

Is your church group interested in hosting one of the following EMBRACE events?

Workshops (Designed for 20 – 40 people)

‘And you welcomed me’

This 2.5 hour event provides an opportunity to learn about different ways of engaging with migrant people and responding to particular challenges they might face. The workshops run in an informal café-style manner allowing for exchange of ideas and open discussion.

‘Small World’ Café ~ An introduction to cultures in NI

This café-style event provides an opportunity to learn first-hand about different cultures that are represented in N. Ireland. Individuals representing different cultures will be available to share stories and experiences and to answer questions from participants.

Training (Designed for 10 – 20 people)

‘Migration and Us’

This 2 hour interactive training session explores inward and outward migration and provides information on the rights and entitlements of migrant workers in N Ireland. It aims to dispel myths and provide practical information on issues relating to migration.

‘A Stitch in Time’ – Responding to Racism at a Local Level

This 2 hour interactive session is designed to stimulate thinking and discussion around issues of welcome and integration, racism and the process of escalation through the use of artwork.

Speaking Engagements (For any size of group)

If you are interested in having an EMBRACE representative share a reflection on welcome and migration issues, please contact us.

If you are interested in having EMBRACE facilitate one of the above options with your group, or if you have further questions, please contact Aneta at aneta@embraceni.org, 07731378037.

A Fish Out of Water

Exploring the Impact of Migration at a Personal Level

An illustrated resource to stimulate ideas
for small group work

Notes for Leaders

‘A Fish out of Water’ is a series of six picture cards designed to stimulate thinking and discussion around the impact of migration at a personal level. For some, this might mean recalling personal experiences of what it was like to leave a familiar culture, environment or home in order to settle somewhere unfamiliar and foreign. For others, it might mean imagining what it would be like to move to a new place where language, cultural expectations and norms and ‘the rules’ are different.

Often migration is discussed on a national level in terms of numbers, labour markets, costs and benefits to society, etc., but the reality is that migration *is* personal and the effects of it are not only experienced by the ‘host’ country, but also by those who have moved and are newcomers. While the media or other sources can speculate on the impacts of migration at a societal level, it is important to remember that behind each statistic is a story and someone’s personal experience.

The series ‘A Fish out of Water’ encourages thoughtful reflection about what it means to be in a new situation or environment or to be very different from the people and culture around you. Some might find that the saying ‘A fish out of water’ reflects their own experience of living here, even if they were born and raised in this context; therefore, it is important to note that everyone, regardless of background or migration experience, could have experienced times of feeling like a fish out of water.

EMBRACE has worked with designer Anna Wherrett of Root Design (www.rootdesignbelfast.co.uk) to produce the series with the hope that it might generate discussion and raise awareness around the issues of migration and how we all can work to create a more welcoming community.

We can deliver the material in this booklet as a training session. Please contact us for more information. We can also provide Racism Awareness Training and a variety of supporting materials.

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EMBRACE Materials



Information Update, **Embracing Diversity**, provides an introduction to some of the complex issues of immigration, asylum and racism.

The **EMBRACE Welcome Poster** can be used in church halls and doorways to make people from other countries feel more welcome.



Who's who? Who's here? presents an overview of migration terminology, statistics and nationalities.

Hear My Voice is a series of first-hand personal stories of welcome and integration challenges.



These and other free resources can be obtained from the EMBRACE office.

A Stitch in Time: Responding to Racism at a Local Level

Four postcards designed to stimulate thinking and discussion around issues of welcome and integration, racism and the process of escalation, and ultimately how we might strive proactively to make our communities a more welcoming place for everyone.



The postcards come accompanied with Leader's Notes, Bible Study ideas and two information sheets: 'Migration and Us' and 'How should we respond to racism?'

Introduction

The topics addressed in each of the cards explore some of the issues and challenges that arise with feeling like 'A fish out of water'. The cards and accompanying notes were designed for groups to use, but they can also be used for personal reflection.

It is our hope that this set of cards will help people consider some of the effects of re-location and re-settling, as well as some of the issues that arise as a result of migration. We hope that by discussing some of these issues the host community might be more able to understand the experiences of new people and to respond in a welcoming and hospitable way.

It may be helpful to have background knowledge about recent immigration locally and the challenges faced by the people who come here. There is detailed information on the EMBRACE website at www.embraceni.org.

The following publications provide additional information and insights. They are available in hard copy from the EMBRACE office and can be downloaded from the resources page of the website:

Who's Who, Who's Here? – Information on different terminology and categories of immigration

Hear my Voice: Migrant Stories – A series of leaflets telling the stories and experiences of people who have migrated

Fact Sheet: Migration and Us – A brief overview of migration in Northern Ireland

Embracing Diversity: Information Update 2013 – An overview of migration, related issues and the role of the churches.

