities to continue to celebrate their National feast days, their cultural events and liturgies in their own languages. For a people who have been uprooted from their land of birth either by a persistent drought, or by the absence of opportunities or political oppression, these celebrations are therapeutic. But it takes two to tango. Both the migrants and the local people have to willingly find each other. Prejudice is overcome when both parties become involved in the same projects.

At the beginning of September 2019, there was yet another outbreak of violence against the migrant community. In Johannesburg, foreign-owned shops were hopelessly looted and the owners attacked. In Kwa-Zulu Natal and in the Western Cape, foreign truck drivers were attacked and their trucks set alight. The widespread senseless violence jolted the civil authorities out of their comfort zone. This was a far more serious disruption of violence. Some Nigerians in Nigeria threatened to disrupt South African businesses in Nigeria as a form of retaliation. The Zambians cancelled a friendly football match with a South African team. The South African government sent emissaries to Nigeria to offer an olive branch and an explanation of the circumstances that led to the irruption of violence. In the government's explanation, the emphasis fell on criminality, and not on xenophobia. Even though criminal activity loomed large, it would be naïve to underplay or underestimate the deep-seated tensions between the migrant community and the local people who falsely accuse migrants of taking their jobs. The truth of the matter is that the South African economy has virtually ground to a halt. A far more convincing intervention by the state is desirable in order to quell the violence and deal decisively with those who commit crimes with impunity.

Attacks on migrant communities and their businesses are likely to continue into the future because such attacks are now inextricably linked to service delivery protests. To disentangle the two will be a massive challenge. Service delivery protests and the anti-foreign sentiment do not belong together. The deep dissatisfaction of South Africans with the corruption and inefficiency of their own municipalities and their national government should not be blamed on migrants. It is grossly unethical to drag the migrants into the quarrels of South Africans. Migrants ought not to be the scapegoats for the serious failures of South Africans. South Africans ought not to harden their hearts and take out their pain on

innocent migrants. Migrants have their own burdens to carry. South Africans ought to carry their own burden (Gal. 5.5).

PASTORAL VISION

It would be desirable that each Pastoral Parish Council identify, elect or co-opt a member on the PPC whose functions will be the following:

1. To coordinate migrants' and refugee affairs within the parish community.
2. With the assistance of the PPC, to facilitate, create and promote a welcoming and hospitable parish community.
3. To create a discussion forum on issues of concern to both migrants and the local communities.
4. To liaise with the religious and NGO groups that are involved in migrant issues at the parish level.
5. To plan and to adopt best practices concerning the assistance given to migrants and refugees.

For example, Holy Trinity Church in Braamfontein cooperates with faculty members of the medical and dentistry schools to assist migrants.

6. To cooperate with St. Vincent de Paul, the Catholic Women's League and the Knights of Da Gama – to collect second-hand clothing and shoes for the needy.
7. To facilitate the provision of English lessons, if needed.
8. To examine the challenge of statelessness.
9. To pay special attention to the needs of the children of migrants.
To facilitate the integration of migrants into the local community.
10. To find ways and means of dissuading the local community from taking out their dissatisfactions on the migrant community.

11. To promote Celebrations of Reconciliation.

12. To appoint a sub-committee with the help of the PPC.

It would be advisable for diocesan or metropolitan coordinators to develop channels and platforms of coordination so that parishes are not overwhelmed by the amount of work in responding to the needs of the migrant community.

The sharing of reports helps to spread information on current challenges and on best practices.

VIOLENCE AGAINST MIGRANTS

NELSON MANDELA'S OATH

When South Africans hurl insults and inflict violence on migrants, when they strip migrants of their belongings and set alight their businesses, they recklessly go against the solemn oath of Nelson Mandela, the revered father of post-apartheid South Africa. Nelson Mandela made an oath that “never again shall a human being be oppressed by another human being”. This oath was proclaimed by Mandela on behalf of the New South African nation. He and many other leaders paid dearly. They sacrificed their lives so that South Africans might embrace freedom and walk tall among the nations. Mandela is an iconic symbol of peace. This symbol is inextricably associated with the nation of South Africa.

He was the incarnation of the hope that South Africans would triumph against all the odds. Inflicting pain on migrants and refugees is a tragic betrayal of the sacred oath he made on behalf of the people of South Africa. He bequeathed South Africans the values of human dignity, reconciliation, peace, freedom and hospitality. It is hardly 25 years since his death, yet South Africans already trample his legacy underfoot and make a spectacle of themselves. The on-looking nations are no longer impressed.

AFROPHOBIA AND MEMORY LOSS

If the unwarranted violent attacks on migrants and refugees are not brought to a halt, South Africans run the risk of becoming like the oppressors of the apartheid era. The apartheid system brutalised people. It stripped them of their dignity, humiliated them and inculcated a sense of self-hate. Indigenous people were physically segregated and declared foreigners in their own country of birth. This treatment entrenched feelings of revengefulness and bitterness amongst the oppressed. At the launching of the 70's Group (April 2019) the former President of South Africa, Kgalema Motlanthe recalled a visit of Ali Mazrui immediately after the celebration of Democracy (1994). He said Mazrui prophetically warned that now that South Africa is free, South Africans should be careful not to become villains themselves. Hardly 25 years have passed, some of us South Africans do to our African fellow migrants what our former oppressors used to do to us. South Africans considered their former oppressors as monsters. Today we have become those very

monsters. In meting out violence against African migrants we show open hatred. Such hatred against others impairs the dignity of the other and unfortunately reveals the brokenness of the South Africans themselves. The shameless physical attacks on migrants and refugees on spurious allegations that they have robbed South Africans of their jobs is simply disgraceful.

South Africans are put to shame by the migrants who simply show a superior quality of self-restraint in the face of such blatant provocation. A conclusion could be drawn that South Africans who indulge in xenophobia have simply not healed from the wounds of the apartheid era. They are still hurting and are now taking out their anger on their fellow Africans. The apartheid ghosts are ubiquitous. The pillaging and looting of the belongings of the migrants are unashamedly done by the youth while the adults stand by gloating. They received the stolen goods unashamedly into their homes with a misguided sense of triumphant satisfaction. The absence of a consciousness of guilt will continue to undermine the moral fabric of the South African society.

THE HARDENING OF ATTITUDES

The skirmishes between migrants and locals happen intermittently at various places. They are unplanned. At times they happen on the back of a service delivery protest over the lack of clean water, electricity, housing, pit-toilets, schools etc. On such occasions the anger and frustration of the local people at government's empty promises have tended to engulf migrants who live in the same neighbourhood as the protestors. These sporadic confrontations if they go on unchecked, are likely to set up a bad precedent. They hurt people who are involved in them, deeply. They are likely to lead to the hardening of attitudes between locals and migrants. Migrants who are currently the victims will one day seek to retaliate. It is not as if they have taken out an insurance for personal injury or for the loss of their belongings. Whatever they suffer or lose in the unplanned attacks is lost for good. Because these are mob attacks, very few people get arrested, if at all. The victims do not get to see justice being done. They then carry on with their lives burdened with the memory that they have been unjustifiably attacked. They now also have to entertain the fear that such attacks may erupt again in the future.

