



'Sharing our Resources' for evangelisation in England

GfE 'Signpost' Resource Paper No 1a June 2009

Evangelisation and Migration

To be continued in GfE Resource Paper 1b

From the 'Churches Coordinating Group for Evangelisation' (GfE) of Churches Together in England

Evangelisation and Migration (1a)

This resource paper is the first in a series. It is written as a report for church leaders as we all seek to share the good news of Jesus Christ. Evangelisation and Migration is a key mission issue, identified as a priority by denominational evangelism officers. This paper will present information, collate stories and signpost resources available from across the network. The intention is to help local church leaders with the question, 'What can our church do about it?'

Informed by Rev Darrel Jackson who is researching mission and migration across Europe for the World Council of Churches, members of GfE met with a wider Forum of national evangelism officers across the Four Nations under the auspices of the Global Mission Network of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland. This paper is one of two which report on the initial gathering and various conferences and networks which have considered the issues in greater depth since.



Local Church Stories

John Stephens, Methodist Minister of the Dublin Central Mission, described the new life and vibrancy brought by new migrant members. The church had nearly closed, partly for poor parking, but then extended a welcome to people from overseas. Many did not have cars anyway, and the buses all lead to the city centre! They found a spiritual home in the congregation and brought friends. John first came to the city himself 25 years previously to start work with just a suitcase. Though just from Belfast, he said his ministry has been shaped by that experience of being a migrant himself.

The current multi-ethnic congregation is led by a multi ethnic staff and leadership. 160 on Sunday mornings are served by 5 staff including a Sri Lankan minister and Argentinean administrator; while there are people from the Philippines, Korea, and Africa on the council. Hospitality, relationships, practical and pastoral support have been key. They intentionally want to be God's people together as a community, as this is how they have been called to be. John says other churches may well grow with ethnic congregations, with worship in their own language, but each church needs to find out the best way under God for them to grow. The multi-ethnic congregation approach brings 'many problems' and a 'wonderful blessing' at the same time.

Another story was told about the 'The Solid Rock' church in Dublin by Jabulani Mwale. As well as a multicultural main congregation they have different mission congregations e.g. Nigerian and Cameroon, and plans for many more. They run both models of united fellowship and diversity, which has led to considerable growth, as can be seen on their website www.thesolidrock.net.



The different stories led to a considered debate about the best model of mission, with the advantages and disadvantages both ways of having a diverse mix of people in one congregation, compared to specific language, age and cultural group, worshipping and reaching out to their own people groups. The Forum discussed the much debated old premise of Donald McGavran that 'people don't like to become Christians by crossing cultural barriers', and the relevance of research in to this in our own day. We came to a general conclusion which you will see below in point number 20.

Some general considerations

Darrel Jackson observed that "when living in Hungary I was an 'expatriate'; in the Isle of Man a 'come over' and in the Forest of Dean 'from away'".

There are different ways of describing the 'the other', and 'migrant': each word having a different connotation. With this and many of the newspaper headline words like 'waves', 'floods', 'overwhelmed' and 'sponging' in mind, together with confusion in many minds over the closely related subject of asylum seekers, the Forum engaged with all issues from a positive perspective and noted the following points. They raise lots of questions for us all to consider further.

1. Migration movements are not new. They happened before, in and after biblical times
2. Jesus himself was a migrant and said that what we do for the least, we do for him.
3. One in ten British people live abroad so there is 'out' migration as well as 'in'. This trend has been for hundreds of years, especially from Ireland and Scotland to all parts of the world.
4. Ethnic congregations are not new either. Welsh and Swedish examples are well known.
5. However, studies in Spain and elsewhere show that people often lose their faith when they move, for many reasons.
6. A good missional framework for evangelisation is: 'listen, serve, receive and share'. Another framework, is 'observe, interpret, and make it happen'.