Access at: www.embraceni.org/category/about-us/embrace-resources

Facilitation Ideas

Please use the cards in a way that will suit the needs of the group you are working with. The following ideas might be useful for some groups; however, please use what will be most beneficial for the group you are working with.

- Begin conversation for each card by asking the group: What do you see? What strikes you in this image?
- Note that there are guiding quotes on the back of each card that might provide interesting content for further discussion.
- Try building up a scenario where a group member has to go to a foreign country to live. Ask:
 - How is he or she going to feel?
 - How will it feel not to know the language?
 - What if the food does not agree with you?
 - You look different – will you feel everyone is looking at you?
 - Would you be afraid of discrimination or violence against you?
 - Will you have a sense of being isolated from people?
 - What will you miss the most from your home country?
 - What perceptions might people have of you which are inaccurate or completely false?

How can I find out more?

EMBRACE runs **Workshops** for groups of church people, to support and advise them on local initiatives they can undertake at congregational and local community level to welcome incomers. Topics include how to cope with language barriers; the setting up of English classes; how drop in centres and clubs can promote integration and friendship; and general information about the challenges faced by migrant people.

The group can also facilitate **Migration Awareness Training**. Knowledge makes it easier to dispel negative attitudes that may be based on myths or ignorance.

EMBRACE produces an annual information update about immigration and associated issues, *Embracing Diversity*, see www.embraceni.org/category/about-us/embrace-resources. See also www.embraceni.org/category/information/.

Other resources are helpful in building welcome at parish/congregational level. www.embraceni.org/category/about-us/embrace-resources/

The website also includes Advice for Churches on signposting minority-ethnic people in crisis situations www.embraceni.org/category/christian-response/advice-for-churches/

The United Bible Societies has produced the resource, *On the Road a Journey through the Bible* a combination of Bible stories, prayers, personal experiences and suggested questions for discussion. See www.la-bible.net/doc/dons08072.pdf

And if a stranger dwells with you in your land, you shall not mistreat him. The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you
Leviticus 19:33-34

I was a stranger and you made me welcome Matthew 25: 35

EMBRACE NI
Building a Welcoming Community

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Who are they?

Research about recent European migrants found that they were mostly young people between the ages of 18 to 34 without dependents when they arrive. Around 60% were young men. They often work below the level of their skills and qualifications.

What jobs do migrant workers do?

A report on central and eastern European workers, 2004–2009, showed them filling the following jobs: 10,840 in administration, business and management, 6,000 in manufacturing, 5,025 in food/fish/meat processing, 3,805 in hospitality and catering, 3,740 in construction and land, 2,240 in agriculture, 1,480 in retailing, 1,460 in the health sector, 855 in transport, 145 in entertainment and leisure and 535 others. These may not be entirely accurate as agencies enrol workers in the admin sector and they move to other jobs. The IT and health sectors have drawn skilled people from outside Europe.

Do immigrants cost us money?

There are costs because of increased pressure on medical, education and housing services, but migrant workers pay tax and national insurance like the rest of us and contribute to the local economy by paying rent and buying food, clothing and other necessities. They are ineligible for out of work benefits until they have been living here for some time.

Do we need migrants?

A research study published in 2009 found that migrant workers helped maintain an adequate labour supply during the 2004–2008 economic boom and seem to have made the difference between some businesses surviving, or relocating abroad. 31% of 600 businesses in one survey said that migrants were important to their survival. This rose to 50% in health and social care and agriculture. See *Economic, Labour Market and Skills Impacts of Migrant Workers in Northern Ireland* www.delni.gov.uk/skillsimpacts/migrantworkers.

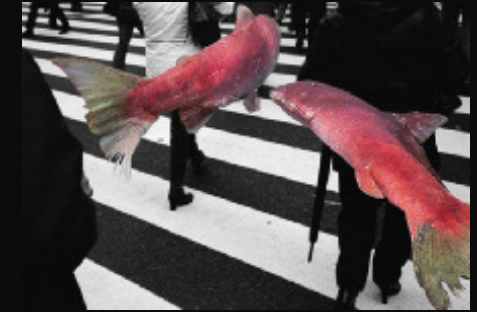
'If you look at food processing, if it wasn't for inward migration ... the factories would have closed. Everyone in them would have lost their jobs, most of the farmers on which the rural economy depends would also have lost their jobs...'

Dungannon interviewee in *Immigration and Social Cohesion in the UK*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2008

Suggestions for Discussion

Card 1:

A Fish Out of Water



What do you see in this picture? What strikes you the most?

