



# EMBRACE REFLECTIONS

## SUMMER 2023

**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.

### Embracing the Stranger



### Scott Boldt - Chairperson

Greetings and Welcome to the fourth edition of EMBRACE REFLECTIONS. One of the main aims of EMBRACE is to support and equip the churches with resources, information, reflections and connections that will assist us all in making Northern Ireland a more welcoming community. We hope EMBRACE REFLECTIONS provides you with hope, encouragement and insight. I think there is a lot of 'good eating' in these 12 pages to nourish the spirit and hopefully inspire you to action or to find out more.

This year EMBRACE is celebrating our **20th Anniversary** and we believe that even though the north of Ireland has transformed considerably since 2003, there remains ongoing challenges to welcome and embrace the 'stranger' whether that is in your home or church, in your workplace or school, on the street where you live, in your community or within wider society.

We can have a significant impact on the lives of others (and therefore on our own lives) by listening and learning, saying 'hello' and inviting people to our homes or church, or out for a coffee or a meal. Such interactions lead to relationships which help us to recognise the contributions newcomers make and the gifts they bring.

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- **Embracing the Stranger - Challenges and Opportunities for NI Churches.** Dr Emma Soye gives us a summary of her recent research report.
- **Jubilee Farm, Larne**
- **Refugee Week Theme for 2023 COMPASSION**
- **St Patrick's Day Welcome** for Embrace committee member Dougie Tyler
- **Time to Fly** by Ruth Padel
- **Acacia Path:** a NI charity teaching English to people seeking asylum and refuge

## Challenges and Opportunities for NI Churches



In 2022, EMBRACE NI commissioned Dr Emma Soye to conduct a piece of research on the work that churches are doing across NI to welcome newcomers, and the challenges and opportunities they experience in this work. Emma conducted desk research and 29 interviews with church staff and congregation members; people working for church-funded and Christian organisations; and current and previous members of the EMBRACE NI committee.

Churches across NI are welcoming asylum seekers, refugees, and migrant workers in three key areas. Firstly, a number of churches in NI are providing community spaces and initiatives with the aim of encouraging social connection and building community; some have social initiatives which specifically aim to welcome newcomers and help them to integrate into local communities. Secondly, churches have recognised and responded to the need for English language support. At least 30 churches across NI are currently providing English language classes to asylum seekers, refugees, and migrant workers. Thirdly, many churches are supporting newcomers' basic needs in relation to food, clothing and housing – many respondents saw this support as critical to carrying out the Biblical mandate to 'love the stranger'. A number of churches provide practical support to asylum seekers living in local hotels, while several are involved in supporting resettled refugees in NI through government schemes.

***"The research found that churches are experiencing challenges (as well as opportunities) in how they respond to need, build relationships, work collaboratively, and foster diversity in congregations and local communities."***

### Recommendations for churches in each of these areas

#### Responding to Need

- Be proactive about outreach.
- Innovate in mapping and assessing needs.
- Prioritise listening to newcomers' own wants and needs – be wary of broad representations of 'community' needs.
- Respond to structural barriers to integration by advocating for (and alongside) asylum seekers, refugees, and migrant workers.



- Ensure that responses to newcomers are centred on the Biblical mandate to 'love the foreigner', regardless of their origin, rather than on political or media attention towards specific groups.
- Be aware of the impact of different migration statuses on rights and entitlements.

### Building Relationships

- Prioritise relationship-building while recognising the importance of overarching strategy.
- Encourage congregations to invest in relationships while promoting boundaries and cultural sensitivity.
- Move away from depictions of asylum seekers and refugees as inherently vulnerable and in need of 'support'.

### Working Together

- Establish a shared code of practice among churches for welcoming newcomers, while recognising the contingency of 'welcome' in context.
- Partner with churches in rural/urban areas to share learning.
- Signpost newcomers to the work of other churches and organisations.
- Collaborate with organisations outside the church sector, sharing learning and expertise.



