

## **HOSPITALITY AND SANCTUARY FOR ALL**

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

### **INTRODUCTION**

This resource offers prompts for conversation and reflection on the theme of hospitality and sanctuary. Though people of different backgrounds are involved in the work of hospitality and sanctuary, this is a resource produced for Churches. The resource is produced for use in Britain and Ireland. However, this material can be used by Churches in all parts of the world.

In this second edition I have reorganised and represented some material, with some changes and additional writing.

There is no attempt here to provide information on or to discuss immigration and asylum policy, or to make any political statement. I do write however as a person who has had a keen and critical interest on these matters from the age of 11 onwards. My interest has grown out of my own experience of immigration.

I was born in Nairobi where I lived till the age of 11 in 1964. Kenya achieved independence, and with my parents and family I left for Britain, via a nine month sojourn in what was then Tanganyika. My first home in this country was in Dudley, West Midlands.

From my earliest days of life in the UK people of Asian backgrounds talked with me, because I was fluent in English, about their immigration concerns and paper work.

So personally, rather than professionally, I have become familiar with immigration matters, policies and procedures. I am familiar with the fears, frustrations, and pains of people of all backgrounds around these. I have determined to take simple steps to seek justice, mercy and humility in policy and procedure.

As a Methodist Minister, and Pastor, I have worked with others, especially in Churches, to critique and challenge policy and procedure where it has been unjust and discriminatory. I have supported many campaigns to challenge unjust deportations orders. In the 80's I supported people taking sanctuary in Churches. I chaired the Sanctuary Working Group of the British Council of Churches.

In March 1997 I walked from Sheffield where I live, to 10 Downing Street, with a letter to the Prime Minister asking that Asylum Seekers are not detained in conventional prisons alongside convicted criminals, and for a fairer deal for Asylum Seekers. I also walked from the Home Office to Campsfield Detention Centre in Oxford for the same reason.

As President of the Methodist Conference in Britain [2000-2001] I visited all the Detention Centres in Britain and Northern Ireland, following which I wrote a reflection entitled “Unlocking The Doors” [2001]. I sent a copy to the Home Secretary.

In October 2005 I called a meeting, with Craig Barnett a Quaker colleague, to launch the City of Sanctuary initiative. In 2007 Sheffield was declared UK's first City of Sanctuary. When others asked how they could follow this idea, to assist, Craig and I wrote a short book entitled “Building a City of Sanctuary” [2010] with inspiring practical ideas.

There are now over 40 Cities/Towns in Britain and Ireland working with the City of Sanctuary vision, to build cultures of welcome and hospitality, Cities we can be proud to live in. Visit the City of Sanctuary website for more details, watch a short video there, and study the Birmingham Declaration and criteria for action.

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

This resource invites you to reflect theologically, worship and pray around the themes of hospitality and sanctuary. It is Biblically based, but invites you to engage in dialogue with people of other faiths. There is much that people of all faiths, and those who profess no particular religious faith, share on hospitality and sanctuary. I would be delighted if this resource prompts further and deeper reflection, prayer and action.

In the contemporary society around us, there is considerable hostility towards “the stranger”. We can all take action to move people from these attitudes of hatred and hostility to people seeking sanctuary among us towards attitudes of welcome and hospitality.

There is recognition in this resource that all people want to be safe from harm, and that no one is really safe until we are all safe.

I will welcome positive feedback on how to build and strengthen this resource.

I have struggled to find Hymns on the rich theme of sanctuary. The only Hymn I know of that actually refers to “cities of sanctuary” is the one entitled Beauty for Brokenness. The Hymn “there are no strangers to God’s love” refers to “people seeking sanctuary”. Perhaps Hymn writers could write some more!

What follows places the material in the context of issues around migration, though the concept of sanctuary can be applied to many different issues related to being safe from harm. Section One explores the idea of God taking sanctuary among us. Section Two calls for hospitality to the “stranger”, and considers biblical and interfaith perspectives. Section Three introduces discussion around the themes of gift and redemption. Section Four introduces the idea of City of Sanctuary and building cultures of welcome and hospitality. There is a brief invitation to look at what it means to be a sanctuary to yourself and to others, and there are ideas for action, worship and prayer. The Act of Worship can be used to conclude this study. It could also be used as a resource for a Sanctuary Sunday, or for the established Racial Justice Sunday which is observed on the second Sunday in September. Each section includes ideas for group work and personal reflection.

