



# TRAVELING SHOW MINISTRIES

*Mission on the Road*



**UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS  
SECRETARIAT OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN THE CHURCH  
PASTORAL CARE OF MIGRANTS, REFUGEES, AND TRAVELERS**



**UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS**  
*Secretariat of Cultural Diversity in the Church*  
*Subcommittee on Pastoral Care of Migrants, Refugees, and Travelers*

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## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

PCMRT Subcommittee members.....	2
Contact Information .....	3
Traveling Show Ministries Overview.....	4
Pastoral Concerns and Recommendations.....	6
Ministry Advisers.....	7
Message of Pope Francis..	8

## CATHOLIC TEACHING

“In migrants the Church has always contemplated the image of Christ who said, ‘I was a stranger and you welcome me’ (Mt 25:35)”. Their welcome into the local church finds theological basis in Scripture, Church documents and directives on migration, specifically the Instruction, *the Love of Christ towards migrants (2004)*; The Holy Father’s *Messages on the World Day on Migrants and Refugees*; the documents of Vatican II; the Apostolic Letter and Instruction of Pope Paul VI, *On the Care of Migrants (1969)*; the Apostolic Constitution *Exsul Familia*; the USCCB Pastoral Letter, *Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity (2001)*; the *NCCB Resolution on the Pastoral Concern of the Church for People on the Move (1976)*; and the new Code of Canon Law. These documents, directives and norms from the Magisterium elucidate important pastoral findings on the “central position of the human person and the defense of the rights of migrants” (*Erga migrantes caritas Christi*).

## THE SUBCOMMITTEE

The **Subcommittee on the Pastoral Care of Migrants, Refugees and Travelers (PCMRT)** of USCCB’s Secretariat of Cultural Diversity in Church coordinates support in the apostolate through studies, pastoral visits, ensuring collaborations and co-sponsoring annual meetings with chaplains, religious and laity engaged in the pastoral care of traveling show personnel and their families.

## THE TRAVELING SHOW MINISTRIES

**The Concern of the Church for People on the Move.** The Catholic Church, in its mission of preaching the Good News, historically holds a prophetic stand with regard to people who have special spiritual and social needs because of ethnic identity, language and culture, or a particular lifestyle distinguished by human mobility such as that of circus and traveling show people.

**The World of the Traveling Show.** There are 40-50 **circuses** and between 300-400 carnivals in the United States. The need to pursue an occupation accounts for the 300,000+ people on the move in America who share the common goal of entertainment. Diversity and internationality describe the community of traveling show people. Circus performers represent, among others, the countries of Eastern and Western Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

In the **carnivals** are found persons with backgrounds in academia, politics, law, journalism, retailing, farming, music, sports and other areas. Approximately 40% of carnival workers are Catholic. Additionally, in the **race tracks**, in particular car racing and horse racing workers, as well as bull riding professionals, there are significant numbers of Catholics. Those working with racing horses are primarily Hispanic/Latino and the community of bull riders are significantly Brazilian. Therefore, there is significant need for ministries willing to serve people on the move also in Spanish and Portuguese.

**Lifestyle.** Community life is organized around the show, and the basis for community life is the family. By history and tradition, circuses and traveling shows have functioned as family institutions. The family is the vital social grouping that teaches and imbues family members with the values of the community. Everything must work in harmony - everyone performing their assigned tasks.

**Christian Life.** In the world of traveling show people, the fullness of Christian life may be constrained by time and circumstance, the lack of religious education and the unavailability of clergy and religious personnel. Christian values evident in the family and community need to be given expression in the day-to-day reality of the show.

For Catholic show people, their faith is traditional - a stable element and a comfort. Frequently, show people are not able to be in touch with the local church of the community where they are visiting because of their lifestyle and work obligations. At the same time, the itinerant lifestyle is not an insurmountable impediment to the growth and development of religious life among show people. To the contrary, the mobility of show people is itself an opening, a kind of invitation to ministry.

