

SPRING - SUMMER 2021

EMBRACE REFLECTIONS



EMBRACE is a group of Christians working together to promote positive responses to people seeking asylum, refugees, migrant workers and people from minority ethnic backgrounds in Northern Ireland.



A message from our Chair, Scott Boldt

Greetings and Welcome to the first edition of our new EMBRACE REFLECTIONS.!

We intend to produce EMBRACE REFLECTIONS on a regular basis and I thought that I would open each one this year by reflecting on the word 'reflections' itself because it has several different but relevant and insightful meanings. Reflections can mean 'a view or perspective that is formed after careful consideration and thought'. This meaning of reflection captures both what we want to do with this publication and the way in which we as an organisation have consistently sought to research, understand and provide good information and resources to the churches and others on issues related to people who have migrated here, are refugees or seeking asylum or are part of a minority ethnic community. We hope you find our REFLECTIONS thoughtful, helpful, and inspiring.

Thank-you to everyone who has contributed.

OVERVIEW:

- I was a stranger and....
Reflections on the Embrace Lunchtime Seminars
- Upcoming Event - Walking with our Neighbour
- Keeping Informed - Refugees in NI 2021
- Reflections on Refugee Week 2021 - "We cannot walk alone."
- Simple Acts for Refugee Week - read a book
- Prayers and Reflections
- Becoming a Friend of EMBRACE

I was a stranger and...

Reflecting on our lunchtime seminar series

Kettle boiled, sandwich ready and video on. While lunchtime gatherings in this last year have been somewhat different the deep need for dialogue remains. Embrace NI has always sought to engage Churches in conversations that raise the issues facing society and to raise the hearts and minds of the Churches to consider their response. And with this in mind we began an online lunchtime seminar series under the heading; *I was a stranger and....*

Attacks on the multicultural centre in Belfast were at the fore of our minds as we began our planning and the need to be holding a thoughtful conversation on how we as Churches respond to Racism. We would like to believe that racism doesn't exist, however, as racist hate incidents outnumber sectarian hate incidents in Northern Ireland we know that racism is present and needs to be addressed.

Nathaniel Jennings shared his journey coming from an Anglo-American Caribbean background and growing up in Bangladesh before living in Northern Ireland for the last 10 years. Sharing many insights, one that provoked much thought was 'true welcome'. Nathaniel noted that he had spoken to people from various ethnic backgrounds and yes they received warm welcomes as hymnals and bulletins were handed out but while invitations to coffee or lunch were extended they were never followed through. The chance for a deeper relationship was never taken up. On hearing this the scripture; Let us not love in words and tongue but in actions and in truth certainly sprang to mind. (1John 3:15) Nathaniel left us with the question of how do we move from a welcoming church to a church where people belong?

Accompaniment is certainly part of the response to creating belonging and in May Nick Hanrahan took up this conversation. Working for the Jesuit Refugee Service(JRS), UK Nick shared what accompaniment meant to the organisation and the impact it has had on people's lives. The pioneers of JRS were always keen to place special emphasis on being with rather than doing

for; a message that resonated with many participants on-screen working in food banks and Church outreach services. Accompaniment is a skill that demands presence, authentic listening, empathy, compassion, and humility. We recognise that through accompaniment we are like Christ and that a mutual blessing takes place in the relationship. Nick invited us to consider how in each person who is forced to flee to safety, Jesus is present as he was at the time of Herod. In the stranger, we are called to see Christ and to hear the pleas for help.

When asked what is a sign of hope in these recent days one participant pointed to the swallows that he had just seen that morning. Indeed the freedom to move and to build a home is a deep desire that we hold for all who arrive in Northern Ireland. Let us accompany people in making a home for good.



Krish Kandiah, founder of the UK charity *Home for Good*, recounted how his mother was an extraordinary influence in his life by her witness to her community, teaching him to "fight racism with hospitality". As Church communities, we need a radical hospitality that extends to all of humanity - let us not forget the words:

"For God so loved the **whole** world..."

Today, this means that we may need to rethink our concept of mission. Peter Rowan from OMF drew us to consider how the landscape of mission has changed. Mission isn't just about going on long journeys, it can happen right next door. Christians at home can create churches of welcome by extending the hospitality of God to all – engaging locally can be God's way of using us globally.

So as Church communities let us continue to pray about how we create belonging, how we accompany others on their journey and how we engage in Mission by extending hospitality to all.

