



# Sanctuary everywhere

Britain can be a hostile place for people from migrant and refugee backgrounds. This publication has been created to help Quakers articulate a vision of how nations can transition from that hostility to a culture of sanctuary everywhere.





**Quakers at a demonstration outside the Home Office staged in solidarity with hunger strikers at Yarl's Wood Immigration Removal Centre.**

Credit: Suki Furguson for BYM

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# Introduction

The political context is always changing, but the values in which Quakers root our action are constant. We want to help build a society that responds to the inherent worth of each person, expressing our belief in “that of God in every one”.

In the 17th century, many Friends fled Britain because of persecution. For more than three centuries since, Quakers have worked to welcome people who have moved from one place to another. Friends provided refuge for the Amish and other religious minorities in the 18th century. They helped with the ‘Underground Railroad’ that assisted enslaved people in the 19th century. In the 1930s Quakers helped Jews and others threatened by the Nazis to flee to Britain on the Kindertransport. More recently, Quakers have been co-initiators of – and enthusiastic participants in – the sanctuary movements of North America and Britain. In the US this has meant assisting Central American and other refugees to find safety, and resisting deportations when they are threatened. In the UK it has meant partnering with local authorities to become sanctuary cities, to welcome people from all over the world.

**As Quakers, we know that for change to be sustainable it must be political as well as practical**

Many Quakers in Britain are actively welcoming and providing practical support to people seeking asylum. Actions include hosting people at home, providing legal support, volunteering in refugee camps, visiting detention centres, providing English lessons, holding anti-racism events at meeting houses and even knitting patchwork quilts as welcome presents for newcomers.

As Quakers, we know that for change to be sustainable it must be political as well as practical, and must influence policy. In early 2017, more than 100 Friends and allies gathered to consider this at Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre. The conference – an initiative of the Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network, and attended by staff from the Quaker United Nations Office, Quaker Peace & Social Witness, and the Quaker Council for European Affairs – resolved to create a manifesto and infrastructure to work for change. An advisory group was formed and, after a ten-month discernment process, Meeting for Sufferings (the standing representative body of Britain Yearly Meeting) agreed the ‘Sanctuary Everywhere Manifesto’ in December 2017.

The manifesto is overleaf. We have used it as the basis for an infrastructure through which Quakers across Britain are invited to become Sanctuary Meetings – making the commitment to building a culture of welcome, challenging racism in all of its forms, and working together to change the law. How we hope to change the law is set out in the rest of this publication.

# Sanctuary Everywhere Manifesto

Meeting for Sufferings, December 2017

As Quakers, we have long worked for peace and equality, because of our belief that there is that of God in everyone, everywhere, whoever they are.

Through Quakers' longstanding work welcoming newcomers to our shores, we have seen up close that the government's creation of a 'hostile environment' is increasingly embedding policies of discrimination into the practices of the British state. Quakers in Britain are committed to working with others to change this, creating a culture of compassion and welcoming hospitality that answers that of God in every person.

Our Meeting for Sufferings was born of a response to the government's systematic discrimination against Quakers in the past. Today we turn that experience into solidarity, and stand against all oppression and suffering. We declare our determination to work for sanctuary everywhere, including here in Britain, by agreeing this Manifesto for change.

**Human rights standards for all should be the foundation on which any national policy or international agreement on migration is founded, and these include the right to work, to learn, to housing, to medical care and to security in the event of adverse circumstances beyond personal control.**

**We will campaign for change to the asylum process so that it is built on a culture of compassion and practical response, rather than starting from an assumption of disbelief.**

**Within the UK system of immigration detention is institutional violence and discrimination. We oppose indefinite detention, which we believe neither right nor necessary, and will work towards the closure of all detention centres. Other more humane policies are more effective and should be introduced.**

**Our belief in every human being's equality leads us to oppose unjust deportations and removals, whether to the EU or to the wider world.**

**The humanitarian risks of trafficking and unsafe passage lead us to work for new, peaceful, safer routes of migration including the introduction of humanitarian visas and improved rules for family reunion.**

**To ourselves and wider society, we reaffirm our determination to acknowledge and dismantle discrimination in all its forms, wherever it is found.**

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# Contributors

**Barbara Forbes** and **David Forbes** run a small community interest company that offers free advice to asylum seekers, often to those who have exhausted all other possibilities for representation. They are also involved in befriending projects and coordinate the schools programme within Birmingham City of Sanctuary.

