Vatican
Vatican News



Pope Francis shares a moment of silence with members of the assembly of the Synod of Bishops as they pray for migrants and refugees in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican Oct. 19, 2023. Behind the pope is "Angels Unawares," a sculpture by Canadian Timothy Schmalz, depicting a boat with 140 figures of migrants from various historical periods and various nations. (CNS/Lola Gomez)

Carol Glatz

View Author Profile

Catholic News Service

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

Vatican City — June 3, 2024

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

The pope asked people to unite in prayer "for all those who have had to leave their land in search of dignified living conditions. May we journey together with them, be 'synodal' together," he wrote.

At a Vatican news conference to present the message, Cardinal Michael Czerny, prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, said the "journeys of despair and hope" of migrants and refugees "could be ours."

"If we experienced similar pressures," such as war, poverty, natural disasters or other negative factors, "we would flee, too," he said.

"Often propaganda or ideologies give the impression that a forced migrant, refugee or displaced person is (on the move) for pleasure, for an adventure. This is false, false, false," he said, and "it is a shame we have to continue to insist" on the real

"push and pull factors" people are faced with.

Loreto Sister Patricia Murray, executive secretary of the International Union of Superiors General, told reporters that educating young children "is crucial" and must be done by families, schools and wider society.

Some research suggests that "we learn our prejudices by age 7. So that at a very early age we learn who to include and who to exclude," she said.

Advertisement

The message to present is "our differences enrich us, rather than our differences divide us," she said. "We're presenting a vision of society which is multicultural and intercultural, where we learn from one another, where we are transformed and changed by one another."

People need to be reminded that immigrants are not "coming to take, to take whatever. They're coming to give, to give gifts, skills, language, culture and a whole way of living that will enrich all of us," Sister Murray said.

Blessing Okoedion, a survivor of human trafficking from Nigeria and president of Weavers of Hope based in Caserta, Italy, told reporters that like migrants, victims of trafficking are also often fleeing from "situations of oppression and abuse, insecurity and discrimination, lack of prospects for development."

"One should also listen more to the survivors of human trafficking, their experiences of fear and pain, but also of resilience and courage in the destination countries where they are exploited," she said.

Trafficked to Italy in 2013, Okoedion reported her traffickers to the police and received direction and help in rebuilding her life from Ursuline Sister Rita Giaretta, who has been assisting trafficked women since 1995 in Caserta.

Together with other survivors of trafficking and sexual exploitation, she founded the Weavers of Hope association in 2018, which has helped about 150 girls and women trafficked to Italy, she said.

"We are not ashamed to be called survivors of sexual exploitation because, with our testimony, we would like every girl in the world and in Nigeria to have hope and to

continue dreaming, and that those who are still victims may be able to find the courage to be able to get out," she said.

Their work, she said, is "a sign of redemption," of not giving up and "of not keeping our mouths shut."