Upcoming Events - Refugee Week 14th - 20th June

To mark Refugee Week (14th - 20th June), EMBRACE will be holding an event on the 10th June, and you are all invited to attend.

Walking with our neighbour

Stories you've never heard before of kites, cooking and commerce!

Refugees, migrants, people seeking asylum and new residents to Northern Ireland have more stories to tell than just where they came from and how they got here.

Can you join us to listen to and get to know Barbara, Obaid and Sohail as we zoom and take time out together on

Thursday 10th June from 1 to 1.45pm.

e-mail info@embraceni.org to receive the link



WELCOME!

to a Church for Everyone

Mirë se vjen

Albanian

أهلاً وسهلاً

Arabic

স্বাগতম

Bengali

Добре дошли

Bulgarian

欢迎

Simplified Chinese

Malaysia/China/Singapore

歡迎

Traditional Chinese

Hong Kong/Taiwan

Dobrodošli

Croatian/Bosnian/Serbian

Vitáme vás

Czech

Tere tulemast

Estonian

خوش آمدید

Persian/Farsi

Bienvenue

French

Willkommen

German

Καλώς ήρθατε

Greek

स्वागतम्

Hindi

Isten Hozott

Hungarian

Fáilte

Irish

Benvenuto/

benvenuta

Italian (m/f)

Esiet sveicināti

Latvian

Sveiki atvykę

Lithuanian

സ്വാഗതം

Malayalam

Witamy

Polish

Bem-vindo

Portuguese

ਜੀ ਆਇਆ ਹੁੰਦਾ

Punjabi

Mišto avilan

Romanian

Bine ați venit

Romanian

Добро пожаловать

Russian

Vitajte

Slovak

soo dhawoo

Somali

Bienvenido

Spanish

Karibu

Swahili

mabuhay

Tagalog/Filipino

வேல்தோமே

Tamil

ຍັບດັ່ງບຸຊັ

Thai

Benvindu

Telugu

Hoşgeldin

Turkish

Walcome

Ulster Scots

خوش آمدید

Urdu

ᐸ ᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ

Yoruba

sawubona

Zulu



WELCOME! TO A CHURCH FOR EVERYONE

Welcome! in 39 different languages!

We have revised and updated our Welcome Poster for you to put up in your church as a friendly welcome to anyone coming to your church who speaks a language other than English. We are providing these for free but are asking that you contribute £5 to cover the cost of postage. Email us at info@embraceni.org to request your copies.

Keeping Informed

Refugees in Northern Ireland

2020–21

Some basic facts



Margaret McNulty

www.embraceni.org

E-mail: info@embraceni.org

Our booklet *Refugees in Northern Ireland 2021* is now available. This is the latest edition of a publication which was first published in 2016 and has been published yearly since then. The booklet provides a detailed overview on the issue of refugees in Northern Ireland and has been updated to reflect changes happening in 2020, including the additional difficulties created for refugees by the COVID 19 pandemic and the work being done to address them.

We are very grateful for all the work Margaret McNulty has put in to writing and updating the *Refugees in NI* series over the years. This booklet is very much a result of her extensive knowledge and meticulous research.

From the Foreword of *Refugees in Northern Ireland 2021*:

"I feel that it is very important to have a publication that gives an overview of the topic: 'Refugees in Northern Ireland'. People are coming with much to offer to their new homeland but are also hoping for a warm welcome and support to rebuild their lives. At a time when many are asking questions about those who are arriving on our shores: 'Why are they here? Who are they? What impact will they have on our lives?' and hopefully 'What can I do?', it is important to be able to access factual information. It is also essential to have an up-to-date developed understanding of the challenges involved, both for people who arrive here and for us as a society as we seek to offer sanctuary and the opportunity to contribute and belong in a new country".

Denise Wright, MBE, former EMBRACE Chair, Co-ordinator of the NI Refugee and Asylum Forum and member of the Delivery Consortium for the NI Resettlement Scheme

**A download of the pdf is available on our website - EMBRACENI.ORG.
A limited number of hard copies are also available, please contact the office.**

WE CANNOT WALK ALONE



REFUGEE WEEK 2021

**Sr Eileen
O'Connell OP**

"We cannot walk alone" When I hear this theme for Refugee Week 2021, my mind fills instantly with images of people walking, not alone but with many others. I love to walk but these mind pictures are not of that type of walking, not like those walking memories captured in my camera roll, not scenic, not beautiful. Rather, they are sad, heart-breaking images that, once seen, cannot be unseen, cannot be forgotten.