**Tatiana Garavito** is a racial justice activist, organiser and the Sanctuary Everywhere Programme Manager.

**Tim Gee** is a member of South East London Area Meeting and QARN. He was Programme Developer for the Sanctuary meetings project.

**Till Geiger** came to Britain as a postgraduate student in 1985. He is a member of Disley Meeting and serves as Clerk to the QPSW Peace Education, Campaigning and Networking Subcommittee.

**Chris Gwyntopher** is involved in Coventry Migrant Women's House, Spare Room for Refugees and QARN.

**Andrew Lane** is the Director of the Quaker Council for European Affairs (QCEA), which engages with Quaker communities and agencies across Europe. He also coordinates its human rights programme. He serves on the steering committees of Quakers in Criminal Justice, European Peacebuilding Liaison Office and the European Network against the Arms Trade. Prior to working in Brussels, Andrew worked as the policy advisor to a regional police commissioner in the UK.

**Kate McNally** coordinates activity related to asylum, refugees and forced migration.

**Deborah Mitchell** is a member of Cornwall Area Meeting, attending Falmouth Local Meeting. She is committed to using Restorative Practice to teach and learn about 'harms against identity'. These include racism, Islamophobia and all forms of prejudice and discrimination.

**Bridget Obi** is a trainee Advocate with Baobab women's group and a public speaker, journalist and community organiser.

**Bridget Walker** is a member of the Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network (QARN) and co-author of two reports on immigration bail hearings for the Bail Observation Project of the Close Campsfield campaign.

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# Chapter 1: Discrimination

Tim Gee

Since their earliest use in Britain, restrictions on freedom of movement have been both arbitrary and discriminatory. This country's first systematic immigration controls were introduced in 1905 as part of the Aliens Act, a law directed against Jewish refugees escaping anti-Semitic oppression in Eastern Europe and Russia.<sup>1</sup>

The first systematic controls directed against black people came in 1962 with the Commonwealth Immigrants Act, a law designed to limit the number of arrivals from countries that were formerly part of the British Empire. As with the 1905 legislation, it was agitated for by racist groups.<sup>2</sup>

Aside from the increased freedom of movement enjoyed by EU/EEA citizens from the early 1970s, successive UK governments have restricted the entry of those from outside these areas, including those forced to flee their homes.<sup>3</sup>

In 2016, 20 people worldwide were forced to migrate every minute due to war, violence and persecution.<sup>4</sup> 85 per cent of forced migrants on the move recounted having witnessed extreme violence. Those fleeing from Afghanistan and Iraq reported even higher levels.<sup>5</sup>

Taking a longer view, an analysis of UN figures shows that more than half of the people counted by the UN as refugees are from places that have been ruled by Britain in living memory. In contrast, considerably less than one per cent of the total population of those classified as refugees by the UN currently live in the UK.<sup>6</sup>

Quakers oppose war and stand for peace. Racism is one of the factors that can be used as a precursor for war, and is often stoked and offered justification by the state and national media at times of war. The current system of discrimination against those seeking sanctuary is, for many of those who encounter it, a wall of injustice. And that wall is, in part, a product of racism and war, which have cultivated a system of inequality and injustice in British culture.

*Taking a longer view, an analysis of UN figures shows that more than half of the people counted by the UN as refugees are from places that have been ruled by Britain in living memory.*

That is why, with others, we seek to build a culture of welcome, challenge racism in all its forms and seek to change the law. Every act of welcome is an act of faith and an act of peace. As Quakers, we sustain ourselves with the knowledge that all walls fall eventually.

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# Chapter 2: Destitution

Bridget Obi and Chris Gwyntopher

*Human rights standards for all should be the foundation on which any national policy or international agreement on migration is founded, and these include the right to work, to learn, to housing, to medical care and to security in the event of adverse circumstances beyond personal control.*

## **Sanctuary Everywhere Manifesto.**

Hungry, cold, without somewhere safe to sleep, sick, with recurring mental health problems, a vulnerability to exploitation, an inability to live legally, in fear of being detained and deported to a country where one would not be able to survive... These are the experiences of thousands of people because of laws intended to deter them from fleeing to the UK, and to force those who are here without leave to remain to depart.

## **Even women's refuges are frequently unable to offer shelter**

Women face particular hardship and danger. Through our work, we uphold a friend who was 24 years old when she was separated from her husband. He had violently thrown her out of the house. She had been rejected by most of her family and as a result was homeless and frightened. The police had been called; she was badly bruised. She was denied public housing or Jobseeker's Allowance because she had not been able to apply for leave to remain in her own right. She was treated as a dependant of her estranged husband.

