



RESOURCE PACK

Responses to 2013 Government Asylum Seekers Policy

"I was a stranger and you welcomed me." Matthew 25:35

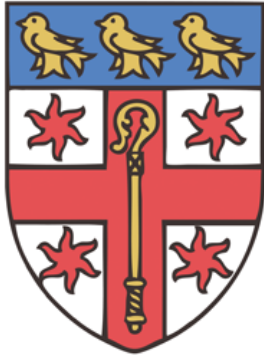
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To network with others you can contact the Coordinator of Mission and Community Engagement for Churches of Christ SA & NT, Mark Riessen at mriessen@churchesofchrist-sa.org.au

You can also network at AID Network: Advocacy for Indefinite Detainees on Facebook.

For resources and stories and links go to www.welcometoaustralia.org.au



Anglican Diocese of Adelaide

MEDIA RELEASE FROM THE ANGLICAN ARCHBISHOP OF ADELAIDE, JEFFREY DRIVER

The Federal Government's policy of ensuring that no asylum seeker who arrives by boat and without a visa can ever be settled in Australia is an abrogation of Australia's moral responsibility to vulnerable people.

Archbishop Jeffrey Driver, Chair of the Anglican Church's Refugee Network, has criticised the policy announced yesterday as "politically driven, based on popular myth, and inhumane".

"The policy claims to address the risks to people arriving by boat, yet it comes into play only after people have made the dangerous journey to Australia by boat," the Archbishop said.

"It focuses on people who arrive without visas, yet it does not recognise that in many of the places people flee from, it is dangerous even to be seen approaching Western embassies seeking a visa.

"This policy plays to the myth that somehow boat arrivals have 'jumped the queue', but in the disorderly and dangerous world of displaced people there is often simply no queue to jump. People do what they can to save their own lives and the lives of people they love," the Archbishop said.

"Once refugees have touched Australian territory, whether by land or sea, they come under Australian jurisdiction through the UN Refugee Convention and should have their claims processed within Australian national territory at locations where they have access to a full range of support services.

"Sending people to Manus Island is sending people to a place that is already inadequate. With people housed in dilapidated buildings and tents, the health risks of malaria and limited safe drinking water and poor sanitation it is no wonder the Australian Human Right Commission has previously called for its closure.

"The Federal Government's policy seeks to address the problem of people smugglers by abusing their victims. The need to take strong action against people smugglers is recognised, but it must be by way of direct action against the people smugglers themselves," Archbishop Driver said.

**Please contact Katrina McLachlan on 0414972537 or
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Protection Not Punishment

Press Release -Friday 19th July, 2013

Rev. Elenie Poulos, Chairperson of the recently formed Australian Churches Refugee Taskforce, has expressed grave concern at the new arrangements for asylum seekers announced today. “It is a tragedy that people fleeing persecution and looking for safety are dying at sea. The only way to stop this happening is to make it safe for people to stay in Indonesia, Malaysia or other countries in the region. “Today we heard nothing about better protecting people. Australia is closing the door to people in need. Shifting the burden to one of the poorest countries in our region is not improving protection. We are one of the richest countries on earth and we are turning our back on people in need. “This is not a matter of ‘left’ versus ‘right’ politics. This is about how we best respond out of a humanitarian perspective. Shifting the burden and sending people to stay in a malaria-ridden island with almost no supports is not an acceptable alternative to protection”, said Rev. Poulos. In 2012 less than 1% of world’s refugees were accepted by Australia. Much poorer countries are taking hundreds of thousands more every year. While Australia received 29,610 asylum applications in 2012, Turkey received 325,301, Jordan 135,946, Lebanon 134,896, South Sudan 101,480. Father Peter Catt, the Anglican Dean of Brisbane, who also chairs the Brisbane Anglican Diocese’s Social Responsibility Committee, expressed his dismay at the closed door policy.

“The punishment of vulnerable people continues. It is not a moral response to punish one group of people in order to send a message to another. A truly regional solution would see better protection for asylum seekers and refugees in throughout the region. And for those who arrive on shores, the moral response would be to process their claims for protection, as per our obligations under the Refugee Convention. “Asylum seekers are people loved by God. We have a moral responsibility to care for them. Asylum seekers who arrive by boat continue to be used to score political points. Real and durable solutions will not be found via closed doors and burden-shifting,” said Father Catt.

The Australian Churches Refugee Taskforce is an initiative supported by the National Council of Churches in Australia, and is steered by representatives from seven Christian churches and three ecumenical bodies. The Taskforce is supported by a network of 216 Christian entities in Australia. The Council of Churches of Christ in Australia is a member church of the NCCA.

<http://www.australianchurchesrefugeetaskforce.com.au/protection-not-punishment/>

Dear Prime Minister

Calling for a collaborative and compassionate way forward

As head of the Baptist Union of Victoria and with responsibility for equipping and empowering Baptist leaders for mission and engagement in the communities in which they operate, I feel compelled to write to you with grave concerns over the dispassionate and politically expedient direction your government is taking on asylum seekers.

While we acknowledge the need to prevent the deaths of asylum seekers at sea, we are appalled at the lack of compassion in your recent policy amendments. A regional approach to this issue would clarify Australia's reasonable obligations to provide asylum, but not punish people arriving by boat, the vast majority of whom are genuine refugees.

This is not a party-political point we are making, because the opposition has also failed to find a humane and compassionate way forward.

