

## **Becoming a Sanctuary Church (or Group of Churches)**

Sanctuary, or hospitality-with-safety, is a long-standing theme of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, the foundation for which is found in the Law-books of the Hebrew Scriptures, and echoed in Jesus' teaching about how we treat the neighbour and the outsider. The Hebrew Scriptures refer once to love of neighbor and 37 times to love of the outsider or stranger. Sanctuary in churches used to assist those who claimed to be innocent of a crime, but in the last few decades has operated in churches in Central America, the United States and the UK primarily to protect immigrants or refugees facing deportation by the state. Now we need Sanctuary Churches who wish to meet and greet new arrivals fleeing from war and hunger.

### **We in Churches need to**

- 1) Develop a welcoming, hospitable, inclusive environment in our church community in which strangers feel genuinely welcome even if they are not like us;
- 2) Befriend homeless people, asylum seekers, refugees, people from the travelling communities and all those seeking sanctuary among us, and when appropriate assist them in facing difficulties with the authorities;
- 3) Invite refugees or others seeking safety to come and speak to our congregation, and to attend other events or activities which may meet some of their needs;
- 4) Work at making our worshipping communities really inclusive, with training in appropriate theology and biblical interpretation;
- 5) Commit to wider local initiatives which aim to offer welcome, end hatred & hostility, and build cultures and communities in which all are welcome, valued and safe;
- 6) Support organisations and events seeking to offer information and hospitality, especially those such as Refugee Week, and Poverty and Homelessness Sundays;
- 7) Seek to encourage our own village, town or city to become a community of sanctuary, which welcomes all those of different culture or ethnicity.

### **Individual Christians need to**

- 1) Greet people with a smile, especially those of a different culture;
- 2) Open our homes to "strangers" who seek sanctuary - invite someone around for a meal...go out of your way to welcome, invite them to appropriate activities;
- 3) Be vigilant and passionate about listening to those who feel most neglected or excluded, and do all we can to build safe and inclusive spaces, in our own home, residential and care homes, congregations, clubs and local communities;
- 4) Seek partners in all faiths, and in people who profess no religious faith but care deeply about safety for all – and work with them;
- 5) Volunteer if we are able to help in groups or organisations assisting those in need or aim to do so;
- 6) Don't pass a *Big Issue* seller without greeting them even if you don't buy a copy;
- 7) Educate ourselves - read books like *Refugee Boy*, *Two Caravans* or *Kite Runner*; learn to greet people in their own language; be aware of prejudiced views about those seeking sanctuary in UK, and find the facts on the Refugee Council website [http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/policy\\_research/the\\_truth\\_about\\_asylum](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/policy_research/the_truth_about_asylum)
- 8) 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*.