

Building a Welcoming Community

Newsletter Number 8

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Launch of EMBRACE CD ROM



Zimbabwean Story: an image from the EMBRACE CD

Once We Were Strangers was launched recently in St Columcille's Church in Ballyhackamore, East Belfast. This CD Rom is a collection of first-hand accounts of the life experiences of immigrants and refugees here. These are accompanied by bible studies and other resources. The event was attended by people who had worked on the CD, some of those who contributed their stories, and members of the local congregation from other countries were among the guests.

A group of people worked on the CD, but Rev. Karen Campbell was the key person in bringing it from idea to finished resource. She explained how the personal experiences were collected and said:

'The resulting stories were at times moving - to hear of the generosity of people who had unconditionally opened their homes and welcomed strangers in - but at other times, the reality was harsh, shocking and at times utterly disturbing: there were many cases of the story teller feeling utterly dehumanised by the way in which they had been treated. Hopefully these stories will prompt us all to re-examine our attitudes and actions and our welcoming posture as we embrace the multi-cultural nation we now inhabit.'

She also stressed how Christians from other countries could enrich the church here and said:

'I hope this CD is one way of encouraging us to foster a culture of interdependence where we come to support each other and grow in understanding of what it means to be a global, kingdom church.'

To obtain a copy of the EMBRACE CD, *Once We Were Strangers*, or for more information about this resource please contact the EMBRACE office, by email or phone.

A donation of £5, per disc would be most welcome.

Inter-Cultural Insights Booklet Published

Inter-Cultural Insights: Christian Reflections on Racism, Hospitality and Identity from the Island of Ireland is edited by Scott Boldt and published by AICCMR (the All Ireland Churches' Consultative Meeting on Racism) and it was launched at the same time as the EMBRACE CD. It is a valuable resource, containing reflections from incomers and local church people. Some quotations from the booklet:

'Even if always strangers in Ireland, in God's eyes we belong.'

Florence Muthoni Hegarty

'We as immigrants and refugees have a lot to give, but not many people want to give us a chance.'

Yvonne Mefor

...'it is those seemingly insignificant human touches that advance the process of integration, belonging and connectedness that enable different people to feel at home with each other and be recognised in a new and renewing world.'

Fr Bobby Gilmore

Inter-Cultural Insights is available from the Inter-Church Centre, 48 Elmwood Ave, Belfast, BT9 6AZ, Tel. (048 from Irish Republic) 9066 3145 or the Reconciliation Office, Edgehill Theological College, 9 Lennoxvale, Belfast, BT9 7BY, (048 from Irish Republic) 9068 6933, or can be downloaded from www.embraceni.org.

Some abbreviations used in this newsletter:

AICCMR the All Ireland Churches' Consultative Meeting on Racism, MCRC Multi-Cultural Resource Centre; NICEM Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities; NICRAS Northern Ireland Community for Refugees and Asylum Seekers.

CCRJ Meeting

Committee Members of EMBRACE met with Rev. Claudette Douglas (Research and Development Officer) and Mr. Andy Bruce (Manager) of Churches' Commission for Racial Justice of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) on 1st February to explain the work of EMBRACE, provide an insight into the situation in Northern Ireland and to learn about CCRJ and how we can support one another.

Contact us: EMBRACE,

12-24 University Avenue, Belfast, BT7 1GY

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Refugee News

Lunchtime Drop-in for Refugees

NICRAS is the only refugee-led organisation in Northern Ireland. This community group for refugees and people seeking asylum aims to support the integration process while consciousness raising, campaigning and informing people about the legal situation, and organising social and fundraising events.

NICRAS is becoming much more active and now has an address at One Vision Offices, Unit 2, 129 Ormeau Road, Belfast, BT7 1SH, e-mail nicras@hotmail.co.uk. To find out more, phone Ronald Vellem or Moira McCombe at NICEM, on 9023 8645 (until April) or call in to the Thursday lunchtime drop-in at the Vision Offices (12.00-2.00). From April, NICRAS will be starting a volunteering programme and from 2 April please contact Ronald or Moira on Tel: 90248855.

Musical Fundraiser for NICRAS

On 3 February Ceol-le-Céile, Together in Music, sang music from a variety of cultural traditions in City Church, Belfast, in order to raise funds for NICRAS. In this bi-centenary year of the abolition of slavery, they included music from the African-American spiritual tradition, alongside Irish, Scottish, African and liturgical pieces.

If you want to know more about Ceol-le-Céile or to enquire about booking possibilities, please contact Norman Richardson n.richardson@stran.ac.uk or telephone 07711762571.

News from the South

Report on Separated Children

In January, members of the Churches Asylum Network met in Dublin to focus on the Irish Refugee Council's recent report, *Making Separated Children Visible*, which is looking for a more child-centred public response to minors who arrive on their own. Over 4,500 of these very vulnerable children have come to Ireland in recent years and more than 300 have gone missing. Read more about the problems they experience and the report's recommendations:

<http://www.inishrefugeecouncil.ie/pub06/children.pdf>.