Victorian Baptists urge the government to acknowledge the suffering of people who arrive here, fleeing persecution, having made desperate decisions and undertaken dangerous journeys seeking safety and refuge. Australia is a wealthy country, yet receives very few of the 10.5 million refugees in the world today, not to mention the 17.7 million internally displaced persons of concern to the UNHCR (Global Trends 2012). Your new policies further undermine Australia's record on human rights, and make a mockery of our nation's place on the UN Security Council. Instead, we should be building a reputation as a country of generosity and genuine respect for human rights.

We know that extreme poverty and a high incidence of violent crime make Papua New Guinea an unsafe and unviable option for permanent resettlement of refugees. Denying those who are justifiably seeking asylum in Australia any hope of security will simply increase their experience of trauma, and cannot be justified. Australia should not be punishing innocent and vulnerable people in order to send a message to people smugglers. This is a failure of justice.

Courageous leadership in these circumstances would not trade in dog-whistle politics, but make genuine efforts to increase the number of refugees accepted into Australia. We want to see bi-partisan compassion, not a coalition of cruelty. If that means providing resources for the speedy processing of claims in Indonesia or Malaysia, then so be it. If you really want to prevent deaths at sea, then make dangerous sea voyages unnecessary.

Victorian Baptists are already involved in working with asylum seekers and refugees in our communities, and many are in our churches. Hospitality to the stranger is a fundamental biblical principle that we cannot neglect, and we will always be willing to assist with the implementation of compassionate responses to those seeking refuge here.

Yours sincerely,

Rev. Daniel Bullock

Director of Mission & Ministries
Baptist Union of Victoria

How is your church responding to the Government's announced policy on Asylum Seekers?

What would Bonhoeffer do Mr Rudd?

The following is an Opinion Editorial written by Uniting Church in Australia Reverend Professor Andrew Dutney, posted on the ABC Religion and Ethics program 26 July 2013:

“Hoisted on his own petard.” That phrase has kept coming to mind as I’ve followed the announcement, explanation and implementation of the so-called “PNG Solution”.

In 2006, then-Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs Kevin Rudd wrote an article for *The Monthly* entitled “Faith in Politics”. It was about the role of churches and individual Christians in politics. His purpose was to critique the “privatised, pietised and politically compliant Christianity” of the televangelists and to challenge “those who would seek today to traduce Christianity by turning it into the political handmaiden of the conservative political establishment”.

In this argument Rudd nominated the important German theologian, church leader and martyr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer as the proponent and exemplar of authentically Christian political engagement. He said, “Bonhoeffer is, without doubt, the man I most admire in the history of the twentieth century.” And I do not doubt him.

Rudd’s account of Bonhoeffer’s life, thought and ongoing relevance was informed and insightful. It still makes worthwhile reading. In particular Rudd was able to crystallise a core principle to shape the engagement between Christians and the state, namely, “that Christianity, consistent with Bonhoeffer’s critique in the 30s, must always take the side of the marginalised, the vulnerable and the oppressed.”

He went on to show how such a principle would guide Christians’ engagement with some specific political challenges. One example is worth quoting at length:

“Another great challenge of our age is asylum seekers. The biblical injunction to care for the stranger in our midst is clear. The parable of the Good Samaritan is but one of many which deal with the matter of how we should respond to a vulnerable stranger in our midst. That is why the government’s proposal to excise the Australian mainland from the entire Australian migration zone and to rely almost exclusively on the so-called Pacific Solution should be the cause of great ethical concern to all the Christian churches. We should never forget that the reason we have a UN convention on the protection of refugees is in large part because of the horror of the Holocaust, when the West (including Australia) turned its back on the Jewish people of Germany and the other occupied countries of Europe who sought asylum during the ‘30s.”

But now Mr Rudd is the Prime Minister in a government that has itself excised the Australian mainland from the Australian migration zone and adopted its very own “PNG Solution”. He leads a government whose policy on asylum seekers is inevitably “the cause of great ethical concern to all the Christian churches”.

Even if the so-called PNG Solution “worked”, and refugees fleeing for their lives stopped arriving by boat in Australian waters seeking asylum, the “solution” is wrong. It is wrong morally and spiritually. It is wrong because it requires us to mistreat and harm a group of marginalised, vulnerable, oppressed people who have arrived asking us for help.

It also a poor way to treat those who have not yet taken to the boats. There is nothing wrong with wanting to give desperate people in war torn countries a better option than risking ocean voyages in crowded, inadequate vessels. On the contrary. But the PNG Solution does not do that. It merely tries to remove the last – pretty bad – option that they have.

In his 2006 essay Mr Rudd reflected on how Bonhoeffer might have responded to complex contemporary issues such as “militant Islamism”, “international terrorism” and asylum seekers. He

wrote, “Bonhoeffer’s voice, speaking to us through the ages, would ask this simple, truth-based question: what is causing this phenomenon? He would also caution against inflammatory rhetoric that seeks to gain political advantage, rather than respond substantively and find a way forward.”

So what is causing this phenomenon? More to the point, why isn’t the political debate about those causes – war, poverty, racism – and how Australia can best involve itself in international efforts to address them?

Conveying the truth over the lies in this political maelstrom has become one of the most complicated challenges for us as Christians. With both major political parties – each led by a practicing Christian – trumpeting policies with language such as “waves of boats”, “flood of migrants”, “orderly migration” and “sovereign borders,” it is difficult to remember that at the heart of this “wicked problem” are the extraordinary lives of very ordinary men, women and children seeking asylum.

