

## Exploitation of migrants is a scandal, says bishop



Migrant workers must not be exploited, taken advantage of and paid less than a living wage. That was the message of Bishop Thomas McMahon of Brentwood at an annual Mass in support of migrant workers on Monday.

The Mass, held at the Metropolitan Cathedral Church of St George, Southwark, London, on the Feast of St Joseph the Worker, was the sixth Mass for Migrants organised by the Archdiocese of Westminster, the Archdiocese of Southwark and the Diocese of Brentwood and supported by their justice and peace commissions.

In a strongly worded statement Bishop McMahon contrasted the focus of the churches, and especially Catholic social teaching, on the person, calling for dignity and justice for the worker, with the market which always focuses on profit and how to maximise gain.

He quoted Pope Leo XIII calling for a living wage as far back as 1891 in his encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, when he spoke out against the treatment of labour as a commodity, saying: “Wages ought not to be insufficient to support a frugal and good wage earner. If through necessity or fear of a worse evil the worker accepts harder conditions because an employer or contractor will afford them no better, then the worker is made the victim of force and injustice.”

Also in the 19th century Cardinal Henry Edward Manning, known as the friend of workers, said: “A worker’s wage should be sufficient to keep his wife and children, to provide them with decent housing and a healthy diet and to educate them.”

The London Citizens/Citizens UK living wage campaign celebrates its 10th anniversary this year. Since its launch in 2001 the campaign has lifted 8,000 families out of working poverty and persuaded 140 companies and organisations to pay the living wage. Despite this progress, Bishop McMahon said “it still remains a scandal and deeply unjust when ordinary workers and especially migrant workers are exploited, taken advantage of and paid less than a living wage. It affronts their dignity, their self-worth

and that of their families.”

He concluded by urging his audience of 1,500 people: “Take to the streets, raise our voices, and stand up for Gospel values.”

At the Offertory, in addition to the bread and wine, migrant workers brought symbols of their work such as hammers and briefcases. The Mass was concelebrated by Archbishop Peter Smith of Southwark. Over 50 priests, many from the 47 Catholic ethnic chaplaincies in London, took part in the celebration of the Mass, which was followed by a march to Westminster Central Hall.

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