

DIOCESAN SYNOD

Title: **MINISTRY TO REFUGEES**

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1. INTRODUCTION

This paper provides an update on our ministry to refugee families who have settled in Essex and East London. It focuses on the Syrian families who have been displaced and resettled here in the past three years, the support provided by Essex Integration and the use of the refugee appeal fund set up in autumn 2015. It also introduces the Community Sponsorship Scheme as another route to assist resettlement.

2. CONTEXT

As a result of the horrendous civil war in Syria many non-combatant families have had to flee from their homes to refugee camps in Jordan and Lebanon under the oversight of the UNHCR. Since 2015 our diocese, in partnership with Essex County Council and other local agencies, has provided resettlement support for 25 Syrian families across Essex. Three of those families are housed in diocesan premises not currently needed for ministerial purposes. We are expecting to support at least another five families in 2019.

3. ESSEX INTEGRATION AND LOCAL SUPPORT GROUPS

Our Diocesan support agency, Essex Integration (formerly Fresh Beginnings), based in Colchester, are now contracted by the County Council to be the sole support agency for Syrian refugees. They, together with many local support groups from our parish churches and some ecumenical partners, are doing a fantastic job in helping settle these arriving families in their new homes, signposting and accompanying them for English language tuition, medical care, schools, and fitness to work etc. In recent times they've assisted two Syrian men into full-time work and hope to do similarly for five more over the next few months. Twelve men have also passed their UK driving tests since arriving in the country. This has been done with partial grant aid, especially for housing, under the Home Office's VPRS (Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme)

4. COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP

In addition to this, a local group in East London now led by Fr Gareth Jones, Vicar of St Mary's Ilford assisted by Revd Alex Guest, curate at Waltham Abbey has been working via the Home Office's Community Sponsorship Programme to welcome another Syrian family into Dagenham. This relies more fully on local fund raising rather than Government grants and will be initially supported by our appeal funds.

5. DIOCESAN REFUGEE CO-ORDINATOR

Fr Gareth has also recently and energetically assumed the role of Diocesan Refugee Co-ordinator in succession to Revd Dave Scott and Mr Martin Mitchell who have moved on in the past year.

5. USE OF THE DIOCESAN APPEAL FUND

After the horrendous scenes shown on our media outlets back in 2015, our diocesan appeal for Syrian families rapidly raised £108,000 due to the generosity of many individuals and parishes. Just over half of that fund has now been spent in support of the resettlement needs not provided for by Government grants: white goods, vacuum cleaners, mobile phones and other immediate essentials, especially for the children.

5. CONCLUSION

It has been such a great encouragement to see so many Christians in our parishes come together to help and support these families who have been through so much in the trauma of war and conflict. Many still need very particular and sensitive support in coping with what they have seen and making a new start in a new country and new homes.

Most, but not all, Syrian refugees have an Islamic faith and heritage, and in line with the Jesus teaching, especially in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25-37), we are called to be neighbours to those who are in desperate need. Our help and support is in the name of Christ, yet with no church strings attached.

As our diocese continues to support those already here and expects to receive and assist more Syrian refugee families going forward, Synod is asked to continue its support for this essential and transformative ministry.

MOTION

This Synod:

- i. *renews its commitment to partner with Essex County Council, the Home Office and local church and community groups in supporting refugee families who are legally re-settled in the diocese;*
- ii. *recognizes and gives thanks for the transformational ministry of Essex Integration as the diocesan support agency for refugees;*
- iii. *encourages church members and PCCs to consider financial support for Essex Integration through their charitable giving;*
- iv. *and promotes the setting up of Community Sponsorship schemes as an alternative means of supporting incoming families.*

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