

This Motion was presented and carried unanimously at the 83rd Ordinary Session of the Synod of the Anglican Diocese of Quebec, November 3, 2012.

MOTION PERTAINING TO BILL C-31

Moved by The Rev'd Jeffrey Metcalfe

Seconded by Mary Jean Martin

BE IT RESOLVED THAT this Synod:

- a) call on the federal government to repeal those provisions of Bill C-31 changing Canada's refugee policy, which put at risk the security of those seeking refuge in our country, in particular but not limited to:
 - i) The unqualified discretion given to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration to unilaterally declare certain countries as "safe" and the same discretion given to the minister to declare refugee claimants as "irregular arrivals," resulting in penalties including, but not limited to, imprisonment;
 - ii) The shortened timelines for the process of refugee determination which make access to legal counsel exceedingly difficult if not impossible;
 - iii) The provision that denies access to Humanitarian and Compassionate appeals for a full year after a negative decision by the Immigration and Refugee Board, by which time the refugee claimant will have been deported;
- b) affirm the church's ancient practice of providing sanctuary for refugees unjustly facing a clear and present threat to their safety and security;
- c) encourage the congregations of the diocese to study and otherwise explore the possibility of providing sanctuary to refugee claimants facing deportation under the provisions of Bill C-31, drawing on resources available from the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada and other Christian communities.

CARRIED

BACKGROUND TO THE MOTION:

In June the Government of Canada legislated a sweeping revision of refugee policy that includes discriminatory provisions placing vulnerable people in danger for their lives. Under Bill C-31, refugees seeking asylum in Canada will have only fifteen days to submit a fully researched application in order to qualify for refugee status, making access to legal counsel effectively impossible. Refugees from countries the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration designates as "safe" – a designation not defined or regulated by the terms of the law but made under the Minister's personal discretion –

would, if rejected at their Immigration and Refugee Board hearing, be deported from Canada with no appeal available.

As Christians the scriptures call us to particularly care for exiles and strangers (see Exodus 22:21 and Matthew 25:35), recalling that Jesus and his family were themselves refugees fleeing persecution and seeking sanctuary in a foreign land (see Matthew 2:13-23). As Christians in the Anglican tradition, the Baptismal Covenant obligates us to "strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being," and the Marks of Mission call us "to respond to human need by loving service."

The church has a long history of providing sanctuary for those facing a threat to their lives as a result of unjust expulsion ordered by the authorities. As noted by the Anglican Church of Canada's former General Secretary, Archdeacon Michael Pollesel, *"Centuries before Christ's birth, sanctuary was a place where criminals could seek asylum in designated 'cities of refuge,' as described in the Torah. For many centuries since then, people have been able to claim asylum or sanctuary by seeking refuge in churches in different countries. While the seeking and offering of sanctuary is not new, since the 1980s there has been resurgence in the sanctuary movement. Importantly, [...] today, those who seek sanctuary are not criminals, but people who have fled their homelands for a variety of reasons."*