

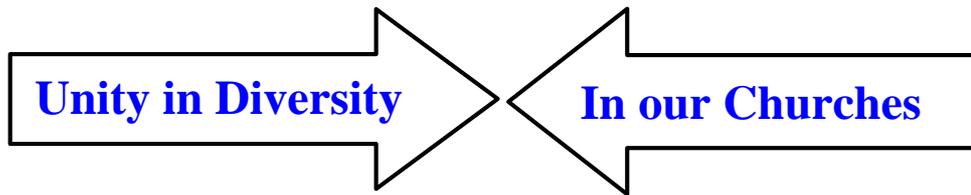
Unity in Diversity

In our Churches

This document is based on the Key Integration Guidelines as devised by the Parish-Based Integration Project and the Inter-Church Committee on Social Issues.



A resource to assist local parishes and congregations with the integration of new residents into their faith communities



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This document was produced as one of the outputs from the "Parish based Integration Project". This project, which is largely funded by the Integration Unit of the Office of the Minister for State for Integration, was initiated and is managed by the Inter-Church Committee on Social Issues, a committee of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting which represents 15 Churches operating in the island of Ireland.

The fifteen member Churches are currently: The Roman Catholic Church, The Antiochian Orthodox Church, The Church of Ireland, The Greek Orthodox Church in Britain and Ireland, The LifeLink Network of Churches, The Lutheran Church in Ireland, The Methodist Church in Ireland, The Moravian Church (Irish District), The Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church of Ireland, The Presbyterian Church in Ireland, The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Ireland, The Rock of Ages Cherubim and Seraphim Church, The Romanian Orthodox Church in Ireland, The Russian Orthodox Church in Ireland, The Salvation Army (Ireland Division).

Further details on the project, and a significant body of relevant resource material, are available on the website at www.iccsi.ie

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Context for this booklet

In the last decade the fabric of Irish society has changed profoundly. According to the latest Census results, Ireland's population includes about 10% who are non-Irish nationals. Whilst this is not significantly different from our European neighbours, the pace of this change certainly is and is probably unique in modern history. Other countries have faced a much more gradual change in their cultural mix, and so they had much more time to gradually test the waters. Ireland has been subject to a somewhat more sudden immersion into the deep end of multiculturalism. Immigrants have also contributed to the surge in membership of many religious groups in Ireland. The most innovative and dramatic changes in Ireland's religious landscape in recent years is not the participation of immigrants in mainline churches but the birth and spread of immigrant-led religious groups.

The 2006 Census lists 26 religions (including 'atheists', 'other stated religions', 'no religion' and 'not stated' in this census classification). It also gives a percentage change between the two last censuses, 2002 and 2006. It is interesting to note that among the fastest growing religions in Ireland are the Apostolic or Pentecostal with a growth rate of 157%, Orthodox 99%, Hindu 96%, Atheist 85%, Lutheran 72%, Muslim 69% etc. While some of these figures are from a very small base, nevertheless it still emphasizes the rapidly changing religious landscape.

Religion is an important aspect of personal identity for many people, and is carried with them throughout their lives wherever they may find themselves. In new circumstances religion can generate the personal stability needed to replace important things left behind such as family and social links. Our Churches, as faith communities, have important roles to play in our society. This significant social responsibility carried by our churches ought to ensure positive steps towards social cohesion.

Religious migrant communities may play a positive or negative role within the process of integration. They may give to the migrant in the first phase of integration a feeling of home and of belonging which will ensure a sense of security and mutual support. These communities must be open and interact with the host society, seeking the common faith as the binding link which may become a bridge towards a smoother integration process.

Religious communities that are common to both host society and migrant community should be encouraged to exchange and share in order to avoid marginalisation and frustration being felt by migrant faith communities. That could lead to the build-up of radicalisation within the religious community or of individuals within it.

The religious communities of the host societies can be enriched by the contributions of migrant religious communities. Intercultural experiences should be encouraged and eventually transferred into other sectors of social life. All the stakeholders, societal, ecclesial and governmental, should work together to pursue this goal. Churches and other faith communities in a receiving country have a role to play in the migration process. They can become a resource to bridge different cultures and

communities, but if they shun this responsibility, or if they are too exclusive or dominant, or do not share values, power and resources, then they may exacerbate negative experiences of alienation, frustration and marginalisation on the part of migrants. In order to allow faith communities to play this important role positively, the government will have to guarantee appropriate legislation: firstly with respect to migration and asylum issues, and secondly, to religious freedom. **A balance must be found between the needs of each faith community, respect for the freedom of every citizen, and the values that are considered fundamental to the dignity of human beings and the proper functioning of civil society.**

In this context of fast changing religious fabric in Ireland the Inter Church Committee on Social Issues on behalf of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting successfully secured funding from the government for the Parish Based Integration Project. This project's broad objective is to promote practical integration of immigrants based around parishes or local congregations. Feedback from the local parishes and congregations who have already engaged with the project is very positive, all emphasizing the usefulness of the key parish integration guidelines devised by the project.

This resource book has been developed by the Project with the intention to assist local parishes with the integration of new immigrants residing within their boundaries. It is envisaged that it will provide a wider framework for devising the appropriate integration strategies within the local context. It contains case studies and models of best practice and also makes suggestions for their adaptation and implementation into the particular circumstances of local parishes and congregations.

Another priority for the Project is to provide a focus for coordination and sharing of resources and experiences between the agencies and committees of individual churches. Dialogue and respect for difference are the key to finding the way to move forward. Welcoming others, respecting their differences as positive values and coming to interact with them so that they are fully engaged can be a complex but rewarding process of creating a feeling of belonging. We need to emphasise what we all share in common, and that is our unity in Christ. We need to acknowledge that it is only a true expression of our faith communities when we all speak this language with conviction and that we really belong to each other and to Christ.

This is the dawn of a new era and the arrival of Christians and churches from many cultural backgrounds opens the possibility of testing our Christian witness by that of others, of experiencing one another's gifts and sharing our combined resources. Equally, it opens the prospect of local ethnically based churches operating independently without interest in or concern for other Christian communities. Either of these processes is possible, but only one of them reflects the view of the Church or the Spirit of Christ. Which will we choose?

Unity in Diversity.....A Prayer

Generous, challenging God
Thank you for the gift and challenge of diversity.
Grant us the humility and creativity
To work together, to bridge difference
And bind together in love.

Loving, accepting God
Thank you for the ideal and the possibility of unity.
May our oneness in Christ Jesus
Become not just lip service
But practical reality.

Triune God, Three in One,
Thank you for the example of unity in diversity.
Enable us with patience and love
To explore and to understand
How we already are, and may be still further,
One family in Christ.

God of gift and challenge,
Acceptance, love and community,
Enable us, with all our differences,
To become truly one in spirit and purpose,
For Jesus Christ's sake.
Amen.

Rev. Rosemary Lindsay

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Introduction

The search for new community and for new ways of being on foreign soils is not unfamiliar to the Irish collective psyche. For generations Ireland has exported vast numbers of her population to other shores in search of work, economic stability or freedoms of one kind or another. For many Irish people abroad their first task became that of finding or recreating communities with a similar ethos to those from which they had come. For others however this was not a viable, and sometimes not a desirable option and they were forced to adapt their behaviours, aspirations and sense of identity to a very different world. Accessing the support of others, negotiating some new form of community was usually a vital ingredient in successfully negotiating this transition.

This book is based on the particular experiences of such sub-groups of local church communities or congregations which have chosen to make cultural diversity a central feature of their identity. These congregations are on a journey of engaging as groups, often from several disparate cultural backgrounds, in the development of supportive and inclusive community. In doing so, all involved are challenged to find ways of reaching beyond their culturally determined assumptions and their accustomed ways of relating and communicating in order to truly meet with each other. They are also challenged to develop structures which will support and facilitate these processes. Their aim is to build new communities which honour equality, inclusion and respect for difference. A smaller number have made existing Irish communities their own. In the process the individuals and sub-groups involved find that they themselves are also being recreated.

Learning occurs when we engage positively with change and new experience. For many of those involved in creating culturally diverse community their journey has involved dramatic cultural and geographic uprooting as well as huge physical and psychological change. Wrenched from their familiar cultures in Africa, Asia or Eastern Europe they had to make new homes in the foreign and mysterious soils of Irish society. For the Irish participants in such initiatives the uprooting has not been primarily physical; nonetheless they too have been faced with profound shifts in their familiar realities.

Churches are often experienced as places where little change occurs. It appears that many of the Irish participants involved responded initially to the influx of newcomers in a somewhat naive way. Perhaps motivated by a sense of a gospel imperative to attend to those in need, the ensuing contact with newcomers from unfamiliar cultures propelled them into the unexpectedly demanding and unfamiliar challenges of interculturalism. This has compelled them to question often long standing assumptions, critique normative behaviors and expand their meaning systems in quite unexpected and unanticipated ways. Neither did they necessarily have the awareness that the creation of communities espousing equality, inclusion and the valuing of difference would necessarily have profound implications for the familiar, time honored models and structures of church.

These implications gradually dawned in an unfolding evolutionary process. People were changed. Perhaps one of the most unexpected changes was a new awareness of the need to question old practices, preconceptions and structures. For both newcomers and Irish participants there have been profound experiential journeys to undertake, as encountering new cultures, new experiences, new expectations, they have had to lay aside the comfort of traditional assumptions, beliefs and practices.

The work of developing an intercultural community, while undoubtedly a rich and creative field of endeavor, is also full of challenges. In fact it seems that the successful development of a culturally diverse community, particularly in a religious context, is relatively rare even at an international level.

We live in a world that is increasingly divided; separation seems to be the norm. This may in part explain why there is little available at either a practical, theological or theoretical level which might aid, challenge or support those involved in interculturalism on a parish/faith community basis.

Chapter 1: Cultural Diversity in the Early Church

1.1 The need for Cultural Diversity in our Churches

The original Christian communities were Jewish in their way of life. They worshipped in the Temple and observed the Jewish law. Then persecution drove them out of Jerusalem. On arriving in a big metropolitan city like Antioch they shared their faith with their Gentile neighbours. The Gentiles began to respond and the question then arose should these new Christians be forced to become Jews before they could be considered full members of the new church.

The great Council at Jerusalem described in Acts 15, considered this issue. After considerable debate and argument they decided that Gentile believers in Jesus should not be circumcised and did not need to keep every detail of the Jewish Law. In practice this meant learning tolerance of each others culture. Many of Paul's letters are about the give and take necessary for these two groups to live as one new community.