The uncomplicated truth – the unheard truth – is this: Our borders are not under threat. It is not illegal to seek asylum. There is no such thing as an orderly queue. We are not being overrun by asylum seekers on leaky boats. There is no “refugee emergency” or “crisis” in Australia. The reality is around 45 million people worldwide are displaced because of conflict, famine and persecution. This is the truth that Prime Minister Rudd has turned his back on and that Opposition Leader Tony Abbott wilfully disregards in this awful debate. In their desire to secure more votes in the upcoming election, Labor and the Coalition are engaging in what must be one of the hardest and most retributory round of policies we have seen in this country since the White Australia program.

Under Labor’s latest scheme, all asylum seekers arriving by boat will now be processed in offshore detention centres – most likely Nauru and Manus Island. Those whose applications are successful – and we know that just over 90% of those who arrive by boat are confirmed as refugees – will not be resettled in Australia. Instead, they will remain in Papua New Guinea, a nation with entrenched poverty, high levels of violent crime, poor healthcare and education and high unemployment.

Of course, this isn’t just about the utter inadequacy of a developing nation to provide a safe and secure future for a miniscule number of the world’s refugees. This is also about the fundamental abrogation of our commitment to human rights here in Australia. There are around 17,000 asylum seekers and refugees living in poverty in Australian communities who have been denied the right to work. There are a further 10,000 asylum seekers in detention centres – including 1700 children.

In 2006 Mr Rudd was right about the clear implication of the biblical injunction to care for the stranger in our midst. He was right to draw lessons from the Good Samaritan to guide our response to the vulnerable stranger. He could have added the command of Jesus to treat others as you would want to be treated. He could have pointed to the Christian conviction that every human being is made in the image of God; that they have a dignity and significance as human beings that commands our respect and care, and that requires that we do not harm them. It requires that we honour them, extend hospitality to them and, indeed, love them. And against all these measures his 2013 PNG Solution is just wrong. Against Kevin Rudd’s own measures of right and wrong his PNG Solution is just wrong.

What would Bonhoeffer do about asylum seekers, Mr Rudd? You know as well as I do that it wouldn’t be this.

<http://blogs.victas.uca.org.au/mediaroom/?p=1631>

So you think it's a good idea to welcome refugees? Excuse me while I burst your bubble.

July 20, 2013

Let me be clear: I am in vehement agreement that Australia needs to show compassion to asylum seekers and meet its international obligations.

Now let me be real: Have you actually thought about what it would mean for Australia and its society if we did? Have you thought about what it would mean for you?

I live in Fairfield, an area of Sydney that you have to apologise for hailing from (if the person that you are speaking to has heard of it). I've long stopped hesitating to reveal where I live, but the rest of Sydney's views on it haven't changed. Fairfield and its neighbouring suburbs are rich in culture, low on socioeconomic status. We are an area that has grown because of the efforts of migrants, and we are home to many refugees who have either been granted asylum or are in the process of having their visas approved. Somewhere in between all of this, anyone with fair skin seemed to have moved on, their only interaction with Fairfield being to reminisce over their youth on a FB page, and lament over what it has now become.

My interaction with asylum seekers has been limited, but has mostly been facilitated through my local church. We hold English speaking classes and through these, refugees find a sense of community and care and sometimes also attend church or the youth group that we run on Friday nights. I am currently taking care of one girl in my small group on a Friday night, who has been in Australia from 11 months. She came here on a boat with her father, leaving her whole family behind. She is a big ball of energy, actually. Her English is still developing, she is still coming to understand and orient herself in our culture. So she is more of a handful than all of the girls I take care of combined.

The people who run ESL classes at our church don't just run a class and go home. They invite their students into their lives, they help them with daily tasks – furnishing a home, paper work, grocery shopping – all of these menial things that are actually incredibly difficult for them. It takes effort. Genuine effort.

What I want you to understand is that there are implications for what you propose. At present, the parts of our society that assist asylum seekers, despite their best efforts, are under resourced and ill-equipped. Most of our society is also frightened, ignorant and unwilling to be welcoming. Those are the facts.

So before you write your letters, or rally, or whatever it is you're about to do, consider what it is that you are willing to give up in order to welcome asylum seekers. In writing to Rudd, or your MP, don't just make demands of them. What are YOU willing to do?

If Rudd agreed to your terms, if all refugees were granted asylum and we did our part – it would not just *happen*. This does not end with a FB like, or share, or letter. It would take genuine care and sacrifice to continue to make these people feel welcomed and re-settled. The reality is that such a task is hard and ongoing and we can't just blame the government if it should go wrong.

I speak for myself. I would sacrifice to assist someone escaping war, persecution, driven to desperation by placing their life in the hands of a leaky boat. But what could this mean? Would it mean an increase in taxes? Would it mean giving my time to assisting someone with their grocery shopping? Would it simply mean that I would patiently attempt to build relationships with people who speak a different language and who have a different way of life to mine rather than just moving to a place that would be easier and more comfortable to live? Would it mean moving into an area where you could do just that?

If any of those options made you baulk, you better re-think what you're fighting for.

Please note:

The title of this blog is deliberately provocative. It's called irony.

Allow me to clarify, once more, **I believe that Australia should welcome and support all those who seek asylum.** The point of this blog is to make you understand the **realities** of this, as someone who lives day to day in a multicultural context, amongst people who have very different ways of life, who have suffered the trauma that is unique only to those of refugee status. We – the people of Australia, myself included, are not people who easily share, not people who easily give up our rights for the sake of others. This creates serious difficulty in allowing people to truly integrate. The relationship quickly turns from welcoming to one of animosity. We have seen it before, and I for one do not want to repeat the mistakes of the past. Again, I pose the question, what are YOU willing to do?

