

## Moving Beyond Welcome



The EMBRACE AGM set out to engage members and guests with the question of how we move beyond welcome to create meaningful relationships and a sense of belonging for people of all nations.

In his keynote talk, **Peter Finch** (pictured above), of Calvary Christian Centre Belfast, who was born in N Ireland, encouraged those present by sharing his vast experience of pastoring congregations from many different national and ethnic backgrounds in many places, including, Brazil, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Dublin, and now Belfast.

Rejecting racist definitions, he emphasised that all people are made in the image of God. Their heart cry is the same. He quoted from 1 Samuel 16:7

'...the Lord sees, not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.'

We are challenged to ask ourselves: 'How much loyalty do I place on my own culture?' It is important to try to have an inclusive heart.

Peter emphasised the need to answer practical as well as spiritual needs. This would sometimes include advocacy, where the company of a local person can promote a better response from agencies. People also need help with the long-term need to belong in a new community, especially through learning the language.

He quoted from 1 Chronicles 12:32 where the men of Issachar '...had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do...' Christian leaders today must keep up with the changing times and also be aware of the cultural/spiritual characteristics of people from different national and ethnic groups. In networking with newcomers, it is important to be self-aware, and to be prepared to learn from the gifts of others. Every people group has something special to contribute.

A characteristic of the present period of increased migration locally has been the growth of independent worshipping groups, especially African churches (see also page one of Newsletter No 13). This is caused by both a local lack of interest in interaction and a trend towards isolationism among Christians who have newly arrived here. Peter Finch hopes that this will just be a staging point, as interaction and cross-pollination are vital.

Peter reflected how effective teachers connect well with themselves, with others and with their subject. The challenge of connection for Christians is to be aware of our strengths and weaknesses, and understand our own cultures, as well as understanding God and others.

The practical model, which he has developed effectively in Dublin and elsewhere, is that of 'one church and many congregations'. People can start with unity of the spirit and progress to areas of faith.

(The challenge of connection was the subject of small group discussion during the AGM. To read more see page 4.)

### **Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Bill 2009, Latest**

In the last newsletter we indicated our concerns about this Bill, especially the threat of increased border internal controls, and the way in which it plans to put increasing obstacles in the way of recent migrants who want to integrate fully by becoming citizens.

The Bill has now been discussed in the House of Lords and will move to be debated in the Commons in June. EMBRACE welcomes the fact that plans to increase border controls within the Common Travel Area (CTA) between the UK and the Republic of Ireland and GB and Northern Ireland were thrown out by the House of Lords. The Government, however, hopes to reinstate these proposals in the Commons.

EMBRACE has written to all MLAs and local MPs to inform them about the group's disquiet, and was among a number of groups that presented a joint UNISON (the public service union)/ STEP (South Tyrone Empowerment Programme) briefing document to our local MPs. David Simpson, MP, DUP, received the document, along with a migrant worker petition on citizenship, at Stormont on 18 May. Other local politicians met migrant worker representatives and people from support and human rights groups including UNISON, STEP, the Law Centre, NICE (the Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities) and EMBRACE. Placards asked for respect for migrant workers, and human rights, and for the withdrawal of the bill. (Read more on Page 2.)

### **Urgent Appeal for EMBRACE Emergency Fund**

As this Newsletter goes to press, the Emergency Fund contains just £9.00. The continuing recession means that even more foreign nationals are becoming destitute as jobs are lost. In addition Roma children still need help with school bus fares, failed asylum applicants still live on the breadline. EMBRACE tries to help those who have no recourse to public funds or other sources of assistance. If you feel that you can spare some money please consider prayerfully if this work is something you could support. See page 4 for details as to how to send your donation.

**Please note our new address:**

**Contact us:**

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**Email: [info@embraceni.org](mailto:info@embraceni.org)**

## Immigration and Refugee Issues

### Migrant Workers Feel Insulted by Citizenship Provisions in Proposed Legislation (See also page 1.)



Young Filipina women sheltering from the rain on the steps of Stormont, at the rally on 18 May, when the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Bill briefing for NI MPs was handed over.

The recommendations in the briefing to NI politicians on the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Bill are as follows:

- Immigration Officer powers should not be extended, but should they be, they must be accompanied by PACE (Police and Criminal Evidence) safeguards and an oversight mechanism must be implemented;
- The proposals relating to citizenship and naturalisation are damaging and should be removed;
- The duty for the welfare of children should be re-drafted to reflect international standards and must apply to any child who comes into contact with UK immigration authorities;
- The Clause, effectively removing the Common Travel Area (amended by the Lords), should not be reinstated;
- The definition of a short-term holding facility should be reviewed.

