



Seaside celebration Greek Orthodox clergy offered a blessing for the feast of epiphany at Margate in Kent yesterday

ROB STO HARD/GETTY IMAGES

French Jews seek refuge in London after gun attacks

Kaya Burgess
Religious Affairs Correspondent

Synagogues around London have experienced an influx of French Jews in the past year, with French children making up more than 50 per cent of the intake in some Jewish primary schools.

At the weekend, France marked the first anniversary of the kosher supermarket siege in Paris, in which four Jewish hostages were murdered. The siege took place in the aftermath of the *Charlie Hebdo* massacre and was a deciding factor for many Jewish families in convincing them to leave France, with London the most popular destination after Israel.

Sabine Zeitouni's husband already worked in London in finance, but she decided to follow him with their three children in July after armed soldiers were posted at her children's school.

"In France, I feel people are more racist towards those who aren't Christians," said Ms Zeitouni, 41. "The English are more open to different cultures. I felt in danger in France, but here I don't at all. [The attacks] strengthened our resolve to leave. Seeing soldiers with sub-machineguns outside my children's school ... it was like we were at war."

At St John's Wood synagogue, there is a French-speaking rabbi and lectures in French. Rabbi Sam Taylor, from the Western Marble Arch synagogue, said that a third of all new members in the past year were French.

"There has been a steady increase," he said. "It's very noticeable. Every month there are new families or young single people coming to London. It happens regularly. In terms of those who pray on a Saturday morning, perhaps a quarter are now from France. They feel much safer here."

Marc Meyer, the French chairman of the Hendon United synagogue, said that 50 per cent of the recent intake at local schools had been French, with some being more than 70 per cent. "There is a very obvious issue with

antisemitism in France and a great degree of discomfort for observant Jews," he said, citing the murder of Ilan Halimi in Paris in 2006, the attack on a Jewish school in Toulouse in 2012 and the supermarket attack.

He said that French Jews had been settling in England for decades, mainly for economic reasons, providing a network of family and friends for those now considering the move.

Rabbi Barry Marcus, from the Central synagogue, said that recent arrivals were "definitely connected to a feeling of discomfort in France", but that many had also left because of President Hollande's economic policies.

Nicolas Sarkozy, the former French president, visited London last night to accept an award for his support of France's Jewish population. At a ceremony to reward young Jewish entrepreneurs, Mr Sarkozy was awarded the Rabbi Moshe Rosen prize, in memory of the Romanian rabbi who protected the country's Jews during communist rule.

Mr Sarkozy said last night: "We do not want French Jews to leave France because they are afraid. We want them to be comfortable to wear a kippah."

"We must stand up to protect our Jewish communities. It is impossible not to. We did not fight the Nazis to force the Jews to run to Israel 70 years later."

The event was organised by the Conference of European Rabbis, which described Mr Sarkozy as "an outspoken supporter of the Jewish community over many years".

Chief Rabbi Pinchas Goldsmith, president of the conference, said: "France right now is the main battleground between hope and fear for the future of Europe, especially for the Jewish community."

"There are those who say that there is no future for Jews in France. Thousands of French Jews have moved to London."

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Clergy demand an apology for transgender Christians

Kaya Burgess

The Church of England has "failed in its duty of care" towards gay and transgender Christians, according to a letter from more than 100 senior Anglicans, who have called for an apology.

The letter is timed to coincide with a meeting in Canterbury this week of Anglican church leaders from around the world. African bishops are expected to walk out in protest at liberal attitudes towards same-sex marriage and gay clergy.

The letter, addressed to the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, is signed by the Bishop of Buckingham, the Right Rev Alan Wilson, and more than 20 deans. It calls for an "acknowledgement that we, the church, have failed in our duty of care to LGBTI [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex] members of the body of Christ around the world".

It adds: "We have made them feel second-class citizens in the kingdom of God, often abandoned and alone", and

calls for "repentance for accepting and promoting discrimination on the grounds of sexuality, and for the pain and rejection that this has caused".

The signatories say that the church must "apologise for our part in perpetuating rather than challenging ill-informed beliefs", warning that gay and transgender Christians have been "ignored and even vilified for too long".

The Church of England is holding a series of "shared conversations" around the country between liberal and conservative churchgoers to find common ground on the issue of sexuality. Organisers will report back before a General Synod in York in July.

The letter coincided with the release of extracts from a book, *The Name of God is Mercy*, published tomorrow, in which Pope Francis explains his "Who am I to judge?" comment about homosexuality in 2013. He says: "I am glad that we are talking about homosexual people because before all else comes the individual person, in his wholeness and dignity."