

Pope prays for migrants, encourages international assistance

VATICAN CITY - Pope Benedict XVI expressed concern for the millions of migrants around the world, and encouraged the agencies trying to help them.

"I entrust to the Lord all those who, often forcibly, must leave their homeland, or who are stateless," the pope said at his noon blessing Dec. 4.

"While I encourage solidarity for them, I pray for all those who are doing their utmost to protect and assist these brothers and sisters in emergency situations, even if it means exposing themselves to serious hardships and dangers," he said.

The pope noted the upcoming anniversaries of international conventions dedicated to assisting migrants worldwide. In early December, government representatives were to meet in Geneva to mark the 60th anniversary of the International Organization for Migration and discuss migration issues.

The next day, the Vatican announced that the international organization had accepted the Holy See as a full member state.

Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, the Vatican representative to international organizations based in Geneva, told Vatican Radio Dec. 5, "At a time when we're seeing a continuous increase in migrants, refugees and people on the move for various reasons, it's important to be present and participate in the efforts of the international community to bring something specific, which is typical of the Holy See: an ethical voice."

The archbishop said for centuries Catholics have generously assisted migrants and refugees "independently of their religious faith, their color and their legal situation. It is the human person, the dignity of the human person that counts and frequently is at risk in the situations of marginalization created in moving from one country to another."

Being a full member of the International Organization for Migration, rather than a

permanent observer as the Vatican is with many U.N. agencies, will give the Vatican a stronger voice in an area where politics is not as important as meeting real human needs, the archbishop said.

Participating in the general debate at the organization's session Dec. 5 in Geneva, Archbishop Tomasi called for greater efforts to promote "a positive perception of migrants," especially at a time when economic hardships have led to a false impression that newcomers are taking people's jobs and are a burden on society.

"There is clear and accumulating evidence about the positive economic contribution made by migrants to their new countries through the taxes they pay, the new businesses they start and the variety of services they provide that range from jobs that are considered socially less attractive, although necessary, to the care of family members who are disabled, elderly or very young," the archbishop said.

In addition, "migrants make visible the link that binds the whole human family together," he said, and their potential to improve society becomes a reality as "they too open themselves to receive and appreciate the basic values of the new society so that a common and richer future may be built together."

In his Angelus address, the pope also noted the celebrations of the 60th anniversary of the Convention on the Status of Refugees and the 50th anniversary of the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

In his remarks to pilgrims on the second Sunday of Advent, the pope called Advent "a season of inner preparation for the coming of the Lord" and a time that recognizes the important roles filled by Mary and St. John the Baptist in preparation for the coming of Jesus.