

Day of Prayer for Migrants and Refugees

The 3rd of December is the date dedicated to celebrate the migrant in our parishes in the UK. Part of Pope Benedict XVI's message for the occasion of the World Day of Prayer for Migrants and Refugees is excerpted below:

"...Then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be my sons and daughters" (2 Cor 6:17-18). If we are aware of this, how can we fail to take charge of all those, particularly refugees and displaced

people, who are in conditions of difficulty or hardship?

How can we fail to meet the needs of those who are de facto the weakest and most defenceless,

marked by precariousness and insecurity, marginalized and often excluded by society? We should give our priority attention to them because, paraphrasing a well known Pauline text, "God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong, God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God" (1 Cor 1:27).

"...[M]ay the World Day for Migrants and Refugees... be for all an incentive to live brotherly love to the full without making any kind of distinction and without discrimination, in the conviction that any one

who needs us and whom we can help is our neighbour (cf. *Deus Caritas Est*, n. 15). May the teaching and example of St Paul, a great and humble Apostle and a migrant, an evangelizer of peoples and cultures, spur us to understand that the exercise of charity is the culmination and synthesis of the whole of Christian life.

"The commandment of love - as we well know - is nourished when disciples of Christ, united, share in the banquet of the



© Sarah Brooker

Godfrey Veerasmy, sj welcoming a refugee at JRS.

Eucharist which is, par excellence, the sacrament of brotherhood and love. And just as Jesus at the Last Supper combined the new commandment of fraternal love with the gift of the Eucharist, so his "friends", following in the footsteps of Christ who made himself a "servant" of humanity, and sustained by his Grace cannot but dedicate themselves to mutual service, taking charge of one another, complying with St Paul's recommendation: "bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ" (Gal 6:2). Only in this way does love increase among believers and for all people (cf. 1 Thes 3:12)...."

This occasion provides us with an opportunity to highlight the needs of refugees and migrants within our churches and to remember them prayerfully. Enclosed with this newsletter is the text of a speech

given by Bishop Patrick Lynch (the Catholic Bishop responsible for refugee issues in England and Wales, and auxiliary bishop in the Archdiocese of Southwark). In it he shares with us the pastoral and hospitality-based approach we are encouraged to adopt when engaging with refugees and migrants.

"the exercise of charity is the culmination and synthesis of the whole of Christian life."

We would encourage you all to use the occasion creatively in your faith communities – perhaps you could think of organising special prayers or an event around this time. Or why not pray especially for refugees at this time in your own private devotions? It would be an ideal way to bring encouragement to refugees in the UK. Many of those we work with tell us how meaningful it is for them to know that so many of our supporters take the time to consider their situation prayerfully as well as to support them financially through donations.

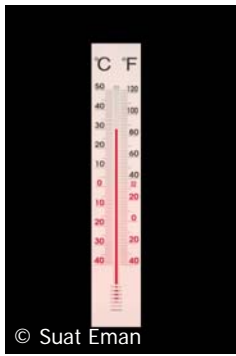
Please do not hesitate to get in touch with us if you would like copies of liturgy resources we have in the office. Please also let us know if you need any leaflets or information for distribution in your churches as well!

Everyone can do their bit !

In every corner of the UK there are thousands of people working incredibly hard to help some of the most vulnerable people in our society – those seeking sanctuary, who are fleeing persecution. From refugee support groups, to Asylum Welcome groups, to churches, mosques and community groups, many give their time to help. But *CITIZENS for Sanctuary* want to see this effort spread into our mainstream culture, because surely there are little ways in which everyone can do their bit to Save Sanctuary? (... see page 3)



JRS-UK surveys its day centres



© Suat Eman

JRS-UK evaluates its services every year as part of our endeavour to constantly improve services and plan for our future work.

We conducted anonymous surveys in each of our day centres. 59 refugees who use our day centres participated. Here are our findings which may not be fully representative but give us some insights on our work from the people we accompany, serve and defend.

45 % of those who replied were from Congo. We got an equal participation from men and women. Most of the people like coming to JRS day centres even if 27% spend between 30 minutes and an hour to reach us and 30% between an hour and an hour and half . Their journeys are not

easy as they may need to take up to 4 different buses.

Why are they coming?

