

CAB Bristol Prayer and Share Group

DRAFT Notes of Meeting

Subject: Refugees and Asylum Seekers
Date: 21-Oct-15 12:30
Location: City Road Baptist Church

Attendees: About 40 Attendees including:

Dr Knut Helm	Trinity College
Father Richard McKay	St Nicholas of Tolentino
	Borderlands
Rachael Bee	Bristol Hospitality Network
Juliet Dellow	Easton Jubilee Trust
Steve Wilmshurst	Kensington Baptist Church

Note: This is a record of what was said, generally in the order in which it was said, although in some cases material has been moved in order to provide a logical flow.

Knut Helm - Trinity and Baptist College

Provided a five minute theological undergirding for the refugee and asylum issues

He, Trinity College, lives on high on an ivory tower.

From on high see a rich heritage – unfortunately we do not seem to warn people of what they see. As a country, by refusing refugees, we are turning away a huge asset.

Almost all of the key personalities in the Bible have been refugees or immigrants including Jesus Christ.

Passages from scripture need more careful understanding than we have in the past. He is writing a book what will become a 250 page book that will unashamedly be academic. Currently has written nine pages.

Trinity College and the Baptist College are bring together resources to provide a deeper theological understanding of the subject. Last Thursday they presented three technical papers. They want to produce a website.

They will be producing robust arguments that can be used in public debate and private conversations.

Nice that people can do ‘real work’, actually working with refugees and asylum seekers. The calling of the academic group is to change the political agenda – the biggest work to persuade/force the politicians into accepting people.

Richard McKay plus two others - Borderlands

60 nationalities in St Nicks congregation

Practical issues for impoverished people – not good news if we are not involved eg Luke 4 and many other passages.

At St Nicks 14 years ago – phone call from Catholic lay group asking for help with the refugee issues – there was a very steep learning curve.

There is a lack of integrity in the Home Office, which refugees know only too well when faced with a brick wall of denial.

Asylum Seekers are considered guilty until proved innocent – proof includes provision of documentation, which of course, someone fleeing for asylum doesn't have.

Until their asylum status is accepted they are treated as prisoners in jail, and are abused by the authorities, eg by not being given a time scale for completion of their appeal.

In partnership with Bristol Refugee Rights

Initially St Nicks took this work on themselves but started running out of resources – finance and energy. Borderlands was created to meet the need – named from Jesus on the borders of Samaria, from exclusion to inclusion.

A drop in centre Mondays and Tuesdays – teach English

Work in partnership – Red Cross and Albany solicitors

Hot meal on Tuesday

Food bank distribution

Every 3-4 weeks a big food bank distribution

Develop a program for Refugees that have been accepted so they can move on.

Bristol is recognised as a City of Sanctuary – Richard is the chair – a key player

A key role in working with the Council

“If the Government is to honour its promise to accept a paltry number of refugees through, it will need chasing.”

Rachael Bee - Bristol Hospitality Network

Smaller group Hosting destitute Asylum seekers from 27 different countries

Got some funding last year for advocacy work for asylum seekers

Hot lunch Monday Tuesday Thursday

People are destitute because:

When they ask for asylum status –

they are not treated as a refugee until accepted as a refugee

Benefits given to Asylum seekers are halted if their claim is rejected, therefore, if they appeal they have to live for a period without financial support.

Lacking networks and backing after refugee status accepted, it typically takes one/two years to build up a network.

People working with refused asylum/refugees find the Home Office nasty and tough.

[Richard questioned the credibility of Home Office].

Seldom have documentary evidence.

30% granted first time round – mainly Syrian

More difficult to achieve refugee status if from a less well known conflict.

The very low level of refugees being accepted from other areas is being masked by the numbers being accepted from Syria– abused and badly treated by our Government – as bad as their home country

Once refused they lose refugee rights – are not allowed to work – no right to housing.

They need support welcome and love

Currently hosting 22 people.

Looking for private rented accommodation for refugees

Juliet Dellow – Easton Jubilee Trust

Set up by Kensington Baptist Church

Now work with refugees – this is a change of policy

Organisation has a Low profile – changed their focus as they realised they were not doing what they could best be doing.

Run an English conversation class – in a fun laid back chilled setting

Talk through navigation of our bureaucracy – eg booking GP appointment

It typically takes ten sessions before refugees feel significantly more confident

After November will run more sessions – four a week – need more volunteers

Steve Wilmshurst - Kensington Baptist Church

Interested in politics – keen to encourage people

Want to learn from Bristol Hospitality network

The need to pray not as an alternative to working – but pray is not an option, it is essential.