<http://christinemead.wordpress.com/>

A response to this blog article can be found below – by Mark Riessen.

relinquishing our rights

By Mark Riessen – posted July 20th 2013 – [Call to Radical Discipleship]

Last night I spent the night sleeping on a bench in the Melbourne international airport. I was booked on a domestic flight to Adelaide which was cancelled after being at the airport and waiting for 5 hours.

I was travelling with a friend, Simon, who works with World Vision. While we were standing in line for a couple of hours waiting to find out what our entitlements were, Simon turned to me and asked, 'what do you think it would be like to give up our rights?' As we looked around at the growing agitation of the crowd from 5 cancelled flights that night and the frustration of overwhelmed staff, we considered what it meant for us who are fortunate to feel as if we are entitled to something.

There were many in the crowd of people gathered who knew their rights and were going to get what they were entitled to even if they had to bully someone to get it. But Simon and I considered, what would it mean for us to relinquish our rights? Our right to be compensated, our right to be booked on a flight the next day, our right to a bed to sleep in that night, our right to be with family, our right to get angry, our right to demand justice for ourselves, our right to a shower, or a fresh change of clothes, our right to be heard...

After a long wait and surveying the crowd and the situation we relinquished our rights and went in search of a bench to sleep on in the airport while others stayed demanding hotels and food vouchers. In our consideration we considered the impact not only on the people around us, but on ourselves? How was this action transforming our attitude towards the world around us?

We live in a culture of entitlement, we know our rights and when they are threatened we fight for them and most of the time we get what we want. When we don't we keep fighting and act like wounded animals when injustice is imposed on us.

While all of this was unfolding we were watching the news on TV screens at the airport as we came to grips with the Prime Ministers new asylum seeker policy. Then I began to reflect on 'rights' in a whole new way.

I think I'm entitled to many things, but what about when my rights to live in safety and to be treated in a humane way are not only taken away, but my right to fight for them is also taken?

It is no secret that I am in strong opposition to asylum seeker policies our government has presented over the past few years. I don't believe offshore processing is a solution, I think our suggested humanitarian intake for 27,000 people per year is far too conservative and think we can quadruple that and I think we unfairly and unjustly demand of our international neighbours who do not have the same capacity as us (PNG, Malaysia, Nauru, etc), what we are not prepared to offer ourselves.

I still maintain that Australia's only solution to a growing issue of displaced people in the world is to relinquish our rights and extend the hand of hospitality and compassion. People arriving by boat are not seeking asylum illegally, they are not economic refugees and they are not coming by the millions. There are many myths our government will have Australians believe to use fear to manipulate while we ignore UN and human rights commitments Australia is signed to, to take in to our country those who seek refuge.

We need to start hearing and speaking truth, and we need to take claim of new rights, the right to share hospitality with strangers, the right to love unconditionally and the right to have compassion on the most vulnerable not to ignore or take advantage of them.

I've just spent 2 days with Christian leaders from around the country where we have been in conversation with Bishop Tom Wright and Rev Tim Costello. The conversations revolved around justice and the realization of the Kingdom of God. Both key speakers spoke to the issue of asylum seekers and how they are treated by governments.

I remain confirmed and convinced that the primary mandate of the church is to be the leaders in the country who encourage capacity towards building for the kingdom of God, who strive to 'put the world to rights' as Tom Wright puts it and to strive to correct the injustice of expulsion of people because of religion, status, language, origin or culture. The Christian church in Australia is to lead the way in modelling Gospel values of putting the world to rights, proclaiming the kingdom of God through practical acts of love, kindness, compassion and hospitality.

We need to relinquish our rights of entitlement when the government disadvantage already disadvantaged and discriminated against people and claim new rights – putting the world to rights, building for the Kingdom, because when it comes to allegiance we are called not to a political party or an ideal, we are called to participate with God in God's kingdom which means allegiance to God over all others. This means allegiance to a way of life and a kingdom which is not of this world or from this world, but allegiance to a kingdom that is for this world, an upside down kingdom where everything is not like it is right now, where the world is put to rights and Shalom is truly realised.

So I relinquish my rights and entitlements and bear myself vulnerable to putting the world to rights the way God calls me which is highly likely to be unpopular in this world but it is just.

Shalom Mark

<http://markriessen.wordpress.com/2013/07/20/relinquishing-our-rights/>

Mark Riessen is a Churches of Christ Minister from South Australia, who is currently the Coordinator of Mission and Community Engagement for Churches of Christ in SA/NT. He was formerly the Senior Minister at the Blackwood Church of Christ (SA), and minister at the Knoxfield Church of Christ (VIC).

it will cost you

By Mark Riessen – posted July 23rd 2013 – [Call to Radical Discipleship]

When Christians complain about cost it agitates me a great deal. I fear we have adopted in Australia a passive and cushy version of Christianity that we think shouldn't cost us. But I have news for you. If you call yourself a Christian then you are a follower of a radical, middle eastern, 1st century Jewish man. Jesus from Nazareth. commissioned and called as God's answer to a devastated and broken world, went about the business of announcing God's Kingdom. This is a Kingdom of hospitality, compassion, love and justice...and it's going to cost you.

The following blog was brought to my attention so I thought it worth sharing

[see above "So you think it's a good idea to welcome refugees? Excuse me while I burst your bubble.]

