

CHURCHES' REFUGEE NETWORK BRIEFING PAPER:

SUPPORTING MIGRANTS AND PEOPLE SEEKING ASYLUM



CONTEXT

In the aftermath of the August 2024 riots the Churches' Refugee Network (CRN) convened a meeting to discuss how churches and church leaders engaged with community groups during those events. This included a discussion about the way the accommodation housing those seeking asylum had been targeted during those riots (including intimidation of people and attacks on property).

As a result of those conversations, the then Chair of the CRN issued a statement condemning the inflammatory rhetoric of politicians and other leaders, and called for greater community cohesion and resilience to counter the voices that were seeking to divide communities.

Sadly, in many places across Britain and Ireland, the hostility that characterised last year's riots has intensified, and this year has witnessed an even greater targeting of accommodation housing those seeking asylum, with a particular focus on hotel-based accommodation.

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) has been contacted by colleagues from the City of Sanctuary organisation, and other groups working with those seeking asylum, and refugees, who mention that they have been 'targeted' as a result of their work. Organisations supporting people seeking asylum, including church communities, have experienced hostility and threats of violence.

Concerns about the appropriation and misuse of Christian identity and symbols intensified when, on 13 September 2025, over 100,000 people marched through London under the slogan of 'Unite the Kingdom', many brandishing banners of a Christian nature.

Finally, from a racial justice perspective, Black and Brown Christians have commented that the appearance of Union and St George flags on the streets of British towns and cities, and the rise of xenophobic sentiment branded as 'patriotism', have created a palpable sense of fear and 'feeling unsafe'.



ROUNDTABLE GATHERING

The CRN convened a follow up meeting, via Teams, on 22 September 2025, to hear from those church leaders working to maintain community cohesion and peace during this challenging time. The roundtable gathering, which included attendees from Britain and Ireland, heard the painful experiences of churches with sizeable refugee and migrant congregations facing hostility, and from church leaders working to support groups within the community who are being targeted and experiencing threats.



MISINFORMATION AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Various attendees spoke of the damaging impact of misinformation and disinformation about people seeking asylum and refugees and those from diverse (ethnic) backgrounds. It was noted that far-right groups peddled a range of stereotypes and prejudicial opinions, often disseminated via social media platforms, to stoke up hostility toward these particular groups.

PROTESTS

We heard that there appears to be an orchestrated campaign, rather than spontaneous action, regarding the protests outside hotels, and areas where there are tensions between established communities and newer ones.

We heard that in some instances, protesters were 'bussed in' from other towns and cities to take part in demonstrations.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



While hotels were regarded as being unsuitable for a variety of socio-political reasons, it was noted that they hindered opportunities for meaningful engagement and encounter that would enable communities to get to know one another as neighbours, and thus go some way toward breaking down barriers. It was apparent that other restrictions facing people seeking asylum, such as their right to work, and access certain forms of support, hindered their ability to fully participate in society as active citizens.

Such a quandary only leads to a greater sense of instability and isolation for individuals and families who may still be traumatised by past experiences. Equally, attendees spoke of the dearth of support from politicians (of all parties) to foster community dialogue in those areas where churches (often with diverse congregations) and Minority Ethnic communities are being threatened. The depth of the hurt and fear in these communities was emphasised.

POLITICAL PREFERENCES

Akin to the above, we also heard about the lack of political support for integration on both a short- and longer-term basis. There was particular concern about the movement of people during the asylum process, which often saw individuals and families uprooted from the communities where they had made connections, after successful asylum applications. The latter scenario often resulted in those who now had 'leave to remain' with the responsibility to find appropriate accommodation and locate the necessary support systems.

It was apparent that there is a lack of joined-up or strategic thinking around the promotion and protection of community cohesion. Attendees highlighted the role of the Church in challenging these failures of leadership, and speaking out of our Gospel values, with a message of unity, reconciliation and compassion.

GOOD NEWS STORIES

Conversely, we heard good news stories from contexts where church representatives had been active as convenors of dialogue and/or in challenging local politicians to put in place structures to support community dialogue. In these instances, encounters helped to address issues arising from stereotypes and misinformation, while dialogue helped to address community

concerns around issues like housing, access to services and community safety.