THE ANTI-FOREIGNER SENTIMENT

The xenophobic attacks reached a point where members of the diplomatic corps felt it necessary to request an explanation from the Minister of Foreign Affairs. As representatives of the African countries in South Africa, they could no longer stand by while their compatriots are being attacked by local people for no apparent reason. The attacks on migrants cannot just be reduced to hooliganism. These attacks are patently fuelled by anti-foreigner sentiment. Hooliganism under these circumstances is an expression of the anti-foreigner sentiment. If these attacks continue unabated, tension between South Africa and other African countries will begin to show. Foreign governments expect the South African government to quell and diffuse the inchoate tensions brought about by the xenophobic attacks. They expect the government to protect all foreign nationals who live in South Africa. The migrants themselves expect to be treated with dignity, respect and equality. They do not need to be reminded time and again that they are outsiders.

THE DUDULA MOVEMENT

A new anti-foreigner movement called *Dudula* (meaning: push them out) has been forged in a cauldron of an anti-foreigner sentiment. This movement is currently trying to spread its presence (or venom) around the country. Some of its followers have stood guard at hospitals and schools in order to prevent migrants without identity documents from accessing medical help or foreign students from entering school premises. This movement is clearly driven by an intense dislike for migrants. What it does is that it poisons the social environment by constantly bringing up the issue of undocumented foreign nationals who should be deported instead of regularising the stay in South Africa. Besides, the *Dudula* movement has no mandate to be harassing migrants about their identity documents. They are not an adjunct arm of the South African police. The police ought to be calling *Dudula* into order. But *Dudula* is given a free reign to harass migrants.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF MIGRANTS

Migrants from Lesotho, Malawi and Mozambique have been involved in the mining sector for decades even though they do not have much to show for it. Migrants bring skills into the economy. Those who run businesses provide employment even to the local people. Many are involved in the informal sector of the economy. The contribution of

migrants to the economy is significant. But they also contribute in other ways. Migrants bring along with them the passion to succeed, industriousness, cultural diversity, and sense of openness to the world as opposed to a narrow inward-looking nationalism and isolationism. Migrants display a rich cultural diversity in a form of customs, traditions, fashion, music and the arts. They are the bearers of the new religious movements which have swept South Africans off their feet. Religious movements by virtue of their mission are destined to promote unity, peace, solidarity, compassion and hospitality. These virtues are the basic building blocks of Christian living. Besides, many members of the new religious movement or churches, are migrants themselves. They, therefore, have a vested interest in forging peaceful relationships with local people. Finally, migrants demonstrate a strong virtue of courage to cross borders and to explore new possibilities in order to enhance their lives.

Migrants and asylum seekers demand that their dignity as human beings be recognized, and that they be accorded the respect given to all persons. They frown upon being considered as foreigners or outsiders who deserve to be harassed, intimidated, punished and even threatened with deportation. Their desire is to be given a chance to find new opportunities and to live peacefully with their neighbours. If confrontations continue to dominate the relationships of migrants and the local people, South Africa should not be surprised one day when South Africans who live in different African countries are singled out, attacked or victimised because of the intolerance and resentment shown to migrants in South Africa. A fallout between South Africa and other African countries can only have disastrous consequences, hence the urgent need to dissipate tensions whenever they appear in the different communities.

AN APPEAL TO YOUTH

Young people have invariably been always in the forefront of the struggle for justice. The youth of 1976 hastened the advent of democracy in South Africa. The Economic Freedom Fighters, a political party of young people, is a thorn in the flesh of the African National Congress. The Fees Must Fall movement of university students twisted the arm of President Zuma to authorise free university education for certain categories of students. The unplanned intermittent attacks on migrants and refugees are reprehensible acts of injustice. Such attacks are aimed at excluding

and stigmatising migrants. Where then are the charismatic young people who would take the side of the oppressed migrants. In fairness, the leader of the Economic Freedom Fighters has consistently advocated a united Africa. He maintains that there should be no discrimination against migrants who wish to settle in South Africa. But there is a need for more prophetic voices especially at a time when support and solidarity would make a significant difference. The virtue of hospitality amongst South Africans is at present a scarce resource. They do not take kindly to Africans who share their skin colour. The ruling party has a maxim: “Batho pele” (people first). Migrants are also human beings (batho) who deserve to be treated with courtesy and respect. Therefore the ruling party by virtue of its motto, should be the ones in the forefront, in defence of the dignity of migrants and refugees. Otherwise, their motto will simply sound like “a gong booming or a cymbal clashing” (1Cor. 13.1).

CONCLUSION

The oath of Nelson Mandela that “never again shall a human being be oppressed by another human being”, will continue to haunt South Africans who remember how despicably they were treated during the apartheid era. They also earnestly prayed that their offspring should never experience the same treatment they endured in the past. There is therefore a moral imperative for South Africans to wipe the slate of their horrors of the past clean. They have been tested through fire. They now have the golden opportunity to show the world how human beings can be forgiving, warm, welcoming and hospitable to strangers.

RECONCILIATION BETWEEN MIGRANTS, REFUGEES AND SOUTH AFRICANS. A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOUR

Prior to the elections of May 8th, 2019, during the electioneering period, some members of the public openly advocated that migrants and refugees be repatriated. Such sentiments of hostility are frightening especially in view of the fact that attacks on migrants and refugees have happened with such a “degrading frequency” (Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, no. 7.3). Attacks on migrants are a defiant rejection of God’s Commandment: “Thou shall love your neighbour as yourself”. Such attacks regrettably cast a dark shadow on the unsurpassable value of life. They speak to a tragic diminishing of the sense of God’s presence. They advance the culture of death. They render the people’s conscience obtuse.

COLLAPSING THE WALL OF SEPARATION

As far as Christians are concerned, faith has a direct bearing on the attitude of people towards each other. Within the context of the conflict between migrants and the South Africans, St. Paul’s words are of particular relevance:

“But now in Christ Jesus, you that used to be so far apart from us have been brought very close, by the blood of Christ. For he is the peace between us and has made the two into one and broken down the barrier which used to keep (us) apart, actually destroying in his own person the hostility” caused by man-made geographical borders (Eph. 2.13-14).

Migrants and refugees through the death of Christ on the cross “are no longer aliens or foreign visitors” but members of God’s household (Eph. 2.19). And as members of God’s household, they are family and therefore ought to be treated with the dignity they deserve. South African believers are also members of the same household of God. It is therefore incumbent upon them to treat migrants and refugees as brothers and sisters. Migrants and South Africans stand as equals before God. They share the same God-given human dignity.

A NEW FELLOWSHIP

The celebration of Easter, of the Paschal Mystery, is a powerful reminder that the Cross of Christ abolished alienation and reconciled all people to God and to each other (Eph. 2.16). The triumph of the Cross is the reason for the collapse of the wall of separation. The rich fruit of that collapse is invariably described as a “new humanity”, a “new fellowship”, a “new creation”, a “new solidarity”, a “new family” and a “new body” with Christ as its head (Eph. 1.23; Gal. 6.15). When South Africans mount an attack on migrants and refugees they submit themselves again to the “yoke of slavery” of the apartheid years. They separate themselves from Christ and have fallen from grace (Gal. 5. 2, 4). The Letter to the Colossians describes this “new fellowship” as God’s “chosen race” that “should be clothed in sincere compassion, in kindness and humility, gentleness and patience”. “Bear with one another” and “let the message of Christ, in all its richness, find a home in you” (Col. 3. 12-13).

