



# THE PARISHES OF THE PURBECK HILLS

IN THE BENEFICE OF ST ALDHELM

The Home Secretary  
The Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP  
Home Office  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF

cc Richard Drax MP

6 January 2019

Dear Mr Javid

## Channel Refugees

Today churches across the UK will have explored the narrative of the Epiphany, when the Wisemen presented prophetic gifts to the infant Jesus. This is not a cosy post-Christmas story, but a tale of hope following the dark politics that resulted in the slaughter of the innocents under Herod's insecure and brutal government. It was from this persecution that the Holy Family fled as refugees seeking asylum and safety in Egypt.

As we recall this narrative we cannot but reflect on the Home Office response to the so called 'crisis' of small numbers of desperate people risking everything, including the lives of their families, to cross the Channel in unseaworthy boats in the hope of safety and sanctuary in the UK.

Speaking on a visit to Dover, you are quoted as saying:

'...if [they] do somehow make it to the UK, we will do everything we can to make sure that [they] are often not successful...'

As Home Secretary you will know that sending genuine refugees away to face possible persecution in order to dissuade others from seeking to come to the UK is illegal under international law, to which the UK is a signatory.

We understand that the majority of those making landfall in the UK over the Christmas period are originally from Iran. The latest asylum statistics show that around three-quarters of Iranian asylum claims succeed, so the majority of these desperate people are likely to be genuine refugees.

The 1951 refugee convention acknowledges that refugees may enter countries through irregular routes and should not be penalised for this. These people are not 'illegal immigrants' as you have claimed, but refugees seeking asylum from persecution - and seeking such asylum is a human right. The UK has an obligation to assess claims fairly and grant

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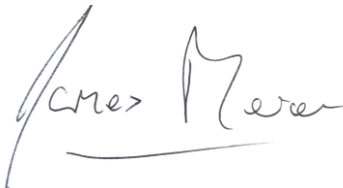
protection to those who need it. The outcome of an asylum application cannot be prejudged, irrespective of how that person reached the country.

Those making these perilous and desperate journeys deserve a humanitarian response. We call on you as Home Secretary to demonstrate this in your words and actions in the coming days and weeks. Please do not inadvertently give succour to xenophobic prejudice by perpetrating a 'hostile environment' towards desperate people in need of kindness and hospitality.

As it says in the Old Testament book of Leviticus:

*'There shall be one standard for you; it shall be for the stranger as well as the native, for I am the LORD your God. (Leviticus 24:22)*

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James Mercer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

On behalf of the Purbeck Hills Parishes

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