



Hospitality yes, hospitality always

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Cristianisme i Justícia. Roger de Llúria, 13. 08010 Barcelona (Spain)

+34 93 317 23 38 • info@fespinal.com • www.cristianismeijusticia.net

Forced out of their homes¹

More than three million people have already had to flee Ukraine because of the war. The European Commission estimates that up to 6.5 million people will be forced to leave the country, in addition to those who are internally displaced. It is the greatest humanitarian crisis in Europe since the Second World War, and it aggravates the global instability that already exists. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) in its most recent annual report² estimated that 92 million persons were in need of the agency's services during 2020. That indicates a significant increase from 2015, when there were 64 million such persons, including refugees, asylum seekers, and the internally displaced. Some of these persons were forced out

of their homes because of wars but also, and increasingly, because of climatic catastrophes. The number of refugees from violence has not stopped growing in recent years, and it joins with the migratory flows caused by economic distress and political oppression in certain regions of the world. The forecast is discouraging; there is little sign of improvement in the many factors causing this forced displacement of massive numbers of people.

Hospitality with a heart, hospitality with a head

Given this reality of war and the fact that so many people are forced to leave their homes, we are deeply moved, and we are motivated to act. Whether as individuals, communities, or institutions,

we ask what we can do, what our contribution should be, how to help alleviate the unnecessary suffering that we see in the faces of so many people, young and old. The obvious emergency requires urgent action; it knocks on our door, and we want to do everything possible to act against injustice. Our being moved by the reality is a symptom of our humanity, our solidarity, and our innate instinct to protect life. The current wave of solidarity shows us that all is not lost, that fraternity is possible. The war in Ukraine—whether because of the media coverage, its geographical proximity, or some other reason—is making many people discover the dramatic reality of refugees. It is mobilizing energy and awakening feelings that we have rarely witnessed before. We acknowledge the value of this “opening of our eyes to hospitality.” We are convinced that we must act with intensity and focus so that our action will bear the greatest possible fruit.

We offer here some criteria that we think will help to build ongoing action in favor of hospitality and a welcoming attitude:

- *Universality* leads us to make no distinction between refugees and migrants. Our compassionate vision and solidarity must be extended to all the people who every day are forced to leave their homes in so many countries (Syria, Afghanistan, Ukraine, Mali, Sudan, Yemen, Colombia, Venezuela, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and countless others) whatever the cause. Millions of victims suffer many forms of violence at the start of their journey, during transit, crossing borders, and often also at their final destination. Our first objective, therefore, must be to offer care to all persons who
 - emigrate or seek refuge, especially the most vulnerable. We must also keep our doors open to those who may arrive in the future. Universality requires the mobilization of all available resources to serve the greatest number in the best way possible. If the emergency care now offered is detrimental to people who have suffered other similar situations, we must examine the reasons. If it gives preference to some nationalities over others or if it prioritizes some situations over others, we are practicing a discriminatory and unfair hospitality, contrary to our ideals.
 - *Continuing assistance* is essential because hospitality does not end with the first welcome; it is not just for the short term or emergency situations; rather, it requires constant accompaniment of the migrants toward full autonomy and inclusion. And this takes time. Ongoing hospitality allows us to go beyond the gesture of opening the door; it requires a donation of time so that the migrants can gradually acquire the skills and the tools that will allow them to manage their own lives and decide their future. Language learning is often an essential element, but a language is not learned only in a classroom: it is learned above all when life is shared. Sharing life is demanding because it forces us to change our plans, move out of our safe environments, open ourselves to the unknown, dedicate time to others, and let ourselves be transformed. That is why hospitality, especially when it involves shared life and intimacy, is so countercultural.
 - *Greater need* is the criterion that invites us to focus on the areas where migrants receive no assistance, especially because of the “gaps” in the international protection system. This criterion moves
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us to accompany the most vulnerable migrants and asylum seekers, those who are in greatest need of help. We must design responses that take into account subsidiarity, without relying excessively on government action or the official protection system. Our responses should also practice complementarity, which means reinforcing the areas where weaknesses or insufficiencies are detected in the system. The possibilities for safe, legal migration need to be extended, and the government's receptive capacity needs to be increased with the help of community sponsorship programs (such as those already underway in Euskadi, Navarra, and Valencia) or other alternative channels. Finally, this criterion requires us to be attentive to those who are made invisible, those who raise no protest, those who do not appear in the media, and those who are not organized ... so that no one is left out.