Although often we might prefer not to think of them at all, not to know about the pain that runs like a fault line through our world, they shine a spotlight on that which cannot and must not be forgotten. Like these images, footage of men, women and children crowded onto boats, crammed into trucks, lying dead on our beaches stop us in our tracks.

People are walking.

Not alone, not in ones and twos, but in their thousands, in vast caravans of desperation. Through all weathers, people are walking, running, fleeing from their home, from their country, from their homeland, from a place where their life has become untenable, where crushing poverty, endemic injustice, persecution and violence are everyday realities, where death is a real prospect, where staying is no longer an option. No one leaves lightly.

People are walking.

The numbers and the details can be too much to take in. We have little say in harsh policy statements. Heartless words from politicians are not spoken in our name.

Taken all together, we can be left feeling powerless. But we are not that.

Our work, as the late poet Mary Oliver put it, is “loving the world.” Our task is to love the world – and we do this by embracing not only those we love already but those we deem ‘other’ until there is no ‘other’, until there is no ‘us’ and there is no ‘them’.

As Christians, God’s words to Abraham are addressed to us too: ‘I will bless you and you will be a blessing. . . . and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you’ (Genesis 12:2-3). Pausing to ‘count your blessings’ surely leads to gratitude. It can instil too, perhaps, a sense of guilt at the unfairness of inequality and of privilege or lack of same, particularly when there is so much that is good, when that list of blessings keeps growing. Why me? Why have I been so lucky? Why are others not? But as people of faith, we cannot rest in the guilt.

We are blessed by God in order to ‘be a blessing’ for others. Friends of God, blessed by God, gifted with God’s grace, we must share this. We must befriend others so that, in and through us, they can meet God, be ‘friended’ by God, blessed by God, gifted by God with grace and with life to the full. Our relationship with God is neither private nor exclusive – as Christians, we cannot walk alone but need a community of faith. We are recipients of God’s grace and we must pass it on, not keep it to ourselves.

Gifted with faith, we are called by God to welcome the stranger, the widow, the orphan and we are taught by Christ to love one another. Gifted with hope, we do not give in to despair but strive for the Kingdom and the reversals it signifies – when the lowly will be lifted up, the hungry filled with good things. Gifted with love, we reach out to embrace our brothers and sisters without pausing to ask if they are like us or not, if they are good enough, if they are worthy enough. Like us, they are children of God. They are our brothers and sisters.

People are walking.

They cannot be left to walk alone – we can walk alongside them.

EMBRACE NI, taking to heart the words ‘I was a stranger and you made me welcome’ (Matthew 25:35), walks with the ‘stranger’ and journeys with churches as they walk alongside the ‘stranger’.

We walk until we are no longer ‘strangers’.
We cannot walk alone – alone we might go faster but together we go further – join us!

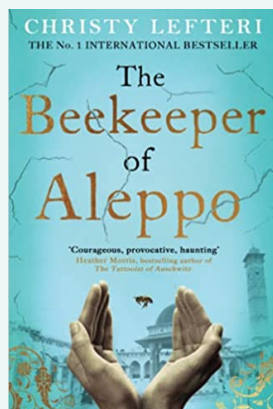


Simple Acts for Refugee Week

As part of Refugee Week, we are encouraged to undertake simple acts. One of those acts is to read a book. Members of the Embrace Committee share books they have enjoyed that raise our awareness of the journey taken by people seeking refuge.

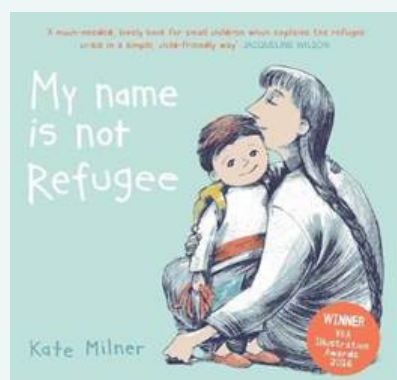


The Beekeeper of Aleppo - Christy Lefteri



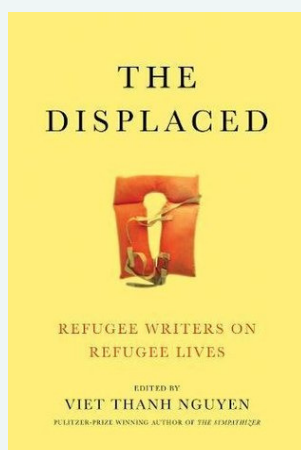
In Northern Ireland we have been able to welcome refugees from Syria and this book opens our eyes to what some of their journeys might have been like. Lefteri, based on her voluntary work at a UNICEF refugee centre in Athens, has woven together a story about the harrowing journey undertaken by Nuri and Afra. The beautiful opening scenes of family life in Syria crumble as following a harrowing sequence of events as the couple journey to the UK. A captivating book that evokes compassion and the possibility of hope when the best of human kindness is extended to our neighbour.

