

## **Strangers at the Gates: Welcoming the Migrant and the Refugee**

### **Address to the Gibraltar Archdeaconry Synod January 2018**

#### **Introduction**

Strangers at the Gates: Welcoming the Migrant and the Refugee. I am grateful for this opportunity to address the Synod on a topic which has become one of the most pressing ethical and political issues of our times. When we agreed the diocesan strategy in 2015, we included striving for the creation of a just society by defending the poor, the disadvantaged and those in need. Since then, our concern for work with migrants and refugees has become a real priority, and many chaplaincies throughout the diocese are involved in this work one way or another. At a European level, the crisis over refugees has been one of the most difficult and divisive questions that the EU has had to face in the last decade.

I want to say that the questions around migration and refugees are very complex. European countries have large departments of civil servants working on these issues. By contrast, I am not an expert in this area, and I do not have a large team of specialist advisors. I do work in Brussels with people who have a good degree of expertise – especially Doris Peshke of the Churches Commission for Migration in Europe (CCME) and David Fieldsend, who organised the Diocesan Conference on Refugee work. This is the first time I have given this presentation, so I will be particularly grateful for your comments and feedback. I should say we are dealing with issues about which people feel strongly, so I will quite understand if there are things I say about which you take a different view.

Where we are going:

- Some definitions around the words ‘migrant’ and ‘refugee’ because there is a lot of confusion about these terms, and the confusion has real and serious impact on peoples lives.
- Exploration of biblical material that might be relevant to our thinking
- Five broad principles for engaging with the European refugee crisis
- Practical ways in which we as churches and individuals can engage and respond.

#### **Some basic facts and definitions**

**Migrant:** There is no definition of ‘migrant’ in law.

IOM (International Organisation for Migration) defines a migrant as any person who is moving or has moved across an international border or within a State away from his/her habitual place of residence, regardless of (1) the person’s legal status; (2) whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary; (3) what the causes for the movement are; or (4) what the length of the stay is.

According to this definition, it is thought that about one in seven of the world’s population are migrants. International migrants, which includes most of us here, make up about 3%. The countries with the highest foreign-born populations are United Arab Emirates (88%) and Qatar (76%), Kuwait (74%).

In 2015 the most popular destinations for migrants were the US (47 million foreign-born nationals), Germany (12 million) and the Russian Federation (12 million). UK is fifth with 8.5million.

About one in five of the world’s migrants live in the top 20 largest cities.

However, as IOM freely admits, there is no legal definition of the term 'migrant' and there are many ways 'migrant' – defined by foreign birth, foreign citizenship, temporary stay (less than a year).

Can define a migrant as someone who is subject to migration controls. In a UK context, there is a key distinction legally between someone subject to immigration control who needs permission to enter or remain in the UK and someone 'not subject to immigration control' who does not. While the UK remains part of the EU, EU nationals are not subject to immigration control although they are often described as migrants. The feeling of 'loss of control' over migrants not subject to UK immigration control has been a major issue in the Brexit debate. If we take foreign birth as the definition, then many famous British people are migrants, such as Joanna Lumley (Kashmir), Cliff Richard (Lucknow, India) and Prince Philip (Corfu, Greece).

**Refugee:** Whereas, the term 'migrant' is relatively loose, the term 'refugee' has a tight definition. A person who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war or violence. A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality or political opinion. Most likely they cannot return home or afraid to do so. (UNHCR definition).

The 1951 Geneva Convention is the main international instrument of refugee law. The Convention clearly spells out who a refugee is and the kind of legal protection, other assistance and social rights he or she should receive from the countries who have signed the Convention. The Convention was limited to protecting mainly European refugees in the aftermath of World War 2 but another document, the 1967 Protocol, expanded the scope of the Convention as the problem of displacement spread around the world.

According to UNHCR, today there are 65.6 million forcibly displaced people, of whom 22.5 million are refugees.

More than half of all refugees worldwide come from just three countries: 1.4m South Sudan, 2.5m Afghanistan and 5.5m Syria. 51% of refugees are school-aged children under the age of 18.