7. For worship, find times which fit best for workers: in Ross on Wye an agricultural workers' congregation meets in the evening, and in East Anglia a Baptist group meets midweek.
8. Recognise that some groups are 'invisible to us'. A Community Education Officer asked if a church building could be used for teaching Polish women living in a hotel round the corner of the small town of 2000 people.
9. Radio 4 reported on Roman Catholic Polish priests who serve congregations: some of whom have been on our shores for decades. 'Keeping the faith' is part of our mission responsibility.
10. 50 years ago a work started with Asian migrants in Glasgow. This work continues at The Well. It is clearly evangelistic and welcomes 5000 people through the door each year, including new migrant groups of a different ethnic origin. This brings a new set of issues.
11. We need to recognise and be sensitive to tensions which can exist between different cultural people groups. This can be the case even if they come from the same country.
12. Many new Christian converts are very keen to evangelise in Britain and Ireland, believing that that is part of their call as Christians in response to the Great Commission, just as British people have done in other parts of the world.
13. We need to be careful about stereotyping people and find out where they have come from and what they bring
14. Christian groups engaged in direct outreach and work with migrants and asylum seekers, often subsequently get involved in issues of justice.
15. Although a Baptism certificate can support an asylum seeker's case, this has not been observed as a common abuse of the church.
16. In East Anglia an outreach to Portuguese people through a café has drawn 10 new believers who have been recently baptised.
17. Statistics have shown that the fastest growing churches in London are the Black Majority and Ethnic groups. Learning from evangelists and pastors for migrant group congregations in network meetings is now taking place.
18. There is no 'one answer fits all' model in all circumstances: responses need to be based on need, cultural relevance, and a welcoming church prepared to change ... and change again.
19. We do well to remind ourselves of lessons learnt in previous generations about indigenous leadership, as explored by missiologists like Roland Allen in 'Missionary Methods: St Paul's or Ours?'
20. One model which can work well is to have Cell groups for individual ethnic identities and then for them all to join together in a central Celebration, shaped by what the Cell groups bring. Each Cell group can have its own relevant outreach programme. This model has worked in both rural and urban areas.
21. A good place for specific mission would be Victoria Coach station where many travel to and change, 'without a friend in the world'. With no chapel on site could a Christian team work from a converted coach? The Salvation Army have an outreach there.



To be continued ..

These GfE Resource Papers are intended to be short and small enough to send by email and web attachment. A lot of material is available on Evangelisation and Migration and so this paper continues in GfE 'Signpost' Resource Paper No 1b via:

http://www.cte.org.uk/Groups/95021/Churches_Together_in/Themes/Church_Life_Evangelisation/Evangelisation/Resource_Papers/Resource_Papers.aspx

Additional material is available at: <http://www.gfe.org.uk/migration.htm>

Resources

1. The CTBI booklet 'Migration Principles' CTBI 2007 provides valuable guidelines for all churches. www.ctbi.org.uk.
2. Global Connections, OM and YWAM have the 'Caleb Project' book 'The New Faces of Europe'. www.calebproject.org
3. The Methodist church have produced 'May I call you friend?' for interfaith outreach. www.mph.org.uk
4. The Baptist Union have a download resource on Migration with 10 principles. www.baptist.org.uk
5. Alpha provide course material in Russian, Polish and Chinese. www.alpha.org
6. 'A Christian Perspective on a Polarised Debate' by Nick Spencer. Paternoster 2004 explores Evangelisation.
7. A general introduction to the issues of migration is: 'International Migration: A very short Introduction' by Khalid Koser in the Oxford University Press 'Very Short Introductions' series (OUP 2007).

This Resource Paper is one of a growing series on different topics for local church leaders, being produced and posted on:

http://www.cte.org.uk/Groups/95021/Churches_Together_in/Themes/Church_Life_Evangelisation/Evangelisation/Resource_Papers/Resource_Papers.aspx

These papers collate contributions from our immediate and wider network, and are presented in good faith for accuracy and representation. They cannot be considered formal statements or endorsements on behalf of all churches in England, and GfE / CTE cannot be held responsible for material and opinions which have been quoted.

The Churches Coordinating Group for Evangelisation (GfE), is a network of national evangelism officers of the major denominations and home mission agencies. Our aim is to help the churches in England work together in sharing the good news of Jesus Christ.

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