Migration in not today's phenomenon but since the creation of human beings.

The phenomenon of Emigration has been with us since the very first appearance of human beings on earth. On our Island, the pre historical site Ghar Dalam is prove enough of all this. This historical site is a show case of remains much make us understand and instigate us to study this phenomenon. It is not only local but worldwide phenomenon. Emigration served its very purpose to make peoples mix and find ways and means to live with each other. In this way emigrants influenced and left their impact on locals and new settlements emerged. All this was not that easy, and emigration was always a high risk adventure.

In the course of human experience, countless were the occasions where famine and natural calamities led to situations where people, sometimes in their masses, had to seek shelter and a new living elsewhere in their own land or in other countries.

On other occasions, people have to flee because of tensions between culturally and ethnically diverse groups or between the rights of the individual and the power of the State, civil conflicts, wars, persecutions and expulsions.

In this study we are going to analyse all this phenomena, its impact and historical value. We are going to apply all this to our local situation.

Classic examples of such experiences are deeply rooted in the collective memory of every people and are also found in the Bible. For instance, Joseph’s brothers had to go down into Egypt, driven by a devastating famine.
In ancient times, people had to travel from one place to another on foot aided by animal-drawn carts, or on makeshift boats. When improvements in transportation facilities started to make it easier for people to move from one place to another, more and more people started moving.

The arrival of passenger ships and planes opened the door to a widespread migration phenomenon which practically involves all nations, either as countries of departure, of transit or of arrival.

Millions of men, women and children, young and old alike, continue to face the drama of emigration to seek work and a better standard of living for themselves and their families, if not to survive.

**Maltese migration**

Among these millions there were several thousands of people of Maltese origin who had to seek a future abroad because they could not find work or an economically decent living in these islands, especially after the two World Wars.

On the whole, emigration from Malta was free from political harassment or racial and religious pressures. It was in the main of an economic nature, with the push factor being a restricted national territory, while the pull factor was provided by the opportunities offered by much larger countries and the jobs available there.

In the old days, many of the Maltese you used to establish themselves in countries around the Mediterranean. However, there were also some who were adventurous enough to find their way as far as South America.

In the 20th Century, especially after World War II, when job opportunities in Malta were very lacking, many Maltese people were obliged to leave their country and the community of their origins and travel to Australia, the United States of America, Canada, the United Kingdom and other countries.

A substantial part of the working-age population of Malta and Gozo had to emigrate in those years. The process sometimes involved the families as a whole. To the extent that there was hardly any Maltese family left in these islands which did not have some members who had to emigrate.
The biggest challenge awaiting such migrants was perhaps the nature of the work they would be able to find and the challenges of setting up a new home in a foreign land. However, there were also the differences of the language, culture and social system of the host society which sometimes may complicate further the effort for integration.

The story of Maltese migration is in itself a strong witness to the value of real integration in a society where all are active members and responsible for one another’s welfare, generously offering a creative contribution and rightfully sharing in the same rights and duties.

**The contribution of the Catholic Church**

In this picture we cannot leave out the contribution of the Catholic Church which was always interested to keep on accompanying all people on the move. There were the missionaries who themselves left their country of origin not to seek a better future but to spread the good news. Besides the Church urged local churches not to leave on their own those of the fold who undertook this step in life and left home. It was Pope Pius the 12th who saw the need to set up a commission within the Roman Curia to take upon its shoulders the pastoral care of all people on the move. *Exsul Familia* is the apostolic constitution written by Pope Pius XII on the topic of migration. It was released on 1 August 1952. The title of the document refers to the migrant Holy Family, forced to flee into Egypt, taken as the archetype of every refugee family. *Exsul Familia* is the only papal document in which Pope Pius himself outlines the nature and extent of Papal charities during and after World War II on millions of refugees and displaced persons.

The Church in Malta took this challenge as from the beginning and from a humble effort by the then Catholic Action, an association within the Catholic Church, the Valletta branch, at ‘Palazzo Caraffa’, in Old Bakery Street, it turned to be an organization on its own which evolved throughout the years. It was elevated to be part of the integral set up of the Church’s Curia on the level of one of the eight secretariats which constituted the setup of the same Curia. As the Latin expression goes, “Ad perpetuam rei memoriam”, to be remembered for ever, all this was through the zeal and hard work and vision of Mgr. Philip Calleja, President and Founder of “Kummissjoni Emigranti”.

CMLA 2015 – Fr Alfred Vella (Malta): Emigration: ties between the past and the present
The Catholic Church kept alive this mandate to keep accompanying those who had to be uprooted and travel to far and distant countries and settle there. In 2004, ‘The Pontifical Council for the pastoral care of Migrants and Itinerant people’ published the Instruction called ‘Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi’ (The Love of Christ towards migrants) to renew its teaching and keep on urging all those involved in this pastoral work to do their utmost and keep burning in them the love for their fellow countrymen who had to undergo this difficult and turbulent experience.

During the first decade of the 21st century Malta was negotiating to join the European Union and so many Maltese were longing to make their way to go and work with European institutions. When Malta became part of this Union many others went to Brussels and Luxembourg to find a living and make a career of their own. This number continued to grow and is expected to grow larger since Malta is going to hold the Presidency in 2017. The local Catholic Church kept being on the lookout for our brothers and sisters who decided to give it a go outside our Island and took this opportunity. It was once again a mission entrusted to Emigrants’ Commission to keep on being of service to them.

**The Story that never ends**

Migration is an ongoing adventure. One has to have a record of this perennial experience. There are various means how to keep alive this experience and to keep ties between the past and the future. We are all in duty bound to leave future generations aware of what has happened to their ancestors and what where their roots. This yearning is within every one of us, it is a need which we have an obligation to satisfy and cherish. How are we going to preserve the past and present it to future generations the best way possible?

These questions have been brewing in the minds of so many and were dealt with since the very first ‘Convention of Maltese living abroad’ way back 1969. It was renewed in the second Convention of the year 2000 and in during the third convention of 2010 the project started rolling. Now we are attending the fourth Convention and we can look forward and appreciate all efforts that were done to have the “Malta Migration Museum” set up at ‘Dar l-Emigrant. Like so many other countries we can boast now that we have this museum where future generations can see and study for themselves why and how so many of their dear ones of past times had to leave their country of origin and settle abroad. How they managed to survive
in the receiving country and were able to make their way through. Not only but they managed to make a name for their own and the country of origin.

**The values of encounter**

Migrants carry with them a sense of trust and hope which inspires and sustains their search for better opportunities in life. Yet they do not seek simply to improve their financial and social condition.

The experience of migration often begins in the trauma of having to leave behind family and possessions which had in some way formed part of their existence. At times they also face a sense of disorientation due to an uncertain future. Yet, they do not lose the dream of being able to build, with hope and courage, a new life in a new country.

Migrants trust that they will encounter acceptance, solidarity and help. They also hope to meet people who recognise the values and resources migrants have to offer, and are open to sharing humanly and materially with other humans.

If it is true that migration has marked the history of humankind, it is also true that there is no country which its history has not been enriched through the encounter with other peoples. In general, all countries have experienced the wealth of the encounter between cultures and the positive contribution which migrants have brought to their economy and to their societies.

Progress in the capacity to live together within the universal human family is closely linked to the growth of a mentality of healthy hospitality.

**Fr Alfred Vella**  
**Malta**