Most displaced people are hosted by countries in the Middle East and Africa. 17% of displaced people are hosted in Europe and 16% in the Americas. The top hosting countries are Turkey (2.9m) and Pakistan (1.4m).

**Internally-displaced person.** People who are forced to flee their homes but never cross an international border are known as IDPs. These individuals seek safety anywhere they can find it – in nearby towns, schools, settlements, internal camps, even forests and fields. They suffer many of the same traumas as refugees. However, unlike refugees, IDPs are not protected by international law or eligible to receive many types of aid because they are legally under the protection of their own government.

**Stateless person:** A stateless person is someone who is not a citizen of any country. A person can become stateless due to a variety of reasons, including sovereign, legal, technical or administrative decisions or oversights. 10m people around the world are stateless or at risk of statelessness.

**Asylum Seeker:** When people flee their own country and seek sanctuary in another country, they apply for asylum – the right to be recognised as a refugee and receive legal protection and material assistance. An asylum seeker must demonstrate that his or her fear of persecution in his or her home country is well-founded.

The terms migrant and 'asylum seeker' are frequently confused in public debate. An Oxford Migration Observatory survey has found that UK public opinion consistently shows people think the level of migration is too high (70%). When thinking about immigrants, respondents are most likely (62%) to think of asylum seekers. They are least likely to think of students (29%). However, students represent the largest group of UK immigrants (37%) whereas asylum seekers are the smallest group (only 4%). There is widespread agreement that the UK should stop illegal immigration; majority support for reducing low-skilled immigration, but only a minority of people think the UK should reduce high-skilled workers and students. A recent report by the UK's Higher Education Policy Institute indicates that the most common country of origin for overseas students is China, and that the average annual value of foreign student to the UK economy is £100,000. The inclusion of foreign students in UK migration statistics has long been a cause of friction between the Higher Education world and the Home Office. The Home Office is, I understand, currently working on proposals to reshape UK immigration policy in the light of these complexities, so that the UK does not inadvertently deter people, like foreign students and foreign nurses whom it wants and needs.

### **Biblical Reference Points**

The opening chapters of Genesis show us that God makes man, male and female in his own image and likeness. (Gen 1:26) Scholars have argued about what this likeness consists of: is it human reason? Human relationships? Human capacity for spirituality? It is clear that humanity has dominion over all the other beings that God made. Of all the things that God creates, humanity is the summit. Man and woman is invested with an especial dignity. With the creation of humanity, God's creation is complete.

Very soon in the story after the creation, humanity is on the move. Adam and Eve are forced to leave the Garden of Eden. Their Son Cain is forced to become a stranger and fugitive on the earth after he kills his brother Abel. As we progress into the foundation narratives for the people of Israel, we realise that theirs are stories of migration. Abraham and Sarah were asked to leave their homeland and set out for a land that the Lord would show them. (Gen. 12:1). The Chronicler reminds us that all the patriarchs were in fact strangers in the land, wandering from one nation to another and one kingdom to another. (1 Chron 16:19). Jacob took his family to live in Egypt, where they eventually became slaves. Eventually, God raised up Moses to lead them out of Egypt where they finally settled in the promised land.

Given this backdrop, the Torah has many references that urge the people of Israel to remember their own past history as strangers, and indeed as slaves, and therefore to deal justly and mercifully with those who are strangers and refugees in their midst. At harvest time, they were solemnly to declare: 'My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down to Egypt with a few people and the Lord brought us up out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.' (Deut. 26:5ff). In Leviticus 19:33f they are instructed: 'When an alien lives with you in your land, do not ill-treat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the Lord your God.' The 'ger', or stranger, appears repeatedly alongside other vulnerable groups who lack family and land, such as orphans and widows. Deut 24:19-22: "When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. When you beat your olive trees, you shall not go over them again. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow. When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not strip it afterward. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I command you to do this."

