

Seeds of Hope: EMBRACE Spring Meeting



Dan Healy of the EMBRACE Committee talking to Inderjit Bhogal before the EMBRACE Spring Meeting and AGM (For more on the event see Page 4.)

Keynote speaker Revd Dr Inderjit Bhogal, OBE, who recently took up his post as Leader of the Corrymeela Community, told those who attended the EMBRACE Spring Meeting and AGM on 10 May that 'Respect', 'Embrace' and 'Life' were three of his favourite words.

He quoted from a poem by Andrew Motion, which is printed on the wall of Sheffield Hallam University. It contains the words: 'What if...?' and he linked this with Martin Luther King's dream that all children would be judged on merit, as themselves not by the colour of their skin. (Dr Bhogal started his work here on the 4 April, the anniversary of the day when Martin Luther King was killed.) Over 40 years on, how do we measure up to his dream and keep it alive? Dr Bhogal asked:

'What is your dream? What are your hopes? What are your words, hopes or aspirations?'



Some of the groups at the Spring Meeting discussing the implications of the keynote speech

His own dream relates to the urgency of working towards better understanding and defeating the prevalent myths and stereotypes about migrants and the need to 'develop relationships of deep respect and trust', seeing each other as made in the image of God. This is 'an ongoing and never-ending

process' until we feel 'a sense of belonging to each other'. He stressed the need to 'build harmonious and hospitable cities where all are valued and feel safe' and the need to help our congregations to value diversity.

Isolation should be a concern. People feel very much on the edge. The Church is locally based and well placed to address inequality through hope, justice and hospitality and has the resources in people, buildings and projects. It has a lot to offer and there is a need to counter the negative attitudes towards what faith is about. The key values are in Micah: 'Justice', 'mercy' and 'humility' and Deuteronomy Chapter 10 – 'What does the Lord require of you? You shall love the stranger as yourself.' This is repeated 37 times. These values need to be promoted: 'Love God; Love your neighbour.' Every world faith shares these values.

Dr Bhogal expressed the hope that EMBRACE and Corrymeela would be partners.

Archbishop John Sentamu Asks: 'Is the Big Society Big Enough to Offer Shelter to Refugees?'

The Anglican Archbishop of York, John Sentamu, was forced to flee from the brutality of Idi Amin in Uganda in the 1970s. With persistent violence in the world, he argued recently in the *Independent* newspaper, that the reduction in numbers of people seeking asylum in industrialised countries is because of tighter immigration controls. He also drew attention to 'unpalatable evidence' about the appalling fate of some people who have been refused asylum in the UK.

The fact is that globally there are no fewer refugees than before: it is just that most refugees continue to be assisted in poor countries.

He concluded:

Easter for Christians is a time of rebirth, resurrection and good news. I would like to see that message transformed into something very practical, human and down-to-earth. I want to belong to a society that treats its vulnerable people with respect, and which holds out the hope of a new life for those who have been battered, bruised and abused. ... Let Easter be a time of hope for everyone – but especially the broken, the homeless, the fugitive and the destitute.

www.independent.co.uk/opinion/commentators/john-sentamu-is-the-big-society-big-enough-to-offer-shelter-to-refugees-2270510.html

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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

Integration Focus for Refugee Week, June 2011

There is a rich variety of events with an upbeat focus in this year's Refugee Week in Belfast, following two years of concentration on destitution within the asylum system. That issue has not gone away but it is good to focus on the positive. The 'week' starts on Saturday 11 June with a family art workshop to create props and a banner for the Lord Mayor's parade, and continues with the launch of Refugee Week at the Ulster Hall, a Book Club discussion, international music at Common Grounds Café, South Belfast and playing a part in a multi-cultural Lord Mayor's Parade. There is a party to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Refugee Convention at the Crescent Arts Centre and a celebration of the contribution of organisations to inclusive neighbourhoods in the same venue.

On 22 June, Fitzroy Presbyterian Church in South Belfast is the venue for an integration market place with themed tables for discussion of a wide number of integration issues, hosted by a range of organisations. Community football teams will take part in a Refugee World Cup tournament and a Northern Ireland Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers (NICRAS) cultural celebration will be held in City Church in south Belfast.

Refugee Community Support

The Northern Ireland Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers (NICRAS) relaunched its web site this spring. Read about their activities at www.nicras.btck.co.uk/ and if you wish to support the group go to www.nicras.btck.co.uk/SupportUs

Minority-Ethnic People & Women's Aid

A recent meeting of the Belfast Migrant Forum was told that over the past two years Women's Aid refuges in Belfast and Lisburn had supported 612 women and 511 children, and 40 women plus 35 children, respectively. Of these, 20 women and 3 children had been trafficked and 109 women and 155 children were from minority-ethnic groups.

Women from minority-ethnic backgrounds who experience abuse may experience more difficulties than local women because language and cultural barriers make it more difficult for them to tell their stories and receive the full benefits from staff support and the solidarity of the other women.

