

BENEDICT XVI DEFENDS YOUNG MIGRANTS

Encourages Christians to Aid Children and Youth

VATICAN CITY, NOV. 27, 2009 (Zenit.org).- Benedict XVI is appealing to Christians to reach out to migrants and refugees, especially children and adolescents, and to raise awareness of their plight.

The Pope affirmed this in a message, released by the Vatican today, that he wrote for the 96th World Day of Migrants and Refugees, which will be celebrated Jan. 17, 2010.

"The migrant is a human person who possesses fundamental, inalienable rights that must be respected by everyone and in every circumstance," he stated.

This year's theme will focus on "Minor Migrants and Refugees," something "that Christians view with great attention," the Pontiff affirmed.

He said, "As a child, Jesus himself experienced migration for, as the Gospel recounts, in order to flee the threats of Herod, he had to seek refuge in Egypt together with Joseph and Mary."

The Holy Father acknowledged that "there is increasing public awareness of the need for immediate and incisive action to protect minors."

"Nevertheless," he said, "many are left to themselves and, in various ways, face the risk of exploitation."

Benedict XVI expressed the hope that "proper attention will be given to minor migrants who need a social environment that permits and fosters their physical, cultural, spiritual and moral development."

Serious hardships

He continued, "Living in a foreign land without effective points of reference generates countless and sometimes serious hardships and difficulties for them, especially those deprived of the support of their family."

The Pope underlined the necessity of giving young people "the possibility of attending school and subsequently of being integrated into the world of work, and

that their social integration be facilitated by appropriate educational and social structures."

"It should never be forgotten that adolescence constitutes a fundamental phase for the formation of human beings," he added.

The Pontiff called on parish communities and Catholic associations to "become aware of the social and pastoral challenges posed by migrant and refugee minors." "Our concrete interventions," he said, "must first be nurtured by faith in the action of grace and Divine Providence."

The Holy Father affirmed: "In this way also hospitality and solidarity to strangers, especially if they are children, become a proclamation of the Gospel of solidarity. "The Church proclaims this when she opens her arms and strives to have the rights of migrants and refugees respected, moving the leaders of nations, and those in charge of international organizations and institutions to promote opportune initiatives for their support."

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On ZENIT's Web page:

Full text of Pontiff's message: <http://zenit.org/article-27678?l=english>