



THE PARISH OF ST CHARLES AND ST THOMAS MORE

**SOUTH LIVERPOOL CHURCHES COMMUNITY
SPONSORSHIP SCHEME**

SYRIAN REFUGEE FAMILY RESETTLEMENT

NEWSLETTER AUTUMN 2018

This is the first Newsletter to our parishioners and friends as the Planning Group seeks to keep you up to date on the progress of our scheme to bring a Syrian family to Liverpool from one of the United Nations Refugee camps in the Middle East. Below we provide details of the Community Sponsorship Scheme, the planning that needs to go into it to get approval from the Home Office and local authorities, and the resources we need to support the family. Many will know that our three parishes have come together because we needed to combine our efforts as we seek to respond to the Syrian Refugee crisis. It is a great strength that we are able to do this as an ecumenical venture. Your help is needed.

“Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.” Hebrews 13:2

Background

In 2015 Government introduced its Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Programme, planning to offer 20,000 Syrian refugees, over 5 years, a secure future in the UK. In 2016 it added the Community Sponsorship Scheme, inviting voluntary and community organisations, like churches, to bring a further 3,000.

At the same time our Church leaders invited parishes to respond to the refugee crisis in a very direct and practical way. Pope Francis in his Angelus appeal in September 2015 said, "Every Catholic parish, every religious community, every monastery, every sanctuary in Europe should accommodate one family, beginning with my diocese of Rome". The Archbishop of Canterbury was the first to host a Syrian family. Dr Justin Welby said, "It is an enormous privilege to welcome a family to live in a cottage in the grounds of Lambeth Palace". The scheme "presents churches and other civil society groups with the opportunity to provide sanctuary to those fleeing war-torn places", he added.

Outline of the Community Sponsorship Scheme

The CSS is now a key element in the government's resettlement programme. Communities and faith groups all over UK have been welcoming Syrian families, and the Diocese and Archdiocese have embraced it wholeheartedly. In Liverpool the overseeing body is Nugent, the Catholic community care organisation. Based on the Canadian model of welcoming refugee families since 1998 (see YouTube), a community group, a parish or number of parishes, assumes responsibility for the resettlement of a family, and aims to support them over a period of 2-5 years until they are fully independent. The community organises itself around a Planning Group who take responsibility for five key areas of support: Finance; Housing; Welfare; Education; Employment.

Progress to date: this is where we are up to with each of these.

Finance: the group must have a minimum of £9,000, but a realistic figure of £10-12,000 is advised by many groups. Thanks to your wonderful generosity we now have more than £10,500. We have had anonymous donations of £7,500, and the three parishes have collected over £3,000. We are aiming for £12,000.

Housing: this is the second critical issue. There have been talks with the Bishop of Liverpool and diocesan authorities about available houses; and with housing associations. Other groups have had properties donated, rented on favourable terms, or gone through supportive private landlords. At time of writing we have not been able to find a house. If you have any contacts that might help, please let us know.

Welfare: given the traumatic experience many refugee families have had, much work has gone into preparations to welcome, support and help the family. So, the early planning covers accompanying the family to the shops; getting on buses; walking the children to school; helping them negotiate officialdom: the benefits office, the job centre, utilities payments. It is important to build relationships and trust, and to have a real compassion for any problems; and to help deal with language difficulties; tackling culture shock and mental health issues; registering with a doctor and dentist. Simple conversation, what Liverpoolians are good at doing - talking and making friends – will be vital. All this will be needed, and we will need your support to do it.

Education: until we know the location of the house, and details of the family chosen, we cannot confirm school arrangements. However much work has been done already to identify teachers for English language support, and organise ESOL classes, and interpreters.

Employment: again, until we know the family and their needs and skills, we cannot confirm details but the Planning Group has done much research into job opportunities, work placements, getting them ready for employment, and providing support.

Your support and help: We know you will all want to help our family when they arrive and we will give you plenty of opportunity to do this in the coming months. In the meantime the employment group would like to collect a few good quality men's suits, in a variety of sizes, suitable for work interviews. Please let Ursula Roberts (umaryroberts@yahoo.com) know.

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