Sadly, even women's refuges are frequently unable to offer shelter to women with no recourse to public funds because refuges are partly funded by housing benefit. Having only had primary education in her country, and with only a basic grasp of English, our friend did not know how the immigration control system worked. She was given shelter by the

Quaker-founded accommodation network Spare Room for Destitute Migrants.

Women flee their countries, homes and families because of environmental disaster, war or persecution. This may be from their own ethnic group, for not conforming to social norms (for example, about education, dress or arranged marriage). Their journey to seek safety in a strange country may involve days without food or proper shelter. They are vulnerable to sexual violence on the way. Some are on the verge of suicide. For a mother, the pain of not being able to provide the basic things for her family can be unbearable.

Barriers these women face when they reach the UK include language, not knowing local laws or customs, no safe home, not having the money to apply for leave to remain, or insensitive and inefficient bureaucracy. This all contributes to a climate of hostility. Support is patchy, and funding for English language classes varies by country of origin.

Women are then eligible for Asylum Support, which is 51 per cent of Income Support. There is also some accommodation provided. Those with children may, with good advocacy, get minimal support under section 17 of the Children's Act. The authorities then assess your case. You can appeal, and whether your appeal is refused or not people are assigned by the state as having "no recourse to public funds".

Those in the asylum system cannot work legally. To survive, they may have to work without pay for a roof over their heads. Some women are forced to work as prostitutes. Food banks, night shelters and friends enable some to survive.

This is far from the equality of respect that Quakers seek. Worse, it is the result of a wilful policy of "hostile environment".<sup>7</sup>



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# Chapter 3: Disbelief

David and Barbara Forbes

*We will campaign for change to the asylum process so that it is built on a culture of compassion and practical response, rather than starting from an assumption of disbelief.*

## **Sanctuary Everywhere Manifesto**

Among the forms of solidarity offered by those qualified to offer it is legal support. Through our work supporting immigrants, we have seen close up how people's rights are being eroded. Often, these erosions are only publicised when legal practitioners come up against them. While she was Home Secretary, Theresa May declared her intention to create a "hostile environment" for what she called "illegal" migrants, and made 45,000 changes to immigration rules.<sup>8</sup> Aspects of detailed regulations have also been changed without any public discussion. In 2015, for example, the fee for renewal of Discretionary Leave to Remain was raised from zero to £649 (and has now been increased again to £993).

The trend continued with the Immigration Act of 2016, which forced landlords to check the immigration status of would-be tenants (with the further effect of making it harder for anyone with a foreign-sounding name to rent a property) and has imposed new criminal sanctions on anyone who employs an "illegal" worker.

New questions about pupils' nationality have been included in the school census form and it was only after some energetic campaigning that the Department for Education told schools they could remind parents that they were entitled to refuse to give this information. The government's so-called "deport first, appeal later" scheme has now been extended to all cases depending on private and family life (previously it only applied to convicted criminals with no residency rights or to those people the Secretary of State

considered it "conducive to the public good" to remove). Any person in such a situation can now be removed from the UK and be forced to appeal from their home country unless they can prove a negative: that they would suffer "serious, irreversible harm". Quakers have also known of people asked to prove other negatives, for example that they have not worked while their lengthy application processes take place. This hostile practice has been accompanied by official promotion of a much more openly hostile language. To give one example, whereas in the past people seeking asylum were given "temporary admission", they are now classed as receiving "immigration bail".

## **Financial support has been cut further**

The Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network reports that financial support for people seeking sanctuary has been cut further, despite there being no right to work; in some cases people are barred from holding a driving licence or having a bank account. Access to legal aid is also rapidly receding, reducing access to justice still further.<sup>9</sup>

Government spokespeople have on a number of occasions shared their hope that Britain withdraw from the European Convention on Human Rights, possibly to replace it with a charter that applies only to British citizens. This would lead to a further hardening of hostile attitudes towards outsiders, and the entrenchment of a two-tier system of discrimination and different legal rights for different people.

All of this adds up to a societal and official culture of disbelief, which all too frequently lets people down. It's time to replace it with a culture of compassion and practical response.

