

# Get Involved: Pray

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## EMBRACE Prayer Group March 2014

My parents were aliens! Well, that was what was written in my dad's identity card which I remember finding when growing up in Coatbridge, Lanarkshire in the 1950s. My mum and dad were amongst a large number of Lithuanian DPs or displaced persons who were forced into exile in the 1940s. Along with my brother and sister we grew up to be a closely united 'family' in the midst of the Lithuanian community of that area and experienced extended 'family' through the friendship and kindness of our neighbours and friends.

I grew up feeling Scottish but on hindsight was greatly influenced by the Lithuanian immigrant community and its customs. We ate 'kopustu', Lithuanian cabbage soup and 'duona' or black bread. I had a Lithuanian costume and attended the Lithuanian choir. Once a month there was a 'Vakarelis' where there was typical Lithuanian food, music, dance, speeches. The songs about the River Nemunas would bring tears to the eyes of those men and women who saw no hope of return to their homeland. When we moaned about school or food I remember my dad reminding us to be thankful for food on the table, education, a roof over our heads and a united family.

Following on from this experience of 'a little community inserted in a larger community' I went on to spend some time in Italy during the 1970s in a little village called Loppiano. It is one of the international centres of the Focolare Movement which began during the Second World War in Northern Italy. Its aim is to contribute to the fulfilment of Jesus' prayer 'That All May Be One'. Through trying to live out unity in diversity, I have made the experience of being part of a global family by living in international communities in Switzerland, Leeds, Glasgow and now, Belfast.

Jesus came on earth and brought with Him the customs and lifestyle of another homeland which can unite us in respect for our diversity beyond boundaries of countries, language and race. Would people recognise that 'homeland' from the way we live? Do our communities create open, welcoming families? Do we recognise one another as belonging to the same family?

I believe this lifestyle can be summarised in Jesus' new commandment of 'mutual love', where we give priority to being the first to love, to loving everybody even 'enemies', and constantly 'start again'. It's a challenge capable of bringing about a revolution. Let's pray that together we can allow that 'heavenly homeland' to be present here on the earth of Belfast for all those we meet and may it extend far and wide.

*Contributed by Irene Jovaras*

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### Let us be thankful for:

- All those from different cultures and backgrounds who enrich our lives.
- Our families and the communities we are part of and all those who have extended hospitality to us.
- The work of EMBRACE and all those individuals, groups and communities who welcome and support our asylum seekers and refugees.

### Let us pray for:

- All those who are going through spiritual, physical and moral trials.
- A growth of mutual love especially within and between our church communities.
- Peace in the world and especially in the Ukraine, Syria and the Congo.
- All the needs of those who are settling into life in Northern Ireland especially for those seeking asylum or who are refugees.