Things to note:

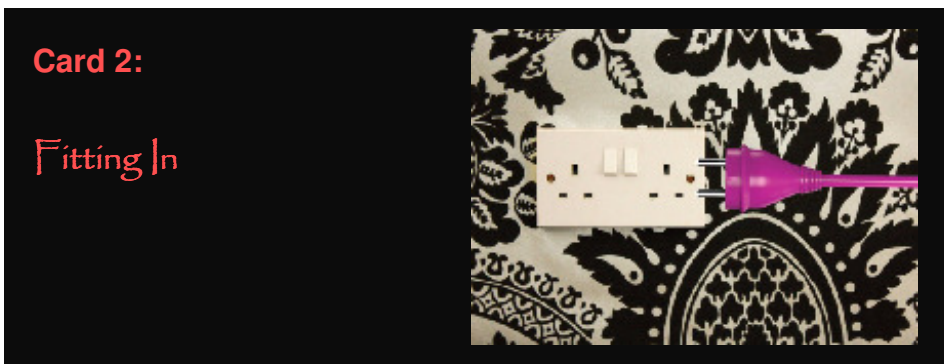
- We do not know if the fish have been forced out of water or whether they are there by choice.
- Are the people in the image aware of the fish?
- Do the fish appear to be swimming against the current?'
- What is an everyday 'normal' environment for some (like crossing the road) is a strange 'life threatening' environment for others. The fish looks healthy now, but for how long will it remain so in this environment?

Questions and Discussion Points:

- Have you ever experienced the feeling of being a fish out of water? What were the difficulties you encountered and what, if any, joys did you experience?
- What aspects of life here might newcomers struggle with? What might their needs be?
- Are there benefits to being out of your comfort zone? What might the fish notice that we miss?
- What things can you do to discover how it might feel to be a fish out of water?
- What can individuals and churches do to make the experience of living here more life enhancing?

Fish and fishing are biblical images. Jesus went fishing, both for fish as well as sending his disciples out 'to fish for men'. Fish are also used to bring nourishment (e.g. feeding of 5000).

The fish is a symbol used by first century Christians. When a Christian met a stranger on the road, the Christian sometimes drew one arc of the simple fish outline in the dirt. If the stranger drew the other arc, both believers knew they were in good company.



What do you see in this picture? What strikes you the most?

Things to note:

- The plug does not fit into the socket.
- The plug has a function, integrity and value in its 'correct' context.
- In a different context (where it does not fit), it can no longer do what it was designed for – to be a conduit for power and energy. In order to 'work' it needs a suitable connection point.
- The colour of the plug stands in sharp contrast to the black and white wall paper. What might this suggest?

Questions and Discussion Points:

- Have you ever felt like you didn't fit in? If so, what was that experience like?
- What things make it difficult for people to fit in? How can we (as individuals and churches) make it easier?

How many new people have come here recently?

The 2011 Census indicates that 95.49% of the people living in N Ireland were born in the UK or the Republic of Ireland. Of the remaining 4.51%, 45,407 were born in the rest of the European Union, and 36,046 in other countries. The greatest number of people came between 2004 and 2009. Some stay just long enough to save enough for specific projects such as buying a house or setting up a business back home. Others settle here, especially if they have children. Fewer new people are coming now because of the recession.

What countries are recent immigrants from?

In the early 2000s people from Portugal and its former colonies came to work in Mid-Ulster, mostly in the food industry. The largest groups of people from outside Europe, working in the health sector, are from the Philippines and India. Since 12 new countries joined the European Union in 2004 the majority of people have come from Central and Eastern Europe, with the greatest numbers from Poland and Lithuania, but there are people here from many other countries.

Why do they choose to come here?

Most people respond to advertisements or are recruited in their home country by agencies. Some may come because friends have had good experiences. A large number come here in order to improve their English. Others want to leave areas of high unemployment or where wages and salaries are very low.

' _____ Recruitment Agency was looking for welders back in Poland ... They got a fellow recruited from a factory where I worked. He went and then few others and few more and it went like a snow ball. I came too.' Tomasz, Poland

The New Workers: Migration, Labour and Citizenship in Northern Ireland in the 21st Century edited by B. Garvey, P. Stewart, J. Kulinska, R. Campuzano

Do many people seek sanctuary/asylum here?

Very small numbers apply for asylum here each year. The UK Border Agency was considering 140 applications from individuals, or people with dependents in 2012. In October that year 80% of applicants receiving support were from 5 countries: China (147), Zimbabwe (34), Nigeria (35), Sudan (36) and Somalia (38). In January 2013 there were just 420 people in supported accommodation while their applications are considered.

Migration and Us

Spring 2013



The Lord said to Abram: Leave your country, your family, and your relatives and go to the land that I will show you.

Genesis 12: 1–5

Are we not all migrants or descendants of migrants to this land?

Our People Our Times: A History of Northern Ireland's Cultural Diversity, NI Museum Council

Where have we gone to and why?

Over 80 million people in the world have Irish blood; 36.5 million US residents claimed Irish ancestry in 2007. Historically some were transported or sold into slavery or left because of poverty, hunger, persecution, discrimination, civil war or unemployment.

