

REPORT FOR THE YEAR 2015



St. Kyriaki Church by St. Paul's Pillar, Paphos

Paphos in the year 2015 saw the recession deepen even further. Jobs are fewer than ever: employees are often paid a fraction of their salary, or work and are unpaid. Although Cyprus belongs to the EU, not all EU legislation is in place, particularly in the fields of employment and immigration. Many workers do not have a contract. Attitudes need to change too, as there is considerable fear and dislike of immigrants, especially Muslim. When, for example, do we ever see an employee in a hijab? We hope the current discussions about the future of Cyprus may bring a better climate. Meantime there is plenty for Caritas to address to show the peace, love and unity of the Kingdom.

We thank God that there are many individuals who give generous help and work with us to help the poor and vulnerable regardless of race and faith. Particular thanks to the anonymous donor who enabled Caritas to feed up to 240 people every week this year. Special thanks too to two local doctors who have reduced their charges or given their services completely free: to a helpful local optician and local pharmacist: to local groups such as Aspire School, the Latchi Bridge Club and the Magic Circle, to Joe for the Christmas cards and donation from his 80th birthday party... It is not possible to name everyone. Thanks too to holidaymakers who have returned to UK and inspired friends and parishioners to give their support: and to our wonderful volunteers who help out in so many ways, especially by driving or packing and delivering the food. God bless you all.



Christmas cards on sale on the walkway to the church



Birthdays and Anniversaries to raise funds

FOOD PROGRAMME

Numbers of requests continued to rise, but thanks to people's generosity we were able to give really worthwhile bags to struggling families. Towards the end of the year the benefit of the Cyprus government's Guaranteed Minimum Income scheme began to be more widely felt, and we were able to decrease our numbers gradually to around 200. It is necessary to monitor beneficiaries since, human nature being as it is, a good many people will not volunteer that they are getting regular income. The trend continues into 2016, but it should be mentioned that more and more refugees are coming into Cyprus, usually by boat from Turkey. They are often family members following after their relatives who got here first. Syrian refugees now get international protection as a special case, but there is still a period of some months for everything to be processed. Some families go to the holding camp at Kofinou, but many avoid this, fearing deportation or wanting to reach relatives and friends. In this period they can suffer great hardship, until after around six months they can apply for EEE (the Guaranteed Minimum Income) - which may then be some time finally arriving.



A refugee friend from Ivory Coast helps to sort the bags of food



After delivering the bags of food – five men from Rumania live in the employer's poor accommodation

OTHER HUMANITARIAN AID

We have been privileged to be able to provide a variety of humanitarian aid. Parishioners and the public have donated money, gas, clothes, furniture and toys – notably in a special gift collection for needy children at Christmas, but also through the year, not forgetting those who give their time and effort to fetch and carry. Our thanks are due to all. We have a special friend in Mrs. Rehab al Habrat, one of the Syrians. Some years ago as a young bride brought over by her husband and knowing no Greek and only a little English from school, she resolved to learn both in order to make something of life for the family. Caritas was able to help the family in a time of extreme need, and we have been more than repaid by having an enthusiastic helper who is ready for anything. We have thus been able to work with many Arabic-speaking refugees all over Paphos and some of the surrounding areas. Caritas through Rehab has been able to give them considerable help.

New arrivals have been escorted and assisted with the social and governmental systems they need to know- hospital, doctor, labour office, immigration office, schools. A small example: some schools give a sandwich to pupils in the morning, but if you can't understand the form in Greek, your children will not have the sandwich...and poor families struggle to give their children a sandwich from home every day. Often it is a frantic mother who calls for help to understand and be understood while taking a child to hospital. And what do you do if you receive an official letter you can't begin to read?

It is good to be able to report that Caritas has been developing further working relationships outside the Catholic community. Anglican friends and members of the public have given donations of money, food and other items. The New Testament Church in Peyia asked how they could meet the refugees and help and subsequently took on the care of one of the families, as part of their own charitable work. We have also been able to share our access to expert advice on the laws and systems of Cyprus.

It was a special joy to receive a hand-knitted blanket from the Guides in Wymondham, Norfolk, UK. With their leader Fran Young they were inspired by our late parishioner Kathy Newbury, who with her husband Tim and son Matthew were strong supporters of Caritas. It has gone to a family recently arrived from Syria.



