

Dear Rectors and Synod members,

As you are aware, at the recent session of Synod a resolution regarding the Syrian refugee crisis was passed. The resolution included encouragement for all in the Diocese to pray for, and to practically support, the people of that war-torn region, while also supporting Diocesan organisations providing assistance and resources. The full text of the resolution is included below.

Following the passing of the resolution, Synod members were given the opportunity to share insights and ideas as to how we as a Christian community can support the refugees that are destined to be housed in Sydney. Attached to this email is a summary of the comments made at that time.

I encourage you to share these practical measures with your leadership team, and prayerfully consider how your church can contribute to the care of these people in great need.

47/15 Syrian refugee crisis

This Synod, mindful of the scale of the humanitarian catastrophe in the wake of the violence in Syria and elsewhere in the Middle East, remembering the open handed generosity of Christ our Good Samaritan, and aware of the abundant resources with which our gracious God has endowed this nation –

- (a) gives thanks to God for the leadership of Archbishop Glenn Davies on this issue both in public and in private, and particularly in mobilising the Diocese through its parishes and organisations to assist those in such dire need;
- (b) commits itself to support him in prayer as he continues to play such an important role in our nation's response to this crisis;
- (c) commits itself and encourages all in this Diocese to continue to pray for the people of this war-torn region, especially those who suffer persecution for the name of Jesus;
- (d) encourages all in the Diocese to seek to build personal helping relationships where possible;
- (e) commends the Australian Government for agreeing to increase the number of refugees from this region;
- (f) respectfully calls on the Australian Government to consider further significant increases to this number and the provision of a permanent safe-haven for the men, women and children who have suffered as result of civil war, terrorism and the policies of regimes and organisations in all parts of the world, including all those who have suffered persecution for their faith; and
- (g) encourages all members of the Anglican Church in Sydney to enthusiastically and generously support the fundraising initiatives of Diocesan organisations that have committed assistance, expertise, resources and facilities towards the needs of the Syrian refugees.

Responses to the motion regarding the Syrian Refugee Crisis

20 October 2015

1. Mr Tony Willis

Sydney Anglican Schools Corporation (now the Anglican Schools Corporation) formed a task force to report to the November Board meeting regarding ways the Corporation can support the refugees, including offering scholarships to students and considering how its schools can partner with Anglicare to raise funds.

2. Bishop Chris Edwards

Anglican Retirement Villages ("ARV") are in the last stages of finalising a new village in Penrith for people at risk (of homelessness). ARV's board has decided to offer all of the units to any elderly refugees. Bishop Edwards gave encouragement for all in the Diocese to think seriously about how we can address this issue and to consider the comments in the European press who are noting the support of refugees given by "faith communities".

3. Mrs Gillian Davidson

Anglican Deaconess Ministries ("ADM") is hosting a website as part of a coordinated response to the crisis. At the website (www.1parish1refugeefamily.org/) parishes are invited to register their interest in assisting. Assistance may include adopting a refugee family, providing a personal welcome and practical assistance through means such as ESL classes, employment, etc. Synod members are encouraged to bring the website to the attention of those in their parish, and sign up.

4. Mr Roger Gallagher

Be welcoming, but also consider what other practical help could be provided. For example, the youth of the Diocese have the opportunity to contribute towards the resettlement of Syrian refugees by being welcoming towards any refugees (whether at church or at school) and, for those with a more academic bent, by offering tutoring to refugee students.

5. Bishop Peter Lin

Most refugees coming to Sydney will go to the Georges River Region, which has limited resources to provide for them. What will be needed most will be for people to form and build relationships with refugees: personal connection with people to really loving them through practical help, such as taking and showing them how to –

- shop,
- catch a bus,
- find a doctor or dentist,
- enrol kids in school,
- fill a prescription,
- speak to Centrelink and government departments, and
- many other practical everyday tasks.

Having them over for meals (repeatedly), and sharing Christ when the opportunity arises is also important.

Most helping organisations 'leave the hamper at the door'; very few will talk, embrace and include them. We can do this and we should do this. Perhaps a Bible Study Group can, together, support a refugee family; or a congregation support a refugee family, or a church.

And our great desire (though not required) is that we will have opportunity to share the message of love and forgiveness through faith in Jesus.

