

PROMOTING THE COMMON GOOD THROUGH SOLIDARITY WITH MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES



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The first part of this discussion on the Catholic Social Teaching principle of the COMMON GOOD dealt entirely with the teaching of the Church regarding this principle as reflected in the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

This section will attempt to establish whether migrants, refugees and other foreign-born persons can and do enjoy equal benefits of the common good with South African-born persons.

The socio-economic situation in South Africa today – can South Africa be a welcoming host country for migrants and refugees?

It is a sad but truthful admission that the majority of South Africa's citizens have witnessed or experienced for at least the past twenty years that the 'common good' is factually absent from the vocabulary of the governing authority. The gap between the wealthy and the destitute has widened exponentially; the country's social development services – based on the tenets of a noble Constitution – have imploded; decent education is inaccessible to the majority of learners; healthcare and social services are unequally distributed; shelter and security are a pipedream for the majority of citizens, while work and a living wage are little more than a chimera with 32.1 % officially unemployed. The percentage of gainfully employed South Africans is unknown. Additionally, South Africa has a large population of locally born migrants in search of work, education for young children or access to healthcare.

Instead of striving for the common good for all persons living in South Africa, civil authorities stand accused of corruption, malfeasance and lawlessness.

Yet to succumb to apathy, despair, anger that leaves one hopeless and helpless is neither Christian, nor becoming of any member of the human family. It renders one ill-equipped to welcome the stranger, the migrant, the refugee, the vulnerable (internal) migrants....

In a pastoral letter on the upcoming South African elections of 2024, the Catholic bishops quotes Haggai 1: 5, 6 to encourage us to look to the prophet Haggai in order to discern how we have journeyed as a nation, as a multi-religious state or as a multi-ethnic kinship in a way to reflect on how we could behave differently:

“So now, Yahweh Sabaoth says this: Reflect carefully how things have gone for you. You have sown much and harvested little; you eat but never have enough, drink but never have your fill, put on clothes but do not feel warm. The wage earner gets his wages only to put them in a purse riddled with holes.”

What is the situation like for foreign-born migrants and refugees?

In the wake of the criminal neglect of the common good at all levels of society by the South African state, civil society has risen in the main to promote and protect the common good for all persons living in South African, not just for its ‘own’ poor, displaced or otherwise vulnerable citizens.

Hence there are numerous law clinics, paralegal advice centres, lawyers who focus on human rights for migrants, refugees and otherwise vulnerable persons, disaster response non-governmental organisations, refugee consortiums – albeit in the urban and peri-urban areas.

Churches and mosques are likewise at the forefront of accompanying foreign-born and locally born vulnerable persons negotiate their way through a South Africa state that is not well reputed for either protecting the human dignity of all people who live in it, or for advancing the common good equally amongst everyone who live in the country.

The pastoral care of migrants and refugees [PMCR]

The Southern African Catholic Bishops’ Conference [SACBC] is a veritable forerunner in this respect.¹ In 2018 it began actively researching the various challenges and specific needs that migrants, refugees and displaced persons face in Southern Africa.

By the end of 2019, an SACBC Pastoral Care of Migrants and Refugees [PCMR] was formally established. The PCMR is coordinated by a multidisciplinary team comprising the Jesuit Refugee Service South Africa, Caritas South Africa, the Scalabrini Institute for Human Mobility in Africa [SIHMA], Catholic Parliamentary Liaison Office (of the SACBC), the Catholic Relief Services [CRS] and other refugee consortia. The PCMR is the official Church voice and makes representations to Government and other civic authorities. Furthermore, it provides a mechanism for effective communication not only within the Church, but also among Catholic and other groups that act in solidarity with migrants, refugees and displaced persons.

¹ International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) article by Rachel Westerby 6 May 2023

Come end of 2021 there were PCMR offices or desks in 24 dioceses in operation. Training and capacity building workshops were conducted throughout the SACBC dioceses, namely in South Africa, Eswatini and Botswana.

To get a good understanding of the 'on the ground' work of the PCMR follow the link <https://sacbc.org.za/sacbc-migrants-and-refugees-people-of-hope/> and watch "PEOPLE OF HOPE", the official of the Pastoral Care for Migrants and Refugees of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference [SACBC].



SOUTHERN AFRICAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE 2024 ELECTION PRAYER

Lord, we the people of South Africa,

Thank and Praise you for your inexhaustible love and the graces of healing and peace you continually offer to us as a nation.

As we prepare for the elections 2024, send us your Holy Spirit to guide us as we choose leaders for our Nation.

Leaders who aspire for the common good of our Nation. Leaders who fear the Lord in their hearts.

May the Youth in particular and all people, register and prepare to vote.

May all the officials and volunteers of the IEC be honest and work diligently to ensure all regulations are followed.

May South African Police Service be well prepared to maintain safety and security during campaigning, voting and counting of votes.

May all media houses and journalists communicate, report fairly, truthfully and broadcast no hate speech.

May all leaders and people in general respect the right of voters to vote confidentially and freely.

May we as a Nation accept final results with gratitude, spirit of peace and declare the voting process as having been free and fair.

Merciful God and Father may Your Will be done!

We ask this through Christ Our Lord. Amen!