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# Chapter 4: Immigration detention

Bridget Walker

*Within the UK system of immigration detention is institutional violence and discrimination. We oppose indefinite detention, which we believe neither right nor necessary, and will work towards the closure of all detention centres. Other more humane policies are more effective and should be introduced.*

## **Sanctuary Everywhere Manifesto**

When I first visited someone in immigration detention I knew I must speak out. It is one of the darkest corners of our asylum system and not widely known. It is against our testimony to equality and must be brought into the light and brought to an end. Every year around 30,000 people are detained in immigration detention centres in the UK. This is a vast increase since the 1980s, when numbers were in the mid-hundreds.<sup>10</sup>

Anyone with 'irregular status' can be detained – new arrivals, people with no papers or 'wrong passports', and overstayers. Most have not been charged with any crime. Those who have, if they had had British passports, would have been released on licence or walked free. Any foreign national offender who has served a sentence of more than 12 months is now subject to forced removal.

## **Conditions are variable ... there can be up to six men in a room**

The decision to detain is an administrative one – there is no judicial oversight and people can be held indefinitely. The recommendations for a time limit from an all-party parliamentary inquiry of 2015 and the more recent Shaw report commissioned by the Home Office have not brought change. Nearly half of all those detained are subsequently released back into the community. Detention has served no purpose.

Indefinite detention affects mental health. Yet men and women who should be exempt under the government's own rules are detained; these include those with severe physical and mental health problems and torture survivors.

Most detention centres/immigration removal centres are run under licence from the government by private companies for profit, often in difficult-to-access locations. The annual cost to the taxpayer is around £75 million, but there is limited accountability. The Independent Monitoring Boards, which monitor the day-to-day life in their local prison or removal centre and ensure that proper standards of care and decency are maintained, play an important role, but often lack the authority to make changes.

Conditions are variable, with no consistent standard. At one detention centre/immigration removal centre there can be up to six men in a room, there are problems over food, and health care is poor.

There are many ways in which Friends can and do act – by demonstrating outside detention centres and visiting those inside, supporting their families, standing surety when they apply for bail, offering help on release. Friends also challenge the system, lobbying MPs, campaigning for a 28-day limit on detention, contributing to submissions to parliament, and engaging with the private companies that run the centres.

Based on this experience, we believe that indefinite immigration detention is neither right nor necessary and will work towards the closure of all detention centres. Detention is not the answer – for anyone.

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# Chapter 5: Deportations and removals

Till Geiger

*Our belief in every human being's equality leads us to oppose unjust deportations and removals, whether to the EU or to the wider world.*

## **Sanctuary Everywhere Manifesto**

As part of the Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network, I've long been concerned for the rights of those seeking sanctuary. When I began my work I hadn't considered that the environment of hostility might extend to me.

Since the European Union referendum there has been a rise in hate crime and overt racism, ranging from individual comments to taunts to physical attacks, some of which I have experienced directly. For some European Union (EU) and European Economic Area (EEA) citizens this is a new experience. For others, it is one we thought left behind in the past. We are acutely aware though that for many non-EU/EEA citizens this has been a lived reality for many years.

Until the point of the UK's formal departure from the EU, European Union/European Economic Area member states share, with citizens of the United Kingdom, the freedom of movement guaranteed under the various treaties underpinning the European Union – a principle some of us hoped might eventually be applied more widely in the world.

With the outcome of the referendum, the entitlement to reside in the UK and the status of EU/EEA citizens has been called into question. This uncertainty has prompted many people to consider leaving the UK. Indeed, many EU citizens fear that they might be forced to leave – often after living in the UK for decades.

Even though they are often still legally entitled to live in this country, we hear

stories of applicants for the permanent right to remain from EU/EEA countries being told to prepare to leave the country, because of minor mistakes on their application forms, for being the non-working partner of a British citizen or for not having medical insurance. Again, in this, and for the first time, EU citizens are experiencing similar problems to those that non-EU nationals have long endured.

**The fact remains that the net is growing ever wider for those who are subjected to the hostile environment of the British immigration system. Now is the time to build solidarity between all people and to make every person feel welcome and valued**

I didn't flee my home. But I have made my home in Britain. I know we will each be treated differently according to the category bestowed upon us. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the net is growing ever wider for those who are subjected to the hostile environment of the British immigration system. Now is the time to build solidarity between all people and to make every person feel welcome and valued.

The current debate over Brexit and EU citizens' rights has highlighted that our freedoms and rights are bound together. The denial of rights and entitlements to some of us may lead to the rights and entitlements of everyone being curtailed. Our solidarity with refugees, asylum seekers, EU/EEA citizens and other migrants is part of a shared insistence on equal rights and social justice for everyone living in Britain and the world.