- *Coordination and networking* are necessary because we can do nothing working alone, neither as persons nor as organizations; the challenges that lie ahead are too big, too painful, too overwhelming. Networking allows us to develop actions of greater scope and better quality. We need to coordinate physical resources and people's energies; we need to partner with organizations and movements that can complement our own efforts; we need to coordinate actions at the migrants' points of origin, on their transit routes, and at their destination, as well as engage in service, reflection, and advocacy. We need to be generous and offer what we have and what we know. We need to provide ready access to the services and resources that will help the migrants. Some will be skilled in communication, others in organizing

communities; some will be especially innovative and creative; others will offer their steadfastness and discreet fidelity ... In these times that are coming upon us, we are going to need everything.

Becoming hospitable individuals and communities

There are things that are simply not within our reach, especially now when democracy is being weakened and citizens feel alienated from their governments, and when politicians ignore not only public pressure and street protests, but even the commitments they made at election time. Perhaps there is little we can do to stop wars, provide more foreign aid, or promote environmental measures that will mitigate the effects of climate change. These are, indeed, the three main factors driving the exponential increase in forced displacement of persons. The difficulty of confronting these factors, however, does not mean that we have to give up doing politics or that we should stop demanding action from our governments. Whenever we stop applying pressure, we provide space for hate-filled speeches that appeal to fear and pit "them against us." In recent years these racist and xenophobic speeches have used politics to legitimize attitudes that are the opposite of hospitality. We want to continue being engaged in politics, and we must do so, even though we are increasingly aware of the limits of all politics.

Whatever our political success, we are always capable of listening and paying close attention to the reality before us. This reality requires us to place ourselves among the people, to draw close

to those who suffer, and to do so with urgency. It requires us to help those who have been forced to leave their homes without knowing if they will ever be able to return. But not only this: we have to go further, as the Samaritan did who, after caring for the wounded man he found by the roadside, continued to look after him (Lk 10, 25-37). We also must find a way to offer hospitality ... permanently.

We have the ability to become hospitable people and welcoming communities that build from below a more fraternal and humane society, capable of caring for the most vulnerable people, including migrants and displaced persons. Our commitment should dispose us to do many things:

- To open the doors of “our house,” that is, those private and public spaces that will allow people—all people—to participate fully in society and become active agents in our everyday life.
- To help heal their wounds so that they can decide what they want to do with their lives. Their return to normality may seem dull to us, but for them it opens up a whole new world full of possibilities.
- To make specific gestures (such as listening, empathizing, caring, ...) that help us to engage with the other, thus overcoming the barriers that separate “them” from “us” and allowing the fear

of the “stranger” to dissipate. In this way we progress toward an ever greater sense of “we,” and a society with a broad, solid sense “we” is much stronger than a society divided between “us” and “them”.

- To enter into dialogue and establish links that help us to understand all the things that unite us and as well as the things that differentiate us. Such understanding will help us to value what we have and who we are, but at the same time it will make us appreciate the special gifts that others have. Such an exchange is possible only in societies that are both integrated and diverse.

In summary, hospitality is an activity that strengthens society because it is based on people and communities that want to overcome fear and not become closed in on themselves. Faced with a world that is individualistic, unwelcoming, and polarized, hospitality creates a society capable of organizing people and generating community spaces that welcome everyone. This is indeed within our reach, and it is better to start building such a society today instead of leaving it for tomorrow.

Maria del Carmen de la Fuente
Santi Torres Rocaginé
Migra Studium Foundation
(Jesuit Migrant Service)

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1. Much of the content of this paper is inspired by the official position of the Jesuit Migrant Service of Spain, as announced on March 16. The JMS is a network of ten entities linked to the Society of Jesus that are involved in defending the rights of migrants and their access to full citizenship. You can check the JMS position at the following link: <https://sjme.org/>
 2. The UNHCR annual report for 2020 was published in mid-2021 and is available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/flagship-reports/globalreport/>