

Pastoral Letter from Archbishop Eamon Martin

Sunday, 25 October 2015

Some of the most moving contributions at the Synod on the Family have been about the plight of migrant and refugee families in many parts of the world. I found myself deeply moved on several occasions as we listened to accounts of families separated, grieving and oppressed because of war and persecution in their homelands. An African bishop told us that massive numbers of refugees have poured into Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Zambia and Malawi. Some of the poorest countries in the world such as Malawi have been inundated with people fleeing war and destruction. Malawi has been dealing with over 400,000 refugees. So far, we have been asked to take only a small fraction of that number into Ireland as a whole.

Church

Like the blind beggar Bartimaeus in today's Gospel, sitting on the side of the road, members of these unfortunate families cry out to us: 'Have pity on me'. The Church has been playing its part in responding. Great work has already been done by a host of individuals, groups and parishes across the diocese such as Trócaire and St Vincent de Paul, Parish Pastoral Councils, schools and other agencies. I thank all of you for your generosity and solidarity with the plight of these tragic people. Many of you have contributed financially to support the work of charities dedicated to relieve the sufferings of the refugees and you can continue to do so by donating to their work at <http://www.trocaire.org/refugee-crisis>.

Government

Although the resettlement of refugees is a complex issue, the governments in both parts of Ireland must do more to protect

the human rights of refugees. We are being confronted with a human tragedy that requires a generous political and church partnership to help meet the needs of these vulnerable people. We have not always handled refugees with the respect that they deserve and lessons need to be learned from the mistakes we have made in the past. There is a pressing need for prompt strategic action that welds together a cohesive plan for welcome, integration and provision of sustainable resources for the refugees. I ask you to stress this to all political figures local, national and international.

What next?

In today's First reading the prophet Jeremiah speaks about the way that God comforts his people by reaching out to them in their need: *'See, I will gather them from the far ends of earth... They had left in tears, I will comfort them as I lead them back; I will guide them to streams of water, by a smooth path where they will not stumble. For I am a father to Israel...'*

As we look to the future and make initial preparations for the arrival of the first cohort of refugees into our diocese, I encourage Parish Pastoral Councils to continue to liaise with other agencies and to coordinate our resources and our response. Many of you are looking at this issue as a response to the call of Pope Francis to reach out to the poor and disadvantaged and of course it is a key objective of our diocesan plan. We can garner the rich array of talents and gifts that are readily present in our communities and use them to meet the human, practical and spiritual needs of the brothers and sisters who will come to us.

Finally, as Christians, I ask that we commit ourselves to pray for those who have been caught up in all these terrible conflicts and I ask you to pray with me the prayer for refugee and migrant families everywhere. + **Eamon**