At first I reacted negatively to this blog but I understand what the writer was bringing to the surface. So I have been prompted to write this. I understand that difference is an inconvenience to us but excuse me while I burst your bubble. If you are a follower of Jesus it is guaranteed to cost you. Sounds attractive doesn't it?

When Kevin Rudd spoke in favour of extending Australian hospitality to asylum seekers back in 2006, he quoted the famous story of the Good Samaritan from Luke's Gospel. What many people fail to understand about the story of the Samaritan is that his altruistic assistance came at a cost. This isn't just a story about a guy helping a fellow human on the road, the Samaritan invested significant time and resources into the person he helped. Extending hospitality to strangers will cost you.

Prior to telling the story of the Samaritan, Jesus was travelling through Samaria with his disciples. There were many people coming to Jesus saying they wanted to follow him. Jesus is very clear in guaranteeing each one that to follow him will cost them.

I have been investing my time into working with asylum seekers for 12 years. I see this as one of the faithful responses to being a follower of Jesus. But this ministry has come at a great cost. It has cost me time and finances, it has cost me patience and tears of sorrow and anguish. It has cost me friendships and criticism from those who disapprove of my commitment to extend hospitality to these strangers. But I see this as more of an investment than a cost. This investment has transformed my life and ministry and the asylum seekers I have developed meaningful relationships with have become close friends and like family. Yes people coming from across the sea change things, they may influence change in our culture and change in the way we live our lives, but I think we are the richer for it. Most of all when you open up your homes to people in need, they change you and they have changed me for the better. I have met Christ in the other and I have learnt the value of welcome and hospitality.

Tim Costello *CEO of World Vision Aus) recently returned from a trip to Jordan. He witnessed some of the implications of one of the greatest refugee crises of our time. While we complain about 15,000 people arriving by boat in the space of a year, Jordan are receiving an average of 6,000 Syrian refugees per day. That's right per day! Tim told a few of us a story at a recent gathering. He met a man in Jordan who was hosting a Syrian family with his family in his own home. He and his family were committed Christians and the Syrian family committed muslims. Every day the man and his family would pray for a change in the political climate of Syria to stop the suffering of the people. Every day the Syrian family would pray for different political outcomes that might be better suited to them. Tim can tell the details of the story much better than me but the point is one family was hosting a refugee family with drastically different religious views and radically opposing political views. Tim asked the man what motivated him to take in this family in

and how they continue to exist under the same roof peacefully. The man replied by saying it's the right response to being a Christian. It costs him and his family space in their home, finance to feed and clothe them but it is the response to being a follower of Jesus. It will cost you.

I was disturbed to hear how the protests in Nauru were reported recently. I believe the people in Nauru detained seemingly indefinitely, have every right to be angry, but they're not monsters, they're just being human. On Saturday July 20th I wrote a blog post titled 'relinquishing out rights'. I reflected on my experience of being stranded in an airport after a cancelled flight. What I observed after just 5 hours of inconvenience was normal everyday Australians getting violent because they were merely inconvenienced. They were violent with their words towards airline staff and violent with their actions, kicking furniture and slamming luggage on the floor in protest. So when people are detained against their will and no-one communicates with them for months and months about their status, I understand that they are angry and I think we ought to reserve our judgement of these people we have locked up for no good reason.

My point is we have a culture in Australia of entitlement to many things, in fact it's a privilege that we have the lives we have. But while dozens and dozens of other countries are receiving refugees by the tens and hundreds of thousands we have slammed the door shut! Why? Because we are concerned about the cost to us? Well it should be a no brainer to those who profess to be Christian and we ought to learn from the example of our Middle Eastern friends. Hospitality and compassion ought to be our first response not exclusion, redirection and incarceration. Yes it is going to cost us, that is guaranteed and that ought to be no surprise to Christians, but extending hospitality and welcome to those who seek to come to our country for a better life will be the greatest investment we can ever make and may even redeem the soul of our nation.

Shalom Mark

<http://markriessen.wordpress.com/2013/07/23/it-will-cost-you/>

Welcoming the Stranger

Quotations to Stir Heart and Mind *Compiled by Richard A. Kauffman*

Christianity Today posted 22/2/2005

LET ALL GUESTS who arrive be received like Christ, for he is going to say, "I came as a guest, and you received me." Rule of St. Benedict

A STORY said to originate in a Russian Orthodox monastery has an older monk telling a younger one: "I have finally learned to accept people as they are. Whatever they are in the world, a prostitute, a prime minister, it is all the same to me. But sometimes I see a stranger coming up the road, and I say, 'Oh, Jesus Christ, is it you again?'" Kathleen Norris, *Dakota*

FOR THE LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who ... defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing.

Deuteronomy 10:17-18

BE KIND, for everyone you meet is fighting a great battle.

Philo of Alexandria, quoted in Dan Wakefield, *How Do We Know When It's God?*

TO OPEN UP and become sensitive to God's own mission could also mean that we begin to recognize the strangers as messengers, sent to us with a particular message, and that, therefore, before we dare preach to them we ought to listen to their stories. Gerhard Hoffman in *International Review of Mission*

I BELIEVE we are still here to help men and women to learn to live as each other's guests. We are guests of this life. We are guests of this planet, and we are almost destroying it. ... People should learn a new language, a new way of life, learn to be guests and let others be their guest.