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# Chapter 6: Dangerous passage

Andrew Lane and Kate McNally

*The humanitarian risks of trafficking and unsafe passage lead us to work for new, peaceful, safer routes of migration including the introduction of humanitarian visas and improved rules for family reunion.*

## **Sanctuary Everywhere Manifesto**

As increased numbers of people have arrived in Europe, Quakers have responded. Many have opted to assist directly, and Quakers from across Europe have been among those volunteering in refugee camps. European Quakers have also begun a series of ‘help the helper’ retreats, open to people of all faiths and none, to help returned volunteers process their experiences. Longer-term support for those who suffer from secondary trauma is being developed. Quakers have also been part of a group establishing ‘Humanitarian Corridors’ in Ireland, offering those in the camps a safe and legal way to enter Europe.

“The ability to ask for sanctuary is a human right, and the willingness to provide it is an act of basic humanity. If the effect of the Government’s decision(s) is that a child’s safest route to sanctuary is to risk their life on the back of a truck, then we as a country must do better.”

Two characteristics of European policies make matters worse for people seeking sanctuary: militarised responses and externalised responses. The Quaker Council for European Affairs (QCEA) has been keen to draw attention to this. Militarised responses to forced migration have been used increasingly by European governments since 2015. We have seen the construction

of walls and fences to keep people from reaching territory (in breach of international obligations to shelter refugees), with prominent examples on Hungary’s southern border and in northern France near the English Channel.

European governments have deployed joint naval operations through the European Union in the Mediterranean and through NATO in the Aegean Seas. The EU operation has so far refrained from one of its intended purposes: to engage militarily with smugglers on the Libyan coast. Quakers have raised concerns about human rights risks and encouraged a larger civilian maritime presence to help save lives at sea.

The European Union has the largest international development budget in the world. But European governments are increasingly diverting this money to pay for militarisation in countries on the migrant path to Europe. A migration security industry has developed, with significant lobbying influence in European capitals.

There is already an overwhelming imbalance between tiny government support for peacebuilding and huge support for militarism and the arms trade. QCEA estimates that European peacebuilding spending is approximately one per cent of European military spending (€255 billion in 2015<sup>11</sup>).

This brings us to the issue of root causes. European governments have been working together to develop support for peacebuilding in recent years, and have relevant experience that could be used to address the root causes of forced migration. Examples include the EU’s unarmed confidence-building mission in Georgia and



funding for non-governmental peacebuilding organisations to work in violent conflicts in many parts of the world.

The human rights standards developed in Europe since the Holocaust have helped to ensure that peace and human dignity have been increasingly respected in Europe over the last 70 years. To avoid being held to these standards in their treatment of forced migrants, European governments are asking their neighbours to prevent them from travelling on to Europe. This is affecting a wide range of EU policies, as governments seek to use a wide range of tools to persuade other countries to host migrants or accept rejected asylum seekers. This can include direct payments, manipulation of trade agreements and new conditions for the receipt of development aid. 'Compacts' with a much wider range of countries, including Nigeria, Niger, Senegal, Mali and Ethiopia, are intended to have a similar effect. Some governments have suggested only accepting asylum applications from reception centres outside of Europe.

Quakers continue to be involved in advocacy for safe and legal ways for people to come to Europe while their right to asylum is established. Recognising that there is not a single solution, civil society organisations have proposed a toolbox of different measures that European governments can use to manage this process. Foremost among them is a widened scope of family reunion rules, allowing the families of people who have attained refugee status to join them. Another is the need for a system of humanitarian visas so that people can live in safety while their applications are processed, rather than needing to engage in perilous

journeys. Because, to echo the Recording Clerk of Britain Yearly Meeting, Paul Parker, when the UK government had abandoned one of its more progressive measures to welcome refugee children: "The ability to ask for sanctuary is a human right, and the willingness to provide it is an act of basic humanity. If the effect of the government's decision(s) is that a child's safest route to sanctuary is to risk their life on the back of a truck, then we as a country must do better."

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# Chapter 7: Dismantling inequality

Deborah Mitchell

*To ourselves and wider society, we reaffirm our determination to acknowledge and dismantle discrimination in all of its forms, wherever it is to be found.*

## **Sanctuary Everywhere Manifesto**

Quaker values recognise the true equality of all people, and hold each person as unique, precious, a child of God. This knowledge points to differences of race as a myth: there is one human race and differences of skin colour should hold no more meaning than differences of eye colour or hair colour.