Are many local people still leaving?

Over 20,000 people still leave N Ireland each year to study, to take up jobs or to see the world. (This number will now also include some people who are returning to their home countries.)

Is inward migration new?

There have always been incomers to Ireland, from pre-historic times onwards: Anglo-Normans in the twelfth century, Scots and the English in the seventeenth. Huguenots and Jewish people came to escape persecution. Italian and Indian communities developed from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Small numbers of Vietnamese refugees came in the 1960s and larger numbers of Chinese people migrated from Hong Kong around the same time.

Why are there increased numbers now?

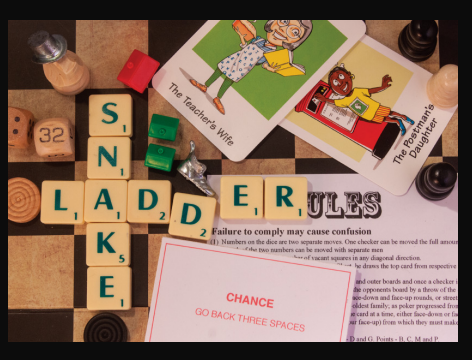
The Troubles and high unemployment contributed to outward migration in the 1970s and 1980s. A declining birth rate has led to a reduction in the numbers of young people available for work. (The population of Belfast, for example, dropped from 400,000 in the middle of the twentieth century to 270,000 in 2006.) So, when violence reduced and the economy began to expand, there was a shortage of workers, and skills gaps also emerged.

- How much of our identity is determined by being able to do something (e.g. a job, a role, a ministry)? Can you describe your self without saying what you do? Try introducing yourself to the person next to you without mentioning what you do or your work.
- What is needed in this picture in order for the plug to 'fit'?
- How can churches be an adaptor to help new people connect and to share their gifts with our communities?
- How important is it to allow new people to serve as well as to support them?
- What do you know about past and present experiences of people who left the island of Ireland and were aliens in foreign lands? Did any of your extended family emigrate? Do you have any stories about what happened to them? How do you think the experience of our own people should influence how we treat the alien in our midst today?

Time and again in the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament), the Jews are reminded that they were once exiles and aliens in Egypt themselves. This experience should help them to deal justly and lovingly with the alien in their midst. (See Exodus 22:21 and 23:9; Deuteronomy 10:19; Leviticus 19:33-34). The biblical call is clear: we are to love the 'alien' as ourselves.

Card 3:

Which Game? Whose Rules?



What do you see in this picture? What strikes you the most?

Things to note:

- What pieces are present on the playing board?
- Playing pieces have value and integrity within the context of 'their game', but what happens when they are all put on a new board and played by different rules?
- Snakes and Ladders is a game of moving up and down, of advancing and falling back, depending on the roll of the dice. There is a great deal of chance regarding where you land. What might this represent within the context of migration?

Questions and Discussion Points:

- What unwritten 'rules' might our culture have?
- How do we respond to people who behave in ways that are different from ourselves?
- Have you ever had an experience of having to learn or to teach some unwritten cultural rules? What was this experience like?
- How can we help people understand how things are done and how can we do away with unnecessary rules?
- What things might be ladders to integration and what might be snakes?
- Do you think many migrant people choose to land here or is it a 'chance' destination?
- What are the unwritten rules in church?
- How can the church help people to find means of moving forward and avoid the pitfalls which pull them down?

Card 5: From A Distance

... If I don't speak to you I don't know what makes you laugh, I don't know what makes you cry, I don't know what makes you happy, I don't know your history...

Ann from Liberia quoted in *The New Workers: Migration, Labour and Citizenship in Northern Ireland in the 21st Century* edited by B. Garvey, P. Stewart, J. Kulinska, R. Campuzano
[www.strath.ac.uk/media/departments/hrm/pdfs/hrm-pdf-other/Main_template_Layout_1_\(2\).pdf](http://www.strath.ac.uk/media/departments/hrm/pdfs/hrm-pdf-other/Main_template_Layout_1_(2).pdf)

A Tunisian proverb

When I saw him from a distance, I thought he was my enemy.

When he came closer, I recognised a human being.

When I shook his hand, I found a brother.

Quoted in *On the Road: A Journey through the Bible for Migrants*,
French Bible Society
www.la-bible.net/doc/dons08072.pdf

Card 6: Dancing With Diversity

You don't get harmony when everybody sings the same note.

Doug Floyd

Music is expression of harmony in sound. Love is the expression of harmony in life.

Stephen F. Gaskin

'When the first boatload of Vietnamese [refugees] arrived, they refused to get off the boat. They said, 'you must be joking, we are coming from war-torn Vietnam.' And so the first boatload went back to Liverpool. That is how bad it was [in 1980]. But now it is different. Now we are a growing society, becoming more normal, more multicultural.'