Make your place of worship a sanctuary where all are treated with warm welcome, generous hospitality and protection from harm. The best Christian symbol of this is the Eucharist, a revelation of the world as it is meant to be, a foretaste of the heavenly banquet, where all are welcome and valued equally, and where no one is excluded or made to feel like an outsider.

All the strength of God to you.

**Inderjit Bhogal**

**May 2015**

**Ways to use this resource:**

1 Bible Study and House Groups can use the four sections of this resource in the four weeks of Lent or Advent. There are suggested group discussions and activities, and worship material. As a time guide, allow ninety minutes per section. Each discussion activity suggested will require between fifteen and thirty minutes.

2 The Order of Service provided can be used at an Act of Worship [midweek or on a Sunday]

3 Use the themes of the resource for conversation and dialogue with people of different faiths

4 Use the resource for personal study and reflection

5 The Books and journal articles listed will help individuals and groups to further their study and reflection

6 Individually and/or as a group follow up some of the action points

## THE CONTEXT

### MIGRATION IS A CRUCIAL CONTEMPORARY ISSUE

Each year up to 1 Billion people cross a border.

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 requires our most serious attention.

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. Over 80% of the world's refugees are in neighbouring countries. At the time of writing, Pakistan, Iran, Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey are the world's top five hosts of refugees according to the UN. 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 the desolate sea.

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](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 confined to space. The entire created order is the sanctuary of God. Heaven and heavens cannot confine God [1 Kings 8:27]. Yet God asks for sanctuary [Exodus 25:8].

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 5<sup>th</sup> 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 the hospitality of 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 are challenged to see the Image of God and to serve Christ in those who are different to us.

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 [read Genesis 43:32]:

What does the observation here 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 a truly inclusive 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](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? What word of God do prophets of another language bring 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

All human beings desire dignity, respect and flourishing.

Most refugees and people seeking sanctuary come from situations of pain and suffering. This pain and suffering cannot be ignored. Many of those who suffer thus identify with, and find meaning in the experience of the rejection, suffering and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. In the cost of Christ's passion and pain is the gift of healing and hope. Here suffering is not willed by God, but is encompassed in God's love. In the face of sorrow and hurt it is appropriate to ask why and to want to find meaning and wholeness in it. 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 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 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 God's 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].

Challenge the framing and stereotyping of refugees and those seeking sanctuary as a cost. Honour them for the gifts they are and bring, and advocate this change. It is the refugees that so often pay a very high cost, often losing all they have. Many lose their lives in their search for a better life

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 word of God and 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 23:31-46**

**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 20<sup>th</sup> 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 5<sup>th</sup> 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.”

There are excellent initiatives being taken by churches and church groups building welcome, hospitality and sanctuary alongside refugees and those seeking sanctuary today. For examples visit the faith section of the city of sanctuary website. See also the story of Restore [Appendix 2], and St Chad’s Sanctuary, Birmingham.

### **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 [2<sup>nd</sup> Edition]. Building A City Of Sanctuary: A Practical Handbook With Inspiring Examples. Plug and Tap, Ripon

## **Sanctuary/Safe Churches: Safe from harm**

All people can be vulnerable at some point in their lives, especially in communities that intentionally set out, like Churches, to be welcoming to all, and inclusive. It is essential in Churches to be proactive in building safeguards and promoting cultures of safeguarding and environments of safety for all.

What Churches can do includes:

- Taking steps to increase understanding within congregations about how they can build safer communities and spaces
- Fostering deep cultural changes to fully understand what safeguarding means in every part of the life of congregations
- Recognising that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility
- Developing robust measures to ensure that safeguarding policies are in place and are followed in all practice, including adhering to Safer Recruitment of church volunteers and paid workers
- Providing structured systems of supervision and support for all those working with vulnerable people
- Ensuring that any training undertaken is reflected in subsequent practice.

