

Building a Welcoming Community

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Launch of AICCMR Directory of Migrant-Led Churches & Chaplaincies

The *Directory of Migrant-Led Churches & Chaplaincies* was produced by the All-Ireland Churches Consultative Meeting on Racism (AICCMR) as a resource for migrants, visitors to Ireland, the media, community groups, Christian churches and service providers. The research was carried out by Dr Livingstone Thompson and Dr Alan Bruce in the Republic of Ireland and Dr Scott Boldt (EMBRACE chairperson), Yvonne Naylor, Rob Fairmichael and Naomi Brown in Northern Ireland. The booklet provides a snapshot in time. The information is inevitably going to change so it will be updated regularly on the inter-church web site www.irishchurches.org. The booklet can also be printed off from the EMBRACE web site.

The directory shows that there are 361 new local faith communities, congregations and chaplaincies run by migrants and for migrants; 33 are in Northern Ireland.

Michael Earle, General Secretary of the Irish Council of Churches and Executive Secretary of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting, explains in the introduction why new churches are formed: 'Many of our new neighbours come from strong church-going backgrounds and look for an identity with their homeland that helps them make the huge adjustment to living in a new country'. Many others, however, are 'adding to the significant growth taking place within indigenous churches'.

Speakers highlighted how difficult it can be for us to accept things being done in a different way. As Scott Boldt said, it is both 'incredibly exciting and incredibly daunting'. Protestant and Catholic difference is no longer the sole dynamic, with some of the new churches not recognising each other as Christian.

Fr Irenaeus du Plessis, of the Antiochian Church of St Ignatius, Belfast, (pictured right) formally launched the book with a moving address that emphasised the positive potential of the situation. Christians are all strangers on this earth with a theology that instructs us to make foreigners welcome. If we despise people here, what will we say to them in the hereafter?

'The womb of the church is much wider than our concept.'

He sees his own newly opened church in North Belfast (see below) as a house of prayer for all nations.

Antiochian Orthodox Church Opens in Belfast

The ancient church of Antioch dates back to the earliest years of Christianity. Their first church locally is the **Church of St Ignatius**, in the former St James' Church of Ireland building on the corner of Antrim Rd and Cliftonville Rd, Belfast. People from many countries, including Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Russia, Serbia and Ukraine attend services and find fellowship there. They have a pan-orthodox policy and a Romanian Orthodox congregation uses the church regularly. Read more on their web site: <http://www.belfast.antiochireland.org/>

See also the Orthodox Ireland Pilgrimage site. <http://www.pilgrimageireland.com/index.html> and <http://www.earlychristianireland.org/>

From 12 o'clock to 6 o'clock on Saturdays there is an exhibition of icons and, at 6 o'clock, the service of Great Vespers attracts local people from all denominations. Safe in the

knowledge that this form of worship dates back almost 2000 years, Fr Irenaeus says people feel free to worship in 'a non-threatening environment where you can immerse yourself in prayer'.



The Don't Be a Stranger Campaign

The Evangelical Alliance's **Don't Be a Stranger** campaign is aimed at encouraging the public to build strong communities that are especially welcoming to migrants. It showcases the stories of newcomers to the UK, and the churches working with them. See <http://www.eauk.org/nostrangers/>

The campaign was launched at the EA's flagship event, the Temple Address, 28 November, 2008. In his address, Archbishop John Sentamu spoke of his dislike of the word 'tolerance'. Where he grew up in Africa, what was practiced was 'magnanimity', meeting the other person half way.

When Archbishop William Temple gave his lecture in 1943 he argued the need for the economy to be seen as the servant not the master. He said that non-economic questions had to be asked as to whether economic methods or structures help or hinder the development of people in community. John Sentamu argues that recovery today can only begin when these questions are answered through neighbourliness and mercy, community and service. You can see a section of Archbishop John Sentamu's address and some of the reactions to it on the Evangelical Alliance web site <http://www.eauk.org/articles/temple-address.cfm#video>.

A second video examines how Christians have responded to increased migration in the UK. You can also read more about the campaign and download a full copy of the address: <http://eauk.org/articles/temple-address.cfm>.

'...be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us...' Ephesians 5 1-2

Please note our new address:

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Immigration Issues

Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Bill 2009

Along with other voluntary groups, EMBRACE is concerned at aspects of the immigration bill that is making its way through Parliament. These are some of the worries.

- It will take longer and be more difficult to 'earn' UK citizenship. (See below.)
- The Common Travel Area between UK and Ireland and GB and N. Ireland, will effectively be abolished with the introduction of increased border controls.
- Immigration officials will have the equivalent of police powers, without proper oversight and safeguards.

