

Looking Back: Looking Forward

EMBRACE AGM and Spring Meeting, 16 May 2013

EMBRACE was launched in 2003 to raise consciousness within the Christian community about refugee issues and by the following year widened its remit to include encouraging welcome and respect for newcomers and minority-ethnic people living here. On 16 May, EMBRACE will look back at how far the group has come, and speaker Duncan Morrow will examine the context of that journey and look to the future.

(For the reflections of one former committee member see page 3.)

Morning of Reflection: 10 Years On

On 4 March the EMBRACE Committee and staff were welcomed in Drumalis Retreat Centre where Sr Anna Hainey had prepared a reflection – Celebrating 10 Years ‘a morning together as members of EMBRACE to celebrate, to reflect back and to look forward in hope.’ The present members of the group were delighted to welcome former committee members and those who had done foundational work before the group was launched formally: Sr Catherine Campbell, Sr Noreen Christian, Mrs Shelagh Livingstone, Ms Maura McCallion and Fr Paul Turley.



Sr Catherine Campbell shares memories of the birth of EMBRACE, while Jill Marrs (Administrative Assistant) and Maura McCallion (right) listen

Catherine, Noreen, Paul and Shelagh were able to describe how a little pioneering group from the Conference of the Religious in Ireland (CORI) had brought together people from other denominations who were sensitive to the issues. They were delighted with how the group had developed.

Shelagh commented that after the worst of the Troubles were over, racism became more evident and it was clear that there were people among us whose needs were being ignored.

As a relative newcomer, volunteer Jenna Liechty Martin picked up the themes of journeying or wandering, which were part of Sr Anna's reflection. She felt that EMBRACE had done a little of both: purposeful journeying when responding to a targeted task but also trying new things, unsure where they might lead.

When asked to share the high points many people mentioned how the group had shared meals together, including celebrations in each others' homes and how some had modelled welcome by hosting migrants or people seeking asylum who were in need.

Several people highlighted how comfortably this inter-denominational group was able to work together because they shared a common cause. Jill Marrs said that when she attended a London conference people commented that EMBRACE was a challenge, as all the other groups were based on one Christian denomination.

Scott Boldt emphasised how staff and volunteers had helped the group to expand the range of activities that could be achieved, especially in the ability to run events throughout N Ireland.



The group celebrates with a cake at Drumalis

The Unchanging Message

If Jesus the 'stranger' were physically among us today, he would have some harsh words to say. We would hear his voice above the noises of the politicians and the media, saying justice, mercy, compassion, love, endurance and perseverance. CTBI calls on the public, the media and politicians to allow the spirit of compassion to inform both discussion and policy.

Rev. Nezlin Sterling, one of the presidents of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI), quoted in the first EMBRACE Newsletter, October 2003

Let mutual love continue. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.

Hebrews 13: 1-2

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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

Focus on Statistics:

Just before EMBRACE was formed, the 2002 census established that there were 26,659 people living here who were born outside the UK or the Republic of Ireland and 14,279 people said they belonged to a minority-ethnic group.

Country of Birth and Ethnicity in the 2011 Census

The 2011 census indicates that there has been a big increase but still only 4.51% of people living in N Ireland were born in countries other than the UK or the Irish Republic, 45,407 from the rest of the European Union, and 36,046 born in other countries.

Within the census data (see Col. 2) 98.21% declared themselves to be 'White'; 6,303 people (0.35%) Chinese; 6,198 (0.34%) Indian; 6,014 (0.33%) Mixed; 4,998 (0.28%) Other Asian; 2,353 (0.13%) Other; 2,345 (0.13%) Black African; 1,301 (0.07%) Irish Travellers; 1,091 (0.06%) Pakistani; 899 (0.05%) Black other; 540 (0.03%) Bangladeshi; and 372 (0.02%) Black Caribbean. www.ninis2.nisra.gov.uk Although more than double the figure in 2001, only 1.8 per cent (32,400) of the usually resident population of Northern Ireland identified as belonging to a minority-ethnic group in 2011. www.nisra.gov.uk/Census/key_stats_bulletin_2011.pdf

(It is more usual today to regard people from other nationalities as 'minority-ethnic' including white Europeans.)

