

Get Involved: Pray



EMBRACE Prayer Group
February 2015

“So how do you celebrate Christmas in your country?” I still remember being asked that question, by a well-meaning elderly English gentleman, in North London, twenty years’ ago. I was born and raised in England, but because of my permanent suntan (due to my mixed West Indian and English heritage) and my Eastern European surname (thanks to my Serbian adopted dad), his presumption was that I couldn’t possibly be English. Yet, at that point, England was the only country that I had ever lived in, and, yes, I still consider myself English. I was fortunate to be raised in a family of mixed nationalities and mixed colours. Mum was English, Dad was Serbian, but had taken British nationality, my older sister (adopted, like me) is English and white, and my younger sister (fostered) is Nigerian, but born and raised in England. As children, we used to joke that we were like the United Nations in our house! The benefit was that I learned from an early age that people are people. Regardless of colour or origin, we all love, dislike, have good parts and bad parts, and have needs. I remember the astonishment of my seven-year old school-friend, when I fell over, and he discovered that my blood was red – just like his, despite him being white and me being brown!

However, the point of this is not for me to ‘wander down memory lane’, but to remind us all that, despite our differences, so much unites us – both the good and the bad. Sometimes it is tempting to think that, because some of us have been the ‘outsiders’, we will automatically welcome other ‘outsiders’ too, but that is not always the case. So much unites us – and that includes our ability to be prejudiced against others, who are not like us. So much unites us – and that includes our fears, when new people arrive, and threaten the stability of the relationships that we have worked hard to make. We need to face up to our own fears and prejudices, so that we can overcome them, and so that, instead of acting as if others, who are not like us, do not belong, we accept them, with all their differences, into the rich mix that is everyday life now – wherever we live.

I am reminded of Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan woman, recorded in John’s Gospel, chapter four. Jesus could have chosen to focus on all that divided them – He was a Jewish male, she was a Samaritan female; He was the pure Son of God, she had been married five times and was living with her current partner. Instead of that, He focused on what united them – on the basic level, the need for a drink of water, but on a deeper level, her need for acceptance and love and purpose. This month we celebrate Valentine’s Day, and there will be plenty in the shops, enticing us to part with our money, in the name of ‘love’. Let us use the occasion instead to show acceptance and love to those whom we would normally see as ‘different’. After all, as William Butler Yeats once said, ‘There are no strangers here; only friends you haven’t yet met.’

Marjory Parrott,
(Marjory and her husband, John, are the church leaders at The Salvation Army in Newry)

This month we give thanks for:

- diversity and things that unite us
- opportunities we have to engage and learn from people who are 'different'

We pray:

- for the ability to overcome our own fears and prejudices about others who are not like us
- that we would extend acceptance and love towards those whom we would usually see as ‘different’.