

Racial Justice Sunday 2015 - HOSPITALITY AND SANCTUARY FOR ALL

“I was a stranger and you welcomed me...” [Matthew 25: 35]

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THE CONTEXT

MIGRATION IS A CRUCIAL CONTEMPORARY ISSUE

The next twenty/thirty years will see huge movements of people as a result of environmental degradation, climate change, famine, war and persecution. It is a sign of our times and we are required to pay attention to it.

The UN High Commission for Refugees [UNHCR] says that 2013 was the worst year for the number of Refugees crisis on record. The population of forcibly displaced people in 2014 was 51 million. We are familiar with images of people living in refugee camps, in tents and temporary shelter, following natural disasters or upheaval resulting from human action.

Britain is often said to be the number one target for people desperately seeking safety. However, less than 1% of the 51 million uprooted people make their way in to Britain. At the time of writing, Pakistan, Iran, Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey are the world's top five hosts of refugees according to the UN. In the main, refugees take the shortest routes as they seek safety. Afghans cross to Pakistan; Somalis to Kenya; Zimbabweans to South Africa; Syrians to Lebanon. The population of Lebanon increased by 40% in 2014 as a result of the accommodation of refugees from Syria. The UK equivalent of this would increase the population here by around 30 million.

There are refugees, of course, who take longer and more difficult journeys, risking life and costing huge amounts of money. We know stories of people holding the undersides of planes to make their journey; many travel on crowded creaking old boats; others travel in air tight containers on trucks. Many thousands perish on the way and are lost in desert sands or desolate seas.

There are those, particularly women and children, who get trapped in the scandalous Human Trafficking trade. They get here and then disappear, or are enslaved, in the sex trade. According to a Home Office Report published In November 2014, there were said to be over 10,000 people living in conditions of slavery in Britain. Click here for details:

https://fullfact.org/factchecks/human_trafficking_10000_slaves_in_britain_today-29299

On 20 June 2014 World Refugee Day, it was reported, by the EU Border Agency, that around 50,000 people had attempted to cross the Mediterranean to Italy in 2014. They took perilous journeys on unseaworthy vessels. With the EU closing doors, there are no safe or legal routes for refugees and they are forced into the hands of unscrupulous smugglers and traffickers.

Three hundred people drowned in October 2013 off Lampedusa, Italy. Nearly 3,000 people drowned or went missing in the waters between North Africa and Italy in 2014. This is a colossal humanitarian catastrophe. The “Mare Nostrum” boat rescue saved over 400 people a day following its introduction after the Lampedusa tragedy. Half of those rescued were people from Syria and Eritrea, the rest were from Gambia, Ghana, Mali, Nigeria, the Palestinian territories or Somalia. One reason why people make this journey is that there is no safe and legal route into Europe.

In October 2014 the Italian government announced that it was withdrawing its boat rescue service. Britain supported this policy and said that the boat service created a "pull factor" for migrants to attempt dangerous sea crossings. A limited joint EU "border protection" service replaced the Mare Nostrum in November 2014. It did not include search and rescue. Human Rights organisations fear that more refugees and migrants will die in the waters. Around 1200 people drowned in the Mediterranean Sea in one week in April 2015. It is the duty of governments to help refugees in need of shelter and sanctuary.

On the day it was announced that the Mare Nostrum was to be withdrawn, with support from Britain, Sir Nicholas Winton was awarded the Order of the White Lion in Prague (28/10/14) for organising the rescue of 669 mostly Jewish refugee children from Nazi-occupied Czechoslovakia on the eve of WWII. He organised rescue trains.

Every day hundreds and thousands of people set out to cross whatever barrier is in the way to find safety and a better life. When people are deprived of their homes, their families, and familiar surroundings, they will be grateful for welcome, hospitality, safety and compassionate concern in their new environments.

There is a challenge here to consider working to make your city, town, village, church, school, college, university, club or place of work, a Sanctuary committed to building cultures of welcome and hospitality, especially for those in greatest need and danger. Primarily, this is a commitment to helping make the most vulnerable people among us safe from harm.

How we relate to each other, and in particular to people seeking sanctuary and safety will be central to humanity. How we treat those who are in greatest need for safety will be the measure by which we shall judge personal, national and international morality and spirituality.

"The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as a citizen among you; you shall love the stranger as yourself" [Leviticus 19: 34]

Group work:

Medicins Sans Frontieres/Doctors without borders [msf. org.uk] provides medical care without being restricted by borders.

The world's economy transcends borders.

We work and collaborate from "wall-less" workplaces through the internet.

What would be required to build a world without immigration borders? There is freedom of movement in the EU for citizens. Can we strive for a worldwide freedom of movement, a world with no borders?

Borders are recent inventions. Not long ago people of Europe were travelling all over the world without any thought of borders, and settled in America and Australia for example.

God knows no borders.

THE UN REFUGEE CONVENTION

The UN Refugee Convention was signed in 1951 in the context of millions of people made homeless by WW11 ended in 1945.

It is a universal instrument, signed by 147 countries, that protects refugees around the world. It does not distinguish between “asylum seekers” and “refugees”.

Throughout history human beings have needed to seek safety.

By the end of WW11 there were 12 million displaced people.

The international community recognised the need to protect refugees.

The 1951 Convention applied only to Europe.

In 1967 it was extended to apply globally.

The Refugee Convention tells us:

- Who is a Refugee
- That Refugees should not be returned to face persecution
- That Refugees should be protected without discrimination
- That international co-operation is required through UNHCR to protect Refugees

The UN Refugee Convention drafted over 60 years ago is not a perfect instrument. It does not, for example, provide adequate protection for people:

- Fleeing desperate poverty
- Fleeing en masse to escape genocide
- Women fleeing domestic violence
- Trafficked women, children men
- Seeking refuge following destruction of their homes due to climate change

No one should be forced to flee their homes. But when they do, people must be able to obtain safety and security. All countries should honour this commitment.

The Refugee Convention has saved millions of lives.

SECTION ONE

GOD TAKES SANCTUARY AMONG US

Bible passages to read for this section :

Exodus 25:8; Psalm 139: 8-10; John 1:14

God is with us and takes sanctuary among us.

God is not without witness anywhere in the world.

This is affirmed by the major world faiths.

The Bible places God at the centre of all creation [Genesis 1]. The existence of God is taken for granted. The question that the Bible wrestles with, and illuminates is, how is God with us [Sobrino, 2004]?

God is revealed in the Bible as a companion, accompanying people in all their journeys, and present with them in all contexts [Psalm 139:8-10]. It is in their journeying that people encounter God, and particularly in the context of hospitality to “the stranger”. For example, in the story of Abraham and Sarah sharing a meal with three travelling strangers, they find they are entertaining angels [Genesis 18].

The Bible discloses God as a Migrant God [Song, 1982], and a God of a migrant, travelling, people.