Language in the 2011 Census

The level of recent European immigration is reflected in the statistics for languages spoken in the household. English was not the main language for 3.1% of people (54,500), aged three or over. Polish is spoken by 17,000 people (1%). (Polish nationals are now the largest minority foreign national group here, with 19,658 people.) Other languages included: Lithuanian (6,300 people; 0.4 per cent); Irish (4,200 people; 0.2 per cent); Portuguese (2,300), Slovak (2,300), Chinese (2,200), Tagalog / Filipino (1,900), Latvian (1,300), Russian (1,200), Malayalam (1,200) and Hungarian (1,000).

Religion in the 2011 Census

Only 0.92% of people said that they had been brought up in a religion or philosophy other than Christian.

Drop in Migrants Coming from Outside Europe

The number of work permits issued here to people from countries where advance entry permission is needed, dropped from 3,930 in 2004–05 to less than 1,000 in 2010. As the immigration rules have become tighter, numbers have reduced further and by 2011 the annual number was 227. These were for 100 people from India, 40 from China, 25 from the Philippines, 25 from the USA, 10 from Malaysia and 10 from Pakistan and the rest from countries with less than 10 applicants. www.nisra.gov.uk/archive/demography/population/migration/All_MigI011.xls

School Children

In the year 2011–12 there were 8,674 children in N Ireland schools and pre-school education centres who need some language support. They are known in education circles as Newcomer Children.

Neighbourhood Statistics

The new NINIS (NI Neighbourhood Information Service) website gives access to data for areas as small as electoral wards across a range of themes including Population, Health and Social Care, Education and Crime. The preliminary census information is easily available and includes data on country of birth, ethnic group, languages spoken, national identity and religion. More details will be released later. www.ninis2.nisra.gov.uk

The NI Strategic Migration Partnership (NISMP) **Migration Information Portal** is another useful source for statistics and analysis. A brochure accompanied the launch of this online resource and gives an overview of the material covered. (www.conflictresearch.org.uk/Resources/Documents/Full%20brochure_3%20-%20NISMP%20print.pdf)

UK Border Agency Releases Local Asylum Figures

The UK Border Agency (UKBA) has released figures for asylum applications in N Ireland. In 2012 they say there were 140 applications for asylum, for main applicants, some of whom have dependents. The top countries of origin of the asylum applicants in 2012 were 48 from Somalia, 30 China, 13 Sudan, 9 Zimbabwe, 8 Syria, 6 Iran, 5 Nigeria, 4 India, 3 Kuwait, 2 Palestine and 2 Sri Lanka. There were single applicants from Algeria, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Ivory Coast, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Pakistan, and two were stateless. Source: UKBA www.migrationni.org/demographic-trends

Preliminary applications for asylum processed by the Belfast-based **Bryson One Stop Service for Asylum Seekers** which channels support services here were considerably higher. They processed the paperwork for 286 applicants and 84 dependents in the calendar year 2012.

In January 2013 there were 420 people in accommodation and receiving cash asylum support here. This included 110 individuals and 97 families, comprised of 310 family members.

Immigration Detention Latest

Larne House Short Term Holding unit was opened in 2011 to house immigration detainees.

The NI Policing Board annual Human Rights Report for 2012 recorded concern over the continued use of police custody to hold immigration detainees; 228 people had been detained in this way for immigration offences between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012 and there were a further 146 immigration detainees between 1 July 2011 and 31 March 2012. The board is asking the PSNI to explain why the UK Border Agency was continuing to use police custody suites while Larne House is available.

www.nipolicingboard.org.uk/human_rights_annual_report_online_version.pdf

(The company running the centre is now known as Tascor instead of Reliance.)

New Belfast Contact Number for CAB

Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) in Belfast now has a single contact number for all its Belfast branches – 0300 1 233 233. Callers are given a series of options and can make appointments with any office.

CHURCHES NEWS

Council for Immigrants of the Irish Episcopal Conference (IECI)

Dr Helen Young is working as Field Officer for IECI, which was formed in 2009 in order to develop and foster initiatives in relation to outreach and pastoral care of immigrants. In 2012–13 the Council for Immigrants is co-ordinating a pilot programme for Catholic parishes, encouraging different levels of engagement with pastoral work to promote the inclusion and participation of migrants. Themes include resourcing the welcome of migrants at liturgical level and ideas for working with parishes and schools in relation to the sacraments. Parishes are encouraged to hold events such as an international liturgical celebration.