6. Mrs Tara Sing

Many people do not understand what the refugees have been through. Consequently part of helping the church in Fairfield has been to teach what these people have been through in an effort to keep compassion and love for all refugees on the church's agenda. Several methods can be used –

- Fairfield shared the stories of refugee families with the church; notably many of these families have over the years become Sunday school teachers and fill other key roles in the church,
- consider holding an information session to understand how refugee support organisations try to help people,
- screen, or encourage the watching of, the movie “The Devil and the Deep Blue Sea” which is useful to help people to understand and empathise with the plight of refugees, and
- partner with other churches.

Making the time and effort to befriend these people is what is important.

7. Mr Frederick Chilton

In Australia it is easy to fail to understand the enormity of the issue. Lebanon has a population of 4 million people, 1 million of whom are Syrian refugees. Lebanon is a struggling economy and unable to look after them. We can help by writing to politicians to increase our intake of Syrian Christian brothers and sisters.

Anglican Aid and the Overseas Council Australia (“OCA”) are working amongst them, with projects such as training refugees to be teachers to teach the refugee children.

8. The Rev Dr Margaret Powell

The refugees’ greatest need is our time, and would benefit greatly if visited in their homes: in their culture, to visit someone in their home is the most honouring thing you can do. If they can host you and serve you, it will restore a little of their dignity. Just spending time is appreciated by them, even if language is a barrier.

Our churches should get together and form teams, even if it involves releasing people from regular rosters to travel to meet with the refugees. Think about forming ministry teams - it is worth it to travel across Sydney.

For anyone who has their own business, offering employment or training would be incredibly beneficial.

Our churches need to be welcoming places. We need to love one another so that they can see the unity in Christ.

9. The Rev Michael Aitken

Christians should lead in loving refugees. Noting that we are not likely to receive many refugees in the Northern Beaches area, we have partnered with churches across the area and across denominations to aim to provide host families for 100 refugees over a three month hosting period. The intention is that through our church networks, independent living accommodation such as granny flats, houses and units in our area can be made available for a 3 month minimum duration at an affordable rent. As churches we will be pooling services such as ESL classes, childcare and social activities; we will also be providing a system of 'buddies' to befriend and support refugees.

We have received positive responses from the Premier and Settlement Services International (the organisation tasked to aid the Government’s settlement of these refugees) and so far have 30 churches on board. Could there be wider participation across the Christian churches of Sydney? Please pray for us as we work to make this Northern Beaches initiative a reality.

10. Mr Eddie Ozols

As the son of refugee parents, he understands that the people who were kind to his parents, being friendly, were the people who helped the most. Relationship is the key. Practical ways to help are important, and may include organising English lessons.

11. The Rev Brian Tung

Could partnerships be formed between parishes and Evangelism and New Churches to identify, recruit and deploy language competent evangelists to the refugee community (including, if appropriate, the establishment of a scholarship for the training of such a worker at Moore College)?

12. Ms Jane Paingakulam

We should not forget about the refugees who have been here for a long time already. The excellent initiatives that we have heard about tonight should be considered for a wider context.

13. Mrs Annette Sheen

Instead of waiting until the refugees arrive, we could start teaching kids Arabic now, and try to set aside families now who can relate to the refugees. We could also go to public schools with the initiatives we are considering for Anglican schools and encourage them to do similar.

14. The Rev David Clarke

Hoxton Park Anglican Church has planted an Arabic congregation, with everything done in Arabic including Middle-Eastern style music. Please pray for them as they reach out to the refugees arriving in South West Sydney, under the leadership of Pastor Sami Youkhana. Please pray for boldness as they face opposition and consider financially supporting Hoxton Park in this ministry.

15. The Rev Steve Roberts

Practical support is important, such as lending cars and offering help adjusting to Australian ways. There are Apps which can be used for translation for both sending texts and in personal conversation if language is a problem. A real help is to establish friendships through children.

16. Mr Peter M Young

Think of the people left behind. Pray for the refugees here, but also for those still in Syria and Iraq, and especially for those few, that band of brothers and sisters, who are persecuted for and shed blood for their faith.

17. Mr Grant Millard

From February 2016, approximately 500 Syrian Refugees will be arriving per month in Australia. Anglicare is leading the Diocesan response to the refugee intake and is developing a range of programs where other diocesan organisations and parishes can become involved in assisting new arrivals. To date the Archbishop's appeal to assist Syrian refugees in Australia has raised just over \$250,000. The Archbishop has been on the front foot in advocacy for Syrian refugees with the Australian government as well.

Consider that the refugee intake will not remain in the media focus for a prolonged period, but the need will be prolonged. Let's make our response so overwhelmingly positive, that the Federal Government will be compelled to say that we can do more.