Copies of this report are available as a PDF here: [www.embraceni.org](http://www.embraceni.org) or

Scan QR Code







**Learning lasts a lifetime** - one of the truisms that emerges from hosting a family from Ukraine. Yesterday I hurriedly packed up what Valeriia would need for her day out. She was well-prepared with a bag for her pack lunch. The question then arose of what would happen to "Maya". I prided myself in knowing what Valeriia's favourite soft toy of the day was called and in knowing that, of course, Maya would have to come with us. But I promptly, and to Valeriia's horror, popped Maya into the bag. Learning: For a nine year old who has had the experience of having her life's belongings stuffed into a travel bag to flee war, Maya is a little person who should be treated with a little more respect!

I have climbed Slemish many times - but never, until this year, on St Patrick's Day. It took a newcomer - Oksana, Valeriia's mum - to suggest it. Oksana, Valeriia, some of their relatives also placed in Northern Ireland and I . . . and hundreds of others . . . climbed the mountain a few weeks back. We were greeted and welcomed by such a diversity of people. They were familiar to me but bewildering to the newcomers. There was a Catholic religious group saying the rosary, members of numerous evangelical groups handing out tracts, burger vans, face painters a terrific traditional Irish youth orchestra and even the Lord Mayor!

Many, though sadly not all newcomers, whether refugees or not, have designated people with some, usually limited, responsibility to help them orientate themselves. There is nothing though to beat the spontaneous smile or offer of help. Valeriia and Oksana had to walk to school in the rain recently. Another parent - with a car - pulled up and offered a lift. It was a wonderful opportunity to practice a newly learnt phrase: "Thank you so much!"

Legend has it that Patrick was captured, probably in the North of England, by pirates and taken to Ireland. Nowadays one might say he was trafficked. He was put to work to herd animals on Slemish; these days one might say he was exploited in terms of employment. Following his escape back to Britain, Patrick returned to Ireland to preach the Christian gospel. But that was not without challenges. As a newcomer he was ridiculed, misunderstood, robbed and even imprisoned for a time. Whilst the details might be legend - one might expect that with a time interval of 15 centuries - there is little doubt that Patrick had experienced enough at that time to empathize with those who arrive on our shores today.



(left to right) Dougie, Rita, Alina, Oksana, Valeriia, Bogdan and Ethan. Photo taken at the summit of Slemish on St. Patrick's Day.



## The challenge for Christians is, "What do we do if we encounter someone who is trafficked, exploited, ridiculed, misunderstood or robbed?"



The parable of the Good Samaritan - and many others of Jesus' stories - make the answer to that very clear. What is sometimes less clear - and what we need to learn - is "What does "do likewise" mean in the particular scenarios we meet day to day?"

Sometimes, if churches have already organized themselves in a particular area to respond to, say, the presence of Ukrainian - or other - refugees, then just being a "presence" at an event like a community lunch or an information evening can afford us the opportunity to "reach out" and "make a connection" with someone - which can lead to "doing likewise".



### Jubilee Farm, Larne

#### A Feeling of Life and Vitality

#### Portia Woods



Jubilee Farm at the top of the Glynn Brae, just under 2 miles from Larne Town Centre, is Northern Ireland's first Community Owned Farm. The farm is owned by 150 people in the community, with a Board, of Management and small team of employees, supported by regular volunteers. The Farm Manager Tim Davies, manages all aspects of the farm with part time support from four members of staff The vision of Jubilee Farm comes from the Christian mandate to care for the earth and in that light practices environmental and agricultural stewardship of God's creation and strives to be an 'ecologically conscious Christian community.'

Twice a week, adults with additional needs attend the farm referred by the Northern Health and Social Care Trust. They get involved in the full range of tasks throughout all four seasons - growing, picking and preparing vegetables, feeding the pigs, goats and chickens as well as collecting eggs. Planting trees and preparing the ground for planting are tasks at present. The physical, mental and social benefits are met and often the visit to Jubilee Farm is the highlight of the week.



The Farm welcomes everyone in the community, it is core to the Christian ethos, and is open to all faiths and none. People seeking asylum and refugees visit the farm weekly to volunteer. Mohammed from Iran regards "Jubilee Farm is a place where I can enjoy nature. It is quiet, lots of fresh air and many moments to enjoy with friendly and caring people. Yonas from Eritrea wants "to leave my footprint by planting the trees and I would love to see nature protected and the trees grow one day." Mohammed also emphasises that as "Asylum seekers stay passively in hotels they welcome opportunities to change their mood. The farm is one of the places that revives the feeling of life and vitality".