- The first instruction of God is for people to “go and fill the earth”
- God instructs Abraham and Sarah to go out on a journey
- Joseph’s brothers go to Egypt because there was “corn in Egypt”
- God calls Moses to lead people out of bondage in Egypt and to embark on a new journey
- God chooses to dwell with the people, to take sanctuary among them [Numbers 10: 33-34]
- A simple Ark is built for the travelling, dynamic God
- Many of the key biblical texts are reflections of a travelling people
- Jeremiah instructs the exiled community to seek the welfare of the City where they find themselves “for in its welfare you will find your welfare” [Jeremiah 29:7]

This is the astonishing reflection in the Bible. Then this Migrant God takes another journey, a self emptying journey, to be revealed in human form [Philippians 2:7], incarnate in Christ. This is the heart of the good news declared in the Bible. God is revealed in Christ, as God who comes to us, and is with us in the journey of life.

And, the face of Christ is also seen in those considered to “the least important” [Matthew 25: 40]

In John 1:14 the nativity and the good news disclosed in Jesus is summarised:

“And the Word became flesh...and dwelt among us”.

The Greek word translated as “dwelt” comes from a root verb and its corresponding noun meaning “tent”, a word used also for the “Tabernacle” where the Ark of the Covenant was housed. It is a

word used by Peter on the Mount of Transfiguration when he says “I will make three dwellings here” [Matthew 17:4 and see also, for example, Hebrews 8:5; 9:1, 21; 11:9]

The “Tabernacle” was the portable sanctuary constructed at Sinai and primarily associated with the wanderings of the Hebrew people in the wilderness. It was the sacred space where God dwelt among people: “Make me a sanctuary, so that I may dwell among you” says God [Exodus 25:8].

The first one for whom human beings are required to provide sanctuary is God!

This sanctuary for God was not a house, not a mansion, not even a stable, or anything solid and permanent. It was mobile, and represented the mobility of the travelling God, accompanying a travelling people in all their journeying.

Group work:

Get people into small groups.

Ask them to look at different references to ark, tent and dwelling in the Bible [eg Exodus 25: 8; Numbers 10:33-34; Matthew 17:1-5; John 1:14; Hebrews 8:5; 9:1,21: 11:9]

What do they learn here about meaning of ark, tent, dwelling?

What does it mean to give Sanctuary to God?

Read John 1:14

The word translated “dwell” is rooted in the noun translated as “tent” above. The sentence here literally means that God has pitched a tent among us, to live among us.

Read John 2:13-22.

In what sense is our own body the Temple of God?

What does it mean to say that God is our refuge/sanctuary, or to pray “be thou my soul’s shelter, be thou my strong tower”?

Read Psalm 18:2; 27: 5; 46:1-3; 71:3; Deuteronomy 33: 27; Isaiah 25:4; Jeremiah 16:19

How do we take sanctuary and shelter in God? What does it mean to “abide” in Christ? [**John 15**]

The nativity stories reveal God taking sanctuary among people with the vulnerability and dependency of a child.

The first requirement, for the birth of Christ, is a sanctuary...a little room [Song, 1982], challenging the idea that there was “no room” [Luke 2:7]. See Appendix 1.

Not long after his birth Mary and Joseph flee to Egypt as refugees for sanctuary [Matthew 2:13-15].

Group work:

Read Matthew 2:13-15, and Reflect [for individual or group work]

How would this family fare at a Port of entry into the UK today?

What story would Mary and Joseph tell when asked on what ground they are seeking sanctuary in Britain?

Would officials believe Mary and Joseph's story about their child, and the dangers they face?

Invite individuals and groups to write a short story outlining the situation faced by the Holy Family fleeing to Egypt for sanctuary.

With stories like these at the heart of Biblical witness some important questions are raised.

What can be done to make room [Luke 2:7] for those who are seeking sanctuary among us here?

How can you help all people facing similar situations to be welcome, have hospitality, be safe and have sanctuary in your community or nation today?

The stories surrounding Jesus and the early church, in Luke and Acts, continue the theme of journey, with a key story being the encounter with the risen Christ who meets and walks with his disciples as a "stranger" on the road to Emmaus, and how he was known "in the breaking of the bread" [Luke 24: 13-35]. Jesus is often described as an unrecognised stranger [John 1:10-11; 6:20; 8:14,25; 21:12; Luke 24:13-35]

In this section we have reminded ourselves that in Hebrew and Christian spirituality, hospitality to the stranger is connected to encounter with God [Genesis 18; Luke 24:13-35; Hebrews 13:2]

SECTION TWO

HOSPITALITY TO THE STRANGER

Bible passages to read for this section:

Genesis 18: 1-8; Psalm 23; Isaiah 58:6-9; Luke 4: 18-19; Luke 10:25-37; Luke 14:15-23; John 2:1-10; John 6:1-13; Acts 2:43-46; Hebrews 13:2; 1 Peter 2:9-10

A prayer of reflection

Brigit, the 5th Century Irish Saint was known for her hospitality. The words following are attributed to her:

I should like a great lake of finest ale, for the King of Kings;
I should like a table of the choicest food, for the family of heaven.
Let the table be made from the fruits of faith, and the food be forgiving love.
I should welcome the poor to my feast, for they are God's children.
I should welcome the sick to my feast, for they are God's joy.
Let the poor sit with Jesus at the highest place, and the sick dance with the angels.
God bless the poor, God bless the sick, and God bless our human race.
God bless our food, God bless our drink, all homes, O God, embrace.

Group work:

Read Genesis 18:1-8, and Luke 24:13-35

Look at Rublev's portrayal of the Holy Trinity

Images of Rublev's Icon available here:

<https://www.google.com/search?q=rublev%27s+icon&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&aq=t&rls=org.mozilla:en-GB:official&client=firefox-a&channel=np&source=hp>

Reflect on the centrality of hospitality in daily life.

Hebrews 13:2 "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it"

When has this been your experience?

In pairs or small groups [maximum four per group] talk about the time when you were hospitable to a stranger, or when a stranger gave you hospitality, and were in the company of Angels "without knowing it".

The Christian Faith is rooted in the practice of hospitality with a Table as a central image [Pohl, 1999]. The Table, Holy Communion, and the food shared here is a foretaste of the Heavenly Banquet that God prepares for all people. God is the Host at the Heavenly Banquet where all are welcome, all have a seat, no one is excluded, and each guest is personally served, and treated equally with respect and dignity. We are called to practice such hospitality on earth, modeling hospitality in heaven.

The realm, and reign and Kingdom of God, is revealed as a feast where all are welcome. Hospitality is the key to interpret this. It is also a good point for entry into dialogue with people of different faiths and beliefs, for hospitality is valued in all cultures. Hospitality reveals the heart of God. Hospitality is the frame of reference for interpreting the ministry of Christ. Jesus said to his followers, “whenever you meet in my name have some food and remember me”.

Holy Communion at its best reveals the new world we are called to build. God’s people are called to reflect God’s grace and generosity, to adopt an attitude of hospitality and spread the table, and symbolize the feast of God. Hospitality is the basis for building human community. The very meaning of compassion is to share bread with others.