George Steiner, literary critic, quoted in personal correspondence by humanitarian-aid executive Tom Getman

THE SCOPE of who it is that God means to invite to the feast, you see, is not ours to define. We are not put in charge of the guest list. Don C. Skinner, *A Passage through Sacred History*

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2005/march/16.74.html>

Jesus the security threat by Brad Coath (UNOH)

A few weeks ago, I was at a vigil in support of twenty-seven refugees who were hunger striking to express their protest at being indefinitely detained as so called 'security threats', where I saw a sign that made me think. It said, "*Jesus would have been given an 'adverse security assessment'.*" In a time when many fear those who are landing on our shores, and where politicians talk about refugees as if they are criminals, we would do well to consider the message of that sign.

In the 1st century Roman Empire, in a world where struggling peasants living under the weight of an oppressive rule which brought peace, comfort and security to the few at the top of the pecking order at crushing expense to the vast majority, petty thieves and common criminals were not punished with crucifixion. This particularly brutal form of execution was a political punishment reserved for those who challenged the authority of the state. When they walked past a hill of rotting corpses hanging from trees and crude crosses, people would get the message loud and clear: you don't mess with Rome.

Let us make no mistake; whatever else we can say about the death of Jesus of Nazareth, we can say this: Jesus was executed as a security threat.

But why? How could Jesus, who came to tell us to love our enemies and offer us salvation, be a threat to security? And perhaps more pertinently, *whose* security?

Truth be told, just about everything Jesus did challenged the social, economic, and political order that legitimated the positions of those in power and the oppression of the masses. He welcomed 'sinners', those who were seen to be unclean before God and in constant debt to the Temple, perhaps because they were sick, crippled, blind, Gentile or just poor. He broke down the boundaries of who was 'in' and 'out'. He challenged the state monopoly on the fishing market with feeding miracles and miraculous catches of fish. He called people to dare to believe in an alternative world where Caesar wasn't king, but God. And he directly challenged the Temple, the symbol of the ruling elite's power and collusion with Rome, proclaiming access to God outside of its walls.

Jesus was indeed a 'security threat' to the interests of those in power (though certainly not a violent one!) and as such, he was demonized, denied natural justice, and arbitrarily executed.

This must give us pause for thought. As we label people 'security threats', as we do with 54 proven refugees (and 6 of their children), demonizing them, denying them natural justice, and arbitrarily punishing them by locking them up indefinitely with no end in sight (barring a review that has no power to ultimately change their situation), we must recognize the ways of Roman domination in ourselves. Whose side of the ancient story are we on when, in the name of 'security' and 'national interests' we torture (for that is what indefinite detention amounts to) a bunch of Tamils caught up in a civil war against an oppressive state, and who have fled as refugees to a country whose government is grasping at its own dissolving grip on power, so desperate to 'stop the boats' and be seen to be 'tough' on borders that it will collude with a government that has committed war crimes and continues to abuse human rights?

We must not let ourselves be turned into pawns of fear and hate, siding with the ways of Roman domination but rather, step over to Jesus' side of the story; of the peasant from Nazareth who welcomed the excluded and demonized, challenged state-sponsored oppression and called others to lay down fear for love.

Ten myths around asylum seekers arriving on boats in Australian waters

DO you believe that thousands of illegal boat people are swamping our shores in unprecedented numbers and threatening Australian jobs and the economy?

You wouldn't be the only person to do so - and you'll be hearing more about it as politicians jockey for your vote ahead of the federal election.

Asylum seekers arriving on boats in Australian waters is likely to be one of the top issues debated throughout the election campaign.

News.com.au explains 10 boat-people myths.

Myth 1: We are being swamped

REALITY: The number of people arriving in Australia to claim asylum jumped by more than a third last year to 15,800 people, driven by an increase in arrivals from Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Australia resettles the third largest number of refugees of any country per capita, but actual Australia's asylum seeker numbers, while politically sensitive, remain numerically small. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) says Australia receives about three per cent of the total asylum claims made in industrialised countries around the world and, "by comparison, asylum levels in Australia continue to remain below those recorded by many other industrialised and non-industrialised countries".

Myth 2: We're a magnet compared to other countries

REALITY: Nearly half a million - 493,000 - asylum claims were lodged in industrialised countries last year, the second highest number on record after 2003, as war, civil strife, political repression and sectarian violence continue to force movements of populations across borders. Europe received 355,000 asylum seeker claims, while North America had 103,000. In particular, conflict in Syria has prompted a new mass wave of refugees fleeing that country. Afghanistan alone has a diaspora of more than 2.7 million refugees across 71 countries, but more than 95 per cent are in neighbouring Pakistan and Iran.

Myth 3: We take more asylum seekers because we're a rich, First World country

REALITY: According to Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, the reverse is true. "The burden of helping the world's forcibly displaced people is starkly uneven," he said. "Poor countries host vastly more displaced people than wealthier ones. While anti-refugee sentiment is heard loudest in industrialised countries, developing nations host 80 per cent of the world's refugees."

Myth 4: They're illegal, queue jumping undesirables

REALITY: Asylum seekers who arrive in Australia by boat are neither engaging in illegal activity, nor are they immigrants. The UN Refugee Convention (to which Australia is a signatory) recognises that refugees have a right to enter a country for the purposes of seeking asylum, regardless of how they arrive or whether they hold valid travel or identity documents. Australian law also permits unauthorised entry into Australia for the purposes of seeking asylum. Asylum seekers do not break any Australian laws simply by arriving on boats or without authorisation. Australia has a proud history of boat people and other asylum seekers becoming good citizens.

