

Building a Welcoming Community

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He was Two Hours from Removal



John Zekry photographed at the launch of the RAG advice pack. (See page 2, Column 1.) Photograph Courtesy of Law Centre (NI).

John Zekry (pictured above) applied for asylum in the UK in the late 1990s on grounds of religious persecution as a Christian in Egypt. The Home Office believed that his family had been attacked but accepted the word of the Egyptian government that they were taking steps to protect their Christian minority. His appeals failed and eventually, in spite of the fact that he was known to have a child here, he was detained and moved first to Scotland and then to a removal centre near Heathrow airport. He had little access to a phone and could not find legal support locally in GB. When he did manage to contact immigration solicitors in Belfast (including those at the Law Centre), they felt his case was hopeless; it was the weekend and he was booked for removal the following Tuesday.

His hero is Thomas Carey, a solicitor he had met through friends at church. In spite of a lack of immigration law expertise he worked through the weekend, got the case reopened, and a Judicial Review stopped John's removal just hours before the flight. Mr Carey then worked on his case, along with the Law Centre, and contacted priests about the situation in Egypt. After another year, the Home Office finally gave him leave to remain on compassionate grounds. John says: 'There is always hope. Nothing is impossible in God's hands'.

This case shows the difficulties experienced by people who are suddenly detained in GB and the value of the new RAG information pack (see page 2, Col. 1). John is also typical of the increasing number of people applying for asylum here recently who are Christians coming under pressure or persecution in other countries.

The Pain of Waiting for a Decision

Previous research into the health of refugees has tended to focus on the effects of past trauma but the work of a Sligo doctor shows that their current situation is often equally damaging. People applying for asylum in Ireland face language and cultural barriers in accessing health services and not being allowed to work seems to have 'a massively negative effect'. Dr Magzoub Toar's study in Sligo/Leitrim shows that people seeking asylum suffer in greater numbers from chronic conditions such as severe headaches and migraines, as compared to those who have been granted refugee status and have the same rights as other Irish citizens. Of the refugees in his study, 50% had contacted their GP in the previous 2 months as compared to 73.3% of those who were still seeking asylum. Only 25% of the refugees showed high levels of post-migration stress as compared to 75% among asylum applicants. Such findings could be replicated in the UK although the Home Office now aims to achieve much quicker decisions.

Source: *Sligo Champion*, 20 August 2008

A Banquet for All Peoples

The Churches Together in Britain and Ireland Racial Justice Theme for 2008 focuses on Isaiah 25:6-9:

The Lord Almighty will prepare a banquet for all the peoples of the world...

While the printed material was available for Racial Justice Sunday on 14 September, the resources and ideas for Bible study and events are geared towards other times of the year, including Advent and Christmas, Lent and Easter, Mental Health and Refugee Weeks. The booklet and prayer card can be obtained from CTBI and there are further resources on the internet. See www.ctbi.org.uk/racialjusticesunday.

God of all creation,
You have made all people in your image
And you call us to worship you.
We come to you in all our diversity
young and old, black and white, rich and poor,
male and female
because we know we are all invited to your table.
Thank you for your generous hospitality,
for the food of love that never fails to satisfy.
(Part of a prayer on the CTBI Racial Justice web site.)

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Refugee and Immigration Issues

RAG Advice Pack Launched in Refugee Week

The Deputy First Minister, Martin McGuinness officiated at the launch of the Refugee Action Group **Information Pack for Asylum Seekers Facing Detention** at Stormont on 17 June. The document contains advice on rights, preparation for sudden detention, and information to assist individuals and groups who are supporting detainees. It is available from groups such as the Law Centre, NICRAS and EMBRACE, and can be downloaded at <http://www.mcrc-ni.org/images/stories/RAG%20Briefing%20for%20Asylum-Seekers%20in%20NI.pdf>.

Criticism of UK Asylum System Continues

During the summer there was continued critical analysis of the way in which people seeking asylum here are treated. The Independent Asylum Commission's final report, *Deserving Dignity: How to Improve the Way We Treat People Seeking Sanctuary* was published in July. See www.independentasylumcommission.org.uk. To request a hard copy, email chris@cof.org.uk.

Also in July, a UN Human Rights Committee report asked the UK to review its detention policy for people seeking asylum, especially where children are affected, and to seek alternatives. In regard to our local situation: *'It should provide appropriate detention facilities in Northern Ireland for persons facing deportation.'*

See: <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G08/433/42/PDF/G0843342.pdf?OpenElement>.

New Leaders for Local Refugee Organisations

Safdar Zaman has been chosen as Chair of **NICRAS** (the N Ireland Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers). NICRAS has received new funding for an advice and support worker, a part-time administrator and a youth worker. They are also now financed to make diversity and refugee awareness training available, and would welcome anyone who would like to take advantage of this. Please phone **9024 6699**.



The Kazadi family, including Paul who is Co-Chair of RAG has appointed **Paul Kazadi** as Co-Chair alongside **Anna Morven**. You can read about the Kazadi family's plea to stay here at www.kazadifamily.co.uk Friends of the Kazadis web site.