Sowing the Seeds of a Shared Community was an activity in March that welcomed a new group of people seeking asylum to the farm to enjoy the green space, preparing seeds, planting trees and sharing our similarities and differences over lunch. Over seven countries were represented at the table and although we had some language barriers all shared stories of home, their culture, music, dancing, and a love of the environment. The March activity was funded by the *Executive Office Good Relations Fund*, and it ended with a celebration watercolour class for the attendees.



The market garden at Jubilee Farm grows a wide variety of vegetables and a Veg Box subscription is available June to December. Pork can be bought 'click & collect' or call in at The Farm Shop is open Monday to Friday 10am to 1pm at 50 Glenburn Road, Glynn, Larne, BT40 3JY. The vegetable box weekly or bi-weekly subscription runs early summer to December, collectable at the farm, Whitehead or Jordanstown.



If you would be interested in volunteering, arranging for a group to visit, subscribing to a regular Veg Box (June to December), or buying some high welfare, outdoor-reared, organic-fed pork - **check out our website** - see below. You can also call in to speak to us, or contact us via email [portia.woods@jubilee.coop](mailto:portia.woods@jubilee.coop), or call Tim on 07858098479, or visit our website [www.jubilee.coop](http://www.jubilee.coop)





*This poem draws us into the complexities of world migration. She explores the universal causes of the 'migration of souls' and how it results in being moved into "... a disorientated world, you have to start putting things together in a new way." Much of this is caused by climate change and transactional world politics, which blocks the road for those hoping to find safe shelter in another place. You can also listen to Ruth reading her poem at [www.soundcloud.com](http://www.soundcloud.com)*

### Time to Fly

You go because you heard a cuckoo call. You go because you've met someone, you made a vow, there are no more grasshoppers. You go because the cold is coming, spring is coming, soldiers are coming: plague, flood, an ice age, a new religion, a new idea. You go because the world rotates, because the world is changing and you've lost the key.

You go because you have the kingdom of heaven in your heart. And the kingdom of hell has taken over someone else's heart. You go because you have magnetite in your brain, thorax, tips of your teeth. Because the grass is green over the hill and there's gold, or more likely bauxite, inside the hill. You go because your mother is dying and only you can bring her the apples of the Hesperides. You go because you need work.

You go because astrologers say so. The sea is calling and your best friend bought a motorbike in America last year. You go because the streets are paved with gold and your father went when he was your age. You go because you have seventeen children and the Lord will provide; because your sixteen brothers have parcelled up the land and there's none left for you. You go because the waters are rising, an ice sheet is melting, the rivers are dry

there are no more fish in the sea. You go because God has given you a sign – you had a dream – the potatoes are blighted. Because it is too hot, too cold, you are on a quest for knowledge and knowledge is always beyond. You go because it's destiny, because Pharoah won't let you light candles at sundown on Friday. Because you're looking for

an enchanted lake, the meaning of life, a tall tree to nest in. You go because travel is holy, because your body is wired to go, you'd have a quite different body and different brain if you were the sort of bird that stayed. You go because you can't pay the rent: creditors lie in wait for your children after school. You go because Pharoah has hogged the oil, electricity and paraffin so all you have on your table are candles, when you can get them.





You go because there's nothing left to hope for.

Because there's everything to hope for and all life is risk.

You go because someone put the evil eye on you  
and barometric pressure is dropping. You go because  
you can't cope with your gift – other people can't cope with your gift –  
you have no gift and the barbarians are after you.

You go because the barbarians are gone, Herod  
has turned off the internet and mobile phones, the modem  
is useless and the eagles are coming. You go because the eagles  
have died off with the vultures and the ancestors are angry  
there's no one to clean the bones. You go in peace, you go in war.  
Someone has offered you a job. You go because your dog  
is going too. Because the Grand Vizier sent paramilitaries to your house last night  
you have to go quick and leave the dog behind.

