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Bishop's Message for Day of Migrants, Refugees

"Our Task Is to Build Integrated Communities in the Church"

LONDON, JAN. 15, 2011 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Here is the message of Bishop Patrick Lynch, chairman of the Office for Migration Policy of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, for the 97th World Day of Migrants and Refugees, which will be celebrated Sunday on the theme: "One Human Family."

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In his address for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees today His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI takes as his theme "One human family". He reminds us that because of globalization and migration we are becoming increasingly inter-connected and more conscious than ever that all of us belong to one human family. An important aspect of the mission of the Church in the world today is, therefore, to be a sign and instrument of union with God and of the unity of the whole human race.

Once again Pope Benedict emphasizes the central principles of Catholic Social Teaching with regard to migration - the right to migrate, the right of the State to regulate migration and the responsibility of the State to respect the dignity of every human person and therefore of every migrant. This time, however, he adds that "migrant communities have a duty to integrate into the host country, respecting its laws and national identity. The challenge is to combine the welcome due to every human being, especially when in need with a reckoning of what is necessary for both the local inhabitants and the new arrivals to live a dignified and peaceful life". This message is particularly relevant for the Church here in England and Wales and for our society at this present time.

Integration does not mean assimilation when one loses one's cultural, social and religious identity and is absorbed into the host culture. Integration is a process - often extending over two generations - that begins when the host community reaches out to welcome and help immigrant communities to connect with, belong to and participate in all the networks that form society today. If people don't feel welcome they can't fully belong and if they don't feel they belong it is difficult to participate and integrate. Churches and in particular parishes and schools often serve as the first points of entry into society and civic engagement. It is in the parish that migrant communities experience a sense of being welcomed and belonging. It is through the parishes and the schools that immigrant families make new friends, receive practical advice, help and support and develop some of the basic civic skills that enable them to connect at a deeper level with the wider community and society. It is through the schools that immigrant families first begin to see the realisation of their dream for a better life for their children.

The Catholic Church also recognizes the importance of culture in the integration process by the way it recognizes and affirms the gifts, the faith, the spirituality and the devotions of immigrant communities e.g. the sense of community and solidarity in one community, the strong family bonds

in another, the devotion to Our Lady in another, the sense of joyful thanksgiving and celebration in another.

Integration, however, involves not only appreciating diversity but also nurturing unity. It is our experience as a Church that that unity is shaped and nurtured by four elements:

- Our shared faith in the Risen Lord,
- Our shared sense of belonging to the Church to a diocese and to a local community,
- Our shared experience of prayer and especially the Eucharist and
- Our shared commitment to build God's Kingdom and contribute to the common good in society today.

Our task is to build integrated communities in the Church not separate ones. I would like especially to congratulate the parish of St. Peter's (in Woolwich) and the many parishes up and down the country who are examples of how to be a welcoming community - communities that welcome people from many backgrounds, many countries and many cultures but yet at the same time are communities that help newly arrived immigrants to be fully part of the life of the local Church and fully part of the local community in which they live.

It is very appropriate that our second reading today is from the beginning of St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. When writing to the Corinthians St. Paul was writing to a community that was divided. They were divided between rich and poor and between those strong and weak in their faith. They were divided over which leader they should follow and over their beliefs.

Paul's fervent hope and prayer is that they will be united but he knows that will only happen if they become more open to the Holy Spirit and begin to see themselves as sisters and brothers in the family of God and members of the Body of Christ.

Let us pray this morning as the Holy Father has asked us that we too will be open to presence of the Holy Spirit present in all our brothers and sisters so that the friendship and communion we experience through the mass will help us create greater understanding among peoples and cultures especially in the community in which we live.

With every good wish and blessing for the coming year.

Bishop Patrick Lynch SS.CC.
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