

BISHOP PHILIP AND BISHOP CHRISTOPHER'S VISIT TO ADVICE PORTSMOUTH AND AN ASYLUM DROP IN

On Monday 7th April, Bishop Philip Egan and Bishop Christopher Foster (the Anglican Bishop of Portsmouth) pledged their support for two projects that help some of the most vulnerable people in the city.

They visited Advice Portsmouth in North End, and the asylum drop-in centre at All Saints C of E Church.

Advice Portsmouth, on Kingston Crescent, offers free, independent and confidential advice to residents and tenants about family issues, employment, housing, welfare benefits and debt. It is one of several advice services run locally by the You Trust.

Its chief executive, Nicola Youern, spoke at the C of E's Diocesan Synod last November, telling members that 30 per cent of the 11,000 people they saw in 2012-13 were having problems with changes in welfare benefits, and many were desperate.

And the drop-in centre for asylum seekers and refugees, which is based at All Saints Church, in Commercial Road, Portsmouth, is run by the Red Cross and Haslar Visitors Group. It helps those who have applied for asylum in the UK and are waiting to hear the outcome, and those who have been granted refugee status.

Many asylum seekers and refugees arrive in the UK from war-torn countries or are fleeing persecution, with few possessions and little money. Some end up destitute and need food and clothing, while others need medical advice. The drop-in centre helps them to find legal advice on their status and translation advice for those who can't understand the forms they need to fill in. Food, clothes and a friendly face are all available.

The visits were arranged to reflect similar joint visits by the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Westminster in the run-up to Easter.

BISHOP PHILIP ADDRESSES AT ADVICE PORTSMOUTH AND ALL SAINTS DROP-IN CENTRE

ADVICE PORTSMOUTH

I'm very happy to be here today with Bishop Christopher to visit you in Advice Portsmouth, and to assure you of the prayers, best wishes and support of the Catholic community of Portsmouth for all the wonderful work you do, in giving independent and specialist advice free to the most vulnerable and needy members of our city community: debt advice, welfare benefits, housing and employment.

In his recent writing *Evangelii Gaudium* ('The Joy of the Gospel'), Pope Francis calls all of us Christians to remember the poor and most vulnerable members of our societies and the duty we have to care for those in need. The churches in Portsmouth do a great deal in this respect already. But it's a huge help to know that we can signpost those who come our way to you in Advice Portsmouth for real and practical help on many issues.

I've been a priest for 30 years this year. I'd say that many people who ring the parish doorbell are seeking not only spiritual advice, but often practical help too. So thank you for all you do. May God bless you all with great joy - and grant you success in all your endeavours.

ASYLUM DROP-IN CENTRE

I'm very happy to be here today with Bishop Christopher to visit you in this All Saints Drop-In Centre and the Haslar Visiting Group. I want to assure you of the prayers, best wishes and support of the Catholic community of Portsmouth for all the wonderful work you do.

I'm very conscious that asylum seekers and immigration detainees are probably among the most marginalised people in the whole of our society. Not only have many of them faced trauma and tragedy in their own country from which they have had to escape, but here in the UK they face huge uncertainty about the future, with little security and no access to the many benefits we in Britain take for granted.

As a Christian, what gives me hope is that Jesus Christ himself was at one time a refugee when as a baby Mary and Joseph took him with them, fleeing persecution and escaping into Egypt. Later of course he returned to his home country and the Holy Family settled in Nazareth.

So I pray today for all refugees and asylum seekers that there may be a truly happy resolution of their plight, just as there was for Jesus, Mary and Joseph. I pray too for all of you generous and good folk, who show the love of God in a simple yet beautiful way to these dear souls who are truly most in need.

Thank you for welcoming me – and may God bless you all!