

# EMBRACE News

## EMBRACE AGM

Anthropologist, Dr Neil Jarman, of the Centre for Conflict Research has agreed to speak at the EMBRACE AGM, on 16 May at Edgehill College. His research expertise includes issues surrounding migrant workers here and the challenges created by rapid demographic change, including racism. The group is delighted but not surprised that he has agreed to speak, as he is always generous in sharing information including his unpublished research materials.

He says: "Ireland has for long been regarded as an island of emigres, it is therefore ironical that the Celtic tiger is now driven by Polish labour".

The AGM will also include discussion of minor constitutional changes related to an application for charity status. There will also be information on a new Emergency Fund that will help the group to respond more easily to requests for practical emergency help, made on behalf of people such as refugees, people seeking asylum and destitute migrant workers.

## Advance Notice of Forthcoming Events

**Sunday 4th June** - Chinese Welfare Association Dragon Boat Race. EMBRACE members and friends are invited to come along and join in the celebration, including racing an EMBRACE Dragon boat on the Lagan river. The fun begins with a traditional Chinese lion dance at 11am at the Lagan Water Sports Complex.

**Saturday 8th July** - Boat trip on Lagan for people seeking asylum, members of EMBRACE and friends, leaving at 12.30pm. (Transport available from City Church) This will be followed by a barbeque as part of the StreetReach celebrations in the Holylands.

**Thursday 28th September** - Indian Cultural Evening. This fund-raising event will be held at 7.30pm at the Indian Community Centre and include Indian dance, reflections on life as an Indian in Northern Ireland, a tour of the centre and a light supper.

**Saturday 2nd December** - Multi-cultural Christmas Craft Fair. To be held from 10am to 1pm in the upstairs hall of City Church.

**Wednesday 13th December** - EMBRACE Christmas party To be held from 7.30pm in the City church for people seeking asylum and friends.

For more details on these events and how you can be involved please call Jill on 0796 9921 328 Or email [info@embraceni.org](mailto:info@embraceni.org) Jill would also be happy to hear from you if you would like to join EMBRACE.

## Increase in Fees

The committee has decided to increase the fees for individual membership to £10 per annum for individuals and £20 for groups. Although it will always be necessary to look for additional funding for the work of EMBRACE, a membership drive and increased subscriptions should enable the group to provide better resources for the educational aspects of the work, as well as assistance to minority ethnic people.

## Vision Day

A morning of reflection was held at Restoration Ministries on 30th March 2006, facilitated by their director, Rev Ruth Patterson. 17 members of EMBRACE including the committee attended.

Ruth took the theme of the Good Samaritan, the role of the inn and the concept of hospitality or welcome at the heart of the Gospel:

"So, where are today's inns? Are they our churches? Do we find our churches on the roadside of life, open to receive and welcome all those who need a resting place or a place of safety or healing for whatever reason? Are they communities of celebration? Do people find in them the challenge and the means through which they can be reconciled, not only with God, but also with their own inner beings and with one another? Does the traveller sense flowing from them a generosity of spirit, a willingness to spend more, more of themselves, more of their resources, more faith, so that all who pass by are not only welcomed, but restored so that they may continue on their journey. ..."

She encouraged the questions "Am I an inn? Am I in my very self a resting place, a place of safety and of hospitality for others whom I encounter each day along the road of life?..." and said "Hospitality is not so much a task as a way of living out our lives and of sharing ourselves. It is something we learn as we open ourselves to God and to each other."...

A question arising from the retreat:

In my welcome of others do I:  
 Become a doormat,  
 Keep others on the doorstep of my life,  
 Let others into the front room,  
 Invite others beyond to the reality that is me - and welcome the reality that is them?

## Diary dates:

- 21 May - World Day for Cultural Development
- 4 June - International Day of Innocent Children Victims of Aggression
- 14-20 June - Refugee Week (UK)
- 20 June - World Refugee Day
- 10 September - Racial Justice Sunday

# Building a Welcoming Community

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## The God of Welcomes

The St Patrick's Day celebration at the Church of Ireland Cathedral in Downpatrick, had a multi-ethnic, multicultural theme this year. Local Church of Ireland parishes were asked to invite people from other nationalities and other ethnic backgrounds.