RAG Plans to Oppose New Immigration Legislation

The umbrella Refugee Action Group, of which EMBRACE is a member, met during the summer to discuss how best to challenge aspects of an Immigration Bill that will be going through Parliament in 2009. There are fears that people entering the country without proper papers will be criminalised automatically and that the ability to raise a refugee case as a defence against this will be limited. There is also continued disquiet over how detention is used. Research and consciousness-raising is planned as well as lobbying of politicians.

Research on Destitute Homelessness

Roisin Devlin of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission is currently completing research on how UK policies, especially relating to housing and social support, affect people who have no recourse to public or any other funds. This will involve two groups of people of particular interest to EMBRACE: those whose asylum applications have failed who cannot be safely returned home and migrant workers who have not worked here long enough to be entitled to local benefits. Roisin can be contacted at roisin.devlin@nihrc.org.

Points to Ponder from MWSN Migration and Integration Conference

'I live in a community which is 90+% Catholic and work in a community which is 90+% Protestant. We have no home experience of integration, we segregate ourselves from other host communities, we do not know how to integrate.'

Bernadette McAlliskey, STEP (South Tyrone Empowerment Project) and MWSN, speaking at the Migrant Worker Support Network conference on Migration and Integration, in April 2008.

'A student from Germany commented that as long as you are seen as a blow-in rather than an equal human you won't start integrating. If the focus is on the needs of migrants there is a danger of being patronising, if you have no easily observed needs and appear (from the type of car you're driving etc) to be doing well financially, you risk the response "How dare they?''

From notes of the MWSN Conference by Jill Marrs, EMBRACE

New Resources

Inter-cultural Insights: Christian Reflections on Racism, Hospitality and Identity from the Island of Ireland edited by Scott Boldt, has been expanded and reprinted. See www.embraceni.org for details as to how to obtain copies.

Look at the new EMBRACE web material about other world faiths and Christian attitudes to dialogue. See: <http://www.embraceni.org/category/resources/interfaith-understanding/>

CHURCH NEWS

Can you contribute to Research on Migrant-Led Churches in Ireland?

The All-Ireland Churches Consultative Meeting on Racism (AICCMR) is undertaking research into the impact of the extraordinary growth in migrant-led churches in Ireland. A Directory will be launched in December. Philip McKinley of AICCMR says *'Every county on the island of Ireland now has significant migrant-led church presence. This directory will therefore seek to highlight the diversity migrants are contributing to Christianity in Ireland.'* The research will be launched as a published booklet and an interactive online resource on the www.irishchurches.org website this coming December.

Research for this project is currently being undertaken by Revd Dr Livingstone Thompson, of Meath Cultural Solutions, and Dr Alan Bruce of Universal Learning Systems in Dublin and Yvonne Naylor, a freelance Community Relations consultant in Belfast. The researchers are contacting congregations, from across the Christian spectrum, with a questionnaire, and if you feel that you would like to contribute, please contact Revd Dr Livingstone Thompson, thompsonliving@yahoo.ie, Dr Alan Bruce, abruce@ulsystems.com or Yvonne Naylor, yvonne.naylor@ntlworld.com.



Photograph taken at a special service on Sunday 21st October marking the first anniversary of Lisburn's Polish Mission Church

One migrant-led congregation is the Polish Mission Church which was formed in April 2006 and meets in the Kingdom Life City Church, Graham Gardens, Lisburn. Its services are held there on the 1st and 3rd Sundays of each month (Contact Tel: 07940 709241). The congregation is led by Szczepan (Stephan) Cackowski (second from left in the back row of the photograph). For more information see www.pmc.info.pl where local people are assured that they will receive a warm welcome if they visit the church:

'Since many of the church members speak good English, the Sunday services are translated every time people from the Irish community come to visit.'

Guest article submitted by Carolyn Kemp

(Overseas Missionary Fellowship, Diaspora Ministries)

Is it really that simple?

That was the second question, the first one was, 'How do we reach the many Chinese, Japanese, and Filipinos in our neighbourhoods?' Maybe you are thinking that does not sound simple at all! But there is no mystery, no secret formula to reaching East Asians with the Gospel. Many attend our churches, wanting help with learning English or to make friends. Life, for those who do not have the courage to walk into a church, can be harsh and very lonely. I meet many East Asians who have brought gifts over to give to the many people they think will invite them into their homes (after all that is the Asian way) but they return to Asia 2 or 3 years later with the gifts still in their possession!

Where do you start? There is one place we can all start - a place familiar to everyone in Ireland - food! I was looking at my diary the other day and suddenly realised how much evangelism and friendship building is done over a hearty meal. Every one of the bible studies I am involved in either has food at the beginning, in the middle or at the end... sometimes all three!

Friends of mine have just started a Food Party in Cambridge every month with 12 Japanese regularly attending. They also periodically had a Sushi Party which 30 Japanese attended! Even asking East Asian friends to come and help prepare a meal from their own country is a wonderful way to share in their culture. And the reward... relationships are made, trust is built, Christ is shared!