Around 70% of Christians in the world today live outside Europe and N. America. Most have enculturated their faith. It is from these communities and other European cultures that many of the immigrants have come to Ireland. Therefore although their central beliefs will be similar to Christians here some of the ways they worship will also reflect the cultures they come from. It is important to realize that joining a local church is one of the very few opportunities where real trans-cultural meeting leading to friendship can emerge.

The issues that face traditional Christians in Ireland today are similar to those described in Acts 15. Will those of us who belong to traditional churches demand that those who come from other cultures become like us before we accept them? Will the newcomers remain largely in their own cultural/ethnic churches? If we do so will we have run away from the challenges of interaction and missed the opportunity of building understanding and finding renewal that comes from cultural diversity as experienced in the early church?

We can think of many examples of people from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds living in close proximity but not interacting. The results can be strife and rivalry. Failure to share or alternate power between tribes in Kenya was probably the primary cause of the break down in tribal relations but another factor was an agreement among missionary societies each to work with one tribe resulting in tribes becoming largely members of one Christian denomination and thus on the whole worshipping separately.

We have had a similar experience in Ireland. We are all aware that in some parts of this island Catholics who belonged mostly to the "Irish" tribe and Protestants who belonged mostly to the "British" tribe went to separate places of worship and seldom worshiped together. The result of that was that while the churches strongly advocated peace by negotiation

between the "tribes", the task of reconciliation and moving beyond sectarianism still remains.

The decision described in Acts 15 was of fundamental importance in making it possible for Jews and Gentiles to live together in one new community. This must have been not only an exciting experience but a difficult one for some more than others. **Now, just like then, those who find talking to the "stranger" difficult need encouragement and support.** Those with the gift of making friends across cultural divides need to take the initiative otherwise the forces of reaction will take over. Lydia opening her home to all who loved the Lord irrespective of class or ethnic group in Ephesus is a fine example. (Acts 2:47)

The Jerusalem Council decision had another very important consequence. It allowed Gentile Christians to enculturate their new faith. The coming of the Spirit at Pentecost resulted in each cultural group understanding the Gospel in their own language. It meant that in Greek cities Gentiles who joined the Church drew attention to themselves not because they had changed their culture but because their attitudes and relations with others were obviously different. This set a pattern for the spread of the Christian faith throughout the world. If the first Gentile believers had become like Jews, living exactly the style of life of those who brought them to Christ, they might have become very devout believers, but they would have had very little impact on their own society. Remaining outwardly Greek gave them the opportunity to slowly change their own society. To do that, they had to be open to the influence of Christ where that clashed with Greek culture.

This is as big a challenge for Christians today as it was for the early church. All Christians can become so comfortable in their own culture that they do not see the need to challenge and change that culture and "world view" under the influence of Christ. We Western Christians need to recognize that our own traditional forms of Christianity carry a cultural baggage that may need to be challenged. We can easily regard immigrant Christians as objects of charity and keeping a distance from them, fail to learn anything from them.

Interacting with Christians from other cultures can be immensely enriching and enlivening for any Christian community. It can also help us discern the things that need to be challenged in our own culture and society.

The late Lesslie Newbigin wrote:-

"We need their witness to correct ours as indeed they need ours to correct theirs. At this moment our need is greater because they are far more aware of the dangers of syncretism (amalgamation) of an illegitimate alliance with false elements in their culture than we have been. But we imperatively need one another if we are to be faithful witnesses to Christ". (Newbigin, Lesslie. 1986. "Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture)

Western Christians often do not recognize the cultural baggage they have mixed up with their faith. On the other hand those who come to live in the West from other cultures sometimes are so keen to assimilate they take on board aspects of Western culture best ignored.

Summary:

- **Acceptance of and interaction with new cultures are vital steps towards living as one new community.**
- **Faith communities can be enriched and enlivened through cultural exchange.**
- **New forms of Christianity can help us redefine what it means to be Church today.**

1.2 New cultures and traditions in our Churches

Case Study:

Dealing with a new environment

Joshua was Dean of a university faculty in the capital city of his home country. As such he was a man of influence and importance. He was consulted widely on government policy, and was an academic of considerable renown. Not only was he a man of influence in his society and in his tribal family; he was also a fond husband, father, grandfather, uncle and granduncle. That was before the Government was suddenly and violently overthrown by the army. All known sympathisers of the previous regime had to flee for their lives at only hours' notice. Joshua escaped at night in a rowing boat that took him over the border into the temporary and very relative safety of the next country, leaving his wife and family to follow him when things settled. In the awful carnage which followed he lost all contact with his family and knew nothing of their fate, whether they lived or died. Through the kindness of some priests he was spirited away to the refuge of Ireland. He arrived to an Irish winter and was housed eventually by the Dept of Social Welfare in a small bedsit. Here he spent as much time as possible in bed, where there was relative warmth; and mercifully he could sometimes sleep and in sleeping there was at least temporary forgetfulness of his pain, shock and the helplessness of not knowing whether his loved ones lived and if so where they were. None of the agencies he contacted seemed able to assist in discovering their fate. His dreams were constantly haunted by blood and violence and the faces of his family calling for help. He almost went mad from desperation and loneliness.

On a wet December day he found himself on the side of a mean Dublin street, queuing for a part-time job as a porter in an abattoir. All around was the bustle and anticipation of Christmas. As he stood waiting soaked and frozen he watched a piece of straw blowing from side to side in the gutter. To his eye the straw spoke of his life, blown he knew not where, purposeless now and rootless; even the clothes he stood up in were not his own. Everything that was familiar, dear and gave meaning to his life was gone. He was utterly alone.

The contrasts between Joshua's old and new lives are particularly obvious, marked. However this is not unusual; for most asylum seekers, refugees or indeed for many migrant workers the process of displacement is full of trauma. It involves dislocation and separation.....often violent

separation...from home, loved ones, work and community and all that makes life meaningful and worthwhile. Physical, cultural, psychological and emotional trauma is at the heart of the experience of displacement.

The arrival in a new country, far from relieving these situations, often creates a whole new range of difficulties; at a more subtle level there are the challenges of learning to read and understand the host cultures and to develop a range of behaviours which fit with their requirements.

Those who do not accomplish some level of facility or 'fit' with the demands of the new situation will always be marked as alien by the new hosts with all the risks of social, educational and economic marginalisation which this label facilitates.

Perhaps the deepest challenge at the core of becoming a refugee is the need to adapt and change the world of sense making and assumptions, which are so much part of the individual's home culture and personal identity. This core change is rarely easy as it implies developing a sufficient elasticity of meaning to make sense of displacement, trauma, and loss and of all the new challenges which lie in wait for the new arrival. The next vignette illustrates some of the more subtle areas of loss that await these who are displaced; it is contributed by a member of an Irish church that had developed a particularly close link with an African group.

Case Study:

"The generation gap within the new cultural environment"

We were at an African birthday party; it seemed very familiar to anyone Irish; all the women were in the kitchen and all the men in the front room. They were chatting together and the young boys were in a separate group at the back of the room. During a pause in the conversation, unusual at any African social event, (I think everyone was a bit worn out from the strain of translating into English for my benefit), you could hear all these little African lads talking about football, and their teams. But it was GAA they were talking and in strong Dublin accents. You could sense a sudden change in the quality of the men's silence and in their faces as they listened to their sons' conversation. There was a huge pause in that room; it was as though the world stood still. For me it felt like trespassing on a moment of revelation. Through it I had a dramatic encounter with what it means to loose your culture.

I think out of the blue those men were faced, in a very stark way with the reality that whatever happened, their sons could never be African in the way that they themselves had been but were now no longer. There is a French word that is used to describe this situation: 'metisage'; it is used to describe the experience of those who become stuck between cultures. Who can never go back to what they were and can never be truly and totally part of where they now are. I don't think there is an English language equivalent. Tragically sometimes for better or worse there is no going back.

An important support in the managing the difficult, confusing and tumultuous waters of displacement is the availability of groups and communities of support which will both accept new individuals or groups and recognize the difficulties involved in their processes of transition and

adaptation. Such communities need to allow newcomers safe spaces in which to inquire, question, explore new ways of being, and find a level of emotional and practical support. And perhaps their most important function is to recognize and value and the wealth of creativity and breadth of life experience which is an essential part of the newcomer's identity.

Case Study:

"The Search for a community of faith"

They were out walking despite the biting cold of the February day. They had never even imagined such penetrating, damp cold, when they were in their sub-Saharan homeland. The problem was that they couldn't stand being cooped up in the tiny hostel 'family room' any longer. And sometimes walking tired the children so that they were less obstreperous and full of life when they got back to the little room that the six of them shared.

Nothing about this cold grey Irish town appeared either familiar or welcoming; they felt themselves there under sufferance. The hostel was run like a military regime and staff appeared aloof and often brutally uncaring. Invasion and subsequent persecution had forced the family to exchange the encompassing support of their large extended family and community, the familiarity of their own culture and language and the warmth and blue skies of home for grey Irish skies and ceaseless cold rain. Everything here seemed alien; they felt de-skilled, unwanted and useless in their new environment. As they passed a trim church with its padlocked gate and locked doors they suddenly recognised for the first time, from the faded noticeboard, that this was a church of the denomination to which they had belonged at home; they had sung in the choir in their home church and community had given meaning and structure to their life. Suddenly things began to look up; they had discovered something familiar in this new landscape. Excitedly they made out the time of the Sunday service. As they walked back to the hostel they chatted excitedly. There would be warmth, fellowship, joyful singing, concern, people to whom they could relate, who might help them. Very importantly there would be somewhere to go. They anticipated the welcome they would receive, the same welcome that they had often extended to strangers and refugees in their home church so far away.

