

WELCOME!

A Church for Everyone...

**Helping Churches welcome
people from other cultures**



EMBRACE NI

Building a
Welcoming Community

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Embracing the Challenge

Two Greek words in the New Testament are translated in English as “hospitality.” Philoxenia, which literally means “lover of strangers” and xenodocheo which means “receiving the stranger as if they were family”.¹

Christian hospitality, is therefore an active response of love towards the other, who may not share our culture, beliefs, language or values.

Introducing EMBRACE

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.

Our primary aim is to see local churches becoming places of Christian welcome and hospitality in local communities.

Over the last 15 years we have produced resources to equip local churches to engage with migrant people and advocated for the protection and freedoms of asylum seekers, refugees and migrant workers across government and community forums.

We have also provided a channel so that churches can donate towards emergency support for foreign nationals.

This work continues, however our primary desire is to see local churches becoming

places of Christian welcome and hospitality in local communities. As Christians, our response to all who have made this place home, regardless of how they have come to be here, is profoundly shaped by the Gospel. Christian love is at the heart of all our relationships.

We are known for our warm welcome in these parts, but at times we can be hesitant about how best to communicate appropriately and sensitively across cultures and language barriers.

This short booklet is designed to equip, empower and encourage local churches in becoming transformative places of welcome and hospitality.

¹ Pastor Foley, <http://dotheword.org/2012/02/29/prevenient-grace-the-theological-term-for-hospitality>

People on the

MOVE

The movement of people across the world has been happening throughout history. Many of us have ancestors or family members who have left these shores to find better prospects elsewhere. This happened in the past and continues today.

*‘I was a stranger
and you welcomed me’*

[Matt 25:35 ESV](#)

Internationally, we are seeing a greater number and diversity of people on the move today, than at any other time. In Northern Ireland numbers of international migrants have increased since the beginning of the 21st century.

People come for the same reasons people leave – to get work, or better jobs; to join family or to marry; to experience different places and cultures; to study or to retire. Today we have neighbours from across the globe.

Unfortunately, some people are forced to leave their homelands because of war, famine or persecution; others are trafficked or tricked into different countries to be used in illegal and/or exploitative ways.

Christians will disagree when it comes to the best policies to manage immigration and help refugees. Where we can agree is that regardless of how or why any person came to be here, our duty, responsibility and privilege as Christians is to **embrace** each person as someone made in the image of God.

What does the Bible Say?

The Bible shows us that being a migrant is neither unusual nor unnatural.

When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not ill-treat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the LORD your God.

[Leviticus 19:33-34 NKJV](#)

Throughout the Bible we read of people who were on the move as they followed direction from God (Abraham); sought refuge from a conflict (Jacob), or famine and poverty (Naomi and Ruth); were victims of human trafficking (Joseph); or were simply migrant workers (Paul).

Our Christian faith rests on Jesus who migrated from heaven to earth, and through his resurrection passed over from death to life.

Not only did Jesus cross the divide between Divine and Human life, but in taking on human flesh, became a refugee; fleeing with his family to Egypt shortly after His birth to escape political persecution.

The fact that Jesus experienced human suffering opens up hope for many going through the agony of uprooting and fleeing from injustice. God is very clear: we are to love the foreigner, stranger & outsider.

A Biblical Mandate

» God values every person. Our worth is not determined by our nationality or how we came to be here. Nor is it determined by our appearance, attainment or what we have acquired. God created and takes pleasure in diversity; all tribes and nations will gather before him — not a single homogeneous group.

[Revelation 7:9](#)

» God sees every person and He is aware of all people — including those on the margins of society.

[Matthew 25:40](#)

» God is at work. He can use the displacement of people for His purposes. [Genesis 39:2-5](#)

» God has particular concern for the vulnerable foreigner, not because they are good but because He is good. [Deuteronomy 10:18](#)

» God has brought together people of different gifts to form a body of hospitality, His church. It is not defined by language, culture or borders. [Ephesians 4:1-6](#)

» Jesus himself identified with the stranger, and challenges His followers to welcome the stranger as if the stranger were Him.