There are also problems for Women's Aid if the women are in an immigration category that gives them no right to welfare support here. In that case, the charity may be unable to receive any public money towards their accommodation.

Forced Labour Research Findings

On 8 June a multi-agency report co-ordinated by the Institute for Conflict Research was published, which found instances of severe exploitation in N Ireland, especially in the fishing, mushroom and catering industries, and particularly among eastern Europeans, Filipinos and Chinese people. There are also possible instances within the self-employed sector among some Roma migrants. The report highlights the links between vulnerability and a lack of English language skills, social and support networks, and local knowledge. Read more about the findings and recommendations:

www.jrf.org.uk/publications/forced-labour-northern-ireland-exploiting-vulnerability

Events Focusing on Human Trafficking



Muriel and Geoff Chad of King's Church, Bangor, with their daughter, Debbie Cooley who works for Hope for Justice

The **Hope for Justice** group spoke about their work at an awareness raising event at Belfast's City Church on 7 May. They explained that 99% of the victims of human trafficking are never rescued. Hope for Justice does not advocate vigilante activity but their experienced investigators work with the authorities to free victims and bring perpetrators to justice. This rescue mission is made possible through the support of **Act for Justice Groups** and **Church Partners**. To find out more go to www.actforjustice.org.uk or www.hopeforjustice.org.uk or contact Owen Crane: owen.crane@hopeforjustice.org.uk.

On 22 June, **Migrant Help** is hosting an inter-agency workshop in Belfast, with an all Ireland perspective. It is one of the groups that undertakes ongoing support for people who are recognised officially as having been trafficked.

Perceptions of Africa and African People

In May the **Afro-Community Support Organisation Northern Ireland (ACSONI)** hosted an important international conference in Belfast on African images and their impact on public perception, a subject in line with their own development and capacity-building work which aims to challenge the negative images and promote the positive.

Images of African people usually depict poverty, economic dependency and starvation. All these factors are key drivers to inequality of opportunity, discrimination, poor race relations, and misconceptions about people from the Afro community and the African continent.

Read more at www.acsoni.org/DE.htm

ACSONI is one of the signatories to the Code of Conduct on Images and Messages which has the following principles:

- Respect for the dignity of the people concerned;
- Belief in the equality of all people;
- Acceptance of the need to promote fairness, solidarity and justice.

The code also requires signatories to avoid untruthful, stereotyping or sensational images, have the permission of the people portrayed and allow those whose situation is represented to communicate their stories themselves. Read more at www.acsoni.org/code.htm

CHURCHES NEWS

Newry Churches Enjoy an Inter-Cultural Event

In April, **Newry District Inter-Church Forum (NIICF)**, assisted by EMBRACE and Newry and Mourne District Council, hosted an afternoon of music, song and dance to encourage contact among people from different cultures living in the Newry area. About fifty people from eight different nationalities were entertained by music and dance from Bulgaria, Spain, Bangladesh, Poland and Ireland.

Churches working together are ideally placed to facilitate people from other countries in meeting and getting to know local people and each other.

Hosting English classes in Richhill, Co. Armagh

Helping our new neighbours learn English will empower them and help overcome barriers of distrust.

Since 2006 Richhill Methodist Church has been running English classes with professional tutors employed by the Southern Regional College. Paul Andrews writes that

We always have refreshments half way through the class, which other members provide. This has been a great opportunity to get to know the 'new residents' as we call them.

The people learning English have also been directed to local facilities, helped to find employment and made welcome at church services and events. Read more at www.irishmethodist.org/issues/teaching_english.php



Levante and Marta from Hungary (in the middle), share a cup of tea with Caroline Ritchie and Michael Hawthorne, class tutor.

Also in Armagh...

Leaflets containing guidelines to help parishes become more inclusive, especially to immigrants and other newcomers have been distributed in the Church of Ireland Diocese of Armagh. This is part of a wider diocesan initiative by the Board of Social Responsibility.

As members of the worldwide Anglican Communion we should ensure that our churches are open and welcoming places for immigrants and other newcomers who may wish to experience the joy of worship with us and to develop relationships within the parish family.

Embracing Diversity: Parish Guidelines

The Role of the Church in Integration in Bangor

In March 2011 North Down YMCA published a research report on the Harbour Ward Integration Project which provides information, support and contact opportunities for migrant workers and families, senior citizens and young men aged over 18, living within the Harbour Ward, Bangor.

Researcher, Elaine Rowan looked at the needs of minority-ethnic communities in the area and the potential for a One-Stop Shop/ Community Hub partnership co-ordinated by the YMCA, which could help to meet the needs of people settling in the area. In analysing existing provision, the report described the work already being done and the potential for partnership with other community organisations and churches. The work of one local church is described.