When Sunday arrived they were up early to cook the meal that it was customary to bring to church to share with others as people chatted and socialised after the service; church was an all day affair back home. When they pushed open the door into the dark, uninviting lobby a smell of damp greeted them; they could hear that the service was already in progress. As they trooped into the dim building the small congregation were at prayer. The first seeds of doubt began to assail them; they became conscious of coldly curious looks as they hushed the children and settled into a seat. No-one approached them; no-one smiled. Everyone seemed to have books in which they were following the service; they had none. After some time an elderly man wordlessly handed them a handful of closed books. As they wrestled to find the appropriate book or page the organ started to play a tune that sounded familiar. A small Irish boy passed their seat and collected himself a toy from a box at the back; the smaller children looked longingly at the soft toy he cuddled; they were afraid to follow his example. All their toys had been left behind when they fled their home. The parents joined lustily in the feeble singing from memory and in their own language, until the intensity of the stares silenced them. A little while later the small group of Irish children were taken out through a side door, they assumed for Sunday school. Again no one approached the newcomers but bravely they urged their older children

to follow through the door. Five minutes later, a formidable woman ushered them back to the seat with a few whispered words they couldn't understand. At the close of the short service the clergyman gave the family a cursory handshake and the congregation melted away, driving off into the distance and the building was locked. They returned to the hostel to eat their packed lunch in silence.

The following Sunday they tried again; this time when they arrived the building was still locked. No one had thought to mention, and the notice board didn't indicate that a service was not held every week; on alternate weeks it was in one of a number of outlying churches; even if they had their own transport they would not have known where to go.

The next Sunday they stayed in the hostel.

It would be all too easy to criticise that small rural congregation for their lack of welcome or for the lack of even a modicum of interest and care extended to the newcomers. Perhaps it is important to acknowledge that such a situation is not too unusual. Many similar stories abound; some are much worse. In fairness it would also be important to explore the perspective and the context in which the congregation existed; it is rare that there are not reasons which go some way to explain even if they do not to justify such unsympathetic reactions.

Members of many smaller congregations will have had little contact with those who are different from themselves and their imaginative potential of what the other may be experiencing in terms of displacement or pain may be consequently very limited. Clergy frequently feel ill-equipped to deal with the psychological and social needs of newcomers and feel that they have quite enough to do already. All these factors tend to create a context in which the local group feel very unsure as to how to respond to newcomers appropriately, particularly those who are so obviously different.

Every church, congregation or local parish will have a sense of purpose or vision, even though this is often vague and rarely clearly spelled out. This sense of purpose is made up of the various reasons for which a church assumes it exists, and these vary widely from situation to situation. They will often be vague and sometimes contradictory and are dependent on many things including local circumstances, the people and personality types who make up the congregation or parish, the local and national leadership, the recent history, the range of experience and power of leaders. For instance one congregation may see its purpose as being to create a safe and secure retreat into which its members can withdraw to be nurtured and supported, a kind of club for those of like mind.

Another, with a much more outgoing agenda will see itself as existing largely to serve the wider local community in which it exists. Yet another may see itself existing to share its version of the 'good news', to evangelise. Another may see its primary role as creating a sense of community for its members and others. Some churches see their primary role as being the nurturing of a particular musical or liturgical tradition. Others see their primary role as being the development of the spirituality of its members while another may be much more preoccupied with enforcing conformity of behaviour. A church which sees liturgy or a particular type of musical experience among its priorities may place its energy into choir and liturgical development rather than welcome. A

parish whose priority is to do with the maintenance of a club for its members will tend to have little interest in outsiders or their fate.

Furthermore it would be disingenuous not to acknowledge the thinly veiled racism which is at the core of many sectors of Irish life. Esther Edeko, a Nigerian nun and educational researcher with a long experience of working in Ireland, decided to live for some months in Dublin without her nun's uniform. She found that people now avoided her, would move seats in a bus or church if she sat beside them and were quite needlessly rude. Transformed into an ordinary African woman, without the security of the cloth, she endured racist remarks, foul language and many acts of social marginalisation. Churches and their members, far from living out the lofty ideals of the New Testament and acting as a transformative influence in society, tend to reflect the norms of the society in which they exist. ***Hence where racism and xenophobia are active ingredients in the life of a country these will also exist within churches.***

To date, while an active minority of parishes and congregations have transformed themselves into welcoming transcultural communities, the major denominations are yet to improve and develop the work with their members, leaders, clergy and clergy to help through training, the provision of resources and guidance to combat racist or exclusionary tendencies so prevalent in today's Ireland.

The media bear some responsibility for negative attitudes towards newcomers so prevalent in Ireland today. The constant defining of refugees, asylum seekers and migrant workers as 'problem' have conditioned many Irish people to view immigrants as in a negative light.

All these are real factors which influence the attitudes of individuals, communities and congregations when they encounter newcomers. This does not excuse the negative attitudes which many have experienced in Irish churches; it does however go some way to unpacking why they may exist. More pertinently it also outlines areas to which church leadership needs to attend if local congregations are to be able to offer the welcome and support that will be useful in enabling newcomers to play their part in Irish society. It is important to remember that churches are at times one of the few contexts in which newcomers can meet and share in a real way with Irish people.

Summary:

- **Adapting to a new culture and environment can be painful and have deep emotional impact**
- **Community support groups play an important role in easing the transition process**
- **Church communities are often points of first contact; therefore it is imperative that they create welcoming conditions**

1.3 Cultural dilemmas in our Churches

When newcomers have found their way into some aspect of Irish community, be that school, church or other context, this does not mean that all the problems are instantly resolved. There is still a long way to go and many challenges to encounter. Many such challenges relate to dealing with difficulties between individuals or groups. Dealing with people from a different culture takes quite a shift in thinking to understand that firstly we may experience unexpected responses and secondly these responses do not necessarily mean what they would from someone with whom we share a culture.

Perhaps the following example illustrates how an individual's reaction can be misinterpreted when you apply an Irish interpretive lens to a particular range of behaviours.

Case Study:

"Classroom Behavior"

A small Nigerian boy was being upbraided for poor homework by a new teacher in an inner city Dublin school. He met the overworked teacher's onslaught with silence and downcast eyes. In describing the incident to colleagues later on in the day the teacher defined the child as not only disobedient, stupid and troublesome (because of the lack of homework) but also as sullen, sulky and shifty. 'He went into a sulk; he gave no explanation for the homework; he wouldn't even meet my eyes.'

The small boy was in fact acting with utmost politeness according to the dictates of his home culture. He had been taught the rudeness of ever making eye to eye contact or of justifying himself to any authority figure; so he kept his eyes down; he kept quiet because he was trying to communicate his acceptance of the teacher's punishment. He was acting out of what his culture defined as appropriate behavior under the circumstances. The teacher, on receiving an unexpected response never paused to wonder what this might mean coming from someone of a different culture; instead she interpreted his reactions through the explanatory range of her Irish culture's expectations. Understandably the small boy reacted automatically and didn't even stop to consider how that his reactions might be different or how they might be interpreted. Both pupil and teacher were trapped within the lenses of their cultural frameworks. Both were reacting according to the normal behaviors and interpretations dictated by their own cultural worlds. And neither seemed able or perhaps willing question their assumptions or to peer around the edges of those filters to experiment with different interpretations.

This situation can become even more complex when groups of people from different cultures meet and try to work together or to develop a relationship. The following simple example illustrates how easily misunderstandings can occur.

Case Study:

"Recognizing Difference"

Three or four families, the core of a small Methodist church had become very involved in developing relationships with the thirty or so Congolese and Angolan asylum seekers who had joined the fellowship. They regularly invited the newcomers to their homes, hosted Christmas parties or summer barbeques and embarked on joint outings to the countryside and to historic sites to give the newcomers a wider sense of Ireland and to create common ground for conversation. In time it appeared that a number of solid new relationships were being built. After a number of years most of the African families were moved out of the hostels where they were initially accommodated and were allocated their own houses by the Dept of Social Welfare. As time passed, the Irish group were at first mystified, and then hurt and inclined to withdraw and become a bit cynical of their friend's behaviour...not one of them had received an invitation to the new homes. What looked like the development of a small but significant impasse was only averted when one family took the bull by the horns and shared their sense of hurt with the African family to whom they were closest. It emerged that the Africans too had been mystified, and indeed somewhat hurt that their new friends had not taken time to visit them in their new homes. The explanation was quite simple: in Congolese or Angolan culture honour is conferred by visiting; it is not deemed to be real friendship if you have to await an invitation. In current, though not necessarily past Irish culture, the honour is conferred through receiving an invitation. It would be considered somewhat impolite to 'invite oneself'. The Irish were waiting to be invited; the Africans were waiting to be visited; meanwhile the beginnings of a divide was emerging, whose source was to be found in individuals using their own cultural frame of reference to interpret the actions of others. It did not help that Irish culture and to a lesser extent Congolese and Angolan cultures are all somewhat reticent about actually 'naming' issues; this allowed the impasse to grow. Questioning and exploring rather than assuming the meaning behind a behaviour or range of behaviours, and being conscious of the norms and expectations of a culture, including one's own, is important in multi-cultural engagement.

Both individuals and groups from a common culture tend to act think and interpret unquestioningly in the particular range of ways that they have been taught, never thinking to question how their reactions might be experienced or interpreted by those from a different culture. Equally, like the teacher, they will tend to interpret the behaviors and reactions of others according to the lenses of their own habitual assumptions, rarely pausing to wonder whether behaviors or reactions might have a different meaning to the one which they automatically assume.

This set of values is profoundly different to the culture and mindsets of many African and Asian ethnic groupings. Because the eurocentric values tend to reside at a level of sub-consciousness we are only dimly aware of them and hence we tend to act 'as if' they were totally and unquestionably valid. On the other hand people coming into Ireland will tend to preserve the lenses of their own culture, continuing both to act out of and interpret

the actions of others according to the assumptive world of their home culture.

Summary:

- **An awareness of other cultures' norms is essential in developing intercultural communication and interaction.**
- **Building bridges by participating in one another's customs is a way of building understanding and interaction.**
- **Diverse cultures in our churches will enrich our communities and foster new relationships.**

1.4 Communicating the Message

Where newcomers have come for short-term work and do not intend to learn English the provision of Services/Masses in their own language may be appropriate. Arranging such events shows the desire to welcome everyone. However where people have come to stay long-term in Ireland there is an opportunity for experiencing a new intercultural Church that can be a hopeful sign for a healthy integrated society for the future. Integrating is much more demanding. In the process of integrating, newcomers and older members will find that by meeting people from different cultures on a regular basis their sense of belonging to an intercultural world-wide Christian family will grow.

This will eventually create a new transcultural Christian identity. Other identities, national and cultural can be retained but the previous Christian identity will be broadened. All widening experiences can be stressful and sometimes misunderstandings occur but ultimately they are fruitful, exciting and energizing. They require initiative and patience on the part of all who participate but above all the creation of a new inter-cultural community requires us to be open and welcoming.