Myth 5: Most asylum seekers come by boat

REALITY: Statistics from 2008 showed at least 13 asylum seekers arrive through Australian airports daily, more than 32 times the number of boat people supposedly "flooding" across our maritime borders in that year. A total of 4768 "plane people", more than 96 per cent of applicants for refugee status, arrived in that year on legitimate tourist, business and other visas - compared with 161 who arrived by boat during the same period. While boat numbers have increased, Australian Government statistics from the first quarter of 2013 showed more than 90 per cent of asylum seekers who arrived by boat were found to be genuine refugees. In comparison, those who arrived by plane - despite being eligible for release into the community and not having to face years of detention on Nauru or Manus Island - were almost twice as likely to be rejected as refugees. The figure continued a long-term trend of high approval rates for people arriving by boat, with 93.5 per cent being found to be refugees in 2010-11 and 91 per cent in 2011-12.

Myth 6: Asylum seekers are taking our jobs

REALITY: The Federal Government released 16,000 asylum seekers into the community as they wait for their refugee claims to be processed. They receive about \$220 a week from Centrelink, most of which goes towards rent and food, but they are on bridging visas which stipulate that they're not allowed to get jobs. Nearly half of those asylum seekers are subject to the government's "no advantage" rule, which means they could be in this limbo for many years. Most asylum seekers want to work and will take jobs other Australians don't want to do, report refugee agencies, but their visa conditions make work illegal. Refugee groups say that barring foreign migrants from the workforce could create an underclass, but they also reject the Federal Opposition's suggestion of a "work for the dole scheme".

Myth 7: People from war torn countries cause problems

REALITY: According to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, the number of settlers - people entitled to permanent residence, including people arriving in Australia on humanitarian programs - between July 2010 and June 2011 came from more than 200 countries and totalled 127,460.

Most were born in one of the following four countries:

- New Zealand (20.2 per cent)
- China (11.5 per cent)
- United Kingdom (8.6 per cent)
- India (8.3 per cent)

Myth 8: They don't assimilate or contribute

REALITY: Refugees have been coming to Australia for decades and the first big wave of boat people, from Vietnam in the 1970s, have proven to be successful migrants who have assimilated and added much to Australian society. After surviving perilous journeys by their courage and strength, these people epitomise the qualities admired and rewarded in Australian society.

Historically, refugees have contributed to the economic, civil and social fabric of Australian life and their success can be found in all fields of endeavour and marked by their presence on the New Year and Queen's birthday honours lists.

Myth 9: Numbers are booming because we lack tough border protection policies

REALITY: In 2007, the total population of asylum seekers, refugees and internationally displaced persons of concern to the UNHCR was estimated at 31.7 million people. By the end of 2011, the number of forcibly displaced people worldwide exceeded 42 million and the number of asylum applications in 2011 was also the highest for almost a decade. The reason for the increase in numbers represents the upsurge in people affected by affected by war, military and social upheaval and human rights abuses, which is reflected in the fact Afghanistan continues to provide the most asylum seekers of any country in the world, with 36,600 last year, followed by the Syrian Arab Republic, Serbia, China and Pakistan. According to the Refugee Council of Australia, "most people do not wish to leave their homes, families, friends and everything they know and hold dear. They do so as a last resort, to escape persecution and find safety and security for themselves and their families".

Myth 10: We can just turn the boats back

REALITY: While this is the current subject of political debate between the Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, (who says we can't) and the Federal Opposition Leader, Tony Abbott, (who says we can) the truth is that wherever they come from, most boat people use Indonesia as a launching point for Australian waters. Indonesia's president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono has indicated towing boats back into Indonesian waters is not an option and it is likely a regional summit will be held to discuss a joint solution for the issue of the maritime trade of asylum seekers.

Read more: <http://www.news.com.au/world-news/ten-myths-around-asylum-seekers-arriving-on-boats-in-australian-waters/story-fndir2ev-1226676024840#ixzz2afSGNy2t>

Biblical Hospitality and Asylum Seekers

Over the past few years, one of our key public issues in Australia has been the treatment of asylum seekers. This issue raises such complex questions about the nature of political hospitality that it might seem overwhelming. Moreover, our Baptist tradition was forged in the separation of church and state, so we might be tempted to leave these bigger issues of hospitality to the state.

This would be unhelpful for at least two reasons: first, the historic Baptist opposition to dominant, state churches does not imply that our discipleship has had no political commitments. On the contrary, asserting the freedom of religion was a political act. Martin Luther King Jr belonged squarely in the Baptist tradition when he insisted that black Americans should not be treated as second-class citizens. For similar reasons, Australian Baptists Rightly joined the groundswell in the 1960s that finally welcomed Aboriginal people back into their own country as citizens with a full range of citizenship rights.

So why should Christians be championing the cause of asylum seekers today? In short, this issue goes to the heart of our identity and calling as the people of God.

The Gospel of Matthew tells us that Jesus started life as a refugee child, fleeing with his family to Egypt. Even his father's name, Joseph, reminds us that Jesus was not the first Jew to be a refugee in Egypt. All the tribal ancestors of Israel took refuge there. We read that scripture was fulfilled when Jesus went there as a child, because "Out of Egypt I called my son" (Matthew 2.15). The quote is from Hosea 11.1: "When Israel was a child I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son". That is, Matthew sees a spiritual analogy between the life of Jesus and the life of Israel: both are marked by the refugee experience.

And this experience is also embodied in the laws of Israel.

