

Christian Leaders Challenge European Politicians

In November 2014, at a time of increasing negativity about immigration, His Holiness, **Pope Francis**, addressed the Council of Europe and the European Parliament. He spoke about the founders of the European Union

who envisioned a future based on the capacity to work together in bridging divisions and in fostering peace ... At the heart of this ambitious political project was confidence in man, not so much as a citizen or an economic agent, but in man, in men and women as persons endowed with transcendent dignity.

Promoting such dignity requires the recognition of people's rights, in the social context of their responsibilities and of the common good. The Pope also spoke of the loneliness of disorientated immigrants and called for a united response to the question of migration.

We cannot allow the Mediterranean to become a vast cemetery! The boats landing daily on the shores of Europe are filled with men and women who need acceptance and assistance. The absence of mutual support within the European Union runs the risk of encouraging ... solutions which fail to take into account the human dignity of immigrants, and thus contribute to slave labour and continuing social tensions. Europe will be able to confront the problems associated with immigration only if it is capable of clearly asserting its own cultural identity and enacting adequate legislation to protect the rights of European citizens and to ensure the acceptance of immigrants.

He also spoke about

adopting fair, courageous and realistic policies which can assist the countries of origin in their own social and political development and in their efforts to resolve internal conflicts ... rather than ... policies motivated by self-interest, which increase and feed such conflicts. ... the time has come to work together in building a Europe which revolves not around the economy, but around the sacredness of the human person, around inalienable values.

http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/november/documents/papa-francesco_20141125_strasburgo-parlamento-europeo.html

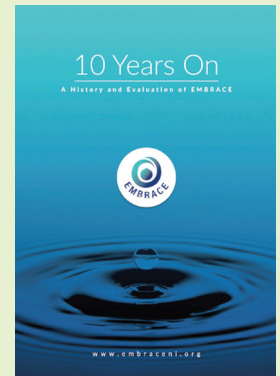
The **Churches Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME)** has supported a common European asylum policy and, along with other NGOs, has pleaded for collaboration in the EU in providing protection for those who have been forced to flee Syria.

The war in Syria has caused over 3 million people to flee from conflict and persecution. All EU Member States must seize this opportunity to provide safe and legal means of entry so that more people can rebuild their lives in Europe in safety and dignity.

www.ccme.be/fileadmin/filer/ccme/20_Areas_of_Work/01_Refugee_Protection/2014_II_20_-_Pledging_Conference_2014_Letter_to_EU_Institutions_FINAL.pdf

History and Evaluation of EMBRACE

10 Years On, a history and evaluation of EMBRACE will be presented at the AGM (see page 4)



Creating Safe and Inclusive Space

The Belfast Friendship Club (BFC), meets every Thursday evening in the Common Ground Café, South Belfast, and has been regarded as a beacon of good practice in providing a place where people can meet together comfortably, regardless of their nationality, religion, culture, ethnic background or social class. A new publication, *Be the Change: a Guide to Creating Safe and Inclusive Space*, by Dr Stephanie Mitchell, who has been responsible for running the BFC for a number of years, outlines how that good practice is achieved. It is relevant to any individual or group from the community, voluntary, faith-based or statutory sectors who wants to work with a diverse group of people.

The topics covered include how to create safe space; understanding how to give consistent welcome; setting boundaries; the quality of leadership needed; and how to build social capital. The booklet examines the barriers that may make it hard for people to feel comfortable. Consistency is emphasized. It is especially important for people whose lives are uncertain (such as those in the asylum system) to know that you will always be there for them. There are lots of tips including, the importance of giving people accurate name badges to wear and knowing how names should be pronounced. This simple measure

asserts and dignifies the person behind other aspects of the identity they carry. It also tends to make other differences in status, role, or income evident elsewhere seem irrelevant.

www.belfastfriendshipclub.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Be-the-change-December-2014.pdf

Show proper respect to everyone... | Peter 2:17

We are not called by God to do extraordinary things, but to do ordinary things with extraordinary love. Jean Vanier

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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

New City of Sanctuary Campaign Toolkit

This updated resource, *Working Together for the Right to Remain*, helps people to understand the asylum system and the legal and procedural barriers faced by people who seek asylum here, and advises on how to build a private or public campaign for the right to stay in the UK. www.righttoremain.org.uk/toolkit/index.html

Refugee Integration

Research by the **Red Cross** confirms that people's problems do not end when they are granted temporary leave to remain here as refugees. Their 2014 report, *The Move-On Period: An Ordeal for New Refugees*, concludes that 'moving from asylum support to mainstream benefits and the labour market is a real ordeal for new refugees – and usually takes much longer than the 28-day "grace period" allowed by the government.' Research in GB identified 23 factors that could affect the process and how this results in many people becoming destitute. www.redcross.org.uk/moveonreport

