



‘Leading for Mission’ Consultation Forum for Migrant Chaplaincies Summary Report

Following the success of the recent *Take the Way of the Gospel* Regional Consultation Forums for parish leaders, Monsignor Joselito Asis, Episcopal Vicar for Migrants and Refugees, requested an opportunity for representatives from the migrant chaplaincies to come together to explore what *Take the Way of the Gospel* might mean for them.

The proposal became a reality on 18 July 2023, when 52 chaplains and lay leaders from the Croatian, Filipino, Hungarian, Indonesian, Polish, Portuguese-speaking, Samoan, Slovenian, Spanish-speaking, South Sudanese, Vietnamese, Swahili, Syriac, Tamil and Tongan communities gathered at the Cardinal Knox Centre.

The forum was structured as a series of five small group conversations where participants were invited to firstly consider their vision for migrant chaplaincy in light of Pope Francis’ call for the renewal of our Church and, secondly, to identify what they might need to do to better align with this vision for the future.

In each of the five conversations, participants were encouraged to talk with people they didn’t know, didn’t know well or wouldn’t normally talk to. While one participant joked that moving tables every 15–20 minutes reminded him of the itinerant experience of a new migrant, overwhelmingly the participants found that in listening to and sharing with people from other chaplaincies they discovered how much they had in common. This is nicely summarised in a comment from one of the conversations: ‘we are various chaplaincies but [our] one focus is Jesus’.

This report draws themes from the content of the conversations at this gathering and is presented in three sections: a vision for migrant chaplaincies; the issues and challenges migrant chaplaincies are currently facing; and, lastly, some potential responses. *Direct quotes are included in blue.*

Vision for migrant chaplaincies

One group started their conversation by asking themselves ‘why have a migrant chaplaincy?’ They concluded **being able to fully express in your own language**, [having a] **sense of community** and [being among] **like people** [enables migrants to] **feel more comfortable**. The importance of understanding culture was also expressed in comments in other conversations such as **acknowledging various cultures and backgrounds** and **celebrating culture**.

In some conversations participants felt it important to **preserve culture and traditional Catholic practice**, while others thought it was important to **break the barrier amongst different ethnic groups** and **collaborate with other communities**.

Two themes emerged from these conversations that provide insight into the vision for migrant chaplaincy:

Encouraging migrant communities and keeping them connected with their faith

Assisting migrants to **learn from a new culture to adapt it with a new life** and **building strong community** [by] **celebrating cultures within community** were thought to be important, as was providing practical assistance for new migrants such as **helping new migrants know where things are**, **providing resources and facilities**, and **visiting members of the community to see how they are doing**.

Suggested ways of keeping people connected with their faith included an **invitation and encouragement to come to Church**, reminding them of the importance of **Sunday Mass** and recognising that **celebrating the sacraments is an opportunity to bring families together**.

Reaching out to **show compassion for people outside the Church** [and] **not judging them** was

¹See *Evangelii Gaudium* §27

also felt to be important. The desire to teach, train and connect was evident in comments such as being able to respond to different understandings of faith and providing activities to deepen faith.

The opportunity to not focus on survival but being active in society and to live the Word of God are potential outcomes of this attention to community engagement.

Connecting migrant communities with the local Church

The second theme was expressed most directly in the comment that the vision of migrant chaplaincies is to bring people in the chaplaincy into the Church. It was also reflected in other comments such as:

- [We] come from different nations but share one Church, one Archdiocese, one God, one Mother Mary
- [We] have an idea of the local Church
- [We strive for] acceptance, recognition and full participation
- [The work has] two directions – reaching out to the migrant communities and [helping] migrant communities serve local parishes and the Archdiocese.

Achieving integration with the local Church requires effort on both sides. One challenge for migrant chaplaincies is to open wider the cultural practices and, for parishes, to have an open mind to learn and incorporate other cultures in the Church community.