Summary:

- **Language is central to cultural identity and the inclusion of other languages in services makes cultural interaction possible.**
- **Encouraging all cultural groups in a parish to participate to religious customs is an important type of community builder.**
- **The welcoming conditions must make sense to the group being welcomed.**

Chapter 2: Guidelines for integration of immigrants into local parishes

The Parish-based Integration Project has identified a set of ten guidelines to assist local faith communities in working through the process of integrating immigrants into their communities. These ten guidelines are shown below, and then in the rest of this chapter each is elaborated in more detail, with suggestions and case study material.

Ten Key Integration Guidelines for Parishes

- 1. Carefully analyse your local circumstances, in order to be able to provide a meaningful welcome to newcomers.*
- 2. The welcoming process should involve everybody, not just the clergy and parish/church council.*
- 3. Make sure that the outside image of your church looks appealing to newcomers of various ethnic backgrounds. Attractive notice boards and information relevant languages are helpful.*
- 4. Symbols and messages of welcome are important. Stress the universal dimension of welcome and emphasize your church as a church for all nations.*
- 5. Nominate people to welcome newcomers, giving careful consideration to ensure their suitability for greeting people on arrival and helping them feel at home in church. Learn people's names correctly.*
- 6. Use plain English language in services as it helps those with limited language skills to participate better. Incorporate elements into worship from the countries represented in the congregation.*
- 7. Music and praise groups should seek to learn and incorporate hymns or praise songs in languages representing the diversity of the congregation.*
- 8. Occasional shared meals where everyone contributes food can create a focus for working together and sharing cultural heritage. Celebrate national festivals.*
- 9. Use Bible Studies or other such meetings to develop relationships and promote understanding of different perspectives*
- 10. Promote the participation of newcomers in leadership, project teams, etc. Promote a sense of belonging and being understood and appreciated.*

2.1 Mapping and analysis

Guideline1. Carefully analyse your local circumstances, in order to be able to provide a meaningful welcome to newcomers.

Matthew 25:35 "I was a stranger and you welcomed me."

Romans 12:9-13. This verse calls for sharing with needy fellow Christians and opening homes to strangers. Welcoming the newcomer will take different forms depending on their needs. Asylum seekers, migrant workers and students require different kinds of support but all need a warm welcome.

Possible Comments or Queries:

"Not too sure what you mean by this?"

"How is research of local circumstances helpful?"

"What circumstances, those of newcomers?"

Question:

How could your parish efficiently and sensitively survey the ethnic diversity in the area?

Suggestions:

- You will need to identify who is your target group; in other words who do you want to welcome to your church?
- To do this effectively you may need to undertake some simple research or at least answer some questions: What language/culture groups are represented in your area, or in your target group? Are they migrant workers, asylum seekers, refugees? Are they principally families, young single people, and older people? What might their main areas of need be?
- You might also consider what you as a specific local church have to offer them
- Consider delivering the parish/church newsletter to immigrant households

Case Study:

St. Peter's Church – Phibsboro, Dublin 7

St. Peter's Church in Phibsboro has a significant and interesting history as being one of the very first churches to encounter people from different ethnic backgrounds. It has a long experience of facilitating and accommodating people from different cultures, helping them to have their voices heard and to express their needs at a very early stage in the fast transformation process of becoming a country of immigration rather than a country of emigration. Its history goes back to the mid-nineties and presents an almost unique approach from a Roman Catholic parish in the sense that it demonstrated clearly that any barrier such as language or cultural differences can be overcome. An open and welcoming attitude from the leadership of the church, complimented by genuine caring and sensitivity towards the needs of the new ethnic communities living within the area surrounding the parish led ultimately to setting up a proper support structure through which the practical, legal and socio-economic needs of the new communities were dealt with on a professional manner. According to Fr. Brian Moore, a Vincentian Priest with over seventeen years of overseas experience, the parish decided to take the initiative and contact the people from the new ethnic communities, who were living in hostels around residential areas such as North Circular Road, Phibsboro Road, Dorset Street, and other areas within the North Inner City, and distributed fliers inviting people to St. Peter's Church to an open forum in which their most pressing needs could be expressed. The St. Peter's Church leaders and active parishioners were astonished with the response they received from people, Fr. Brian recalls that over eighty people attended and a very lively forum took place. One by one people started to voice their difficulties faced when negotiating their way around the legal and social welfare system. As, at the time the asylum process in Ireland was very unclear, it had no proper structure in place to deal with applications for refugee status, this in turn led to very long waiting times for those who entered the process and people had suddenly faced having to cope with plenty of free time in their hands and very little for them to do, except going to the library or walking the streets around the city centre as some hostels demanded that rooms were vacated between ten AM and five o'clock in the evening. A prevailing issue then, and continues to be today as well, was language and the difficulties posed by being unable to speak it. The response from the parish was swift and positive, language classes were organised in an office made available by the parish. Soon the space provided proved to be too small and inadequate to cope with the demand and the parish leadership decided to relocate the sacristy of the church as it was a very spacious room with easy access from the main roads. This created the space for a drop-in centre, where people were welcomed with tea, coffee and biscuits, and people began to access the new place frequently and in considerable numbers. As people were beginning to speak the language, they were able to express their problems and furthermore relationships based on trust, mutual respect and dignity between volunteers and the newcomers, and this created a climate where people felt safe. And since then, the Vincentian Refugee Centre emerged in the parish and responded in a professional manner to the practical needs of people from the new ethnic communities, and not just in the geographical catchments area, but also responding to referrals and queries nationwide. Today, the Centre provides a number of specialist needs tailored services to all categories of immigrants and has become one of the most established NGOs working in this area.

2.2 Welcoming Process

Guideline 2. The welcoming process should involve everybody, not just the clergy and parish/church council.

Romans 15:7 *"Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God."*

1 Peter 4:7-10. *These words are addressed to everyone. Everyone can convey welcome to a newcomer.*

Possible Comments or Queries:

"How could everyone convey welcome to a newcomer?"
"What is a welcoming process...?"

Question:

How would you devise the welcoming process taking into account the particular circumstances of your parish area?

Suggestions:

- You may need to help your congregation, as well as the leadership, to appreciate the importance of welcome. Everyone has an important part to play in the process. This can be done through sermons, short workshops and some simple handouts.
- Consider delivering the parish/church newsletter to immigrant households

Case Study:

Galway Methodist Church – Galway City

There are particular nuances which contributed to realising an integrated congregation in the Methodist Church in Galway. In no small measure the proactive approach displayed by both the minister and lay leaders in facilitating participation to worship for members from new ethnic communities was a key factor in achieving a fully integrated and vibrant congregation. A particular feature of the Galway Methodist congregation is that one of its leaders is African, an immigrant himself, and had experienced the traumatic impact which the asylum process can have upon a person. This in depth experience has enabled him on the one hand to understand and relate fully with those who were part of this process, and on the other hand people knew that they could tell their experiences of this process to someone who has been there already, therefore establishing a relationship based on trust. When Sahr and Clodagh Yambasu moved to Galway and took over the ministry of the Methodist Church, Galway was beginning to become one of the Direct Provision towns, as people in the asylum process were accommodated to various hostels and B&Bs around the city centre.

Families with young children and in many instances one parent families found that living in a small room in a hostel was detrimental to a healthy family life, causing isolation and anxiety with the added boredom and frustration caused by the restrictions imposed on accessing the labour market or entering various forms of education. Other important issues revolved around practical advice with filling application forms, legal advice and representation with applications for refugee status and other forms of residency, accessing English language classes, identifying and securing places in schools for children, accessing accommodation in the private rented sector, and indeed all other things necessary to ensure an adequate connection in a completely new and place. Reverend Sahr Yambasu, due to a large extent to the fact that he is African born, began to receive numerous calls for help with all the issues and problems mentioned above. Furthermore he found himself deeply involved in providing that practical support which at that time, with a few exceptions, was largely non-existing from neither statutory or NGO agencies, not to mention church itself. Reverends Sahr and Clodagh Yambasu recall that on many occasions, their residence became a place for counselling where they would mediate and facilitate between family members, reassuring them and talking to them about God and God's church. And according to Sahr and Clodagh, it was this deep involvement in supporting people with practical assistance when they needed it, that determined people to also come and visit the congregation he was leading. And come they did...

2.3 Church Image

Guideline 3. Make sure that the outside image of your church looks appealing to newcomers of various ethnic backgrounds. Attractive notice boards and information relevant languages are helpful.

Acts 2: 47

People noticed what was happening with all the goings and comings in the places where Christians met.

Possible Comments or Queries:

"How do you find out what makes sense to the group being hosted?"

Question:

How could you make the outside image of your church more inviting and welcoming?

Suggestions:

- Look critically at your buildings, both outside and inside. What messages might they convey to a newcomer, for instance cold formality or warm welcome? It is often relatively easy and cheap to make some minor adjustments which convey the latter.
- Your church notice-board and the outside of your building are the first things that people see; they will either attract or repel.
- A good notice-board does three things: it conveys a sense of welcome; it gives clear information about services and activities in languages relevant to passer-bys; it communicates something of the unique flavour of the congregation/s that meet there. It should give relevant phone numbers and the church email address for those wanting further information.
- Well kept, well-lit, colourful buildings attract; dark, dingy and rundown exteriors create their own impression.

Case Study:

The Joint Presbyterian and Methodist Church – Limerick City

The joint Presbyterian and Methodist Church in Limerick sends a clear message of welcome and openness. The newly refurbished and decorated church is bright and inviting. The congregation is diverse and representing over twenty countries around the world. Having images and pictures in the Church which reflect the religious life of the cultures represented in the congregation is a potent sign of recognition. Such variety and diversity also poses certain challenges. The continuous hard work of the leadership makes sure that cultural differences are easier to bridge if they are explained to people. Various activities such as: potluck meals are very popular and bring people together in an informal and friendly setting. Regular workshops with themes dealing with cultural issues are also helpful in making people understand certain behaviors and attitudes characteristic to different ethnic and cultural groups. The minister's previous overseas experience was crucial in understanding the complex process of migration and the changes which take place at a personal, family and group level.

2.4 Symbols of welcome

Guideline 4. Symbols and messages of welcome are important. Stress the universal dimension of welcome and emphasize your church as a church for all nations.

Acts 2:1-10.

This passage is often contrasted with the story of Babel where God deconstructs a false imperial unity. At Pentecost God brings about a new unity that respects each language and cultural diversity.

