

New Leader of Corrymeela is Dr Inderjit Bhogal OBE, founder of City of Sanctuary Movement



Inderjit Bhogal with Margaret McNulty of EMBRACE in 2009, at a Refugee Action Group meeting in Belfast, when he spoke about City of Sanctuary.

Dr David Stevens Leader of the Corrymeela Community died last year and Dr Inderjit Bhogal has now been appointed to take his place. He is a Methodist minister (former President of the British Methodist Conference and Chief Executive of the Yorkshire and Humber Faiths Forum) and founder of City of Sanctuary, a 'movement to build a culture of hospitality for people seeking sanctuary in the UK' which enables cities to say that they are proud to be a place of safety for refugees. www.cityofsanctuary.org/

Speaking on BBC Radio Ulster's Sunday Sequence, on 27 February 2011, Dr Bhogal described how he had come to Dudley in Yorkshire from Kenya in 1964. When he came to Northern Ireland in the 1970s as a student, his family and friends thought that he was mad because it was at the height of the Troubles. He felt conspicuous then because of the colour of his skin but what he remembers of that time is that wherever he went people said

Welcome ... You are very welcome here.

Those words meant a lot to him because different aspects of his national, ethnic and faith identity set him apart from local people and, as he said, 'in many ways I have been an outsider'. The words of welcome, decades ago, drew him back to 'a beautiful place' (Corrymeela in Co Antrim) and to 'beautiful people'. In those days his difference stood out but now, he says: 'Diversity has become more diverse. It is about being an international community.'

It is up to Irish people who know what it is to be strangers elsewhere in the world to build a culture of welcome.

It's important to get people of different backgrounds to meet together to discover in each other something of the image of God, to build relationships of ... mutual respect and trust and to bring people to the point where they can work together to create something positive.

Of the Corrymeela Community he said

Corrymeela will continue to put in place the building blocks on the long road to reconciliation.

Sister Joan Roddy Retires

In 1999 the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference set up the Refugee Project; to keep the Bishops and the Church informed about asylum issues; to contribute to the pastoral care of refugees and people seeking sanctuary; and contribute to public policy. Sr Joan Roddy co-ordinated what later became the Refugee and Migrant Project. She facilitated the Churches Asylum Network and published a regular *Sanctuary* bulletin on statistics, events and issues. Joan co-ordinated the project tirelessly and compassionately, creating a network of contacts and working to encourage a climate of welcome and consideration for people from other countries. She retired in April and the project closed. EMBRACE wishes Joan a happy and fulfilling retirement and Denise Wright, EMBRACE Chairperson said:

Joan has not only been an advocate for those who might not otherwise have had a voice but she has also been a good friend and inspiration to those of us who have been blessed to work with her. She has the great gift of being able to listen, discern and speak with wisdom in difficult situations. Those of us who know her well also know that there is no such thing as retirement in the Kingdom of God and we look forward to seeing how her gifting will be used in the years to come.

EMBRACE Prayer Group

April 2011's EMBRACE prayer letter has the same theme as that of the Spring Meeting and AGM: 'Seeds of Hope' (see page 4.) This is an extract.

A man throws seed on the land. Night and day - while he sleeps, while he is awake - the seed is sprouting and growing; how, he does not know. (Mark 4:26-28)

In many ways EMBRACE is a sower of seeds, especially the seeds of compassion and welcome for the stranger who may happen to arrive in our midst. Our hope and prayer this month is that the seeds we all sow will germinate and fully flower in the fertile ground of the churches and that concern for those on the margins will lead members and leaders to effective action on their behalf.

Read more www.embraceni.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/April-Prayer-Letter.pdf

Contact us:

EMBRACE
48 Elmwood Ave, Belfast BT9 6AZ
Tel: 079699 21328
Web: www.embraceni.org
Email: info@embraceni.org

EMBRACE is a group of Christians from different denominations working together to promote a positive response to people who are seeking asylum, refugees, migrant workers and people from minority-ethnic backgrounds living in Northern Ireland.

REFUGEE & IMMIGRATION ISSUES

Short Term Holding Facility in Larne

The UK Border Agency (UKBA) can detain people who are suspected of immigration offences or about to be removed or deported, including people at the end of the asylum process. Immigration detainees are no longer housed in N Ireland but are transferred to Removal Centres in GB. Under the Operation Gull joint police and UKBA immigration enforcement project a difficulty sometimes arises in immediate removal. People are usually taken out by ferry and operators only allow a small number of detainees on each boat. This can cause delays and at present some people are held for a time in the custody suites of Police Stations. This is far from ideal so UKBA is adapting part of Larne police station to become a short term holding centre, which will open in late summer 2011. It will accommodate 22 adults who can be held for no more than 7 days. The proximity to the international airport may mean that some people will be directly removed to their home countries, rather than routed through GB.

