

**The Archbishop's Pastoral Letter of 16th September, 2015
(Unofficial translation)**

My dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

For months now men, women, and children have been in the dramatic situation of having to flee from war and poverty, risking their lives to cross the sea seeking protection in Europe. Thousands - whose only baggage was the hope of finding a land where they might live in peace - have perished during that ultimate crossing.

Europe is attempting to provide help to all who are obliged to flee from their homeland, in keeping with its international undertakings to guarantee fundamental rights of protection to all human beings. For believers, this outpouring of solidarity is rooted in the mystery of our faith. The way Jesus went out to meet those on the periphery constitutes the example we Christians must follow. "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me." (Matthew 25, 40)

Pope Francis tells us : *"Jesus is "the evangelizer par excellence and the Gospel in person" (Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii gaudium, 209). His solicitude, particularly for the most vulnerable and marginalized, invites all of us to care for the frailest and to recognize his suffering countenance, especially in the victims of new forms of poverty and slavery. The Lord says: "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me" (Mt 25:35-36). The mission of the Church, herself a pilgrim in the world and the Mother of all, is thus to love Jesus Christ, to adore and love him, particularly in the poorest and most abandoned; among these are certainly migrants and refugees, who are trying to escape difficult living conditions and dangers of every kind."*¹

All Christians have heard this appeal; I propose that we, the Church in Luxembourg, now set out to make our contribution towards alleviating these dramatic situations. This is why I have decided to launch a Church initiative called "Reech eng Hand – Reech Deng Hand". Let us stretch out our hands to today's castaways. This project will focus on the reception of refugees and seekers of international protection here in Luxembourg. I invite all Christian communities and religious congregations to prayerfully reflect on the ways and means of their involvement; I fully endorse Pope Francis' request that each parish should house a family.

In order to make headway, I would like each parish community to form a team of volunteers and to designate a contact person for the purpose of liaising with the diocesan working group. This working group has been set up to develop and coordinate the project. It will support parishes and institutions in drawing up their own local projects within this initiative.

In practical terms, what can we do?

Several aspects will be developed:

- Reception: in particular hosting and supporting refugees living in the parish in order

¹ Pope Francis' message for the 101st World Day of Migrants and Refugees : Church without Frontiers, Mother to all, 18 January 2015

to facilitate their integration into everyday life, through giving of our time and friendship...

- Housing: I urge communities and private individuals owning unused accommodation to lease it temporarily for refugee reception facilities. I would say to the Fabriques d'Eglise with land at their disposal: consider the possibility of leasing it, for a period of time to be defined, for the purpose of installing modular housing units. I urge owners of unoccupied lodgings to make their premises available for rental ("location avec garanties").
- For all this to be possible, cooperation with the civil authorities will need to be reinforced.
- Activity in the political sphere: formulating proposals and engaging in dialogue with the authorities to improve the level of protection afforded to civilians, both in their homeland and after they have fled it.

By pulling together, in harmony with the universal Church, we can set up an ambitious scheme capable of aiding a significant number of people. I ask you therefore to take this initiative to heart, and in your parishes, your religious or other communities, to join in and support our action, so as to offer a dignified and humane welcome to those who seek our protection.

There are many Christians among the thousands of refugees coming into Europe. They have had to flee persecution on account of their belief in Jesus Christ. They look to us for brotherly help which we cannot possibly refuse to them.

I often hear the fear expressed that Christian Europe will lose its identity by letting in refugees professing a different faith from ours. I understand this fear; however, Christian Europe will truly be the loser on the day we close our frontiers, and cease to live according to Gospel values.

I appeal to all men and women holding political office to make every effort on behalf of peace, and to pursue vigorously a policy of peace based on justice.

I appeal to European Union leaders to exert the same energy in resolving humanitarian problems as they deployed for financial ones.

My heartfelt thanks go to all of you, who commit to working side by side with all women and men of good will towards resolving this humanitarian crisis. *More particularly, I wish to thank individuals, parish and religious communities who are already involved in refugee aid.*

Let us not fall into the trap of confining our efforts to financial aid; let us give of our time and energy...

Let us dare to make a truly Christian response!

Luxembourg, 16th September, 2015

+Jean-Claude Hollerich
Archbishop of Luxembourg