UNITY IN JESUS CHRIST

One of the major concerns of the Apostolic Church was the question of unity. The unity of Christians was paramount. On this question, there was no compromise. Through Baptism one becomes a member of the Body of Christ’s Church (1 Cor. 12-13). This membership is based on conversion and on faith in Christ. This fundamental message of unity is repeatedly stated by St. Paul in his various writings: “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, for all are one in Christ (Gal. 3.11; Gal. 6.16, Rom. 10.12). René Padilla writes that this unity in Christ is “no mere spiritual unity, but a concrete community made up of Jews and Gentiles” (R. Padilla, p.75). What is therefore desirable within the South African context, is a genuine, concrete unity between migrants, refugees and South Africans. South Africans themselves are in desperate need of unity. The divisions caused by apartheid still run deep.

ST. PAUL’S ANALOGY OF THE BODY

The importance of unity is illustrated further by the use of the metaphor of the body in the Hymn to Love in Paul’s Letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 13.2). The Corinthian Church was torn apart because some of the members claimed to possess spiritual gifts that were superior to those of others. This claim apparently enhanced their status within the church community. Within the South African community, the division between migrants, refugees and South Africans is fuelled by the unfortunate belief

that migrants are here to take advantage of the benefits of housing, health-care, employment and education at the expense of the local people. Now St. Paul uses the analogy of the body in order to contradict such an erroneous belief. He says the metaphor of the body simply highlights the diversity and collaboration of the different members of the body: “God has formed the body together, giving all the more honour to the least members so that there is no bodily rupture and members are mutually concerned about one another” (1 Cor. 12. 24-25).

Migrants and refugees by virtue of the harsh and even inhumane conditions in which they find themselves, are the least members of the body who deserve attention. The parable of the Last Judgement drives the message home. All the nations will be assembled before the King and he will say: “Come, you whom my Father has blessed, take your heritage, the Kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world ... For I was a stranger and you welcomed me, - in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me” (Mt. 25: 32,35,40).

The metaphor of the body represents an appeal to South Africans to break the chains of sexism, ethnicity and exclusive nationalism. It is an appeal that the continent of Africa be seen as a home of all the people who live on it. South Africans have to come to terms with the reality of interdependence among African nations. The harsh realities of war, persecution, disease, persistent poverty and corruption experienced in other countries, are destined to have an unavoidable impact on South Africa. South Africa is not an island nor are its borders hermetically sealed.

If South Africans only loved South Africans and excluded migrants and refugees, what good would that serve? Incidentally South Africans do not necessarily love themselves. They face serious challenges. Violent service delivery protests irrupt from time to time and leave in their wake the destruction of property, namely schools, clinics, libraries, buses etc. Levels of violent crimes are unacceptably high: murder, rape, femicide and gangsterism. The cancer of corruption has weakened the entire fabric of society. Unemployment (27%) and the resultant poverty have given rise to high levels of frustration and despair among the poor. The country's leadership is at its wits end. South Africa is currently a society angry at itself.

Notwithstanding the bleakness of the image that emerges, it is morally reprehensible to discriminate against migrants and refugees who are equally trapped in a situation of dire need. They are worse off than the local people because they are in a strange land. They do not have the fortune of depending on the network of friends and the extended family. It is against such a background that the parable of the Good Samaritan calls on each one of us to “become a person who treats everyone encountered – however frightening, alien, naked or defenceless – with dignity and compassion” (Johnson, L. The Gospel of Luke, Sacra Pagina, 1991). In spite of the hardships faced by South Africans, it is still demanded of them to be humane and charitable. Pope Benedict XVI quotes Paul, the Apostle of the nations: “even if we speak the tongues of men and angels, and if we have the faith to move mountains, but are without love, all will come to nothing” (Pope Benedict XVI, Letter to the Catholic Church in the People’s Republic of China, no. 6, 2007).

There has to be a change of heart among South Africans and a deep desire to be welcoming. There is an urgent need to accept the reality of the migration of people not just here in Southern Africa but the world over. It is imperative that suspicions be dissipated and divisions overcome. From this imperative flows a radical consciousness of the unity of those who belong to Christ or alternatively those who are genuinely human at heart. Faith leads a believer to promote solidarity, mutual acceptance and mutual support.

PENTECOST AND INCLUSIVITY

Again René Padilla points out that “loyalty to Jesus Christ relativized all the differences” (R. Padilla, p.76). Thus on Pentecost day the Gospel was preached in a variety of tongues to people from the four corners of the world. “And they were all excited, because each one of them heard the believers speaking in his or her own language” (Act. 2.6).

The thrust of the message of the event of Pentecost as far as migrants and refugees and South Africans are concerned, is that they essentially belong to the one body of Christ, one community of faith in spite of their race, place of origin, colour or social standing. The pulling together of resources by the Pentecost people continue to offer a compelling model to divided communities that they do have the potential to overcome their differences and work collaboratively for the promotion of all the people.

For this to happen, St. Paul insists that the warring parties need to change their behaviour “modelled on a new mind”. This is the only way to discover what it is that God wants, what is the perfect thing to do (Rom. 12.2). A new mind, accompanied by a new attitude and a new set of values are what is needed in order to bridge the gaping divide between the migrant community and the South Africans.

THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT

Scripture reminds us that the role of the Spirit is multifaceted. It is the Spirit that pours God’s love into our hearts (Rom. 5.5). It is this love that should serve as the basis of unity amongst the different people of God. It is this love that is meant to repair the rift between conflicting parties in society. Regrettably there is resistance to its influence and invitation. Hence the need for conversion at the very instigation of the self-same Spirit. It is by the power of the Spirit that obstacles and prejudice are overcome. It is the Spirit that enables people to reach out to each other, to support each other, to heal each other. The Spirit gives life and sustains fellowship (Pope John Paul II, *Dominum et Vivicantem*, no. 1). “Though indelibly different we are”, the Spirit gives a new identity to all the people who come from the different parts of the African continent (Bellah, p. 304). Taking after Mary, all the believers are invited to treasure and to ponder the role of the Holy Spirit in our daily lives. The effects of our faith ought to manifest themselves in our relationships with others (Lk. 2.19).

The gifts of the Spirit are intended to be put into practice for the benefit of the community. The gift of sharing in Christ’s body, the gift of unity, imposes an obligation on all the recipients “to make that unity a living reality” (Gaybba B. *The Spirit of Love*, p. 183). The gifts are to be put to good use in order to enrich the community and not to be hidden in the ground (Mt. 25.18). Brian Gaybba rightly points out that the gift of unity requires “a visible expression” (Gaybba, *op cit.* p. 183). Reconciliation and peace between the migrants and South Africans requires a visible expression. The initiative needs to be taken by South Africans for they are the ones who threw the first stone (Jn. 8.7). Attacks on migrants has been a direct assault on the human dignity of migrants. This has been a trampling underfoot of the commandment to love one’s neighbour as oneself. This calls for a reparation by both individuals and their communities. A symbolic gesture of making amends at national level would go a long way towards assuaging the aggrieved. A public apology

accompanied by a concrete action of restoring the dignity of migrants would be the appropriate thing to do. The fact that it has not been done, speaks to the hesitation and ambivalence of the South African leadership.

