

“Public authorities unjustly deny the rights of human persons if they block or impede emigration or immigration”

“One cannot doubt that all who are blessed with dignity, and especially those who go by the name of Christian should wish by common, co-operative effort... to open up to all the road to a more human life, where each person will be loved and helped as a sibling, as a neighbour.”

*(Pope Paul VI in
Pastoralis Migratorium, 1969
& Populorum Progressio, 1967)*



**CATHOLIC
ARCHDIOCESE
OF MELBOURNE**

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Melbourne Catholic Migrant & Refugee Office



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History

1945-49 Started as the *Catholic Rehabilitation Office* that was primarily concerned with finding accommodation and employment for returned service personnel.

1949 Became *Catholic Immigration Office* (CIO) and, as a sponsorship agency, its mandate was to sponsor and settle refugees and displaced people after WWII. On arrival, provided reception, transport, accommodation, food, linen, furniture, introduction to the local parish/school and assistance in finding employment.

Late 1940's Bishop's Conference decided to recruit *Migrant Chaplains* to be responsible for the pastoral care of their communities. This catered for the language and cultural needs of post WWII immigrants.

Early 1950's Provided regular social events and English classes but decrease in immigrant intake curtailed work of the Office. Around this time, the St Vincent de Paul Society (SVdP) built migrant hostels at Brighton and Preston. The Office was closely involved with these projects. Administered interest-free travel and settlement loans.

1968 *Senate of Priests* was established and included a zone for Migrant Chaplains. Office used to actively seek chaplains for migrant communities and administered costs

and stipends. *International Catholic Migration Commission* funding for loans eventually ceased.

Early 1970's The Office had 5 employees, including social welfare workers. About this time, the ability to sponsor was severely curtailed as government intake of immigrants reduced.

August 1972 Archdiocesan Commission on Migration (ACoM) was established with representatives from different sections of the Catholic community. ACoM used to plan a Pastoral Course on Migration at CTC, Clayton; and prepare the information package for *Refugee & Migrant Sunday* still held nationally in late August each year.

November 1975 ACoM published *The Harmonious Society: Christian Attitudes to Migration* outlining their philosophy and action so far.

1976 Inaugural *National Communities Mass* at St Patrick's Cathedral was held and the *Migrant & Refugee Mass* is still an annual event on the second Sunday in October.

1977 Government established separate Refugee Program and in response the Office developed the *Catholic Co-ordinating Committee for Refugees* (CCCR) that included CIO, Catholic Education Office, SVdP, Catholic Family Welfare Bureau, religious orders, Australian Catholic Relief, Knights of the Southern Cross and National Catholic Rural Movement. CCCR coordinated the Church's own work linking with other churches, voluntary agencies and government departments.

Late 1979 *Community Refugee Settlement Scheme* was established by the government and several parishes responded by having their own CRSS group active in the settlement of off-shore refugees.

1979-82 Office had representation on government's *Victorian Migration Settlement Council*.

1983-85 Staff traveled to migrant camps to provide welfare services. Over the years, the Office has made submissions to the government. It made recommendations that seminarians should study a community language and a unit in the pastoral care of migrants.

The Office has also commissioned studies into certain ethnic groups (e.g. South Americans in the Springvale area in early 1980s) that have been of value to pastoral workers.

"It is an inherent right of the human person to be able to go to any country, where they hope to find better living conditions."

(Pope John XXII in *Pacem in Terris*, 1963)

The MCMRO is still an agency of the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne and is primarily concerned with the pastoral care of migrants and refugees in parishes. However, due to the changing nature of immigration and border protection, the issues go beyond the traditional Catholic immigrants.

Through the ACoM endeavours to provide advice and guidance from a Catholic perspective in response to policy and program issues relating to migrants, immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, population and multiculturalism.

Through other organisations, such as the National Council of Churches in Australia and Justice for Asylum Seekers, the MCMRO supports programs that raise social awareness and provide education and advocacy around the many issues pertaining to immigration and treatment of asylum seekers in Australia today.