Dublin City Interfaith Forum

In 2010 the Irish Council of Churches began a project to show how positive change can come about through faith and city interaction. The Dublin City Interfaith Forum is now a focus for integration, helping people from different faiths to get to know each other, promoting peace and combating racism. Their website contains news and resources including the new booklet for Christian Muslim Dialogue, published by Cois Tine, Society of African Missions (SMA) Justice Office. See www.dublincityinterfaithforum.org/

EMBRACE Workshops

Last year EMBRACE delivered workshops for churches in Antrim town as part of the CAN (Carrickfergus, **Antrim** and Newtownabbey) Respect Peace III programme. On 15 November a further workshop event took place in **Carrickfergus** Town Hall and on 26 November the final evening of this series of workshops was held in Ballyhenry Presbyterian Church, **Newtownabbey**. As a follow-up to the Carrick session, a Migration Awareness event took place there with a local youth group.

When asked for feedback at the Newtownabbey event, a number of participants mentioned the value of hearing development worker, Aneta Dabek's story of migration and integration. Others were interested in finding out about the numbers of people who are here from other countries, others about language issues and one appreciated the 'Start where you are' workshop and was 'thinking about what can be done within our church'.

Training Using 'Stitch in Time' Cards

In our last newsletter we described how cards had been designed to illustrate how racism can escalate where there is no intervention. On 21st February a pilot session, 'A Stitch in Time', Responding to Racism at a Local Level' took place in **Cookstown**. Participants could both learn about racism and its effects and consider what they can do in their own locality.

Online Survey of the Use of EMBRACE Resources

An internet survey asked participants to say which of the EMBRACE resources they had used during the last year. The resources used were in the following order: 68% had used the website; 59% the Information Update; 45% the monthly prayer letter and Welcome Poster; 31% the Happy Christmas Poster; and 22% the Word of Welcome language booklet and the 'Hear My voice' story fliers. You can fill in the survey at www.surveymonkey.com/s/JJS8K2SZ

Resources for Bible Study

The Women's World Day of Prayer services in March focused on 'Welcoming the Stranger' and the background resources prepared for the services could be used for general study. They include activities sheets for children. www.wwdp-natcomm.org/wwdp_2013_Day_of_Prayer.asp

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI)

Lenten Bible Studies, 'This is Our Story: Journeys of Faith', were prepared by Rev. Nicholas Sagovsky, who has been heavily influenced by the experiences of people in a Bible study group he started for people who had sought asylum in the UK. They could be used outside the season of Lent. He writes:

We can learn so much as we hear about other people's journeys of faith – the good bits and the hard bits – and we can see more clearly how we follow in the footsteps of those who have gone before us - right back to Jesus and to the Israelites who endured such hardships in the wilderness to come to their promised land.

The course can be downloaded from www.ctbi.org.uk/622

Steven Foster's Reflection on the Birth and Growth of EMBRACE

Steven was a student for the Methodist ministry at Edgehill Theological College when he joined the EMBRACE committee. The gathering in the Curragh Community that he mentions was a meal where people of different denominations were brought together with a view to forming a group. Steven served on the committee while he was in Belfast but his ordained ministry has led him to a number of congregations north and south of the border. He is serving currently as Methodist minister in Gorey, Co. Wexford.

In summer 2002 I met some destitute young men from the Middle East. It was a privilege to get to know them, hear their stories and to become friends with them. I gradually learned what other support was available to point them to. I attended the gathering in the Curragh Community and was blessed by the others I began to get to know. For me, the main focus was the encouragement that I received by knowing that other Christians were living out their faith in this way.

The guys that I had contact with were all from a Muslim background, but EMBRACE was a distinctly Christian group. That was beautifully powerful – we trust in and follow the Lord Jesus Christ, but in serving him, I was seeking to share his love with others, regardless of what their faith was.