Jesus used the story of the Good Samaritan to teach this. In this story it is a stranger who shows the hospitality that reflects true faith with Jesus’ instruction to “Go and do likewise” [Luke 10: 37].

What it means to “Love your neighbor as yourself” is best seen in the offering of hospitality in the story of the Good Samaritan.

Jesus insists in his teaching to serve those in the greatest need. He said that’s where his followers will see his face and serve him:

“In as much as you did it to the least of these you did it to me” [Matthew 25: 40]

The many meals Jesus shared express hospitality, especially to those considered to be the least important. His followers are called to practice hospitality.

We give leadership when we, individually and communally, reflect the spirit of a host who like Jesus provides service and hospitality.

Group work:

For reflection individually or with a group:

Make a list of all the meals Jesus shared with disciples and others, from all four gospels.

Here is a sample list for example from John;

Wedding Feast in Cana [John 2], Feeding 5000 [John 6], a meal with a family [John 12], the Last Supper [John 13], a Beach Breakfast [John 21].

Then make a list of:

1. Any common factors
2. The various locations
3. The variety of people participating
4. The various people who contributed food
5. The hosting qualities Jesus showed and required

Then reflect:

1. Are all these meals sacramental?
2. What insight do you bring from these meals to your understanding of the Last Supper/the Lord's Table/the Eucharist?
3. What distinctive insights do you take from these meals to all your meals?
4. What do they teach us about hospitality?

Welcome the stranger: A Biblical perspective

In our days of instructions to be wary of strangers it is important to be clear about what is meant in the instruction to "welcome the stranger" here.

Read Chapter 13 Welcome the Stranger, in Brueggemann, W. [1991] Interpretation and Obedience: From Faithful Reading to Faithful Living. Fortress Press, Minneapolis [pages 290-310]

Brueggemann offers the following reflections:

In a world of hostility there is a counter-cultural gospel summons to practice hospitality.

The ways communities are structured create insiders and outsiders, those who are like us and those who are different from us, the included and the excluded.

The insiders have life and space to be, and are human. The outsiders have no access to life or space to be, and can be seen as less than human.

Some Biblical scholars connect the sociological term "*habiru*" with the Biblical term "Hebrew", and see it as an alternative rendering of Hebrew.

The term “Hebrew” has its root in the verb “*abar*” meaning “to cross over”. The Hebrew thus refers to the one who is dis-placed/uprooted and who crosses over boundaries in the search for survival and life.

Brueggemann concludes that the people who finally become the “people of God” in the Hebrew Scriptures are among those whom the empire, for example Egypt, declared “strangers”, “outsiders”, “a threat”.

One of the clearest ways to distinguish between the insider and the outsider is to consider issues around eating and hospitality.

For example in Genesis 43: 32, in the Joseph narrative, we read:

“They served him by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves, because the Egyptians could not eat with the Hebrews, for that is an abomination to the Egyptians”.

The Biblical witness reflects that the “stranger” is the “outsider” who may defile the “insider” if they were to eat together. But the “stranger” crosses boundaries in the search for space, security and life.

Group Work

For discussion:

What does this observation say about the ritual power of food, the simple act of eating, and table manners? Where is the unease in this observation? Does the word “abomination” introduce here the idea of purity laws around food? Is there ritually “clean” or “unclean” food?

Read Mark 7 and Acts 10: 1-16 for further reflection.

Which of our practices, including how we create “our” community/congregation, create “insiders” and “outsiders”?

Are there people you are uncomfortable eating with?

What makes some people feel uncomfortable about sharing in Holy Communion?

What kind of hospitality can we provide to build truly inclusive a community/congregation?

Jesus cuts through boundaries and separation between who or what is considered to be clean or unclean. Perhaps Jesus’ most subversive activity, for which he was criticized, was to eat with those considered to be the outsiders or social outcasts of his day. He expressed his solidarity with the most marginalized people around him by sharing food with them, and eating with them. He connected with people by sharing food with them.

Jesus left an example for his followers. He kept an open table. Our lifestyle should reflect hospitality and solidarity, not hostility and segregation. Sharing food and hospitality with the most marginalized and excluded people is an act of holiness. Hospitality does not defile you, it makes you whole.

The followers of Jesus have seen in him the Good Shepherd [John 10: 11-18]. His ministry prioritized those who were considered to “the least important” [Matthew 25: 40], and excluded from belonging. He included by eating with them. He opened his ministry by announcing and pointing to a new community, the Kingdom of God, where the excluded are included [Luke 4: 18-27], and where all are treated to hospitality of the highest order [John 2:1-11].

Communities continue to create outsiders, those who are dis-placed, the “strangers”.

Jesus said that his followers will see and serve him in those considered to “the least important:

“Come you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundations of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me”
[Matthew 25: 34-36]

One of the best loved New Testament stories is of encountering the risen Christ in the stranger over a meal, and how he was “made known to them in the breaking of the bread” [Luke 24: 13-35]. We meet God when we break bread with others.

This is beautiful gospel wisdom. Christian Discipleship is about being on the way, following Christ, and encountering Christ in the stranger. The followers of Jesus have no option but to welcome the stranger, and to share good hospitality.

Hospitality: entry point for interfaith dialogue

Hospitality is a practice valued and understood in all cultures and faith traditions.

All major world faiths teach the practice of the so called Golden Rule:

Treat others as you want them to treat you.

Below are short readings and reflections from different faiths [some of these were shared by adherents of these faiths at a City of Sanctuary meeting 10/12/2007, Sheffield]:

Bahai:

“Be kind to strangers, help to make them feel at home” [Abdu’l Baha]

Follow this up here:

http://www.rt66.com/~kijherman/5To_Live_The_Life.htm

Buddhist:

“Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening, if when I have done so, there should, in my Pure Land, be any discrimination of regard or privilege between humans and devas or between different individuals on such grounds as colour, relative beauty or other criteria, save the harmless kind of discrimination that is necessary for naming and keeping count of things” [Dharmakara’s fourth vow, from the Larger Pureland Sutra]

Follow this up here:

<http://buddhaspace.blogspot.co.uk/2012/07/buddhism-by-numbers-6-kinds-of.html>

Christian:

“In as much as you did it to the least important you did it to me” [Jesus Christ, Matthew 25: 40]. Each Church displays the sign of the Cross, a reminder that here central place is given to the news that God is disclosed in one who is rejected or excluded.

Hinduism:

God resides in all human beings. To welcome a guest therefore is to also welcome God. All guests are to be welcomed with the same respect that you would offer God.

Follow this up here:

<http://www.lassiwithlavina.com/faith/hindu-hospitality-the-gods-amongst-us/html>

Islam:

“Do good to parents, kinsfolk, orphans, those in need, neighbours who are near, neighbours who are strangers, the companion by your side, the wayfarer you meet” [Quran Surah 4 verse 36]

Follow this up here:

<http://www.onislam.net/english/reading-islam/understanding-islam/ethics-and-values/460191-hospitality-in-islam-the-joy-of-honoring-others.html?Values=>

Jewish:

“You shall also love the stranger” [Deuteronomy 10: 19]. No other command is repeated more than this one.

