

MESSAGE FROM THE CHURCHES IN POLAND CONCERNING REFUGEES

“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember [...] those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body” (Hebrews 13,2-3).

The nations of Europe and the Churches are facing the enormous challenge of the migrant crisis. About three million people from countries of Africa and Asia have crossed the border of the European Union. Some of them are fleeing because of war and religious persecution, others in a search for a better life.

The current situation has tested the concept of cooperation of states within the European Union. There has been a noticeable polarisation of standpoints on the issue of effective means of dealing with the migrant crisis. Poland too has been facing this challenge.

The obligations of Christians concerning this stem from Divine Revelation and the Tradition of the Churches. In the Book of Genesis, we read that when a famine occurred in the land where Abraham was living, he went to Egypt and settled there as a foreigner (cf. Genesis 12,10). Also, the patriarch Jacob, instructed by God, took his whole family and possessions to Egypt, where he found refuge from death by hunger (cf. Genesis 42,1-6; 46,1-7). Our Lord Jesus Christ and His Family also shared the fate of refugees when they had to flee the anger of Herod (cf. Matthew 2,13-15). The task of the Churches is to prepare people's hearts to provide assistance, by specific acts of mercy, to those who suffer – those escaping from war, persecution and death. Such an attitude by Christians to others has been their particular feature ever since the beginnings of the Church.

Our country has on many occasions provided shelter to those having to flee from persecution. In the days of the Jagiellonians, our land was famed for its hospitality. After Poles lost their independence, they too were treated hospitably in other countries. In the 1980s of the last century, the countries of West Europe granted us help. A decade later, Belarusians, Ukrainians and Chechens could experience Polish hospitality. Maintaining and being educated in hospitality should be an expression of Christian sensitivity and national tradition.

There is no doubt that solving the migrant problem in Poland and Europe requires the cooperation of people of good will on many levels. What is needed is generosity and prudence, open hearts and the establishment of rights ensuring that the dignity of both one's own citizens and those asking for help will be respected.

Christians should strive to cooperate with appropriate state authorities and social organisations. Only a broadly conceived humanitarian action and a consideration of the political and economic causes of the present difficulties can bring about an actual improvement in the situation. May this also provide an impulse to develop voluntary service, including at the level of

our parishes, in order to effectively and responsibly resolve the problems that arise.

We should not lose sight of the main reason for the current migrant crisis, i.e. the wars raging in the Middle East and Africa. This makes it necessary to pray for peace, engage in all kinds of mediation and constantly appeal to the consciences of those in power. Many people have stayed in their countries and are expecting our assistance to be directed towards the regions affected. At the same time, we have to care for those who have decided to leave the lands of their fathers. We call on the believers in our Churches to persist in prayer and provide help to those in need. Let us not cease from striving to overcome the present crisis.

We trust God to illuminate our hearts so that we can meet Christ's challenge with evangelical love: "I was a stranger, and you invited Me in" (Matthew 25,35).

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on behalf of the Churches affiliated in the Polish Ecumenical Council
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