

Building a Welcoming Community

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Church Leaders Visit the Welcome Centre

Most migrant workers from the new EU accession countries contribute to our economic progress and earn sufficient money to improve the standard of living of their families. A small number, however, are not successful. Church leaders met at St Peter's Cathedral, Belfast, on 1 June to be briefed on the situation for migrant workers from accession countries who become destitute because they have no entitlement to benefits, unless they have had continuous work for 1 year (See EMBRACE Newsletter No 5). They learned how the state is relying on the voluntary sector to fill in gaps in statutory provision. The number of different government departments who have responsibility for aspects of the lives of migrant workers was also identified as a problem.

Mandy Jones of the Simon Community spoke about her experience with homeless migrant workers. Simon had decided to give beds to migrants although these could not be statutorily supported. They had been able to find beds for 9 people recently and, through continued support these have all been successfully returned to working life and independent living. This was possible through successful networking with other groups in the community sector who provided help e.g. with translating. The Housing Executive had also been helpful in supporting language services. It was noted that migrants often ask for information on churches and want to become active church members.

Following the briefing, there was a chance for the church leaders to meet homeless people, including some foreign nationals, at the Welcome Centre, a day centre adjoining the Cathedral. It was chosen for the visit as it relies entirely on donations, not statutory support, and is therefore able to assist foreign nationals. Although the centre has a few beds for women it can only give assistance for men by providing a shower, food and an opportunity to socialise during the day.

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Report Launch

Members of EMBRACE attended the launch of *Improving Government Service Delivery to Minority Ethnic Groups*, on 9 October, in the Long Gallery at Stormont. The research for the report was carried out in partnership with the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM). (EMBRACE is grateful for the financial support of OFMDFM for publications during 2006, including this newsletter.)



Left to Right: Denise Wright, Margaret McNulty, Eileen Chan-Hu and Richard Kerr.

Ms Chan-Hu is Co-ordinator of the Ethnic Minorities Project in Ballymena, and was one of the speakers at the launch of the report. The Ethnic Minorities Project involves addressing the needs of minority ethnic people through needs analysis, capacity building, working with interpreters and co-operating with other agencies. For more information: Email: emp@ballymenacommunityforum.org Tel: 028 2564 8822

Churches to Provide Packs for Destitute Migrant Workers

Evidence on the streets suggests that there is a marked increase in the number of migrant workers who are sleeping rough and approaching hostels for accommodation. A pilot project is being launched which will enable churches to support people who are homeless and sleeping rough.

Involving Belfast churches, this pilot is to start in the next few weeks. It is hoped that it will iron out issues relating to supervision of the project and storage of donated materials such as changes of clothing, toiletries etc. So watch this space.

For more information on migrant workers visit our web site www.embraceni.org

The Challenge of Change

Representatives of faith-based groups joined members of the public and voluntary sectors from Ireland, north and south, and northern England for a major convention in Newry from 5-7 June, facilitated by Mediation Northern Ireland. The title, *The Challenge of Change*, reflected the difficulties of societies emerging from conflict, struggling with division, and now wrestling with the issues thrown up by European and global economic and social trends including mass migration.

One of the keynote speakers was Trevor Phillips, chair of the Commission for Racial Equality who gave a message of warning. He commented on the growth of the British National Party, the trebling of south Asian ghettos in Great Britain and his sorrow at how the failure to manage ethnic diversity in his native Guyana had led to endemic poverty and violence. The issue of migration was not one of volume but about the management of change. Politicians needed to engage with the issue. People need to feel equal, to be able to participate in power and decision making and to interact with each other. Residential isolation creates increased feelings of isolation.

The present engines for integration are the workplace and the schools and this is not working. There is a need to find ground where we have more in common than that which separates us. The real engine of change should be politics. There is a need to establish common codes, language, dress and behaviour.

Mr Phillips also stressed the need for locally respected leaders and mentioned the trade unions and the churches in the context of community leadership.