As the Bishop of Lincoln, Rt Rev Dr John Saxbee, said during the Committee Stage in the House of Lords, on 11 February 2009:

'After all, what is a border? Is it a barrier or is it a meeting place? I imagine that most of us want to believe that a border can be a meeting place. Therefore, I imagine that most of us would rather not be debating a Bill which is predicated on a pathology of suspicion and a predetermination towards exclusion rather than welcome.'

http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200809/ldhansrd/ldallfiles/peers/lord_hansard_1503_od.html

EMBRACE has plans to lobby about these issues, and about the continued lack of oversight and transparency in the implementation of current immigration legislation. Under Operation Gull which is led by police and immigration officers, 600 people were picked up last year and most were detained and removed.

The Points-Based Immigration System and Proposed Citizenship Changes Worry Migrant Workers

Katrina Albarico of the Filipino Group within the Parish Pastoral Council of St Colmcille's church in Ballyhackamore, Belfast, has alerted EMBRACE to the concerns of recent immigrants and their employers. We have benefited from the skills of people from countries such as India and the Philippines, especially in the health service. New immigration rules make it increasingly difficult to get permission to work here if you come from outside the European Economic Area. In addition, the proposed Pathway to Citizenship in the new Bill going through Parliament (see above) puts added obstacles in the way of recent incomers. Katrina says: 'As one of the migrants who became affected when the rule for residency was changed retrospectively from four to five years in 2005, I strongly feel for the ones who have to face harsher and constantly evolving rules as it is now.'

Public service union UNISON and the Joint Council for the Welfare of Migrants have been running petitions on this issue.

New Report on Migration and Integration

The Equality Commission report, *New Migration, Equality and Integration: Issues and Challenges for Northern Ireland*, by Neil Jarman and Agnieszka Martynowicz highlights the issues raised by recent immigration in Northern Ireland. It also focuses on concerns about the equal treatment of migrant workers and how our increasingly diverse population can be integrated effectively. Read more at <http://www.equalityni.org/> following the link to Migrant Workers Report.

CAB Report: In the Dark

In December 2008 Citizens Advice (CAB) published a report giving evidence of the denial of basic employment rights here. Many of the 23,000 people who consult CAB each year about workplace rights are incomers. *In the Dark* shows that many of the foreign people working here are not given proper contracts and/or pay slips. 'A reality of extremely long hours and low rates of pay coupled with the denial of other basic employment rights such as the right to paid holiday and sick pay exists for many migrant workers in Northern Ireland.' To read more see <http://www.citizensadvice.co.uk/en/Publications/Social-Policy-Reports/In-The-Dark/>

Rights for Agency Workers

The Department for Business Enterprise & Regulatory Reform includes information for N. Ireland in its new information leaflet, *Agency Workers: Know Your Rights*. It can be downloaded at <http://www.berr.gov.uk/files/file49917.pdf>

See also <http://campaigns.direct.gov.uk/agencyworkers/>

The guide, *Your Rights at Work*, is being revised locally by the Department of Employment and will be available in several languages. The Department is also hoping to develop enhanced powers of investigation and prosecution. There are currently two inspectors with power to investigate and prosecute locally-based employment agencies.

The Right to Marry

Most immigrants are required to obtain a Certificate of Approval from the Secretary of State, at a cost of £295, before they are allowed to marry. The Law Centre NI has complained that this is a violation of a fundamental human right. The scheme is discriminatory as well as expensive, as it does not apply to marriages according to Church of England rites, although this anomaly may be removed soon.

Refugee and Asylum Issues

Destitution and Other Money Issues Concern NICRAS

Small numbers of people seek asylum here and that makes it all the more frustrating that destitution is still a major issue for the **Northern Ireland Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers (NICRAS)**. People who have been refused leave to remain at the end of a long, gruelling process are unlikely to be eligible for continued Home Office support. If they are prepared to return home voluntarily, they can receive accommodation, and subsistence vouchers but if they are unwilling to return to their country of origin they quickly become destitute, as they are not allowed to receive welfare benefits or to work.

NICRAS is also concerned about people who cannot find the money for college fees and the difficulties for those who live on the outskirts of Belfast, in finding money to travel to school or college, especially if they are only receiving vouchers.

The **NI Human Rights Commission** research on destitution among people with little or no recourse to public funds is due to be published in June. The people of concern include asylum applicants whose claims have failed, irregular migrants, and some categories of migrant worker who find themselves jobless. Look out for the report on www.nihrc.org

(If you would like to assist NICRAS in helping destitute people see page 4, EMBRACE Emergency Fund.)

