



## **Letter to those who are finding a home here in Germany on the occasion of the World Day for Migrants and Refugees on the 15<sup>th</sup> of January 2017**

Dear men, women, children and youths who have come to Germany,

As the Bishop of the Catholic Church of Rottenburg-Stuttgart I greet you in this country. And I know that the great majority of the population of our country – especially also the majority of the 1.8 million Catholics of Rottenburg-Stuttgart – extend these greetings to you as well.

You have had a difficult time. The whole extent of your fate, is often difficult for us here in Germany to comprehend.

In the past years I have visited many refugee shelters in the diocese of Rottenburg-Stuttgart. The mostly tragic experiences that the people there have recounted to me have both saddened and affected me. I have seen that many who have come to us have been so badly affected in body and soul that they need professional help in order to find ways to cope with their experiences. Rest assured that I have included many of your fates in my prayers.

Already in the spring of 2014, shortly after the first reports in the summer of 2013 on the increasingly escalating situation on the refugee routes to Europe, I made the Convent Weingarten available as a shelter for refugees. This was the initial spark for our engagement in the refugee work of the Catholic Church in Württemberg. A total of 9,000 fleeing men, women, children and youths have been looked after or accommodated in part on our premises or in cooperation with the states and communes by members of the Caritas. In addition, a large number of professional and voluntary helpers, men and women have given of their time in many ways in the refugee work. For this I utter my heartfelt thanks!

Humanitarian aid is a living duty for us as Christian, because the founder of our religion has called upon us to love our neighbour. The Gospel states: “You shall Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all

your strength and with all your mind and love your neighbour as yourself.” This is the double command of love, the command to love your neighbour that comes from the love of God whole made ALL people. This is how it is stated in the Gospel (LK 10.27). Another point Jesus Christ, himself said was a stranger and you took me in. For all that you have done for the least of my brothers and sisters, you have done for me.” (Mt 25, 25,40). These words of Jesus are our guide and compass in our commitment.

In order to make a success of integration there is also a contribution on the part of those who come to us and those who are still to come. For also those who have lived for decades or even generations in this country, guests, hosts and those harboured here, have worries and expectations. Expectations of those who come to us in need and those who wish to remain in Germany.

For this reason I want to encourage you to become active in our society. This is founded on fundamental values that we will not give up nor want to do so. Even if our society today seems to be mostly secular, its traditions, its depiction of people and their inalienable dignity are founded on Christian fundamentals. Such humane fundamental orientations shape our coexistence, promote our togetherness and obligate us to hospitality. Therefore I would like to ask of you to learn, value and observe our values and fundamental orientations that open up and are given to you in a new home. (This includes the recognition of our constitution and our laws as well as the equality between man and woman). These values and fundamental orientations move us that we can and want to accept fleeing people and that they can practice their own religion only because of the freedom of religion that is guaranteed in our constitution.

As a Bishop it pains me especially to see that religion is being misused to justify force, hate and exclusion, when people, under the pretext of defending the so-called “Christian Western world” insult or attack people of other origins, other cultures and other beliefs.

When hate-filled perpetrators of violence in the name of Islam call for terrorist deeds, allow them or even carry them out, they destroy our community and forfeit their right to remain. I hope that you can agree with me on this point. I therefore appeal for a friendly accommodation and togetherness of Christians, Moslems, Jews, Atheists and people of all directions of belief in our community God’s mercy is the source of strength and the root for peace and justice and tolerance. His love makes us brothers and sisters.

Also the ability to talk a common language is an important contribution for mutual understanding and for a cherishing and open togetherness.

I am always in contact with representatives of various religious communities. The dialogue with representatives of various Muslim associations in our country is already in full swing. The thriving cooperation does not occur without our talking to each other. Since 2005 – now for the past 12 years, I have invited the representatives of the various Muslim associations for an annual exchange and discussion. Because especially those who came to us many years ago play an important role in the integration of the refugees. They are important bridge builders between the culture of their countries of origin and the culture of our country. They can contribute to the feeling of acceptance of those who have arrived in our country and prevent them sliding into thoughts of extremism. I therefore appeal to all to heartily support the process of integration.

I worry about the flash points in our mutual home. They have required too many innocent victims. For the future I hope and wish that the togetherness is not only successful in our country but that a friendly growing together and living together without hate and terror will become possible in the whole world.

I greet you at the beginning of the year 2017 and wish you the peaceful blessing of God.

Rottenburg/Stuttgart on the World Day of Migrants and Refugees,  
15<sup>th</sup> January 2017

Yours,

Bishop Dr. Gebhard Fürst