Here is the list of the main reasons (they could tick several options): to get money for bus transportation (64%), to get a pack of toiletries (48%), to exchange supermarkets vouchers (37%), to have lunch (18%) and to chat in a safe environment (18%) in a friendly and welcoming atmosphere.

“The atmosphere and treatment have a human touch with “smiling faces”

What do they like in these day centres?

They feel “like at home” as they are welcomed and respected. JRS volunteers take time to listen to these people, and help them to solve their problems. This place is also a way for them to meet people in the same situation. They can share their ideas, their feelings, and their experiences.

The atmosphere and treatment have a human touch with “smiling faces”.

What don't they like?

The JRS team being very small, the time needed to wait to talk to staff can take a long time. There is a lack of order. The systems with the vouchers change too much.

What would they like JRS to offer?

More help with their cases: solicitors, relationship to home office, housing... Giving more help to those who study. Helping refugees secure voluntary work. Increase the financial grants available for living expenses. Table tennis and internet connections in the day centres. Help us to be allowed to work to contribute to the economy.

We deeply thank all those who responded to our questionnaires and are grateful for the honesty of the responses. We will now take away the information received and see how we can improve our services and meet the needs identified, resources permitting.

Turn off your computer and pick up a pen!

IT is very rare in our virtual society where the email and tele-working is developing fast to hear someone saying “turn off your computer and take up a pen!” But that is what JRS is offering you today with its new letter writing accompaniment program of asylum seekers in removal centres.

8 months ago JRS decided to do a little test by asking Anne if she would write to detained asylum seekers. This test has been so successful that JRS has decided to expand the program and is looking for correspondents to write to detainees. Two new correspondents have already joined, will you be the 4th person? Before you decide here are some answers to questions you might ask yourself:

Why write to a detainee? Writing to a detainee can :

- 1) Create a new sense of self worth
- 2) Renew their self respect
- 3) Restore their lost dignity
- 4) Affirm their need to be recognized
- 5) Give them a sense of gratitude
- 6) Renew their faith in humanity

Engaging your skills as a writer can

- 1) Open up the world to those detained
- 2) Broaden their horizons
- 3) Freshen and inspire their imagination
- 4) Give them honest knowledge and insight into the world beyond the enclosed confines of their present situation

Will I get any help?

JRS will support you during your correspondence. You will first receive a little “training” to understand better who JRS is and who are the people you

are writing to and any protocol needed to be known before hand. You will also get a “Starter Pack” with pen, paper and stamps. Last but not least, JRS will call you and your pen-friend to know how you are getting on and if you need any more assistance.

How to get more information? Contact Margaret or Anne-Elizabeth at JRS on 02073570974



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Everyone can do their bit (from page 1)

It turns out there are many ways, and 10 of them can be found in the recently published '10 ways for CITIZENS to Save Sanctuary'. A simple guide for all ages and abilities, which can be used to make a massive difference as we all work together to secure justice for those fleeing persecution, and rebuild public support for sanctuary.

surely there are little ways in which everyone can do their bit to Save Sanctuary?

Published by *CITIZENS for Sanctuary*, the booklet draws on many of the key recommendations outlined by the Independent Asylum Commission. The Commission produced the most exhaustive and detailed Citizens' enquiry into the UK asylum system to date, and its 180 recommendations

don't just fall at the door of the UK Border Agency – many can be achieved if we all just do a little bit ourselves, and encourage others to do the same.

Take just one example: helping your community to understand the different reasons why people might have to come to the UK. It sounds like a big challenge, as many people's view seemly deeply negative and ingrained – but actually public attitudes can be easily overcome.

Most people get their information and opinions of 'asylum seekers' from the press, whose views are often unclear and misleading. 71% of people asked said they *knew* that the information they received was unclear – so those papers have a lot to answer for. Why not contact the editor of your local paper and ensure that their writers are clear about the distinction between immigration and asylum, and if they

will commit to change their style guide to include the word 'sanctuary' wherever relevant. 85% of people felt positive about the word 'sanctuary', where only 18% felt the same about the word 'asylum'.