We are also called to recognise the profound and far-reaching inequalities created by racism. Racism is a pervasive set of societal, cultural, and institutional beliefs and practices that, regardless of intention, subordinate and oppress one group of people for the benefit of another.

## **Not a binary matter of racism or anti-racism but a journey of thousands of behaviours**

This inequality is rooted in history and especially in slavery as terrible and systematic oppression and exploitation. We inherit racism and perpetuate its multiple consequences, often without being aware of it. In our Quaker commitment to justice, we need to become aware. For those Quakers who are white, we need to be aware of how this confers privileges and benefits that reinforce inequalities and are often unexamined.

Quakers have a growing understanding of our role and responsibilities in relation to this situation. We are learning together about how racism is perpetuated by organisational structures, processes, norms and expectations, in addition to individual behaviour and attitudes.

This links back to questions of how we can create a culture that expresses welcome in all possible ways, bearing in mind that much British culture has invested in racism, through centuries of colonialism, imperialism and militarism. Our Quaker commitments do not insulate us from wider culture but call us into a different relationship with it.

It is not a binary matter of racism or anti-racism but a journey of thousands of behaviours and communications to forge different relationships. For this reason we hope that every meeting of the Society of Friends will want to challenge itself to engage in a journey to be truly welcoming in every way, actively seeking to identify and reduce any cultural 'borders' to Quaker community or campaigns.

The role of those of us who are longer-standing residents of Britain is to listen to, support, resource, accompany and spiritually uphold the leadership of those who are oppressed by structural racism and the border system.

We need to be aware that structural inequality in wider society can be reproduced even within progressive spiritual communities. If we are to "anticipate the kingdom of heaven" we must begin by "creating the new society in the shell of the old", and in so doing question and challenge dominant customs and norms.

These new relationships fulfil Minute 38 from our Yearly Meeting 2017: "Working in partnership with others to build a movement can lead us to question our own practices, for only when we are also working on ourselves can we witness and speak beyond Friends. Can we recognise where we need to learn and to change?"

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# Conclusion: A spiritual vocation

Quakers talk a lot about our heritage of welcoming refugees and standing against racism in all its forms. Deeper than the practicality of action though is a strong spiritual foundation. Inherent in the belief that God dwells within every person is an imperative to welcome every person in need.

As Quakers, we say we have a radical faith. The etymological definition of radical is 'to go to the root'. At the root of Quaker spiritual inheritance is the life and example of Jesus, who built practical solidarity with those whom the authorities discriminated against.

One of the most painful ironies of our modern public discourse on responses to forced migration is that some of those deliberately fostering a culture of hostility also make a claim to Judeo-Christian values.<sup>12</sup>

Being true to the origins of our faith means repudiating deliberate cruelty. Thus to turn away a person seeking sanctuary is to reject Christian values, as we understand them.

Our Quaker book of *Advices & queries* encourages us to "bear witness to the humanity of all people", both by engaging in the work of reconciliation and by opposing discrimination against people on the basis of "who or what they are".<sup>13</sup> It reminds us that people are people, wherever they come from.

The faith basis of Quaker work in Britain is further strengthened by the fact that, in many different ways, forced migration has emerged as a 'tested concern'. A Quaker concern is more than just a personal worry or a feeling of righteous anger. It is "a special inward calling to carry out a particular service characterised by a feeling of having been directly called by God and by an imperative to act".<sup>14</sup>

The British representative body for Quakers, Meeting for Sufferings, has been sent a number of minutes of concern from area meetings over recent years, and has responded by encouraging Quaker Peace & Social Witness to develop a programme to address those concerns. The Sanctuary Meetings project and the Sanctuary Everywhere Manifesto are the result. Now is the time to act.

One of the most painful ironies is that some of those fostering a culture of hostility also claim Judeo-Christian values

Although the context is different, we can be inspired nevertheless by the definition of sanctuary offered by the Quaker co-founder of the Sanctuary Churches movement in the USA: "It incorporates prophetic witness into protective community; that is, in addition to protecting the violated from the state, the public practice of sanctuary holds the state accountable for its violation of human rights. Sanctuary is a faith practice, which is part of what it means for the church to be the church."

We leave the last words to Jesus himself as described by Matthew, who in the last public speech before his arrest shared a vision of a future where he would be able to say: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me in".