You go because you've eaten the dog and that's it, there's nothing else.  
You go because you've given up and might as well. Because your love  
is dead – because she laughed at you; you go because she's coming with you,  
it will be a big adventure and you'll live happily ever after.  
You go in hope, in faith, in haste, in high spirits, deep sorrow, deep  
snow, deep shit and without question.

You pause halfway to stoke up on Omega 3 and horseshoe crabs.  
You go for phosphorus, myrtle-berries, salt. You go for oil  
and pepper. You go because it was your father's dying wish.  
You go from pole to pole, you go because you can,  
you have no feet, you sleep and mate on the wing.  
Because you need a place to shed your skin  
in safety. You go with a thousand questions but you are growing up,  
growing old, moving on. Say goodbye to the might-have-beens

you can't step into the same river twice.

You go because hope, need and escape  
are names for the same god. You go because life  
is sweet, life is cheap, life is flux  
and you can't take it with you. You go because you're alive,  
because you're dying, maybe dead already. You go because you must.

© Ruth Padel from *The Mara Crossing*, Chatto and Windus, 2012

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# Refugee Week 2023

“Our task must be to free ourselves – by widening our circles of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.”- Albert Einstein



## ...You can do for Refugee Week 19-25 June 2023



Audiobooks, music, and podcasts are so powerful because they can engage our minds and emotions in unique ways. They offer an accessible way to learn, be entertained, and connect with others in convenient and fun ways.

**Get your links here:** [www.refugeeweek.org.uk](http://www.refugeeweek.org.uk)

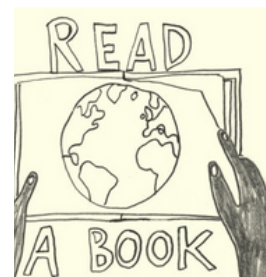


Films can help us understand different perspectives by introducing us to different people, cultures and perspectives. By seeing the world through someone else's eyes, we can gain a deeper understanding of their experiences and challenges.

**Get your film links here:** [www.refugeeweek.org.uk](http://www.refugeeweek.org.uk)

Audiobooks, music, and podcasts are so powerful because they can engage our minds and emotions in unique ways. They offer an accessible way to learn, be entertained, and connect with others in convenient and fun ways.

**Get your book links here:** [www.refugeeweek.org.uk](http://www.refugeeweek.org.uk)



Wherever you walk and whoever you walk with, you'll be joining people up and down the country, coming together to create new connections and reflect on the journeys that refugees face. You can walk together whenever you wish – but we are particularly encouraging people to do their walks during the Great Get Together weekend, (23rd- 25th June).

**Get more ideas here:**

<https://refugeeweek.org.uk/simple-acts/walk-together-2/>

# Refugee Week 2023

**Refugee Week Lecture**  
(Save the Date!)

**Vicky Tennant**  
UNHCR Representative to the United Kingdom

**Belfast**  
**Thursday**  
**22 June (am)**

In Honour of  
**Ronnie Vellem**

Law Centre NI | Migration Justice Project | Refugee Week



Avril Edgar Director

Acacia Path is a Christian organisation that seeks to welcome newcomers to our land in the name of Jesus. We long to see them equipped to thrive in the place they now call home. We strive to treat all with dignity and respect as image-bearers of God, regardless of their background. Currently, our volunteers run weekly ESOL classes, often this is a church building, a school, or in Home Office Initial Accommodation (IA) as well as signposting them to other local organisations, churches, and services.

The Home Office accommodation, which is for newly arrived asylum seekers, is usually in a building that was previously used in the hospitality industry – like a hotel or bed and breakfast. Although the buildings were in this sector, the services do not transfer – there is no breakfast in bed or fine dining, although they are provided with three meals a day. We currently have 100 volunteers serving in 8 projects as well as having helped a number of churches around the province set up their own classes which have also served many asylum seekers in Initial Accommodation, as well as dozens more who have been dispersed into the community or have received their refugee status.

Some community-based classes have also attracted international students and economic migrants. Our classes are a safe place where people can learn the language, make local friends, find community, and experience the love of God.

