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# THE INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC MIGRATION COMMISSION

JAMES J. NORRIS\*

**T**O THE POPULATION problems which followed upon the Second World War, three possible solutions presented themselves: repatriation, integration, emigration. The first two solutions are not pertinent to a discussion of migration. For a considerable number of persons the only answer to their problem is resettlement in a new land. In its simplest terms it is a question of bringing men without land to lands without men.

While the Church has always helped emigrants and immigrants, with both social services and religious care, it had in the past never set up a network of national organizations which operated in the field of migration. In a few countries, Catholic organizations were helping refugees and immigrants, but in most places there were no official Catholic groups which would sponsor, receive and place those refugees who lacked sponsors. Prior to 1950, the principal movements of migrants involved refugees, sponsored and resettled by the International Refugee Organization (IRO) and individual governments. When the termination of the IRO came into sight, it became obvious that the activities of private agencies would have to be greatly expanded to complement the work of governments. It was this urgent need that brought into being in July 1951, at the express request of Pope Pius XII, the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC). In the Apostolic Constitution, *Exsul Familia*, he was to write:

Very recently, we approved an International Catholic Commission for Emigration, whose function is to unite and organize existing Catholic associations and committees, and to promote, supplement and coordinate their projects and activities on behalf of emigrants and refugees.

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The aims of the ICMC, as listed in its Constitution, are these:

- To coordinate more closely the effort of all Catholic activity in the field of emigration, immigration, resettlement and services to refugees;
- To represent Catholic activities and organizations before international organizations and conferences concerned with surplus populations, refugees and migrants;
- To convoke international conferences of Catholic groups in order to better coordinate and plan services to migrants and refugees and to bring about a better understanding between countries of emigration and countries of immigration;
- To stimulate and encourage Catholic activity on behalf of migrants and refugees in countries where such activity is needed;
- To provide technical and advisory assistance to interested groups and organizations;
- To interpret the needs of migrants and refugees;
- To promote international recognition of the refugee status of all persons lacking the protection of a government;
- To work toward the recognition, by governments and international organizations, of the right of migrants and refugees to adequate spiritual and religious care;
- To exert every effort to have Christian principles, particularly the protection of family rights, applied in migration policies.

The structure of the organization is as follows:

**THE COUNCIL** — The Council is the principal governing body. It is composed of representatives appointed by the Bishops of those nations particularly concerned with migration. Additional members, not to

exceed ten in number, may be co-opted by the above-mentioned representatives from among officers and directors of Catholic organizations interested in international migration and from among other persons of special competence.

**THE GOVERNING COMMITTEE** — This is an executive board composed of three persons designated by the Council to carry on the work of the Council between its meetings. It meets on the average every three months.

**THE GENERAL SECRETARIAT** — The Secretariat in Geneva is the principal administrative office of the Commission. It handles all the operational organizational work of the ICMC. The Information Center is an integral part of the Secretariat.

**THE CONFERENCE OF DIRECTORS** — This is an advisory body composed of the Directors of national operating agencies affiliated with the ICMC. They meet to discuss operational problems and to advise the Council in policy matters.

**INTERNATIONAL MEETINGS AND CONGRESSES** — These assemblies are convoked to give a public forum to migration problems and Catholic efforts to solve them. They assemble religious and lay persons interested in activities relating in any way to migration work, participation generally being by invitation.

While the primary task of the ICMC is to stimulate the formation of national Catholic agencies in countries where no such agencies exist and to increase the activity of those agencies already in existence, other activities have been undertaken which assume almost equal importance.

The Commission has undertaken the study and collection of written material and

statistics on populations and population movements, and the distribution of this material in readable form in many languages, in an effort to inform and instruct the general public on migration activities. The Information Center in the Geneva Headquarters of the ICMC edits general publications aimed at making known population problems and bringing about a more Christian attitude in seeking solutions. The following publications are issued:

The *ICMC News* — This is a bulletin published monthly in English and quarterly in French, Spanish and German. Special issues are published in various languages at the time of international conferences.

The *Migration Digest* — This publication appears in English, Portuguese, Spanish and French. Each issue is devoted to a specific topic and is composed of a number of articles by specialists in their fields.

*Documentation* — Analyses are made of various phases of migration activity. Distribution is restricted to members and affiliates of the Commission. The information center provides news releases to all media, particularly the press services of the various countries.

The Commission also represents Catholic interests at international governmental and non-governmental meetings. It is accredited to the United Nations with Consultative Status. It is represented at meetings of the United Nations, the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. It is a member of private agency conferences such as the International Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations Interested in Migration and the Standing Conference of Voluntary Agencies Working for Refugees, as well as various sub-committees and working groups.

The ICMC has a close working relationship with governmental and non-governmental organizations. The Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration (ICEM) is the principal governmental organization with which ICMC collaborates. ICEM provides financial support to projects of the ICMC and grants travel loans to migrants sponsored by ICMC and its affiliates. Close contact on technical matters is maintained with the International Labor Office and also with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, through whom Ford Foundation grants have been received. Agencies affiliated with ICMC sponsor and place many refugees whose financing is provided by the United States Escapee Program.

Large numbers of potential emigrants lack the financial means to pay the full costs of their ocean passage and resettlement. With the help of the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration, the ICMC established a Loan Fund for these persons. Emigrants are encouraged to pay as much as possible toward their travel costs, the ICEM gives a flat grant toward each assisted movement, and the ICMC and its affiliates lend the balance. Migrants are expected to repay these interest-free loans as quickly as possible so that the fund may "revolve" for the benefit of other migrants. Repayments are made in local currency to the Catholic agency in the country where the immigrants are settled; the agency must in turn convert the money into the currency needed for the purchase of additional ocean passages. The principal activity of the loan fund has been the reunion of families, bringing women and children together with their breadwinners in countries of immigration.

