

Vicar's Letter for August 2018

Dear Friends

I think we have all been shocked, and I expect very ashamed, of the recent revelation of the deportation of some of the "Windrush generation". It has been very wrong that those who were invited here all those years ago, bringing their skills and willingness to work, have now been treated so badly by the country that welcomed them. Perhaps it has been particularly shocking to us, living in the North West, who have such a rich diversity of nationalities and cultures. You only have to walk in the centre of Manchester to see and hear how many different nations are represented among us. And of course, with Liverpool being so close, we are used to welcoming people from overseas - as well as benefiting from a huge range of products brought on the ships from their countries.

In addition we have the challenge of refugees and asylum seekers - most of whom are genuinely seeking a safer, better life for themselves and their families. But still the system seems hostile and uncaring, with detention threatened and often a reality, destitution because they have no funding, no benefit support and an endless legal process.

Jesus challenges his followers to welcome the stranger and in doing so to welcome him. Every so often it's worth asking ourselves: what does such hospitality mean and how might it apply to ourselves, our homes, our lives and our church? And how can we as individuals and as groups/communities demonstrate it - even if we feel our efforts are but drops in the ocean?

True welcome often asks us to make space for the stranger, not only physically, but for their culture, their beliefs and their needs too. True welcome involves setting our own likes aside and putting others first. True welcome is usually costly, but it offers us the opportunity to learn from those who come among us, temporarily, or more permanently, and to receive the benefit of their gifts and skills and who they are as persons created by God, just like us.

Recently I read an article by some Christians who had opened their homes to refugee families. They had hoped for 'a neat little family of one husband, one wife, one child'. The family they received was one woman with two young children (and third on the way), a husband/father who came some time later bringing another child who had been separated from his parents and who stayed with the host family until his parents could be (thankfully) located. These families lived and shared their lives together, and it changed them all!

We may not feel we can open our homes to receive a refugee family but we can look at other ways of offering hospitality. Many people who come to our services at St Matthew's for the first time - to hear their banns being read, or who are visitors on

holiday or coming to see relatives - all say how welcomed they have felt. We try to talk to 'strangers' and get to know them, because we ourselves know what it feels like if we go away and visit a different church and how lovely it is when locals make the effort to speak to us and make us feel welcome.

This summer when some of us may be going away and visiting other churches, maybe we can notice what kind of welcome we receive and whether we can learn any tips from them. And if we are having a 'staycation' let's try to put ourselves in others' shoes and build on our hospitality to make all who come through our doors truly welcome and truly part of our church family.

Wishing you a joyful and happy summer

With every blessing

Kate