

(The text of an email sent to all clergy and churchwardens on 16 March)

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

It is encouraging to see so many churches in our diocese involved in prayer and action to support those caught up in the ongoing Ukrainian conflict, including working with other organisations and settled Eastern European communities in their area.

The national Church has made available [resources](#) to help us respond to the war and its impact on us here. This includes a toolkit for parishes, which I hope you will find helpful. We have also set up a [diocesan webpage](#) dedicated to this. We will be working with our colleagues in Transforming Communities Together (TCT) to provide resources and guidance to support clergy and churches who wish to welcome Ukrainian refugees. It will always be important to ensure that networks of community support and friendship are available to refugees, who are likely to be feeling quite isolated on arrival; our parish churches, chaplaincies, fresh expressions and schools will often be well-placed to contribute to these.

We have received a number of enquiries in the diocese from clergy who would like to register for the Government's [Homes for Ukraine](#) scheme, which is set to open on Friday, 18 March. While the details of the scheme are still emerging, we want to reassure clergy in our diocese that they are able to offer clergy houses in this way (and that the £350 monthly payment would be theirs to retain). We are also actively working to identify several currently vacant properties owned by the diocese which could possibly be used to house Ukrainian refugees.

There is, of course, absolutely no expectation that you will register for this scheme, nor pressure on you to do so. Domestic circumstances vary greatly across clergy households and properties, and for some an offer of accommodation would be impractical. Moreover, following two years of pandemic and its aftermath, their own resilience and capacity will be a continuing concern for some clergy.

Refugees are vulnerable people, and they are likely to be experiencing some level of trauma, which could in some cases lead to behaviour that is unpredictable, challenging and time-consuming. Clergy and their households will need a strong support network around them, including supportive congregations, if they are to take in refugees. If you have children or vulnerable adults already in your household, or visiting you, you will also need to take this into account in your decision making. This is not a short-term project; at the minimum it requires a commitment of at least six months. It is also anticipated that the numbers offering accommodation may well exceed the numbers of refugees requiring it.

With all this in mind, I ask that clergy who or are considering signing up to the scheme would please **liaise with their Archdeacon in the first instance** so that they can offer advice and support. If clergy reach the stage in the process where they do take in refugees, it will also be essential for safeguarding reasons that archdeacons are updated about this so that a record can be kept.

I would also ask you to be attentive to the situation of Ukrainian and Russian people already living in this country. They are likely to be feeling vulnerable and anxious, and any support you can give them will be important. If you know people in your churches or communities who are fluent in Ukrainian or Russian, please could you let [Pete Bate](#) know; it would be good if we could build up an interpreters' pastoral network.

Most of all, I would ask you to continue to pray from your heart, and to encourage others to pray, for the suffering people of Ukraine, for those displaced from their homes or separated from their families, and for those living around Ukraine, especially the Russian people. We pray in penitence, **Lord have mercy**, and we pray in hope, **Your kingdom come**.

Your brother in Christ,

+Michael