

Eva Grosman Challenges Christians

On 28 August EMBRACE held an evening of workshops at Edgehill College on *The Challenge of Racism* (see also page 3). Guest speaker, Eva Grosman, is originally from Poland. She established Polish Cultural week here, and the *Polska* magazine, organises trade missions and intercultural events and facilitates political and community development. She challenged fellow Christians, not just to engage positively with newcomers, which can be relatively easy, but also to engage with people who may perpetrate racist actions.



Eva Grosman at the EMBRACE Workshop on Racism

Draft NI Racial Equality Strategy

It is understood that the Churches are planning a joint response to the Office of the First Minister and Deputy Minister (OFMDFM) draft Race Equality Strategy, *A Sense of Belonging*, which has been released for consultation. A number of groups, including EMBRACE, have issued a joint response asking for a more ambitious strategy containing accountable action plans and objectives. See www.community-relations.org.uk/2014/09/united-civic-voice-calls-greater-ambition-racial-equality-strategy/

EMBRACE will also be completing its own response and encourages others to do so too, before the closure date of 10th October 2014. The document, consultation details and dates of public meetings can be found on the OFMDFM web site. www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/index/equality-and-strategy/good-relations/race/racial-equality-strategy.htm#racial-equality-public-meetings

EMBRACE Still Needed in 2014

EMBRACE Chairperson, 2013/2014, Revd Richard Kerr, was the group's first Chairperson over a decade ago and in his annual report to the AGM in May 2014 (see also page 4) he said that the group was as necessary now as it was then.

The relevance of EMBRACE and our message of welcome is as important as ever. Locally, racially motivated hate crimes, people trafficking and destitute migrants are a reminder that there is still much to be done. The wider European and global context provides emphasis ... We are privileged to be able to partner with so many Churches from across the denominations to create spaces of welcome in Christ's name. So many people are working, often inconspicuously, to ensure that people of every language, nation and ethnic group find a 'home from home', a place of sanctuary and acceptance.

Recent Rise in Hate Crime

The PSNI published the *Trends in Hate Motivated Incidents and Crimes Recorded by the Police in Northern Ireland 2004/05 to 2013/14* bulletin in June 2014. The figures indicate that, while there was a decline in reported incidents between 2010 and 2013, the 2013/14 figures show a serious increase. In 2013/14, for example, there were nearly 100 more reported instances of violence against the person with a racist motivation than in the previous year. Numbers of racist incidents rose by 30.9%. Violence against the person made up 49% of the crimes and criminal damage 46%. The largest numbers of victims were from Poland, but there were significant numbers of people from other European countries, and also people of an Asian background, people from African countries and both white and black British and Irish people. The biggest rise in reported incidents was in the Belfast. www.psnipolice.uk/hate_motivated_incidents_and_crimes_in_northern_ireland_2004-05_to_2013-14.pdf

Even confident long-term residents from minority-ethnic backgrounds are beginning to have negative thoughts.

I've been living here for 37 years, ... and I've never regretted coming to live in Northern Ireland ... But after all the racist attacks, I have started asking myself – do I want to be here, long-term? I don't think so.

Nisha Tandon, member of the Indian Community, and organiser of the Belfast Mela. *Belfast Telegraph*, 23 August 2014

The police have responded by setting up a specialist anti-hate crime unit and established Operation Reiner to tackle the upsurge in race hate crime. They are also encouraging more reporting of hate crimes and incidents (see page 2).

Do not plot harm against your neighbour, who lives trustfully near you. Do not accuse anyone for no reason – when they have done you no harm. ... He [the Lord] mocks proud mockers but shows favour to the humble and oppressed. *Proverbs 3: 29–30, 34 NIV*

There are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a person who stirs up conflict in the community. *Proverbs 6: 16–19 NIV*

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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

Northern Ireland Asylum Application Figures

A BBC Freedom of Information request to the Home Office has resulted in the release of figures that are usually not available to the public. They reveal that in Northern Ireland 130 people applied for asylum in 2009 and 20 of these applications were approved; 150 applied in 2010 and 20 were successful; and 200 applied in 2011 and 60 were granted asylum.

Of the 240 applications for asylum in 2012, about a third were successful. These applications represented just over 1% of the UK figures. The Home Office also revealed that there were 270 people in N Ireland who had not been granted asylum but had not been sent home. These people are often destitute. www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-27674001

As of 31st December 2013 there were 494 people seeking asylum here in NASS (National Asylum Support Service) supported accommodation with applications under consideration.