Sikhism:

Every Sikh Gurdwara [temple] displays the Nishan Sahib, a visible sign signifying a place of worship and refuge where all are welcome for worship and offered welcome and hospitality without discrimination. Each Gurdwara practices the Langar, an open kitchen and meal.

Group work:

Read Matthew 25:31-46

Read the story from the Sikh faith below

These two readings provide material for fruitful dialogue between Christians and Sikhs.

The story is told that at a time of Sikh-Muslim conflict, Bhai Gunnaya Ji, a disciple of Guru Gobind Singh Ji was on the battle field, serving water to all who needed it, Sikhs and Muslims.

Many Sikhs complained to Guru Gobind Singh Ji about this.

“Your disciple Gunnaya Ji is serving water to the enemies and reviving them”, they said.

The Guru summoned Bhai Gunnaya Ji and asked him, “Why are you giving water to the enemies?”

Bhai Gunnaya Ji replied, “I have not given water to any enemy. Apart from your image I see no one. When you ask me for water, I serve it”.

The Guru was so impressed with his disciple that he embraced him, patted him on the back, and said, “You are blessed, and blessed is your service. Here, take this ointment and bandage. As you serve water, also apply this balm and bandage on those who are injured.”

The Guru also gave him a Towel, and said, “With this Towel, also wipe the face of the wounded...You have honoured me with your Roopa Seva [Image Service}.

In this section we have reminded ourselves that hospitality reveals the heart of God, is the framework for the ministry of Christ, and therefore at the core of what it is to be Church.

SECTION THREE

WELCOME THE STRANGER: GIFT AND REDEMPTION

Bible passages to read for this section:

Isaiah 53; Luke 24:13-35

The gifts and enrichment that come when the stranger is welcomed

Group Discussion:

There is a promise in scripture that it is through those of a different language that God will speak [Isaiah 28:9-11]

What is your experience of this?

Contact a Refugee organisation to invite a speaker from another country to come and share their story with you/your group.

What is God calling us to through the experiences and voices of those who speak a different language to us?

The “stranger” joining a new community brings new insights, not least what it is to be excluded and hurt, into the public speech of a community. This includes:

- The wisdom of listening, hearing and responding [Exodus 2: 23-25; 3: 8 where we read of God who “heard” and “took notice” of the hurt of the Hebrews in Egypt, and came “to deliver them”]
- The experience and wisdom of embracing and including new comers with new status. The “stranger” can reveal the face of Christ [Matthew 25: 35-40]. This can develop into the understanding that “once you were no people but now you are God’s people; once you received no mercy, but now you have received mercy” [1 Peter 2: 9-10]

Biblical witness insists that the formerly excluded people are incorporated into a new community, no longer strangers but pilgrims together, with hopes and possibilities that transcend human barriers:

- They bring their dream of a new world, a new covenant [Jeremiah 31: 31-34], a new City for “here we have no abiding City, but we are looking for a City that is to come” [Hebrews 13:14]
- They hold up the challenge to live by a new ethic. Most specifically “you shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” [Deuteronomy 10: 19]. No Biblical commandment is more frequently repeated
- Their prophets preach this call to compassion and inclusiveness, and criticism of injustice [Isaiah 58:6-9; Micah 6:8]
- They continue in their prayers to make audible the cries and protests of the people [Psalms]
- They can reveal to us the face of Christ as we talk, listen, and share bread together [Luke 24:13-35]

In Ezekiel 34 there is a stinging criticism of the ruling authorities or Shepherds who exploit people, and show no compassion. There is anticipation of a new order where God is the Shepherd:

“I myself will be the Shepherd...I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, but the fat and the strong I will destroy, I will feed them with justice” [Ezekiel 34:15-16].

Group work:

Who is the “stranger” in your context?

How are you, your community and your nation blessed and enriched by the “stranger”?

Find out about people who came to UK as refugees, and who made outstanding contributions here to enrich us all. Look here for examples:

<http://www.unhcr.org.uk/news-and-views/news-list/news-detail/article/london-celebrates-the-outstanding-contributions-of-extraordinary-refugee-women.html>

Redemptive gift in the suffering of the stranger

Most refugees and people seeking sanctuary come from situations of pain and suffering. We cannot ignore this pain and suffering. Many of those who suffer thus identify with, and find meaning in the experience of the rejection, suffering and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The Bible reflects the stories and experiences of a travelling people, undertaking difficult journeys. Their hopes lie in a bruised Messiah.

In Isaiah 53 there is a humbling acknowledgement of the “suffering servant” who is:

- Afflicted and acquainted with suffering
- Considered to be of no account
- Taken away by a perversion of justice

But it is the suffering and “stripes” and “bruises” of the suffering servant by which “we are healed”.

In the New Testament Jesus is seen to embody the suffering servant. From his childhood to his crucifixion, Jesus Christ was familiar with the experience of vulnerability, rejection, persecution and suffering. In many ways he was a stranger in his own community. Even his own disciples did not always understand or recognize him. He was arrested though he had committed no crime. There were those who “stood up and gave false testimony against him” [Mark 14:57]. He was held captive. He was tortured. He was crucified outside the City gates, the ultimate acknowledgement that human community is defined by who is “in” and who is an “outsider”. Jesus was betrayed, denied and abandoned by his best friends. This hurt him the most. He was nailed and crucified.

The earliest disciples and followers of Christ saw him as the “suffering servant” who bore the weight and agony of human sin as he hung on a cross.

The insight and truth proclaimed in this Biblical testimony is that salvation and liberation comes through suffering that is taken on and redeemed [Luke 24:26]. The crucifixion of Christ declares that God is with us in the human agonies and tragedies, and gives us hope in our most awful experiences. The crucifixion of Christ declares the depth of God’s presence and love, reminds us there is nothing worthwhile without cost, and insists on maintaining hope. The resurrection declares that there is never a dead end. There is the reality of hurt, and there is always hope. In the words of Romans 5:20, “where sin increased, grace abounded all the more”.

The gospel does not go from crucifixion to crucifixion. It goes from crucifixion to resurrection.

We bear witness to this truth when we see, acknowledge, feel, take on, challenge, seek to eradicate and redeem suffering and injustice. We cannot live with the gospel if we allow people to go from torture to torture, homelessness to homelessness, persecution to imprisonment.

We are called to practice the gospel by listening to, paying attention to, entering and identifying with the stories of pain and suffering that refugees and those seeking sanctuary, bear and tell. The weight of the sin of the world which is exposed when self interest makes us indifferent to the security of others.

In working with those who are hurting through the violence of war, famine, poverty and persecution, we together bear the weight of sin; we together struggle together for justice, and seek the freedom of all. Thus we share in God's work of grace and redemption, and find hope and meaning in "the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world" [John 1:29].

