

## **Unity, Stability of Migrant Families Must be Defended, Pope Says**

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VATICAN CITY (CNS) -- The unity and stability of families, including migrant and immigrant families, must be defended "with courage and patience," Pope Benedict XVI said.

Addressing members of the Pontifical Council for Migrants and Travelers May 15, the pope said the traditional family always must be supported.

"One must not forget that the family, including the migrant or itinerant family, is the original cell of society and must not be destroyed," he said. The family is "the community in which, from infancy, one is taught to adore and love God, learning the grammar of human and moral values and how to make good use of freedom in truth."

Many families find it difficult to live up to their calling, he said, but the challenges multiply for families who are on the move together or whose lives are marked by long periods of separation.

The plenary meeting of the pontifical council looked at "families who find themselves, for whatever reasons, separated from their homes and homelands," said Cardinal Renato Martino, council president.

"The separation of members of the family adds particularly to the miseries related to migration," he told the pope. "It cries out for the promotion of the right to reunification."

Cardinal Martino referred specifically to the United States, noting that the pope had spoken about the need for immigrant family reunification policies when he met April 16 with U.S. President George W. Bush in Washington.

During his U.S. trip, the pope told council members, "I had the opportunity to encourage that great country to continue its commitment to welcoming those brothers and sisters who come mainly from poor countries. In particular, I highlighted the serious problem of family reunification."

The Catholic Church, he said, works not only on behalf of individuals on the move, "but also for their families, communities of love and factors of integration."

Particularly with Catholic immigrants, he said, it is essential that parishes reach out and invite families to Mass, highlighting the connection between Christ's love poured out in the Eucharist and the love and self-giving of a husband and wife.

Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio of Brooklyn, N.Y., a member of the council, offered other members concrete suggestions for improving the pastoral care of immigrant families, particularly when welcoming a new birth, celebrating marriages and marking a death.

At each of these moments, he said, the customs of the immigrant's or migrant's culture of origin must be taken into account and respected as much as possible.

Many immigrants come from countries where couples must have a civil marriage before the religious ceremony can take place, but the disruption of migration or lack of money often means they never receive the sacrament of marriage, he said. Facilitating the celebration is an important pastoral task, he said.

And, he said, when migration already makes life difficult, a death in the family can be especially traumatic, whether it is the death of a loved one in the homeland or in the new country.

The parish should be ready to assist those in mourning, he said.

"Making available the celebration of the Eucharist for someone who has died a long distance away is a wonderful pastoral approach to easing the grief of migrants who may not be able to return to their home countries to grieve for their loved ones," he said.