

Get Involved: Pray



EMBRACE Prayer Group June 2013

At this year's AGM, we shared some of our thoughts and reflections on our time working with EMBRACE and living in Belfast.

It has seemed at times over the last three years that we have occupied a somewhat awkward position, since we are 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 build a welcoming community.

One lesson that we've learned is that being a guest and being open to the hospitality of others is often just as important as being a host and offering hospitality to others. We have been on the receiving end of the generosity and hospitality of so many people during our time here. We could not have felt comfortable or welcomed in this country and city without that hospitality. Being a guest is a humbling experience. As a guest, 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 our host's world and reality, willing to listen and to learn.

As time passed and we found ourselves at home in Belfast, there were situations where we were not sure if we were the host or the guest. We 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. Perhaps this is one of the reasons EMBRACE exists, because in building a welcoming community it is sometimes required that you are a host and sometimes you need to be a guest. As in a physical embrace or hug, there is a giving and a receiving. 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. Many people we encountered 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.

Wherever we might live in the future, 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.

Contributed by Jenna Liechty Martin and Peter Martin, EMBRACE Volunteers

This month we give thanks for...

- Times in our lives when we have been the recipients of someone else's hospitality and for times when we have had the opportunity to extend hospitality to others.

We pray for...

- Awareness for ourselves and our churches to know when to be the 'host' and when it is time to allow others to 'host' us.
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