So, for example, Leviticus 19.34 says: The immigrant who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the immigrant as yourself, for you were immigrants in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God. (cf. Exodus 22.21) Similarly, the later prophets came to recognize the treatment of asylum seekers as a litmus test of faith (e.g. Jeremiah 7.5-7).

In the Old Testament, the 'immigrant', 'alien', 'refugee' or 'sojourner' (all possible translations of *ger*) is a foreigner who has left his or her country to settle elsewhere. Perhaps the most common reasons for movement are famine and war. Some things never change: the United Nations *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees* (1951), for example, arose as a response to international displacements following World War II, and since Australia is a signatory to this Convention, we recognize the legal right to seek asylum.

When people arrive in a host country, there are always complex questions about the extent of their assimilation. Not surprisingly, then, Old Testament laws sometimes set assimilating strangers apart from 'the foreigner' (the *nokri* or *ben nekar*) who is not given full rights of participation (e.g., Exodus 12.43 excludes such people from the Passover). This distinction is surprisingly overturned, however, in Isaiah 56.3,6 where the 'foreigner' (*ben nekar*) can offer acceptable sacrifices to God and is welcomed into the covenant community.

References to strangers in the New Testament are few but significant. Being 'strangers' (*paroikoi*) becomes a central metaphor for Christian identity in some books, building on the

theological idea in Leviticus that all Israelites were in some sense 'sojourners' (Leviticus 25.23, cf. 1 Peter 1.1 and Ephesians 2.19).

Perhaps against our expectations, we may even find Christ present in the stranger. This is precisely the point that is made in the parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25: the hungry and thirsty stranger (*xenos* in vs. 38 and 44) may actually be the Lord, and not even the people in the parable called 'the righteous' have been able to discern this. In other words, no-one has the power to tell whether the needy stranger may in fact be Christ.

Ezekiel 47 is also a challenge to our political imagination: it takes us beyond random acts of kindness and demands that refugees be given a 'fair go' in the provision of land, that is, basic resources that provide the foundation of economic security:

So you shall divide this land among you according to the tribes of Israel. You shall allot it as an inheritance for yourselves and for the aliens who reside among you and have begotten children among you. They shall be to you as citizens of Israel; with you they shall be allotted an inheritance among the tribes of Israel. In whatever tribe aliens reside, there you shall assign them their inheritance, says the LORD God. (Ezekiel 47.21--23)

In international comparisons (taking account of national wealth and population sizes), the welcome that Australia offers to asylum seekers is not very impressive. On The other hand, especially under the able leadership of Meewon Yang, the Baptist Churches in Victoria have done some great work with refugee communities, and we now have a large number of churches whose members began their life in Australia as refugees. It is exactly this kind of work for which we should be known in the wider community. It's in our biblical genes.

Mark Brett

For general information, see www.refugeecouncil.org. From a Christian perspective, M. Daniel Carroll R., *Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church, and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008).

Speaking Sense About Seeking Asylum

It has been quite a few weeks in the media. Papua New Guinea has been part of the focus. The descriptions used about PNG in some of the Australian Press are disturbing. The way that some aspects of PNG life have been described is disappointing to say the least. The social ills of PNG have been described without any comment on its strengths and very significant capacity. I am sensitive to this because PNG is a GMP partner country. We have a good partnership.

There is much Australia can learn from PNG. We can grow in our understanding of community life, the importance of family and neighbours, the rhythm of work and rest. We can learn from the churches. For example, their confidence in God's activity in daily life is inspiring. Yes, there are challenges that PNG faces – some quite serious – in the same way that Australia faces serious challenges and difficulties.

Some realities remain: no matter what our personal political persuasions are, all people have basic human rights.

All people are:

- Loved by God and Jesus gave his life for them.
- Entitled to shelter, clean water, sufficient food, freedom of worship, protection, education, health care and productive activity for each day.

All of us, irrespective of ethnicity, dream of the future. For some this dream is all the more powerful because of the fear and terror they experience where they live. Some seek asylum or safety. No one leaves home and family for somewhere else unless their hope for the future is more powerful than the fear of staying. For some, the journey they take is risky, arduous, demanding and life threatening.

In the debate in Australia over the asylum seeker situation it has become hard to voice concerns without sounding politically partisan. It seems safer to be silent. Yet all of us need to give voice to what we understand to be a Christian response. The words we use, the opinions we have, and the way people are described must be connected to the ministry of Jesus.

It is true that Australia is a wealthy country. We are blessed with resources and opportunities. We do need to have some means of assessing claims for asylum. We do need to consider our response in light of the huge movements of people across land borders in Asia, Africa and North and South America. We should not meet the costs of detention from the aid budget!

Compared to PNG, Australia is large and powerful. Compared to Iran, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka, Australia is Christian. Compared to a refugee camp or a boat on the sea, Australia is safe.

We live in a 'Lucky Country' and our responsibility as Christians is to be people of compassion, generosity and grace.

John Gilmore, GMP Executive Director

Further Reading and Information:

Asylum Seeker Resource Centre:	http://www.asrc.org.au/
Refugee Council of Australia	http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/
Refugee Week	http://www.refugeeweek.org.au/
United Nations Refugee Agency	http://www.unhcr.org/
Australian Human Rights Commission	http://www.humanrights.gov.au/
Social Policy Connections	http://www.socialpolicyconnections.com.au/
Australian Churches Refugee Taskforce	http://www.australianchurchesrefugeetaskforce.com.au/

Events and Information Sessions:

A service of lament for Asylum Seekers and Refugees on

25 August at 5pm

Blackwood Uniting Church

266 Main Road, Blackwood