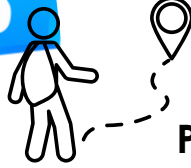
As people who belong to and seek to follow Jesus, we take the word of God seriously as He commands us to 'treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.' **Contact Email:** [office.acaciapath@gmail.com](mailto:office.acaciapath@gmail.com)



[www.embraceni.org](http://www.embraceni.org)



# FACTS



Free legal advice & assistance  
employment / social security / immigration & asylum  
Call: (028) 9024 4401  
...or email us at:  
benefitsadvice@lawcentreni.org

## People Seeking Asylum and Refugees NI

Number of asylum seekers in receipt of **Section 95\*** support in NI are increasing quickly :

**Year 2020 - 961** ✨ **2021 -1021** ✨ **2022 -1710 \*\***

**DISPERSAL:** Asylum seekers now being dispersed to Lisburn, Newtownabbey, Bangor, Carrickfergus, Derry/L'Derry, Portstewart, Craigavon, Newcastle etc. There is a lack of strategic community engagement from Home Office. These areas have limited experience of the needs and issues facing asylum communities and are also struggling to alleviate poverty in "settled" communities. The Migration Justice Project is being contacted by charities asking for education sessions for their staff & volunteers as they try to cope.

**CONTINGENCY HOTEL USE:** Concerns about length of time people are staying in "temporary" hotel accommodation including families. At least 20 hotels now in use. Across Northern Ireland there are reports of large families being split up over different floors, families of 5 living in one room for 9 months, issues with food, no play or social areas, difficulty accessing school places due to location.

**POVERTY:** Asylum support rates increased by 10.1% in January 2023 – now at £45 per week in the community, £9.10 per week in a hotel. St Vincent de Paul have estimated that around ¾ of all their support requests in Belfast are from asylum seekers, this is expected to increase in rural areas with dispersal also.

## Prayer Space



We encourage you to pray for all people who find themselves seeking 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.

### Hospitality: Paying Attention to a Christian Tradition

When we talk about 'welcoming the stranger' we are really looking at how we offer hospitality to others. I often think that this word has lost some of its authentic meaning. Theologian Christina Pohl suggests that in today's world hospitality has "lost its moral dimension and, in the process, most Christians have lost touch with the amazingly rich and complex tradition of hospitality."

I wonder if we sometimes forget that hospitality is actually a 'dynamic expression of vibrant Christianity.' In other words this core element of hospitality calls on us to pay attention to the 'other'. It would seem that practising the concept of genuine Christian hospitality, even when expressed by the smallest gesture of care, is a key element for all our Christian Churches today. Let us continue to pay attention to the 'other' in our world. It is the building block for restorative community.

Sr Susie O'Rawe OP

\*Section 95 The Home Office can provide housing and financial support to a person who has claimed asylum if they do not have accommodation and/ or cannot afford to meet their essential living needs':.

\*\*<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/asylum-and-resettlement-datasets#asylum-support>

# SUDAN CONFLICT

Food insecurity, conflict, climate change and gender inequalities are just some of the challenges that millions of our South Sudanese brothers and sisters face daily. Half of South Sudan lacks access to safe water



## Prayer for the people of Sudan

God of refuge, the rock in whom we trust,  
watch over our sisters and brothers in Sudan.

Bring comfort to those who grieve,  
shelter to those who are homeless,  
and sustenance to those who hunger and thirst.

God of mercy, open our hearts to your grace,  
so that we are filled with compassion and a generosity of  
spirit, and inspire us to take action.

Spirit of love, pour out your peace like a healing balm,  
which brings hope in place of despair. Amen

Catherine Gorman/CAFOD



# SAVE THE DATE

 **Tuesday 23rd May 2023**

**Embrace AGM 12.30-1.00pm**

This will be via Zoom. Please email us to confirm your attendance to receive log in details etc.  
[info@embrace.org](mailto:info@embrace.org)



 **Thursday 19th October 2023**



*20th Anniversary  
Celebration*



More information to come



We are always open to contributions from you - so please send us your own reflections, prayers and insights. Wishing you every good wish as we enter this hopeful season.



[www.embraceni.org](http://www.embraceni.org)