Possible Comments or Queries:

"Can you give examples of symbols of welcome?"

Question:

How could your church display images and pictures reflecting the religious life of the cultures present in your parish?

Suggestions:

- Your foyer is the first part of the church that a newcomer encounters. What does it communicate? Is it attractive, bright and cheerful; or dark, forbidding and off-putting?
- Some prominently displayed symbols or words of welcome, in languages recognisable to newcomers or to your target group, create an immediate connection with newcomers.
- Having hymnbooks, service sheets, and bibles available in the languages common to your target groups indicate that a church has gone to some trouble to appreciate the needs of other culture or language groups.

Case Study:

Hosanna House, Redeemed Christian Church of God, Cavan

Hosanna House parish in Cavan is part of the Redeemed Christian Church of God in Ireland and in a very short time has become part and parcel of the local community. The parish is now four years in Cavan, a community church, very close to the heart of the community. It is an active member of Cavan Co. Council Community Forum and member of the local social inclusion group making clear efforts to integrate the church within the community. Perhaps slightly different than other RCCG parishes, the Cavan church has a diversity of nationalities represented in the congregation: Brazilian, Lithuanian, Irish, Russian, Ghanaian, Polish, Filipino, Malaysian, Nigerian, Indian, Latvian, etc. The various activities taking place and involving the local community provide an excellent opportunity for social interaction between various groups of the community with the ultimate goal for an integrated community of faith.

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The church's link with the local employment services has secured a place of work for a secretary on a Community Employment scheme. The youth group is vibrant and active with sports in the community such as table tennis, boxing, pool and various other games where the young people from different cultures come together and begin to learn about each other. The leader's extensive knowledge in multicultural issues is acknowledged and tapped into as he was requested to lead a series of Garda training sessions in multicultural issues. The multicultural training sessions were carried during Oct – Nov 2007 and over three hundred Gardaí from counties Cavan and Monaghan took part in the training sessions provided by the staff at Hosanna House. Addiction counselling, marriage counselling, The Arch Club for social gatherings of people with special needs, are among the other services offered by the church to the local community. The School of Success is a developmental and motivational leadership programme designed to restore confidence in the self and in the faith community. The objective is to provide a faith based programme aimed at moving people from minus to plus, from negative to positive. To let them know that when they are joined to the living God, there is hope.

The end of 2006 offered the church an opportunity to organise the 2006 Christmas Carol and Community Award Night in Hosanna House in Cavan with large participation from the members of the congregation and the local community. The church's uniformed choir performed ensuring a very successful social event. The congregation is hoping to move shortly to new and more adequate premises in a more central location in Cavan town. The deep involvement of the church with the local community has prevented incidents of racism or racially motivated crime from occurring, and on the contrary it has better connected the various groups in the community and helped build a sense of belonging for the new arrivals. This model of a new church establishing itself in the local community by involving the local community is relatively new in Ireland and it constitutes the ideal outlet for integration and social cohesion at a local level. It also symbolises the huge contribution that new cultures and communities can bring to our society.

2.5 Role of Welcomers

Guideline 5. Nominate people to welcome newcomers, giving careful consideration to ensure their suitability for greeting people on arrival and helping them feel at home in church. Learn people's names correctly.

Acts 16:40

"And they went out of the prison, and entered into [the house of] Lydia: and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed."

Possible Comments or Queries:

Paul and Silas have just been set free from prison. They go immediately to the house of Lydia. Why?

Question:

Is there a need for welcomers in your church?

Suggestion:

- Designated welcomers chosen both for their ability to communicate and for their cultural/age/gender mix should always be on hand, before, during and after services. Bear in mind: they may need some training for their important work.
- Welcomers should ensure that the newcomers are supported with the process of adjustment and adaptation within the congregation
- Welcomers need not only to communicate a sense of warmth; they also need to be able to learn new names, and to introduce newcomers to sub-groups in the church with whom they might have something in common.
- Coffee or tea after the service, creates an important informal space where people can chat, get to know each other, and share fellowship.

Case Study:

Clontarf Methodist Church – Clontarf, Dublin 3

Clontarf Methodist Church was one of the first local Irish congregations to fully embrace multi-culturalism when, during the late 1990's, the first significant numbers of asylum seekers and refugees began to arrive in Ireland. While many things have changed in the last years, the story of its development into a transcultural congregation reveals many interesting lessons.

In reflecting on the developments at Clontarf, a number of key factors seem worth commenting on in the congregation's development. These may well have a wider applicability to other groupings who are working towards the building of intercultural community. Firstly, the original members were quite disparate in origin, had consequently had to get used to each others' differing views and were probably less wedded to the traditions of a particular denomination than is usual. For both reasons they were arguably in a better position to adapt than might otherwise have been expected. It is interesting to note that many of the congregations who have developed transculturally were also already quite varied in their original composition.

Secondly, the building was bright, attractive, welcoming and designed for flexibility. This created an initial sense of welcome and meant that a wide range of functions could be accommodated. The external notice boards gave a clear indication of life and enthusiasm, as well as communicating relevant information about the community's activities clearly and attractively.

Thirdly, the congregation indicated a warmth and willingness to enter into relationship with newcomers and to set up structures to attend to the needs that were identified. They sought out those who could provide relevant information. There was an emphasis on relationship building, communication and responsive action in the development of support structures.

Fourthly, the congregation also evidenced an enthusiastic willingness to invite participation and to adapt services, meetings and music to the needs, culture and spirituality of newcomers.

Lastly, there was a willingness not only to consult with and learn from the newcomers, but also to experiment together in how best to proceed. There was an emphasis on consultation, communication and participative decision making. If something didn't work it was abandoned and something new was tried. In time there was an enthusiastic willingness to involve migrant newcomers in community leadership. Proactive attitudes, warm comfortable buildings, practical responsiveness and participative processes were all significant parts in the creation of what was for a number of years a really useful exercise in transcultural community building.

Case Study:

Abbey Presbyterian Church – Dublin City

Abbey Presbyterian Church has a small team of welcomers always waiting in the porch before a Service ready to welcome newcomers. They welcome people warmly, often with an enthusiastic handshake. They escort them to a seat having learnt their names. When the Service is over and tea and coffee is served, they will introduce them to the minister and to the others whom they think they would like to meet, perhaps from the same country or of a similar age. They look out for them next Sunday and offer a card so that if desired the newcomer can enter information about how to be contacted.

2.6 Use of Language

Guideline 6. Use plain English language in services as it helps those with limited language skills to participate better. Incorporate elements into worship from the countries represented in the congregation.

Acts 2:11 "And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?"

Acts 2:11 All heard in their own tongue. Members of the early church spoke a variety of languages and came from different cultural backgrounds yet still had a strong sense of belonging.

Possible Comments or Queries:

"Regularly explain terms in common use within the church"
"Explain how your church works."

Question:

Is there an inclusive language or different languages used when communicating with people, so that immigrants can feel part of the parish?

Suggestions:

- In this phase you are promoting the development of relationships and involving newcomers in the life of the church and perhaps making some changes to services to create a sense of inclusion.
- Learning key phrases in the language of an ethnic group represented in the congregation is also useful.
- Consider introducing within different parts of the liturgy space for prayers to be recited in various languages.
- Consider developing teams of readers and collectors who represent the cultural and age mix of your congregation; readings can be given in a selection of relevant languages.

Case Study

City Church, Belfast

The City Church in Belfast is a Christ centred community dedicated to impacting Belfast, Northern Ireland and the nations with the love of God in the power of the Holy Spirit. It has an emphasis on praise and worship and focuses on the centrality of prayer and the Word of God. It is to its members an obvious ministry of the Holy Spirit seeking a relational Christianity with a focus on body ministry and

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the priesthood of all believers. Its heart beats for evangelism, reaching the lost and planting them into new churches.

The church is also concerned with worldwide issues and is involved in overseas mission with a primary concern for the poor and disadvantaged and a desire for social justice. It seeks to express the prophetic voice to the nation, proclaiming an anti-sectarian and non- discriminatory message of loving your neighbour.

The church building is used almost continually throughout the week. Besides the normal church meetings, are groups such as the Crescent Arts centre, Narcotics Anonymous, P.A.C.T. (PSNI), Holylands Residents Association, Kids Klub, Tango Class, Green party, Friends of the Earth, McGuire Support Group, Lower Ormeau & Botanic Association, Queens University.

Another important part of the work of the Belfast City Church involves practical responses to the needs of the newcomers. This challenging work requires reaching out to the new communities, understanding the diversity within, establishing channels of communication and creating spaces for sharing witness. Engaging with often marginalized groups such as asylum seekers or members of the Roma Community is not an easy task. Language is a major barrier but not a deterrent, members of the church would sometimes take language lessons or attempt to learn practical words and phrases in the languages of the new residents. The coffee shop provides the perfect opportunity for people to do voluntary work and improve their knowledge of the English language, to develop social and interpersonal skills, and to learn the about the history of their new home. The work is both challenging and rewarding and both communities have a lot to learn and gain in this process of building one inclusive community.

2.7 Music

Guideline 7. Music and praise groups should seek to learn and incorporate hymns or praise songs in languages representing the diversity of the congregation.

Acts 2:47 "Praising God, and having favour with all the people." Praising God was an important part of early church life.

Possible Comments or Queries:

Music can often be the ice-breaker in a church setting; furthermore, it can become the conduit for cultural exchange.

Question:

Is your congregation willing to have hymns or praise songs representing the diversity of the congregation sung during worship times?

Suggestions:

- Music is important; the establishment of music and praise groups which become responsible for some of the music in worship are often very effective; they can learn praise songs in a variety of idioms and languages representing the mix of the congregation. Remember to attend to the needs of your Irish members too!
- Overheads giving readings, sermon synopses, hymns, prayer topics and announcement notes make what's going on accessible to everyone. There are a number of internet sites which provide translations of English text into other languages.
- Consider introducing multicultural concerts inviting along the whole congregation

Case Study:

St. George & St. Thomas Parish, Cathal Brugha Street and the Discovery Gospel Choir – Dublin City

The Church of Ireland parish of St. George & St. Thomas is an interesting building in the heart of the city with a small but friendly community of Christians who welcomes all those who wish to join in for worship. The parish is made up of people who have lifelong connections with this parish and this area of Dublin as well as people who have come more recently to live in this city. It is a multi national congregation and has members from over ten countries worshipping regularly there. The Revd Canon Katharine Poulton was the first woman to be ordained (as a Deacon) in the Church of Ireland in 1987. She presently serves as Bishop's Curate at St George & St Thomas's Church, Cathal Brugha Street, Dublin.