There are several different words used for the sojourner or the stranger in Hebrew, however, and one of them, the 'nokri' has more negative connotations. The nokri, is the true 'foreigner', who was economically independent, who had different values and who did not integrate into Israelite life. The Israelites are repeatedly warned about the nokri, who had the potential to threaten Israel's culture and religion. So the stranger or nokri was not allowed to share in the Passover (Ex. 12:43) and debts owed by him were not cancelled in a Jubilee year (Deut. 15:3). Solomon is especially reprovved for taking a harem of foreign wives who do not share his religious faith and who lead him into idolatry. (1 Kings 11:1-11).

What might we take from all this?

- The *ger* – the economically dependent, the vulnerable, the asylum seeker is deserving of protection. There is an imperative on the host community to welcome and care for the vulnerable foreigner, to facilitate their inclusion and to treat these newcomers as full citizens.
- On the other hand, there is a recognition that strangers may threaten the wellbeing of the host community if they do not integrate or actively disturb the values and culture of the host community.
- So Old Testament story and law indicates that there is a duty on the foreigner to respect and embrace the host society. But the greater biblical duty is on the host community generously to welcome and care for the vulnerable foreigner.

Then just to add some thoughts from the New Testament. Jesus, the Messiah, is born away from his maternal home in Bethlehem. He is laid to rest in a manger amongst the animals because there is no proper accommodation for him and his parents there. Soon after his birth, political violence means his family must flee to a foreign country, to Egypt, where they are what we would call refugees. The grown-up Jesus in his ministry is constantly travelling. He complains that he sometimes has nowhere to lay his head. In describing what the final judgement will be like, he says: 'Come you who are blessed of my Father, for I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in.'

The experience of the early Christian community was that they felt their primary belonging was to the Kingdom of God not to the kingdoms of this world. So the apostle Peter addresses Christians as 'strangers in the world, scattered throughout different countries.' They are 'aliens and strangers' in this world (2:11). Nevertheless, although they ultimately serve a different king, they are to submit themselves reverently and obediently to earthly authorities (2:13). And the book of Hebrews revisits the experience of the Patriarchs suggesting that we, like them, are involved in a spiritual pilgrimage, seeking a better country which is a heavenly one (Heb 11:16). The suggestion is that Christians are to have a divine and spiritual perspective, which might involve sitting light to earthly certainties. For we look for the city which is to come. But that does not absolve Christians from proper respect towards earthly governing authorities.

### **Principles for thinking Christianly about the European Refugee Crisis**

We have looked at some of the basic facts about refugees and migration, and we have looked at some scriptural resources. I now want to turn to the specific refugee crisis that we have been facing and are still facing in Europe.

There are two principal migration routes. Firstly, we are talking here about large numbers of people fleeing war in Syria and arriving in Europe via Turkey, the Greek islands, Greece and then working their way northwards mainly to Germany. They are joined by other refugees from countries such as Afghanistan and Eritrea. Secondly, we are dealing with a migration route of folk coming from sub-

Saharan Africa, crossing the Sahara and then attempting the crossing of the Mediterranean in small boats.

Last year I was presented by Pope Francis with a Lampedusa cross. Lampedusa is at the southern most tip of Italy. These crosses are made out of the wood from broken boats that is washed up on the shore. The people who travelled in the boat from which this cross is made very likely died in their attempt to reach Italy. So often crosses are made of silver or precious metal. But this cross is made of wood associated with death, the same as Christ's cross at Golgotha of course. I keep it in my office and it is a constant reminder of the plight of refugees.

I want to offer you five principles for thinking about the crisis that the arrival of large numbers of refugees in Europe has provoked. They are not original to me; I drew them from the European Evangelical Alliance, but I think they give us a helpful framework.

### **1. National/International Responses have been insufficient or shamefully unethical**

Every human being is made in the image of God, has infinite worth and dignity and innate rights. Our attitudes must be shaped by these truths, as we consider an individual refugee wherever they are in the process of moving from war or barbarity to safety in Europe, whether they are on the road, having their status decided or are now learning to integrate.

