

Summer

praying for those seeking sanctuary

AIM

Some ideas for praying with and for those who have come to Britain to seek sanctuary.

INTRODUCTION

The term 'seekers of sanctuary' is being used to replace the words previously used for asylum seekers and refugees, as these terms have become political footballs. Some towns and cities in the UK have joined the Sanctuary movement and are trying to educate and inspire local communities to offer welcome to those seeking sanctuary.

Here are some resources you may like to use in a small group, in a service of worship or individually to reflect and pray about current issues regarding those seeking sanctuary in Britain. You will find further information in the local and national press and on the internet. You may want to use some of the information in your church magazine or news letter to encourage others to think and pray about this.

Let me tell you

Rima Andmariam, now 17 years old, arrived in the UK in March 2008, fleeing persecution in Eritrea and then racist neglect in Italy.

She came to stay with Robert Swinfen and Alison Phipps in Glasgow in March 2009, and they have become a close-knit family unit. Rima has a strong case for asylum from Eritrea, but under the Dublin Regulation is liable to be returned to Italy. She has come to love Robert and Alison as her Dad and Mum, and they have very strong parental feelings for her too. For the past year they, with some help from friends, have provided her entire support as if she were indeed their foster daughter. Rima is extremely vulnerable and in need of a secure family to recover from the trauma and chaos of the past three years of her life. She is doing very well, but is far from ready to live on her own and both wants and needs to continue living with her British Mum and Dad.

Rima's family are "Pentecostal" Christians, which is illegal in Eritrea. Her father was taken away by the police when Rima was 14, and nothing has been heard of him since. Six months later the police came back for Rima's mother; as she was breast-feeding they instead took Rima for interrogation. Rima was fortunate enough to be released, but her mother realised that she would continue to be in danger as the oldest child in the family, and therefore arranged for friends to smuggle her out of Eritrea.

After a difficult and dangerous journey, Rima managed to reach Italy, but her troubles were far from over. As with many other Africans seeking sanctuary from persecution in Italy, after initial registration (name, date of birth, fingerprint) Rima was completely ignored. She lived in a large derelict squat and had to walk to charity soup-kitchens for food. This precarious situation eventually led to an incident in which Rima lost a finger, with the stump becoming badly infected. The charity volunteers in Milan clubbed together to find the money to pay for Rima to travel to the UK, where they hoped she would be treated better.

Rima was 15 when she was dispersed to Cardiff in March 2008, and to start with was treated as the child which she was. Unfortunately, the formal Age Assessment which Social Services performed was extremely biased and concluded that – as she could not prove her exact date of birth – she was over 20. This meant that she was liable to be sent back to Italy. Terrified of a return to such a scary and precarious existence, Rima ran away. She moved from house to house for several months, staying with one or two other Eritrean asylum seekers, before she was sent to Scotland where she arrived in Glasgow homeless and destitute in March 2009.

Summer

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Rita's case was a subject of a recent Judicial Review. She continues to seek leave to remain in the UK. You can find more at:

<http://www.lettrimastay.org.uk/>

In his own words...

Sorry

Sorry that we are here

That we take your time Sorry

Sorry that we breathe your air

That we walk on your ground

That we stand in your view

Sorry

Yes sorry

Sorry that we look like we do

Sorry that we disturb your rest

You do enough for us already

Sorry that we are not grateful and happy

Not grateful enough

And that my name is not David

Or Catherine

Or May

But Rashed Holta

And Ardita

Sorry that we sit in your trains and buses

And on your benches in the sun

And that we brought nothing

And the only thing we have is a story

Not even a happy story ..

A Boy from Bosnia Age Unknown

Summer

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Sanctuary movement

Sanctuary has a long history in the Christian tradition. The City of Sanctuary movement has recently sought to renew this as a response to the needs of people looking for hospitality in a wide of circumstances in this country. This response has been chosen in order to built a more positive way forward than the rather negative press that has been gathering over this decade towards asylum seekers and refugees. Whilst not all people in Britain share these negative views it was felt that a more positive reminder of the Christian tradition of sanctuary could offer a positive way forward at this time. Sheffield became the UK's first City of Sanctuary in 2007.

The Sanctuary movement has three core principles:

1. it is a mainstream grassroots movment built from a coalition of people and organisations from all sections of society
2. it works by creating opportunities for relationships between local people and those seeking sanctuary
3. it offers a positive vision of a culture of hospitality for those in need of safety.

You can find more here:

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

There are plenty of ideas and activities linked to the movement for sanctuary including making a welcome bookmark here:

<http://www.cityofsanctuary.org/resources/bookmark>

A recent promise

Children in detention. 'It has been clear to many of us involved in this area that it would make any civilised being very **very** uncomfortable to see children locked up behind bars. I visited **Yarl's** Wood a couple of times when I was the opposition spokesman for immigration, and although conditions there improved quite considerably in the last few years, there is no getting away from the fact that if you are a civilised decent human being the sight of young children locked up behind bars should make you feel profoundly uneasy. It made me feel uneasy. So I'm not just ending the detention of children out of a sense of duty or because I'm instructed to by the prime minister and deputy minister – it is actually a pleasure as well as a duty to end this. I think this will be a better country when we don't detain children for immigration purposes'

Damien Green, Minister for Immigration, made this statement in June 2010.

Prayer

They came looking for Sanctuary

They arrived looking for Sanctuary.

We shared conversation together and

Summer

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caught a glimpse of the

Love of Distressed People.

They shared stories of their lives.

We listened to each other and

learned anew of the courage and

Compassion of the Dispossessed.

They enjoyed a meal with us.

We arranged hospitality

with the presence of the

Spirit of Vitality giving encouragement

They presented us with a challenge.

Afterwards, we talked about ways of living together and

came near to the reconciling

Spirit of Justice, Joy and Peace

Let us share love,

compassion

justice

so that we take light

to women, men and children

breathing,

crying people

who yearn

to be released from their bondage

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EVALUATION

Please try to answer these questions for yourself and for others who will use this material:

1. What was the most helpful thing?
2. What was the least helpful thing?
3. What would you like to try now?

THE NEXT STEP

If you want more summer materials please revisit the website.

If you want to do more work around this issue then please email Geoff Duncan at world.churchandsociety@urcthamesnorth.org.uk for up to date information and networking opportunities.

Acknowledgements

This material has been provided by Geoffrey Duncan who has given permission for it to be used in the Vision4life process.

HOW TO FEEDBACK TO VISION4LIFE?

If you wish to offer any feedback – brickbats and bouquets are equally welcome! – you can do so in various ways.

You can email the Vision4Life steering group about general or website V4L issues via the website or at admin@vision4life.org.uk

If you have comments and particularly contributions to the prayer year, you can email the V4L prayer year coordinator via prayer@vision4life.org.uk

If you want to make contributions or ask questions about other V4L years you can email:

Year 3 – Transformed for Evangelism: evangelism@vision4life.org.uk