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When Revd Canon Poulton was appointed to this parish, the congregation had less than twenty people, all Irish with no immigrants among them. A year later, the immigrant communities started to arrive and continued to do so steadily. Today the congregation has over a hundred committed people and an average sixty people attending services each Sunday. One of the latest ethnic communities to join the congregation is the Filipino community which is also actively involved in the parish life. The leadership encourages participation to worship from the other ethnic groups in the congregation by inviting people to do readings and to share into the responsibilities of day to day running of the parish. The parish has also a very active branch of Mother's Union with fifteen members enrolled. The Mothers' Union members bring a variety of practical help and support to their parish and community. Initiatives may include marriage preparation, parenting courses, parent and toddler groups and other community outreach projects. The mission of the Mothers' Union is to demonstrate the Christian faith in action by the transformation of communities worldwide through the nurture of the family in its many forms. Among future plans, a Faith Clinic is almost ready to start and is led by the Dublin and Glendalough Diocesan Chaplain for the International Community, the Reverend Obinna Ulogwara.

The church is also the base of the Discovery Gospel Choir, Ireland's first integrated Gospel Choir. The choir is co-ordinated by Hard Gospel Officer for the Republic of Ireland, Philip McKinley. It has an age profile of 7-82, and is drawn from twelve nations and three continents. The choir sings songs from all over the world, in many different languages, yet their message is uniform; love God and love your neighbour. The choir has members from Uganda, China, Nigeria, Rep. of Ireland, South Africa, India, England, Cameroon, America, Northern Ireland, Zimbabwe, Australia, Sudan and France.

2.8 Finding Unity

Guideline 8. Occasional shared meals where everyone contributes food can create a focus for working together and sharing cultural heritage. Celebrate national festivals.

Hebrews 13:2 "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares."

*Galatians 2:11-13. Peter has to justify his conduct because in the Jewish tradition at that time there was a strict prohibition on eating with outsiders. The importance therefore of Jews and Gentiles eating together to signify a new community **cannot** be overestimated. Just how difficult it was for Jews to put this into practice is made clear in Galatians where even Peter under pressure felt he had to defer to the prohibition and is rebuked by Paul.*

Possible Comments or Queries:

"...People are happy to contribute food from their culture."

Question:

How can the unity found in sharing food be used to bring people together and help us understand one another?

Suggestions:

- Occasional church meals and potluck suppers where everyone is invited to contribute food create a focus for working together and sharing cultural heritage. Joint outings to Irish historic or cultural sites promote relationships but also create a context in which different cultural groups can get to know something of Irish culture and share something of their own history.
- Encourage your Irish families to entertain newcomers in their homes

Case Study:

Victory Christian Fellowship – Dublin 2

Victory was formed in the early 1990's as a small Pentecostal house church with a small number of attenders. Its growth has been quite dramatic. It now numbers over seven hundred members, with another three or four hundred less committed attenders. At least half of the combined total, are from a wide variety of countries, including a significant number of Nigerians. Victory is one of the largest multi-cultural churches in Ireland. Since the late nineteen-nineties it has seen practical and spiritual ministry to those who have been culturally displaced as a central part of its role and has worked with the Department of Social Welfare to develop a range of hostels, providing accommodation for new arrivals. The church also runs a limited number of vocational training programmes and provides an informal job-finding service from this.

To accommodate the large number of members who wish to attend each Sunday it is necessary to hold three morning services. Sunday evening meetings are dedicated to seminar style teaching series on various subjects. The very informal worship is led by a twenty strong multi-cultural praise group mainly from non-Irish backgrounds. Their repertoire consists almost exclusively of contemporary music, some of which is composed by group members. Interludes between singing are filled with members of the congregation praying spontaneously, audibly and simultaneously against a gentle background of instrumental music. The atmosphere is both reflective and worshipful. The service is conducted in English and the preaching is informal and Bible based; almost the whole congregation consult their well worn Bibles throughout. A large team, again mainly of non-Irish members, welcome visitors, take up the collections and distribute the communion elements. Visitors are invited to coffee after the service where they are met by a team who welcome and get to know them. Two crèches and a youth church operate during services. A wide range of activities take place usually on a weekly basis, including evenings of intercessory prayer, women's lunches, weekend seminar and fun days for young people and a comprehensive training programme in Bible study and Christian belief and practice. This wide network of activities creates a sense of dynamic community where there is much for everyone to become involved with. Victory has recently bought a large plot of land near Firhouse and is planning a new suite of buildings to include a twelve hundred seater sanctuary, a community centre, Christian bookshop, coffee shop and social services centre. The leadership structure of the church consists of a senior pastor, pastor, assistant pastor (all of whom are Irish), a number of teachers and a team of cell group leaders who have a significant pastoral role. Many of these are from non-Irish cultural backgrounds as are the leaders of both the praise and intercessory prayer groups...

2.9 Bible/study groups and other meetings

Guideline 9. Use Bible Studies or other such meetings to develop relationships and promote understanding of different perspectives.

Matthew 28:19 "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations..."

Acts 2:46. This verse states that they met together day after day both in the Temple and in their homes.

Possible Comments or Queries:

"Encourage families to take responsibility for a new family"

Question:

How Bible studies or prayer groups could be used to encourage relationships to develop and different perspectives to be shared and understood?

Suggestions:

- Establish joint bible-study or discussion groups; this helps develop relationships, promote an understanding of different perspectives and confirms an understanding of common roots.

Case Study:

Drogheda Presbyterian Church - Drogheda

When Rev. John Woodside took over the ministry in Drogheda Presbyterian Church, he had a small and dedicated core congregation of less than twenty people each Sunday. Today he is looking after a congregation of over one hundred and fifty people, where the majority are from different ethnic minorities.

From an immigration status perspective, almost all the new members from different ethnic background worshipping in Drogheda Presbyterian Church are either migrant workers or students. The congregation has now members from the new ethnic communities representing over ten countries with especially strong representation from countries such as Lithuania, Poland, Czech Republic, Korea, China etc.

With the European Union's enlargement and the accession to ten new countries, migration into Ireland increased significantly and spread beyond main cities and towns, and Drogheda is no exception. Considerable numbers of migrant workers arrived and while the majority found jobs and began to adapt and settle within the new environment, some people were not as fortunate and looked for support from various sources. As the Presbyterian parish began to observe new people coming to their congregation, some of older members, the elders, approached the newcomers and welcomed them and invited them to a cup of tea after the sermon.

Initially, the minister's approach was one of "taking things slowly" in the sense that he did not wish to impose too much on the newcomers but as he admitted later on, the open and welcoming attitude from the elders in the congregation proved to be positive and people from the new ethnic communities were happy to be approached and accepted the invitation to tea and chat with delight. Although in the beginning, the language barrier raised some challenges, these were quickly overrun by inventive approaches in delivering the sermons. An interpreter would translate for a group until the members would have got a better command of the language. The sermons themselves were delivered in such uncomplicated manner that they were easily understood and reflected upon, and according to John, this method of preaching the very basics teachings of the Gospel, is one of the main, if not the main reason, for his church to become so popular and increase its membership in such short space of time. People from the new ethnic communities were invited to read chapters of the Gospel, and even if the reading was slightly unclear, they would still be praised for it.

People were also invited to share in the responsibilities involved in things such as organising the tea and coffee after service, cleaning and maintenance of the church. The minister's ability and skill to be able to persuade the old core congregation to accept a few changes, led to massive change in the composition of the congregation. This change produced in turn great benefits for both the older and newer members in the congregation. Beside people learning about each other, about each others' cultures and traditions, it created new friendships, it established new supporting and humanitarian projects where members of the older congregation were happy to participate and donate generously for a well worthy cause. The Drogheda Presbyterian congregation also counts for a number of students, mainly from China and their understanding of Christian faith and religion in general would be limited as some were atheists. This posed a new challenge for the parish and soon a Bible Fellowship was formed and the minister teaches the Bible, the students learn about Christianity and also improve and practice their English. Future plans include relocation into larger building as the existing church buildings are becoming unsuitable to host present numbers attending services. RTE has broadcast a Sunday service. The Presbyterian Church in Drogheda is a perfect model of an integrated parish, which addressed the challenges posed by the arrival of people from various cultures and countries embracing different faiths, yet enjoying and benefiting from worshipping together.

Case Study:

Micah Community – St. Peter’s Church, Phibsboro, Dublin 7.

*A ministry of particular interest is the Micah Community, founded in 2002 by a Vincentian priest, Fr. Michael McCullagh. The Micah Community is a multinational group of young adults offering opportunities for friendship, faith formation, and social outreach. The Community forms part of the Vincentian family and, inspired by the words of the prophet Micah, strives to **"act justly, love tenderly, and walk humbly with our God."** (Micah 6:8)*

Although this group shares a general age-bracket, there is much diversity within the group, which provides a challenge to see beyond the differences and embrace one another with acceptance and love. Coming from 16 different countries, various different backgrounds, families, lifestyles and cultures, it is amazing how young people share the same needs, same hopes, and same desires. It has been said that everywhere in the world, people laugh the same, and cry the same – their smiles and tears are shared smiles and tears. That clearly resonates in the Micah Community. And even in the area of faith, many differ – from conservative to moderate to liberal. Micah tries to foster an environment that is wholly accepting of these differences. In an economically rich society like Ireland, it is amazing how many – having their physical needs met – begin to think that they don’t need God. People have become experts at masking that deep hunger for something ‘more’ – namely, spiritual fulfillment. It is very evident how ‘unattractive’ the church can be to young people in Ireland, with their busy lives, developing careers, and various social activities. The challenge to the Community is to draw people through friendship, which is the foundation of all things. Then, Micah offers a deeper sense of community to all engaged in it. And there, in that caring community environment, young adults are fed real spiritual food – a hunger from which no human being has immunity. Micah unveils that hidden hunger and gives young people an opportunity to grow in their faith through a gentle sharing, and openness, a journeying together, and through discovering God’s presence in our everyday experience. Micah is a ministry of ‘like to like’ where all are in the same boat together – offering a tremendous network of support. It gives young adults a sense of belonging, connectedness, and solidarity. Tight bonds of friendship are formed, and relationships are deepened through quality time spent together. This community of young adults also strives to reach out to the most vulnerable and forgotten of society. Linking with local voluntary groups, they are not confined to the walls of the church and to their own insular group, but are active in serving others, eagerly healing the hurts of our world. Though it encourages and is involved in acts of Justice within the wider community, it can be argued that an equally important mission Micah faces is the justice of loving one another – the cross-cultural dignity & respect developed from the inside out.

