

DIOCESE IN EUROPE

THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND

The Bishop in Europe:
The Right Reverend Dr. Robert Innes



Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

BISHOP'S LENT APPEAL 2018

Sustaining a Ministry of Hope for Refugees in the Calais area of France

I send you this appeal on the day when we remember the Presentation of Christ in the Temple. In all the fragility of human flesh, the baby who had been born far from home and laid in a manger is presented by his proud young parents in the Jerusalem Temple. It is a day when we especially recall the immense dignity of human nature. God not only makes human beings in his image, but redeems them by taking human nature upon himself.

Sadly, in today's world the dignity of those who are refugees is often not regarded or respected. This year's Lent Appeal relates to a group of refugees who are in particularly acute need. The purpose of the Appeal is to aid the plight of unaccompanied child migrants in the Calais area. These youngsters have been reduced to sleeping rough in the open since the closure of the refugee camps last year. They are extremely vulnerable.

The funds raised will be shared between two projects.

Firstly, a safe house and outreach ministry to child migrants run by an Old Catholic monk – Br Johannes Maertens – who is a member of our congregation in Calais. The project is called Maria Skobtsova House, named after an Orthodox Saint and Martyr who took care of Russian refugees, migrants, the homeless and Jewish people in Paris during the last century. Brother Johannes asks us to help in the following words:

“As you have seen on social media the situation in Calais is getting tense and goes from worse to dramatic. It is estimated that around 600 refugees now live on the streets, parks and grasslands of Calais. The refugees are dependent on the local associations for a warm meal, clothes and sleeping bags. Refugees are often exposed to violence on the streets and their sleeping bags are taken by the police. One Eritrean refugee who speaks good French says he wants to leave France as he doesn't feel safe anymore. ‘They treat us almost as if we are animals. I don't feel safe here.’”

“The average age of refugees is young to young adults, some boys are only 14 years old, and girls 16. These are very vulnerable to being trafficked as they are often unaccompanied minors. The police don't seem to distinguish between the adults and minors; they DO NOT guide the minors to the social services responsible for minors. We need an urgent Christian response to this inhumane situation.”

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Charity Commission registration number: 250186

In partnership with Canterbury Diocese and the USPG, we are recruiting a priest who will serve as Chaplain to the Pas-de-Calais congregations and as a refugee project officer to give pastoral support and assistance, liaising with the various NGOs and agencies present on the ground. So, **the second purpose** of the Appeal is to raise funds to help the new priest by having financial resources to hand to support small projects.

Being able to get out of the cold for a while and talk to a friendly face, to have help to understand the administrative system, to have help with language learning or other practical skills, these are all small tasks that our fund could help with. Helping with these small tasks could make a world of difference to the lives of the stranded migrants in the Calais area.

The plight of the many migrants from the horn of Africa and the Middle East, including many children without accompanying parents, who have ended up on the north coast of France is repeatedly in and then out of the news. When the news cameras move on elsewhere they do not cease to exist. If anything their plight is worse than when they are in the spotlight of media attention. The Calais Jungle Camp which was demolished in October 2016 may no longer be there nor the official refugee camp which caught fire in Dunkirk, but the number of migrants subsisting in the surrounding area sleeping out under the trees or the stars has hardly changed. Valiant volunteers from France and Britain struggle to meet the most basic needs of these migrants (with generously donated food, clothing & blankets). But what they and the migrants themselves are urgently seeking is human warmth and hope.

In the middle of 2017, a survey of unaccompanied minors who had been living in the area on average 7-9 months was undertaken. A fifth had been there for more than a year. More than 95% had experienced police brutality. 75% had been arrested and detained for varying periods of time. More than half had experienced being woken up in the middle of the night and moved on with nowhere to go. More than a third had family in the UK but the process of getting permission for reuniting with their family was causing long delays. Less than five percent had been given any access to information about asylum law.

There will be updates on these projects posted regularly on the Diocesan website at www.europe.anglican.org Do keep an eye out for these regular updates. And please do consider how you can support my appeal.

Finally, I wish you a holy and spiritually fulfilling Lent. As usual, you can give money to this appeal through your church treasurer, who will forward money to the diocesan office.

With every blessing,

+ Robert Gibraltar in Europe

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