[Matthew 25:35](#)

Facts & FIGURES

There were 244 million international migrants in 2015

Who's Here?



Around 175,000 international migrants arrived here between 2000-2014

About 32,000 stayed

Living in Northern Ireland in 2015 there were...

93,000

5% OF POPULATION

people born in EU countries

(other than the UK or Ireland)

35,000

1.9% OF POPULATION

people born in non-EU countries

The greatest number of people from other countries who have come here are from European Union countries such as Poland, Lithuania and Slovakia.

Some professions such as IT and healthcare recruit from across the world, from countries such as India, the Philippines and Nigeria.

Who's Who?

Migrant

A general term for anyone who has moved or been moved, either within their own country or across international borders.

Migrant Worker

Someone who moves for work.

Immigrant

Largely used to describe someone who arrives with the intention of settling long-term.

Asylum Seeker

Someone who has arrived here seeking refuge and is going through a process in order to prove their need for protection.

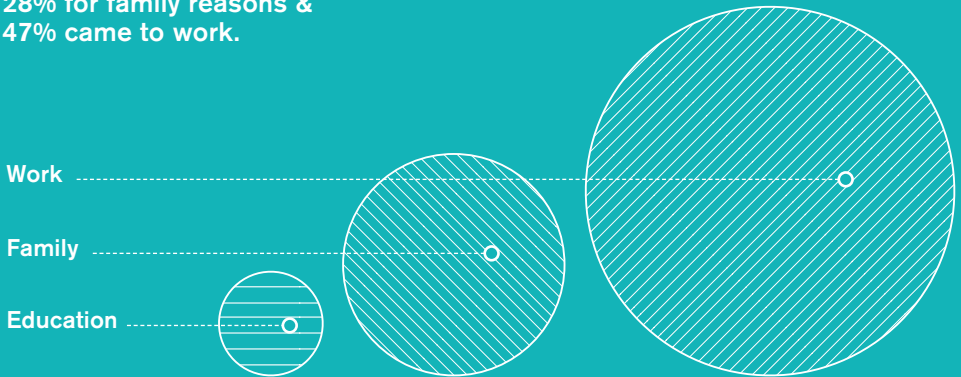
Refugee

In the UK, a refugee is someone who has shown they have a well-founded fear of persecution in their home country and have been allowed to stay, usually for a period of five years, in the first instance.

Trafficked Person

Someone who has moved or been moved away from their home, as a result of deception, coercion or violence, for the purposes of exploitation here. (e.g. in agricultural labour, the sex trade or cannabis growing.)

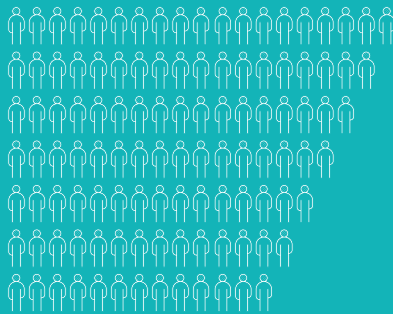
In 2014,
13% of migrants came here for education,
28% for family reasons &
47% came to work.



At the end of 2015,
65.3 million people in the world had
been displaced from their homes due
to conflict and persecution



That's 1 in 113 worldwide...



Of these, the UK was
home to fewer than 1%.

Approximately 200–300 people come to Northern Ireland each year to seek asylum, from countries such as: China, Somalia, Afghanistan and Iran. Many have made perilous expensive journeys, and some will have suffered bereavement & torture.

The government sometimes brings small numbers of refugees to the UK directly from areas of conflict. Up to 2,000 of the most vulnerable Syrian refugees are being brought to Northern Ireland over the next few years.

What Are Some of the Challenges?

Language

Many migrant people have little or no English when they arrive. This can make it difficult to understand their new environment and to build friendships.

