

# Get Involved: Pray

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## EMBRACE Prayer Group Summer 2014

The marching season is upon us with its accompanying tensions and fears, highlighting the challenges of living in a divided community. We are still threatened rather than enriched by diversity, because our identity seems to be forged out of what we are 'against' rather than what we are 'for'.

The thousands who marched through the streets of Belfast on June 14<sup>th</sup> to the accompaniment of samba drums, were united against a common enemy, racism, and standing for a climate of welcome and equality. We reflected the increasing diversity of colour, creed and culture in Northern Ireland. The atmosphere was friendly and even joyful. Diversity was celebrated, not feared. This was Belfast at its best: walking side by side with friend and stranger, smiling, talking and waving colourful banners representing the many organisations which work for equality, acceptance and justice for all. The two men who had been attacked in their home a few days before, walked with us, one supported by a crutch. I saw many of my English language students from NICRAS (the Northern Ireland Community of Refugees and Asylum-Seekers) and some of them joined me on the march.

Most of the men and women we teach in NICRAS are Muslim, many from Somalia and Sudan, and some from Syria. Their July will be very different from those around them and from mine. During Ramadan, they will be fasting, abstaining from water and food from sunrise to sunset each day (about nineteen hours this time of year) leading up to the three-day celebration of Eid-al-Fitr, beginning on July 29<sup>th</sup>.

Here in Northern Ireland, we are still struggling to move into a shared future. The more we reach out beyond ourselves to those of different colour, creed and ethnic background, the more we will realise how insignificant our own grievances are compared to those who have come from the poorest, most oppressed, and war-torn parts of the world. We need more diversity in Northern Ireland not less.

Jesus led the way. Throughout the Gospels we see him reaching out to the stranger, the poor, the forgotten and the oppressed. We must do the same. That's where we meet him. It is not an optional extra for the Christian.

'As long as you did it to the least of these, you did it to me'. (Mathew 25:40)

'Do not neglect to show hospitality to the stranger, for thereby, some have entertained angels unawares'. (Hebrews 13:2)

*Contributed by Sr. Anne Kilroy*

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### **This month we pray:**

Lord, no one is a stranger to you. Open our minds, hearts and arms to embrace the stranger in our midst. Help us to get to know one another so that we cease to fear one another. We pray for peace and harmony on our streets. Spirit of love and wisdom, show us to how to work tirelessly for a shared future for all your people.