

EMBRACE AGM – 16th May 2013

Reflections shared by Jenna Liechty Martin and Peter Martin

We've been asked to give a short reflection on our time here and we would like to use this time to say thank you the staff, committee and members of EMBRACE for allowing us to work and learn alongside you. It is not an overstatement to say it has been a life-changing experience.

It has seemed at times over the last three years that we have occupied a somewhat awkward position of volunteering at an organisation that seeks to promote welcome to newcomers while we are also newcomers to this land. Perhaps though this also provided us with unique insight into what it means to be a welcoming community.

One of these lessons for us has been that being a guest and being open to the hospitality of others is often just as important as being a host and offering others hospitality. We have been on the receiving end of the generosity and hospitality of too many people to count. We could not have felt comfortable or welcomed in this country and city without that hospitality.

But being a guest is a humbling experience. We are on our host's terms; for example, when invited to a meal we are often in the host's home, eating their food, when they want to eat it, speaking their language, etc. As a guest we must be open to experiencing their world and their reality, willing to listen and to learn.

Since we decided to stick around for several years, we began to encounter times and places where we were not sure if we were the host or guest. This meant we also learned that being a host requires a certain amount of vulnerability; it means inviting others to see who we are and what we value.

In some ways knowing when we are a host and when we are a guest is not always easy, and at times a bit awkward. But, for us, this is one of the reasons EMBRACE exists, because in building a welcoming community it is sometimes required that you are a host and that sometimes you are a guest. EMBRACE empowers people to reach out to strangers, to offer welcome and hospitality and in the process it also develops confidence for individuals, churches and communities to receive the contributions of those who are newcomers.

For us, being a *host* meant others had empowered us to share who we are and to contribute our gifts. You made room for us to express things we value and to share parts of our culture. Being a *guest* meant we needed to open ourselves up to new ways of seeing things, learning new cultural norms and accepting people along with their varied histories and cultures.

This is perhaps one of the most significant learnings we will take away from our experience with EMBRACE. Wherever we live, we hope to take time to be both host and guest, inviting others into our communities and life, but also willing to accept the invitation of hospitality from others.

We would like to end as we began by again thanking you, especially the EMBRACE committee and staff. It has become clear from our experience that the work of EMBRACE is not a simply a cause taken up as a 'job' or a meeting once a month, but it is also a lifestyle and a way of being in this world. In exchange for the opportunity to work with you, we hope to be as generous and hospitable in the communities we live and work in in the future.