Role for Churches in Integration

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Michael McDowell TD, recently stressed the part which could be played by non-governmental organisations including churches and faith communities in promoting the integration of immigrants into Irish society: 'we need religious groups to foster ... tolerance, sense of responsibility, kindness and sense of sharing...'

C of I Gazette 16/02/07.

Immigration

Orientation Pack for Migrants

The MCRC orientation pack, compiled by Tatiana Rehakova, for people from the mid and eastern European accession states is now available in Polish as well as English. It contains leaflets with advice on employment, housing, social security, benefits, health services, education, shopping, transport and opening a bank account. To check on availability phone MCRC, 9024 4639.

A Rights Guide for Migrant Workers

Your Rights in Northern Ireland explains the rights and entitlements for foreign nationals working here. It is available in 3 versions and a number of languages depending on the country of origin. They cover employment, housing, healthcare, human rights, political and educational issues.

For further information or to obtain copies please contact the Law Centre NI (028) 9024 4401.

The Law Centre may also be contacted for assistance with immigration issues.

Home Office Enforcement Unit

This will open in Belfast shortly to deal with infringements of immigration legislation. It will be staffed by HO officials, as well as members of the PSNI and Gardai. There is concern that resources are being spent on this unit while there is no immigration public enquiry office and that there will be increased use of detention and removal powers. While most of the people involved will be removed because of problems relating to immigration status, some will also be asylum applicants.

There is concern that the speedy removal of immigration detainees to centres in Scotland or England reduces opportunities for scrutiny and the continuity of proper legal advice. People are separated from their families and other support networks. There are also unique legal issues here, such as the status of people with children born in Ireland.

Holocaust Memorial Day

This year's commemoration theme was the Dignity of Difference, highlighting the experience of the many different groups who were persecuted by the Nazis. The main local event was held in Lisburn on 25 January, and the programme stated that the theme 'encourages us to reflect on the consequences of excluding those who differ from us and how we might instead celebrate difference and create a culture of respect'. A booklet, *The Kindertransport Journey* by Robert Sugar, was published for the event and is in the EMBRACE resource library. It includes information about the Millisle Farm where the local Jewish Community supported refugee children and young people.

Around the Churches

Preparing to be Peacemakers

The Presbyterian Preparing Youth for Peace course has been renamed, Preparing Youth to be Peacemakers, and revised in order to take account of increasing diversity here and to help young people to explore how they can make a difference.

'...how should we respond to conflict and division in Northern Ireland as Christians? ...Belfast has been called the "race hate capital" of Europe. Do we have any special contribution to make?'

PYP brochure

For more information contact Deborah Erwin,
Tel: 028 9032 2284, email: debs@pciyouth.org.

The Holy Family as Refugees

In December the Lisburn Christian Fellowship Church reflected on the Holy Family's flight to Egypt as a backdrop to examining the diversity of people from other nationalities who have come to the Lisburn area. The service included interviews with two people (from the Dominican Republic and India), exploring how they had been received and how the church could help to make them welcome. The Mayor, Councilor Trevor Lunn, picked up Pastor George Hilary's message on 'welcoming the stranger' and tied it to his mayoral theme of making 'Lisburn a City for Everyone'.

To read more see www.lisburn.com.

Christmas Welcome for Polish People

The Church of Ireland people of Willowfield parish, and the parishioners of the neighbouring Catholic church, St Anthony's, got together in December 2006 to host a festive Irish evening to help welcome Polish people who had settled in that area of East Belfast. The evening included a traditional meal, folk music and carols sung in English and Polish.

Portadown Carol Service

Greenfield Community Church in Portadown, runs an ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) class and they held a successful carol service which was planned with the Polish and Hungarian students. The internet made it easy to find translations for the bible readings and carols.

Some web sites to try for language translation:

Bible: www.biblegateway.com

Hymns: www.cyberhymnal.org

Hard Gospel Lent Course

Church of Ireland clergy have been circulated with a discussion course on dealing with difference, 'Loving our Neighbours'. One of the 6-week sessions is on welcoming the stranger. Published for Lent, it can be used at any time of year. See www.hardgospel.net.

International Mass

On Saturday 6th January Armagh Parish involved people from immigrant nationalities in the celebration of the 7pm vigil mass. There were readings in Polish and Lithuanian and the prayers of intercession were introduced in English and prayed in Spanish, Italian, Latvian, Irish, French, and Malayalam.

Bishop Walsh Welcomes Migrant Workers

14 January was designated as the World Day of Migrants and Refugees and this year's theme was 'the migrant family'. St Colmcille's church in Ballyhackamore, East Belfast, held a special mass on the day. Prayers were read in different languages. Bishop Patrick Walsh preached, stressing the importance of integrating all newcomers. He welcomed the contribution of migrant people, stressing how lucky we were to have so many well-qualified enthusiastic workers who had accepted the invitation to come here. They were a welcome addition to the church community and an inspiration in their dignified celebration of the liturgy. To be called to show the love of Christ towards migrants was a privilege, and to celebrate with them was a reminder of the universality of the Church.

