



Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador

The Anglican Church of Canada

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Bishop's Pastoral Letter on Refugees

(Where practical, to be read aloud on Sunday and distributed afterward as a printed copy.)

Dear Friends,

I write at this time to speak to you on the current refugee situation in the Middle East and Europe. I will not discuss the background of the current humanitarian crisis or reflect theologically upon our Christian response because the need is so pressing that I believe it calls for immediate action. I note that the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, and Pope Francis have both called for Christians to help as best they can and to receive refugees if possible. I take my inspiration, pastorally and theologically, from both leaders on this matter. Human need is human need. And the need is great today.

At a special gathering of the clergy of the Avalon Peninsula part of our Diocese held on September 17th a "Working Group" was set up to advise me as Bishop on the challenge before us and to investigate possible responses. I thank the members of that group for their fine work. They are: **the Rev. Mark Nichols, the Ven. Charlene Taylor, the Rev. Gail MacDonald, the Rev. Lynn Courage, and the Rev. Christopher Fowler.** The group consulted among themselves and with others, notably the Association for New Canadians (ANC). They have now presented me with a report and I will draw from it for this letter, quoting freely from their report as necessary.

Essentially, the Working Group has recommended that our Diocese not seek to become a Sponsorship Agreement Holder (SAH) but rather partner with the ANC to sponsor refugees. The ANC already holds SAH status and is willing to enter into a co-sponsorship arrangement with parishes and other diocesan groups. Working in partnership with the ANC will also give us access to the Blended Visa-Office Referred (BVOR) program, which is the fastest and easiest way to sponsor a refugee family. In light of the urgency of the current crisis, such a partnership will enable the Diocese to more effectively and efficiently respond to the events unfolding in our world today.

At this time, rather than directly sponsoring a family or families, the Working Group recommends that the role of the Diocese should be to facilitate, enable, and support parishes and diocesan groups to sponsor refugee families. This could be achieved through identifying, pooling and matching financial, material and human resources available throughout the Diocese and deploying those assets to where they are needed, so that we may be able to enable sponsorship in parishes and diocesan groups where such sponsorship may not otherwise have been possible.

In line with the recommendations of the Working Group I call upon all parishes to engage in a process of discernment with respect to what role each parish would be willing and able to play in refugee sponsorship and support. This discernment should consider the following questions:

1. Does the parish have, or would they be able to secure, the financial and human resources necessary, with assistance from the Diocese and the ANC, to sponsor a family?
(It should be further noted that sponsoring a refugee family of five would require funding in the amount of approximately \$20,000 and AT LEAST six dedicated individuals who would commit to physically assisting and caring for the family for at least one year. A place of residence for the family would also have to be secured.)
2. Does the parish, in partnership with another parish or diocesan group, with assistance from the Diocese and the ANC, have, or be able to secure, the financial and human resources necessary to sponsor a family?
3. Does the parish have, or be able to secure, financial and/or human resources in support and assistance to other parishes or diocesan groups sponsoring a refugee family?

The Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador is prepared to arrange information sessions between the ANC and any diocesan groups who want more information on sponsorship to aid in their discernment. As Bishop, I ask that every parish report back to me before the end of October on the results of this discernment. Once we have this information, the Working Group will then be able to identify, communicate and coordinate actionable steps that parishes and diocesan groups can take to respond to the humanitarian crisis either through “sponsorship” or “support of sponsorship”.

As a direct contribution from the Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador, I have directed that up to \$25,000 be made available immediately from a recent and unexpected gift to assist any parish or group of parishes that wish to bring a refugee family here. Those desiring to receive funding in this way are asked to contact me directly in writing indicating their intentions. The money that we are making available can be used by a single party or shared by a group of parishes.

It is my hope and prayer that we will embrace our first family in need before Christmas.

I end with prayer:

*God of compassion,
whose own son experienced life as a refugee,
we remember those fleeing from danger,
hungry and afraid, with nowhere to call home.
God, we ask for them warmth, security, food and peace.*

*God of hope,
we thank you for those who are working to bring relief and
comfort to those displaced,
showing glimpses of grace in the darkness of despair.
God, give them strength.*

*God of justice,
guide the nations and the leaders of the world towards peace,
stir hearts to be generous and compassionate.
God, help us to play our part in bringing about the change
that we want to see. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

With my every blessing,
+Geoff