

## **Is it appropriate to share the Gospel with refugees coming to Europe?**

The Refugee Campaign's partners are resourcing Europe's churches to reach out to refugees. Europe's Evangelicals are offering hope. For the Church – that is, all genuine Christians –, this hope includes the eternal dimension. Sensitive sharing of faith is absolutely appropriate.

In Europe, especially more aggressively-secular Western Europe, many object to churches' alleged lack of neutrality, equal treatment of others, or legitimacy in serving others when they have a religious motivation. Religion is supposedly a bad motivation and may lead to exploitation. (See below).

Actually, the Refugee Campaign sees faith in Jesus as an excellent motivation for providing help to the vulnerable. We believe that churches should do what they can, despite their limited resources. And as a general rule help should be given regardless of age, gender, religion or any other criteria. Practical support should be given unconditionally and never simply as a platform to proselytise. No one should exploit the vulnerability or tragedy of others.

Churches are called to love the vulnerable and minister to their needs in a holistic way. This includes caring for physical, emotional and spiritual needs. The Church has a specific biblical mandate to share the good news that all can enter into a saving relationship with God through Jesus Christ, whatever their religious background. It is perfectly fitting for Christians to discuss faith where opportunity arises, provided this is sensitive and respectful and the refugee does not feel coerced or manipulated in any way. The Refugee Campaign is promoting resources which will help Christians to share their faith appropriately.

## **Would sharing faith be exploiting vulnerability?**

Especially in Western Europe, which is more influenced by more aggressive forms of secularism, objections abound due to the prejudice that churches are not necessarily 'neutral,' that they are discriminatory, exploiting of others, that they should not be as involved or if they are, they should not 'proselytise.'

*"Our Christian missions' history has occasionally included crusades, religious wars, forced conversions, inquisitions, and inappropriate connections between missions and colonisation. Of course we have long rejected such practices, but not everyone knows that,"* said Thomas K. Johnson [commenting](#) on the 2011 remarkable joint statement by the World Evangelical Alliance, World Council of Churches and Pontifical Council for Interfaith Dialogue, [Christian Witness in an Multifaith World.](#))

Although it is unnecessary and impossible to confess and ask forgiveness for these sins committed by others, we should acknowledge these facts of Christian history explicitly as much as our rejection of these past errors. This is especially important because not doing so helps breed prejudice and rumour about continued bad intentions and abuses among churches and Christians.

However, most of these present day accusations are unverified or simply not valid. In their work to serve the needy and vulnerable, including refugees, Christians will choose to operate in various ways, from local and informal initiatives to involvement with the authorities and non-religious organisations to church action to work with Christian aid and development organisations.

Christian aid and development agencies complement the work of the local church. They are motivated by their faith, and in disaster situations respect and sign up to best quality standards of their branch, such as the Red Cross Code of Conduct, and SPHERE standards. This means they will not withhold aid to anyone in need, regardless of age, gender, or religion. They respect and often work with local churches, but see their mandate as different and complementary.

Like Christian development organisations, the Refugee Campaign's partners believe firmly in and therefore subscribe to universally recognised standards of Human Rights, especially respect for religious freedom. These standards imply that, in general, we should "impose no religious obligations on beneficiaries" of aid and ministry and that in all cases, "the use of any form of coercion or manipulation is excluded." (See the excellent [Code of Conduct for Christian Development Organisations](#) drafted by a platform within the Swiss Evangelical Alliance.) Likewise, any abuse of authority, especially when it comes to religion or belief, must not be permitted: people who benefit from services are often vulnerable, yet are to be put on an equal footing and treated on that basis. That may mean that certain aspects of the ministry are made accessible only to believers.