

Motion No.15

Proposer: Dr Lucy Michael

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Your Grace, members of the Synod,

It is my privilege to propose today this motion on behalf of the Primate's Ethnic Diversity, Inclusion and Racial Justice Reference Group, of which my co-proposer Stella Obe and I are members.

It asks two things.

Firstly that the General Synod acknowledges the impact of anti-refugee and migrant hatred in our communities.

And secondly that Synod requests the Honorary Secretaries write to Diocesan Councils seeking suggestions in how we as a Church can do two things:

1. Counter the language of anti-refugee and migrant hatred at the local level; and
2. How we as a Church can communicate a strong message of Christian welcome to all.

This motion is a small strike against an emerging thread of hate in our society but more importantly it speaks to our third and fourth marks of mission: to Tend— to respond to human need by loving service and to Transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation

Firstly it is important that we do acknowledge the emergence of hate in our society against refugees and migrants.

Hate is a problem of our time.

That hate is directed squarely at victims of war and persecution who have survived treacherous journeys from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and other deeply unstable countries.

For some, this desperate journey was their last. An increasing number of women and unaccompanied children continue to take perilous journeys in search of safety. In 2021, more than 3,000 people who risked their lives trying to reach Europe by sea were reported dead or missing. Many more are dying inside Europe's land borders. Just last week a 29 year old woman leaving Greece with her husband was shot dead by border guards. She was killed for seeking to exercise her legal right to seek asylum in Europe, a right fought for and defended by Christians across Europe in Jesus' name.

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For those who do make it to Europe, there are challenges with language, accommodation, getting permission to stay and to work, raising families alone and far from home. On top of that, they contend with hate and rising threats against them.

Attacks on refugees and reception centres now occur regularly across Europe. You may have heard about the recent petrol bomb attack at Dover refugee reception centre or the gun attack on a Kurdish community centre in Paris, or even the hate inciting video made by one of Ireland's anti-migrant groups about visiting Presentation Brothers in Cork last week. But since last year there have been high profile protests at refugee accommodation centres and a sharp increase in attacks on refugee and migrant homes in our parishes on this island north and south. Both PSNI and Gardai identify anti-migrant hate as a growing threat.

Throughout the last decade, attitudes on the north and south of this island to refugees and migrants have been more positive than in other parts of Europe where the politics of hate took hold more quickly.

This extreme hate does not start with violence, it starts much smaller. And we can do something about it. How?

The main driver of anti-immigrant attitudes is the perception of threat, fears that refugees and migrants will have a negative impact on our lives and societies, fears that hate groups are all too happy to create and leverage. The cost of living crisis, the housing crisis, and constant media coverage framing migrants and refugees as illegal or suspicious are creating the perfect storm in our communities, in your parishes.

In some places this is highly visible, in others, it's the quietly growing chatter questioning the humanity and the rights of refugees and migrants to exist and participate in our society. It's in the online media we read every day and which influences us much more deeply than we care to admit.

The emergence of hate like this should be of concern to Christians everywhere, not only because of the extreme harm to individuals and families who, like us, are made in the likeness of God, but because of the millions of insidious ways that hate works to divide communities through prejudice, mistrust and segregation.

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As Christians we should be concerned.

Love thy neighbour.

We ask General Synod therefore to acknowledge the impact of anti-refugee and migrant hatred in our communities.

The challenge to our civilisation and humanity is in how we respond. This is the matter to which the second half of the motion relates.

Will we respond with humanity, love, compassion and solidarity? Or will we allow hate and xenophobia to fester in our communities?

Across the island there has been some consistent pushback, through refugee solidarity work and in projects seeking to counter hate, even public demonstrations such as the large march in Dublin last month.

Right here on our own doorstep, there are community groups north and south working to address the politics of hate and counter the impact of extreme hate groups who would seek to leverage doubt and fear in our communities, and I thank the various individual lay members and clergy here already active in this work.

But where is our church community in all of those? What is the role we will play as a collective bound by those marks of mission? There can be no doubt that we are called to play our part as Christians. Love thy neighbour. Tend. Transform.

Myths and fears about migrants and refugees are almost always based in an idea that we don't know the people concerned, and anti-migrant narratives are always based in dehumanising the people concerned.

Solidarity work is most effective when it is at the local level, acknowledging the insecurities which drive hate and working to bind rather than divide communities in our social justice work. Language of unity and hope is proven to help counter hate, but it must come from trusted people within a community, it cannot be endowed to it from outside. Therein lies the opportunity for our churches to listen, to respond with love, and to build new and local responses to hate.

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By seeking good practice, ideas and information from within our Church.

Let us not be blind to what is now around us. Let us not later say, we should have done something.

Let solidarity and love be our watch words, and tend and transform be our actions.

Thank you.