There is a need for commitment from senior leadership to safeguarding and safety to build sanctuary.

Churches that specifically work hard to welcome and offer hospitality to vulnerable and already hurt people such as refugees and those seeking sanctuary have to be extra vigilant. Powerless people of all backgrounds are particularly vulnerable to harm and abuse. Provision of hospitality and safety is costly. Be a good host.

### **Questions for group work to attend to:**

What does it mean to provide a place of sanctuary, and to ensure that all among us are safe from harm?

In what ways, despite our best intentions, may we inadvertently do harm, or allow harm to those who take sanctuary among us?

How can we deepen awareness of the control, harm and abuse that people seeking sanctuary among us may have experienced in the past, and how this may affect their behaviour and ability to trust, and share their story?

What safeguards and training do we need to make available?

## **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.

<b>A SANCTUARY TO YOURSELF</b>	<b>A SANCTUARY TO OTHERS</b>
Allow yourself to BE Accepting self as is – a work in progress	Allow others to BE Accept others, help to develop independent relationships
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, and to your own body	Active – pays attention to and listens for others; support wellbeing and such listening in 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](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

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

## **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 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:

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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>

## 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](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 we shall be blessed by the grace of God, and that all will be given strength to bear witness to the grace 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 within and before them 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 grace of God will be on them 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, hospitality and sanctuary 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,

**All: 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**

**On the journey to Emmaus**

**Sent by the Lord am I**

**The Church is like a Table**

**There are no strangers to God's love**

**Travelling the road to freedom**

**We've no abiding City here**

**When Christ was lifted from the earth**

## **FURTHER READING**

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## **Journals:**

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

## **Movies:**

Babettes Feast [beautiful story of a refugee's generosity]

Le Havre [the gift of giving sanctuary]

Moving to Mars [follows two refugee families moving from a Thai camp to the British city of Sheffield]

## **Music:**

Maryam Mursal, The Journey. Real World Records CDRW70 [1998]. Maryam is Somalian. She fled from Somalia at the height of the civil war with her five children. This album offers vibrant songs telling the story of Maryam's flight. Tracks include Kufilaw [take care] and Qax [refugee] which she wrote on the way.

## 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 would 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, migration and the refugee crisis 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 demeanour. 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". 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.

## Appendix 2

### **Welcoming the stranger: Life with Restore [the words below are an extract from an article that first appeared in the Bible Society Journal, The Bible in Transmission, Spring 2015], by Shari Brown**

Restore is a project of Birmingham Churches Together, whose mission is to welcome, include and assist integration of refugees and those seeking sanctuary from persecution. Restore's work is relational and rooted in responding to the needs of new arrivals who have experienced loss and trauma back home and are attempting to rebuild their lives in Birmingham. Our primary service is one-to-one befriending where volunteers stand alongside refugees or asylum seekers and offer support. One refugee wrote: "My befriender is very supportive, informative, caring and considerate. Restore has enabled me to confidently integrate myself into the community. I found Restore like a shelter for people like me who are lost in this world."

Restore was founded in 1999 by a group of churches in Birmingham, who wished to help Kosovans fleeing conflict and other asylum seekers arriving in the city as a result of the new policy of dispersal from the south east to different regions of the country. Restore was adopted by Birmingham Churches Together in 2000 and has been a strong expression of ecumenical mission work over the last few years. Whilst retaining a befriending focus, Restore has developed other aspects of work such as social activities, training to equip refugees for work, awareness-raising on refugee issues, and advocacy - both on behalf of clients and in seeking to influence asylum policy and practice. Restore is a project open to all, but it remains a faith based project, deeply committed to the call to 'welcome the stranger'. The following volunteers share what motivates their involvement in Restore's work:

"My motivation has been based upon a desire to do something to counter the blatant injustice, prejudice and hypocrisy with which the machinery of government is used to persecute some of the most vulnerable people amongst us. That's it ... as Christians we are mandated to love our neighbour and to show solidarity with the oppressed and poor. Restore is the practical means for making a positive contribution." (Philip Rogerson)