Cultural differences

People may have different approaches to things like time, status, hospitality and male/female roles.

Financial problems

People from other countries often work below the level of their qualifications in low-paid work. People who are seeking asylum are not allowed to work. They are given accommodation and £37.75 a week to live on (February 2018).

Isolation and lack of family support

In times of change and challenge, people are far from their home communities.

Destitution

Migrant workers who cannot secure work and have no savings or family support locally may become destitute quickly. People who are seeking refuge often lose support during some stage in the asylum application process. Those who have been refused asylum usually lose all support, are not allowed to work, and are destitute indefinitely, if they cannot be returned home.

What People Say

“They come here to seek benefits”

Most non-European migrants cannot claim out-of-work benefits until they become residents or citizens after at least five years.

In 2015, European migrants received only 2.2% of total UK working age benefits. Many more do receive in-work benefits.

People who are applying for asylum are not permitted to work or claim benefits. They are given accommodation and receive an allowance of about £5 per day.

“Immigrants cost the tax payer money & take our jobs”

In 2016 recent European migrants to the UK were reckoned to have paid £8.8 billion more to the state than they used in public services.

Most migrant workers fill job vacancies because we have skills gaps and labour shortages, for example, in the healthcare and food production sectors.

“The UK asylum application process is too lenient.”

In the year to March 2017 only 31% of people seeking asylum were given some form of protection initially. Just under 40% of subsequent appeals were successful.

Monika's STORY

Made to Feel Welcome

“

My name is Monika and I came to Northern Ireland from Poland with my husband and two children.

My first months here were very difficult and I remember not feeling welcomed. I didn't receive as much as a 'Hello,' not even from my neighbours or from the other mothers at my children's school. I felt lonely and isolated. After several months my situation began to change. People started to greet me with a 'Hello' and my neighbours began to ask me 'How are you?' I began to feel welcome. One of my neighbours noticed me and invited me to a parent and toddler group in a nearby church. This changed my life! I met other mothers and carers and made friends. These friendships developed and I was able to meet up, go for walks and to share food together. My neighbour's simple invitation was the first step to making me feel part of a community again.

”

How might you welcome people in?

A simple **'Hello'** can make a big difference. Inviting people to an event or into our homes may come more naturally to some than others, but it can make a huge difference to someone who is new here.

1. Acknowledge people verbally and non-verbally; smile and say 'hello'.
2. Ask and learn people's names, including the correct pronunciation and name preference.
3. Invite people; a personal invitation is the most effective invitation. Offer to accompany people; events and activities are much easier to go to with company.
4. Speak slowly, clearly and calmly. Use plain English, avoid jargon and colloquialisms.
5. Initially it may be appropriate to talk more than ask questions. People who are learning a language always understand more than they can say.

Ivan's STORY

Made to Feel at Home

“

My name is Ivan. My wife and I came to Northern Ireland from Bulgaria.

During the difficult first months of settling, we began to attend a local church. The openness and warm welcome of people there made us feel at home and part of the group. Soon we began to take an active role in church activities. You know, when people are coming from abroad and starting their new life in Northern Ireland, they miss their family the most. The church has become our new family and we appreciate that very much.

”

How might you help new people feel at home?

The settling in process begins with people feeling safe, understanding their new surroundings & accessing key services.

Your friendship can help people through these early days of settling.

1. Help people by showing them where they can access local services and support. Be prepared to provide information, if asked, on local services and facilities (schools, GPs, language classes etc.)
2. To feel truly at home, people should no longer sense that they are a guest who has to be looked after but more like a family member who participates by giving of themselves as well as receiving. Encourage newcomers to participate in church life formally and informally.
3. Notice & celebrate the uniqueness, gifts and qualities of other people. Everyone has a unique contribution to make and needs to feel comfortable in order to contribute.
4. Encourage opportunities for people to share something of their background & culture informally (food, music, way of life).
5. Respect & allow for cultural differences, be flexible, open to doing things in different ways.

