

Refugee crisis Coffee Morning with Bishop Richard

25 June 2022 at 11.30am

Notes

Bishop Richard opened the meeting by talking about the work of the Diocesan Refugee Crisis Fund, which has been running for nearly 6 years.

Father Kieron O'Brien pointed out that since the inception of this fund we are now in a very different place with the war in Ukraine and the constant channel crossings.

Attendees were invited to share their experiences of refugee support across the Diocese, including the names of any groups/organisations they are involved with, with a focus on what is currently being offered and what support is needed from the Diocese.

Mary Downy - Chichester parish

Sanctuary in Chichester provides furniture and household equipment, installs broadband, befriends families and individuals, provides English language tutors, hosts a weekly drop-in, links young refugees with a football project, trains and supports people to find work, supports appeals rights exhausted asylum seekers and extra support for asylum-seeking families, education and accommodation for asylum seekers. To date this has been with Syrians and Afghans.

Mary requested support in the form of prayers from the Diocese and in particular, suggestions how to help an Afghan man and his family, who after 6 weeks are not engaging with the support currently being offered.

It would also be helpful to see a list of those wanting to be involved so that an email group can be set up through which resources and information can be shared.

Celia Emmott – Henfield parish

Involved with Calais Action who campaign in Parliament to provide more safe and legal routes for refugees.

Regarding The Ukrainian crisis the village has become very focussed on food boxes and aid, with a third collection to be taken out to Ukraine shortly. This has been an ecumenical effort.

Celia asked if it would be possible to join with other local parishes in this effort. She asked for support from the Diocese in providing communication links.

Miranda Litchfield – Petworth & Midhurst parish

There are a few refugees placed with locals but the majority appear to be going to Chichester.

Jenny Finlayson – Cranleigh & Bramley parish

A scheme is in place – “One Cranleigh”. Awareness has been made through leaflet distribution with people being asked to commit to a monthly donation of £10 which will go towards helping pay for rental accommodation and clothing, food and toys are being donated/collected.

Jo Threlfall – Worth Abbey

Three school places have been offered to Ukrainian children. A weekly holy hour dedicated to refugees is taking place.

An enquiry from Father Paul Fleetwood was what places are available in schools within the Diocese for refugee children. Bishop Richard suggested that he contact Julie Oldroyd in Education Services.

Nick Banfield – Oxted & Warlingham parish

Since 16 March 2022 Oxted & Warlingham Ukraine Support Group, a group of volunteers, have met six times. A welcome booklet has been produced and support is given to both hosts and guests in the form of coffee mornings, arts and crafts chill sessions for the refugees, English lessons provided by volunteers on Monday and Wednesday evenings with the space being given free of charge by the local leisure centre, 85 free SIM cards have been made available and free access to duolingo plus. A local Ukrainian psychologist is supporting the group re the effects of on-going trauma on the refugees. There are 4 host families in the parish to date.

The group has been lobbying parliament re education and visas, with the local MP being very supportive. They have also been lobbying Surrey County Council, Education department for FEET for refugee children (funded early education for two year olds).

The group is co-ordinating with other local Ukr groups and Rotary clubs, in organising a Ukr Independence Day event on 24 August in Priory Park, Reigate.

To date there are 128 refugees in the Tandridge district with 60+ more to arrive. 255 families have offered to host.

A guide has been produced to support traumatised refugees based on advice given by the Ukrainian psychologist and is willing to share if people are interested.

Contact : humansighs@gmail.com for ad-hoc support.

Father Kieron confirmed that the Diocese is currently working on making Mental Health training available in parishes.

Carolyn Fuhrmann – Shoreham, Adur Valley parish

Hosted a Syrian family for the past 2 years in the presbytery in Steyning. The Steyning community are welcoming refugees. The church has promoted Refugee Week with an exhibition in the church hall, stations of the cross taking place and the production of a leaflet. Adur 4 Refugees is currently looking after 6 Syrian families. Both Worthing and Brighton have organisations to support refugees plus the Gatwick Detainee Welfare Group.

