



Proverbs 31:8-9

Open your mouth for the mute,
for the rights of all who are
destitute. Open your mouth, judge
righteously, defend the rights of
the poor and needy.

How do we welcome refugees who have come to live in our towns and villages, and the especially the children who join our schools? Our local high school has welcomed in children from Hong Kong and Afghanistan in recent months. One part of our working relationship with that school is to invite groups of children into church to learn about what the Church is for, what it does, and its place and participation in the life of the wider community. Being asked whether we would do the same for the newly arrived Afghan pupils presented some challenges. They were all Muslim. Would they want to even step foot in the building? What would they make of the images in our windows; of the worship space; of a female priest?

The visits they made to church were a joy. Yes, there were some questions about a stained glass representation of Jesus on the cross, amongst others, but we made them welcome and they appreciated and responded to that. They were, as far as I know, unaware that we had collected clothes, toiletries, stationary, face masks, money – all the things they needed but had had to leave behind in such traumatic circumstances. We did it because they were in need and we could help. What mattered as they came into church was that we showed them that they mattered – that their lives were precious and important and that they were welcome. Hearing from their interpreters, who had escaped with them,

something of what they had gone through, it was amazing and wonderful to see them laughing and chatting together and being able to be children in a safe place.

They learnt something about Christianity and about the Church on those visits. One of the most important things we did was to listen. I learned so much, about my own prejudices and pre-conceived ideas; about their rich culture and heritage; and about the joy of giving a welcome to people who have found themselves vulnerable and voiceless and in need in a strange land.

Sometimes the poverty is ours – poverty of loving action. Sometimes the need is ours – the need to better understand the other in order to love as Jesus commands us.

How do we welcome refugees who have come to live in our towns and villages, and the children who join our schools?

Are there opportunities for you to speak or act on behalf of refugees in your community? Getting to know others is the first step to overcoming fear and prejudice. Are there opportunities for you to do that and to help to build community with and for those who have had to leave theirs behind?

Dear Lord

Open our hearts to all who come to this country as refugees. We pray especially for children who have seen and experienced such suffering, that they would find peace, stability, healing and hope in their new homes. Help us to be people who act on behalf of those who find they have no voice, no rights, and little or nothing in the way of practical support. Help us to overcome fear with understanding; indifference with advocacy, and reticence with open-heartedness.

Amen

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