

When I saw him from a distance, I thought he was my enemy. When he came closer, I recognised a human being. When I shook his hand, I found a brother.'

Tunisian proverb

A Code of Practice

The Irish Association of NGOs, Dóchas, has a code of conduct on how messages and images are conveyed, based on respect for the **dignity** of the people concerned; belief in the **equality** of all people; and acceptance of the need to promote **fairness, solidarity and justice**. (See www.dochas.ie/code/default.aspx) The code is concerned that situations are not just described truthfully but that an understanding of the complexities is promoted; that images are avoided that 'potentially stereotype, sensationalise or discriminate against people, situations or places'; and that people have the chance to communicate their own stories.

Want to learn more?

Sources and Further Information

African Issues web site: www.coistine.ie/african-issues

Inter-Cultural Insights: Christian Reflections on Racism, Hospitality and Identity from the Island of Ireland edited by Scott Boldt www.embraceni.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/09/InterCultural%20Insights%5B1%5D1.pdf

The Horn of Africa Community in Belfast: A Needs Assessment by Dr Orna Young, 2012

African Images and Their Impact on Public Perception by Dr Orna Young, 2012

http://acsoni.org/uploads/ACSONI_Images_Research_Report_May_2012_.pdf

Voices from the Global South; A Research Report on Migration, 2010

Dóchas NGO code of conduct on messages and images:

http://dochas.ie/Shared/Files/5/Images_and_Messages.pdf

Local Support Organisations

The African and Caribbean Support Organisation (ACSONI) is a community organisation aiming to address the needs and aspirations of people who are from the continent of Africa and African descendent nations. They can also put people in touch with different national organisations and other support groups and provide training. ACSONI, First Floor, 9 Lower Crescent, Belfast BT7 1NR

E-mail: info@acsoni.org Tel: 028 9043 4090 Web: <http://acsoni.org/index.php>

EMBRACE can provide speakers for talks to church, school and community groups. We can deliver presentations on a range of topics relating to welcome, asylum and migration. For more information contact our office (details below).

This leaflet was published by EMBRACE NI who are grateful for the co-operation of ACSONI.

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EMBRACE Information Sheet 7

Attitudes Towards People of African Descent

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So God created humankind in His image... Genesis 1:27

We believe that all people are created in God's image, but in the past 'race theories' judged black African people to be inferior and were used to justify slavery and European economic dominance of the continent. These have been discredited but negative attitudes remain. In the past many people from Ireland travelled abroad as part of the British army, colonial administration or as missionaries. This history may lead to inherited attitudes towards people from other countries - especially former British colonies. African people may still be seen as in need of civilizing through development, education or redemption. This is reinforced by negative images on television or in newspapers about African countries and African/ Caribbean people. The African and Afro-Caribbean Support Organisation NI (ACSONI) has published research about the damaging attitudes perpetuated by the imagery used by charities.

- Africa is portrayed as if it was one country rather than a vast continent of 55 officially recognised countries
- Africa is shown as an area of underdevelopment, famine, dirt and disease, unable to help itself
- Pitiful images of women and children suggest that they have been abandoned by their own men

African Images and Their Impact on Public Perception by Dr Orna Young, 2012

What Do People Learn about Africa?

When surveyed in 2011, local people reported the kind of things they learned in school such as: 'We looked at shanty towns and Egypt', 'Colonisation', 'Only ever really mentioned in relation to charity events', and 'Drought in the Sudan'.

When asked what they associated with Africa, 91% said 'safari and animals'; 89% 'poverty'; 67% 'music and dance'; 60% 'disease'; 52% 'exotic'; and 52% 'corruption'. At the bottom of the list were topics like 'large modern cities' and 'strong economies'.

The Perceptions of Africa and Africans in Northern Ireland Opinion Poll Survey Report, ACSONI 2011

The continent is seldom seen as a repository of faith, or positive community

The United Nations has designated the period 2015–2025 as the International Decade for People of African Descent, with the theme of 'recognition, justice and development'.