It was apparent that churches are making a difference in many areas, and it was pointed out that more should be done to enable us to hear more of those good news stories.

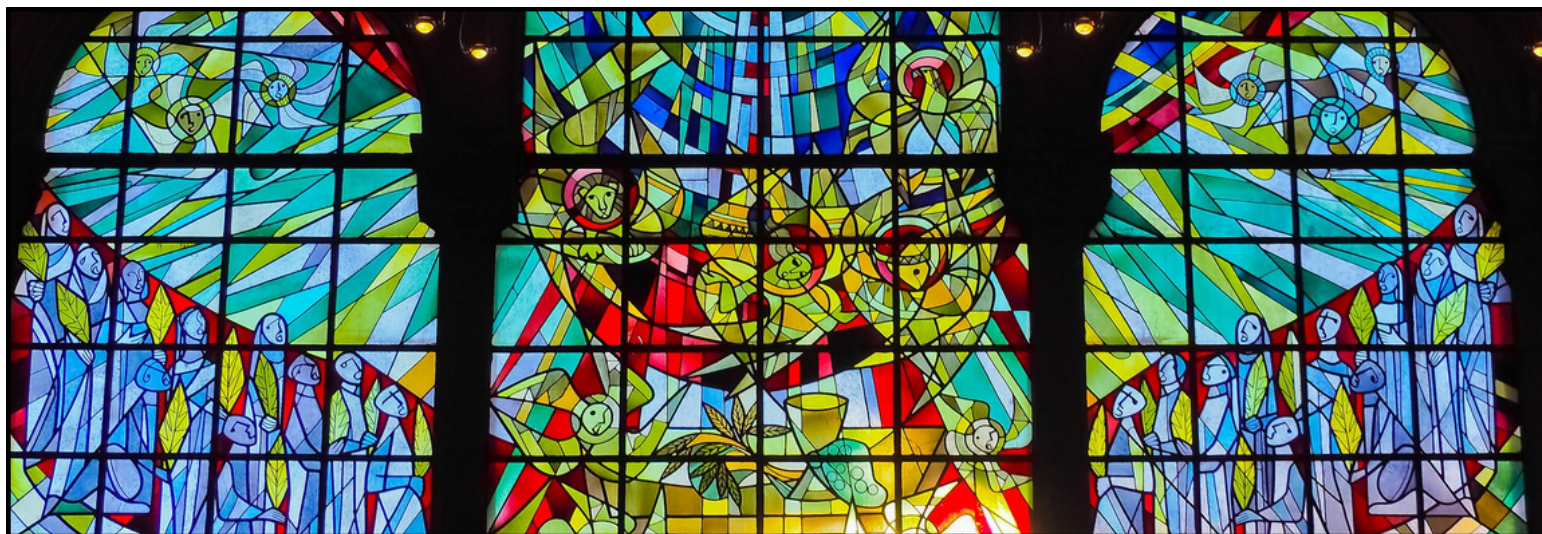


DIALOGUE WITHIN THE CHURCH

It was noted that churches also had to grapple with these issues. An increasing number of congregations have differing views on migration and asylum, and there was a danger that the

issue becomes divisive along political or ethnic lines. We were reminded that dialogue about these issues within the Church is an important foundation for engagement in the wider public square.

(Proverbially, 'putting one's own house in order!').



CRN-RELATED RESOURCES

It was suggested that resources might be offered through CRN to:

- Help facilitate conversations on these issues in a church context. This material would be grounded in Scriptural reflection (the parable of the Good Samaritan was cited as one particularly relevant example). It was suggested that they should emphasise the pastoral and human, rather than political, impacts that are at the heart of the Church's response.
- Outline some key messages to support church leaders who wish to speak on these issues, but are apprehensive about the potential for polarisation and 'pushback'/backlash.

It can be argued that speaking together not only allows us to learn from the good news stories, but can also amplify the voice and experience of local churches and communities. Advent was suggested as a good time for the publication and dissemination of such a resource.