To many migrants and refugees, while they were still in their homeland, the words of the Book of Exodus were music to their ears: "I have seen the miserable state of my people in Egypt. I have heard their appeal to be free of their slave drivers. I mean to bring them up out of that land to a land rich and broad, a land where milk and honey flow" (3. 7-8). This is how the word of mouth advertised South Africa. But now migrants who have been harassed, arrested and detained for not having identity documents and those who have been maliciously attacked in their neighbourhoods, tell a story not of milk and honey, but of humiliation, insults and name-calling.

The above description of contempt, pain and suffering is contrary to the role of the Spirit among us as described in the Letter to the Romans: "The Spirit you received (both migrants and South Africans) is not the spirit of slavery bringing fear into your lives again. It is the Spirit of sons and it makes us cry out 'Abba, Father!' (Rom. 8. 14-15). Both migrants and South Africans have received the Spirit of adoption. Thus, by the power of the Spirit we are made members of one body, children of God, "heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, sharing His sufferings so as to share His glory" (Rom. 8.17, Kasper, W. Harvesting the Fruits, p. 24).

HARDSHIPS. THE PLIGHT OF THE POOR

The conflict between migrants, asylum seekers and South Africans is at the instigation of the latter who feel frustrated and disappointed by their own political leadership. The pain and suffering of South Africans stem from their craving for land, housing, employment and education for their children. Abject poverty has become a formidable barrier to human progress. And so, migrants cannot be made the scapegoat of the shortcomings of the South African State. The conflict between migrants and South Africans is a case of the poor fighting the poor instead of forging bonds of communion and solidarity among themselves with the explicit aim of overcoming their common predicament. Poverty and deprivation are not a matter of fate. Such conditions can be reversed by a collective human effort. The pain and suffering of both the migrants and the majority of South Africans, should perhaps, from the viewpoint of

Scripture, be seen as helping “to make up all that has still to be undergone by Christ for the sake of His body, the Church” (Col. 1.24).

Most migrants and refugees, given the hostile environment they find themselves in, in South Africa, can genuinely identify their negative experience with that of the Apostle Paul when he says: “Hard-pressed on every side, we are never hemmed in; bewildered, we are never at our wits’ end; hunted, we are never abandoned to our fate; struck down, we are not left to die” (2 Cor. 4. 8-10). The suffering of migrants at the hand of their fellow African brothers and sisters can only strengthen their resolve to overcome the odds. David Bosch has this to say about such a challenge:

*“To be a stranger and at the same time at home in another society,
to become part of another country and people,
to surrender the ties with home and family,
to learn another language until it becomes your own,
to identify with the struggles and needs of another people” – is a true test of the mettle of the migrants and refugees (Bosch, D. A Spirituality of the Road, p.24).*

BECOMING TRULY HUMAN

The parable of the Good Samaritan cautions us “not to worry about who deserves to be cared for”. Rather, we should be concerned about (us, ourselves) becoming a person or persons “who treat everyone we meet with dignity, respect and compassion”. This is the heart of the Gospel message.

In the parable of Mary, Martha and Lazarus, Jesus says: “Mary has chosen the better part”, the listening part. Here the emphasis of Jesus falls, not on providing a service such as in the case of Martha, but the emphasis falls on receiving a gift that is, receiving the other person who comes into our space. This person, this migrant or refugee is a messenger of grace.

We are encouraged, not to see the migrant, the other unknown person as a threat, a rival, a competitor. No, we should see the other as a blessing

in disguise; as an opportunity or as an instrument that brings the best out of us, making us worthy of being called: human beings with a heart.

It has often been said that if we are not going to be helpful to others, at least we should not harm or hurt them. We should not burn their houses, destroy their properties, loot their shops or inflict pain on their persons.

INDIFFERENCE. THE GRAVE SIN OF OUR TIME

The grave sin we commit in our times, is the sin of indifference to the plight of others. We walk on the other side of the road like the Priest and the Levite. We don't want to see, we don't want to know. We carry around with us hearts of stone. We measure the worth of persons by applying the misguided criteria of race, nationality, culture and religion. When we discriminate against our fellow-Africans, we betray our own humanity; we diminish our own honour and the worth as human persons. We obscure the image of God imprinted on our faces and in our hearts. The fact is, we are creatures that find our perfection only by establishing a relationship with others. It is this mutuality that makes us truly human. It is a mutual relationship that cuts across man-made boundaries, geographical frontiers, cultural fault-lines and racial divides. Person to person relationships irrespective of origin, language, race or culture tend to be generally warm and pleasant. Group relationships are often poisoned by a prejudice that is embedded in the group.

RELIVING THE NIGHTMARE

Some of the migrants and refugees have had to experience the indignity of bribing their way through the border-posts in order to enter South Africa. As if that was not enough, they have also had to queue for weeks on end, sometimes sleeping in the open, in order to apply for the requisite documents. They were compelled to pay bribes in order to jump the queue. They jostled against each other like cattle. Many struggled to find accommodation upon their arrival. This undignified and virtually hostile reception was for many a prolongation of the nightmare which pressurized them to leave their countries of origin in the first place.

MIGRANTS TEACH BY EXAMPLE

In spite of the overwhelming challenges, most migrants and refugees do not travel empty handed. They do not come cap-in-hand begging for hand-outs. Au contraire, they come bearing gifts. The decision to leave

one's homeland under trying circumstances testifies to one's courage. Migrants are courageous for they do not know what is in store for them in a foreign county. They are highly motivated because they seek to change their life situation for the better. They have a positive attitude because they bank on succeeding. They are highly committed for the sake of their children. They are hard-working. They live by the sweat of their brow. Sometimes they work for months without pay in both the education field and in the health services. They persevere and are patient. South Africans are known to threaten to look for another job if not paid on time. Migrants walk an extra mile. Their generosity makes them vulnerable. Mean employers tend to exploit their availability and commitment. Migrants contribute to the vibrancy of the economy. Now these gifts, these spiritual qualities or these fruits of the Spirit are intended to enable men and women to make a meaningful contribution to society (1 Cor. 12.8-10). The gifts of the Spirit are given to men and women inside and outside the Church. South Africans have been equally endowed with these gifts. Harnessing the gifts of all people can only bode well for the entire society. Gifts build. Bickering destroys and undermines the project of human development. "If you go snapping at each other and tearing each other to pieces, you had better watch or you will destroy the whole community" (Gal. 5.15).

South Africans have regrettably proven themselves to be poor hosts. This is so in spite of the fact that many South Africans were strangers and aliens in different African countries. Alain Thomasset writes that "our ability to accept and welcome the other fundamentally depends on our own sense of having been welcomed ourselves in our vulnerability" (Thomasset, A. p. 41). South Africans have a strain of memory loss. Those who are today in leadership positions were once in exile and enjoyed the hospitality given to them. They used to condemn apartheid abuses from the rooftop but now there is a deafening silence concerning afrophobia in their own country. There was a time when South Africans hailed some African leaders: Nkrumah, Lumumba, Haile-Selassie, Kaunda, Nyerere, Machel, Nujoma, Kenyatta, even Gaddafi. Today that adulation has just about disappeared and the people from the countries of these former leaders are not given the respect they deserve. South Africans have simply forgotten that they once enjoyed hospitality in other countries. South Africans were once treated with disdain in their country of birth. But now we are treating others with a similar disdain.