Demand for Foreign Language Bibles

The Bible Society in Belfast reports an increasing number of enquiries about bibles in languages other than English, including requests from hospitals, churches and study groups. The greatest numbers are for bibles in eastern European languages but Portuguese, Farsi and Tagalog are also being requested.

Presbyterian Course on Loving Our Neighbour

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland Peacemaking Programme has designed a 5-session course, *The Gospel in Conflict: Loving Our Neighbour*. The session on 'Relating to our Neighbours' sets out to explore the challenges and opportunities in building relationship with those who are different. Hospitality is a central practice in our faith, but do we welcome the stranger amongst us in our willingness to dialogue together or do we make the stranger an enemy? This session is included in the course in an attempt to deepen understanding of the measures required to promote good relations in Ireland and to help Presbyterians reflect on the value of diversity.

For further information contact Laura Coulter, (028) 9032 2284 Email: lcoulter@presbyterianireland.org

International Evening in Ballynahinch Baptist Church

Many church congregations are thinking about how they can get to know our many recent incomers. Ballynahinch Baptist church is also exploring how best to meet people's needs, perhaps through the provision of appropriate information for newcomers to the town, English classes for beginners, and assisting with the practicalities involved in settling in a new community.

The church was imaginative in how people were welcomed to their church hall one Saturday night in May. The hall was decorated with the flags of many nations although one of the helpers confided that they did not know if they would get 5 people or 50. They had prepared a large amount of food, suitable for a variety of diets and were rewarded as the hall gradually filled up. People came from many countries including Bangladesh, Columbia, the Czech Republic, Ecuador, India, Iraq, Poland, Slovakia and South Africa.

An animated film, with no speech content (filmed in Belfast but set in India) was shown in order to provide a starting point for conversation during the meal, and there was also a quiz about national flags. One of the worship groups sang songs with a local flavour and the visitors were also entertained by Irish dancing. A group of young Polish men sang gospel songs in Polish and said (very tongue in cheek) that they were going to lead everyone in community singing. Most people managed best with the Alleluias!

A translation from one of the Polish songs:

'I love therefore I don't have to be afraid. Perfect love casts out all fear. 1 John 4: 18

At the end of a very enjoyable evening, former pastor, Hadden Wilson, pointed out that the gospel came to Ireland through a migrant, St Patrick. He asked the guests to tell their friends that they were all very welcome.

'We want you to know the love of Jesus, but our welcome is not dependent on you sharing our faith.'

Racial Prejudice in NI

Recent research on the levels of racial prejudice here has shocked people by revealing that Protestants (33%) were almost twice as likely as Catholics (18%), or those with no religion (19%) to say that they were either very prejudiced or a little prejudiced. The research can be interpreted in many ways but wouldn't it be nice to be able to report in future that there was markedly less prejudice among all Christians than there was felt by those with no religion? Source: *The Life and Times Survey*, Chris Gilligan and Katrina Lloyd, reported in *Research Update* Number 44, June 2006. For more on the survey see www.ark.uk/nilt

'Remember Jesus loves the people you hate.'

Graffiti at the site of the Twin Towers in Manhattan, quoted by Rev. John Dunlop on Radio Ulster Thought for the Day, May 2006.

Catholic Bishops' Statement on Trafficking

The Irish Bishops' Conference, in a statement from Maynooth on 18 June 2006, Human Trafficking is Immoral and Criminal, underlined the 'serious Christian obligation to care for trafficked people and went on to say - The recruitment, transfer and sale of vulnerable people - women, children and men - is a gross violation of human rights. ... It is a matter of urgency that legislation be put in place which regards the trafficked person as the innocent party, and which strengthens criminal proceedings against traffickers.'