That early group encouraged me in the need to serve with grace. I largely looked on while many in the group worked so hard to get EMBRACE set up properly. And in moving away, I've lost contact with people and some of the issues particular to NI. However the things learned have helped me in my relationships ever since – with those seeking asylum in the Republic and other friends from Eastern Europe. But it is encouraging to read of the work that is going on through EMBRACE. Christ's Church in Northern Ireland needs the challenge and insight that EMBRACE brings, and it is clearly continuing to bring that much needed role to the church and society.

EMBRACE NEWS

AGM and Spring Meeting: 'EMBRACE Ten Years On'

The 2013 AGM and Spring Meeting will take place on 16 May in Edgehill College, 9 Lennoxvale, Belfast BT9 5BY. The evening will begin with a meal at 6pm followed by the AGM at 6.30. There will be short break around 7 o'clock, the Spring Meeting will start at 7.30 and the evening will end at 9.30pm. Everyone is welcome and the group look forward to meeting all those who have been involved over the last 10 years. Historian and former Chief Executive Officer of the NI Community Relations Council, Duncan Morrow, will give the address which will be followed by discussion.

Valued Volunteers Return to the USA



EMBRACE has benefited greatly from the work of Jenna Liechty Martin and her husband Peter and the committee will be very sorry when they return home in June. They have contributed greatly to the production of EMBRACE resources, the smooth running of events and the warm co-operation that marks the way in which the group works together. EMBRACE Chairperson, Denise Wright, says

Jenna and Peter Liechty Martin hail from Indiana and have been on placement as part of the Mennonite Mission Network through Edgehill College's Reconciliation Programme. They have been volunteering with EMBRACE since 2010 and sadly their time with us is now coming to an end. They have both become an integral part of the EMBRACE team and they are going to be greatly missed.

Their warmth and willingness to undertake whatever work comes their way has been a great gift to us. Whether it is through volunteering at the Presbyterian Church in Ireland's International Meeting Point on the Lisburn Road, facilitating workshops for EMBRACE, delivering migration awareness training or compiling the EMBRACE prayer letter their contribution has been generous, well-informed and shared in a sensitive and friendly manner.

It is no easy task to get your head around the culture and colloquialisms in NI, the complexity of the churches and their historical differences but Jenna and Peter have managed this and more. They have built enduring relationships and we would like to say a big thank you to them and wish them every blessing as they head home.

EMBRACE Activities

On 22 January, Development Worker Aneta Dabek attended a North East Peace III Integration Conference in Coleraine where she met a number of people from church backgrounds and was able to hear about their plans. Aneta Dabek and Jenna Liechty Martin delivered Migration Awareness training to a group of young people in Carrickfergus on 27 February. Aneta also spoke to a women's group at Windsor Presbyterian Church, Belfast on 4 March. On 8 March Scott Boldt delivered a lecture on 'Encountering Others' to Irish School of Ecumenics students in Dublin.

Several EMBRACE members were asked to speak at Women's World Day of Prayer services on 1 March (see also page 3).

EMBRACE Funding

OFMDFM administers the **Minority Ethnic Development Fund** that distributes funding to the voluntary and community sector. EMBRACE has been awarded grants for the years 2010–11 and 2011–12 towards a Development Worker post and the funding of additional hours for its Administrative Assistant. This funding ended in September 2012 but in October a six-month extension was announced for the existing grant-aided groups – including EMBRACE. Following evaluation, the fund is to remain at £1.1million per annum and reopened for applications in February 2013. Grants will be for a longer period of time.

EMBRACE was awarded £800 from the proceeds of the Dean of Belfast's Christmas Sit Out at St Anne's Cathedral. This will be distributed through the Emergency Fund (see below).

EMBRACE on the Street and Emergency Fund

The winter has meant a continued call on charitable resources as poverty has increased for local people as well as foreign nationals. Requests for help can be varied. A bicycle was provided for a Law Centre NI client through the On the Street Project. In a recent one-month period the Emergency Fund has been used to return a destitute EU national to his home country and provide funding for short-term accommodation for five people who were homeless. In each case no statutory support was available.

Thinking of Joining Us or Making a Donation?

Continue to support the EMBRACE Emergency Fund and 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.

Your support is greatly appreciated.

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