



EMBRACE Annual Report

2023/ 2024

EMBRACE NIC100294

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Chairperson's Report – 20th Anniversary of EMBRACE

Celebrating our 20th anniversary this year reflected EMBRACE's commitment to welcoming and drawing attention to the needs and the gifts of newcomers from all corners of the world. Since we began in 2003, we have witnessed Northern Ireland transform as a society, and we have adapted and responded as an organization. We are proud of the fact that from the beginning EMBRACE has been and will remain an inter-church group supporting Christians throughout the north of Ireland to make it a more welcoming community.

Over these two decades, we have championed the values of compassion, friendship and diversity. We have facilitated the assistance of countless individuals who had no recourse to public funds and have provided vital support. We helped to create awareness and resources around English language learning and cultural integration programs to empower newcomers and locals to make connections with one another.

We look back with gratitude for the partnerships, volunteers, donors and funders who have enabled us to have a meaningful and sustained impact. We now look ahead with renewed determination. Our anniversary was not just about celebrating the past but reaffirming our mission. Together, we will continue to build bridges of understanding and friendship, ensuring that the next 20 years bring even greater strides towards a more welcoming and compassionate society.

With your continued help, we look forward to making a difference in the lives of those who have come here to make Northern Ireland their home. The need to cultivate a welcoming society for those with different backgrounds, experiences and outlooks is as relevant now as it has ever

been. EMBRACE remains focused on informing and resourcing churches to provide that welcome; moreover, we want the churches to be blessed by the presence and abundant gifts that so many newcomers bring to life here.

Our Committee meets regularly in person and on Zoom to discern, pray, explore, plan and organise ways to make the North a more welcoming community. We have been greatly supported in our work this year through the part-time and voluntary contributions made by Sr Susie O’Rawe who brings a wealth of experience and commitment to the organization. We are most grateful for all her work in relation to our events, editing EMBRACE REFLECTIONS, carrying out our administration and developing our website/social media.

Susie also attends relevant events on behalf of EMBRACE and has helped to re-establish our presence. Committee members have been present and contributed to many gatherings over this past year including the 4-Corners Festival, Edmund Rice International, and the ICC/ICCM General Meeting. We want to extend our gratitude to the Irish Council of Churches/Irish Inter-Church Meeting for the modest rent/costs we have in the Inter-Church Centre and to all the churches that have continued to support us financially and at our events. We want to acknowledge the grant we have received from the Dominican Ministry Fund which enabled us to host important convenings to highlight and address unmet needs.

In On Sunday 19 November 2023, EMBRACE organized a MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS WHO DIED SEEKING SAFETY in Carrickfergus Methodist Church. This was a solemn event with a eulogy and liturgy honouring and remembering the known and unknown

who have perished during their journey towards safety or in search of a better life. A special thanks to Committee members Pam, Dougie and Irene for organizing this service.

We continue to develop and provide resources and information to churches and others through our website and via a selection of printed materials. Sr. Susie, with former founding member Margaret McNulty, revised our *Who's Who? Who's Here?* leaflet which provides helpful information on the data and distinctions between migrants, people seeking asylum and refugees. Susie regularly posts information and links on our Facebook page and has been enhancing our website.

Our EMERGENCY FUND remains available to selected organisations who can request funding for individuals and families in need. The bulk of our expenditure this year has been to provide one-off support for heating and accommodation, primarily through Starling Collective.

There is a renewed spirit and energy with EMBRACE and a shared sense of purpose that is moving us on into this new year.

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

Membership

EMBRACE membership is free and available to individuals and to groups on application. Currently there are 47 registered members.

Committee Membership during 2023/24

Scott Boldt, Chairperson

Irene Jovaras, Vice-chairperson

Michael Potter, Treasurer

Pam Dzunu

Dougie Tyler

David Smyth

Standing for Election in 2024/2025

Scott Boldt

Scott is a Professor of Practice at the National University of Wales and the University of Cumbria and in the past managed the Reconciliation and Integration Programme in Edgehill Theological College; he also served as chair of the All-Ireland Churches Consultative Meeting on Racism within the Irish Inter Church Meeting.

Irene Jovaras

Irene was born in Scotland; her parents having moved there as displaced persons from Lithuania in 1940s. Irene worked as a teacher latterly with the Glasgow Asylum Seeker Project and with the Bilingual Support Unit in secondary schools. She is now retired and is active in the Focolare movement and based in Belfast.

Michael Potter

Michael is an Elder at Harmony Hill Presbyterian Church. He has a background in equality and inclusion research, including formerly at the South Tyrone Empowerment Programme (STEP) in Dungannon and currently at the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Dougie Tyler

Dougie is employed by Barnardo's in their residential service for unaccompanied minors. He also volunteers with the Red Cross Family Reunion Integration Service. He is a Diocesan Lay Reader in the Church of Ireland taking services in the East Antrim area. Dougie has worked in Romania in the field of child homelessness and continues to support this work through a NI charity.

Pam Dzunu

Pam is a Local Preacher in Training with the Methodist Church in Ireland. She is the Sunday School Coordinator and Methodist Women in Ireland President at Carrickfergus Methodist Church, where her husband is minister. She is originally from the United States, where she worked for many years in International Student Ministry. Pam has an MA-TESOL degree and 30+ years experience teaching Academic English and ESL.

Retirements from the Committee

David Smyth has decided to step down from the Committee as of May 2024, as work and family commitments have precluded him from participating at the level he would like. We are grateful to David for the contribution and service he has made to the Committee and we look forward to continuing to remain in contact with David and Evangelical Alliance as we move forward.

Accounts

Please see attached.