This short article has attempted to de-

scribe the technical and organizational structure of the International Catholic Migration Commission. It does not attempt to describe the vast range of social services and religious activities involved, because these are handled by individuals, groups and organizations which do not come directly under the responsibility of the Commission.

Along these lines the Church in South American countries had for years helped refugees and immigrants, but lacked formal national organizations functioning for that purpose. The ICMC (with the help of a grant from the Ford Foundation given through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the National Catholic Welfare Conference) appointed representatives in 1952 and 1953 in South America whose task was to interpret the need for an organization in each potential country of immigration and to give the technical help needed in its establishment. A pioneering endeavor of this type requires considerable time because it involves a great deal of preparatory work, the concurrence of the bishops of the country, and the hiring of a competent staff. Yet, relatively quickly, the following national Catholic agencies were established in South America:

The *Comisao Nacional Catolica de Migraçao* of Brazil, with offices in Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo, Curitiba, and Porto Alegre, came into being early in 1953. It immediately undertook to sponsor and place a substantial number of European refugees from China and other refugees from Europe.

The Argentine Bishops in July, 1953, approved the constitution of the *Comision Catolica Argentina de Inmigracion*. This agency concentrates principally on the reception of immigrants from Italy, in a

family reunion program. It places a limited number of refugees from Europe.

The *Comision Catolica Venezolana de Migracion* was established by the Bishops of Venezuela in August 1953. The agency sponsors new immigrants and also finds placements for large numbers of immigrants who have arrived with individual sponsors but have lost their employment.

The *Comité Catolica Colombiano de Inmigracion* was formally set up late in 1953 by the Bishops of Colombia. It has been sponsoring and placing European refugees.

The Chilean Bishops in 1954 approved the formation of the *Instituto Chileno Catolico de Migracion*. The Institute operates a hostel for all immigrants arriving in Chile under both governmental and private sponsorship. It also places in jobs and homes a substantial number of refugees and national immigrants.

In 1957 the Bishops of Uruguay established the *Instituto Catolico Uruguayo de Inmigracion*.

In cooperation with the ICMC, extensive work for refugees and national immigrants has been undertaken in Australia and Canada. The Federal Catholic Immigration Committee of Australia, which formerly handled principally British immigrant cases, expanded its work by appointing Diocesan Directors and organizing a country-wide scheme for sponsoring and placing refugees. In Canada, the Bishops designated the Rural Settlement Society of Canada as their official agency to handle immigration work. The Society has stimulated the establishment of a large number of diocesan offices to help immigrants. The major portion of its endeavor is in the reunion of families of German and Italian immigrants whose wives and children were left in

Europe, but it also places refugees and unsponsored immigrants.

Secretariats for Immigration have been established by the Bishops in South Africa, Peru and Ecuador, and an ICMC office has been opened in Paraguay.

In the European countries of emigration, there had previously existed the St. Raphaelsverein in Germany, the Catholic Central Emigration Agency in Holland, and the Giunta Cattolica per l'Emigrazione in Italy. The Secours Catholique of France, the Caritas of Belgium, the Caritas of Switzerland and the Caritas of Austria have all expanded their services to include emigration work. The Bishops of Spain in 1953 formed the National Spanish Catholic Migration Commission. In 1957 the latter agency processed for emigration more than 10,000 women and children being reunited with heads of families in Latin America.

The National Catholic Welfare Conference\* has been officially engaged in immigration for more than thirty years. The Bishops of the United States established a Bureau of Immigration in their main NCWC Headquarters in Washington in the early 1920's. The Bureau was established to assist immigrants coming to the United States on normal immigration programs through the regular immigration laws. The Bureau of Immigration (now raised to the status of a department) assisted sponsors who wished to arrange for affidavits, and provided many technical services both for sponsors and immigrants. Offices were opened both in New York and El Paso at

subsequent dates in order to handle immigrants coming through those ports of entry into the United States.

In 1938 when many Catholics were being persecuted by the Nazis, the Board of Trustees of NCWC established the Catholic Committee for Refugees, whose principal function was to assist victims of Nazi persecution. This agency has carried on since that date but with the termination of the Nazi persecution its efforts were directed toward the resettlement of priests, of teachers and scholars among the refugees, and orphan children. During the post-war years it has assisted in the immigration of 2693 children and some 600 priests, and has helped a large number of professors and other displaced persons. Since 1945 the Committee has serviced 23,146 cases.

In December, 1945, Catholic Relief Services of the National Catholic Welfare Conference began its work of resettling refugees and displaced persons. This activity was greatly facilitated by the establishment of the National Catholic Resettlement Council which is composed by representatives of all nationality groups and organizations, as well as Catholic lay organizations. Working through Diocesan Directors, CRS-NCWC has resettled 210,000 persons in the United States; 140,000 being admitted under the Displaced Persons Act of 1948, 47,000 refugees under the Refugee Relief Act of 1953 plus 23,000 Hungarians who fled from their homeland after the uprising at the end of 1956. Working in cooperation with Catholic Immigration Agencies throughout the world, CRS-NCWC has aided 84,000 other refugees to resettle in Australia, Canada and the Latin American countries.

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\*For an excellent organizational chart and description of the operation of the National Catholic Welfare Conference see MORROW, MY CATHOLIC FAITH 132 (rev. ed. 1958).