



HOSPITALITY AND SANCTUARY, GRACE AND HOLINESS | 14 June 2026 | 10:45

Ji Aian Noo

This is a Panjabi greeting, spoken at the door, to all visitors, in any home.

The greeting literally means, “I honour/welcome all the arriving ones/all who have just arrived here”.

It does not speak of strangers or guests, only the “arrived/arriving” ones.

That’s all of us.

Ji Aian Noo.

I greet you all in the Name of Christ and wish upon you all the peace and blessings of God.

Peter, Michael, Romita, Maureen, and all you amazing cathedral congregation, It is a delight and an honour to be in your company and to share with you.

Great to link up with you Peter, having first met when I was Director of the Urban Theology Unit in Sheffield.

It is a blessing to worship with you in this beautiful house of God, house of prayer for all nations, house of hospitality, a house of light and beauty and holiness that reveals God, a safe space for all, a holy sanctuary – committed to welcome and safeguarding for who are here.

So we come to Refugee Week and Sanctuary Sunday.

Sanctuary Sunday is an annual moment to call us back and to recommit ourselves to ensure that our work with the “arrived ones”, refugees, people seeking sanctuary is rooted in our worship and prayer, and engages our congregations.

I am wearing this rope as a stole.

I picked up this rope from a broken refugee boat that came to grief off the coast of Lamedusa Island in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, most of those on board drowned.

If this rope could speak what stories would it tell of the people who were on board.

For me “sanctuary” means welcome, hospitality, protective safety.

Key words from our Bible readings help to define sanctuary.

Abraham and Sarah demonstrate not hostility but hospitality to strangers, and find they are entertaining g angels.

Jesus speaks of “compassion”, not cruelty.

I love the words from Romans 5 verse two, which speak of the “grace in which we stand”.

That’s a super definition of sanctuary, so, to welcome, hospitality and safety, I add the idea of grace.

Reflecting grace, not disgrace.

I want to begin by first affirming Derby Cathedral as a Cathedral of Sanctuary.

Just this week you have received from the national City of Sanctuary a unanimously agreed reappraisal of Derby Cathedral as a Cathedral of Sanctuary.

Now pat yourself on the back. That’s from me. Well done, and thank you.

I offer you my own massive and hearty congratulation on this accolade, and well deserved too for your amazing work over many years in a journey of learning, embedding welcome and being a good role model and encouragement to others. You can be very proud of your work and achievement.

Well done on your achievement.

Raise a hand if you are able to.

My thanks to you all for your commitment to sanctuary.

Derby Cathedral was the first cathedral to be recognised as a contemporary Cathedral of Sanctuary in 2015. Other Cathedrals and Churches have since followed in your footsteps.

I have known of Maureen’s work with the “arrived” ones from the days of the arrival here of the “Vietnamese Boat People” in the 1980’s, forty years ago.

It was Maureen Priddin, who, years ago contacted me, on behalf of the Cathedral, to begin the Derby Cathedral of Sanctuary journey.

Maureen also arranged for me to give a recorded sermon for an online Sanctuary Sunday sermon in June 2020 in the middle of the Covid pandemic.

When Maureen and I first started talking sanctuary matters, I was at the time also a member of the Governing Council of Derby University, along with the Bishop, and a trustee of the Derby Multifaith Centre, and the idea of sanctuary provided a good collaborative approach to community engagement and learning.

The Cathedral has worked closely with, and is integral to the Derby City of Sanctuary network.

We are meeting for worship in the context of the “hostile environment” spilling out on to the streets, what is our response to this?

We have seen this in our streets across Britain and Ireland.

We challenge hostility with hospitality.

Hospitality is the face of social holiness.

Loving, compassionate and welcoming responses to refugees arriving in the UK across the English Channel are lighting up ways to challenge hostility with protective hospitality. These include twelve small and large church congregations, and Cathedral, like Derby Cathedral, that have received the recognition of Church of Sanctuary. Your prophetic responses help to unpack a little of what it means to challenge hostility with hospitality.

The Church of Sanctuary award recognises proven commitments to learning about sanctuary issues, embedding practices of hospitality, safety and inclusion, and encouraging others to do the same. It is a marker along an ongoing journey to express deeper solidarity with isolated, marginalised and maligned communities.

