

Get Involved: Pray



EMBRACE Prayer Group
May 2011

While their presence is often recognised, few people know much about the Irish Traveller community and what they often know is rooted in stereotypes and misperceptions. The Traveller community is the second largest minority ethnic group in Northern Ireland with an estimated population of 1400 people. Defining aspects of Traveller culture include a nomadic lifestyle, a preference for self-employment, placing an emphasis on family and community connections and an oral tradition.

With increasing urbanisation, the nomadic lifestyle and cultural traditions of the Traveller community have been challenged. Because of their cultural differences which do not fit neatly into the mould of an increasingly modern and settled society, people from the Traveller community have often been misunderstood and have been socially, economically, culturally and politically excluded.

Two stories from the Irish Traveller Community illustrate how misunderstanding leads to suspicion, stereotyping and prejudice. Recently, one young girl from the community started her first job working at the counter at a local Belfast retail shop. From the start, she noticed that her clients always counted the change they received very carefully. She also noticed that this wasn't happening to her colleagues and wondered why she was perceived as untrustworthy and unreliable. The continual questioning eventually became unbearable and she decided to leave her job wondering if she would be able to return to work again. Another experience shared by two ladies from the Irish Traveller Community occurred when they were shopping at a local clothing store. Throughout their time at the store they were followed by a shop security guard, just in case they were to steal something.

These brief stories are unsettling and cause us to think of our own attitudes and perceptions towards the Irish Traveller Community and to those who we know little about. We might ask: How might the Church engage with the Traveller community? What might we do to increase our awareness of the issues facing this group of people? How might we gain a better understanding of the distinctive and rich cultural heritage of the Irish Traveller community?

This month we pray for the following.

- We give thanks for the Irish Traveller Community and for their distinctive culture and traditions.
- We give thanks for the many rich cultural heritages present in Northern Ireland.
- We pray for the government who makes laws and regulations, and for agencies that provide assistance and services to minority ethnic groups in Northern Ireland and that they might be mindful of the needs of the individuals in the community.
- We pray for individuals who have experienced forms of prejudice and racism because of their cultural identity.
- We pray that we all might continue to grow in our understanding of those who are different than us and that we might look for the richness in other cultures.