

Circuit Pastoral Letter September 1st

The summer holidays are nearly over, the flowers are beginning to fade and in mornings and evenings there is just a hint of the chill of autumn. As we leave one season behind, rather than thinking of endings, let's look forward to new beginnings – the adventures for some children of new schools, leaving home to go to college, the challenge of starting new jobs or moving home.

Most of those experiences will be positive, even if at times, slightly testing. But nothing compared to the tragic situation faced by the people of Afghanistan. Some who have made it on to the evacuation flights can at least look forward to a new start in a safe place. Others who will soon have the entry gates of the airport shut against them, may see only death and despair in their futures. An interpreter who worked for UK forces spoke of his concern for his wife and family should they not succeed in being airlifted from Kabul. In a quite matter of fact way, he told the interviewer that if he failed to make it onto a plane, he only had four or five days left before he would be discovered by the Taliban and killed.

Peter was right to say in last week's Pastoral Letter that there have always been refugees. Regrettably probably there will always be refugees, people forced to flee their homelands because of violence, war, discrimination and extreme poverty. Christian faith requires us to reach out to help them. This Circuit and churches have been wonderfully supportive to Syrian refugees in camps in Jordan and those resettled here. Our generosity continues to be vital to the wellbeing and welcome of the thousands of asylum seekers and refugees crossing the Channel – more than 8000 this year so far, a record number risking their lives in small overcrowded inflatables in the busiest water way in the world.

Although not technically refugees, many people from Hong Kong are expected to come to the UK as the politically tense situation in the province gets more oppressive. They will be welcomed and supported by the Chinese Church based at Trinity Woking Methodist and the District.

Leaving their homes, country and family behind will be very far from easy for most refugees, nor will settling into life in a different land and culture be without some difficulties. Language barriers, gaining access to education and employment, finding suitable accommodation are all potential obstacles to be overcome. And then there is the mental trauma of what refugees have been through – desperate journeys, separation from loved ones, vulnerability to traffickers, hunger and lack of security.

82.4 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced at the end of 2020 as a result of persecution, conflict, violence or human rights violations. 26 million are registered with the UN as refugees; half of those are children. These figures can seem overwhelming to us as individuals. The distressing footage of the crowds struggling to get through the gates at the airport in Kabul leaves us feeling upset and helpless.

In his letter, Peter suggested some positive actions we can take – trusting in God, praying and accepting the stranger as a friend. Support those charities and churches which are reaching out to refugees with practical help and aid programmes. As Christians our faith does not allow us to walk away from those who need our help. We have a responsibility to try and give refugees a future to look forward to, a new beginning in the sunshine of Christ's love.

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