'The Largest Gatherings of Africans in the history of Ireland'

On 20 July, Church of Ireland Primate, Archbishop Robin Eames met with Pastor Enoch Adeboye, Worldwide Overseer of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) which is the third largest Christian church in the Irish Republic with around 15,000 members to discuss ways of building relationships. The gathering of 6,000 RCCG members at a 'Festival of Life' in the Point Theatre Dublin the following evening, was described by the *Church of Ireland Gazette* (4 August), as 'the largest gathering of Africans in the history of Ireland'.

Isolated Foreign Prisoners

The Ulster Quaker Service Committee is hoping to collaborate in a pilot study with Maghaberry prison and other voluntary groups to see if a more comprehensive support service could be provided for isolated prisoners in our local jails. There is no evidence that foreign nationals are more likely to get into trouble than local people, but increased immigration makes it inevitable that a small number of foreigners end up in prison. These will include some people without families to support them, so this initiative should provide opportunities for volunteers who have a particular interest or expertise in this area. Part of the pilot study will be the provision of appropriate training.

The Quakers are already contracted to run the centre for visitors at Maghaberry and have been involved in the provision of foreign language materials to assist visitors to understand how the prison is run and help them through the technicalities of their first visit. A '*celebrating diversity*' family focus week was held at the Visitors' Centre and in prison visits during the last week of August.

'...presumption is the besetting sin and chronic temptation of the insider. To our peril we ignore, shun and vilify the outsider as strange, dangerous and unclean. We smugly imagine that we possess the truth as few others do, rather than humbly ask God in his mercy that we might be transformed by His truth.'

The Journey with Jesus: Notes to Myself, Daniel B. Clendenin, Journey with Jesus Foundation.

<http://www.journeywithjesus.net/Essays/20060206JJ.shtml>

Ethnic Minorities Report: CMSI

In autumn 2005 Canon Rajkumar Sathayraj and David Maganda visited minority ethnic groups, in order to assess what services are available for incomers and how they are welcomed here, by the community and the churches. Most of the people they met were from African, Chinese, Indian, Middle Eastern or mixed race origin and they included a mixture of religious faiths and traditions. The following were among the findings forwarded to CMS (Church Mission Society) Ireland in 2006:

While some were warmly welcomed by churches and communities, 'many reported that racism is widespread and a society that is inbred with sectarianism will not easily tolerate people-groups outside their comfort zone. Many perceived that they were viewed as ignorant and lacked competence in relation to working skills, or communication just because their accents were different.' As well as verbal and physical abuse, 'They felt that people were suspicious of them and didn't trust them with responsibility, even in the local church...'

'Many from Christian backgrounds commented that they had been in Northern Ireland for more than 5 years and are nothing more than "pew warmers". They have joined the ranks of the "chosen frozen"! It's as if, in the eyes of local Christians and Clergy, they have nothing valuable to contribute to the life and ministry of the church. They viewed that as indirect discrimination and racism purely on the basis of their background and colour.'

Among its recommendations the report encourages educating the church to: '*become a "home" for ethnic minorities and refugees' ...'helping them to find their sense of belonging and community.'*

CMSI are responding positively to the report and are exploring ways of developing a ministry among minority ethnic people.

Apologies to one of the authors of the report, Rev. Rajkumar Sathayraj whose name we misspelled in the printed version of our spring newsletter.

Immigration Advice

There is concern that some people who want to come and work in the UK are given expensive and very poor advice that may result in failure to obtain the correct permissions and ultimately in deportation. It is reported that some people who claim expertise in giving immigration advice are charging up to £200 per hour to very vulnerable people who may already have spent considerable amounts of money in getting here. A reputable solicitor will probably charge no more than £60 per hour.

If you know of someone locally who needs expert advice, they should be encouraged to consult the **Law Centre advice lines** Belfast (028) 90899350 or Derry/ Londonderry (028) 71262433.