The Alternative to Child Detention

The new coalition Government announced its intention to end child detention but anxieties are being expressed that detention of families is being reintroduced through 'pre-departure accommodation facilities'. The Home Office has contracted Barnardo's to run a new holding centre for families at Pease Pottage, Sussex. <http://ncadc.wordpress.com/2011/03/10/barnardos-to-help-run-new-family-detention-centre/>

Signing at Drumkeen House

Some people who are seeking asylum here have to sign regularly with the authorities. They used to do this at police stations but it now happens in the UK Border Agency enforcement and enquiry office, Drumkeen House, in South Belfast. Volunteers from **Refugees in Time of Need (RITON)** have been helping with lifts for some of the people who have to sign, as they mostly live several miles from the offices. The volunteers are not allowed on the premises and are disturbed to find that people signing are only allowed onto the premises within 15 minutes of their appointment and there is no shelter for them outside. The lifts are much appreciated.

News in Brief

Friendship Clubs are Spreading

For example **Foyle Multicultural Forum** has set up a weekly friendship club in SEEDS Café del Mundo, Guildhall Square, Derry. See www.foylemf.org/

New Voters

People from 25 countries registered to vote before the May elections, including 2000 from Poland, 900 Portuguese and 800 Lithuanians. www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-12780447

Diversity in Action Northern Ireland (DIANI)

The DIANI project run jointly by Barnardo's and the National Children's Bureau aims to improve the lives of children who are migrants, seeking asylum or refugees. They encourage networking and have been running valuable training for people working with minority-ethnic children. See www.ncb.org.uk/diani/diani.aspx

Research on Health and Health Provision

The Belfast Health Development Unit's research document *Barriers to Migrant Health and Wellbeing in Belfast* carries findings that should be helpful to all health policy makers and practitioners. The issues highlighted include problems in accessing services, language barriers, racism and harassment. People from some countries may have lacked preventative healthcare before coming here. There are cultural taboos around issues such as mental health. www.belfasttrust.hscni.net/pdf/Migrant-Health-Strategy.pdf

Worker Registration Scheme Ends

Under transitional arrangements the UK Government placed restrictions on nationals from some of the states that joined the EU in 2004. Under the **Worker Registration Scheme (WRS)** migrant workers from the A8 accession countries (the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia) had to pay £90 to register with the Home Office and needed one year's uninterrupted work before they could be considered for entitlement to full welfare and medical benefits here. The requirement to register was strictly applied and some migrant workers became destitute when they lost their jobs. The **NI Human Rights Commission (NIHRC)** investigated the situation locally and called for abolition. They found that the denial of essential services, homelessness support and welfare benefits caused extreme hardship.

From May 2011 the WRS ceased to exist but foreign nationals still have to pass a strict **Habitual Residence Test** before they are eligible for benefits and apply for social housing. First, they must have the **Right to Reside** or **Right of Abode**. This is not just about being allowed to live here but about having certain rights under the EU Rights of Residence Directive. These Treaty rights attach to EU citizens who are working or studying here and can support themselves. People usually only retain this status while they are working; temporarily unable to work; or are in involuntary unemployment, if they have already worked for a year or more before becoming unemployed, and are genuinely looking for work, with a real chance of getting a job.

When the Right to Reside element of the test is satisfied, habitual residence can be decided. This depends on such things as how long they have been here and whether they intend to stay, employment prospects and where their 'centre of interest' lies which might be shown by whether they own property or have all their belongings with them.

To the disappointment of local support groups, for destitute migrants the situation may be unchanged if they cannot say that they have a real chance of employment. People from Romania and Bulgaria will probably have to wait until 2014 before they have the same rights as people from other EU states and have full access to jobs here.

Blue Blindfold and the Signs of Human Trafficking

Human trafficking is a terrible crime and it is clear from recent PSNI rescues that it is happening here. The official **Blue Blindfold** information campaign has been run again here in order to encourage local people to be aware of the signs. Read more on the EMBRACE web site www.embraceni.org/category/information/trafficking/ Police identified 25 victims of human trafficking locally in 2009–10 and 20 more up to March in 2010/11. (See also page 3.)