The address at the service in Down Cathedral was given by Rev. Roy Searle, leader of the Northumbria Community and President of the Baptist Union of Great Britain. He spoke of St Patrick's message:

'The gospel that changed people's hearts and minds from hatred to love, harmony to healing, mistrust and suspicion to kindred communities, where fate and helplessness gave way to a passion that burned for God and brought life. The gospel spoke of a God of compassion, a God who reached beyond the boundaries of any prescribed religion, church or civic boundary or protocol to touch the hearts of all. A God of benediction and blessing, A God who welcomed the stranger, the exile and the refugee. The God whose very nature is community - Father Son and Holy Spirit - unity in diversity. A God who created and celebrates diversity and challenges any notion that something different is deviant and therefore needing to be excluded. A message that transformed and informed Patrick's mission and led him to crusade against injustice and the exploitation of the poor and marginalised.'

'... In the midst of the many changes facing Ireland there is the emergence of people coming from different nations. In the last 48 hours I've waited in a queue behind a young lady from Poland in a book shop, been served in a supermarket by a young Slovakian woman, and sat next to a Nigerian on the bus up the Saintfield Road.'

'... May the God of Welcomes be expressed through the people of God to strangers and exiles in our midst, for in doing so we reflect the mission of Patrick.'

'I thank God for St Patrick, his message, this land and its people and I pray that the same God who transformed and inspired him, may touch our hearts...'

## Contact Us

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Bishop Harold Miller (centre) lays a wreath on St Patrick's grave. Assisting are Rev, Jerome Munyangaju, rector of Killyleagh Co. Down, who is originally from Rwanda, and, on his right, Canon Raj Sathyavay, from India but who works in Egypt. He is currently centred in Hillsborough parish, Co. Down, on a short-term project.



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## Government Change of Policy on Immigration Detention

Since the last newsletter was published, the Government has decided that immigration detainees (including some people who are seeking asylum) will no longer be held here. Many of us have campaigned to stop the use of prisons, or prison-like conditions for detention, but the ending of the practice is not good news. The fact that people will now be sent to removal centres in Scotland or England creates problems such as the following:

- People who are removed from Northern Ireland will be placed at a distance from friends, family, solicitors and other support networks.
- There is the risk that they may be moved without being given timely legal advice.
- Larger numbers may be detained if there is no longer any restriction on accommodation

In our last newsletter we asked for donations which could be used for expenses incurred by the refugee Action group detainee visitors group. We will do our best to ensure that any money already donated is either used on behalf of the 2 men who are still detained in the Crumlin road unit, Belfast. We can also see if money is needed for expenses incurred in assisting detainees who have moved to Scotland or England. However, we are not asking for any new donations until the situation is clearer.

## How the Catholic Church is Responding to Immigration

'In migrants the Church has always contemplated the image of Christ who said, "I was a stranger and you made me welcome" (Matthew 25:35). Their condition is, therefore, a challenge to the faith and love of believers...'

'In welcoming migrants it is ...useful and correct to distinguish between *assistance* in a general sense (a first, short-term welcome), true *welcome* in the full sense (longer-term projects) and *integration* (an aim to be pursued constantly over a long period...)

*Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi*, (The love of Christ towards migrants), Vatican City, 2004.

The challenge of welcoming refugees, and people seeking asylum, has been met by the Irish Catholic Church through the Refugee Project in Maynooth and its work in co-ordinating the Churches Asylum Network. The Church is now also conscious of the need to respond to the growing numbers of people who have come here from other countries to meet labour and skills shortages, first in the south, and increasingly now in the north. A person has now been appointed in each diocese with responsibility for the pastoral care of migrants, and they report to the Bishops' Conference.

The northern dioceses have learned from southern experience, but local patterns are emerging. Immigration is different to what it was in the past. Incomers are no longer focussed on the city of Belfast. Health workers from the Phillipines and India are seen in parishes wherever there are hospitals and care homes. Migrants from eastern Europe are working in the agriculture, food processing and service sectors and so are found in country towns and rural areas as well as the cities. The largest numbers are Polish, Lithuanian or Latvian.