CHURCH NEWS

The World on Our Doorstep

Belfast Bible College hosted the **World on our Doorstep** event in January. It was organised by **Mission Agencies Partnership (MAP)**, which is comprised of 43 mission agencies, and was facilitated by the **N I Evangelical Alliance**. The best-attended MAP event in recent years aimed to educate, and empower Christians to reach out to the growing numbers of people coming here. The lunch was cooked and given as a gift by local Polish, Chinese, Filipino and Indian Christians.

Brazilian Pastor Jose Carlos Lara of **Latin Link**, who pastors a congregation of Portuguese speakers in Dungannon delivered the keynote address on the Biblical mandate of 'welcoming the stranger.' Seminars on the cultural mindset of Muslims, Asians and Europeans were also held, and worship led by the Lisburn Portuguese-speaking congregation. To read more see <http://www.eauk.org/articles/world-on-our-doorstep.cfm>

Read about **Latin Link** <http://www.latinlink.org>

From Ghana to East Belfast



Nicholas Lebey first came to East Belfast in 2006 on an assignment with **YWAM South Africa (Youth with a Mission)**. Now he is back again working in Willowfield Church of Ireland Parish. His youth work involves an after-school football club and an Active Youth evening with 100-150 kids. He does some detached work with schools, including lunchtime discussion groups and RE classes at Knockbreda High School. He is also involved in the parish's healing prayer ministry on the streets.

A special project is the **Connect** group that meets weekly. This allows people with an African or Caribbean background (what he calls the Afro community) to meet and support each other, and also find out information that will help them to integrate into the wider community. Some members of the group have had problems with visa renewal and racism, but most are happy with their lives here. Nicholas recently organised an evening to celebrate Ghanaian Independence Day, which attracted over 100 people from different African countries. While some of the Afro people in the area attend mainstream churches, many feel more comfortable in local African congregations. He says that it can be

isolating to be the only black person in church and our worship styles may also seem strange. Willowfield Parish is starting to hold monthly services led by minority-ethnic people, starting with the African community. Nicholas says 'We need to create opportunities for people to meet [local and incomer] without any fear of intimidation. Mutual respect and openness are the key to a healthy society where we all accept each other, where, in the words of Scripture, we become "each other's keepers".'

Willowfield also has a member of staff looking after activities for people from Eastern and Central Europe.

Corrymeela Refugee Integration Project

The Corrymeela Community in partnership with the Northern Ireland Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers (NICRAS) has just begun a project to encourage integration between the local community and the small but growing numbers of refugees in Northern Ireland. Activities will be focused mostly in Belfast.

Project worker **Ann Marie White** will work to develop understanding between local people and refugees, reducing the potential for friction, and increasing the potential for members of the refugee community to fit into the local community. The project will also involve the development of formal and informal training. Most activities will take place in the Greater Belfast area and the project has funding up to the end of 2011.

St Vincent de Paul Brings People Together in Armagh

Kathy Donnelly co-ordinates activities at the St Patrick's Conference, Malachy's Centre in Armagh City, and is determined that they include the whole community. English classes for migrant workers, and the 'fun', but educational, computer classes attract Polish, Latvian, Lithuanian, Indian and Traveller children. Day excursions for all have been popular during school holidays.

Migrant families have begun to buy houses in the area and seem to like life in Armagh. Many incomers are keen to take part in local activities and melt into the city rather than be seen as representatives of their national group. They say 'We don't want to stand out'. On the negative side, some children tend to stay in their houses and this may be because they fear racist abuse such as name-calling.

The recession has increased the number of migrant workers in need. Kathy is aware of some sad cases where workers just fell short of a full, uninterrupted year's work while registered on the Home Office Worker Registration Scheme (WRS). This is required before they are entitled to full welfare benefits. 'I keep telling everyone how important it is to register on the WRS straight away.' However, the increased need has not been dramatic and some younger Polish workers have gone back home.

Pancake Tuesday, or Doughnut Thursday?

Polish Christians here can choose whether to have a last big feast on Shrove Tuesday with pancakes, or use up all their calorie-rich ingredients on Tlusty Czwartek, (Doughnut Day or Fat Thursday). Huge doughnuts with rich fillings and sweet toppings are eaten as a last treat before the Lenten period of fasting and abstinence. Belfast Lord Mayor Tom Hartley chose that day to invite Polish people to his parlour to celebrate the contribution of Polish culture to Belfast. Some local people were forced to cut up their doughnuts before trying to eat them!

