

Migration in Europe: what is being done by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary?

The issue of migration has been escalating in Europe for months. Over the past few days the situation in Hungary has become especially dramatic. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary (ELCH) has been participating in the activities providing help to refugees to the best of its abilities and resources.

In order to mitigate the immediate crisis and to prepare for the coming of the cold season, we are collecting clothes among parish members and church employees. We have started to organize a network for collecting other donations (sterile bandage, blankets, sleeping bags and mats) and coordinating volunteers. The Diaconal Service of the ELCH has realized the importance of coordinated volunteer activity; therefore, we have initiated the design of a special software which will become a professional tool in coordinating volunteers and a useful supplement to the ongoing communication on social networking sites.

The ELCH is offering 150 daily portions of warm food to refugees gathered around the main railway station (Keleti Station) in Budapest in cooperation with the Lutheran Student Home located nearby (in Rózsák tere). At 2 pm on 4th September, a group of pastors and employees of the Administrative Centre of the ELCH is heading to Keleti Station to distribute the first portions of food with the help of the aid volunteers on site. The group will also be accompanied by Presiding Bishop Péter Gáncs, Bishop Tamás Fabiny, who is in charge of the diaconal work of ELCH, and Gergely Pröhle, the lay leader of the church.

The Diaconal Service of the ELCH is also donating medicine to refugee children in need through the Hungarian Association of Family Pediatricians.

Earlier the ELCH donated one million HUF (around 4,000 USD) to Hungarian Interchurch Aid, one of Hungary's largest and internationally recognized charity organizations. These resources were used to distribute child care products to refugee children in the temporary Reception Centre in Nagyfa in the presence of Presiding Bishop Péter Gáncs.

On the initiative of International and Hungarian Red Cross, the Roma (Gypsy) College in Nyíregyháza has sent volunteers to help with the reception of refugees arriving at the railway station in the border town of Röszke. The first group of three volunteers left on 30th August, a second group will follow on 6th September.

Several parishes and pastors participate in the volunteer activities. Keleti Station and the nearby square named after Pope John Paul II have been of key importance to refugees and

locals alike. Both places are located in the 8th district of Budapest and members of the Lutheran community there have taken an active role in helping the refugees and coordinating the work of church and civil organizations in the district.

Together with Migration Aid, a volunteer civil initiative established to help refugees arriving to Hungary, the Diaconal Service of the ELCH has published information booklets in English, French and, among others, in Farsi, Urdu and Arabic. The booklets are being distributed in the most affected railway stations in order to assist the orientation of migrants. The Diaconal Service has started a consultation with experts in our partner church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria, and wishes to accommodate, as well as extend, their model of railway mission to provide continuous help to travelers in need.

Besides handling the current crisis situation, the ELCH is also seeking to assist the social integration of recognized refugees. To this end, we have applied for the funding of a “House of Integration” at The Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund of the European Commission.

As mentioned above, the issue of migration has become extremely serious in the whole of Europe. The tension is tangible particularly in Hungary, As far as the ELCH is concerned, we are doing everything we can to fight anger and harmful preconceptions and to promote a culture of mutual respect, inclusion and love instead. We appreciate your support in our efforts as well as in the specific contributions outlined above. We ask you to continue praying for all those involved in this really complicated and explosive situation.

On behalf of the leadership of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary:

dr. Tamás Fabiny

Bishop in charge of Diaconia and Foreign Relations

Budapest, 3rd September, 2015