



The Venerable The Archdeacon of Saint Francis

Anglican Diocese of Quebec

4th October 2014

FEAST OF ST FRANCIS OF ASSISI

FROM THE DEANERY MINISTRY COMMITTEE:

The Venerable Doctor Edward Simonton, The Reverend Canon Lynn Dillabough,
Mrs Ruth Sheeran, and Mr John Rasmussen

Then the King will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me...Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.'
MATHEW 25.34-36 & 40

Dear Friends in Christ,

The passage quoted above is about action, about doing something significant when there is a need. Each of us has been in situations when if we had not acted—perhaps to help someone in trouble or to protect a child in danger—we would have suffered from regret and a heavy conscience. There are moments in time when we as a community are called upon to act or be condemned by history. When Christ said that He did not come to judge the world but by His coming the world has been judged, He was giving voice to this need for action.

The Syrian refugee crisis now presents us with an opportunity to follow this injunction. The displacement of eleven million Syrian has galvanised the United Nations into initiating its largest humanitarian appeal since it was founded. The Christian leaders of the world have called upon the Baptised to rise to this challenge. Pope Francis has asked that all European parishes and religious houses sponsor a refugee family, effectively asking them to take in half a million refugees. It is being called the worst humanitarian crisis since the Second World War.

"Facing the tragedy of tens of thousands of refugees — fleeing death by war and famine, and journeying towards the hope of life — the Gospel calls, asking of us to be close to the smallest and forsaken. To give them a concrete hope," he said. "And not just to tell them: 'Have courage, be patient!' " Pope Francis – September 2015

The Pope and the Archbishop of Canterbury have both taken in refugee families. Our own Primate has stated that our actions at this time will decide who we are; it is clearly now our time to act.

"Yet our own actions are what give meaning to our words as we share our abundance through greater international assistance, welcome refugees ... and work for peace. How we choose to respond says a great deal about who we are and the values to which we adhere." The Most Rev'd Fred Hiltz, Primate – September 2015

Last week a delegation of thirty Syrian and Iraqi refugees met with our provincial Premier and Immigration Minister and secured a promise that Quebec would process two thousand applications before the end of this year. The local Syrian Orthodox community has already sponsored thirty families while the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Sherbrooke has just pledged \$300,000 to sponsor another twenty refugee families. For our part, the Deanery of St

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Francis has responded to this call by establishing the Deanery Refugee Fund. Working with St Ephrem Syrian Orthodox Church in Sherbrooke we are hoping to sponsor two families (fifteen people) in the coming months. St Ephram, under the direction of Mr Allen Haddad, President of the Board of Trustees, has generously undertaken to complete the government sponsorship process for us and be responsible for the practical integration of the refugees once they arrive.

Time is short as the situation in the refugee camps is deteriorating rapidly. In order to allow us to move forward immediately, the parishes of St George's, Lennoxville and St Barnabas, North Hatley have generously agreed to lend the Deanery the \$30,000 necessary to begin the process for the first family. To respond to this significant gesture, we anticipate that each parish will decide to donate a lump sum to the Refugee Fund. St Stephen's, Coaticook has already pledged \$5000, and St George's, Ayer's Cliff has contributed \$3000. Considering the size and financial situation of these parishes this is incredibly generous and should make us all proud. If each parish gives according to their means, we will be well on our way to offsetting the loan guaranteed by St George's and St Barnabas and funding the first family. We are now asking each parish to consider how they can financially help.

There is also a great deal that can be done in terms of fundraising, both in each parish community as well as at Deanery events. Not least is the personal giving of those in the Deanery. We ask all of you who are able to give what you can. Donations can be made through your own church with an indication that it is for the Deanery Refugee Fund or directly to St Barnabas. The fund itself will be managed by Kylie Cote, a professional bookkeeper, who will operate under the aegis of St Barnabas, North Hatley. (Please send donations to Deanery Refugee Fund, c/o St-Barnabas Church, 640 Sherbrooke Road, North Hatley, QC, J0B 2C0.) Tax receipts will be issued for donations

The Deanery Ministry Committee anticipates we will all be creative and generous as we truly put our faith into practice and reach out to our fellow brothers and sisters in need. We also hope that our actions will deepen our faith as we learn to see in Christ in others. One member of St Stephen's, Coaticook said to me, with tears in her eyes, that the present situation reminded her that she was descended from Irish refugees fleeing the potato famine. In the Syrian refugees she saw herself. This is the gift that we have been offered – to perceive and serve Christ in one another. As St John Chrysostom, one of the four Great Fathers of the East, reminds us "If you do not find Christ in the beggar at the church door, neither will you find him in the chalice."

I end with the statement by the National Council of Churches from the United States on this present crisis.

"From the very beginning, the Church has identified itself with refugees. Our ancestors in faith were themselves refugees when they fled the chariots of Pharaoh after escaping from slavery. Jesus himself was a refugee when his family fled to Egypt to escape the sword of Herod. Whenever early Christians were persecuted, they were made refugees. Since the first century, when people have fled violence and other calamities, and sought refuge in other places, often the welcome they received in these foreign societies was symbolized, and indeed motivated, by the open embrace of churches providing sanctuary and material assistance. Christians and Jews alike have heeded God's command, "You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt (Deuteronomy 10:19, NRSV)."

Today, fellow Christians and their Muslim neighbors are fleeing violence in Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iraq, Somalia, and Syria in numbers not seen since 16 million people were forced from their lands during the Second World War. And worse, this current refugee crisis is growing. After years of civil strife and now terrorist extremism, Syrians are fleeing by the thousands, not only to neighboring countries, but, as sadly and dramatically playing out daily on our television screens, to Europe. The international community seems incapable of finding a solution to this crisis.

We also call upon churches in the United States, Europe and throughout the world to join in resettling refugees in their cities, towns, and villages, welcoming the stranger as our faith demands. And we call upon all people of conscience to join with churches and other organizations in compassionate responses to this crisis.

This refugee crisis was years in the making. It is now unfolding before our eyes. We cannot let it continue."

*For the DMC,
Edward OGS*