Interview with a policymaker, Community Relations Council, 14 October 2005, quoted by Peter Geoghegan, 'The Search for Equality: Race, Religion and Public Policy in Northern Ireland' in *Shared Space*, Issue 9, 2010
www.community-relations.org.uk/fs/doc/chapter-32.pdf

'The various migrant populations who have arrived in Northern Ireland since the millennium have brought with them, not only their skills and experience, but also their traditions, music, food and language. Ten years ago, Northern Ireland was a relatively insular and inward-looking country. Today, it is a vibrant and culturally diverse society.'

Raymond Russell, *Migration in Northern Ireland: An Update*, 2012
www.niassembly.gov.uk/Documents/RaISe/Publications/2012/general/3112.pdf

Card 3: Which Game? Whose Rules?

I had to start again learning other things, other customs, other traditions and the ways to do things. It was almost like being a child again and being told how to do things. That was difficult because back home I would have always thought of myself as independent.

Rhina from El Salvador quoted in *Voices from the Global South; A Research Report on Migration*. Centre for Global Education, 2010
https://docs.google.com/file/d/0Bwa0-yj_NbZGMTBhZWQwOGEtNjgwMi00Y2QwLWEyMWQtYzQ0ODk3NWl0ZWVj/edit?pli=1

'Settlement choices such as where to live, where to send children to school and where to worship are often interpreted in the host community as affiliation to a 'side' in the conflict, sometimes leading to hostility, intimidation, or even the threat of or actual violence or expulsion from accommodation.'

STEP, *Research to Identify Additional Difficulties Faced by Minority Ethnic Groups and Migrant Workers because of the Conflict in N. Ireland*, 2010, Executive Summary

Card 4: Mixed Signals

'A Polish woman who is a skilled seamstress tried to find work using her skills but found that her basic English skills prevented her from doing so. She was offered a cleaning job through a recruitment agency and worked for 2-3 hours per day for 1 week only. There were no other job offers. Having improved her English she has now found work as a seamstress.'

The Role of the Recruitment Sector in the Employment of Migrant Workers, 2010
www.equalityni.org/archive/pdf/ECMigrantfullrpt.pdf

There are people of different nationalities living in this country: some have the same rights as the local people. Not us. Are we not all humans?

Roma woman from Romania, speaking to a support worker in Belfast

[Romanian and Bulgarian people do not have the same rights as other Europeans, e.g. to seek jobs and receive state support, if necessary. This will change in 2014.]

We are in fear because the UK Home Office is always changing the [immigration] law because of the news...

Female Work Permit holder commenting on the affect of newspaper scaremongering, quoted in *Bayanihan! The Filipino Community in Northern Ireland*, 2012
www.nicem.org.uk/elibrary/publication/bayanihan-research-on-the-filipino-community-in-ni

Card 4:

Mixed Signals



What do you see in this picture? What strikes you the most?

Things to note:

- The path on the other side of the gate is well-worn and trodden.
- The pasture on the other side of the fence appears to be green; however, we do not know what is on 'this' side of the gate.
- The signs on the gate often contradict one another. While some send a welcoming message, others warn the passer-by to beware.

Questions and Discussion Points:

- Pretend that you are the person walking up to this gate. What thoughts and emotions run through you?
- Do you think these signs represent a reality for people who have recently arrived in this country?
- How does the person approaching this gate discern which sign to follow? Are they welcome or should they leave?
- Could the conflicting signs prevent someone from moving forward?
- What barriers might be on the other side of this gate?
- What does it mean to place a 'welcome' sign on a gate?

Card 5:

From A Distance



What do you see in this picture? What strikes you the most?

Things to note:

- The outline of a person is filled in with braille text.
- In order to 'see' the person you have to look closely or else you might miss them.
- In order to *really* see the person you must get close and 'touch' them in order to discover more about who they are and what their story is.
- If you only saw this card from a distance understanding what is written might be difficult.

Questions and Discussion Points:

- Who do you avoid seeing or tend not to notice?
- What are the barriers to interaction with people whom you might avoid contact?
- When have you felt unnoticed or invisible to those around you? How did this make you feel?
- Getting to know people can be difficult when there are language or communication barriers. What experiences do you have with people who speak a different language than your own? What steps can be taken to bridge language barriers?
- How can we make our church a place where people feel seen and known? How do we move beyond an initial welcome to getting to know people at a deeper level? What challenges might you encounter in doing so? What unexpected joys might emerge?

Appendix 1

Quotations in full

Card 1: A Fish Out of Water

We take our culture for granted as fish take their water for granted.

Iwona Wardach, Polish Association NI, June 2012

Everything here is different.

