

SUGGESTIONS FOR WELCOMING NEW RESIDENTS AND RESPONDING TO A RACIST INCIDENT

These suggestions have been derived from conversations with people who have been working with black and minority ethnic groups, including refugees, people seeking asylum, migrant workers and Travellers.

The following suggestions are meant to offer ideas or tips for local churches and church groups; they are purposely simple and straightforward, aimed at encouraging people to respond to the issue of racism.

Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. I was naked and you gave my clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison and you visited me.

(Matthew 25:34-35)

Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those who are in prison as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured as though you yourselves were being tortured.

(Hebrews 13:1-3)

Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers”.

(Romans 12:13,14)

It is important to remember that these suggestions are not exhaustive. Furthermore, they may not be appropriate in certain contexts and communities. Nevertheless, they should provide some useful ways to engage with new residents, regardless of their background, and to respond to any racial incidents.

These suggestions have come from conversations both with people who have initiated contact as well as from ethnic minority people who have been recipients of people's kindness, generosity and welcome.

If you learn of a racial incident that occurs in your local area and want to respond as a church, consider the following:

- Pray for both the victims of this incident and those who perpetrated it.
- Go and visit the victims of the incident. In general, this should be done in pairs rather than by one person or a large group/team. Be sure to let them know who you are and with what church you are associated. Tell them that you are there to say that you are sorry for what has happened to them.
- You might consider, based on the nature of the incident, bringing flowers or chocolates or offering to help repair physical damage that was done.
- Ask the people if there is anything that you can do for them. In some cases, you may offer to act as a liaison with the police.
- In some cases, you might consider making a public response to the incident (e.g. addressing it in a sermon, writing a letter to a newspaper).

- After a period of time following the incident, return to visit and see how they are doing.

There are many ways to welcome new residents into your community. Here are a few suggestions.

- Visit people's homes or a Traveller site and extend a warm welcome.
- Organise and invite people to a welcome evening.
- Provide a welcome pack with practical information on the local area and your church.
- Organise trips and outings.
- If possible, offer transport, services or facilities to people/groups as you get to know them. This could involve a group using a church hall, being provided with English classes or being permitted to use computers at a certain time each week.

There are many ways to welcome new residents into your church.

- Be sure to greet and to welcome any newcomers.
- Ask new church members to make or suggest a symbol representative of their culture that will be prominently displayed.
- Host ethnic nights/events at the church.
- Deliver a sermon on welcoming the stranger and combating racism.
- Invite church leaders from an ethnic minority group or an ethnic community leader to speak at your church.

CONSIDERATIONS AND RESOURCES

There is an expression – Fear begins before we begin – and it is likely that some people reading this might be nervous about reaching out to someone whom they do not know and may be apprehensive about how that person or family will respond to an approach towards them. Fear begins before we begin to act and on many occasions the fear can prevent us from doing what we should. This is why it may be important to do any outreach with the support and prayers of the church and to do so in pairs.

A good rule to follow is to consider what you yourself would like or welcome if you were in a new country/culture. It is likely that you would want to become a meaningful part of a new community and an ordinary participant without being the centre of attention or a 'cause' that has to be helped. Furthermore, it is quite likely that if you were in a different place and your family was subjected to an attack, intimidation or racial abuse, that you would welcome and be grateful to anyone who offered you support and encouragement.

There is also a distinction between making people welcome and accepting them as full participants. Once people have entered into the life of the community and church, they will need to be accepted as full members of it with their own rights and responsibilities.

If you would like to discuss any of these suggestions/ideas, find out about churches and organisations involved in anti-racist work or locate any resources to assist you, please contact Scott Boldt at the Inter-Church Centre, 48 Elmwood

Avenue, Belfast BT9 6AZ; scott.boldt@btconnect.com; 028 (048 from Republic of Ireland) 90 66 31 45.

SUGGESTIONS FOR WELCOMING NEW RESIDENTS AND RESPONDING TO A RACIST INCIDENT

INTRODUCTION

In 2000, the Churches' Commission for Racial Justice (CCRJ) held a week of discussions with equality bodies, human rights bodies and black and minority ethnic organisations in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. In the course of these discussions it became clear that racial justice issues were often not acknowledged by the churches, and that little systematic work was being done by them in challenging racism and promoting good relations with minority ethnic groups. Now, in 2005, there is a general recognition and acknowledgement of the issue of racism throughout society, church leaders have made statements and commitments to addressing the issue, and various church bodies and projects have been established and supported to combat it. Nevertheless, there is an ongoing need by churches to continue with this work, to develop and to deepen it, and to initiate further responses to racism as it arises in society.

As a result of the exploration of the situation in 2000, and the conclusions it drew, the Irish Council of Churches and CCRJ determined to meet together regularly to attempt to provide information and support for the development of racial justice work in Ireland. These gatherings led to the establishment of the All-Ireland Churches Consultative Meeting on Racism (AICCMR) in 2003.