Our previous newsletter described how a Transition Guide had been published in N Ireland to help alleviate the situation here. (This idea is already being copied in at least one area of GB). Two other local initiatives provide assistance. The **Extern Multidisciplinary Homeless Support Team** has two advisers dedicated to helping new refugees. Tel: (028) 9033 0433 **NIACRO** (the NI Council for the Rehabilitation of Offenders) has a programme for helping people to sustain tenancies, especially where they have difficulty with neighbours. Their new **STEM** (Sustaining Tenancies for people from Ethnic Minority backgrounds) project has two support workers who can assist new refugees to integrate in local communities Tel: (028) 9032 0157.

Children with Interrupted Education

In September 2014 the NI Strategic Migration Partnership published a report by Mary Kerr on *The Integration of Children with Interrupted Education into Northern Ireland Schools*. The Belfast-based research revealed an increase in Newcomer children (those needing language support) who had limited prior experience of formal education. These are mainly of Somali and European Roma origin. (One primary school had 50 Somali children on its register during the study.) Schools were praised for developing their own approaches to the complex needs of these students, including fostering links with parents. All the schools, however, were looking for guidelines and examples of recognised good practice so that they could gauge if they are 'on the right track'. Parents were generally appreciative of the work of teachers but highlighted instances of racist abuse at school. Some Roma parents felt that their children were not being stretched. www.migrationni.org/DataEditorUploads/NISMP%20%20Newcomer%20Children%20with%20Interrupted%20EducationFINAL.pdf

Simon Community Smartphone App

The Support My Own Neighbourhood app, launched in November 2014, helps homeless people to find hostels and food banks. Members of the public can also use the app to forward to the Simon Community the location of someone at risk. www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-30219079

Report Challenges Racist Ideas

In December 2014 **Unite Against Hate** published *Challenging Racism: Ending Hate* a report that counters myths about migrants by demonstrating the facts about issues such as population, employment, housing, benefits, the economy, healthcare, education and crime. Authors Dr Richard Montague and Prof. Peter Shirlow conclude

Racism is not only morally wrong – the views which attempt to justify it, in terms of 'threats' to resources, are also factually wrong. People do have genuine concerns about scarce resources, particularly in times of recession. But we also have to look at the facts ...

... migration is not threatening 'our way of life'. To the contrary, our own divisions in Northern Ireland continuously threaten political, economic and social stability. We must accept that Northern Ireland is a changing place.

... there is a stark choice to make between remaining mired in exclusion and division and embracing a more peaceful and prosperous society – which is not only welcoming to newcomers but significantly benefits from them too. www.uniteagainsthate.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Challenging_Racism_Ending_Hate.pdf

Research Findings on Belonging, Alienation and Intolerance

The survey-based **ARK** (Access, Research, Knowledge) project Research Update 93, *Belonging and Alienation in the New Northern Ireland* by Katy Hayward, Lizanne Dowds and Colin Shaw has found that, while four out of five people from all backgrounds have a sense of belonging in their neighbourhood, 'only 4 out of 10 respondents from minority-ethnic backgrounds feel that sense of belonging'. www.ark.ac.uk/publications/updates/update93.pdf

In ARK Research Update 95, *Intolerance Towards Minority Ethnic Communities: An Overview of Responses 2005-2013*, Philip McDermott concludes that 'overall there has been a decline in acceptance of ethnic minority groups in Northern Ireland' and while levels of racial crime fluctuate, he feels that the growing intolerance demonstrated in surveys will 'fuel more overt forms of discrimination or racial attacks in the coming years'. www.ark.ac.uk/publications/updates/Update95.pdf

In December 2014 the **NI Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM)** launched *Voices For Change: Mapping the View of Black and Minority Ethnic [BME] People on Integration and their Sense of Belonging in Northern Ireland*, a report based on an online survey. The following were among the priorities identified as helpful to integration: encouraging positive attitudes to foreign nationals; provision of more information for newcomers as to how our systems work; greater equality and inclusion; better access to English language tuition; improvement in the recognition of qualifications gained abroad; action to challenge poor employment practices; affordable, accessible and flexible childcare; improvements in accessing education, addressing the needs of BME pupils and eliminating racial bullying in schools; improved access to interpreting services, particularly in health care; action to end racism, prejudice and discrimination; and better engagement between politicians and BME communities. <http://nicem.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/VOICES-FOR-CHANGE-NICEM-2014.pdf>

CHURCHES NEWS

Living Church Faith and Life Convention

On 20 September the Catholic Diocese of Down and Connor, Living Church initiative held its first Faith and Life Convention in Our Lady and St Patrick's College, Belfast. EMBRACE development worker, Aneta Dabek, and committee member Irene Jovaras led a well-received workshop on Welcome.