Refugees and those seeking sanctuary among us are messengers and witnesses of God. Cyrus the Persian, someone outside the Covenant Community, was an instrument of Gods liberation [Isaiah 44: 28-45:1]. There is a promise in Scripture, that it is through those of a different language that God shall speak [Isaiah 28: 9-11].

In this section we have reminded ourselves that far from being a drain on our resources, those who come to live among us enrich us, they are messengers of God, and reveal to us the weight of the sin of the world.

SECTION FOUR

CITY OF SANCTUARY: CULTURES OF WELCOME AND HOSPITALITY

Bible passages to read for this section:

Leviticus 19:34; Numbers 35:6-15; Deuteronomy 4:41-43; Joshua 20:1-9; Matthew 35:31-46

A simple exercise that can be used to introduce the theme of sanctuary for groups/congregations [two/three minutes:

Invite your congregation/group/audience to sit comfortably closer together.

Invite them to hold the hand of the person/s next to them, and to raise their hands as they are able to.

Ask them to describe the shape thus formed.

They may say: Arch, Roof, Crown etc.

The point to make is that the shape is like a roof or a simple shelter/house. It will also be like the nativity crib.

Sanctuary is about finding shelter in each other, and giving shelter to others.

As it says in a Celtic Irish Proverb:

Ar scath a cheile a mhaireas na daoine [It is in the shelter of each other that the people live]

If your congregation/group/audience is uncomfortable about holding hands, try and show a copy of the logo of City of Sanctuary. It is available here:

<http://www.cityofsanctuary.org/>

You can explain that the logo celebrates human relationships, the value of companionship and the real sanctuary is the shelter and friendship people offer/give each other.

Alternatively/additionally, you can show a picture of the Sanctuary Knocker of Durham Cathedral, and briefly talk about it. You can see the Durham Sanctuary Knocker here:

<https://www.durhamworldheritagesite.com/architecture/cathedral/intro/sanctuary-knocker>

The idea of Sanctuary and hospitality is valued in all faiths and cultures. Reconciliation and community cohesion is incomplete without the integration of all people, especially those whose lives are most in danger [including Children, Women, older people, victims of human trafficking, refugees and asylum seekers].

People are familiar with the idea of providing safety and sanctuary for suffering Donkeys, Birds, Dogs, Cats and other creatures which is good and worthwhile.

But what about sanctuary for bruised human beings?

The Bible contains the command to “love your neighbour, as yourself”.

Yet this commandment, it has been pointed out [Sacks, 2002], is stated only once in the whole of Hebrew Scriptures [Leviticus 19:18]. No less than 37 times the Hebrew Scriptures challenge people to “love the stranger”. There is no other command repeated so often.

A neighbour is a bit like ourselves. As noted above, a stranger is someone very different.

The Bible challenges us to love the stranger, to ensure they no longer feel like a stranger. Sacks [2002] reminds us that according to the Bible we encounter God in the face of the stranger.

Cities of refuge

The concept of Sanctuary is thousands of years old and rooted in the Bible. It enshrines Hebrew wisdom emerging from the days of “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth”. This is the code that established what is now termed the rule of “proportionality” in the Just War theory.

The Hebrews enshrined Sanctuary into the legal codes of their new society when six Cities of Refuge were established according to the legislation set out in the Book of Numbers 35:6-34 [also Joshua 20:1-9; Deuteronomy 4:41-43].

These Cities were to give refuge, or sanctuary to anyone, including a foreigner, who was accused of manslaughter, to prevent the automatic use of revenge as a rough, and unfair route to justice, “until there is a trial before the congregation” [Numbers 35:12].

Cities of Refuge were about giving protection to people whose lives were in danger. The purpose of Cities of refuge in the Hebrew tradition was the prevention of revenge, not the avoidance of law.

The Rabbinic teaching is that roads leading to these Cities were to be kept in good repair, with clear finger posts, so that a refugee may be free to escape the hands of the avenger of blood and find safety.

City of Sanctuary is a contemporary expression of the City of Refuge idea. It progresses the idea to providing safety and hospitality to vulnerable people, for example - Asylum Seekers

who are not criminals, children whose lives are in danger, victims of domestic abuse and older people who suffer indignity.

Sanctuary and Churches

As early as 600 AD a general right to give Sanctuary belonged to every church in England. Some Cities were granted the status Sanctuary by Royal Charter.

Sanctuary was available in Churches including Battle, Beverley, Colchester, Durham, Hexham, Norwich, Ripon, Southampton, Wells, Winchester, Westminster and York. They offered protection to debtors and criminals. Sanctuary was confined to the designated Church, the limits being extended to the precincts, and in some cases to an even larger area.

For example, at Beverley, Hexham and Ripon, the boundaries of sanctuary covered the area within a radius of a mile from the church. The boundaries were marked by “sanctuary crosses”, some of which still remain.

In Beverley Minster, sanctuary was given for a month after which the person had to leave. They could return for another month if their life was still in danger, but had to leave after 30 days. If the person returned a third time, sanctuary was given permanently.

Durham Cathedral has a Sanctuary Knocker. Those seeking sanctuary held and rattled the Sanctuary Knocker to gain entrance. The Cathedral still has its Sanctuary Knocker on the door.

By the time of the Reformation the concept of sanctuary was being discredited.

In the reign of Henry VIII the number of Sanctuaries was reduced to seven. In 1623 the general right to sanctuary was abolished by statute law.

The concept of sanctuary began to re-emerge in the 20th Century, first in El Salvador, as a form of protection from the activities of “death squads”. People were given sanctuary in Churches. From there it was taken up in the USA when churches sheltered people from Guatemala and El Salvador who had been refused room and refuge.

There have been sanctuaries in Churches in Germany, Switzerland, Denmark and Sweden as well as in Britain.

Sanctuary and hospitality is at the heart of ancient Irish and Celtic spirituality. In Nendrum, for example, on the shores of Strangford Lough are the ruins of a 5th Century Monastery established by St Caolan. Within the walls of the Monastery there is clearly a space where sanctuary was provided for people who were fleeing violence, and whose lives were in danger. In Glendalough Monastery, County Wicklow, you can still see and touch the Sanctuary Cross. The Celtic term *An Tearmann* refers to an area around Churches and Monasteries that was to be free of political, religious and feudal conflict, and people would have sanctuary and be safe. Ireland still has villages called An Tearmann.

There is an old reflection of hospitality from the Island of Ireland in these words:

“We saw a stranger yesterday,
We put food in the eating place,
Drink in the drinking place,
Music in the listening place,
And with the sacred Name of the triune God,
He blessed us and our house,
Our cattle and our dear ones,
As the Lark says in her song,
Often, often, often goes the Christ,
In the stranger’s guise.”

City of Sanctuary today

City of Sanctuary is a growing movement in Britain and Ireland and is focussed on building cultures of welcome and hospitality, particularly, but not exclusively for people seeking sanctuary among us.