"But when did we see you a stranger?" asks the crowd in response. His reply: "Whatever you did – even for those considered the least [by the authorities], you did it for me".<sup>15</sup>

*This article is based on ministry given by Quakers during the discernment phase of the Sanctuary Everywhere programme.*

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# Epilogue: Sanctuary Meetings

In 2017 Britain Yearly Meeting launched a project to support Quakers who act in solidarity with newcomers to Britain. More than 300 people of varying migration journeys helped shape the project in the first six months.

An initiative that supports practical action and political advocacy began to take shape, and the project became the Sanctuary Everywhere programme.

What is a Sanctuary Meeting?

A Sanctuary Meeting is a Quaker meeting that is committed to:

- joining local initiatives to build a culture of welcome
- building alliances with groups opposing racism
- working with others to change the laws on destitution, detention, deportations, and removals.

What makes a Sanctuary Meeting?

How a Sanctuary Meeting fulfils these commitments changes from area to area. Actions taken will vary in response to local issues, abilities and passions within the community, and the leadings of the spirit. They are united, however, by the Sanctuary Everywhere Manifesto (see page 4).

Here are some of the things that Sanctuary Meetings are supported to do:

- Building alliances with migrant or BME-led anti-racist groups in your area, including by offering room grants.
- Holding at least one public meeting a year with other local groups, especially people with direct experience of being discriminated against by the border system.

- Offering accompaniment to people seeking sanctuary in negotiating 'everyday borders' such as healthcare and the education system.
- Assisting campaigns that use direct action to resist deportation.
- Affiliating with a local City of Sanctuary group, if one is nearby.
- If your meeting is based in the countryside, linking up with city-based groups to offer holidays or short breaks for sanctuary seekers.
- If your meeting is close to a Quaker school, working together on projects to assist children new to Britain.
- If your meeting is within travelling distance of an immigration detention centre, at least one person joining a visiting group, upheld by – and reporting back to – the meeting.
- If your meeting owns property, considering turning these into houses of hospitality for people made destitute by the asylum system. Younger Friends in your meeting could be particularly interested in helping to run houses of hospitality.

Support

By committing to being a Sanctuary Meeting, local meetings become part of an international movement to build a culture of hospitality. You will be supported with training, publicity materials, retreats, teleconferences and mutual support networks, channelled into a campaign for political change.



What is happening already?

Quakers across Britain are working in different ways to welcome newcomers to the country. On the Quakers in Britain website ([www.quaker.org.uk/our-work/our-stories](http://www.quaker.org.uk/our-work/our-stories)) you can read stories about Quakers providing housing for people made destitute by the asylum system, setting up City of Sanctuary groups, welcoming resettled refugees, hosting community gardening projects, and campaigning with the Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network.

How to become a Sanctuary Meeting  
At your next local business meeting, seek a minute committing to the three points listed under ‘What is a Sanctuary Meeting?’. Email that minute, and contact details for the two people working on the project, to [sanctuary@quaker.org.uk](mailto:sanctuary@quaker.org.uk). At least one of the two people should be a member or attender. You will then receive support tailored to the needs of your meeting and local community.

## QARN

The Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network (QARN) was set up in 2006 by concerned Friends to work together on joint advocacy and campaigning for radical change to the asylum system. QARN supports the Sanctuary Everywhere programme and can offer speakers and resource materials to meetings. *The Bundle*, a play about the asylum experience, was commissioned by QARN and is available for meetings to hire.

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For more info about the work of Britain Yearly Meeting on migration, see:

**[www.quaker.org.uk/migration](http://www.quaker.org.uk/migration)**

To get in touch with the Sanctuary Everywhere team:

**[sanctuary@quaker.org.uk](mailto:sanctuary@quaker.org.uk)**

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# Appendix: A word on words

Although people new to Britain are no longer referred to as ‘aliens’, an elaborate set of sub-categories has been created. These include ‘asylum seeker’ (a person who has left their country of origin and formally applied for asylum in another country but whose application has not yet been concluded), ‘refused asylum seeker’ (a person whose asylum application has been unsuccessful and who has no other claim for protection) and ‘economic migrant’ (someone who has moved to another country to work).

**“[A person who] owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.”** *The 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees.*

The word ‘refugee’ was introduced to English at the time of the arrival of French Huguenots to mean simply ‘someone in need of refuge’, and given more specific meaning by the UN Refugee Convention (see quote). For some in the government, though, it will only be used for someone who has been officially acknowledged as a refugee – a process that Quakers know from experience is too often flawed and unjust.