'But this narrative of Africa as a land of hopeless, hapless victims is a far cry from the Africa missionaries and religious have come to know and love through years of experience of working for and with our communities in different geographical locations.'

Fr Kieran O'Reilly, SMA, 2009 (now Catholic Bishop of Killaloe)

African and Afro-Caribbean people in Northern Ireland

In the 2011 Census, 5,581 people who are usually resident here said they were born in Africa. In the ethnicity section of the Census only 2,345 people declared themselves to be Black African; 899 as Black Other; and 372 as Black Caribbean. A further 4,998 people identified as Mixed and there will also be people of African descent in those who are in the different Asian categories and in the majority White population. Overall, those of African descent are unlikely to total more than 10,000 people. They have associations with many different countries.

While some have been living here for generations, many have only arrived recently. Immigration rules mean that most of the new arrivals are here to fill highly skilled job vacancies that could not be filled by local people. They are often well educated and multilingual. Some, however, are working in jobs that do not reflect their qualifications. A small number of African people have come here to seek safety by claiming asylum.

Of those who were born in Africa and stated a religious identity in the 2011 census, 3,113 were Christian and 756 were from other faiths.

Their Experiences Here

Many experience racism but also tell positive stories of welcome. Some recent arrivals would suffer severely if they were to lose their jobs, as people from outside Europe have to be here for at least five years before they can apply for permanent residence and be entitled to out-of-work benefits.

'Anywhere you go here, agencies and other departments just see you as someone who doesn't know anything because you are black.' ... 'Some people here are very good. Others haven't accepted me because I am black.'

Timothy, a Zimbabwean refugee, who was a marketing consultant and businessman back home, quoted in *Voices from the Global South; A Research Report on Migration*, 2010

'When I go shopping and people are driving their cars they open their windows and shout abuse.'

'We got a threat from our neighbours saying if we stay there, they would kill us. ... In one area my friend was told to leave, they smashed her windows. We came here to be safe, you know, we came from Somalia...'

The experiences of two recent arrivals quoted in *The Horn of Africa Community in Belfast: A Needs Assessment* by Dr Orna Young, 2012

Experience in Church

The local minister... provided tins of food and spoons to our home but did not invite us to his church. They [the church] were saying we were poor. I was insulted. Would the same thing have happened if a white person moved into the area?'

An African woman quoted in a briefing for Irish Church Leaders by Fee Ching Leong

'... We have once sat in the church ... we smiled as we sat down, but there was nothing in response. They shifted and moved to keep space and distance between us so much that it became embarrassing. ... Was this just? ... it brings home the fact that once you have coloured skin you are regarded as scum ...'

Yvonne Mefor in *Inter-Cultural Insights: Christian Reflections on Racism, Hospitality and Identity from the Island of Ireland*

Contribution to Christianity in Ireland

People of African descent have enriched the local Church in a number of ways. Some have joined existing parishes and congregations, while others have formed new denominations or groups. The Redeemed Christian Church of God, which originated in Nigeria, for example, had approximately 7,000 members in the Republic of Ireland in 2012. Another contribution has been through evangelical and parish ministry: a form of 'reverse mission', countering our growing secularism and shortage of ministers. Clergy of African birth can now be found across the denominations.

What Can We Do in Church?

1. Raise awareness that Africa is not a country. The continent has over 3000 languages and up to 8000 dialects and over 1.1 billion people.
2. Avoid making general statements implying that all 55 countries in the continent of Africa are the same.
3. Portray a balanced message by using visual imagery showing people from African countries playing a part in their own development.
4. Ensure that prayer does not further introduce negative stereotypes.
5. Avoid conveying the message that Europeans 'are saviours of Africa' and absolutely necessary to progress in the continent.
6. Find positive stories to tell about migration, including those in the Bible.
7. Ensure that people of African descent are considered equally for roles of responsibility in your congregation/ parish/ group.
8. Encourage the participation of people from diverse cultures within the church and share some of their language, worship music, prayer and worship styles with the rest of the congregation.

'They prayed for people unfortunate enough to have been born in Africa. I was most offended.'

A Kenyan-born child, living in Belfast