It is a local grass roots, community-led movement, with the aim of creating networks of places and people throughout Britain and Ireland, which for example do their best to include asylum seekers and refugees, and all vulnerable people, in the lives of their communities.

City of Sanctuary was founded in Sheffield in 2005. Sheffield was declared a City of Sanctuary in 2007. There are now over 30 Cities and Towns in Britain and Ireland with a City of Sanctuary vision and working group. The purpose is to make the City/Town a place that takes pride in the welcome and hospitality it offers to all people in need of safety, enabling all residents to contribute positively and fully to the life of local communities.

A City of Sanctuary is not a place where all is well, but a place where many organisations and individuals work within a shared vision of a City that is a place of welcome, hospitality and safety for all people, especially those whose lives are in danger, a City they can be proud to live in. It is a place where:

- The skills and cultures of people seeking sanctuary are valued, and actively included in local communities and able to contribute positively to the life of the City
- Youth and Community Groups, Worship Centres, Local Government, media, Businesses, Schools, Colleges, Universities and Health Centres have a shared commitment to offering sanctuary, so that it is seen as part of the city’s identity by local people
- People seeking sanctuary can easily build relationships with local people as neighbours, friends and colleagues

By creating such a vision, and work, people can demonstrate the desire build a more just and humane approach to people seeking sanctuary among us.

To work towards City of Sanctuary is to build a shared vision, and provide a positive common goal and aspiration for a variety of organisations, groups and individuals. Many people are familiar with the “Fair Trade City” recognition granted when a number of organisations agree to buy, sell or serve Fair Trade goods. Similarly, City of Sanctuary embodies clear goals and is recognised when a significant number of local organisations sign up to the initiative, agree to provide welcome,

hospitality and safety, and make a commitment to broaden support for the idea in order to gradually influence the culture of the city as a whole. To achieve recognition as a City of Sanctuary is only a marker on an ongoing journey. It is to arrive at a point where large numbers of organisations and individuals are committed to continue to work towards a shared vision of a city/town/place where all are welcome, valued, belong equally, have sanctuary and are safe.

City of sanctuary builds on the history and spirituality of sanctuary. In the contemporary expression of cities of refuge, the City of Sanctuary moves the idea towards a vision where local communities and organisations work together to challenge sectarianism, racism, hatred and bigotry and to build cultures of welcome, hospitality and safety for all residents. No one is safe until we are all safe. It recognises that the work of reconciliation and peace is not complete without the integration of all residents of the City. It builds a positive image of the City. The vision can be applied in many different contexts and not just confined to Cities. See the City of Sanctuary website for ideas.

City of Sanctuary is a contemporary expression of an ancient tradition. As in the past, it is about respectful manners, behaving well towards others with welcome and hospitality, and being safe to be with. Good manners precede law. It is only when manners fail that we have to create laws to provide protection. The original cities of refuge were set up to encourage good manners while people waited for the processes of law.

People from these Islands have benefitted from the hospitality of other nations and people when we have travelled abroad, and continue to do so.

There is a human, legal, moral and spiritual obligation on us all to provide safety and sanctuary to each other, and especially to those whose lives are in danger. This is important and urgent in our times of open hostility and hatred particularly towards people from other countries seeking security and sanctuary among us.

Group work:

What does your congregation do to end hatred and hostility, and to build harmonious and hospitable communities where all are welcome, valued, belong equally, have sanctuary, and are safe?

Consider working to make your city, town, village, church, school, university, club, place of work a Sanctuary committed to building cultures of welcome and hospitality, especially for those in greatest need and danger.

See City of Sanctuary website for ideas.

See guidance provided in Barnett, C., Bhogal, I. 2010 [2nd Edition]. Building A City Of Sanctuary: A Practical Handbook With Inspiring Examples. Plug and Tap, Ripon

Be a sanctuary to yourself, and to others

We can be strangers to ourselves.

Welcome the stranger you are to yourself. Do not “oppress” this stranger. This is the first step to welcoming the stranger.

Love your neighbour *as yourself* [Leviticus 19: 18].

Love the stranger *as yourself* [Leviticus 19:34].

Personal Reflection:

In what ways are you a stranger to yourself? Consider your own self as a stranger to your self. Familiarity can be alienating.

Imagine that you come to your self as a stranger [Luke 15: 17].

Where do you discern the hand of God or the face of Christ in this stranger?

How would you welcome your self?

What hospitality and safety can you offer yourself?

Make space for yourself, and allow space to others.

Be a safe person to yourself, and safe for others to be with.

Be a sanctuary to yourself, and a sanctuary to others.

Pay attention to your self and your body.

Your body is the Temple of God. It is sacred.

Below are some points for personal reflection and consideration. These were prepared by a member of the Belfast City of Sanctuary group.

A SANCTUARY TO YOURSELF	A SANCTUARY TO OTHERS
Allow yourself to BE Accepting self as is – a work in progress	Allow others to BE Allow others as they are – works in progress
Compassionate towards self	Compassionate towards others
Forgiving towards self	Forgiving towards others
Non-judgemental towards self	Non-judgemental towards others
Assumes self has done their best Attaches no blame to self	Assumes others have done their best Attaches no blame on others
Trusts in own capacity to recover, learn and grow	Trusts in others' capacity to recover, learn and grow
Patient, unhurried, calm	Patient, unhurried, calm
Reflective – pays attention to and listens to self	Active – pays attention to and listens for others
Puts self at centre of own life [opposite of selflessness]	Encourages others to identify and pay attention to own needs
Promotes and is protective of own wellbeing	Respectful of difference
Recognises that no-one else is responsible for own happiness	Impartial – holds no agenda
Restorative – makes time for respite, however briefly, in own sanctuary	Restorative – invites others to take respite, however briefly, in own sanctuary
Motivated by wanting to – not by obligation, guilt or avoidance of guilt	Motivated by wanting to – not by obligation, guilt or avoidance of guilt

What you can do. Positive action for groups and individuals:

Consider working to make your city, town, village, church, school, university, club, place of work a Sanctuary committed to building cultures of welcome and hospitality, especially for those in greatest need and danger.

Do all you can to end hatred and hostility, and to build harmonious and hospitable communities where all are welcome, valued, belong equally, have sanctuary, and are safe.