Feel the church should be a louder voice and clarify the mis-information put out by the Government and media.

Bishop Richard mentioned that The Right Reverend Kenneth Nowakowski, as the Eparchial Bishop of the Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy of the Holy Family of London is in talks with the Government and that details can be found on their Diocesan website. Bishop Paul McAleenan, the lead Bishop for Migration, has also been in talks with the Government.

The Bishop referred attendees to the news section of the Arundel & Brighton Diocesan website.

East Grinstead parish

The Refugees Welcome Crawley refugee support group initially started up for Syrian refugees. It provides homework clubs, mens and ladies clubs and a clothing centre. Oasis Café and The Engine Room in Crawley, both provide secular venues. In the Crawley area there are current circa 1200 refugees living in hotels. 30 families in East Grinstead.

The Lions club is constantly fundraising.

Max Siwicki and Antoni Dazewski are part of the The Polish Knights charity who provide food, clothing, accommodation, first aid and free medical provision for refugees.

Billingshurst parish

There is a non church based group that are currently meeting on a monthly basis to find ways to help. They believe that there is plenty of talent within the parish to tap into but are yet to find the best way to do this. Sr Helen Ryan suggested that slips on benches at masses to ask for volunteers and an idea of what they can offer, may be a good starting point. Money has been raised through plant sales. The suggestion of a hub had been raised where refugees can meet others in similar situation – social interaction is vital.

A request was made to make use of the closed church within the parish (St Crispin, Pulborough) to use as a hub.

The setting up of some form of on-line market place by the Diocese was suggested.

Mary White - Horsham parish

As a member of the Justice & Peace group have been lobbying regarding the slow and complex process for refugees seeking asylum.

Karen Goldsmith – Billingshurst parish

Involved with Indigo Volunteering – connects volunteers with humanitarian projects.

For real asylum seekers there is no real route out of danger, so crossing the English Channel is their only option. Once they arrive they can claim legal asylum. Re-settlement is different from Asylum.

There is a need to stand up and speak out against the Nationality & Borders Act. Lobby local MPs and Parliament. The Anglican church spoke out but the Catholic church are yet to do so.

Father Kieron agreed that a stronger catholic voice is needed.

ACTION : *Laura Maydew-gale to ensure that Karen's talk to the Justice & Peace Assembly is available on the Diocesan website.*

Raising awareness in the community is important and then offers of money and support will follow. Billingshurst has a good support network of groups knitting blankets, a free clothing shop and through a Horsham Support Appeal Group vans take aid out to Moldova. Billingshurst for Ukraine is a developing group. 17 host families.

Support from young people should be sought, perhaps the Lourdes redshirts could become involved.

David White – Horsham parish

Member of the Horsham Support Appeal Group, experienced in working locally and overseas in building water supplies and designing and building sewage systems for refugee camps in the 1950s.

Christine Evans – Horsham parish

Works with Horsham Refugee Support Group reaching out person to person. Many refugees don't have the confidence to reach out for themselves.

Tessa Ricketts, Social Action Advisor gave feedback from the recent Diocesan questionnaire.

21 questionnaires were returned. 16 people said they were aware of refugees from Ukraine and other countries arriving in their local area. 5 people said someone from their parish was prepared to act as a Parish Refugee Representative. 10 people said volunteer help with translation would be useful – this is being followed up with volunteers who have offered their interpretation skills.

Bishop Richard concluded that a lot of work can be done at a local level and promised that a Diocesan newsletter will be produced which will be made available on the Diocesan website. Attendees were invited to put their names forward for being involved with a steering group and/or as a point of contact for a parish. The steering group needs to be dynamic and co-ordinating, with good resources available.

Father Kieron explained that a Modern Slavery steering group already exists which in connection with Sussex and Surrey Police now has a safe house in the Diocese which is ready to receive it's first guests. It also has a newly formed network of Ambassadors who can act as a designated person in a parish. This is in conjunction with the Anglican church.

CG/June 2022