Asylum Support to Remain Unchanged

The High Court in London ordered the Home Secretary to conduct a review of the level of asylum support, which had been unchanged for the third year running. The Home Office review concluded that the current level of as little as £5.23 per adult per day, plus accommodation, was sufficient.

In its review, the Home Office suggests that asylum seekers need, for example, no more than £1.08 per week to spend on toiletries, £2.51 per week on clothes and footwear and £3.00 on bus and train fares.

The GB charity Refugee Action, which is campaigning against the decision www.refugee-action.org.uk/support_us/campaign/join_a_campaign/1152_bring_back_dignity_to_our_asylum_support_system

Refugee Transition Guide

For people in the asylum system who get leave to remain here the integration process should now be a little easier. In the past, there was often a period of crisis when people were told that they could stay in the country but could end up homeless and destitute if their asylum support stopped and they were asked to leave their accommodation before they had time to access a job or benefits and find somewhere else to live. (For an account of the difficulties that can be experienced read the Red Cross research report *The Move-On Period: An Ordeal For New Refugees* www.redcross.org.uk/~media/BritishRedCross/Documents/About%20us/Research%20reports%20by%20advocacy%20dept/Move%20on%20period%20report.pdf)

The new Refugee Transition Guide in English, Arabic, Chinese, French and Somali can be found on the Belfast City Council web site. It contains vital information for new refugees and their advisers and there is space in it to record personal details and actions taken. Specialist workers in the **Extern Multidisciplinary Homeless Support Team** floating service are available to advise people who have been granted leave to remain. Hard copies are available from support organisations. www.belfastcity.gov.uk/community/goodrelations/goodrelations-projects.aspx

Social Security Changes for Foreign Nationals

During 2014 there have been a number of changes in the residence requirements which limit entitlement to certain benefits such as Jobseekers Allowance and Housing Benefit. These changes are outlined in a Law Centre NI briefing. www.lawcentreni.org/Publications/Law%20Centre%20Information%20Briefings/Law-Centre-Briefing-residence-requirements-social-security-August-2014.pdf

People who have been affected adversely by these changes should be encouraged to access free advice from the Law Centre. Belfast Office (028) 9024 4401 or Derry~Londonderry (028) 7126 2433.

Support Groups' Change of Address

A number of minority-ethnic support groups have moved to **123 Ormeau Road, Belfast BT7 1SH**. They include the following:

Bryson One Stop Service for Asylum Seekers, Monday – Friday, 8.30am–5.30pm, Tel: (028) 9244 8448.

Roma Education Project: Project Leader Judith Davies, Tel: (028) 9072 7924

Roma Health Project: Liaison Officer, Sorina Toma, Tel: (028) 9072 7920

The **Migrant Help** support project for victims of human trafficking will be moving to the same address but calls for assistance should still go to the **07766 668 781** helpline.

Belfast Migrant Centre Advice Service

Until further funding is available the centre is no longer able to accept any new clients for generalist advice. For the foreseeable future they will only accept referrals from victims of race hate crime: E-mail bilingualsupportworker@nicem.org.uk or Tel: (028) 9043 8962.

Hate Crime Reporting to the PSNI (See also page 1.)

When reporting hate crime, including racist crime, in an emergency dial **999**, for non-emergency calls please telephone the Police Service switchboard on **101** Non Emergency Number. Minicom No. is (028) **9090 1246**. You can also report online: www.psnipolice.uk/index/advice-and-legislation/advice_hate_crime/hate_crime_reporting.htm

News in Brief

Migration Statistics

It is estimated that between July 2012 and July 2013 887 more international migrants left N Ireland than came here (an inflow of 12,736 and an outflow of 13,623). www.nisra.gov.uk/demography/default.asp18.htm This is in contrast to increased immigration in the rest of the UK.