Do what you can. Look at the website of City of Sanctuary for ideas and consider the following:

- Get involved in a City of Sanctuary group near you. Be a signed up supporter. Get your Church/Group to be a signed up supporter
- Develop a welcoming, hospitable, inclusive environment in your Church/Group
- Remember and befriend homeless people, Asylum Seekers, Refugees, the travelling communities, and all those seeking sanctuary among us
- Invite people seeking sanctuary to your place of worship
- Invite refugees/people seeking sanctuary to come and speak to your group/congregation
- Never pass a Big Issue seller without acknowledging them even if you don't buy a copy
- Greet people with a smile
- Remember those living in segregated communities who desire integration, community and safety, and support organisations working for integration
- Open your homes to those "strangers" who are seeking sanctuary...invite someone around for a meal...go out of your way to welcome and include them in your worshipping community
- Work at making your worshipping community really inclusive, and at ease with diversity...you could also promote inclusive theology and biblical interpretation
- Be vigilant and passionate about listening to those who feel most neglected, excluded and in danger, and do all in your power to build safe, inclusive, sanctuary spaces...in your own home, in residential and care homes, in congregations, clubs and local communities
- Engage positively with Refugee Week
- Volunteer to work with one of the many organizations working to welcome and support people seeking sanctuary
- Read a book like Refugee Boy, or Two caravans [details below]
- Learn to greet people of another country in their own language
- List five prejudiced views you have heard about those seeking sanctuary in UK, and find the actual facts on the website of the Refugee Council here:
http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/policy_research/the_truth_about_asylum
- Be a safe person to be around in all company and contexts
- Commit yourself to any initiatives which are there to end hatred and hostility and to build cultures and communities in which all are welcome, valued, have hospitality and sanctuary, and, are safe

- Undertake the Sanctuary Way Walk in Ripon, if/as you are able [there are routes of 2, 3, 4 miles]. Google sanctuary way walk, ripon, for details
- In the work of sanctuary and hospitality you will find partners in all faiths, and also in people who profess no religious faith but care deeply about safety for all – work with them
- Care for humanity goes hand in hand with care for the environment. Without clean air and water all living forms will stop breathing
- And remember your body is the Temple of the Lord and sacred. Care for yourself too. Scriptural wisdom is serious when it states: Love your neighbour, as yourself; love the stranger as yourself
- Mind your language. Don't use negative terms to refer to refugees or those seeking sanctuary

In this section we have reminded ourselves that sanctuary is not a modern or novel idea, but deeply rooted in our history and spirituality.

An Order of Service with ideas and suggestions for development of the themes of hospitality and sanctuary

See suggestions for Hymns at the end of this section

Greetings and Welcome and Call to Worship

Hymn

Psalm 139: 1-14

Prayer of Approach and Confession:

You may prepare your own, and here is a sample to consider:

Holy God, we bless you.
You create each one of us beautiful and blessed,
In your image and likeness.
You create us and stay with us.
You are our refuge,
You take sanctuary in us.
You call each one of us by name.
You know all our hopes and desires.
You know all our aches and pains.
You know the journeys we take.
Your presence surrounds us like a sanctuary.

We bless you
For you sent Jesus Christ
And in him you have shown the world new ways of living and loving.
We bless you
For you give us in your Spirit
Strength to live by each day.

Holy God, forgive us
For all the ways in which we and others assault and abuse your image in us, in others, and in all your creation around us.

Forgive us
That our living and loving
So often betrays the living and loving in Jesus that we profess.
Forgive us
For our failure to offer welcome and hospitality to the stranger

As we worship, say our prayers;
Read from scriptures and meditate on them;
As we sing our songs;
And renew our commitments to you again,
And resolve to live by the principle of welcome and hospitality;
Grant us the assurance again
That you forgive us.

Heal us and strengthen us
That we may worship you well,
And go from here to live, love and serve
To your praise and glory.

Hallowed be your name in our worship and witness.
Hallowed be your name in all you call us to be, to do, and to say.

In the Name of Christ. Amen.

Getting into the theme:

Flag up the theme and use a suitable activity already suggested in this resource. Here is one:

A simple exercise that can be used to introduce the theme of sanctuary [two minutes]

Invite your congregation/group/audience to sit comfortably closer together.

Invite them to hold the hand of the person/s next to them, and to raise their hands as they are able to.

Ask them to describe the shape thus formed.

They may say: Arch, Roof, Crown etc.

The point to make is that the shape is like a roof or a simple shelter/house. It will also be like the nativity crib.

Explain that Sanctuary is about finding shelter in each other, and giving shelter to others.

As it says in a Celtic Irish Proverb:

Is ar scath a cheile a mhaireann na daoine [It is in the shelter of each other that the people live]

If your congregation/group/audience is uncomfortable about holding hands, try and show a copy of the logo of City of Sanctuary. It is available here:

<http://www.cityofsanctuary.org/>

You can explain that the logo celebrates human relationships, the value of companionship and the real sanctuary is the shelter and friendship people offer/give each other.

Alternatively/additionally, you can show a picture of the Sanctuary Knecker of Durham

Cathedral, and briefly talk about it. You can see the Durham Sanctuary Knocker here:

<https://www.durhamworldheritagesite.com/architecture/cathedral/intro/sanctuary-knocker>

Hymn

Readings: Select from those suggested above, or other appropriate ones

Hymn

Sermon: Use material provided in this resource, and illustrative stories from your experience or from the City of Sanctuary website

Possible outline:

- Open with a positive story of welcome and hospitality
- Talk about the reality of hatred and hostility, and division in attitudes and communities.
- Use Biblical material to highlight what it is to be a stranger
- Use Biblical material to highlight experiences of encountering God and Christ in the stranger
- Use Biblical material to hold up Jesus' style of keeping an open, welcoming table
- Conclude with the challenge to practice welcome the stranger and practice hospitality

Click on the link below to read the message of His Holiness the Pope Francis for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2014.

http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/migration/documents/papa-francesco_20130805_world-migrants-day.html

Offertory/Collection

Prayers of Intercession: Write your own, or see samples below

Sanctuary Prayer

Let us Pray.

Let us pray to God for the Church of Christ throughout the world, and especially this Congregation with its diversity, and our neighbours of all denominations that the light of God will shine upon us, and that all will be given strength to bear witness to the light of God in our mission and ministry, worship and prayer.

God hears our prayers.

The Kingdom of God is within us.

Let us pray to God for all nations and all leaders that God will illuminate with light the pathways made of mercy, justice and humility for all to walk.

God hears our prayers.

The Kingdom of God is within us.

Let us pray to God for all who need help and support today, especially those we carry in our hearts for they are in our prayers that the light of God will shine on all who sit in darkness and bless them.

God hears our prayers.

The Kingdom of God is within us.

Let us pray to God for all who are far from home, prisoners, immigrants, exiles, refugees and all who seek sanctuary that God will be the shelter of their lives and souls, and help us to build communities of welcome and hospitality for all.

God hears our prayers.

The Kingdom of God is within us.

Let us pray to God for our selves, that we may be a sanctuary, that we may be given the grace to follow Christ as his Disciples, and practice his art of hospitality and welcome to the stranger.

God hears our prayers.

The Kingdom of God is within us.

Let us with thanks hold before God those who have died and whose memory is precious to us. Let your light perpetual shine on them Holy God. And grant to us light and encouragement from the vision, witness and example of all the Saints who have gone before us.

God hears our prayers.

The Kingdom of God is within us.

We offer our prayers in the Name of Christ, and sum them all up in the words of the Prayer Jesus taught:

Our Father...