The briefing also includes personal responses to the Bill from UNISON members.

Flor Alafante, a Filipina nurse working in a nursing home in Craigavon, attended the Stormont handover. She is quoted in the briefing:

'I work in a nursing home and could not believe my ears when I heard that migrant workers could be asked to do voluntary work to 'earn' their citizenship. It made me feel really angry. Surely my work qualifies for community service! And I don't see I could do voluntary work when I already work long hours with changing shifts!'

Another nurse, Ricky Gallo, is reported explaining how the Bill's proposals would inhibit community integration:

'I think this bill is making it harder for us to get involved in anything, not the other way round! You have to work and make sure nothing goes wrong with your work, because everything depends on you keeping that job. And then, you never know what will happen next. You always feel like they could send you home, so you don't really want to get involved in anything, because it doesn't feel like this is definitely going to be 'home' until you've got some kind of settled status.'

To read the full document, see [www.stepni.org](http://www.stepni.org), following the link to Other Services.

### Refugee Bodies also Criticise the Proposed Legislation

The British Refugee Council, the Scottish Refugee Council, and the Welsh Refugee Council are also unhappy about the citizenship proposals:

'Refugees whose need for protection is recognised by the UKBA should immediately be given permanent rights of settlement so they can rebuild their lives. They should not be faced with further hurdles such as extra years of 'probationary citizenship' and should not be made to fulfil additional obligations such as doing voluntary work.'

They also want Judicial Review in the High Court to be retained for immigration cases. The briefing can be downloaded at [http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/policy/briefings/2009/revise\\_bci\\_briefing.htm](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/policy/briefings/2009/revise_bci_briefing.htm)

### Numbers of People Applying for Asylum Locally

There were 194 applications for asylum in Northern Ireland in the period from April 2008 to the end of March 2009. These included 164 single people and 30 families, 146 male applicants and 48 females. The main countries of origin were Somalia, China, Zimbabwe and Kuwait.

### RAG Emergency Helpline

People detained under immigration legislation can find it difficult to inform friends or legal advisors and may lose contact with all their support mechanisms when they moved from N. Ireland to removal centres in GB. This includes people whose asylum claims are at the end, or are nearing the end, of the legal process. It also includes some people who might want to claim asylum.

Last year the Refugee Action Group (RAG) published an information pack for people who might be in danger of detention. This June, with the co-operation of the Law Centre (NI), they are also setting up an emergency out-of-hours telephone helpline, run by a rota of volunteers. They will offer to pass on information about the detention to family and friends, and to an immigration solicitor. The scheme should also produce valuable information about what happens to people whose detention is normally impossible to research, as they do not appear in official statistics. So, it is hoped that travellers who observe someone being detained will also ring the helpline.

Around 20 people have volunteered to be part of the rota. RAG is grateful to the Law Centre for facilitating the training for the volunteers who undertake this valuable work. The first training has taken place, but if you want to volunteer, please let EMBRACE know. EMBRACE also has cards with information about the emergency number, and copies of the information pack.

**RAG Immigration Emergency Helpline: 0800 8400 495.**

### New Support Services for Human Trafficking Victims

An increased recognition of the seriousness of human trafficking here has led to new support services being put in place. A new specialist PSNI unit has been set up to rescue trafficked people and prosecute people who are guilty of sexual exploitation, domestic servitude and forced labour. Local female victims of sexual trafficking will be looked after by Women's Aid. In the last few weeks, several women have been rescued by police, in co-ordinated raids on brothels here and in G.B. To read more see <http://www.nio.gov.uk/goggins-announces-extensive-new-support-services-for-victims-of-human-trafficking/media-detail.htm?newsID=15921>

## CHURCH NEWS

### One Hundred Thousand Ways to Welcome

Emma Cowan organised an evening on 11 June in All Souls' Church Hall, Elmwood Ave, Belfast, to discuss, among other things, how far the theology of hospitality extends in practice to people on the margins of society, including migrant workers, people seeking asylum and refugees. The event was hosted by the Corrymeela Community. This AKT (Activism from the Kitchen Table) initiative posed the question:

'We mythologize about our famous welcomes in this part of the world but how much do we reach out to those who feel excluded?'