"Almost all my life in this country (50+ years) I've lived and worked amongst people arriving from other countries and cultures and having originally myself uprooted from a very homogenous culture (Sweden), it feels as though over the years this diversity has become part of my DNA. I myself have received so much through this experience with so many diverse encounters that it seemed very natural and obvious to get involved with Restore. I guess I also know a little about what it means to leave your own country, the pain and the loss, although I did so for very different reasons compared to refugees. The prevalent xenophobia in this and other countries is so against everything I believe about 'welcoming the stranger'. My Christian faith is obviously a strong motivation." (Kerstin Eadie)

"My motivation for being a Restore befriender is the injunction as a Christian to reach out to the most vulnerable and marginalised of one's society. I desire to live in a society that is inclusive and affirming, as even Christ's love is ever inclusive and affirming. I am inspired by the knowledge that God in Christ shared the journey of being a refugee and thus in befriending refugees, we befriend those of similar journeys to Christ. The distinctively subjective reason for my engaging in Restore's

work is that I, too, had to seek asylum and am forever grateful that I was given the opportunity of moving from unfreedom to freedom in my adopted British society. Lastly, given the nature of a British society that is in flux, and not for the better, if I don't do it, who will?!" (Brian Brown)

We do not deceive ourselves that befriending and social activities can transform situations, but remarkably people affirm the healing aspect of social interaction, recreation and the sense that somebody cares! One asylum seeker described the impact of men's activities as follows: "For most asylum seekers, hardly a day passes without you getting bad news either coming from the Home Office or from events taking place back home. "Your house has been burnt down". "Your family don't have money to pay rent". "Your wife has been taken by informers for interrogation". The list goes on and on. All this boggles your mind making your life miserable. Then a phone call comes up asking if you are available for a Restore men's event. This is good news to a lonely man who has not been out for a long time. We have been to so many places of interest in and around Birmingham, played pool, football, table tennis and gone swimming. This has helped keep us busy, reduce stress and lift self-esteem. Visiting and meeting different people makes me feel relaxed and confident about the future."

It is not all depressing either. Restore has its experiences of great joy when refugee status is granted, family reunion takes place, and people's lives move on for the better. A befriender writes of his witnessing a 'truly holy moment':

"My befriender phoned me very excitedly to say that finally his wife and two children have their visas to join him in the UK. He fled Darfur three years ago and hadn't seen them since – in fact, for two years they had no contact and he didn't know whether they were alive or dead. My wife and I drove him and his friend to Heathrow to meet them. The plane landed on time at 10pm, but we were still waiting in a rapidly emptying Arrivals area at 11pm. At last the aluminium doors open and there they were – she in a long black robe with red head-scarf with the children, in their best clothes, hesitant beside her. My befriender does not move. His wife walks slowly, with great grace and dignity, to the end, and he is there facing her. It was like slow motion. They folded into a gentle embrace, almost as if they weren't quite sure if the other was solid flesh and then simply stand and hold each other. She is wiping away tears as he stoops ever so gently to clasp his son and then his daughter. It is reverent – a truly holy moment. The evening was a time of great joy, for us as well as the family who now begin life together in a new country where they are safe at last." (Charles Worth)

Paulette Mengnjo, a refugee, has the last word:

Paulette fled persecution in the Cameroon and sought sanctuary in the UK. She speaks with frustration about the lack of quality legal representation she received when first applying for asylum. Her case was refused by the Home Office and a Judge upheld the decision, determining that she was not a high profile political activist and could relocate to a safe place in her home country. Destitution and detention in Yarl's Wood Removal Centre followed. It was only after a much respected legal firm took on her case, referred her to Freedom from Torture for a medico-legal report and submitted a fresh application that she was granted refugee status. Asked what kept her going through the tough years, she responds: "Hope kept me going." She then refers to the advocacy of agencies like Restore, the support of her church community at Olton Baptist, and individuals who generously provided accommodation, financial support and friendship.

## Appendix 3

### 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*.