Discrimination against migrants and refugees does not only show itself during public confrontations. It is far more insidious than that. Discrimination is palpably felt in hospital and school admissions. Foreign nationals are expected to pay more or are simply turned away. Banks make it difficult for migrants to open accounts. The force of prejudice is felt by African migrants in their everyday life. And this is totally reprehensible for it defies the principles of fairness, of equal treatment and of human dignity.

In the past, South Africa took great pride in the work of The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in spite of the controversy surrounding some of its findings. The work of the Commission is credited with having averted an open civil war between the different races in a post-apartheid South Africa. However, the legacy of The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, its “never again” motto, does not seem to have had a profound impact on the entire South African society. Otherwise, how do you explain the animosity, the open and at times subtle hostility towards migrants? South Africa used to be praised for its gallant spirit of reconciliation. But that reputation is beginning to wear thin because of the visible anti-foreigner sentiment. What is the point of having one of the best Constitutions in the world and yet fail deplorably as a country to manage an ostensibly incipient ugly conflict between migrants and South Africans? This conflict needs to be stopped in its tracks before it causes incalculable harm to the country’s reputation.

Scripture says Christ “made peace by his death on the cross” (Col. 1.20). As followers of Christ, we have a task to advance the recognition of diversity and to acknowledge as our calling the promotion of the dignity and sanctity of every person.

THE SYNODAL PROCESS AND MIGRANTS

MOTIVATION

As far as the different categories of people on the move are concerned, their integration into the Synodal process is deemed not just desirable but urgent. The following reasons serve as a compelling motivation why they feel so strong about participating in the Synodal process.

South Africa serves as an adequate example. In South Africa people on the move, especially migrants and refugees, have experienced nothing but rejection, harsh treatment and being named “foreigners” with negative connotations. They have been called “outsiders”, the “unwanted” even though some of them have been here since the dawn of the South African democracy, 27 years ago. They have been falsely accused of “stealing” jobs that should be given to local people. When there are “service delivery” protests, that is, violent complaints about the provision of water, electricity, housing, roads etc. people on the move become the victims. They bear the brunt of the anger of local people. Their stores are at times looted and even set alight. They are accused of selling drugs and are said to be involved in human trafficking. These are extremely harmful generalisations that tarnish the image of the migrants. At times migrants and refugees are attacked physically. People on the move have been thoroughly victimised and turned into scapegoats for the short-comings of the socio-economic system of South Africa. They are spoken of disparagingly. Anecdotally, the hospitality industry has virtually employed migrants to the exclusion of locals. This has not gone unnoticed. Industries that uphold this practice drive a wedge between migrants and locals. On the whole, people on the move strongly feel that their own human rights are trampled underfoot and their own human dignity disrespected. They have this deep desire to confront their fellow-Christians about the many negative experiences that pain them. Their on-going pain and rejection is their strong motivation to desire a common platform where they could be heard.

SYNODAL ASSEMBLIES

The theme of synodality introduced by Pope Francis on the 50th Anniversary of the Synod of Bishops has been like a breath of fresh air to the people on the move, especially migrants and refugees. The Pope notes that the synodal gatherings or journeys, should not just be an

inspirational sharing of ideas or useful discussions, but should actually generate commitment to programmes that yield practical useful outcomes. Synodical gatherings should also be a natural setting for evangelisation and conversion.

The word 'synod' is generally described as deriving from two Greek words: syn i.e. 'with' and odos, i.e. 'path'. Synod therefore means the path on which God's people travel together. Synods are church assemblies where entire communities of the local church are fully represented. They take place at diocesan, provincial, regional and continental levels. People on the move do not wish to be seen gaining access to synodal gatherings surreptitiously. They wish the church should consider them as a necessary constituency of the church. There should therefore be a formal acknowledgement of their existence and an open willingness to include them in the various church structures that represent the laity. Inclusion should be the key motivating force that seeks to bring to an end years of excluding migrants and refugees based on a narrow nationalistic ideology of keeping the South African borders impenetrable. The irony is that the South African borders are simply porous.

Synodal assemblies are appropriate official structures at which Christians come together in order to discern, discuss and reflect together under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, matters of faith, and pastoral concerns. It is at these platforms that people on the move seek to stake their claims as fellow Catholics. They wish to speak directly for themselves without interpreters or go-betweens.

STAKING CLAIMS

It is critical that their representatives be granted an official status as bona fide elected delegates of migrants and refugees communities. Members of these communities, once accepted as genuine representatives, wish to stake the following claims and hope to get some clarity on a number of the dilemmas they face in society.

First, they would like to be allowed to make a contribution towards the agenda of these assemblies. There is a fear that an imposed agenda might address only some of their serious concerns. Members wish to make it clear that their entitlement to participate and speak out derives from the sacrament of baptism from the seal of holy chrism that set them

apart and incorporated them into the body of Christ. They maintain they are Catholics. They too say “Amen” after receiving the Body and Blood of Christ. They affirm the real presence of Christ. They wish to understand if the Church is “an instrumental sign of intimate union with God and of the unity of all humanity” (Vatican II. Constitution on the Church, no.1). Why then are migrants and refugees excluded from this unity and continuously made to feel like intruders with a criminal intent.

Migrants and refugees are steadfast in their belief that they too have been made in the image of God and therefore claim the fatherhood of God. They claim that they too cry Abba, that they are not outsiders, that they are insiders. They belong. They are not half-brothers or half-sisters. They wish to engage their fellow-Catholics on these matters during the synodal gatherings. They are extremely preoccupied with the public rejection they face. They wish to interrogate the silence of local Catholics in the face of what really amounts to a second round of open persecution after the initial harrowing experiences in their countries of origin.

The synodal platforms, in promoting dialogue, should also shed some light on biblical sayings which do not appear to be applicable in situations where Christian migrants and refugees are involved. The following are a few examples:

- Matthew 25: “For when I was hungry, thirsty, a stranger, naked, etc., you took care of me. When you do these things to the least of my brothers/sisters, you do them to me”.

Migrants and refugees see themselves as the least of the brothers and sisters. Many crossed the borders empty-handed. They are puzzled, disappointed and genuinely confused that the warm words of the Gospel in South Africa do not appear to apply to their situation of extreme need.

- Luke 10: Migrants have also learnt from their adult catechesis that Christ has given the word “neighbour” in the parable of the Good Samaritan, a new meaning. The answer to the question: Who is my neighbour?

My neighbour is the person who needs my help. Migrants and refugees are clearly the people who are in need because of their precarious circumstance.

- Galatians 5: Migrants hear the reading on the Fruits of the Spirit: “Joy, peace, love, kindness, compassion, honesty, integrity” etc. but they are yet to experience the full power and weight of these virtues. They appear to be excluded from the freely given grace of the Holy Spirit.