The hall was packed with people learning about what it feels like to be someone whose story is not normally heard by the rest of society. Each table tackled a different social issue. Connections were made, preconceptions changed, and practical expressions of welcome and inclusion were discussed. One of the initiatives, shared at the end of the meeting, was the new Refugee Action Group helpline. (See page 2).

### Embracing Diversity

#### Spring Supplement 2009 to Information Update 2008

In previous years, EMBRACE has published an Information Update to ensure that the group's supporters, the Churches and others have up-to-date information about developments in the areas of immigration, asylum, racism and Christian welcome. However, this spring, it was decided to leave a full update until the autumn, when some issues such as economic and population trends and new immigration legislation would be clearer. So, a supplement to last year's update was distributed at the AGM.

The decision to publish a supplement does not mean that little has happened. What started as a brief updating on a few issues grew into a 44-page booklet! Some of the significant information included is as follows:

- The latest population and migrant worker figures
- The likely impact of the financial crisis on migration
- Exploitation in our fishing industry
- How the Worker Registration Scheme contributes to destitution
  - The impact of the points-based system - including its impact on Christian groups (see also Column 2)
  - The cost of being a migrant
  - Comment on the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Bill
  - Recent developments on people trafficking and local support services (See page 2)
- The latest asylum application figures (see page 2)
- Problems for refused asylum claimants on Section 4 vouchers
  - Continued issues around the enforcement of immigration legislation, including an important NI Human Rights Commission report
  - Latest figures on race hate crime
  - Good practice models for integration and cohesion
  - Resources and developments on Christian welcome

Find the supplement on the EMBRACE website at [www.embraceni.org/category/about-us/embrace-resources/](http://www.embraceni.org/category/about-us/embrace-resources/) or contact the EMBRACE office to receive a printed copy.

### Racial Justice Sunday

The Churches Together in Britain and Ireland theme for Racial Justice Sunday, 13 September 2009, is 'The changing Face of Britain and Ireland ' with the Biblical text: 'Who do you say I am?' Mark 8:29. The poster is available to download now at, [http://www.ctbi.org.uk/pdf\\_view.php?id=336](http://www.ctbi.org.uk/pdf_view.php?id=336) and resources will soon be available on the racial justice section of the (CTBI) website: <http://www.ctbi.org.uk/92>. They will include Biblical passages and reflections, homilies and personal stories, suggested hymns and prayers, resources for work with young people, a children's activity and a prayer leaflet.

### Points-Based Immigration System & Christian Groups

The Government is trying to limit immigration to people who fill labour and skills shortages, most recently by a 5-tier, Australian style points-based system for people from outside Europe.

Categories of workers, including 'ministers of religion' 'religious workers' and 'charity workers' must now have licenced sponsors. Organisations are checked for legitimacy and to see if they have the administrative capacity to carry out sponsorship duties. The initial fee, for charitable sponsors is between £300 and £1,000, depending on the size of the organisation. Within 10 working days, sponsors must report things such as delays in taking up work, or absences of more than 10 days.

Churches with substantial administrative capacity find ways of coping with the extra burden of sponsorship, but ministers of religion in the main denominations tend to be technically self-employed, and used to be responsible for their own immigration status. Churches have had to find ways of becoming 'quasi employers'. The expense and complexity of the paperwork deters short-term contracts. Evangelical Alliance (EA) has issued guidelines to assist churches and groups negotiating the system. See <http://www.eauk.org/public%2Daffairs/socialjustice/> Daniel Webster of EA told *Christianity Today*

'While drawing up our guidelines for the new system, it became clear that the Border Agency hasn't taken into account the way Christian activities work in practice.' ... 'Some of the problems we have seen are due to churches not being aware of their new responsibilities, while on other occasions immigration officials have wrongly banned people from the country because they haven't understood their own rules.'

<http://www.christiantoday.co.uk/article/immigration.rules.throw.churches.into.confusion.says.evangelical.alliance/23091.htm>

Locally, Youth with a Mission (YWAM) in Belfast has cancelled some Discipleship training courses because they were unable to bring in trainees from areas such as South Africa, Lebanon, Palestine and North and South America. They were given sponsorship status for charity workers and not for religious workers. The problem may be sorted out in future, but meanwhile they have lost out financially. Jonny Clark of YWAM said that the experience was horrendous, with the main frustration being the inflexibility of the system. They were left with no options.