My name is not Refugee - Kate Milner



The very best of children's books teach adults and children alike. This beautifully illustrated book encourages meaningful family conversations while explaining the refugee crisis in an accessible way. One day, a mother tells her young son that they must say goodbye to their old friends and leave home. Their taps run dry, there is rubbish everywhere, and it's just not safe. Through pictures and questions posed to the reader the book evokes compassion for the situation refugees find themselves in. When the family reach a safe place to make a new home, the boy must remember that although children may call him Refugee, that is not his real name.

The Displaced - edited by Viet Thanh Nguyen



The voices of displaced peoples need to be heard. Nguyen has drawn together a wonderful collection of essays that give both insight and challenge. Each essay is compelling in its own right but it was Marina Lewycka as she reflected on the changing landscape that once welcomed her as a refugee and the uncomfortable rhetoric that came with Brexit that encouraged me to ensure that the Churches challenge negative narratives and policies that impact refugees. This book challenges us to set aside our rose-tinted glasses and to consider what life is like for the refugee - those journeying and those decades later struggling to truly be at home.



To be in with a chance to win a copy of our reviewed books e-mail info@embraceni.org with your name and postal address by 30th June 2021

Prayers & Reflections

We encourage you to pray for all people who find themselves seeking refugee, asylum and travelling to new homes. May they know the presence of God on their journey and encounter the love of Christ in the people they meet.

'Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it' (Hebrews 13:2).

God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, provide for all seeking refuge from famine.

God of Hagar, Joseph and Moses, liberate all seeking refuge from slavery.

God of Esther, Naomi and Ruth, strengthen all seeking refuge as families.

God of David, Elijah, and Jeremiah, protect all seeking refuge from conflict.

God of Ezekiel, Ezra and Nehemiah, comfort all who are longing for home.

God of Jesus, Mary and Joseph journey with all seeking refuge today. In the name of the One who was both refuge and refugee.

Amen

(taken from Christian Aid)

If you really change your ways and your actions and deal with each other justly, if you do not oppress the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow and do not shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not follow other gods to your own harm, then I will let you live in this place, in the land I gave your ancestors for ever and ever. (Jeremiah 7:5-7)

O God, Trinity of love, from the profound communion of your divine life, pour out upon us a torrent of fraternal love.

Grant us the love reflected in the actions of Jesus, in his family of Nazareth, and in the early Christian community.

Grant that we Christians may live the Gospel, discovering Christ in each human being, recognising him crucified in the sufferings of the abandoned and forgotten of our world, and risen in each brother or sister who makes a new start.

Come, Holy Spirit, show us your beauty, reflected in all the peoples of the earth, so that we may discover anew that all are important and all are necessary, different faces of the one humanity that God so loves.

Amen.

(taken from Fratelli Tutti)

*I saw a stranger yestreen:
I put food in the eating place,
Drink in the drinking place,
Music in the listening place:
And in the sacred name of the Triune
He blessed myself and my house,
My cattle and my dear ones.
And the lark said in her song
Often, often, often
Goes the Christ in the stranger's guise,
Often, often, often
Goes the Christ in the stranger's guise.*

Becoming a Friend of EMBRACE

Individuals and groups may become Friends of EMBRACE.

As a Friend of EMBRACE we would like you to play an active part in the work of EMBRACE. There are several ways you can be involved:

- Supporting EMBRACE in the distribution of resources in your church and churches in your area.
- Helping to support and organise EMBRACE events and specific projects.
- Donating to the work of EMBRACE as we promote positive responses to people seeking asylum, refugees, migrants, and people from minority ethnic backgrounds in Northern Ireland.

As a Friend of EMBRACE you can also vote at our AGMs for election of members to our committee.

For more information please email us at info@embraceni.org.

Or download an application form to become a Friend of EMBRACE from our website - embraceni.org.

Please email it to info@embraceni.org. or return to our office at 48 Elmwood Avenue, Belfast BT9 6AZ.

Thank you for standing with us.