In Matthew 10:42 Jesus said, "And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward." The Lord knew that offering even a simple drink would open the door to meaningful friendships.

For those of you who are befriending East Asians, we can offer training. (All we need is a venue and someone to look after tea/coffee.) We do three things:

- Help give an understanding and cultural awareness of the issues facing East Asians in understanding the bible and coming to faith in Christ.
- Help you think through issues that face East Asians when they return to Asia as believers - how do we prepare them to stand for Christ.
- Help provide understanding of the East Asian mindset in order to explain the gospel in a way they will understand.

My colleague, Melanie Croom, and I will be in Ireland on: 22-25 January 2009, 22-25 April 2009. If you would like further information, please contact Rev Roy and Eileen Taylor on 01291862769 or rwed31@btinternet.com.

EMBRACE News

Committee Day of Reflection April 2008

The Road to Emmaus: The group reflected on Luke 24: 13-35, the 'road to Emmaus', and on paintings depicting the scene. The story of hopes dashed and then restored brought parallels with the hopes of those who migrate here that are not fulfilled. Jesus gave a new and better hope than was anticipated; can we help to make this true for the migrant? Jesus revealed himself as a listener, who was prepared to meet people at their point of interest/need, prepared to take time to explain but not force himself on others. Do we listen? Are migrant people the subjects of conversation or objects? The morning reinforced the importance of hospitality and the spiritual implications that can lie behind ideas of hospitality. EMBRACE is grateful to **Sr Anna Hainey** for the insights she shared in leading the event at Drumalis.

AGM on 20 May

In his **Annual Report** Chairperson **Scott Boldt** spoke of the encouragement of people's prayers and financial support (especially through gift-aided standing orders which had allowed planning). Grants from the C of I Priorities Fund, Lloyd's TSB and the Churches Commission for Racial Justice had covered printing and administrative costs. It is hoped that in 2009 the group might have a full time volunteer for one year to assist development.

Gifts to the **Emergency Fund** and **EMBRACE on the Streets** had enabled destitute migrant workers to get back into work or to go home - including one young man who had been robbed of all his belongings. Others, without recourse to public funds had hostel beds financed, and payments were made to allow failed asylum applicants to have their belongings sent on to them following their removal from this country. There is continued networking with groups such as the NI Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers, the Refugee Action Group, the South Belfast Roundtable on Racism and the Churches Asylum Network in Dublin, in responding to the needs of vulnerable people.

Scott thanked the committee members for their input on research and information production, for inspired and inspiring speaking, and for their work as catalysts for change and justice. He expressed special gratitude to **Jill Marrs** EMBRACE part-time Administrator 'who keeps everything going with enthusiasm and grace'. He concluded with Archbishop Oscar Romero's prayer:

'We plant seeds that will one day grow.

We water seeds that are already planted, knowing that they hold future promise.

We lay foundations that will need further development.

We provide the yeast that produces effects beyond our capabilities.'

EMBRACE is grateful to **Deirdre Coghlan** for her impressive keynote address 'Life in the Shadows: An Exploration of Irregular Migration in Ireland' and to **David Craig** of Mountpottinger Presbyterian Church who spoke about supporting two African families in the congregation whose applications for asylum had failed.

Committee News

The following were re-elected to the committee: **Scott Boldt** (Chairperson), **Paddy Donnelly**, **Lynda Gould**, **Tim Foley**, **Richard Kerr** (Treasurer), **Margaret McNulty**, **Fr Paul Turley**, **Sr Brighde Vallely**, and **Denise Wright** (Secretary/ Vice-Chairperson). Two new people were elected. **Fr Perry Gildea**, a Vincentian priest, whose order is known in Ireland for its Refugee Centre in Dublin and **Maura McCallion**, Assistant Director (Casework) in the NI Law Centre. At a later date **David Stevens**, Director of the Corrymeela Community took the place of **Billy Kane** who used to represent Corrymeela but is now living in Sweden. **Karen Jardine** has also now joined the committee representing the Evangelical Alliance. Committee members **Billy Kane**, **Yvonne Naylor** and **John Wonnacott** did not stand for re-election. Their contribution to the group during their time of service was greatly appreciated.

Thank You to St Clement's

As the St Clement's Retreat Centre closes EMBRACE pays tribute to the role of the Redemptorists there, under the leadership of **Michael Kelleher**, for their support for EMBRACE from its inception - early encouragement, financial support, making the premises available for meetings, and providing accommodation for at least one vulnerable person who had reached the end of the asylum process. The group's gratitude extends to their friend **Paul Turley** for his service on the committee and for his friendship and spiritual insights, and they wish him well as he recovers from illness and moves to Cork.

'My children, our love is not just to be words or mere talk, but something real and active.' 1 John 3:18

Thinking of Joining Us?

If you are not already a member of EMBRACE, please consider joining us. Subscriptions are £10.00 annually per person and £20.00 for groups. Please write to us at the address below. If you would like to make a donation towards our work please send a cheque, payable to EMBRACE.

Your support is greatly appreciated.

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