

Vatican Official Says Integration Needs Effort from Immigrants, Neighbors

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VATICAN CITY (CNS) -- The integration of immigrants into a new society requires effort from both the immigrants and their new neighbors, said a Vatican official.

Integration is a two-way process, Archbishop Agostino Marchetto, secretary of the Pontifical Council for Migrants and Travelers, said during a speech Jan. 28 at the University of San Diego.

Integration "is the responsibility not only of the immigrant but also of the host society" and is achieved through open dialogue, the archbishop added.

Archbishop Marchetto's office at the Vatican released the text of his speech on the efforts of different faith communities to understand and approach the challenges of contemporary immigration.

The speech was billed as a preview to an international conference April 15-16 at the Catholic university in California; the conference will discuss the relationships among migration, religious experience and national identity.

Archbishop Marchetto said a new immigrant must show "respect for his/her own cultural heritage, without forgetting or discarding it."

But, at the same time, he said, if immigrants are not open to the culture of their new homeland, "they could adopt an attitude of closure, leading to the formation of ghettos with their co-nationals and, unfortunately, to their marginalization."

Differences in religion, teaching methods, social conventions, language and even food can be disorienting because immigrants perceive themselves as standing out from the majority, the archbishop said.

The host country also must recognize the contribution immigrants make not only economically, but also culturally, he said.

"When recognition is given to the immigrant's positive contribution to the host society, through his culture and his talents, the immigrant himself would become better motivated to find a high degree of interaction with the local population," he said.

Only when diversity is valued, the archbishop said, can equal rights and duties flourish for everyone.

Both immigrants and citizens of the host country must be committed to respecting people's dignity -- which include those ways that make one person different from another -- while also respecting the customs and laws of the host country, he said.

Archbishop Marchetto also said that respect for the religious freedom of immigrants is essential for promoting their integration.

If "society wants to benefit from international migration, then it must respect the freedom of migrants to profess, practice and even change their religion," he said.

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