

A Cup of Cold Water

Refugee Sunday Reflection – Archbishop Ann Germond



“Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.” (Matthew 10:40)

When Archbishop Shane Parker invited dioceses and parishes across Canada to observe a Refugee Sunday, I found myself returning to a memory from my own first days in Canada.

It was January 1987. I had arrived from South Africa and, on my first Sunday morning, ventured into an Anglican church in Ottawa. I still remember the words my

parish priest had spoken before I left home: “You will always feel at home in an Anglican church.”

There was comfort in the familiar rhythms of the liturgy. I knew the prayers and the hymns. Yet I also knew I was the outsider. You simply know those things.

At the end of the service, the woman sitting in front of me turned around, introduced herself, and asked my name. We spoke for only a few moments, but I have often thought of that conversation as a cup of cold water extended to one of Christ’s little ones.

The next day, I met her again in a grocery store. My brand-new Canadian credit card was declined, and I stood there feeling embarrassed and humiliated. Without hesitation, Evelyn stepped forward and quietly paid for my groceries.

When she later discovered that we were living in an empty apartment while we waited for our furniture to arrive from overseas, she filled her car with tables, chairs, and household items and brought them to us. We remained friends until her death.

I still tell that story because it reminds me that the Kingdom of God often comes to us through remarkably ordinary acts of welcome.

The Gospel is, at its heart, an issue of hospitality—the gift of God’s hospitality which is proclaimed and which, when it is received, leads us to show hospitality to others.

That hospitality begins with God. We receive God’s welcome in Christ. But we are not meant to keep that welcome for ourselves. It becomes an ever-expanding welcome, drawing us to those who long to find belonging, acceptance, and hope.

Scripture reminds us that offering hospitality to the stranger is not simply a kind suggestion; it is woven throughout God’s story. Israel was commanded to remember its own experience as strangers. Jesus identifies himself with the stranger who is welcomed. Again and again,

we discover that when we open our doors to another, we discover Christ already waiting there.

It is in that spirit that I have invited our congregations to observe Refugee Sunday on August 23.

My hope is that churches across the Diocese of Algoma will join in praying for those who have been displaced by war, violence, persecution, and environmental disaster, while reflecting on our own calling to welcome the stranger and accompany those seeking safety and a new beginning.

Every parish will observe the day in its own way. Alongside Hope has prepared worship resources that I hope many congregations will find helpful, but the invitation is much broader than any particular liturgy. It is an invitation to consider how the hospitality of God is already taking shape among us—and how we are being called to extend it even further.

As I think about Refugee Sunday, I find myself returning once again to Evelyn and her simple acts of kindness so many years ago. They were small gestures, but they changed my experience of arriving in a new country. They taught me something about Christ that I have never forgotten.

As we prepare for Refugee Sunday, I invite you to ask the same question I continue to ask myself:

Who might need a cup of cold water from my hand today?