

Stand with refugees this Advent

"I was a stranger and you welcomed me" - Matthew 25:35

WHAT'S THE ISSUE?

Every Advent, the Church prepares to welcome Christ - a child whose own family became refugees, fleeing into Egypt to find sanctuary from the violence of the state under King Herod. **Today, people in the same situation as the Holy Family face deepening hostility in the UK and laws designed to deter rather than offer protection.**

Public debate frequently labels people crossing the Channel in small boats as "illegal migrants". **Under international law, seeking asylum is not illegal** even if a person enters a country without authorisation. While someone may cross a border irregularly, international treaties recognise that people fleeing persecution often cannot use standard travel visas or safe routes. **Because the UK offers virtually no safe, formal routes to apply for protection from abroad, people fleeing violence are forced onto perilous journeys.** It is illegal, however, to punish people seeking sanctuary for how they arrive in the country.

All of us deserve to live in safety and dignity. And if we were ever forced from our homes, we would want the opportunity to rebuild our lives safely elsewhere, just like the Holy Family. Recent UK asylum legislation and restrictions on family reunion have made it increasingly difficult for those fleeing war, conflict, or persecution to find safety and rebuild their lives in dignity and peace.

Justice & Peace Scotland and the Society of St Vincent de Paul (SSVP) Scotland are inviting Catholics across Scotland to Welcome the Stranger this Christmas by calling on Prime Minister Andy Burnham to treat refugees with the compassion they deserve.

DID YOU KNOW?

REFUGEES AND PEOPLE SEEKING ASYLUM MAKE UP LESS THAN 1% OF THE UK'S TOTAL POPULATION AND AROUND ONLY 16% OF THE TOTAL IMMIGRANT POPULATION. PEOPLE SEEKING SAFETY FROM WAR, VIOLENCE, AND PERSECUTION ARE A TINY DEMOGRAPHIC YET THEY ARE BEING POLITICALLY SCAPEGOATED AND BLAMED FOR SOCIETY'S PROBLEMS.

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PERSON SEEKING ASYLUM

SOMEONE WHO HAS ARRIVED IN THE UK AND FORMALLY APPLIED FOR PROTECTION UNDER THE 1951 REFUGEE CONVENTION. SEEKING ASYLUM IS A UNIVERSAL HUMAN RIGHT. UNDER THE CONVENTION, PEOPLE CAN ARRIVE IN A COUNTRY BY ANY MEANS AND MUST HAVE THEIR CLAIM HEARD.

REFUGEE

SOMEONE WHOSE ASYLUM CLAIM HAS BEEN ACCEPTED BECAUSE THEY HAVE PROVEN THEY FACE A WELL-FOUNDED FEAR OF PERSECUTION. REFUGEE STATUS IS A LEGAL RECOGNITION ENTITLING THEM TO PROTECTION, THOUGH RECENT RULES MAKE THAT SECURITY TEMPORARY AND PRECARIOUS.

IMMIGRATION DETENTION

THE ADMINISTRATIVE IMPRISONMENT OF PEOPLE BY THE HOME OFFICE WHILE THEIR IMMIGRATION STATUS IS RESOLVED. LOCKED IN PRISON-LIKE CENTRES WITH LIMITED FAMILY OR COMMUNITY CONTACT, DETAINEES OFTEN EXPERIENCE SEVERE MENTAL TRAUMA AND ISOLATION.

> WHEN THERE ARE JUST REASONS FOR IT [PEOPLE] MUST BE PERMITTED TO EMIGRATE TO OTHER COUNTRIES AND TAKE UP RESIDENCE THERE. THE FACT THAT SOMEONE IS A CITIZEN OF A PARTICULAR STATE DOES NOT DEPRIVE HIM OF MEMBERSHIP IN THE HUMAN FAMILY...
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> **Pacem in Terris, Pope John XXIII, 1963**

WHAT DOES THE CATHOLIC CHURCH SAY ABOUT REFUGEES?

Catholic Social Teaching has long promoted safety and sanctuary for refugees and people seeking asylum. From *Pacem in Terris* in 1963 to *Magnifica Humanitas* in 2026, **the Church has consistently taught that in pursuit of the common good for all people, where a fellow human being has just reasons to seek protection in the borders of another state, that protection should be granted**.

The foundational principle of all Catholic Social Teaching is the inviolable dignity of every human person, created in the image and likeness of God, **a dignity that does not depend on nationality, passport, or legal status.** We all have a duty to protect that dignity for all of our neighbours, especially where it is threatened by violence and oppression.

Pope Francis taught that every stranger who arrives on our shores embodies an opportunity to encounter Jesus Christ. In his message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees in 2021, he explored the theme 'towards an ever wider we', warning that solidarity with one another is increasingly under threat from nationalist or individualist tendencies, with the highest price being paid by those viewed as 'the other'.

During this season of Advent and Christmas, as we remember the Holy Family searching for shelter at the inns of Bethlehem, are we prepared offer refuge to those knocking at our doors today?



> "A LITMUS TEST FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE TODAY IS THE TREATMENT OF MIGRANTS, REFUGEES AND THOSE FORCED TO MOVE DUE TO POVERTY, VIOLENCE, CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL DISASTERS. THE WAY A SOCIETY TREATS THEM REVEALS WHETHER ITS SENSE OF JUSTICE IS DRIVEN BY FEAR OR BY THE SPIRIT OF FRATERNITY."
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> **Magnifica Humanitas, Pope Leo XIV, 2026**

TAKE ACTION TO WELCOME THE STRANGER

STEP 1 - JOIN OUR CAMPAIGN AND SEND A POSTCARD TO ANDY BURNHAM

Add your name to one of our postcards calling on the Prime Minister to:

- Restore the right to asylum:
- Put dignity and protection at the heart of the asylum system
- End immigration detention

Get involved:

- To order free postcards for your parish or group, email: **socialjustice@ssvpscotland.com**
- For further information on refugees, people seeking asylum, or immigration detention or to request additional copies of this briefing, email: **office@justiceandpeacescotland.org.uk** or **visit www.justiceandpeacescotland.org.uk**

STEP 2 - PRAY IN YOUR PARISH OR GROUP

Include refugees in your prayer intentions this Advent. Pray, too, for political leaders and all people, that hearts may be moved to compassion and a desire to welcome the stranger.

Justice & Peace Scotland is the operating name of the National Justice and Peace Commission. It is a Commission of the Bishops' Conference of Scotland. Catholic National Endowment Trust (also known as The Bishops' Conference of Scotland) is a charity registered in Scotland. Charity No. SCO 16650. Society of St Vincent de Paul Scotland (SSVP Scotland) is a charity registered in Scotland. Charity No. SC 006326