CHURCHES NEWS

EMBRACE workshops

EMBRACE held two workshop events recently. On 20 November 2010 over twenty people met in **Templepatrick Presbyterian Church** halls to learn about ways to engage with migrant people. Revd Richard Kerr spoke about the history and ethos of EMBRACE, Denise Wright gave an overview of the recent experience of legislation and Aneta Dabek, EMBRACE development worker (originally from Poland) was able to talk from experience about the value of welcome: 'A smile is the same in any language.'

EMBRACE members and others led short sessions in small groups. Topics included the experience of setting up a friendship club, hospitality, migrant destitution and EMBRACE On the Street, and how to run a language class. Lastly they heard from Maura McCallion and Margaret McNulty about advice EMBRACE has developed with the help of the Law Centre NI on how best to signpost foreign nationals who find themselves in difficulty. See below for how to access the advice.

The **Newry** workshops were held in **Bagenal's Castle** on 12 March and EMBRACE was grateful for the support of the Newry and Mourne Good Relations Officer, Suzanne Rice and for the welcome of the Mayor, Mr Michael Murphy who congratulated EMBRACE and said that the day would be 'all about dialogue'. Twenty-four people from a wide spread of denominations engaged with similar topics to those at Templepatrick. EMBRACE was pleased to have a local participant Sr Helena Daly to lead one of the workshops and share her experience of setting up and running English language classes in Newry.

Feedback from one Newry participant

Q 'What was the most valuable aspect of the workshops for you and why?'

A 'To find like-minded people who are willing to reach out and have a vision of inclusion.'

The Newry event was supported by the **Newry District Inter-Church Forum**, a new group that aims to help build relationships and promote reconciliation locally. Such church groups are ideally placed to come together to equip themselves to help build more welcoming communities.

Would churches in your locality like to get together and ask EMBRACE to hold a workshop event in your area? Just let us know.

Advice and Toolkit for Churches

EMBRACE has been concerned that church people who are well equipped to assist local people, sometimes have difficulty when someone comes to them from another country with crisis issues that are hard to solve. Our website carries suggestions on what to do when people have a family member in immigration detention, for example, or is destitute, with no recourse to public funds. Find out more at www.embraceni.org/category/christian-response/advice-for-churches/ This is part of a toolkit EMBRACE is developing, based on the experience from the workshops, which gives advice on such topics as developing existing church activities to be more inclusive of newcomers, and providing an English language class. We hope to have this available on our website soon, when details of how to access it will be carried on our homepage, www.embraceni.org



Denise Wright, EMBRACE Chairperson, (far right), leads a discussion on Friendship Clubs at the Newry workshops. See Col 1.

Drop-in Ministry

Keith Preston started a drop-in ministry in an unused Presbyterian church on the Lisburn Road, Belfast, in summer 2010. He has shared his experience with others at the EMBRACE workshop events. His location is perfect for the people he is trying to reach, migrants and those who are seeking asylum. The drop-in is primarily a friendship centre as there are already plenty of advice agencies in South Belfast. Team ministry and prayer support are very important.

Ours is a place to come in for free tea and coffee, somewhere warm, somewhere to practice English. Our primary motivation is the love of Jesus Christ and our desire for others to make friends with Him too.

They held special Christmas events, run English classes, hold Farsi-speaking services and are planning an African fellowship group. Once a month they have Sunday lunches when people bring food to share with each other.

It's good as the people feel ownership, it's not a handout, all can bring as they are able.

News in Brief

North Down YMCA Good Relations Conference

Minority Ethnic Development Worker, Elaine Rowan said 'It's about opening up our community to all ... We have a unique opportunity here, to really experience the richness of our increasingly diverse social fabric and today's conference is a chance for us to talk about how we can make the most of this in the future.' Read more

www.northdownymca.org/component/content/article/24-new-fp/78-challenges-for-integration-in-harbour-ward.html

MAP 'World on Our Doorstep' Conference

On 26 February 2011 the Mission Agencies Partnership organised a day for Christians to learn about welcome, hospitality and integration into local churches of people from other cultures and international backgrounds.