First Bangor Presbyterian Church

The Church ... has significant experience in offering support and services to the ethnic minority community in the town. Through the dedication and commitment of a number of volunteers under the direction of Helen Sloan the church has delivered language classes, personal mentoring, information sessions, events, etc. The church's new premises are ideal for the provision of a space where people from both migrant and local communities can meet, build relationships and mentoring support. The central location and the variety of room configurations makes it accessible to the whole community for a range of events that could contribute to the promotion of community and personal safety, capacity-building and raising awareness and appreciation of cultural diversity on various levels – individual, community, statutory and corporate.

Read more about the Harbour Ward Project: www.northdownymca.org/your-community/harbour-project.html

Barriers to Friendship and Integration

At the EMBRACE AGM and Spring Meeting, EMBRACE Development Worker **Aneta Dabek** spoke movingly about her work with churches. She told stories about two-way barriers to integration and the positive opportunities within churches. Some extracts:

During the last year I have met many people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, and also people from churches that work, or would like to work, with newcomers. These contacts proved to me that many people from both groups have open hearts and that they would like to know and understand each other better. This indicates great potential but there are barriers, which lie on both sides...

A few months ago I met the leader of a Parent and Toddler group in a local church. She came to me and asked for help. She said, 'Last week two Polish mums came to my group and they don't have very good English, I don't know what to do? Can you help me? I need an interpreter.' ...

Another time a man from my church, whom I had seen there for years, said to me, 'I didn't know that your English was so good. That is why I have never spoken to you before.' Sometimes people who have lived their whole lives here are afraid to speak to newcomers, because they don't want to put them in uncomfortable spots, or embarrass them...

Read more about the AGM and Spring Meeting on Page 4.

EMBRACE NEWS

Spring Meeting (See also page 1.)

In addition to keynote speaker, Dr Inderjit Bhogal, EMBRACE was grateful to Dr Helen Young, Field Officer, Irish Episcopal Council for Immigrants, for speaking about her work within the Catholic Church. Helen is encouraging parishes to have a positive attitude towards people from other cultures, an awareness of their needs, and to involve newcomers in mass and other liturgies and in membership of choirs and parish councils. A first step has been to have a named person in each parish, assigned to ensure that the needs of newcomers are met and to get them to do something, even if it is only to put up a welcome poster in different languages.



Dr Helen Young

Helen is working with regional clusters in the north, south, east and west of the island. This allows networking and the highlighting of local concerns. One significant problem is the exploitation of isolated domestic workers. Cluster meetings provide opportunities to raise awareness about cultural differences and sacramental issues, learning for example, that Filipino parents may expect to have 20 people as godparents.

EMBRACE AGM

Annual Report

Chairperson, Denise Wright presented the report for 2010–11. Reflecting on the year, she noted that increased funding had enabled the employment of Development Worker Aneta Dabek and increased hours for Administrative Assistant Jill Marrs. Mennonite volunteers Peter and Jenna Liechty Martin have been another valuable addition to the work of the group. She highlighted the production of information updates and newsletters by Margaret McNulty and Jill Marrs who keeps the web site up-to-date. She drew attention to the prayer letters organised by Jenna and gave special thanks to Maura McCallion, who has stood down from the committee, for her valued contribution to the work of EMBRACE.

She also thanked all those who had given money to the Emergency Fund and the churches who collect goods as part of the EMBRACE on the Street project, supporting destitute people.

Financial Report

Treasurer Scott Boldt noted the increased flow of funds due to the grant from the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) and significant contributions from the Churches. He also highlighted the £1,000 donation to the Emergency Fund from the Dean of Belfast's sit-out that was timely because of the hard winter. The fund had enabled a number of destitute people to return to Europe and short-term support for homeless migrants and people seeking asylum.

Elections

The following were elected to the EMBRACE committee for the year 2011–12: **Dr Scott Boldt, Paddy Donnelly, Fr Perry Gildea, Br Dan Healy, Revd Richard Kerr, Margaret McNulty, Ruth Watt and Denise Wright.** At a later

meeting of the committee the following office bearers were elected: Chairperson: **Denise Wright**, Vice Chair: **Perry Gildea**, Secretary: **Ruth Watt**, Treasurer: **Scott Boldt** and Information Officer: **Margaret McNulty.**

Aneta Dabek's talk at the AGM and Spring Meeting

As well as highlighting the barriers faced by people from other countries, Aneta spoke about the EMBRACE workshops designed to empower churches in their work with newcomers and her introduction of a Free Translation Service for Church Notices that can be accessed on the web site. It is hoped that renewed funding will allow this work to continue and that there will be five workshop events for churches in different venues during the coming year. (See also page 3.)



Aneta Dabek

EMBRACE Resources

Perry Gildea writes in the EMBRACE June prayer letter:

All through his Galilean ministry Jesus used stories to convey his message. So too he now speaks to us in the stories of those who have come to us looking for safety, a home, work, a place to bring up and educate their families. Unless we make the effort to listen to their personal stories we will not hear Jesus speaking to us through them. One of his repeated appeals was to those 'who had ears to hear'.

Download this and previous prayer letters, the Spring Newsletter and the new 2011 Information Update, *Embracing Diversity*: www.embraceni.org/

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.

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