**Pastoral Ministers.** The special regard of the Church for people on the move is shown by the pastoral workers who are dedicated to this apostolate and who build communities of the faithful and bring these small communities in solidarity with the Church to live the Gospel. There is a very small group of clergy, religious and laity who regularly minister to show people. Their presence to show people is one of a living image of Christ. They are welcomed by Catholic show people as well as by non-Catholics with whom an ecumenical attitude of openness and cooperation is shared. The greatest need of the traveling show people is for priests and pastoral ministers to be available for religious education, Mass and other Sacraments.

**Pastoral Awareness.** The increase of pastoral awareness of the Traveling Show Apostolate is a serious concern of the Catholic Church in the United States. Pastoral awareness opens the door to welcome of the faithful to full membership in the entire ecclesial community. Yet, as the mobility of show people limits their participation in ordinary parish life, so does ordinary parish life often overlook the circumstances of the faithful who appear beyond its reach. Pastoral awareness invites pastoral outreach. To ensure that the world of show people, even in their mobility, may be fully integrated into the life of the Church, the following suggestions are offered as a means to reach out in Christian love and friendship to all who create festive occasions which provide us with a happy diversion from daily cares. The pastoral care which we bring to show people must be inspired by the dynamic of the mystery of salvation which makes the festive occasion become one of the privileged images of meeting with God.

- ◆ Religious and lay leaders could visit traveling shows to welcome them and celebrate the Mass, with homilies mindful of their lifestyle.
- ◆ A special liturgy, memorial service or a paraliturgy may be planned at the local parish or in an appropriate place at the circus or fair grounds, at a time convenient for the people. Posters can be displayed at the circus or fair grounds, inviting the show people to attend.
- ◆ Pastors can organize volunteers to visit show people and assist them in preparing their children for the Sacraments and also invite the children to social gatherings of parish children.
- ◆ Scripture and Catholic information booths can be set up at fairs to interest visitors in learning and knowing more about faith and the Church. Familiarity with the Scripture can help show people to grow in faith by being nourished with the Word of God.
- ◆ Religious leaders could serve in many ways: religious teaching, family support, and giving witness to the love of God by their presence.
- ◆ Seminaries and Catholic Universities could consider including a course on the special and unique ministry of people on the move as part of the formation curriculum of seminarians. Seminarians and students could also get involved in outreach initiatives to show people, who are known to better respond to a “ministry of presence”.
- ◆ Dioceses could appoint a diocesan coordinator for local outreach.

## Dicastery for Integral Human Development Migrants and Refugees Section

**Prefect:** **Cardinal Peter Turkson**  
Dicastery for Integral Human Development

**Secretary:** **Rev. Bruno-Marie Duffé**  
Dicastery for Integral Human Development

**Official:** **Sr. Alessandra Pander**  
Traveling Show Ministries



### Ministry Advisers

Rev. Fr. Jerry Hogan  
Adviser on Circus Ministry

Rev. Fr. Richard Notter  
Hispanic Circus Ministry

Rev. Mr. Luis Alonso Trevino  
Adviser on Horse Race Track Ministry

Rev. Fr. John Vakulskas  
Adviser on Carnival Ministry

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I know that, with the pace of your life and of your work, it is difficult for you to be part of a parish community in a permanent way. For this reason, I invite you to look after your faith. Seize every opportunity to approach the sacraments. Pass on to your children love for God and neighbor: the journey of beauty.

I recommend that the particular Churches and parishes be attentive to your needs and those of all people who move about. As you know, the Church is concerned with the problems that accompany your itinerant life, and wants to help you eliminate the prejudices that sometimes keep you on the fringes.

You cannot imagine the good that you do: a good that is sown.

I entrust all of you to the maternal protection of Mary Most Holy, Mother of Mercy. I impart my blessing to you and your loved ones and I ask you, please, do not forget to pray for me.

*Excerpt from the Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants in the Jubilee of the World of Traveling Shows on June 16, 2016*