African Christian Fellowship

Have you come from Africa and are finding it hard to adjust? You will find a welcome at the African Christian Fellowship which meets on the first Saturday afternoon of every month from 2 o'clock to 4 o'clock, at Knockbreda, Parish Hall, Purdy's Lane, Belfast. Come and bring a friend. All are welcome.

For further information and directions, contact Mary Munyangaju, 4482 8231, 07749863247 or Email mariagaju1@yahoo.co.uk.

OMF International

In January, around 100 people from a number of churches met in Derry, Bangor and Portrush, to receive training on cultural understanding from representatives of OMF (Overseas Missionary Fellowship). This organisation has a focus on people from East Asian backgrounds, both in their home countries and throughout the world. The team will be back in Northern Ireland in April.

For more information on OMF see www.omf.org.uk.

Send us your news

We can only include a few examples of what is happening at local level but please let us know what your Church or congregation is doing to help build a more welcoming community here.

Email: info@embraceni.org

EMBRACE News

Navigating the Migration Maze

On 16 November about 30 people attended an EMBRACE training and information morning on immigration. Buster Cox, immigration legal adviser at the Law Centre (NI) provided a summary of immigration law and its implications for individual people. Margaret McNulty, information officer of EMBRACE, followed with an overview of the pros and cons of mass migration for the people concerned, the countries of origin and host countries.

Award Ceremony and Party for Refugees

On 13 December City Church hosted a NICEM award ceremony to recognise the contribution of refugees and asylum applicants in the community, by their volunteering work during 2006. Belfast Lord Mayor Pat McCarthy presented these awards. Some were for members of the World United Football team, a mixture of local players, including minority ethnic people, alongside people seeking asylum. Special awards were also given to people who had supported refugees in 2006, including one acknowledging the work of EMBRACE. The annual NICRAS Christmas party followed the presentations. EMBRACE helped with the food.

EMBRACE on the Street Update

This pilot project evolved last year as concerns arose over the number of migrant workers, mainly from Eastern Europe who had become homeless through loss of a job.

At least one year of uninterrupted employment is required to be eligible for any welfare benefits. Some rough sleepers suffer harassment and violence. Richard Kerr contacted some local churches for help in a pilot project.

In consultation with Homeplus and Simon Community a list of needs: clothing, blankets, toiletries and easily handled foodstuffs was drawn up. May St. Presbyterian Church kindly offered room for short-term storage of materials (and another facility in the Docks area also was offered).

Churches responded generously and since November we have had regular deliveries to May St. from St. Jude's (and the Ballynafeigh churches), Crescent Church, Fisherwick, Fitzroy in S. Belfast, and St Patrick's (E. Belfast).

Goods leave May St. twice weekly via Homeplus - a voluntary organisation seeking out 'rough sleepers' to offer support. If funds are available, a couple of nights in a hostel may lift someone sufficiently to find another job.

Recently during a week in February the day outreach team made over 30 contacts with migrants, mostly men aged 25-50 years, while the 'Night Owl' group had a total of 46 contacts with 29 individuals (5 women), 9 were migrants and the remainder were local people.

This work is not easy, interacting with people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds as well as the social problems of people living on the streets. Connor Mulholland of Fitzroy Presbyterian Church says 'The dedicated volunteers and others working with them value your prayers and support.' Margaret Henry of Homeplus was delighted when the project started:

'... [We] were amazed at the amount of stuff that has been donated ... We were like children in a sweet shop! All the donations are very useful, and the clothes in particular are good quality. We filled a box for this evening's Outreach and one for the Day Centre tomorrow, and will be calling round on a regular basis. The tinned food means that as well as making sandwiches, we can provide proper dinners in our Day Centre. Would you extend our sincere thanks to all who contributed as without this sort of help, we would not be able to continue in existence. ...'

Speaking Engagements

EMBRACE continues to provide speakers. Committee members have contributed to events recently in Newtownards, Banbridge and Dungannon.

Please contact us if you would like speakers for church, group or inter-church gathering. Some committee members are also prepared to provide anti-racism and cultural diversity training.

Advance notice: EMBRACE AGM, 22nd May

At 7.30pm in Edgehill College, 9 Lennoxvale Ave., Belfast

AICCMR Worship Event

Taste and See: An inter-church event reflecting a variety of Christian worship styles new to the island of Ireland, to be held on Saturday 19 May in St Colmcille's Church, Ballyhackamore, Newtownards Road, East Belfast.

Workshops: 10.30am to 12.30pm. Worship event: 2.00pm to 4.00pm. A programme for the day will be available soon.

For more information on this event contact: Scott Boldt, Edgehill Reconciliation Project, Edgehill Theological College, Tel: 9068 6933 Email rec@edgehillcollege.org

Diary Dates

Intercultural & Anti-Racism Week 19-25 March 2007 (including the UN International Day Against Racial Discrimination 21 March and the bi-centenary of the Abolition of Slavery 25 March).

For more information and/or materials contact the Equality Commission for NI: information@equalityni.org or info@nccri.ie (Irish Republic).

Contact Us: EMBRACE

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