At a service of Holy Communion/Eucharist/Mass, here is an alternative prayer which may be said as Bread is broken, and can be used at this point as intercessory prayer:

Holy God

As we break and hold this bread

We hold and offer to you

- The brokenness of those who live and struggle with hunger and disease
- The brokenness of those who are excluded or rejected from community
- The brokenness of communities and neighbourhoods
- The brokenness in relationships between nations
- The brokenness in household and personal relationships
- The brokenness in relationships between different faiths
- The brokenness in relationships between different Christian denominations
- The brokenness within congregations
- The brokenness we carry within our own bodies
- The brokenness we know when death tears away our loved ones

As we hold and offer you this broken bread,

And as we eat it,

Help us to keep trusting you are there in the midst of all our brokenness,

Doing your work of healing hurts.

And so strengthen us that we may give ourselves to share in your work.

Feed us now and evermore

And feed the world so that none may be hungry

And all may know welcome and hospitality.

In the name of Christ.

Amen

Hymn

Blessing

The sentences below can be used as a sending out and closing affirmation:

LITANY OF JUSTICE

Reader: Jesus said, "I was hungry and you gave me food". Made in the Image of God,

All: We see the face of Christ in all.

Reader: Jesus said, "I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink". Made in the Image of God,

All: We see the face of Christ in all.

Reader: Jesus said, "I was a stranger and you welcomed me". Made in the Image of God,

All: We see the face of Christ in all.

Reader: Jesus said, "I was naked and you gave me clothing". Made in the Image of God,

We see the face of Christ in all.

Reader: Jesus said, "I was sick and you took care of me". Made in the Image of God,

All: We see the face of Christ in all.

Reader: Jesus said, "I was in prison and you visited me". Made in the Image of God,

All: We see the face of Christ in all.

Reader: Jesus said, "In as much as you did to one of those considered to the least important, you did it to me". Made in the Image of God,

All: We see the face of Christ in all. We go from here to see and serve Christ in all.

Amen.

Hymns to consider:

Amen Siakudumisa

Be Thou my vision

Beauty for brokenness

Brother, Sister let me serve you

Come all you people, come and praise your maker

I the Lord of sea and sky

If you believe and I believe, and we together pray

Jesus Christ is waiting

Laudate Dominum

Longing for light, we wait in darkness

Lord of all hopefulness

Let us build a house where love can dwell

Sent by the Lord am I

The Church is like a Table

Travelling the road to freedom

We've no abiding City here

When Christ was lifted from the earth

FURTHER READING

Books:

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Darling, J., Barnett, C., Eldridge, S. 2010. City Of Sanctuary – A UK Initiative For Hospitality. *Forced Migration Review*. **February 2010** [Issue 34], pages 46-47

Goff, C. 2010. City Of Sanctuary: Preparing A Warm Reception. *New Start*. **May 2010**. [Issue 478], pages 18-23

Appendix 1

Make more room [The reflection below was first published in the Methodist Recorder, December 2013]

Mariana was sitting, hunched, on an old Milk Crate that was stood up on its side. It was freezing cold. She wore a Black Wollen Scarf over her head, a Black Coat and Trousers, and Red Socks and Sandals. She had a child aged no more than one wrapped up warm in a dark green Shawl in her lap. I had just arrived on the spot, a Bus Shelter. As I waited for a Bus I sat beside Mariana. She had caught my attention, pleading with me buy the magazine she was selling.

It has been my practice to always acknowledge and greet people like Mariana in the Street, and never to ignore them, even if I have no intention of buying from them. So we talked for a while.

Mariana told me her name [I am not using her real name here], and that she was of Roma background. At one point I asked her what makes her tolerate the severe cold weather, and frosty attitudes from many who walk past with most ignoring her completely.

“Make room, make more room for my babies” she repeated. By babies she meant her children, and she has four under the age of ten. She is doing what she can to make room and life better for her babies.

I did not ask Mariana what her age was, but she looked much older than her years. She could have been Grandma.

On the Bus I reflected on the many recent news items around prejudice and hatred towards people of Roma backgrounds in Cities like Belfast, Boston and Sheffield, and European Union rule changes from 1.1.2014 when restrictions on working rights will end. There will not be a mass migration of Bulgarians and Romanians coming to the UK in the New Year.

The EU Immigration and Employment Commissioner, Laiszlo Andor, has asked Britain to be less “hysterical” about immigration. Bulgarians and Romanians are more likely to go to Italy or Spain. When EU migrants come to the UK they come here to work. They are more likely to be in work than on benefits.

In our ageing population, with deepening Pension fund concerns, we need to welcome and embrace more migrant workers. It is too simplistic to blame our mounting economic debt and youth unemployment on immigration.

“Make more room” is the plea of Mariana and people all around the world prepared to put up with harsh realities and hostility in order to work for a better life. The voice of those who cry “there is no room” has to be challenged with attitudes and actions to “make more room”.

This is the beginning and challenge of the Gospel of Christ. The pregnant Mary and Joseph arrived in Bethlehem for registration according to the rules. Visualise a desperate family knocking on door after door asking for accommodation. Mary gave birth and sat with Joseph and her baby in a Cattle Shed because “there was no room for them in the Inn” [Luke 2:7]. A different Gospel meditation is that “he came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him” [John 1:11]. But the Inn Keeper was willing to make room, even if just a little room with the Cattle, for the desperate family.

The first requirement for the manifestation of God in Christ was to make room among people and within people. The mission of God begins with a plea for a little room. Jesus' ministry reflects the mission of God. He called people to openness, to be unbound, to open closed doors and hearts, and he kept an open Table for all.

The Gospel insight is that the mission of God is seen when more room is made for just one person, when one person is freed from loneliness, or homelessness, or malnutrition. Unprecedented global movements and trends in the economy and migration challenge the Churches to work ecumenically and internationally with all people to prioritise the call of God to make more room.

We can all share in this mission of God and conduct it in the Name of Christ. We can begin by taking simple steps to make more room in our hearts and minds, in our congregations, in our local communities for people like Mariana and her babies. By showing how to make more room, we can play our part in moving people away from hatred, hostility, exclusion and violence towards a new world where all are welcome, belong equally, have sanctuary and are safe.

Before I got off the Bus, I recalled again Mariana's face and demeanor. She reminded me of two important people in the Christmas story, namely Simeon and Anna [Luke 2:25-39]. The nativity focus is very much on a baby. We have the young refugee family of Mary, Joseph and Jesus. There are the visiting Kings from afar. Simeon and Anna place older people at the heart of Christmas too and accord them respect. They adored the baby. In our ageing population, make room for older people in your Christmas festivities.

Simeon is described as "righteous and devout", and I'm sure these words could apply to Anna too. Simeon held the Christ Child and prayed, "now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace" [Luke 2:29 King James Version].

Just as I write this the news has come through that Nelson Mandela has died. Mandela dreamed of "a society in which all South Africans, both black and white, will be able to walk tall, without any fear in their hearts, assured of their inalienable right to human dignity, a rainbow nation at peace with itself and the world". He has played his part in calling us to God's mission to make room for everyone. Like him, we can rise to this challenge and keep his dream alive too.