

REFUGEES MAY CALL ON US



Every day, new refugees, victims of violence and poverty come to our country. Now it is mainly women and children from Ukraine. There is a great willingness to help them. Many volunteers take initiatives to welcome them into the local community. Also from parishes there are activities to offer shelter to refugees. Often parishes cooperate with other church communities, regional social organisations and local civil authorities. Together, they look at what is needed, what needs to be done and how this can fit in with existing initiatives.

Christ has given us the task of helping refugees, our fellow human beings in need. This is not self-evident, because "As society becomes ever more globalized, it makes us neighbours but does not make us brothers [and sisters]" (Pope Benedict XVI, 'Caritas in Veritate', 19 2009). Christ shows us what brotherly and sisterly love is and calls us to receive refugees in that spirit. Let us take up this challenge with confidence and in faith and prayer.

We greatly appreciate the efforts of many within and outside our faith community, professionals and volunteers, who work to ensure that people in need from Ukraine are received in a dignified manner. We must not forget other refugees in and around Europe. Besides taking care of people in need here, it is important to work on a humane and safe world in which people do not have to flee. What happens to refugees is a great injustice. The international community has a heavy responsibility to restore and maintain peace and global justice.

Through Christ, we can confidently extend a helping hand to refugees. Our faith inspires us to do so. We realise this even more now that tensions in the world are accompanied by new violence. Christ gives us a generous heart. "When she [Lydia] and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home". And she prevailed upon us". (Acts 16:15). The Gospel calls us to justice and love in our dealings with refugees. Receiving refugees and migrants is a sign of Christian mercy. Jesus asks us to be merciful. He says: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me" (Mt 25:35). Christ inspires us by his call: "I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink."

Many of you are hospitable in all kinds of ways. It is important to follow the advice of professional organisations and to always make clear agreements about this with the relevant contact person in the local municipality.

Pope Francis repeatedly calls on us in these days to meet refugees personally. Many refugees come from war zones, are separated from their families and carry with them experiences of violence and horror. Let it be known that we care for them by offering a sympathetic ear and our attention and our genuine willingness to assist them. They may call on us.

"The starting point for a just policy must not be self-protection [...] but doing justice to those who call on us. Placing the human dignity of migrants at the centre will give benefit to that of Dutch citizens" (Episcopal Letter 'I was a stranger' 1998/2005). Solidarity is not an appeal to the feeling or sentiment of compassion or pity, but is a recognition of the essential dignity of every human being. "Because every human being is our neighbour, no one should be excluded", we wrote in our letter 'Hospitable Netherlands' (2015).

We are aware that it is not enough to open our hearts to the suffering of refugees. Much has to be done before they will be able to live in peace and security again. Receiving refugees requires commitment, help, understanding, attention and management of new and complex situations, which often come on top of many already existing problems. Many offer their help like the widow of Sarepta who welcomed the prophet Elijah when she had only a little meal left (I Kings 17, 8-15). Do we realise what a situation refugees are in? Their entire existence has been uprooted. Their houses are in ruins. They had to leave everything behind and have only been able to take the bare necessities with them.

In addition to the concrete and necessary help and attention that we can give to the refugees, let us be united in prayer for peace in Ukraine and throughout the world. We pray with you for an end to the war, that refugees may finally return home safely. We also think of all the soldiers who have been sent into battle. May God grant true and lasting peace soon, through the intercession of Mary, Queen of Peace.

The Roman Catholic bishops of the Netherlands

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