Considering the standards of care properly due to every human being, we see the failings of our European nations, but also, of course, of those nations and leaders whose barbarity or self-interest or failure to govern well has caused the horror from which the refugees are fleeing.

It is a particularly tragic failure that EU member states have failed to find a way to work together in order fairly and efficiently to respond to the refugee crisis. If there had been a fairer sharing of the task then the strain on southern countries, particularly Greece, would have been less and more refugees could be cared for. The people of Greece rightly feel very badly about this.

In addition, search and rescue missions in the Mediterranean have been inadequate. Far too many people have drowned because of the work of people smugglers. The EU has not got the balance right between coastal protection and proper care for those in small boats at sea.

It is wrong that some countries have tried to avoid welcoming people in need of protection, especially refugees. Whether people are refugees or economic migrants, all deserve to be treated compassionately, with their immediate physical needs tended and then to have their legal status processed efficiently. It is ironic that some countries have closed their doors to migrants in order to protect their status as Christian nations. Hungary has received particular criticism in this respect, and I have experienced very different attitudes from Roman Catholic Leaders in Eastern Europe compared with the line taken by Pope Francis. Christians are called to act compassionately to all in need whatever their religion. Nations are called to welcome the foreigner, provided the foreigner takes proper steps to integrate.

It is especially wrong that unaccompanied minors have been ignored or just put in adult camps, as I have witnessed in Greece.

Refugees and migrants have been attacked, bullied and their possessions taken. Some of the worst abuses are in the area around Calais, where police have been beating migrants and stealing their sleeping bags. Delegations of UK MPs have been deeply shocked by what they have seen in Calais, given that the UK government is subsidising the French law enforcement efforts. The French

government has recently made it a crime to give food or shelter to refugees, even children, in this area.

So, the first principle is that we have got an awful lot wrong for which we should repent.

## **2. We must actively recognise a limit to the generosity of host countries**

It is wrong when people in general and refugees in particular adopt an attitude of entitlement, demand help ungratefully or take for granted the goodwill of ordinary people. As soon as possible, refugees should be encouraged to actively contribute to their host society and to integrate.

It is naïve to think that Europe could accommodate all the people who might want to migrate here. We have to invest in the diplomatic efforts, aid efforts, regeneration and climate change prevention that will encourage economic migrants to remain in their own countries.

Amongst the great mixture of people who seek to move to Europe, the needs of genuine refugees must not be lost.

Nevertheless, many of those who migrate for other reasons suffer terrible trauma during their journeys, and are worthy of compassion and support even if they are ultimately returned to their home countries.

## **3. Portraying migrants as threatening or dangerous people is untrue and reprehensible**

It is wrong for anyone to imply through careless or deliberately chosen words that all migrants or all Muslims are dangerous or do not know how to behave. The 1930s teach us to be wary of those who blame religious and ethnic minorities for a country's ills in the name of the nation, often backed up by supposed support from Christianity.

It is, of course, wrong when refugees behave badly. Illegal behaviour should be investigated thoroughly with due legal process. But, again, care should be taken to see whether there are mitigating factors, e.g. psychological trauma, extreme poverty or cultural misunderstanding.

Where problems arise with immigrant communities it is not adequate simply to keep quiet or turn a blind eye. On the other hand, discussing migrant misbehaviour or problems within Islam should be done carefully and never in a way that strengthens negative stereotyping.

## **4. Principles of Religious Freedom should prevail**

Freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief is for all and should be respected for everyone everywhere.

No refugee should be discriminated against, persecuted or not tolerated because of their beliefs. We have a duty to ensure that all refugees are able to practise their faith and express their beliefs while they are in camps. Refugees must also be taught about and accept the principle of religious freedom including the right to change one's religion and to critique another's faith.

The vulnerability of refugees must never be exploited by those who wish to convert them to any cause or faith, including Christianity. However, refugees should also have the opportunity to discuss faith issues, and aid to refugees should not be subject to an imposed cloak of supposed secular neutrality.

## **5. Principles regarding integration**

From a biblical perspective, refugees have a duty to integrate, but host communities have a greater duty to welcome, which comes first.