We heard that the Church, with its networks that extend from the local through to the international contexts, can play an important role in emphasising that the movement of people is a global issue. (This phenomenon also features heavily in the Bible, especially the Old Testament.) Moreover, greater emphasis should be placed on the action that needs to be taken by governments to prevent and stop wars and humanitarian disasters, as well as the policy decisions by political leaders that are contributing to displacement and forced migration of people globally.

Closely connected to this is how we speak about identity and belonging in a church context, conscious of the heightened tensions in many areas centred on identity-based insecurity and conflict. Issues around what it means to be 'British' or 'Irish' and how this relates to one's faith, are being debated against an increasing tide of (Christian) nationalism. It should be noted that conversations on these issues are taking place within the member churches of CTBI, as well as national ecumenical instruments, and it would be good to draw together some of that learning for wider sharing and further reflection.

We heard about the manipulation and misuse of Christian identity and symbols as a particular concern, with reference to open letters published recently by individual church leaders and ecumenical groups of signatories. It would be important to be mindful of these issues in relation to Remembrance Sunday in November for those churches who participate in this commemoration.



CHURCH OF SANCTUARY

We heard about the work of the [Church of Sanctuary](#) movement to challenge hostility with hospitality, through its growing network. There are many good news stories from this programme of fear being overcome through encounter, and church communities being empowered and supported to take action according to their values, while resisting the trap of polarisation. It was noted with concern however that this work has been impacted by increasing hostility which is directed primarily towards the wider City of Sanctuary movement and is based on misrepresentation of what this work is about and what it seeks to achieve. This is making the work much more difficult, with the safety and wellbeing of those it seeks to support being the primary concern.

Church of Sanctuary is currently revising the publication, 'Hospitality and Sanctuary for All', which addresses the importance of churches being places and spaces that offer hospitality, sanctuary and welcome to asylum seekers, refugees, 'strangers' and those fleeing peril. The revised edition of this book will be available at the end of October 2025.



ACTIONS

- Circulation of a briefing paper sharing and building on the main themes from this roundtable.
- A resource or resources to support and encourage dialogue within the Church, and clear communication in the wider society from the Church on these issues. This would bring Gospel-inspired language to the debate and the pastoral experience of local churches to the narratives presented in the media, social media, political discourse etc.
- Solidarity with the Church of Sanctuary and City of Sanctuary movements, including challenging misrepresentation.
- The publication of 'Hospitality and Sanctuary for All', providing ideas, inspiration and practical guidance on making churches places of welcome.
- CRN to disseminate more 'good news' stories to counter the negative narrative, and make more people aware that it is possible to be a change maker in a local context.

PRAYER

We are grateful to Bishop Rose Hudson-Wilkin, CRN Chair, for the prayer below.

Loving Father, our hearts cry out to you at the suffering in our world: We remember and pray for the many around the world who are fleeing from wars, violence, abuse, torture, imprisonment, poverty, famine and climate change. Open our eyes, our ears and our hearts that we may respond with compassion and equity to the cries of those seeking refuge.

Give us the political will in our complex world to work together in creating a world free from abuse, war and violence; a world where we care for those who are most vulnerable; a world where all our resources are shared; a world where we give respect to each other irrespective of colour, culture or creed.

Lord Jesus, help us to remember that you and your earthly family know the experience of seeking refuge and that you travel with those today making perilous journeys to safeguard their lives and that of their families. Give us courage to work for a world in which justice, peace and love become the foundation on which we build together.

Holy Spirit, comfort and heal the brokenness in our world, strengthen and inspire us 'to do justice, to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God.'

Amen



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CRN

Keep up to date with the latest news, developments and upcoming meetings from the Churches' Refugee Network.

Find out more about the work of the CRN by clicking [here](#).



CTBI MAGAZINE



Edition 12 of the [CTBI Magazine](#), Autumn Edition is out now.

Find the latest information and resources from CTBI and its networks, including an overview of work of the CRN.

Read previous editions [here](#).

THE BULLETIN

Issues of 'The Bulletin' will be published on the CTBI website, featuring news, updates and resources from the Churches' Refugee Network (CRN).

Read previous editions [here](#).



MORE INFORMATION



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