

‘WITH COURAGE LET US ALL COMBINE’

Wet winter weather didn't perturb a large Ballarat crowd embracing National Refugee Week. After a march along Sturt Street and the raising of the flag, Sadiki Mukasa, an African refugee and Ballarat's multicultural ambassador, addressed the crowd and shared his harrowing story and his gratefulness of having Ballarat as 'home' for his family now. (see Ballarat Courier website link below)

<http://www.thecourier.com.au/story/3979398/rallying-for-refugees/>

Ted Lovett's playing of the didgeridoo welcomed guests as they moved upstairs to the Trench Room at the Town Hall to the Civic Reception where dignitaries spoke of the Ballarat community's commitment to refugees. Refugee Week runs from 19-25 June 2016 and the theme is 'with courage let us all combine'

www.refugeeweek.org.au



Photo 1: Mayor Des Hudson and Cr Belinda Coates, Deputy Mayor

Photo 2: Guests attending the Civic Reception

Photo 3: Constantine Osuchukwu, Sonia Vignjevic (Victorian Multicultural Commissioner), Bishop Paul Bird, Cr Belinda Coates, Anne Foley (Executive Officer - Ballarat Regional Multicultural Council) and Stella Savy (musician)

BISHOP PAUL BIRD' S HOMILY FROM SUNDAY, JUNE 19 – REFUGEE WEEK AT ST PATRICK'S CATHEDRAL, BALLARAT CAN BE READ BELOW:

Last Thursday evening I attended a celebration in Parramatta, west of Sydney. It was a ceremony to welcome the new bishop of the Parramatta. One of the unusual features of the occasion was that the new bishop was a refugee.

Bishop Vincent Long Van Nguyen was born in Vietnam. He fled Vietnam as a teenager in 1979 on a boat packed with refugees. They eventually made it to Malaysia. There he spent sixteen months in a refugee camp. While he was in the camp he taught himself English. In 1980 he was accepted as a refugee by Australia and he arrived as a 19-year-old in the Melbourne suburb of Springvale. Two years later he joined the Franciscans. He was ordained as a priest in 1989 and served in parishes in Sydney and Melbourne. He was appointed an assistant bishop in Melbourne. Now he is Bishop of Parramatta.

Following his appointment, Bishop Long said: "My appointment is not just about me. It's an affirmation and recognition on the part of the universal church of the gifts and contributions that migrants and refugees can make to the church and also to society."

During the Mass to welcome him to Parramatta, Bishop Long expressed his gratitude for the welcome he received when he first arrived in Australia and the opportunities he had been given in his new country. He expressed his hope that we might offer a similar welcome to refugees who come to us now.

Today marks the start of refugee week. This is an annual week-long celebration of the positive contributions of refugees to Australian society. There are concerts, films, lunches with guest speakers and gatherings for prayer. The week highlights the gifts that refugees bring to Australia. It also seeks to promote a spirit of respect for people who have come to this country from all parts of the world.

As we begin refugee week we can draw on the Scriptures to guide us in our attitude to people seeking refuge. The first reading for this evening's Mass was from the prophet Zechariah. There we read: "I will pour out a spirit of kindness and prayer." The Scriptures speak often of prayer. They urge us to ask God for the gifts we need and also to pray for others that they might have what they need in their lives. This evening I suggest that we pray especially for refugees – those who have come to Australia and those who are in so many camps around the world. Pray that they might find a home that is free from war and violence – a home where they can live in peace.

The prophet Zechariah also refers to a spirit of kindness. This is something that should guide us in our dealings with everyone, including those seeking refuge. The Book of Leviticus says: "When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the stranger. You shall love the stranger as yourself." There are various groups here in Ballarat that show practical kindness to people who have come here as refugees. The Scriptures call us all to do what we can to show kindness to people in need.

As we continue our Mass, I invite you to pray for refugees – those who have come to Australia and those who have fled war and violence in so many countries around the world. Pray also that we might have the will and the wisdom to do what we can to help those seeking refuge.

We remember the words of Jesus: "Whatsoever you do for one of the least of these, you do for me."

Bishop Paul Bird CSsR