Words spoken during a discussion among a group of people claiming asylum; quoted in the EMBRACE prayer letter, June 2012
www.embraceni.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/June12-Prayer-Letter.pdf

'... in 2010, the total number of international migrants in the world was estimated at 214 million people'

International Organization for Migration (IOM), *World Migration Report 2011; Communicating Effectively about Migration*
http://publications.iom.int/bookstore/free/WMR2011_English.pdf

Card 2: Fitting In

... I was trying so many interviews, and I was really trying hard. I had a degree back home but it's not valid here. I couldn't get a job...

Rhina from El Salvador quoted in *Voices from the Global South; A Research Report on Migration*. Centre for Global Education, 2010
https://docs.google.com/file/d/0Bwa0-yj_NbZGMTBhZWQwOGEtNjgwMi00Y2QwLWEyMWQtYzQ0ODk3NWl0ZWVj/edit?pli=1

'The comments given by respondents demonstrate a concern about adapting to life in Northern Ireland with one respondent saying their main concern was "Getting adjusted to living in a foreign country".'

'Za Chlebem': The Impact of the Economic Downturn on the Polish Community in Northern Ireland by Robbie McVeigh and Chris McAfee., 2009
www.nicem.org.uk/uploads/publications/Za_Chlebem_Report.pdf

The 2011 census indicates that 81,453 people (4.51% of the total population) of people living in N Ireland were born in countries other than the UK or the Irish Republic, 45,407 from the rest of the European Union, and 36,046 born in other countries.

From the New Testament we see that the early church was not immune from tribal divides. It is clear, however, that through their allegiance to Christ they sought to form reconciled communities from every tribe and nation.

Read: **Ephesians 2:14**

This was not an easy process. Jewish believers had to make space for believers from other cultures and local churches were gradually composed of people from many different backgrounds.

Our challenge today is to make sure that our churches are guided by a biblical culture which encourages people from other countries and cultures to feel welcome, rather than a church culture which rejects anyone who is not like 'us'. The church of Jesus Christ is from every tribe, language, people and nation.

Questions

1. How can we remove barriers between local community and newcomers at our churches? What can we do so that new people will feel welcomed in our congregations?
2. How can we show our acceptance of people who are different from us?
3. What can we do to help our neighbours to feel at home in Northern Ireland?

Taking it forward

Look around your own neighbourhood. How many people from different countries and cultures live around you? Next time, when you pass them, say 'Hello' and offer them a warm smile. You do not know what impact your simple smile could have in making your neighbour feel welcome.

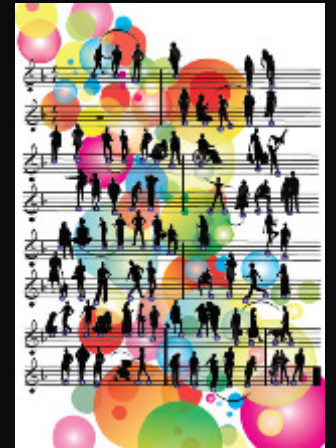
- What biblical stories might we look to for guidance about how to engage with those who might be less visible in society?

The 'aliens', or people that were often only seen 'from a distance', during New Testament times were the Samaritans; yet these were the very people that Jesus reached out to.

In John 4, Jesus makes contact with an 'alien' woman. He also stays with the Samaritans for two days.

Card 6:

Dancing with Diversity



What do you see in this picture? What strikes you the most?

Things to note:

- Look carefully at the people on the music staff. A wide variety of people are represented.
- Each person is standing on a particular note. Together they make up the song 'He's got the whole world in His hands'.

Questions and Discussion Points:

- Dancing to (or singing) a song is not always simple, especially if people are moving to a different tune.
- In order for the song to be complete, it takes people from all backgrounds and walks of life to contribute and join in. Everyone has a role to play.
- 'Dancing with Diversity' is the title of this card, making it sound quite idyllic and pleasant; however, the reality is that sometimes making diversity work can be difficult and messy. What experiences (both positive and negative) have you had in 'dancing with diversity'?
- When we look at the people Jesus chose to be his disciples we see that he chose a very diverse group of people. There were fishermen, a tax collector, a zealot; however, even in their diversity they were able to form a community around Jesus in the service of his Kingdom.
- How comfortable are we with diversity? Can we embrace diversity as an expression of God's creativity *or* do we wish people were more like us?

Taking it forward

Return to the opening question of who you might find it difficult to have an encounter with. Discuss what things have encouraged you from this study which might help you to reach out to people who are different from you.

Read the passage from Isaiah below and spend the last moments in prayer asking for fresh strength to reach out to others.

Isaiah 40: 29-31

²⁹ He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless.

³⁰ Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; ³¹ but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

Card 6: Dancing With Diversity



Making Space

Setting the scene

Tribalism has always been an issue that divides. People feel comfortable with those who look and act as they do and this is true among Christians as well.

Are there people you find it difficult to befriend?

Is it difficult to accept people with different views from yours?