Providing financial support is another option

Hospitality – want people to be involved in hosting refugees

Fourth thing to offer is Christ. This is wanted more than anything else.

[We need to bring Christ to refugees as well as help them practically]

Question and Comment Time

01 Legal Status of refused Asylum seekers

What is the legal status on refused asylum refugees?

They are supposed to leave the country – they often can't – expected to sign fortnightly/ monthly. Therefore, Home Office knows the persons address

'Hiding' is more difficult than being 'up front' with the Home Office, asylum seekers are advised to take this course.

02 What is the long term path for refused Asylum Seekers?

To get the claim agreed can involve multiple appeals

eg one who appealed four times, had a bad judge on one of those appeals.

In the vast majority can get it agreed, but it costs lots of money

Immigration detention – prison conditions – no date to let out

Systematically abused by system – no date to let out or be expelled

As bad as Victorian times.

03 What are the options for the destitute, those who don't find anywhere to live?

The Julian Trust night shelter is an option (but not for many – it is intimidating – many find it preferable to sleep outside in the bushes).

Friends.

Asylum occupation is often doubly occupied.

People sleeping rough often do so in groups of two or three together.

It is getting harder now the Winter is coming.

04 Proposed build of a refugee centre near Bath

Proposal

'C' a Chairman of a property company in Bath suggested:

He has offered a property as a reception centre to the Government

He has been to Calais

Passionate to do what he can

Has been passed from pillar to post – Richard Harrington (new Minister) has not acknowledged his submissions

He has a property near the junction of the M4 and the A46 that could take 1000 migrants Serco 4GS and (other) who house refugees are bursting at the seams – Charlie is keen to see this happen

He will connect with anyone who will listen

There is a small group want nothing on this site – local opposition

Business developing and designing properties could be done at one fifth of cost of a commercial contractor.

The community could be created to include a Medical Centre and Community school. The planning system is very difficult

Any support would be welcome.

Why not start a petition and get a few, a 1000, signatures.

Nick Webb helping just a couple of people

Site quick and effective and low cost

The site is Government Land an eight acre site.

A crisis situation – this is a better alternative to hotels around Heathrow

The Labour party, before them, took the same approach.

We need to work on the general population to change opinion

A response to the proposal from the meeting

(There was not a general discussion on the proposal)

There was some support for providing a well run centre, but also questions about whether large centres like this were appropriate solutions, and about the wisdom of such a large scheme.

05 Feedback and Possible Courses of Action

- Danger of meeting and talking, and doing nothing about the rising number of people without shelter tonight.
- Imagine your son or daughter was a refugee – what would we do?
- 'Knock on door of' 10 Downing Street – the Government is using harsh force
- They are treated as a criminal when they are simply seeking sanctuary.
- The news can be misunderstood.
- Experience of Germany whose economy had benefited from immigration.
- Citizens UK are running a campaign in Bristol – wider than just Syrians.
- Other countries, such as the Lebanon and Turkey are much more hospitable, with very much more limited resources.
- The question is: what can we in Bristol do? – rather than what can we do in Bristol?
- The Bristol Hospitality Network need thin men's clothes.
- Men are mostly likely to come – they can run and withstand hardship – normally married men who bring family later – the women and children follow.

- Have we engaged with countries that have had this issue? What did they do?
- Invite people working in the field to talk to congregations – avoid reinventing wheels

The problem of accommodation is one that the church could solve. How might we do that? If we came together – people contributing £500 or £5,000 – we could raise enough to rent properties to house a good number of people. We could claim rent at the end of the month, rather than the beginning.

Suggestions – more options for responses

Let Paul have the details or send him an email

For more information:

Bristol Networks website - Adam Hudson
Bristol Hospitality Network

Next Meeting – Possible Subjects

Homelessness
Progress update on asylum seekers and refugees
Affordable housing for asylum seekers and refugees.

PRAYER

The gathering broke into small groups for prayer

Web Sites

Organisations involved in the Meeting:

Trinity College	http://www.trinitycollegebristol.ac.uk/
St Nicholas of Tolentino	http://www.tolentino.org.uk/
Borderlands	http://borderlands.uk.com/
Bristol Hospitality Network	https://bristolhospitalitynetwork.wordpress.com/
Easton Jubilee Trust	http://www.ejt.org.uk/
Kensington Baptist Church	http://kenbaptist.org/
Bristol Networks	http://www.bristolnetworks.org.uk/