One of the key needs identified is the yearning to experience church liturgies in one's own language. Priests in the south with language expertise have come north to help with this. There have been masses in Polish in places such as Ballymena, Belfast, Lisburn and Castlewellan. 400 people attended a Polish mass in St Eugene's Cathedral, Derry. In East Belfast there has been a mass in Tagalog for Filipinos and there is a regular Malabar rite celebration for Indian people. Churches have also included scripture readings in minority languages and involved immigrants in various ministries. Parishes have also hosted special social events and held English language classes.

A Polish priest has now been appointed in the north to care for Polish migrants. There is also a continuing need to equip the churches with expertise on migrants' rights and entitlements and people are also concerned about migrant worker destitution, and the availability of language support in schools.

## Desecration

Unfortunately, some churches have learned about racism through the experiences of their new parishioners. On 9th March this year, sectarianism and racism were very personal within the walls of St Colmcille's church in Ballyhackamore. It is close to the Ulster hospital in Dundonald and so has a number of Indian and Filipino parishioners. Following earlier incidents during a parish mission, vandals returned and desecrated the church with excrement and graffiti, including sectarian, sexual and racist slogans. This was soon after the attack on the Filipino family in Dundonald that forced them to abandon their house. Parish priest, Fr Paddy De Largy, (who is also the Down and Connor diocesan representative for the pastoral care of migrants) said that a small section of the community seems unable to accept people from other countries.

In order to feel better equipped to understand and deal with issues such as sectarianism and racism, the local Belmont and District Council of Churches had been studying hate and hate crimes during Lent. Following the attack, Presbyterian minister Rev. Richard Hill, a former chairman of the Council of Churches made his views clear:

'My neighbouring church and my friends have been attacked ... it is an attack on the whole community of Christians in east Belfast.'

To read more see

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern\\_ireland/479396.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/479396.stm)

The present chairman, Paddy Donnelly, of St Colmcille's (who is also an EMBRACE committee member), has been active in trying to ensure that action is taken to assist migrant worker families who are subject to harassment. He has been involved in bringing families into conversation with local politicians, church representatives and the PSNI so that their concerns are treated seriously.

## Correction

In the earliest version of the last Newsletter, No.5, we stated that migrant workers needed to pay £70 each time that they register for work, in fact the regulations state that they only need pay a fee on first registration.

However if you find cases where people are being asked to pay additional fees please let us know. There is still concern about how eastern European migrants from the 8 countries which joined the EU in 2004 are treated while they are living and working here.

There are particular worries about overcrowded living conditions and the problems of destitution for those who lose their jobs, which we highlighted in our last newsletter.

Each year EMBRACE produces an Information Update booklet on the situation for people seeking asylum, migrant workers and others from minority ethnic backgrounds. The 2006 edition, entitled 'Embracing diversity' is now available.

To receive a free copy please call Jill on 07969921328.

## A Christian response to Racism

Last summer Tim Foley, a Mennonite from Portadown, published his thoughts on racism on the Anabaptist Network, Root and Branch web site. Some extracts:

'Dr Paul Connolly's research (Queen's University) shows that racism in white settled people in NI is roughly twice as bad as the racism/sectarianism between Catholic and Protestant communities: 42% of us wouldn't want a minority ethnic person as a close relative compared to 26% for Protestant/Catholic. However the figure for our attitude to Travellers is awful: 77%. ...

In the bible narrative our response to the 'stranger' is a test of our commitment to God. Hospitality is a central practice of the faith: Do we welcome the stranger amongst us in our willingness to dialogue, eat, play and converse together or do we make the stranger an enemy? The Old Testament commands the people of God to care for the stranger, though the enemy does not have the same privileged position as in the New Testament. In those scriptures it is everywhere: Jesus as a child refugee, Jesus embracing outsiders of all kinds, his solidarity with the excluded on the cross, all pointing to Paul's revelation that the divisions between peoples were destroyed by the cross.

