



CNI

COMMENT - Bold Steps are needed to resolve the refugee and Syria Crises

The image of Aylan Kurdi's lifeless body being carried from the beach where it was washed up has moved us in our millions. - writes Ken Good

The death of the infant, who drowned as his family fled conflict and persecution, encapsulates the plight of millions more – in Syria, elsewhere in the Middle East, and in Africa. It challenges us as Christians – and as human beings – to act.

There have been other crises in recent times – famine and genocide in Africa and elsewhere – but we were shielded from much of that horror. Now, though, the proliferation of media – traditional and especially social – means that the latest refugee crisis is played out daily in our

living rooms, before our eyes, in all its wretchedness.

Day after day we see pictures of the more fortunate refugees being rescued from the Mediterranean. We see the bodies of the less fortunate being recovered from the sea by naval personnel. We see desperate families trekking across countries in search of sanctuary; destitute people, at their wits' end, scrambling, fighting to board trains in their quest for security.

We are shocked, horrified, embarrassed and angered by it. Worst of all, many of us feel powerless. It is, after all, the worst such crisis we have seen in our lifetime.

Others feel compelled to do something about it. But what?

In the gospel, Christ – who was also a refugee – taught us how we should respond.

In Matthew 25:35, Christ said: 'For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in.'

This Sunday's second reading, James 2: 14–17, calls us to action: 'What good is it, my brothers

and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill”, and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.’

We need action at individual level, at national level, and at international level. And in all cases the response should be guided by compassion and humanity.

One practical way in which individuals in our diocese can help is by supporting Christian Aid’s ‘Syria Crisis Appeal’. The charity has been providing assistance for Syrians who have fled to neighbouring countries and are seeking refuge. It is also supporting a sister agency helping people in need inside Syria itself. You can get more information about Christian Aid’s work in the region by visiting www.christianaid.ie/syria People here can contribute to the ‘Syria Crisis Appeal’. They can encourage politicians to help refugees worldwide. They can encourage their own communities to welcome and accept refugees.

But the scale of this problem demands action at government level, too. Our political leaders can

churchnewsireland@gmail.com

be assured that there is a groundswell of support in our churches, parishes and communities for bold steps to be taken to address the crisis.

I urge the British and Irish governments, and indeed the Executive in Northern Ireland, to be compassionate and to reach out. Our countries must stretch themselves to help our fellow human beings in their hour of need. We must all stretch ourselves to act as Christ demands of us. It means doing all we can to resolve conflict and end poverty, wherever they occur.

Our diocese has designated 2016 a Year of Opportunity. During the year, we will be focusing on three themes: mission, generosity and children. Those three themes also lie at the heart of the current refugee crisis.

I feel deeply for the victims caught up in this catastrophe. I fear there may be many more victims, as the situation in Syria deteriorates. But I am encouraged by the warmth and generosity which has been evident throughout our diocese and the wider community. If each of us plays a part, if all of us acts as Christ wants us to, I am hopeful that this terrible crisis can be eased.

Finally, I would urge people, to remember the men, women and children who are at the heart of this problem. Please pray for them.

Ken Good is the Anglican bishop of Derry & Raphoe