Solidarity. Many migrants and refugees point out that South Africans in general have an extremely poor sense of solidarity with the rest of the entire African continent. South Africans fail to realise that they have a common destiny with the African continent to which they belong. African leaders forge ahead with talks about building a common market for all the African countries while in South Africa, citizens of other African countries are treated like lepers. A vision of economic interdependence among African countries is regrettably still at a rudimentary stage. This myopia accounts for the unnecessary resentment experienced by people on the move.

Pope John Paul II points out that solidarity “is a duty of all towards all”. Furthermore, solidarity “entails a sense of moral responsibility that helps us to see the other person as our neighbour” who needs our help (Pope John Paul II, On Social Concern, no.39.5). Genuine solidarity opens people’s hearts towards migrants and refugees. Solidarity broadens the circle of inclusivity. Synodal gatherings where laity and church leaders are assembled, render themselves ideal platforms for the removal of obstacles to the promotion of life-giving solidarity and justice.

CHURCH AS EXPERT IN HUMANITY

Another item of interest to the migrant community is the strong belief that the church is an “expert in humanity”. (John Paul II, On Social Concern, no. 41.2). Human relations between migrants and local South Africans are at a low ebb. Tension and violence are hidden just below the surface. The expertise of church leaders and the wisdom of the lay people would alleviate the precarious situation. The synodal platforms are the ideal location where the church as “expert in humanity” is in a position to listen to the plight of migrants and to mobilise campaigns essentially aimed at restoring and enhancing the dignity of people on the move.

OPTION FOR THE POOR

People on the move are also anxious to raise the teaching of Pope John Paul II on the question of “the option or love of preference for the poor” (John Paul II, On Social Concern, no. 42.2). They wish to know why they

do not qualify for such a preference in view of their abject poverty. Many young refugee men sleep in the open, on pavements, under bus shelters, under bridges or in derelict buildings. They are constantly harassed by the police. Some do not have proper identity documents. They live like wild animals. Their sub-human status and lifestyle have severely compromised their moral standing as human beings. They live “a gutter-life” on the margins of society. Instead of being given help as “neighbours” and as human beings, they are simply ignored or harassed. They are physically present, but invisible to all passer-byes. It is this dire situation that seeks to question the relevance of John Paul’s teaching on the radical option for the poor. Migrants and refugees have become the deprived, the needy, the marginalised and the poor. They seek to ask the synodal gatherings why they do not qualify for Christian charity and for preferential care.

SCRAMBLE FOR JOBS

The scourge of unemployment and the struggle over limited resources are at the heart of the conflict between economic migrants and unemployed South Africans. Under normal circumstances, work is supposed to unite all the workers so that they may bargain together for better benefits, (John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, no. 20.3). In the South African context, work has become a divisive wedge between economic migrants and local South African workers. People on the move are extremely hopeful that the promise made by the synodal gatherings will not dissipate but rather offer answers to the dilemmas that face migrants and refugees.

The fierce competition or battle over employment is at times a matter of life or death. At the core of this ruthless competition is the basic fact that men or women’s life is work. Work is a man’s or woman’s vocation. Men and women gain a living by the sweat of their brow (Gen.3.19, (*Laborem Exercens*, no. 1.2). Work “serves man to realise his humanity”, it enables him to fulfill his calling as a person (*ibid*, 6.3). This is a fundamental teaching of the Catholic Church. How then can South Africans seek to prevent migrants from fulfilling their vocation as persons and from realising their humanity? Migrant workers also have moral obligations to fend for their families. These are the vexing questions to be tackled by the synodal panel discussions.

It would be wrong to give an impression that nobody cares about the harsh “living conditions” of migrants and refugees. There is a plethora of non-governmental organisations, faith-based groups and human rights lawyers who work tirelessly to relieve the migrant communities of their perennial oppressive living conditions. Such significant gestures of charity have not gone unnoticed. They help to sustain migrants in the hope of a more humane world. “If you do well to those who do good to you, what thanks can you expect? For even sinners do that much” (Lk.6.33).

THE MARK OF CAIN

Mention must be made that South African black people are increasingly becoming desperate and frustrated because of the absence of employment and the consequent ravages of poverty and insecurity. Unemployment is said to be at 42%. Joblessness in the main, affects masses of young people. Migrants and refugees reluctantly predict that given the fast-deteriorating economic situation, able-bodied South Africans will also be compelled to seek greener pastures in other countries. This time round, they will not be warmly welcomed as they were in the past when they fled from the apartheid monster. Migrants warn that when “the ground (of South Africa) will no longer yield its strength”, South Africans will become “fugitives and wanderers”. Besides, they will bear the mark of Cain on their foreheads because they rose up against their fellow-Africans from other countries and did incalculable harm to their dignity (Gen.4.9-16). Some countries might wish to return a favour to South Africans.

The relationship between migrants and refugees and local South Africans is more than just bad blood. The tensions between the two has intermittently broken into public violence. The palpable tension between the two communities can easily point to the reality of a divided church. The truth of the matter is that there are no incidents of visible tensions or violence within the church communities themselves. But it would be a folly to assume that church people are not involved in the attacks directed at foreign nationals.

Divisions between migrant communities and local communities affect by and large the African people only. This is largely because of residential segregation. These divisions nevertheless, point to a crisis of faith and of

Christian-living. The arrival of large numbers of migrants from Catholic countries in Africa has actually increased the number of Catholics. But this is also the case in the Protestant churches. Migration has also led to the significant growth of the “prosperity” churches.

There appears to be a broad challenge in South Africa with regard to evangelisation. The South African Church is barely a hundred and fifty years old. It is a young church. Whether it is completely out of the realm of mission ad gentes or not, is a matter of debate. What is publicly known is that Christians move from one church to another with great ease. They claim that “Churches are the same. They pray to the same God”. As far as evangelisation is concerned, South Africa still needs a deepening of faith, of church doctrine, of the meaning of its rich liturgy and of Christian charity.

THE NEW MISSION TERRITORY

Focus on the plight of migrants and refugees has become like a new mission territory. It is a new mission territory because it is global in its outreach. People on the move have revealed the shocking living conditions of nations around the world. Rich nations are desperately trying to seal the borders of their countries so as to prevent the poor of the world from entering. The poor migrants are driven out of their countries by poverty, hunger, persecution, violence and war. The challenge is so great that it deserves full attention. Hence the need for a new evangelisation, a new orientation, a new reading of the gospel that will bridge the chasm between “us” and “them”. This new mission will also require an increased sense of Christian charity, of hospitality, of welcoming others and of an increased awareness that resources, though limited, are to be shared. Hopefully these ideas and the gospel mandate will form part of the dialogue at synodal gatherings of the baptised disciples of Christ.

Synodality implies a journeying together. Migrants and refugees sincerely hope to have their representatives participating fully on all levels of the synod. They also pray that there be a genuine sharing of gifts between themselves and local South Africans. They look forward to reaching commonly desired outcomes, to removing stumbling blocks amicably and to finding lasting solutions to sticky recurrent problems. This synodal journey of Christians is a journey of a different kind. They anticipate

certain experiences. Like the followers of Jesus who journeyed with him to Emmaus, they wish that their eyes could be opened so that they might recognise him. They wish that they too could have a burning sensation within their hearts as they listen to each other (Lk.24). For some, this remarkable way of being Church, of openness to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, might even lead to a Damascus experience for all concerned. People create problems. But through the power of the Gospel, they may also resolve those problems.