Some of the high points of the year: Lamis was shot in the street in Syria as a young girl and became wheelchair-dependent. Later, as a young mother she was abandoned by her husband, with a one-year-old son. When Caritas heard about her and helped, she was virtually destitute. Not long afterwards her landlady, angry because she had not been able to pay the rent, physically put her out in the street and locked the door. Kind donors enabled us to set her up in an apartment, and a local doctor friend arranged for her to have a necessary operation free of charge. With help, she applied for state assistance, and now is able to cope.

The second: Karim, child of a Russian mother and Arab father who has deserted the family, leaving them in poverty. A delightful 8-year-old, Karim had a dreadful squint in both eyes which would have blighted his future. Thanks to one of our Caritas members whose efforts won sponsorship from the Dashin Foundation, Karim was able to have a life-changing operation in Nicosia. His eyes are perfect, and he is a different child. What is more, he won the Jasmitha Singh Heart of Gold Award 2015 given by Paphos for his courage and spirit. Caritas also found out that his mother was severely short-sighted, could not see to read, and could not afford glasses: she was able to get them when Caritas paid part of the cost, with the help of a local optician who gave a good deal. And through the work of our Caritas lawyer, their complicated legal problems have been resolved. Thanks be to God, their life has been changed.

The third: Abu Omar and Umm Omar and their family, who fled from northern Iraq and the incursions of Daesh (Islamic State). Abu Omar has a disability, one leg shorter than the other, but he found work – labouring, so often the only available work for these migrants- which made his leg problem worse. He was told to rest or he would be in a wheelchair. Caritas discovered that his wife, Umm Omar, was an expert needlewoman, and provided a sewing machine and materials. She now earns income for the family.

EDUCATION

It was a long-held wish to offer English lessons to children, especially as we hear complaints that immigrant children are overlooked in school and fall behind. Mrs Mary Chajwoski made this possible when she came forward to volunteer. She is a teacher at the local International School. Liaising with Rehab, they began with a mixed-age group of children from a few families in Rehab's sitting-room, and quickly divided into two groups of children meeting in various homes, with an additional group of mothers learning round the kitchen table. Two other teachers have volunteered, and there are prospects of a conversation group for improvers also. There is great demand, and it would be easy to develop this work given the resources. The possibilities are many.





On the subject of education, Caritas discovered that one of the real needs of poor immigrant families is for help with school uniform, not forgetting shoes. At least one child was not going to school because she did not have uniform. We were able to help out a number of families at the start of the school year, and hope to be ready for this need next year.

LEGAL AID

Assistance with legal problems which beset the migrant community is one of the most valued forms of help. Caritas Cyprus Migrants Centre, set up by Dolores Savvides in Limassol with funding from CRS America, gives the services of a qualified lawyer who visits Paphos. Through him a number of migrants have been helped, notably to set their documents in order, re-open closed files, obtain release from employers, receive medical cards, claim for unpaid salary, and avoid forced deportation. Our thanks are due also to Gosia Chrysanthou, working for Caritas in Nicosia, whose generous sharing of expertise has helped to train co-workers in Paphos to help with such matters as attending hearings at the Labour Office, preparing letters of complaint, and advising on procedures for obtaining statutory rights etc.

VISITING

Another area of our Caritas work is in visiting the sick, elderly, or housebound, usually of the expatriate community, since these are the ones we most easily hear about. We have a fine team of visitors, and met regularly in 2015 to catch up on developments and make sure no one was left out. Special thanks are due for the caring and efficient chairmanship of Wendy Connolly this year.

EVENTS

Caritas has had a fairly quiet year as regards events, because 2015 has seen the fruition of a 20-year project of the parish to build a purpose-built Hospice for Paphos which will be run in Christian charity, free at point of use and open to people of all races and faiths. Great has been the rejoicing, and there are many events arranged for the Hospice as celebration and fund-raising. However, Caritas has not been inactive. In January we held a Walk in the Harbour (with placards) and a Candlelight Vigil for World Refugees Day. We had a major Raffle with the prize of a tablet to raise funds for a medical emergency. Our Soup and Sandwiches events are enjoyed, and give an opportunity for sharing information and receiving suggestions. For Christmas we had a collection of gifts for needy children, and as usual, had an enormous response.

And our last word for 2015? Thanksgiving for all the help we have received, and for the privilege of being able to share the lives of so many courageous struggling people in the name of the Lord. To quote the words of Dag Hammarskjöld: For all that has been: thanks. For all that will be: Yes!