Jesus was journeying back towards Galilee and normally a good Jew would avoid Samaritan territory completely, but instead he chose to venture into the country of the outcasts. Samaritans were hated by Jews and vice versa, so Jesus had gone to a place where he was an outsider himself.

The story begins at Jacob's well which is the well of the outcast; Jacob had to flee from Esau because he stole his birth right. It is the hour of the outcast, midday, too hot for any respectable person to be out and so only the social and moral outcasts hover shamefully there.

Jesus has an encounter here with a Samaritan woman that demonstrates his willingness to engage and show concern for all people.

Read: **John 4: 1-28, 39**

Questions

1. In what ways might this woman be seen as an outcast?
2. Even though there are many reasons why Jesus should not be speaking to this woman at this hour, he engages the woman in conversation by starting with their most basic physical need. They are both looking for a drink. Why do you think he starts this way and does not immediately tell her that he is the Messiah?
3. In verse 12, the woman wants to know whether Jesus is greater than the forefathers of her own race. How does Jesus respond to the challenge of racial supremacy? Is this effective?
4. In verse 20, the woman again wants to engage Jesus in religious debate by talking about where the best place to worship is. She wants to know who is better Jacob or Jesus. Should she worship in a temple or worship out on a mountain? She wants to know whose side this man is really on and which group he belongs to, yet Jesus is careful to sidestep this contentious issue by focusing not on the where of worship but rather on how we should be worshipping. What are some of the issues that spark religious debate in Northern Ireland that can side-track us from relating, sharing and displaying the love of Jesus to others?

The disciples had already been to the city to buy food; yet it took the testimony of the Samaritan woman to encourage others to believe in the Messiah.

What challenge does that bring to us?

Bible Study Suggestions

Card 1: Fish Out of Water



Once we were strangers

Setting the scene

Before looking at the Bible passage together, ask the group to identify some of the reasons why people might leave their homeland (e.g. to escape war, poverty or famine; to seek better economic opportunities; to seek medical treatment; to enjoy a better climate or lifestyle; to start a business; to retire; to find work; to marry or be with a partner or children; to serve their country as a diplomat; to study or to travel for an extended period). Write these up for all to see. Don't evaluate any of the reasons at this stage. The movement of people from place to place has always been part and parcel of human history.

You may invite the group to consider the following questions:

- How many of your family members have lived or worked in other countries?
- Do you aspire to travel to other countries in order to work or live?
- Under what circumstances would you leave your home and go and live somewhere else?

Next, look at the list of reasons and see whether we perceive these to be good or valid reasons.

- Do we judge people coming here differently to how we might judge ourselves for going to some other country? For example, compare the person seeking asylum with someone retiring to a farmhouse in Provence.
- Do we judge in favour of those in the greatest need or those who have the most to offer? Should it matter?

The wealth of biblical material on the treatment of strangers is still highly pertinent to the present day. Throughout the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament), Israel's identity as the People of God and their obligation towards the stranger is tied to their own history as a sojourning people. This is traced back to Abraham who leaves his land and family in response to God's call. It is recalled over and over again in Genesis that Abraham lived as an alien. Israel's own experience of exile and oppression in Egypt (where they went to escape famine) is the context for God's dramatic intervention on his people's behalf. Even when they do finally reach their own land, they are told to regard it as belonging to God and their status as that of resident aliens. Therefore, they are to have compassion on the disadvantaged, including the stranger, because they have experienced the same plight. There is a bond between the people of Israel and the aliens residing among them because the Israelites can identify with their needs and struggles.

Read: **Deuteronomy 26**

Questions

1. How was Israel instructed to treat 'the stranger'?
2. How was this linked to Israel's own identity?
3. How is it linked to God's character?
4. What is the significance of 'aliens' being grouped together with the Levites, widows and the fatherless?

Taking it forward

During the week, take a bit of time to look out for newspaper reports or stories about refugees, people seeking asylum, migrant workers or minority ethnic people. Consider your own reactions to these news items.

Questions

1. Today several million refugees and internally displaced people live in the countries in and around the Middle East. Imagine if Mary and Joseph were fleeing danger today. What lengths might Joseph have to go to, to get his family to safety? What risks and dangers might they face?
2. What examples from Jesus' life can you think of when he had to rely on the kindness of strangers?
3. Looking at his life, in what ways was Jesus an 'insider' and an 'outsider' in his own society during his earthly ministry?
4. Think about how he related to other 'outsiders' and how his teaching challenged his listeners to cross boundaries and to relate to others in a new way. Who do you see as outsiders? Why?
5. How might the gospel challenge us to cross boundaries to relate to these people in a new way?

Taking it forward

Think of ways in which the story of Christ as a refugee could be told.

Card 5: From A Distance



Jesus the outsider meets with an outsider

Setting the scene

Ask the group: who are the people you cross over to the other side of the street to avoid.