Cultural Journeys with the Irish Churches Peace Project (ICPP) and EMBRACE

The Irish Churches Peace Project (ICPP) is an initiative of the four largest Churches here: Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Church of Ireland, Methodist; and the Irish Council of Churches. EMBRACE NI has been a partner in their 'Cultural Journey' initiative which was launched in Newry in 2014, with a series of events concluding with a residential in Derry~Londonderry. (See also Newsletters 28 and 29.)

The Cultural Journey programme aims to advance understanding between people from different countries and ethnic and cultural backgrounds. There was a well-attended Cultural Experience event at Kilkeel; and in October and November, Lurgan was the chosen venue for the programme. In October and November there were also a number of intercultural events held in the Duncairn Centre for Culture and Arts. At the opening event, as well as the music of Vessie and Nikolay Ivanov, and other activities, a panel session chaired by broadcaster and columnist Anne Hailes.



Anne Hailes interviews (L to R) Jennifer Yu of the Chinese community, Nandi Mbondiah from Zimbabwe and Dr Satyavir Singhal of the Indian Community Centre

Women in Faith were associated with the first North Belfast event, as well as ICPP and EMBRACE, and they it followed up with a successful craft morning for people from a variety of cultures. The ICPP and EMBRACE plan further joint events in the spring. Contact Aneta Dabek Mob. 077 3137 8037, or E-mail aneta@embraceni.org for further information.

EMBRACE Prayer Letters

The December 2014 EMBRACE prayer letter described how Polish people celebrate Christmas.

In Poland, there is a vacant chair and a table setting is reserved for an unexpected guest, always provided for in hospitable Polish homes. It is kept for somebody unknown at the supper table. ... This is to remind us that Mary and Joseph were also looking for shelter.

January's prayer letter reflects on the flight of the Holy Family and contains the personal story of a man who was forced to flee from his country and has found safety here.

www.embraceni.org/category/about-us/embrace-prayer-letters/

Refugee Workshop for Storehouse Volunteers

The **Storehouse Centre**, Castle Arcade, Belfast helps to provide the basic essentials of life, including food, clothing and furniture for people who cannot make ends meet. Their volunteers have been encountering people who have applied for asylum here and so, on 8 November, EMBRACE ran a workshop for about 20 of their volunteers, in order to help them understand the issues facing people in the asylum system. As well as being provided with information, those who attended appreciated hearing the personal story of someone who had been through the experience of having to flee from her home country.

EMBRACE has previously run a workshop for Salvation Army staff and is very open to assisting other Christian organisations or groups who need to know more about issues relating to the lives of migrants, refugees and minority-ethnic people. We also welcome requests to run courses on migration awareness and on responding to racism. In addition, EMBRACE offers a translation service for church notices. Contact Aneta Dabek Mob. 077 3137 8037, or E-mail aneta@embraceni.org

'And You Welcomed Me' Workshops Event

On 24 November Christians from the Mid-Ulster area met in Gortalowry House, Cookstown, for EMBRACE workshops on the welcome and integration of people from other countries. Most who attended were from individual local Mid-Ulster churches and there were also attendees from Women's Aid, St Vincent de Paul, and the Dungannon Churches' Forum.

Local Pastor Ufuoma Obahor spoke on promoting community integration. He explained how, formerly a doctor in London, God had told him to come here, how he has decided that this is now his home and that it is the responsibility of Christians to change the places they live in. He emphasised the importance of welcome in church and how God promoted integration at Pentecost.

This very successful event is being followed up by a Cultural Journey programme (see column 1).

Irish Methodist Multi-Ethnic Churches Conference

In October 2014 over a hundred people met in Portlaoise for the third, and best-attended, Methodist multi-ethnic churches conference. Dr Sahr Yambasu of St Patrick's United Methodist Church, Waterford, addressed the challenges of holding together, nurturing and sustaining multi-ethnic churches.

While Christ is above culture, God mediates Christ and his love to us through cultural agencies. These include the languages we use to communicate with each other, the ways we have been taught by our cultures and environments to view and understand the world, and how we have been brought up to relate to other human beings...