EMBRACE News

EMBRACE AGM

Our 2006 AGM was supported by an encouraging turnout that was rewarded by a stimulating address, 'Migrant workers, new trends and new challenges', by Dr Neil Jarman. As one example of the dramatic nature of change he highlighted the fact that before Poland joined the EU there were only 20 Polish families here. Now there are perhaps 20,000. He spoke of the benefits of migration for families, the host countries who needed the labour and skills, but also the benefit to the developing world where remittances from migrants now outstrip foreign aid. The negative aspects are the difficulties faced by migrants e.g. in accessing housing, accessing language classes and opening bank accounts as well as harassment. He appealed for strategic planning here to smooth the process.

Anna Lo of the Chinese Welfare Association gave the response, which complemented his picture of the contemporary situation, by providing insights into what it was like for earlier migrants. The first generation of Chinese who came here in the '60s had experienced the same lack of facilities and this institutional neglect could be seen as 'structural racism'. Voluntary groups had initially done more than politicians to improve the situation and the government's new race relations strategy will need to be pushed by people on the ground, or it will become a paper exercise.

Among the emerging issues raised in Richard Kerr's chairman's report was destitution among migrant workers. EMBRACE had worked to raise consciousness and had established an emergency fund for this and other cases of hardship. The constitution had been revised so that EMBRACE could apply for charity status and these changes were agreed by the membership.

Committee Elections

The following were elected to the committee:

Anne Bennett, Scott Boldt, Paddy Donnelly, Therese Fitzgerald, Tim Foley, Richard Kerr, Billy Kane, Margaret McNulty, Anna Rankin, Paul Turley, Brighde Vallely, John Wonnacott and Denise Wright.

From these, Richard Kerr was elected chairperson, Anne Bennett, Secretary and Denise Wright, Treasurer. At a later committee meeting Margaret McNulty was elected Information Officer.

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New improved web site

The new EMBRACE website went live at the end of June. On the site you'll find information on racism, immigration, asylum, human trafficking and what our Christian response should be. In addition there is information about EMBRACE including news of events and ways to be involved.

We rely on our members to let us know what works, what doesn't work and what else you would like to see on these new web pages. We want the site to be a really good resource, informing and inspiring people who want to make this a more welcoming place for incomers and minority ethnic people. Please visit the EMBRACE web site www.embraceni.org and tell us what you think of it.

Planning Morning

On 11 September members of the committee got together to consider priorities for the future, focussing in particular on how best to communicate with the Christian community.

Forthcoming events:

Saturday 11th November 2006

An inter-church event reflecting a variety of Christian worship styles new to the island of Ireland, at Christ Church Cathedral Dublin, 3.00 to 5.00pm, organised by the All-Ireland Churches' Consultative Meeting on Racism (AICCMR). For further information contact Scott Boldt at rec@edgehillcollege.org or 028 9068 6933.

Thursday 16th November 2006

Navigating the Migration Maze - An EMBRACE Information and Training Morning which will provide information and an opportunity for discussion on issues relating to migration in general and to the rights of those who come here as migrant workers. The event will be held from 9.30am - 1pm at the City Church, University Avenue, Belfast and will be followed by a light lunch. The event costs £10 (including lunch). For more details or to book, contact our office.

Saturday 2nd December - Multi-cultural Christmas Craft Fair. To be held from 10am to 1pm in the upstairs hall of City Church, 12-24 University Avenue, Belfast.

Wednesday 13th December - EMBRACE Christmas party.

This evening event for people seeking asylum and friends will be held in a Belfast venue. Full details will be available on the EMBRACE website soon.

Membership

If you aren't a member and would like to join us, or have been a member in the past, and would like to renew your membership, please contact our office for a membership form. Membership fees are £10 per annum for individuals and £20 for groups. Donations are also welcome for our emergency fund and for the ongoing work of EMBRACE.

Diary dates:

17 October	International Day for the Eradication of Poverty
16 November	International Day of Tolerance
25 November	International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women
10 December	Human Rights Day