



Overflowing Love

Welcoming Love

**Advent Offering 2018
2-24 December**

Welcoming Love at Open Doors, Hull

The story *Welcoming Love* features the work Open Doors, Hull, one of many outstanding projects supported by the Methodist Church's Mission in Britain Fund. It is written for you, or a member of your congregation to read aloud, or retell, whilst displaying the PowerPoint presentation illustrating the work of Open Doors, Hull.

The presentation has 26 slides indicated in brackets at the appropriate point in the story, for example (*Slide 2*). Several slides run back-to-back, so display them quite swiftly to keep the story moving at a good pace.

(*Slide 1*) is the title slide to use when introducing Welcoming Love with Advent Offering 2018)

(*Slide 2*) Let's step inside Open Doors, Hull...

But just before we do, while we're still outside in the cold, waiting on the doorstep of Princes Avenue Methodist Church...

Imagine what it might be like to be terrified enough to flee everything familiar and those you love. You've travelled thousands of miles to seek refuge in a foreign country. Somewhere with a different language that makes navigating maps, bus timetables and even supermarket aisles tough; somewhere with an unfamiliar culture you can't make sense of and a confusing system you must somehow master to be allowed to stay; somewhere you must scrape by on not enough.

Now, you're beginning to dream of how extraordinary it would feel to be welcomed in the way we are about to be: it's how

Maryam – and hundreds of others like her from all over the world – are welcomed through Open Doors every week.

(*Slide 3*) Maryam is 50; a mother and grandmother from Syria who had to leave behind most of her family, and 30 years of being a midwife. She came to safety in Hull with her husband and youngest son. She is smiling in almost every photo, but her expression covers deep pain.

"Yes, I am smiling on the outside. But not in my heart." Her other children were too old for entry to Britain. She longs to see them and her grandchildren, especially the ones she hasn't met.

Come on inside. Come in with Maryam...

(*Slide 4*) This welcoming smile is the first of hundreds you'll receive at Open Doors, Hull. Whatever your mother tongue, you will know that you matter here.

(*Slide 5*) Jayne Mercer is a British Red Cross worker visiting Open Doors to help



asylum seekers and refugees trace their family members. She says, “There are other services that help in Hull. But nowhere has the atmosphere this one does; it really is the jewel in the crown.”

But Open Door’s welcome is practical too, making a life-changing difference to everyone who comes.

(Slides 6–8) Love is translated into hot drinks and a hearty lunch that really fill you up, served by a team of friendly volunteers.

(Slide 9) Love is wrapped up in clothes to make sure you stay warm.

(Slide 10) Love is offered to you in expert advice or help...

(Slide 11) and in friendship...

(Slide 12) shared with you through music and craft workshops or English lessons...

(Slide 13) and given to you to take in food parcels for your family.

(Slide 14) Such love is infectious; it fills you up.

(Slide 15) Like many beneficiaries here, Maryam is also a volunteer. Although she can’t speak much English, her smiling service is a huge help to others.

(Slide 16) It’s heart-warming to watch Maryam buzz around mothering so many

(Slide 17) But what’s really staggering to hear is that having taken part in Open Doors’ crochet class, now when Maryam finishes volunteering

at Open Doors, she goes home to spend her evenings making baby blankets and headbands for new mums at Hull Hospital. She even made a beautiful heart decoration for the Christmas tree at Open Doors too! While missing her family and unable to work as a midwife here; overflowing with love to others helps soothe Maryam’s pain and gives her a precious sense of purpose.

(Slide 18) Ayman shares a similar experience. He says the best thing about being given asylum in the UK is simply being safe. Until forced to flee Syria, Ayman was a dentist. But losing his profession was nothing compared to leaving his extended family behind. Yet Ayman values the purpose he’s found through volunteering.

(Slide 19) This is seen again and again at Open Doors. Bashir Siraj, the Project Coordinator, is also a refugee – from Pakistan. He received help from the project when he and his family fled to the UK to escape the misuse of laws that oppressed Christians.

“What inspires me is the aim and work of Open Doors. We host people; we have our arms open in welcome to recognise each human being and to encourage them to grow in confidence. It’s not just a job to me; it’s my passion to help because I’ve been through the process. You put a smile back on people’s faces. We can’t solve everything but we go the extra mile. We listen, and then respond with great care.”

(Slide 20) Open Doors helps people who desperately need it – asylum seekers, refugees and migrant workers. Through the main Thursday drop-in and activities on other





days, more than 300 people from over 60 nationalities are helped here each week by 60 volunteers. Amazing, considering it all began in 2000 with just a few church members reaching out to some Afghani men new to their neighbourhood.

Bashir says it's not a professional service like bigger organisations, but they try their best and carry the message of Christ in their actions – with limited resources and a strong team of committed volunteers.

(Slide 21) A visit to Open Doors reveals the phenomenal level of excellence and hard work here; done so warmly that you could miss how well run it is.

(Slide 22) Joan Salby has volunteered here for 13 years. Today she's on the welcome desk. She explains why serving at Open Doors is so special: "At first I wasn't sure I could do it; I was nervous. But as soon as I arrived, I felt completely at home. It's very rewarding seeing people relax here. But even after all this time, I'm still shocked by some of their stories and how they've been treated."

(Slide 23) "There's such a spread of cultures too. Jesus went out to everybody and it feels a bit like we're doing the same. It's not just us though, it's the people who support us. I can think of so many times when we had no money left to give someone destitute standing in front of us, and then a lady would come in with her weekly £5 just in time: such an answer to prayer."

(Slide 24) No one speaks more highly of Open Doors than the people it reaches. Asghar, an asylum seeker who fled Iran in 2014 after becoming a Christian put his life at risk says, "Open Doors is very hopeful. When I was homeless they gave me money and food. They were so friendly. Please help them keep doing this."

(Slide 25) We could pass on thank you after thank you, but as Rokahaya from Senegal's name means blessing, we'll let her words of thanks and prophetic challenge be the last ones we hear at Open Doors:

"To be in a land where there's no one you know... and to find people so warm; so willing to welcome you... if everyone did this everywhere, nobody would be in need.

"Thank you so much for receiving strangers and making them feel wonderful. You have touched my heart. I don't know how I would keep going without you."

(Slide 26) Thank you for helping Open Doors, Hull to overflow with love and give a warm welcome to people in need.

Thanks too for supporting the Mission in Britain Fund and the other outstanding projects it helps.

Let's keep praying and giving to such vital work – because it's your work too.

You have helped make all these strangers feel like friends. Together let's pray and give, so that our love overflows more and more!

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The Methodist Church

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