Issues and challenges for migrant communities

Similar to the regional consultation forums held throughout the year, a major challenge identified by participants is the church is ageing and there are not many young people in Church today. Consequently, how to bring youth/young people to the Church received considerable attention during the forum.

One conversation noted the first generation has strong tradition [but the] second generation has no connection with the faith. There was consideration that perhaps the Church setting does not appeal. A friendly environment and experiencing unity in the Gospel were felt to be important. The need to pay more attention to the

next generation – Church [is] not only to pray, [but] needs attractive social activities as well was also cited.

There was an overwhelming desire to find more ways to engage youth. Practical suggestions were to involve young people in parish activities – youth programs, choir, Legion of Mary, to get young people involved in Mass for example as readers and special ministers, to get young people involved in the different activities of the Church or to connect young people by providing an opportunity to help others. Other suggestions were Eucharistic youth movements, scouts, Bible study, catechism, adoration [and] fundraising, and to encourage youth groups, offer young adults' prayer and life workshops and retreats, prayers and camps.

Paying attention to the needs of different age groups was reflected in a suggestion that children 4 years to 18 years [need] catechism training whereas over 18s [might benefit from] youth groups, choir, movie nights and/or retreats, camps, engagement in causes. An 18–35 year old (single) youth gathering was also suggested. The differing needs of children born in Australia and those born overseas was also mentioned.

Other challenges were also captured although these did not receive such thorough consideration. They included:

- Loneliness
- Remembering the elderly in our communities
- Family/school disconnect
- Australian cultural factors, such as the gap between the older generation and the younger generation and the focus on work and sports.

Some potential responses

The overriding theme was about increasing inclusiveness within the Church. The desire for inclusiveness is perhaps best encapsulated in a vision for our Church as an evangelising community [where there are] no strangers and in remembering we have different ethnicity but [we are] one in Christ.

The need to address inclusiveness was underscored by comments such as some not feeling welcome in their local parish, migrants feel like visitors and migrant communities

are treated like second-class parishioners. Interestingly, while there was a request for equal treatment to all cultures, there was also a desire to break the cultural barrier – [to] share culture, cross culture and for unity in diversity.

Suggestions for how inclusiveness might be addressed have been grouped in seven sub-themes:

Enhancing relationships with one another

There was a recognition of the similarity of experience in arrival across migrant groups and a desire for more connection between the chaplaincies to enable listening to one another and helping one another. There were many suggestions of activities to enhance collaboration, such as:

- Cultural exchange – food, dances, songs, music
- Mass and prayer services with other communities such as an All Nations Mass
- Youth programs with other communities – sports competitions, concerts
- Recognising other migrant celebrations
- Prayer conferences and forums.

It was suggested that this type of connection might be encouraged through a common social media platform so communities can see what each other is achieving and provide ongoing support and ideas. Working together better across the migrant chaplaincies may also help address the perceived need for more resources.

Enhancing parish relationships

There was a desire for migrant communities to better connect to the local parish. Suggestions for how inclusiveness might be addressed by parishes were:

- Welcoming every community during gathering
- [Providing] fellowship after Mass to get to know one another [and] assist in socialization and camaraderie; and
- [To] encourage gathering of smaller faith groups for prayer and reflection [and to] promote faith discussion.

There was a request for parishes to be open to new ideas and programs, to embrace new songs and be open to new evangelical programs and

to encourage lay ministers and lay prayer groups [and to] look at it as a call or special vocation. Suggestions for lay involvement included rosary groups, Couples for Christ, Divine Mercy, Legion of Mary and Society of Mary.

There were suggestions for improving cross cultural participation and engagement such as including ethnic choirs in parish Masses and getting migrants involved in pastoral activities and migrant community representation on parish pastoral councils.

Enhancing liturgy and worship

Some comments related to enhancing liturgy, recognising that liturgy must be relevant and good with [a] meaningful sermon, and that music is important.