Dr Sahr Yambasu, *Methodist Newsletter*, December 2015

During the workshops there was an opportunity to explore approaches to tackling the practical difficulties experienced when bringing people from different cultures together. In the afternoon, Dr Yambasu used the story of how God brought Peter and Cornelius together (Acts 10-11) to illustrate the positive opportunities presented to churches that embrace multi-ethnic differences.

EMBRACE NEWS

Spring Meeting and AGM, Thursday 14 May 2015

The EMBRACE Spring Meeting will have a youth focus, with young people and youth leaders providing insight into how churches can be more inclusive of young people from different ethnic and language backgrounds. The 'Our Voice' DVD, which presents reflections of young people as they settle here will be launched, and there will be the opportunity to view and collect this and other EMBRACE resources. The Spring Meeting is to be held at Edgehill Theological College, preceded by a short AGM. All are welcome to attend. Please check our website for further details (www.embraceni.org).

Meeting with the Four Church Leaders

On 26 September 2014 a delegation from EMBRACE, representing a variety of denominations, met with the four Church leaders at Edgehill Theological College, Belfast. The EMBRACE representatives outlined the work of the group and the issues for migrant and minority-ethnic people in church and in society here, including the increase in reported racist incidents. The Church leaders had time to ask questions and were receptive to the issues raised.

Planning Morning

The committee met on 20 October 2014 to plan for the future and identified priorities. Some of these are outlined below:

Geographical reach was discussed and it was noted that events had taken place in a wide number of areas recently, largely due to partnerships with Rural Community Network and the Irish Churches Peace Project at local level. Rather than attempting to set up satellite groups it was thought better to empower existing groups on the ground, to try to identify local 'champions' and people who could provide a two-way exchange of information. It was also agreed that EMBRACE should be more pro-active and strategic in developing links with key Christian groups and local leaders.

It was agreed to continue to develop youth resources and build on existing links with youth organisations. Where possible it would be helpful to have a presence at youth events run by other groups and an input in the resources of groups, as had worked well with the Girls' Brigade.

In engaging with the leadership of churches (see also above) it was agreed to work on a public relations strategy and identify key contacts so that communication can be improved. It was also important to review the website and printed resources to see if they remain fit for purpose.

It was acknowledged that the group had much of which to be proud. At the heart of EMBRACE was the seeking for discernment through reflection and retreat, and modelling welcome through hospitality.

Advocacy

EMBRACE submitted a response to the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) draft racial equality strategy *A Sense of Belonging*. See: www.embraceni.org. The group also wrote to some N Ireland MPs asking them to consider joining the majority of local MPs who have signed an Early Day Motion in Parliament at Westminster expressing concern at the low level of asylum support and asking the Government to raise the rates to at least 70% of income support. www.parliament.uk/edm/2014-15/99

Committee and Staff Activities

As well as the events highlighted on page 3, Development Worker, Aneta Dabek and committee member Margaret McNulty led a workshop on 3 December, as part of a field trip on racism and ethnicity for sociology students at the University of Ulster. Aneta and Margaret also addressed a clergy breakfast on 5 December at the Duncairn Arts and Community Centre, North Belfast. On 20 November Margaret also enjoyed sharing information and stories about migrant experiences and Christian welcome with Methodist Women in Ireland (MWI) from Broomhill, Priesthill, Dromore and Magheragall congregations, at Priesthill Methodist Church, the Maze, Co. Antrim. Aneta spoke at a service in Sandy Row Methodist Church, Belfast, on 14 December.

Emergency Fund

The Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) crisis fund for migrant people, which was piloted some years ago, has been revived in 2015 with a £55,000 sum made available at the end of January. This is to be distributed by local organisations before the end of March 2015 to people with no recourse to public funds. The money is welcome but will not meet all the pressing needs. The EMBRACE Emergency Fund continues to provide a lifeline for people who have no access to other help. For example, there are increasing instances of people from other countries arriving here but finding it hard to find employment and, with no entitlement to benefits, their only alternative is to ask for help to return home. EMBRACE is one of the only charities whose criteria include the option to provide transport to the country of origin.

EMBRACE On the Street

Edgehill Theological College was a valuable base for the EMBRACE On the Street programme for many years but this arrangement was hard to sustain following the end of the Edgehill Reconciliation Programme. The scheme is now co-ordinated by Matt Orme at Storehouse, Belfast, and you can contact him at matt@storehousebelfast.com. Deliveries should be made to Storehouse, Unit 4, Kilwee Industrial Estate, Upper Dunmurry Lane, Belfast, BT17 0HD during opening hours which are Tuesday, 7.30pm to 9pm and Thursday 10am to 12noon.

Thinking of Joining Us or Making a Donation?

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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