

Love Your Neighbor - People on the Move

The ecumenical councils of the Nordic-Baltic region call for a renewed commitment to show love and care for those people forced to flee from war, catastrophes, and suffering. We call for dignified treatment of people seeking refuge by our governments and EU institutions.

In late January, the ecumenical councils of the Nordic-Baltic region convened in Iceland for a joint session. The representatives from Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden share concerns, hopes and a commitment to people forced to flee. The meeting coincided with the end of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. The week revolved around the parable of the Good Samaritan and Jesus' admonition to his followers: *You shall love the Lord your God ... and your neighbor as yourself* (Luke 10:27). Christ's love compels us to broaden our definition of who our neighbor is and extend our concern beyond our own borders.

With this message of love in mind, we must speak up about our concern about more restrictive migration policies. We witness a narrative about "the other" that is spreading fear and division, perpetuating harmful stereotypes, and justifying unjust policies. We witness dubious efforts to out-source responsibility for people seeking refuge from persecution and war. We witness politics that focus on border protection, but we must also protect the child, woman and man seeking refuge. In the Mediterranean Sea alone, 3 760 people were reported dead or missing by UNHCR last year.

It is imperative that we, as followers of Christ, remind ourselves and our policy makers of the injustice, suffering and unbearable living conditions enforced on people fleeing. We risk diminishing our own humanity if we forget the value of every human life. We risk being the ones who, in Jesus' parable, "pass by on the other side", treating our neighbor with indifference.

Yet we know that we as societies and churches can do better: we have as churches welcomed Ukrainians arriving in our countries, so we know the capability and strength is there. We are aware of how migration in large numbers can be a challenge to our societies. But we know that welcoming those in need is a core value for us as humans and Christians.

We therefore call for our governments and EU not to lose sight of these basic values. We call for

- the upholding of the right of those who are in need of protection to apply for asylum and have one's case tested.
- strong measures to be put in place to ensure that reported violence by authorities at the borders is investigated.

Let us not forget that we are called to love our neighbor who is suffering – people fleeing from conflicts, violence or persecution!

On behalf of the ecumenical secretaries gathered in Reykjavík for the Nordic Baltic ecumenical meeting.

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