More tips on how to change public attitudes are available in the booklet, which is perfect for schools and community groups. And there are many other resources inside and online, which will ensure that together CITIZENS can Save Sanctuary!

www.citizensforsanctuary.org.uk



Time to think: The Allegory of the Black Swan



© Margaret Baxter

Our Royal Swans gazed across the water with an expression that looked to the observer, of disdain at the stranger who, uncannily, resembled our regal friend's bodily form. There, surrounded by a ray of sunlight transforming the murky water of the Thames Docklands, drifting with such grace and elegance was the Black Swan. The Black Swan gave the impression of returning the intense stare with an air of genuine nobility, full of dignity and stateliness. I wondered whether such intensity of focus, on behalf of our black friend, was simply an effort to conceal the true desire of his heart. To receive a warm and

friendly welcome after the thousands of miles he had flown to arrive in these strange but pleasing waters.

I am told that the Black Swan following a long flight must alight and seek sanctuary as a consequence of shedding its old feathers. This act of nature renders it incapable of continuing its passage until its feathers are regenerated.

And what of our magnificent White Swans? Do you think they can find it in their hearts to befriend this beautiful creature?

And we, beautiful creatures that we are, gifted by God. How would we respond to the strange but beautiful creature that has suddenly arrived in our midst? Like a whisper in the wind I hear the calm voice of my Lord hauntingly gentle but with clarity and longing resonating in the beat of my heart "I was hungry you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me a drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me... As you did this to

the least of these brothers and sisters, you did it to me." (Mt.25: 35)

"A human being is part of the whole, called by us 'Universe'; a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts, and feelings as something separated from the rest—a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us.

"Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures"

Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures, and the whole of nature in its beauty." (Albert Einstein)

Margaret Baxter SSMN

Toughening up on Vouchers

Many of you will be aware of the supermarket voucher exchange



scheme JRS operates to exchange the voucher support some of the asylum seekers get for cash.

These individuals qualify for what is known as section 4 support because they meet some very limited criteria:

- They have a judicial review pending in their case
- They have been able to introduce a fresh asylum application and so have a new case

They have agreed to return to their country of origin and are supported in this way in the meantime.

They receive £35 in supermarket vouchers per week and rarely have a choice of which vouchers they receive.

We have recently heard of new measures, which will make it impossible for these asylum seekers

to exchange their vouchers for cash in the near future.

By mid December a new card, the Azure card, will be issued to everyone on section 4 support. The national roll out will start on 28th September in Scotland. This card will be topped up weekly so the asylum seeker will have to keep it with him/her to continue to use it. A full list of retailers, which will accept the card, is not yet available, though we do know that the card will be issued by Sodexo. It is also not clear whether the asylum seekers will be able to purchase bus or other transport tickets, though it seems to be unlikely given the new arrangements, making it difficult for them to attend essential medical and legal appointments or even to go shopping if they have been accommodated far away from the retailers which will accept the Azure card.

We are already meeting with partner organisations to plan what we will do about the new section 4 support measures. We will be asking you for help in campaigning against voucher support in the near future! **Louise Zanré**

25th April 2010: be in London!

The London marathon will take place on 25th April 2010. Mary who ran the marathon for JRS last year told us: "The thought of running a marathon is daunting at its best, scary at its worst. Many took the plunge and came through unscathed, save for a few bumps and blisters. But the medal at the end made it all worthwhile". Along with John and Ruta, Mary raised more than £5,000 which allowed JRS to give the asylum seekers visiting its offices 400 hygiene packs, 10 education grants and more than 550 bus passes.

Ruta loved it so much that she is running again for us and has already started her training! She has even brought another runner with his own place to run and raise money for us - Chris, a friend of hers. We are still looking for more runners to join our team. Face your fears and challenge yourself: come and run the marathon for JRS! We need you!

If you wish more information call Marine on 07703 326 474 before mid-October.

Did you like this newsletter? Spread the word and pass it on to someone who does not know JRS. You can also email us at uk@jrs.net to receive more copies. When you have finished reading it, recycle it!



Support our work



What should you do?

If you want to send a donation:

☑ by cheque (payable to Jesuit Refugee Service) or cash: Fill the information in the box on the right and send it back by Post to: JRS, 6 Melior Street, London SE1 3QP

☑ Or make a secure payment on:

<http://www.justgiving.com/jesuitrefugeeservice/Donate/>

☑ If you want more information please contact us on 020 7357 0974

- Please add me to your mailing list
- Donation enclosed Amount: £ _____
- I am a UK taxpayer and would like to gift aid my donation to JRS** (*Gift aid increases the value of your donation to us by 28p in every pound*)

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____