Re-launch of Unite Against Hate

The Centre for Democracy and Peace Building re-launched the Unite Against Hate project against hate crime in June 2014. Their web site gives information about reporting, victim support, events and resources. www.uniteagainsthate.org.uk/

NI Housing Executive Hate Harassment Support Pack

The Housing Executive encourages people to report incidents to their district offices or to the PSNI and seek support from the victim advocacy service. Find out more and download their hate harassment pack: www.nihe.gov.uk/index/community/anti_social_behaviour/hate_crime.htm

CHURCHES NEWS

Cultural Journeys with the Irish Churches Peace Project (ICPP) and EMBRACE

The Irish Churches Peace Project (ICPP) is an initiative of the four largest Churches here: Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Church of Ireland, Methodist; and the Irish Council of Churches. As part of their work they strive to promote good relations, equality and social cohesion and respect for diversity. EMBRACE is a partner in their 'Cultural Journey' initiative. This was launched with a cultural event in Newry (see EMBRACE Newsletter No 28), which was followed up by a series of evenings in April and May 2014, where people from minority-ethnic backgrounds met with people from the established community. There was also a successful residential event in Derry~Londonderry.

On 22nd August about 65 members of the established community along with new residents of Killeel, Co. Down, had an opportunity to meet, chat and begin to understand the many cultures represented in the town and to experience music and food from different countries. The countries represented included Belarus, Poland and Bulgaria. This 'Cultural Experience' event was part of the Fish Fest and many of the migrants who attended work in the fish processing factories. Presbyterian women, who have been teaching migrant workers to understand and speak English over the last 10 years, were able to enjoy the evening with some of their students.

There will be Cultural Journey events in Lurgan on 15th October, followed by workshops on 29th October and 5th November and a residential later that month. It is also planned to hold events in North Belfast. Contact Aneta Dabek Mob: **077 3137 8037** or E-mail aneta@embraceni.org for further information.

EMBRACE Workshop Event on Racism at Edgehill

Participants at the EMBRACE workshop event at Edgehill College on 28th August heard **Eva Grosman** encouraging the churches to engage with communities in order to combat racism (see also page 1). **Denise Wright** described how race hate crimes happen because of an escalation process, which begins with derogatory language and moves on to harassment, intimidation and then violence. She encouraged everyone to intervene whenever they hear negative language so that this negative process can be interrupted.

Scott Boldt explained the context for racism here and Aneta Dabek introduced the EMBRACE resource *A Stitch in Time*, which can be used in discussion groups, to help people plan a local response to racism. (To learn more about this resource contact Aneta Dabek Mob: **077 3137 8037** or E-mail aneta@embraceni.org)

Jasbeer Singh described the personal impact of experiencing multiple racist incidents and attacks on the houses where he has lived here. A number of the other participants also talked about their experiences of hate crime including repeated physical attacks by people in their neighbourhoods. While Northern Ireland has its welcoming side, victims of repeated negative behaviour learn to be wary of others, always looking over their shoulders. As part of the written feedback at the end of the event one of the participants said 'Sometimes I find it really hard to walk on the street because of my appearance.'

EMBRACE Information Update 2014

The *Embracing Diversity; Information Update 2014* by EMBRACE Information Officer, Margaret McNulty is available online and hard copies can be obtained from the EMBRACE office. Additional information in this edition includes, for example, recent restrictions on the availability of benefits for European migrants, public opinion about immigration, and some analysis of the 2011 Census in relation to people who were born in other countries. www.embraceni.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/2014-Information-Update-FINAL.pdf

Focolare Summer Gathering at Corrymeela

Over 300 Christians from all backgrounds and parts of Ireland met at Corrymeela, 2–6 July, 2014 for the Focolare summer gathering, 'Many Streams – One River'. Aneta Dabek and EMBRACE committee member, Irene Jovaras, were involved in the preparations and delivered the 'Welcoming Others' workshop together. Find out more: www.irishchurches.org/news/1682/northern-ireland-to-host-landmark-christian-event and view videos of the sessions at www.focolare.org/ireland/news/2014/07/14/replay-live-streaming/?doing_wp_cron=1409912387.4766221046447753906250



Aneta Dabek, EMBRACE Development Worker (right) at the 'Welcoming Others' Workshop at the Focolare Gathering

Racial Justice Sunday Resources

September 8th 2014 was Racial Justice Sunday but the resources (which were developed in Wales and have a Celtic feel) are still available on the Churches Together in Britain and Ireland web site. www.ctbi.org.uk/680 Why not consider using some of the prayers?

Blessed are You, Lord Jesus Christ.

You crossed every border between Divinity and humanity to make your home with us.

Help us to welcome you in newcomers, migrants and refugees.