The Local Church's

RESPONSE

Christian hospitality is deeply biblical and profoundly important in the life of the Church and wider society today. EMBRACE is passionate about the local Church modelling Christian welcome in local communities. There are brilliant examples of this already happening across the churches.

“

Our experience of newcomers has been very positive. People from countries such as the Philippines, India, Poland and Slovakia have come to our church and participated in the choir, as Ministers of the Word, Ministers of the Eucharist and Ministers of Outreach.

Young newcomers are also Altar Servers, readers of the Prayers at Church services, on the Greeters Team, and leaders in the Sunday Children's Liturgy. We have found that church involvement leads to wider community involvement, with people attending and helping in community work and the events of different organisations. We can share information about things like education – the school system here and how to access it, and help in finding jobs.

”

Member of St
Colmcilles Parish,
East Belfast

“

We have provided English language classes for many years. Recently we brought together students, their families and church members for an International Meal. At the end of the event the students began to sing in their first languages, and we recognised the tunes of worship songs in Polish and languages of West Africa. The beauty of the diversity and harmony of languages led one tutor to comment, ‘This must be what heaven is like’.

”

An English language teacher from Seaview Presbyterian Church, Belfast

“

At River City we are passionate about being a welcoming community for all people. We have been so blessed by the various nationalities that have found a home in our church family in recent years. Their lives and faith have so enriched and strengthened us as a community. Our assistant pastor is from Kerala in India and is one of three Indian pastors now serving across our family of churches in Northern Ireland. Each month we hold a fellowship meal where the diversity of our congregation is seen in the food that is served. We find eating together a great way of celebrating our cultures and sharing together the one life that Jesus has brought us into.

”

River City Church, Derry~Londonderry

Embracing the CHALLENGES

Change can begin with simple shifts in how we think and what we do. Here are some suggestions to help our churches, communities and culture become places of welcome and hospitality.

Our Church

Pray

for newcomers and how to support them, for the ability to see people who are new and the wisdom and confidence to engage with them.

Adjust your programmes

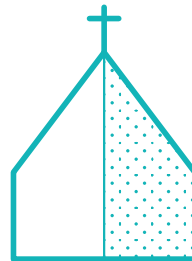
Use language, illustrations and stories that can be understood by people who are not local. Sports, music, crafts and children's activities are all easier ways of connecting and making friends with people not fluent in English.

Recognise

Gifts in people from other countries who attend church and provide them with opportunities for involvement.

Create welcoming opportunities

Hold English classes to help people build competency and friendships, or pot luck dinners where each person can bring a traditional dish from their home country to share and celebrate culture.





Our Communities

Collaborate

The church can be a catalyst in bringing people together to partner with local community groups. Network with likeminded bodies: churches, statutory agencies and NGO's.

Create a Welcoming Environment

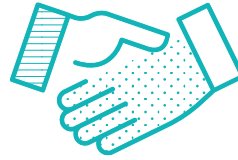
Help make your community a safe and friendly environment for new people to join.

Build a Trust Relationship

Start by saying 'Hello', acknowledge people verbally and non-verbally. Be willing to hear stories. Invite people to church or community groups or better still go with them.

Try the Language

Learn a few words of greeting. Event fliers and notices can also be translated into commonly spoken languages. EMBRACE has resources available on the website: www.embraceni.org



Our Culture

Respect Difference

Don't seek to make people who are different feel uncomfortable or make fun of a culture you don't understand.

Challenge Rumours & Racism

Take abusive comments seriously and challenge negative attitudes.

Stand Up

Be a voice; engage with community groups and local government, encourage politicians to make these issues a priority.

Speak Up

Start the conversation about creating a welcoming culture with friends and family, encouraging them to do the same.

For further resources
please visit *embraceni.org*

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For further information & resources contact:

EMBRACE NI
48 Elmwood Avenue
Belfast BT9 6AZ
info@embraceni.org
www.embraceni.org

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EMBRACE NI
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Welcoming Community

evangelical alliance 
together making Jesus known

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