2.10 Participation

Guideline 10. Promote the participation of newcomers in leadership, project teams, etc. Promote a sense of belonging and being understood and appreciated.

Eph 2:19 "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God. "

Acts 6:1-7. This is a dispute between two cultural groups. Note that the Greek speaking widows were being ignored by the Hebrew helpers. The solution was to appoint Greek speaking servers to take responsibility for the fair distribution of food to all the widows of both cultural groups.

Possible Comments or Queries:

"How can people be co-opted onto the leadership body?"

Question:

How could newcomers be encouraged to participate in leadership, project teams, etc..?

Suggestions:

- In order to belong, people need a sense of involvement and an ownership in what's happening; they also need to feel understood and appreciated for the richness which they bring.
- Initiate working groups made of immigrant communities to conduct meeting in their own language and allow for representation on the parish council, so their voices can be heard and also, their participation and contribution in the parish life is facilitated
- Involve newcomers and original members in a periodic discussion or SWOT analysis of the congregation or parish (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats).
- Invite newcomers to become involved in leadership, special interest or project groups in a real way. Avoid tokenistic involvement!

Case study:

Dublin Central Mission (DCM) – Abbey Street Methodist Church, Dublin City

Various countries are now represented within the congregation. Members comes from Africa - Botswana, Kenya, Nigeria, Liberia, South Africa, Zimbabwe and Ethiopia; from Europe - Norway, Germany, Finland, Wales and England; from Asia - the Philippines, Malaysia, India, Tajikistan; and from North and South America. The number associated with the congregation has more than doubled during the last five years. Most of the changes have occurred particularly in the last three years. The congregation averaged about forty people at Sunday worship three years ago. On an average Sunday now the figure stands at approximately seventy adults and twenty children. This change has occurred quite rapidly as new people from many countries of the world have come to Dublin to help feed the shortage of workers in the booming economy of the last few years. Many of them have come from countries where there is a strong Methodist Church and have sought out a local Methodist congregation.

The world-wide geographical spread is amazing within the congregation. There are people from over twenty different countries now associated with DCM....

Chapter 3: Models of Good Practice in our churches

3.1. Reaching out and responding to needs of immigrants

St. Peter's Catholic Church in Phibsboro, Dublin has a significant and interesting history as being one of the very first Irish churches to encounter people from different ethnic backgrounds. It has a long experience of facilitating and accommodating people from different cultures, of enabling their voices to be heard and their needs expressed at a very early stage in the fast transformation process of Ireland becoming a country of immigration rather than a country of emigration. Its history goes back to the mid-nineties and presents an almost unique approach from a Roman Catholic parish in the sense that it demonstrated clearly that any barrier such as language or cultural differences can be overcome.

An open and welcoming attitude from the leadership of the church, complimented by genuine caring and sensitivity towards the needs of the new ethnic communities living in the area surrounding the parish led ultimately to setting up a proper support structure through which the practical, legal and socio-economic needs of the new communities were dealt with on a professional manner. According to Fr. Brian Moore, a Vincentian Priest with over seventeen years of overseas experience, the parish decided to take the initiative and contact the people from the new ethnic communities, who then were living in hostels around residential areas such as North Circular Road, Phibsboro Road, Dorset Street, and other areas within the North Inner City, and distributed fliers inviting people to St. Peter's Church to an open forum in which their most pressing needs could be expressed.

The St. Peter's Church leaders and active parishioners were astonished with the response they received from people, Fr. Brian recalls that over eighty people attended and a very lively forum took place. One by one, people started to voice the difficulties they faced when negotiating their way around the legal and social welfare system. At that time the asylum process in Ireland was very unclear with no proper structure in place to deal with applications for refugee status. This in turn led to very long waiting times for those who entered the process. They were suddenly faced with having to cope with plenty of free time on their hands and very little for them to do, except go to the library or walk the streets around the city centre as some hostels demanded that rooms were vacated between ten AM and five o'clock in the evening. A prevailing issue then, which continues today, was language and the difficulties posed by being unable to speak it.

The response from the parish was swift and positive. Language classes were organized in an office made available by the parish. Soon the space provided proved to be too small and inadequate to cope with the demand, so the parish leadership decided to relocate the sacristy of the church as it was a very spacious room with easy access from the main roads. This created the space for a drop-in centre where people were welcomed with tea, coffee and biscuits. People began to access the new place frequently and in considerable numbers. As people began to feel more comfortable speaking the language, they were able to express their problems. Relationships grew based on trust, mutual respect and dignity between

volunteers and the newcomers and this created a climate where people felt safe.

The needs began to be more diverse requiring assistance with filling forms and assistance with finding suitable accommodation in the private sector. The need for representation and advocacy emerged more and more and soon volunteers were overwhelmed by the demand for services. The leadership in St. Peter's Church had to re-assess the situation. After discussions, a proposal was made to access funding with the purpose of creating a proper support group which would employ professionally qualified staff to adequately deal with the needs of the new ethnic communities. As St. Peter's is a parish run by the Vincentian Order which has very close links with all other Vincentian agencies and organizations, a partnership project between the Vincentian Fathers, St. Vincent de Paul and the Daughters of Charity was formed. It was officially launched by An Taoiseach Bertie Ahern TD in January 1999, four years after the parish started its work with people from other ethnic backgrounds.

Since then, the Vincentian Refugee Centre has developed and responded in a professional manner to the practical needs of people from the new ethnic communities, not just in the geographical catchments area, but also responding to referrals and queries nationwide. Today, the Centre provides a number of specialist needs-tailored services to all categories of immigrants and has established itself as one of the most established NGOs working in this area. But as far as practical needs of the new communities in the parish of St. Peter's were addressed by the Refugee Centre, the pastoral and spiritual needs were not met to the same standards. Concerns expressed by senior parishioners (most people in the parish were of senior or retirement age) revealed a fear of being pushed aside and neglected in favor of the people from new communities. For this group of hosts, change was coming too fast and they were finding it increasingly difficult to cope with.

On the other hand, the people from the new communities were feeling left out, ignored and their participation in services of worship declined. They only used the church for more specific practical needs and services. It was only a few years ago that a special African service had been introduced on a Sunday afternoon basis and many African immigrants had started to attend at those times. However, according to Fr. Brian Moore, some of the African immigrants did not want to attend that Mass for various reasons, and despite the cold welcome showed by the parishioners, continued to attend Mass at St. Peter's. This challenged the leadership to take some initiatives towards inclusiveness. As a result, participation in worship services was encouraged and people were invited to sing and play musical instruments especially during evening Masses.

Other factors contributed to the increase in the number of people worshipping from various backgrounds. These included the EU enlargement (May 2004), the ongoing international recruiting and outsourcing from HSE and other state and private companies, as well as the central location of St. Peter's Parish. This all led to the formation of a truly diverse congregation. This diversity was recognized by the fact that RTE issued an invitation to the parish to broadcast its Christmas Service from St. Peter's Church, a reflection of the deep changes in the fabric of our parishes. The leadership is also sensitive to the challenges posed by this change and seeks to take appropriate steps to counteract any negative impact which could affect either old or new members of the

congregation. A new ministry initiative offering "Hospitality to the International Community" is now at advanced stage and will begin very soon. The new members in the parish from various parts of the world will play an active role in this ministry and their language and welcoming skills will help make the newcomers feel welcomed and appreciated.

3.2. Engaging newcomers into community life

The Discovery Gospel Choir, based in the Church of Ireland parish of St. George & St. Thomas in Dublin, is Ireland's first integrated Gospel Choir, with members from Uganda, China, Haiti, Nigeria, Rep of Ireland, South Africa, England, Cameroon, America, Northern Ireland, Zimbabwe, Sudan and France. The host parish is made up of people who have lifelong connections with this parish and this area of Dublin as well as people who have come more recently to live in this city. It is a multi national congregation and has members from over ten countries worshipping regularly there.

The choir leads worship at the church's Discovery 'African Anglican' services. In these services, the choir attempts to blend music from Africa and Europe in a way that is familiar, inspiring and educational. The choir is co-ordinated by Dublin-based "Hard Gospel" project Officer, Philip McKinley and its musical director is Justine Nantale from Uganda. It has embraced diversity not only of race and background but also of age, with the youngest member just seven years old and the oldest eighty-two, and is drawn from twelve nations and three continents. The choir sings songs from all over the world, in many different languages, yet their message is uniform; love God and love your neighbour.

So far the choir has performed in Mosney Asylum Centre, Mountjoy Prison, for Sinn Fein's Gerry Kelly and the former DUP leader Revd Dr Ian Paisley in Stormont, Belfast, in the Point Theatre, Dublin Castle, Croke Park, Lansdowne Road and at the Meteor Music Awards in the RDS, where the choir performed an anti-racism single with Sinead O'Connor and Republic of Loose, called '*We people (who are darker than blue)*'. The choir has also performed a number of times on radio and television including Today FM, Newstalk, City Channel, TV3, TG4, and RTE's 'Make Dreams Come True', 'The Cafe' and the 'Late Late Show'. In April 2007 the choir hosted Ireland's first U2charist. In 2005 the Dubliner magazine voted them 'Best Soul Music' of the year. The Irish Times described Discovery as 'inspiring', 'exhilarating' and 'exuberant', while Archbishop Desmond Tutu called them a 'fantastic choir'.

3.3. Promoting participation and belonging to Faith Communities

In **Dublin Central Mission Methodist Church, Lower Abbey Street, Dublin,** the minister Dr. John Stephens decided to carry a mini-census of the congregation in 2003. The aim of this census was to provide an in-depth picture of the present day congregation. Some comparisons were made with the congregation in 1998. This showed the magnitude of the changes that had occurred in a relatively short period. Many countries are now represented within the congregation. There are Africans from

Botswana, Kenya, Nigeria, Liberia, South Africa, Zimbabwe and Ethiopia; Europeans from Norway, Germany, Finland, Wales and England; Asians from the Philippines, Malaysia, India, Tajikistan; as well as members from North and South America. The number associated with the congregation has more than doubled during the last five years. Most of the changes have occurred particularly in the last three years.