EMBRACE News

Christmas Party for Refugees

On 17th December EMBRACE helped to facilitate the NICRAS Christmas party for people seeking asylum and refugees in City Church, Belfast. The evening included children's entertainment, food and music. EMBRACE greatly appreciated the assistance given by the Committee, members, friends, the catering team and party planner, **Selwan Tang**. For photographs see <http://www.embraceni.org/category/about-us/embrace-news/>

Committee News

Members continue to fulfil speaking engagements. Scott Boldt (Chair) was involved in Methodist Missions month, speaking in Doagh, Glashy and Portaferry churches and leading workshops at the Methodist Missionary Society conference. Richard Kerr has recently addressed the Christian Union at Queen's University. A Committee morning of reflection was held at Drumalis Retreat Centre on Monday 23 March, led by Fr Perry Gildea.

EMBRACE on the Street

EMBRACE on the Street raises awareness of migrant destitution and provides practical assistance through the donation of clothing, bedding, toiletries and non-perishable foodstuffs. Collections are undertaken by a variety of churches throughout NI on a rota basis. Recently Portaferry and Glashy Methodist Churches and the Antiochian Orthodox church have joined the rota.

The items are stored temporarily in Edgehill Theological College and then distributed through specific aid organisations (for example Homeplus, the Simon Community, St Vincent de Paul and the Welcome Centre) to those on the street and in hostels. The actual requests for donations vary depending on the time of year and current need of the aid organisations. The role of coordinating the collections has now been passed on from **Connor Mulholland** to **Scott Boldt**. Thank you, Connor, for all your hard work.

If you would like your church to be involved in the EMBRACE on the Street project contact Scott by phone 028 90686933 or email rec@edgehillcollege.org.

EMBRACE Emergency Fund

Over the past year EMBRACE has distributed over £1,700 to meet a range of needs through partner organisations such as NICRAS (the N. Ireland Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers), The Welcome Centre, Homeplus, Bryson One Stop Shop, CWA (Chinese Welfare Association), BELB Education Welfare and STEP (The South Tyrone Empowerment Programme). In every case there was no recourse to public funds.

We have paid for flights home for destitute migrant workers to a range of countries including Bulgaria, Romania, Portugal, Slovakia, Poland and the Czech Republic and bus fares for Asylum Seekers to travel to England. We have provided hostel accommodation and food for destitute migrant workers and people seeking asylum, as well as for some people who were waiting repatriation by IOM (The International Organization for Migration). We have been paying school bus fares for Roma children in South Belfast who would otherwise not be able to attend secondary school and for a school uniform for another child who was seeking asylum.

New Resources

The **Parish-Based Integration Project** in Dublin has published *Unity and Diversity in Our Churches*, an excellent booklet to assist local parishes and congregations with the integration of new residents into their faith communities and Irish society.

The Changing Face of Britain

The **Catholic Association for Racial Justice (CARJ)** celebrates its 25th anniversary in 2009 by publishing a pamphlet looking at the history of the group and the changes and challenges faced today.

The **Law Centre NI** has published a leaflet that explains to trafficked people, who are subject to labour exploitation, including forced prostitution, how the Centre can help them. *Exploited* includes information in English, Albanian, Brazilian Portuguese, Czech, French, Lithuanian, Malaysian, Mandarin, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian and Thai. This choice of languages reflects the countries of origin of people who have been trafficked here. Help can be accessed via the helplines **Belfast (028) 9024 4401** and **Derry (028) 7126 2433**.

These resources and many more can be consulted at the EMBRACE office. Please phone 07969921328 to ensure that the office is open. (Please note our new address, pages 1 and 4.)

Forthcoming EMBRACE AGM

The AGM will be held on Thursday 14th May, 7.30 - 9.30pm at Edgehill College, 9 Lennoxvale, Belfast. The title for the evening is 'Moving beyond Welcome: Perspectives from Migrant Churches' and will include contributions from leaders of NI migrant churches. Denise Wright will also speak, briefly, about how the EMBRACE Emergency Fund has been used in the past year.

Continue to Support EMBRACE Emergency Fund

As you will see in Column 1, the deep recession has inevitably increased the level of destitution and the demands upon other voluntary groups whom we assist where other funds are not available. More migrant workers are losing their jobs before they have been long enough in registered work to be entitled to state benefits. People whose asylum claims have failed may become destitute (see Page 2). So please continue to trust us to use your money wisely. We work through established organisations following set criteria.

Thinking of Joining Us or Making a Donation?

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.

Please note our new address:

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