The word ‘forced migrant’ is often used to describe anyone displaced or forced to leave their home due a threat to their survival. Most people in this situation remain in their home countries as ‘internally displaced people’ and are often unable to flee to refuge in a safe country due to new barriers to migration. Many forced migrants feel they have to move for reasons other than the justified fear of perse-

cution that would allow them to apply for asylum and refugee status in a safe country. Reasons include natural disasters and climate change.

These words are necessary for when engaging with the authorities. But such words are also problematic: life experiences can rarely be neatly labelled. Worse still, according to the category given, different people are treated differently. In the context of our commitment to plain speaking and our testimony to equality, this requires careful consideration.

In this document, wherever possible, we have tried to speak of refugees in the original sense of the term, except where we are quoting another body. If we must draw attention to a person’s paperwork status, we prefer ‘person in the asylum system’ to ‘asylum seeker’. In order to reduce confusion, to emphasise the humanity of every person, and recognise complexity of ordinary lives, we speak principally and wherever possible of ‘people seeking sanctuary’.

We reject the categories “illegal immigrants” or “illegals”. A human being cannot commit a crime by merely existing. There are very few ways to apply for protection in Britain from outside. In most cases, in order to claim the universal human right of asylum, someone must often endure a perilous journey, which the government will seek to stop.

The embedding of discrimination in law and language can only give oxygen to those who argue that the suspension of rights is not institutional violence but simply the law. We refuse to be complicit. In speaking of people seeking sanctuary Quakers place trust in the newcomer, rather than government categories, and recognise that there are complex reasons for moving from one place to another – including but not limited to the scourges of war, human rights abuse, and economic injustice.

# Asylum fact sheet

Source: Refugee Council<sup>16</sup>

- There were 30,603 asylum applications to the UK in 2016.
- A high number of initial decisions made by the Home Office on asylum cases are wrong. In 2016, the courts overturned 41 per cent of negative decisions that were appealed.
- Since 2005 most people recognised as refugees are only given permission to stay in the UK for five years and can have their case reviewed at any time. This makes it difficult for them to make decisions about their future, to find work and make definite plans for their life in the UK.
- People in the asylum system do not come to the UK to claim benefits. Most know nothing about welfare benefits and had no expectation that they would receive financial support.
- Many people in the asylum system live in poverty and many families are not able to pay for the basics such as clothing, powdered milk and nappies.
- Almost all people in the asylum system are not allowed to work and are forced to rely on state support – this can be as little as £5 a day to live on.
- People in the asylum system are not entitled to council housing. The accommodation allocated to them is not paid for by the local council. Some people seeking asylum, and those who have been refused asylum, are not entitled to any form of financial support and are forced into homelessness. This includes heavily pregnant women.
- Asylum-seeking women who are destitute are vulnerable to violence in the UK. More than a fifth of the women accessing Refugee Council therapeutic services had experienced sexual violence in Britain.
- Over 65 million people around the globe have been forced to flee their homes – that's the equivalent of the entire British population having to leave.
- It's poor countries, not rich, western countries, that look after the vast majority of the world's refugees. The UN's Refugee Agency estimates that nearly nine in ten of the world's refugees are sheltered by developing countries.
- Britain is not Europe's top recipient of asylum applications. Around three per cent of asylum applications to the EU are to Britain.
- Britain offers no asylum visa. There are very few legal ways for refugees to escape a country and claim asylum. When war breaks out, countries like Britain often close down legal escape routes.
- The UK Government has the power to detain people who are here seeking refuge. In the year ending September 2016 29,762 people were imprisoned in immigration detention centres; among them many people seeking asylum. 43 per cent were released back into the community, rendering their detention pointless.
- The top five countries of origin of people applying for asylum in Britain are: Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Syria.

Quakers share a way of life, not a set of beliefs. Quaker unity is based on shared understanding and a shared practice of silent worship – a communal stillness.

Quakers seek to experience God directly – internally, in relationships with others, and with the world. Local meetings for worship are open to all who wish to attend.

Quakers try to live with honesty and integrity. This means speaking truth to all, including people in positions of power. The Quaker commitment to peace arises from the conviction that love is at the heart of existence and that all human beings are unique and equal.

This leads Quakers to put faith into action by working locally and globally to change the systems that cause injustice and violent conflict.

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