Once a refugee has reached a place of safety, has had his/her immediate needs cared for, and knows where he or she will stay, we should help them to learn about their new home. Much of this is best done in a supportive way through friendship. Churches can play a huge role. Refugees should learn the language, how to behave in different social settings, about rights and responsibilities. This includes learning about gender equality. Refugee children should go to school and local children should be encouraged to befriend them. We should work towards helping refugees recover, rebuild their lives and integrate well.

The challenge is to do this whilst not neglecting the poor and vulnerable from other walks of life in our own host nations. And, of course, there is much resentment in the UK because people in poorer communities feel neglected compared with the experience of newer arrivals. These grievances are real and they are a major source of anti-migrant sentiment.

#### **4. What can we do? Private Sponsorship in Europe**

Hitherto, it has mostly been assumed that responsibility for welcoming and integrating refugees is mainly a state responsibility. But one of the most interesting developments in the last few years has been the creation of humanitarian corridors or humanitarian admission schemes in which private individuals or groups work together with government agencies to enable refugees to immigrate.

This model is particularly well established in Canada, which has over the last 40 years welcomed some 300,000 refugees through private sponsorship programmes. In recent years, nearly half of all refugees to Canada have been privately sponsored. About 75% of Canadian sponsors are churches or faith-based NGOs.

The RC community of Sant Egidio has been a leader in this field. In collaboration with the Italian Protestant Churches it has established a humanitarian corridor from Libya to Italy. The way it works is that UNHCR in dialogue with the Italian Government identifies families living in a camp in Libya who are eligible for relocation, perhaps because they are especially vulnerable or there are children at risk. Individuals in Italy sign up with Sant Egidio to sponsor and receive a migrant family. Welcome contracts are entered into, and the refugees are then flown legally and safely from Libya to a home and support network arranged for them in, say, Milan.

A humanitarian corridor is also being developed in France with Catholic and Protestant partners, and there are schemes underway in Germany and Ireland.

The UK Home Office is very interested in this kind of arrangement and is working with the Church of England amongst others on these kinds of partnerships. Three schemes are underway: the Gateway Protection programme, the Syrian Vulnerable persons resettlement scheme and the Vulnerable Children Resettlement Scheme.

Within Belgium, all the main faith groups, including the Anglican Church, have committed to working with the immigration ministry to bring 130 vulnerable families from camps in Lebanon into Belgium. We Anglicans are a relatively small group, so our church has committed to sponsor one family, at a cost of 17,000euros. Just before Christmas the first two families from Lebanon arrived at Brussels National Airport under this scheme, amidst a lot of excitement and publicity. Their arrival felt like a contemporary Christmas story!

I'm afraid I haven't heard of anything like this in Spain or Portugal.

The European Commission has said: 'Private sponsorship is not only a way to increase the possibilities of legal entry but also helps raise public awareness and support for refugees and allows for a more welcoming environment as local communities are involved.'

Finally, I have used Bishop's Appeals to support work with refugees. The last Advent appeal was connected to the Episcopal Church in Rome's outreach with refugees. This year's Lent appeal is going to our own new project in Calais. Here we are working with the Diocese of Canterbury and SPCG to fund a project officer and new chaplain to the Calais chaplaincy.

The clip shows an Iranian family living in the woods near Dunkirk. The man is severely disabled and unable to walk or speak. The woman tells journalists that police had slashed their tents whilst clearing the woods overnight. She shows cuts in the fabric of the tent, which they have now abandoned. They are desperate to get to the UK where they think job prospects are better, but they seem to have no idea of border and migration policy.

Over the course of this Synod you are going to hear of other projects. As a Diocese in Europe we are committed to making a difference in this vital area. I close with the words of Jesus I cited earlier: 'Come you who are blessed of my Father, for I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in.' Finally, some children I met at a refugee camp on the Serbia/Croatia border. The Serbs are very welcoming to refugees, because many of them know in their recent history what it is like to be displaced from your homes. These children are the future. We want the best for them. May God give us welcoming hearts.