Following the release of this advice AICCMR held a conference for 18-19 November 2005 at Dromantine Retreat and Conference Centre in Newry entitled *Challenged by Difference: Threat or Enrichment* where participants listened to the experiences of minority ethnic people, acknowledged the issue of racism, learned and shared information about anti-racist initiatives and to commit to action.

There were four main purposes of the conference.

- To listen and learn from the experiences of ethnic minority groups and people who have responded to the challenge of difference.
- To encourage all Christian churches to acknowledge racism as a fundamental issue in society that the churches have a significant role in addressing.
- To describe and to present anti-racist initiatives that various churches have undertaken, developed or supported.
- To create the time and space for people to interact, share ideas and concerns, caucus on issues and make a commitment to anti-racist work.

Leaders and representatives from the churches, ethnic minority groups and from various agencies came together for this event.

SUGGESTIONS AND IDEAS

In view of Racial Justice Sunday on 11 September 2005, the following list of suggestions has been put together so that local churches might consider different ways to reach out to new residents in their communities and to respond to a racial incident if it occurs in the local area. These suggestions have been derived from conversations with people who have been working with black and minority ethnic groups, including refugees, people seeking asylum, migrant workers and Travellers.

The following suggestions are meant to offer ideas or tips for local churches and church groups; they are purposely simple and straightforward, aimed at encouraging people to respond to the issue of racism.

Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. I was naked and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison and you visited me.
(Matthew 25:34-35)

Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those who are in prison as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured as though you yourselves were being tortured.

(Hebrews 13:1-3)

Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers”.

(Romans 12:13,14)

It is important to remember that these suggestions are not exhaustive. Furthermore, they may not be appropriate in certain contexts and communities. Nevertheless, they should provide some useful ways to engage with new residents, regardless of their background, and to respond to any racial incidents.

These suggestions have come from conversations both with people who have initiated contact as well as from ethnic minority people who have been recipients of people's kindness, generosity and welcome.

If you learn of a racial incident that occurs in your local area and want to respond as a church, consider the following:

- Pray for both the victims of this incident and those who perpetrated it.
- Go and visit the victims of the incident. In general, this should be done in pairs rather than by one person or a large group/team. Be sure to let them know who you are and with what church you are associated. Tell them that you are there to say that you are sorry for what has happened to them.
- You might consider, based on the nature of the incident, bringing flowers or chocolates or offering to help repair physical damage that was done.
- Ask the people if there is anything that you can do for them. In some cases, you may offer to act as a liaison with the police.
- In some cases, you might consider making a public response to the incident (e.g. addressing it in a sermon, writing a letter to a newspaper).

- After a period of time following the incident, return to visit and see how they are doing.

There are many ways to welcome new residents into your community. Here are a few suggestions:

- Visit people's homes or a Traveller site and extend a warm welcome.
- Organise and invite people to a welcome evening.
- Provide a welcome pack with practical information on the local area and your church.
- Organise trips and outings.
- If possible, offer transport, services or facilities to people/groups as you get to know them. This could involve a group using a church hall, being provided with English classes or being permitted to use computers at a certain time each week.

There are many ways to welcome new residents into your church:

- Be sure to greet and to welcome any newcomers.
- Ask new church members to make or suggest a symbol representative of their culture that will be prominently displayed.
- Host ethnic nights/events at the church.
- Deliver a sermon on welcoming the stranger and combating racism.
- Invite church leaders from an ethnic minority group or an ethnic community leader to speak at your church.

CONSIDERATIONS AND RESOURCES

There is an expression – Fear begins before we begin – and it is likely that some people reading this might be nervous about reaching out to someone whom they do not know and may be apprehensive about how that person or family will respond to an approach towards them. Fear begins before we begin to act and on many occasions the fear can prevent us from doing what we should. This is why it may be important to do any outreach with the support and prayers of the church and to do so in pairs.

A good rule to follow is to consider what you yourself would like or welcome if you were in a new country/culture. It is likely that you would want to become a meaningful part of a new community and an ordinary participant without being the centre of attention or a 'cause' that has to be helped. Furthermore, it is quite likely that if you were in a different place and your family was subjected to an attack, intimidation or racial abuse, that you would welcome and be grateful to anyone who offered you support and encouragement.

There is also a distinction between making people welcome and accepting them as full participants. Once people have entered into the life of the community and church, they will need to be accepted as full members of it with their own rights and responsibilities.

If you would like to discuss any of these suggestions/ideas, find out about churches and organisations involved in anti-racist work or locate any resources to assist you, please contact Scott Boldt at the Inter-Church Centre, 48 Elmwood Avenue, Belfast BT9 6AZ; scott.boldt@btconnect.com; 028 (048 from Republic of Ireland) 90 66 31 45.