There were several comments about language, both to embrace language during Mass/with the Church and that the priest [should] celebrate Mass in English as well as the community's language. There was also a suggestion of Mass served by two languages [using] sub-titles.

There was a request to be open to different cultural styles of celebrating Mass (better incorporate culture) and to address the different understanding of the Order of Mass. This might be related to the comment that Mass should be celebrated according to regulation but keep [the] cultural backgrounds and values. There was also a suggestion of standardizing worship rites across all migrant communities. There was also a request for Adoration for 10 minutes every Sunday and another for praying the rosary.

In one conversation, the feeling that one migrant Mass a year [is] not enough was expressed. This may be addressed by the suggestion of a monthly migrant Mass for youth [and] involving them in the Mass, or to encourage ethnic community Masses in parishes.

Enhancing family relationships

The family faith foundation was identified as important. There was a desire to encourage family participation in matters of faith, for families to pray together at home, at meal times. Parents set an example, an inspiration and they need to educate their kids about why they are Catholics, why they should go to Mass, sharing the Gospel with them.

Addressing the desire to keep the mother

language alive and teach it to the kids might provide an opportunity to teach values. This might be supported by the suggestions of organizing a language school or holding a language class before Mass.

The challenge for some parents to balance the priority [of their] job [with their] commitment to faith was identified by one group. Another suggested parents should practice what they preach [as it seems] sports are more important than Mass on Sundays!

Enhancing formation

The need for ongoing formation encompassed a broad spectrum of people, including leaders, families, Catholic educators and children. Suggested formation topics included Bible study and teaching, understanding of faith and understanding of the Eucharist, prayer methods, and family foundations/values/principles.

Enhancing communication

Suggestions to enhance communication included availability of resources/material in other languages, using social media and integrated advertisement of migrant activities on the CAM website.

Enhancing outward action

Recognising small signs can give great results, there was a suggestion of the importance of practical activities that people surrounding us can feel – not traditional ways. There was a focus on the importance of being involved in corporal works of mercy, of speaking out, of faith and action underpinning the purpose of life.

Suggestions of how this could be expressed included helping international students and new migrants, by organising charities to help the country of origin, develop solidarity, humanity and by reaching out to those who are lost/disconnected.

Next Steps

In his concluding comments, Fr Joe Caddy, Vicar General, reminded participants that *Take the Way of the Gospel* is an invitation to review all of our structures and current ways of doing things so we can reorient them to the mission of the Church today. It is clear from the conversations that took place during the forum that this message was embraced.

The desire for migrant chaplaincies to work better together provides a place to begin. While a more thorough review might be necessary to explore structural responses, the sharing and learning from one another that took place at the forum can and should continue. While some initiatives such as having a common social media platform may take time to develop, others suggestions like recognising the celebrations of other migrant communities, or planning joint youth competitions and concerts, might be quicker to implement.

The challenge of engaging youth so clearly identified in the discussion is a challenge that is shared across the Archdiocese. While there may be an opportunity for some specific migrant program responses, it is also a point for connection with the broader Church in Melbourne. It is worth considering if there is an opportunity to engage with parishes, sharing insights and learning from one another. This may, in turn, begin to enhance the relationship between migrant chaplaincies and parishes.

There is further work to do to understand the needs of the elderly in migrant communities and explore the challenge of loneliness. In the spirit of collaboration, there may be an opportunity to undertake the research as a joint initiative with some of our Catholic social service agencies, given their expertise in community development and their programs of support to migrant communities.

While there were many good ideas that point to a way forward, some requests communicated through the forum, such as the request for a Chaplain for the Tongan community and for priests with different languages, are unfortunately beyond the scope of the migrant chaplaincies to address.

At the end of the forum, participants were asked to complete a short evaluation. Meeting one another, hearing other perspectives and sharing ideas were highlights of the experience for many people. Let us hope and pray this fruitful first step towards renewal generates energy and momentum for the journey ahead, as together we *Take the Way of the Gospel*.