... Portadown churches are taking a few small steps in the right direction but much more could be done. .... The social dimensions of the sacraments - for example communion as the space where all of us acknowledge our status as welcomed outsiders or Baptism as the act where enemies of God join God's people. Local Methodist and Presbyterian churches have directly addressed the issues and even had parts of sermons published in the local paper! ... Some of us ... have found that a visit right after a [racist] attack was very warmly welcomed. ...In Portadown, where many of the minorities are Catholic or from Catholic backgrounds, the Catholic clergy are active in visiting and building relationships ... Once a month the church has a Filipino mass. PACE (Protestant and Catholic Encounter) Portadown used the theme of the 'stranger' for the annual carol service this year, and in June organised a CRC [Community Relations Council] funded public Question & Answer event to help air the issues around minorities. ... A local Christian of Indian origin - Nelson Rajh - has gathered a few of us to organise events to bring minorities and locals together. The first of these - an ethnic feast - was a success despite low numbers. Nelson cooked Indian food for all of us and showed a video of Portadown's growing ethnic pluralism. There was some ethnic dancing and singing, both Filipino and Irish. ...

Anabaptist values should make us particularly empathetic and sensitive to people on the margins, to those in a minority. Anabaptist values should cause us to stop and examine our language, attitudes and behaviour: have we really crossed the road to the 'other' or are we just using the right words and phrases? If we belong to the white, settled, middle class sector then how does this dominant powerful position affect our values and how we treat others? It is not enough to just hold the 'right' views on race or anything else: will we change? Full text: <http://www.eleutheria.biz/rnb/article.php?i=21&m=2>

## Developments in Portadown

Tim Foley, speaking today adds:

'A Migrant Worker Forum has made a positive contribution to information sharing and co-operation among voluntary and statutory organisations. On the forum I represent some churches in Portadown but there are no representatives from the new residents themselves which points to the need for capacity building. There are at least two cafes and two shops run by new residents for new residents which has helped to contribute to a long-overdue diversity in Portadown. While there are real issues about increased pressure on some services, such as housing and health, this cannot be blamed on our new friends who are making a huge contribution to our local economy. I also know of one school which the new children have helped to keep open. It would be awful if we welcomed the economic contribution of migrant workers but rejected everything else about them.

Our own church and a local Methodist church have recently started basic English classes which in our case have attracted 14 Polish and Hungarian students. We have found these easy to run and with great benefits for us and the students. The F.E. college, Upper Bann Institute, supplies a teacher which they pay, and we supply a room, materials and church helpers. The classes have helped us to become acquainted with the new residents, learning about pressures such as low wages, unemployment, lack of health-care and expensive housing. The classes are also great fun as we practice conversations! Hopefully we will become friends and it might lead to other projects and greater involvement with these wonderful people.'

## News from the South:

### Discovery Gospel Choir Visit Mountjoy Jail

Just before Christmas 2005, the multi-ethnic Discovery Gospel Choir based in St George's and St Thomas' Church of Ireland parish, Dublin, visited Mountjoy Prison to take part in a service attended by Irish, African and Asian prisoners. A report in the *Church of Ireland Gazette* (13 Jan. 2006) quotes one of the prisoners: 'I saw some lads there and they were singing and dancing and they don't ever go to Mass. They never set foot in this church. Because there was a bit of music there and because there was a different culture there, they all loved it.' The choir's director Philip McKinley said 'We envisage a world where the bars that keep us apart are removed and we are all set free from prejudice and fear.'

The Choir's CD, *Made to Be As One* is now for sale in the Good Bookshop, Donegal Street, Belfast for £10. Proceeds go towards the expenses of the choir, many of whom are people seeking asylum, refugees, or recent immigrants. Some of the leaders of the Discovery initiative are also members of the Archbishop of Dublin's working group on combating racism which has produced a report, *Welcoming Angels*, which has lots of useful insights into the needs of incomers and how congregations can make them welcome. *Welcoming Angels* is available from the Diocesan Office, Diocese of Dublin and Glendalough, Church of Ireland House, Church Avenue, Rathmines, Dublin 6. The price is 5.00 euro.