FORCED MIGRATION. A NEW MISSIONARY TERRITORY

I think one must suggest the seriousness that the pastoral work amongst migrants and refugees, be considered a new missionary territory. Historically, in new territories, resources have been put together to alleviate the challenges that face the people in those new territories. We have the opinion that in modern times, one of the major challenges is migrants and refugees. This does not discount that we still have problems with education, health, unemployment, etc. But alongside these traditional challenges, we also have the challenge of the movement of people across the world.

Think about the Rohingya refugees and the entire community of people moving from one territory to another. Think about the thousands of people during the wars in the Middle East. Presently there are more than a million Syrians in Lebanon when Lebanon itself has more than a million people. Now if you add another million refugees coming into the country, you can understand the crisis which a country like Lebanon is facing. Think about northern Sudan, where the refugees from northern Sudan came down in huge numbers. Think about Belarus these days and Poland, where half a nation of people want to go across from Poland to Germany and they have been prevented from doing so and therefore have to sleep in the open. Think about Latin America and the many people who come from different countries in Latin America who want to go to the United States, who live and sleep in the open because they are refused to cross the boundaries. That is why we are saying migrants and refugees are the new missionary territory in our present times.

Look at the history of Christianity on the African continent. When missionaries: priests, religious and the laity arrived in the different countries where they had no contacts whatsoever, they taught their newly found converts the Word of God. They amassed material resources in order to support their missionary work. This was nearly an impossible task at the beginning. But the missionary pioneers persevered. Their hard work and patience yielded a hundredfold. Forced migration as a new mission territory ought to be seen against the background of the pioneering missionaries. The Gospel message of compassion and solidarity ought to be directed to the local people who see foreign

nationals as a threat to their well-being. There will be a need to reinterpret the meaning of Scripture in light of the present exigencies. Catechesis and adult Christian formation will need to bring to the fore those elements that enable the human spirit to flourish. Jesus Christ as the supreme example to be imitated will dominate the entire new orientation while the role of the Holy Spirit as a model change agent will fill the hearts of all those who are hungry to be truly human by embracing and welcoming the stranger.

Therefore, we have 4 prayers in response:

Firstly, God Almighty will give us the strength of will to do good to migrants and refugees and the strength to see this major challenge. The unique thing about migrants and refugees is that we do not take it as seriously as the other challenges because we say “it is not of our own making, it is not our people, these are foreign nationals, we do not share their blood and therefore we should not be worried about them”. However, we see all the other challenges our fellow citizens or relatives or people we know are facing.

Secondly, we need to pray to ask God to give us the strength of will to see that we are all made in his image. In as much as we are about to celebrate Advent. When we celebrate Advent, we hope that Christ will come and find us eager to welcome him, eager to welcome the presence of God in our mists, and so we pray that we too, should be eager to welcome visitors. To welcome migrants and refugees into our community so that they do not feel that they are strangers, as they are well aware of this. We do not have to remind them of that. But instead, we need to recruit more people to help them, to welcome them.

Thirdly, to pray to God that he be generous in increasing our love and that in increasing our love, we show a love that is not selective but inclusive. A love that accepts other human beings. Although that may be a tall order that is easier said than done. We tend to be very choosy for a variety of reasons. But at the end of the day, we should be able to pray and ask for God's generosity to increase our love for others, for the simple reason that we all belong to God.

Fourthly, to pray that God removes the obstacles that hinder us from receiving others. In as much as we ask that obstacles be removed so that

we accept Christ at the time of Advent. Be prepared to accept him. So too should be given the same grace to be able to accept those in need and in this case, migrants and refugees who simply asked to be recognized as persons and to be helped here and there. So that they can find their feet and live like any other human being. They are not asking for much. We pray that our communities be given the generosity of hearts and not take out our anger and frustrations on migrants and refugees. You will have noticed that each time we have service delivery protests, they are the ones who suffer. Their shops, their little spaza shops, everything they have people want to destroy. People want to take out their anger on them instead of taking it out on the government, or on the people who caused them pain. Therefore, we need to say these prayers for our communities to change. Our biggest wish is, of course, that we could have in every parish people dedicated to this new mission of migrants and refugees because conflicts happen at a community level. It does not happen in Cape Town and Pretoria. Conflict happens in our communities. So, if we had defenders of the rights of migrants in our communities, if we had people with an open heart of accepting other human beings, it would go a long way in us being accepting of them. They are human and we too are human. So, your mission, dear friends, I think, is to try and grow the base of people who have migrants and refugees in your community to help them grow, to have more numbers who come on board because our mission will not succeed unless we have committed people. Thus, growing numbers of people understand this new mission of Christ.

INTERVIEW WITH SHEILA PIRES (RADIO VERITAS)

Buti Tlhagale the Archbishop of Johannesburg and Liaison Bishop for the Bishops' Conference for migrants and refugees, during a workshop for the diocesan coordinator.

Sheila: What are your words for the participants at this workshop?

Archbishop Buti: Well, I've been trying to say that this is a new missionary territory and that's how we should look at it because it comes with its original challenges. It becomes a duty to those who are involved in this ministry to bring other people to its attention so that they too become enthusiastic about it because we are dealing here with human suffering, and this is happening throughout the world. It's almost like perhaps not so much a pandemic. It's like this new COVID-19 that affects everybody, either directly or indirectly, I think looking at the entire world, migrants, and refugees from all sorts of countries are a reality. People live and sleep on the streets and they need to be attended to because they are human beings. They cannot be left to hunt for food like animals, and sleep in the open like animals. Those of us who claim to be Christians, to be the disciples of Christ ought to be involved. We need to show mercy, generosity and indeed love, and should therefore motivate those we live with to have the same passion for the ones who are in need. This does not mean that we have to neglect the community of needy, unemployed people. No, we do not say they should be neglected. But we are saying we have a new challenge of people being pushed around the world driven out of their countries and who therefore need new homes. We should invite members of our communities to join forces and welcome refugees and migrants in our midst.

Sheila: Your Grace, a lot was said about the tensions that are taking place in some communities between locals and foreign nationals. You have said many times that it's usually the foreign nationals who are at the receiving end of the protests and so forth. But this time around we're talking about incitement, for example, from certain political leaders. who promise that should they win the elections; they would get rid of undocumented migrants. Locals accuse foreign nationals of doing illicit trading or of selling goods at a cheaper price and they cannot compete

with them and the list goes on. What would be your advice? How should dioceses and coordinators approach such situations?