Irish Baptist Networks Human Trafficking Conference

In March 2011 IBN facilitated an inter-agency conference with contributions from the Justice Minister, PSNI, Migrant Help, Woman's Aid, Revd Dr Luran Bethell, who works with trafficked women in other countries, and presentations from groups including EMBRACE. (The main papers will be on the Department of Justice website www.dojni.gov.uk/)

EMBRACE NEWS

EMBRACE Spring Meeting & AGM 10 May 2011

In spite of the downturn in the economy what are the positive signs for integration and progress in migrant and local communities? The theme for the EMBRACE Spring Meeting and AGM at Edgehill College is 'Seeds of Hope: Attitudes, Actions and Aspirations for Building a Welcoming Community'. The keynote speaker is Revd Dr Inderjit Bhogal of the Corrymeela Community (see page 1). Dr Helen Young, Field Officer for the Irish Episcopal Council for Immigration will share some of her experience and hopes for integration at parish level, as she talks about her work within the Catholic Church. Aneta Dabek will reflect on her development work with EMBRACE.

Morning of Reflection

On 4 April, the EMBRACE committee, volunteers and staff had a welcome break from the work in a morning of quiet at the Drumalis Retreat Centre. Sr Anna Hailey led a reflection on Sieger Koder's painting 'The Feeding of the Five Thousand'. The reflection was multi-faceted and included consideration of how the disciples share from what they have and who they are, just as in our own lives 'our contributions may be small but Jesus joins with us and multiplies our gifts.' In the light of the AGM theme of seeds of hope Sr Anna reminded the group of just how far we had come from very small beginnings around a decade ago.

Sr Anna included a prayer from *A Companion's Guide* by Denis McBride.

For all who are never invited to celebrations;
for those who are forever overlooked and bypassed
and feel wholly unwanted.

That the Lord might open the eyes and enlighten the
minds of his disciples today to extend a welcome
that will give new life to the neglected. ...

Committee Activities

Many members of the committee, volunteers and staff helped enthusiastically at the EMBRACE workshop events. (See page 3.) EMBRACE has been represented at many conferences, information sessions and networking events; since January that has included the regular meetings of the Churches Asylum Network, Belfast Migrant Forum, Roma support network and the Immigration Sub-Group of the Race Equality Forum. Other events of significance were a South Tyrone Enterprise Partnership (STEP) information day for migrant workers in Newry, an International Roma Rights Day seminar, a Department of Employment and Learning (DEL) seminar on migrant rights and two human trafficking events: an Amnesty seminar and the IBN conference (see page 3).

In March a group of people represented EMBRACE at The **All-Ireland Churches Consultative Meeting on Racism (AICCMR)** gathering in Dublin for a day of 'Listening and Learning', which brought together people from newer, migrant-led churches and the longer established churches in Ireland. (A similar event will be held later in Belfast.)

Scott Boldt gave a talk to Irish School of Ecumenics students. EMBRACE Development Worker Aneta Dabek and Chairperson Denise Wright undertook workshops at a Scout Conference.

EMBRACE will be making a BBC appeal in October.

Web Site

EMBRACE administrator Jill Marrs has been working hard, with the help of Information Officer Margaret McNulty, on the web site to update the factual information which is out-of-date. Recently updated material includes the Migration, Asylum, Immigration Enforcement and Trafficking sections.

Monthly Prayer Sheet

Jenna Liechty Martin has been compiling a prayer sheet each month, with the help of individual members. You can download the April sheet from www.embraceni.org/. Its theme is 'Seeds of Hope'. The March theme was 'Migrant Women', February 'Migrant Children' and January, 'People Seeking Sanctuary and Those Who Support Them'.

Please let us know what you are doing at local level

We realise that we do not carry as many articles as we would like about events outside Belfast. Please let us know what you or your congregation/ parish/ or group are doing, so that we can spread good news and examples of good practice.

EMBRACE On the Street & Emergency Fund

Both these projects continue to be active in providing for the needs of destitute people from other countries and for the exceptional needs of others who cannot pay for the essentials of life.

Due to the harsh winter the emergency fund was in particular demand and a special appeal to supporters in December raised over £1000, this along with a contribution of £1000 from The Black Santa Fund has allowed us to continue to offer support to some very vulnerable people.

EMBRACE On the Street has been equally valuable. It provides practical assistance through the donation of clothing, bedding, sleeping bags, towels, toiletries and non-perishable foodstuffs. Collections are undertaken by a variety of churches throughout NI on a rota basis. A recent request was for toiletries for people who are seeking sanctuary here. What is required depends on the needs at the time. If your church is not already on the collection rota of EMBRACE On the Street and you want to find out what is involved please phone **Ashleigh Hunter** on (028) 9068 6933.

Thinking of Joining Us or Making a Donation?

Continue to support the EMBRACE Emergency Fund 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. 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.

EMBRACE

48 Elmwood Ave, Belfast BT9 6AZ

Tel: 079699 21328

Web: www.embraceni.org

Email: info@embraceni.org



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