Dr David Stevens Leader of the Corrymeela Community says that they successfully negotiated the 'huge bureaucratic hassle', but 'The danger is that small organisations will not be able to meet the demands of the legislation and therefore won't be able to have international volunteers.'

For proper immigration advice, people should consult licenced professionals, such as the Law Centre (NI), or CAB. For more information read our new information supplement (See Column 1).

## EMBRACE News

### EMBRACE AGM

The AGM was 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'. Some speakers were unable to attend but this left space for Peter Finch to do justice to the topic. His stimulating address (see page 1) led people into group discussions. These are just some of the ideas that emerged.

- Welcome and integration must start the moment people come to a new country.
- Good relevant information makes people feel welcome.
- People want to experience the new but also to meet people from their own culture and nationality.
- We should not make assumptions about people.
- People need to be listened to and have respect shown for their culture.
- It helps if people are seen to be involved - at the front of the church.
- Generalisations are unhelpful. Don't say 'You Africans', when you wouldn't say 'You Europeans'.
- Some people saw mono-cultural churches as dangerous, but small vulnerable groups may only be happy worshipping on their own at first.

### Chairperson's Report

In his annual report Chairperson Scott Boldt thanked the many people who had supported EMBRACE throughout the year and outlined the work of the group through advocacy, support for destitute migrant people, the Emergency Fund and information and administration.

He pointed out that, while financial support allowed the work of the group to continue, there was little scope for development. EMBRACE will be approaching the Churches for support. It would be helpful to have more supporters who were prepared to donate through standing orders. He finished with words from Jean Vanier.

'When Jesus sent his disciples out on mission, he told them to be poor, to take nothing with them. And he told them to do things that were impossible for them to do all by themselves. So it is for all missions. Communities and their members are called to be poor and to do impossible things, such as to build community and to bring healing, reconciliation forgiveness and wholeness to people. Mission is to bring the life of God to others, and this can only be done if communities and people are poor and humble, letting the life of God flow through them.'

### Committee News

The following committee members were re-elected:

**Dr Scott Boldt, Denise Wright, Rev. Richard Kerr, Margaret McNulty, Sr Brighde Vallely, Tim Foley, Paddy Donnelly, Fr Perry Gildea, Maura McCallion and Lynda Gould.** The AGM was also given notice that it was intended to co-opt **Dr David Stevens** representing the Corrymeela Community and **Karen Jardine** representing Evangelical Alliance. At the next committee meeting the following were appointed as office-bearers: **Scott Boldt** (Chairperson), **Margaret McNulty** (Vice Chairperson), **Maura McCallion** (Secretary) and **Denise Wright** (Treasurer).

### New Resource

#### *What the Bible Says about the Stranger*

An expanded version of *What the Bible Says about the Stranger: Biblical Perspectives on Racism, Migration, Asylum and Cross-Community Issues*, by Kieran J O'Mahony, OSA, has just been published by the Irish Inter-Church Meeting. It was produced by the All-Ireland Churches' Consultative Meeting on Racism (AICCMR). The new edition runs to 72 pages and is a lively mixture of bible studies, questions for reflection, prayers, suggestions for dramatisation and group work exercises. The Biblical themes start with the God of All Creation and move through the Bible to conclude with Pentecost. There is a useful index of biblical citations and a good users' guide. Northern readers would have been assisted by the inclusion of more N Ireland support groups in the final resource section of this fine publication, but that is a very minor criticism. Copies are available from the Inter-Church Centre, 48 Elmwood Ave, Belfast; Edgehill College, Lennoxvale, Belfast; and EMBRACE, price £5.00 including postage and packaging.



EMBRACE Administrator Jill Marrs, of whom Scott Boldt said in his annual report, 'She works on a part-time basis with a full-time heart...'

### Thinking of Joining Us or Making a Donation?

Continue to support the EMBRACE Emergency Fund, (See page 1) and 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. Membership forms are available from our office or can be downloaded from the funding page on our website, visit [www.embraceni.org/category/about-us/embrace-funding/](http://www.embraceni.org/category/about-us/embrace-funding/). Gift Aid forms can also be obtained from the same page of our website or by contacting us. 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'. Donations by cheque to the Emergency Fund should be made payable to 'EMBRACE Emergency Fund'.

Your support is greatly appreciated.

Please note our new address

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