Archbishop Buti: I think one of the first things we should do is to create communities, especially parish communities, and that is why we keep on talking about ecumenical outreach in the work we do. We should complement what other churches or NGOs are doing so that together we become the buffer. We become a support group. That will protect the refugees. If we have a community that understands the plight of refugees, you will therefore understand why they will not easily get employment. Most people from other countries are creative. They must create work for themselves and that is what they are doing. They run spaza shops and do all sorts of different business undertakings to support their families, which we should support. If local people were doing the same, if they were creating jobs for themselves and not expecting businesses or government to give them jobs, they will realize that they don't differ from refugees and migrants. They can make jobs for themselves and not complain about why foreign nationals are working. They are creating their jobs and their businesses. Locals should also do that and respond to the challenges they face. As for those who accuse or take a dim view of migrants and refugees who do not have papers, one of the points I was making earlier on, was that I wish that all our groups, should have in every parish a place, an office where migrants will be able to go and apply online to be registered and recognized in the country so that people stop accusing them of being undocumented. So I'm saying that it is partly because these things move slowly, therefore, making it imperative to have an office in every diocese and ultimately an office in every parish where we will be able to help migrants without documents so that they become documented people. That will be my response to political leaders who say migrants are undocumented. Let us say yes they are. They came here without documents. Otherwise, you cannot be a refugee if you have your passport, you might as well stay at home. People who come here as migrants and refugees don't have documents. Therefore, our job as an outreach project for migrants and refugees is to help them to get documented as quickly as possible. That, for me, will be the only way of responding strongly to people who criticize migrants without documents.

THE RELEVANCE OF ST. JOHN BAPTIST SCALABRINI



Scalabrini father to the Migrants

His compassion:

“In Milan, I was a spectator of a scene that left in my soul an impression of deep sadness. As I walked through the station, I saw the vast waiting room filled with three or four hundred poorly clad people ...They were emigrants... I left there deeply moved.”

In J. B. Scalabrini’s life, so many choices originate from an encounter. In particular, in front of the drama of people forced to leave their country in search of a more dignified life, he

does not remain indifferent but allows himself to be touched by the pain of others. His testimony is precious for us men and women of today whom so easily risk being infected by the “culture of indifference.”

John Baptist Scalabrini (1839-1905) was born in Fino Mornasco, a town in the Province of Como, in northern Italy, on July 8, 1839. Third of eight children, after high school he entered the seminary of the diocese of Como and was ordained a priest in 1863. He expressed the desire to join the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions (PIME), but the bishop directed him instead as a teacher and then rector of the minor seminary.

In 1970 he was appointed parish priest of St Bartholomew, a parish on the industrial outskirts of Como, where he developed a sensitivity for the situation of textile workers, the unemployed and the disabled, and where he developed the *Little Catechism for Children* (1875). He gave 11 lectures on the First Vatican Council, also appreciated by Don Bosco. In 1876, when he was only 36 years old, Pius IX appointed him bishop of Piacenza which is located in northern Italy, around 80 km away from Milan. The place was defined by Leonardo da Vinci as the “land of passage”.

As a bishop, he took St. Charles Borromeo as his model, who imitated his pastoral dedication and ability to reform the diocese. He reminded the clergy of the need for spiritual retreat, renewed discipline and studies in the three seminaries, anticipating the reforms of Leo XIII and Pius X. He promoted harmony, put to the test by the conflict between “transigents” and “intransigents” and between the followers of Rosmini and those of St Thomas. He was in favour of conciliation between Church and State.

He visited the 365 parishes of the diocese, 200 of which were in the mountains, five times, but for him, those visits were “the dearest of my offices”. He convened three diocesan synods, dedicated to reform, Christian witness in the Church and the Eucharist mystery of unity.

He institutionalized the teaching of the catechism in the form of a real school and reformed its contents. He started the first Italian *Catechetical Review* (1876) and published “*The Catholic Catechism*” (1877). In 1889 he celebrated the First National Catechetical Congress in Piacenza (the first of its kind in the history of the Church).

Pius IX called him the Apostle of the Catechism. He dedicated himself tirelessly to the poor, especially during the famine of 1879-1880. At the time he sold his chalice and horses, to assist the most vulnerable and poor people in his diocese. He founded the Institute for Deaf-Mute (1879) and the Association for Rice Workers (1903) for the religious, social and union assistance of seasonal migrants. He also dedicated the book *Socialism and the Action of the Clergy* to social issues.

Above all, he was struck by the problem of mass migrations at the end of the nineteenth century. He studied its dynamics, held numerous conferences to solicit the intervention of the government and civil society, and worked for the reform of legislation. For migrants, he founded the Congregation of the Missionaries of St. Charles (1887), the Missionary Sisters of St. Charles Borromeo (1895) and a lay association, the Society of St. Raphael (1889), active in the ports of embarkation and disembarkation. Finally, he recommended to the Pope the establishment of a central office of the Holy See for the care of all migrants.

John Baptist Scalabrini lived in a time of great transformations and knew its dramas: at the end of the 19th century there were hundreds of thousands of Italians and Europeans leaving their country every year and

facing the uncertainties and sufferings of migration. Scalabrini could have stopped at compassion for so much pain, but instead, he became “neighbour to neighbour” and asked himself, “What can be done for them? “

More than a century after his death, the fruits of his legacy are still being harvested: today there are thousands of missionaries and volunteers around the world who embrace the Scalabrinian charism and become “migrants with migrants”, to collaborate in God’s dream of uniting all peoples into one family.

His extraordinary activity as a pastor and the many social initiatives stemmed from a soul completely dedicated to God, which found its nourishment in the Eucharist, knew how to accept the cross (*fac me cruce inebriari*) and had a filial devotion to Our Lady. His total dedication to God led him to make St. Paul’s life project his own: to give himself totally to everyone. John Paul II declared him blessed on 9 November 1997.

On 9th October 2022, Pope Francis *proclaimed John Battista Scalabrini a saint*. We know how much migrants, refugees, seafarers and all people involved in human mobility are dear to the Holy Father’s heart. Many times he has pointed out to the Church and society the duty to welcome them, protect them, promote their living conditions and value their contribution to common coexistence. In proclaiming John Baptist Scalabrini a saint, Pope Francis wants to indicate to the Church the model of a bishop who not only gave himself completely to the good of his people but also extended his heart to the sisters and brothers whom life had taken far from home.

His apostolate in support of Italian emigrants was of great benefit. At that time, thousands left for the Americas. Bishop Scalabrini viewed them with the gaze of Christ, of which the Gospel speaks; for example, Matthew writes: “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Mt 9:36). And he took care, with great charity and pastoral intelligence, to guarantee them adequate material and spiritual assistance. Today he is inviting you and me to care for our brothers and sisters living far from their homeland.



Archbishop Buti Tlhagale, o.m.i.

His Grace Archbishop Buti Tlhagale, o.m.i. is the Archbishop of the Catholic Archdiocese of Johannesburg. From 2016-2021, he was the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference's Liaison Bishop for Migrants and Refugees. He is a member of the UNHCR Multi-Religious Council of Leaders and a supporter of the UNHCR #IBelong Campaign. For many years he was the President of SACBC. His Grace strongly advocated against Apartheid and the exclusion of poor and vulnerable people. He has written various articles and statements to address the challenges and rights of migrants, refugees, and displaced persons of the Southern African Region.



Bishop Joseph Mary Kizito

His Lordship Bishop Joseph Mary Kizito (born 2 July 1967) is Ugandan-born. Since 2019 is the Bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Aliwal. He holds a Ph.D. in Missiology focusing on youth sexuality and behaviour change in the field of HIV and AIDS. In 2022, was appointed the SACBC Liaison Bishop for Migrants and Refugees, taking over from Archbishop Buti Tlhagale.



Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference