

Welcoming Refugees (17th September 2016) by Sr Jess

Change the story - Welcome refugees!

How we see people depends to a great extent on the stories we know, or we think we know, about them. Sadly the stories that are so often told about asylum seekers and refugees are often very bad and untrue without understanding of the conditions and dangers from which they come. This can be pernicious. People do not lightly leave their country, family and all they know and love for an unknown and often hostile destination. We need to `change the story. This was the theme of the Day on September 17th `Welcoming Refugees`. In the present post Brexit referendum atmosphere this becomes all the more important.



It was on September 17th that about 30,000 of us gathered to try to do just that – change the story, and witness to our desire to welcome migrants and refugees. There were few police and no counter demonstrations I am glad to say. Many organisations working with migrants, NGOs and faith based organisations were present. There had been an ecumenical service in St James Church, Spanish Place put on jointly by Cafod and Christian Aid. It was well attended with many young people present including Georgia.

We prayed:

Lord, who changes our story from stranger to brother and sister, help us to change the story

- from frustration to freedom
- from panic to peace, for those separated from their families
- from trafficking to safe passage, for those on perilous journeys
- from despair to hope, for hearts weary with grief
- from worry to hospitality, for minds uncertain of change
- from crisis to opportunity, for countries providing a home
- from foreigner to family, as we were welcomed by you.

May we never miss meeting your gaze, in the eyes of our brothers and sisters, the stranger. Amen.

We were reminded we need to stop blaming the victims for the crises they did not cause. Why are people leaving all they have and love? It is a crisis of war, exploitation, inequality, climate change. These are what needs to change. These are the real problems which force people to move into the often unwelcoming unknown.

As Pope Francis says time and again: - `we ourselves need to see, and then enable others to see that migrants and refugees are brothers and sisters to be welcomed, respected and loved`.