Who are the people you would struggle to have a conversation with and why?

Card 4: Mixed Signals



A refugee's story

Setting the scene

Ask the group to think of recent conflicts around the world where groups of people have been targeted because of their ethnicity (e.g. Sudan, Kosovo, Syria, Congo, Kurdistan).

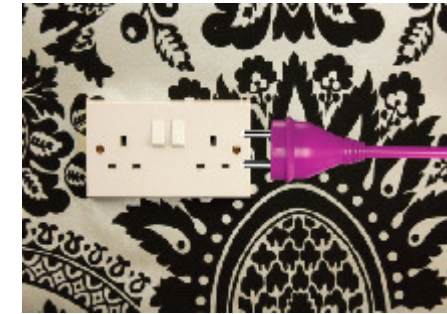
The gospels tell us that following the birth of Jesus his parents were forced to seek refuge in another country. If they had stayed in Judea and Herod's soldiers had found their son, he would have been killed along with all other male children less than two years of age. The Wise Men from the east had brought gifts of gold and other valuable items to the baby Jesus. While these gifts have symbolic and spiritual significance, we could see them as valuable 'currency' - what better provision for a family with few material resources fleeing into exile?

Activity

Ask participants, what they would consider to be the most valuable things they would take with them if they had to flee their country. Write a list of the items people could bring. Tell the group they will be fleeing together and each person may bring only one item. Ask them to organise together what would be the most useful items for the group.

Read: **Matthew 2:1-23**

Card 2: Fitting In



Strangers on earth

Setting the scene

The early church had a very keen sense of being strangers in the world (see 1 Peter 1:1-17 and 1 Peter 2:4-11).

- Have you ever had an experience where you have felt like a stranger?
- How did you feel?
- What do you think made you feel that way?

When you are living abroad your home country may still be in your thoughts. Abraham was called by God to a new future - a journey requiring faith and no small amount of imagination. He learnt to live as though he were a stranger on earth, dependent on God and living into a future which was entirely open.

Read: **Hebrews 11:8-16**

Questions

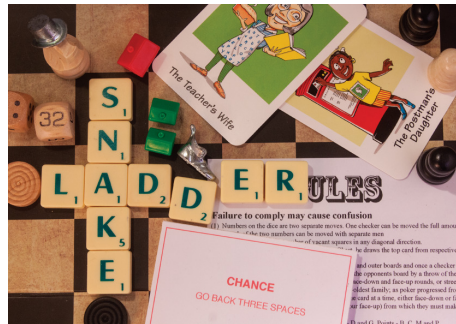
1. In what way are Christians 'strangers on earth'?
2. What implications does this have for how we view other strangers in our country?
3. What can the church learn from asylum applicants and refugees; from migrant workers; from people living here who come from other countries or people of other ethnic backgrounds who live in Northern Ireland? (Why not try this out as role-play or an imagined interview. The 'church member' interviews the other about his/her experiences here, positive and negative.)

4. What are the characteristics of the 'better country' that we long for?
5. What gives you your identity? In particular what do we mean by national identity?
6. How do we view people from other nations or those who have an allegiance to a different national identity, especially those living in this country? Does it make a difference to us where they come from or why they are here?
7. What is the relationship between Christian faith and national identity? Is one more important than the other? How do they get confused?

Taking it forward

Discuss how you plan to take forward your learning from this study.

Card 3: Which Game? Whose Rules?



Challenges and opportunities

Setting the scene:

Our lives are full of good and bad events. When we meet someone who becomes a close friend, we are happy; when we lose a job, we are disappointed. Life is like a Snakes and Ladders game.

Name a good thing which has happened to you lately and then recall a difficult situation you recently faced. How did it make you feel and how did you respond to the situations?

For people who have recently moved from one country to another the highs and lows of life can seem magnified. Not knowing the language, culture and rules can bring difficulties; however, bringing different skills and experiences as well as meeting new friends offers opportunities.

Read: Genesis 29

What were the biggest challenges for Jacob in Haran? What were the greatest opportunities for him there?

Jacob stole his brother's birth-right and had to flee from Esau to another country. In the foreign land he was safe and he even met his love there. Being a newcomer was sometimes beneficial (he could offer new ideas which he brought from his birth country and his uncle's business began to prosper), but also tricky (his father-in-law gave to him the girl he didn't want to marry and explained later, 'It is not our custom here to give the younger daughter in marriage before the older one') (Gen 29:26).

Questions:

1. What kinds of difficulties can people who move to Northern Ireland experience?
2. What good opportunities are there in this country?
3. How can we help people who arrive in Northern Ireland to learn about the culture, history, and rules here?
4. How can we help people to avoid the traps which pull them down while giving them chances to move forward?

Taking it forward

Pray to see people with eyes of compassion and for discernment to know how and when to respond.