A Cathedral of Sanctuary stands in a long and deep history of giving sanctuary spanning a thousand years. There were many Cathedrals of Sanctuary in the past.

In contemporary practice sanctuary is provided in communities of welcome and hospitality. This is what a Church or Cathedral of Sanctuary is with the focus on the congregation working together to build cultures of welcome and hospitality, in solidarity with refugees and people seeking sanctuary.

The ecumenical instrument Churches Together in Britain and Ireland is working with the national charity City of Sanctuary to develop and promote the Church of Sanctuary movement, and the marking of Sanctuary Sunday.

Alongside people of different faiths and beliefs involved in the work of hospitality and sanctuary, this continues to be an important and urgent work for Churches. The purpose here is to do all we can to ensure that people seeking sanctuary among us have the protective safety and hospitality in communities and cultures of welcome and safety.

This is a constructive example of standing up to destructive, racist rhetoric and behaviour around refugees. It is the faith-based response to a hostile environment which aims to deter refugees from coming to the UK, it is seen in the burning of refugee homes with the words “foreigners out”.

The continued growth of the Church of Sanctuary movement demonstrates the courage of those who value diversity in our communities and affirm the challenge to include and support the participation of everyone for the common good outnumber those who seek to divide and marginalise people.

There is much to celebrate.

The association of holiness and sanctuary is a universal concept, and goes back thousands of years. It is enshrined in all humanity all around the world, religious and non-religious. It is an idea that is common to all ethnicities and unites us. All the major world faiths accord centrality to holiness.

Biblically, a holy place or person and holiness is associated with protection from harm, and with the provision of healing.

People go to holy places and people to pray for protection from harm, and for well-being.

The idea that a persecuted or endangered person should be protected is part of all human culture, wisdom and behaviour from ancient times. Original, indigenous American provided sanctuary to those in danger during the invasions of the Spanish, the English and the French.

In India every place of worship enshrines safety especially of those in need including travellers from afar, and this can be traced to days when in the ancient Indus Valley civilisation travellers began to go across the waters of the Indus.

The Christian tradition of Sanctuary is rooted in the Hebrew concept of Cities of Refuge which itself may also have been influenced by Bedouin concept of *nazaala* or “the taking of refuge”. It goes deep into ancient North African and Middle Eastern wisdom. It is reflected in the beautiful story of Abraham and Sarah offering shelter and hospitality to passing strangers in the heat of the day “by the oaks of mamre”, in their tent (Genesis 18:1-8).

This story has to be kept in mind when we reflect on the meaning and message of Jesus sharing hospitality with those he met on the Road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35). Here Jesus comes into the story as a stranger, he becomes a guest and takes up the position of host.

We cannot ignore the fact that in their ancient Indo-European roots hostility and hospitality arise from the term *ghos-ti*, which contains the roles of host, guest and stranger, a trinity we all are.

It is a term that includes the shadow sides and dangers held within hospitality.

In discussions around hospitality, women have pointed out that welcome is not a license to do harm to the host. There is no holiness in harm and hostility.

Hospitality is not a soft practice. In cultures of hostility hospitality offers a positive and counter cultural, even subversive, practice (Pohl, 1999). It is a better way to respond to difference, transcending social borders, and expressing respect especially for people some consider the least important. When people considered unwelcome are shown hospitality, and affirmed as people who also have much to give in mutual respect, we see the subversive nature of hospitality.

True hospitality is an expression of solidarity, a hospitality of mutuality and equality, which affirms all participants as made in the image of God, and equal, with much to give and receive.

The Hebrew prophets consistently help up “the widow, the stranger and the orphan” (Exodus 22:21,22; Deuteronomy 10:18; 14:29). These were people who had no recourse to financial security. Jesus affirmed this priority (Matthew 25: 31-45).

Today these groups of people are represented by older people in need of care, children in danger, and “asylum seekers”. Who are the people who are lacking financial, communal, emotional, and other support networks? Who is hurting the most, and has the least resources of support?

The priority to be given to providing safety for older people and children is increasingly recognised. The challenge to provide safety for refugees and all those seeking sanctuary among us must not be neglected.

I honour and thank you for your excellent work, committed to be as inclusive as possible. Your sanctuary work underlines your values well.

I assure you of my prayerful solidarity.

It is my prayer that God will bless you and strengthen you in all you do to build sanctuary.

The Revd Dr Inderjit Bhogal OBE