Part of a prayer from Pax Christi in the RJS resources. www.ctbi.org.uk/pdf_view.php?id=937

Catholic Church in England and Wales Celebrates Contribution of Migrants

Bishop Patrick Lynch, the Catholic bishop with pastoral responsibility for migrants, celebrated the 'tremendous contribution that migrants make to our Church and our society' at a special Mass in Westminster Cathedral on 5 May 2014 on the Feast of St Joseph the Worker. <http://www.catholicnews.org.uk/Home/News/Migrants-Mass#.U3OxMji6ykY.email>

EMBRACE NEWS

European Focus at AGM and Spring Meeting

EMBRACE was honoured to have Dr **Torsten Moritz** Chief Executive of the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) (pictured below) as AGM guest speaker.



Torsten Moritz at the EMBRACE Spring Meeting

He described how conflict and injustice, force people to choose dangerous routes into Europe. Many are left indebted to smugglers, separated from family, facing a precarious labour market, racism and sometimes destitution. (There were 17,306 documented deaths on European Union (EU) borders between 1988 and 2012.) Torsten explained that CCME was lobbying for Europe to welcome 20,000 refugees for resettlement by the year 2020 and for stronger co-operation so individual countries do not bear burdens alone.

While EU enlargement had mostly gone well, there have been problems, including pressure on health care systems and some destitution. The recession has seen unusual patterns of migration: not just east-west but also south-north. While there had been rapid change, the percentage of migrants in European countries is smaller than people think.

CCME, in co-operation with Churches who are not members, provides Christian advocacy with the European Parliament and Commission e.g. for humane common immigration and asylum policies across the EU. Torsten described how European churches were witnessing to their faith by integrating migrants in parishes, advocating on behalf of people seeking asylum, and in giving advice. Future challenges include the question: 'Are churches really ready to change and become more diverse?'; integration as a two-way street; negative discourse about asylum and welfare state 'abuse'; and lack of safe access to Europe.

Volunteer Zachary Schmidt Returns to the USA



EMBRACE bid a fond but sad farewell this summer to Zachary Schmidt who volunteered his time, insights and exceptional musical talent to numerous EMBRACE events and projects. We are grateful for his contribution to our workshops, *Hear my Voice* DVD, and in supporting our Development Worker, Aneta Dabek. We wish him well in Colorado and hope to see him back in Belfast before too long.

AGM Reports

Chairperson Richard Kerr expressed gratitude for partnerships within the Christian community (see also page 1) and with other organisations. In resourcing churches, there was a greater range of publications and the *Hear My Voice* DVD; and a wider range of events in a greater number of locations, as well as collaboration with other groups and projects. He paid tribute to EMBRACE volunteers and staff.

Treasurer **Scott Boldt** reported on a healthy bank balance. The group is grateful for the donations of members, the financial support from the Churches and for the grant aid from the Minority Ethnic Development Fund of the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM).

Committee Elections at AGM

The following were elected onto the EMBRACE committee and incoming officer bearers were chosen at a later meeting: **Scott Boldt** (Treasurer), **Patricia Carty**, **Helen Delahunty**, **Paddy Donnelly**, **Dan Healy** (Vice Chair), **Ashleigh Hunter**, **Irene Jovaras** (Secretary), **Richard Kerr**, **John Mbayo**, **Margaret McNulty** (Information Officer) and **Denise Wright** (Chairperson). In addition **Noel McCune** is a co-opted member of the committee, representing Contemporary Christianity.

Emergency Fund and EMBRACE On the Street

The Emergency Fund continues to be used to respond to needs that cannot be met in any other way, especially as the OFMDFM crisis fund for migrant people, piloted some years ago, has not been revived.

The Reconciliation Programme at Edgehill Theological College was in partnership with EMBRACE and, as part of that relationship, Ashleigh Hunter, an administrator with the programme at Edgehill, organised the EMBRACE On the Street Project and received donated goods at the College. This partnership also involved assistance at events and EMBRACE has been able to hold meetings at the College. Sadly, the Reconciliation Programme ended in May but the College has kindly agreed that Ashleigh may continue to co-ordinate On the Street and the project can continue to be located in the building. If your congregation or group would like to join the rota of donors please contact Ashleigh at Edgehill College. Tel: (028) 9068 6933 or E-mail ahunter@edgehillcollege.org or contact the EMBRACE office.

Thinking of Joining Us or Making a Donation?

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.

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