The congregation averaged about forty people at Sunday worship three years ago. On an average Sunday now the figure stands at approximately seventy adults and twenty children. This change has occurred quite rapidly as new people from many countries of the world have come to Dublin to help supply the shortage of workers in the booming economy of the last few years. Many of them have come from countries where there is a strong Methodist Church and have sought out a local Methodist congregation.

The world-wide geographical spread is amazing within the congregation. There are people from over twenty different countries now associated with Dublin Central Mission and the city center location is a key element in its ability to make links with the new arrivals. Dublin is the main point of arrival and Dublin Central Mission is the most accessible Methodist Church. Another contributory factor is that Dublin Central Mission traditionally has been a welcoming congregation and this has continued to be the case.

Dublin Central Mission is a welcoming congregation but it may be that there is inadequate follow-up of the new residents. This is one area DCM is seeking to address through the "Welcoming the Stranger" project. It has become clear that the transient nature of city center congregations places huge demands upon the leaders and resident group. It requires much dedication to be constantly welcoming those who are new and investing time and energy into building relationships, which are sustained for a few weeks and then the individuals are seen no more. It can also leave a congregation or minister feeling either guilty asking "Did we do enough to welcome them?" or feeling failure asking the question "Why are they not staying?" Allied to this is the fact that the Superintendent plays multiple roles which severely limits pastoral contact with the congregation. The danger of these recurring issues is that they can cause a congregation to begin to withdraw into themselves. Such attitudes must be challenged in caring and sensitive ways to enable the congregation to maintain its vision and energy as a place of welcome.

During the last five years there has been a dramatic change in the ethnic composition of the congregation. Dublin Central Mission is at a critical stage. There are some Irish families who have left, but it is the age structure of the Irish congregation that is of more concern. Current Irish members are predominantly elderly and will reduce in numbers due to natural causes. It will be a challenge to reach out to Irish people with this vision of a multi-ethnic church and invite them to be part of it.

According to Dr. Stephens, the issue of leadership is the key to the future development of the congregation. If this transition can occur then further steps will follow. It is important that leadership be given in a sensitive manner. The second area that will require much wisdom is in the transition towards a more inclusive style of worship. How can the different cultures be represented in worship? The key revolves around the

issue of mutual accountability to each other. Also no group can claim to have a dominant position or the final say in matters of worship. The first step is the visible involvement of an ethnic mix of people up at the front. Whether it is the reading of the Scriptures or the leading of prayers, there needs to be a broad representation of the congregation. Music is often seen as the battlefield of many churches. Fellowships have been broken by the "worship wars" that have occurred over the use of traditional or contemporary music. Dublin Central Mission is not immune from these tensions.

Almost all the new attendees to Dublin Central Mission are first generation migrants. Immigrants in their new country face enormous challenges, such as cultural change, language barriers, and economic hardship. For the first generation immigrant the desire to worship in a mono-ethnic group is very strong. In this setting the church can become a place of refuge from racism and a community centre to help the group in their attempt to settle in a new land. Within the group their culture is nurtured and affirmed and leadership is developed. Can these strong pull factors towards a mono-ethnic church be overcome? Clearly the experience of Dublin Central Mission is that first generation immigrants have become part of the worshipping community. Yet it is important to recognize that every new immigrant may not be able to integrate, and they should not be made to feel guilty for gathering in their own ethnic groups.

The congregation was clearly welcoming but many of those who were coming needed much more than a handshake and a few kind words. They needed practical help. Through limited pastoral contact it was clear that those who came to live in Ireland for whatever reason experienced increased difficulties. A variety of problems encountered in a personal capacity were as follows: loneliness, vulnerability, culture shock, family problems, family bereavements, accommodation problems, financial difficulties, work-permit issues and immigration complications.

This presented pastoral issues for the congregation, and it was agreed to seek to appoint a worker or workers whose principle task was to be a support and advocate for those who were arriving and finding the transition difficult. As a result the "Welcoming the Stranger Project" was started in May 2003. A pastoral care person was employed on the project and her job was to connect with the new arrivals and build up a resource and skills base that would help the new attendees through the difficult first days. Linked to this would be her ability to help them build friendships and fellowship within the church and beyond. Moving beyond the worshipping congregation there was the recognition that an excellent set of premises existed in a strategic location. There was a desire to see these utilized for the Kingdom of God. There were many asylum seekers, refugees and others who were located in hostels and B&BS located around the city center, for which life can be both difficult and lonely.

3.4. Ecumenical Approaches and Initiatives

Bray Churches Together Ecumenical Group organized an Intercultural Planning Forum to assist people from overseas to integrate into Irish Society. The member churches of Bray Churches Together include four Roman Catholic parishes - St. Fergal's, Queen of Peace, St. Peter's, Holy

Redeemer; Church of Ireland - Christ Church; the Coptic Church, which is the Orthodox church of Egypt; the Methodist Church; the Presbyterian Church - St. Andrew's; the Mountain View Community Church and The Upper Room. Rev. Ken Wilson welcomed everyone & introduced the Parish Integration Project and the Inter-Church Committee on Social Issues. This was followed by a presentation on the Parish Integration Project development and its goals, as well as general immigration and integration issues. An open and lively discussion then took place with questions raised. Amongst the issues raised was the fact that immigrants did not know where local facilities were, and that certain areas might become ghettos in the future. What might the churches do to help? People present felt that as far as housing was concerned, immigrants should be integrated more with the Irish in order to avoid ethnic clusters; and immigrants themselves have a part to play in integrating into Irish society.

As an example of facilitating change in one of the local congregations, the Sunday Readings in the Holy Redeemer are also printed in Polish. While Polish people are attending Mass, they don't appear to be involved in any other Parish activities. How can the church reach out to these people without putting them into a separate group? There are a lot of tourists in Bray each weekend. One suggested that an event with music/traditional music/religious music be organised followed by a cup of tea and a chat – organised by Bray Churches Together. Maybe immigrants would contribute their own music. These events needed to be held in a neutral venue and not in a church as a lot of people might not be church goers and this might put them off. Another issue raised was around the education of immigrants as there is a huge interest in Irish culture and this might help in their integration.

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul has four Conferences in Bray and works closely with immigrants in the area. It was suggested that a glossary of all groups and organisations in Bray be put together and made available at all the churches. The question of visiting neighbours was also asked and the need to learn to live with all other people and to be tolerant was also discussed. What were the churches in Bray doing? The Methodist Church has an English corner run by one teacher and two helpers offering English classes. Holy Redeemer held a welcome evening in the Little Flower Hall in the past. They have a priest from the Philippines who visits and meets with immigrants. Lay people often meet with immigrants. Tea and coffee are served in the Villa Pacis at 10.30am and everyone is welcome. The foreign students in the area also voiced their concerns and a recently arrived student stated that she found it very difficult to get any help from the church during her first eight months. She was able to integrate better when she joined a dance class and at college. Young people want volunteer work and the church is not providing this. It was suggested that she contact the priests/clergy, join a choir, and call to the Parish Office. Reaching out is important. The following issues were also brought up: immigrants should respect Irish culture and the main social place in Ireland is the pub! The only time one lady met Irish people was on the 'Night Link bus!'

The students were also asked what they would like from the group. They suggested music events as it was easier for them to communicate through music, especially if there were language difficulties. Other important

means of promoting integration included sport events, cookery classes, opening school kitchens, working with children and holding children's events, such as music & dance. There is a lot to learn from children and their capacity to integrate as they have better knowledge of the language. What is the next step? 'We want to make people feel comfortable, not just brought into the church' - was the final remark of one of the participants.

The **ecumenical group "Outreach" in Dundalk** is working to promote inter-church dialogue and events and to provide a welcome to the immigrant communities. In order to facilitate participation and interaction with the new ethnic communities, the group is providing support to refugees and asylum seekers, making pastoral visitations to immigrants in their homes, organizing through the local churches both Mass services and Scripture readings for the Polish and Lithuanian communities. Creating a culture of welcome is the main aim of the group and as a result the parish bulletins are now including notices in different languages with special attention given to baptisms, marriages and other church anniversaries. There is also a monthly Eucharist specific to certain migrant groups. St. Vincent de Paul Conferences, in cooperation with local parishes, are responding to some of the practical needs of immigrants. An African/Irish choir was established and induction programs and support for immigrant children at primary school level have also been introduced. The group has been in existence for the past two years and it very active, particularly in promoting the rights of the new ethnic communities in Dundalk, Drogheda and surrounding areas.

3.5. Parallel Communities – Sharing Premises

During the last decade, **Abbey Presbyterian Church in Parnell Square, Dublin** experienced many different strands and types of immigration passing through the doors of their church, bringing in new and different traditions, enthusiasm, optimism and hope for a better future in Ireland. Abbey, due to its unique location in the heart of the City, has been and continues to be host to various ethnic groups who wish to express their faith. It has established itself as a multicultural and a welcoming parish, open and receptive to the needs of the new ethnic groups which started to take residence in the area over the last ten years. It also presents some of the specific elements of an integrated congregation. The Church is shared each Sunday by three main congregations. Sunday mornings to mid-afternoon belong to its old and new (officially registered) members which numbers around two hundred people. The new ethnic groups come from between 20-25 different countries and the service is conducted in English. It is a good atmosphere and there is a social interaction after the service when refreshments are served. This provides an opportunity for old and new members to exchange views, chat and to find out more about each other.

Other congregations use Abbey to conduct services in their own languages at different times on a Sunday. The French speaking African congregation

uses the premises from early afternoon to early evening on Sundays, and they are followed by the Romanian Pentecostal Church from early evening to late evening. Both congregations have a strong and dedicated membership and at the moment, they would rather continue the celebration of their faith on their own. There are good relations with both these congregations with, for example, the Romanian Pentecostal Church sharing the cost of painting with the congregation and then carrying out the painting of the church. On an average Sunday, Abbey Presbyterian Church could be hosting around one thousand people over the course of a day.

In conclusion, Abbey Presbyterian is one of the very first multicultural and partly integrated parishes in the country. It finds itself at a crossroads both in terms of the pastoral care of its own registered members and also in terms of becoming part of the new development plans of the area around Parnell Square. Its welcoming and open attitude towards the new ethnic communities living in the area has inspired the church with a new energy and vitality. By responding positively to both spiritual and pastoral needs of its new members, the church has now gained their loyalty and in turn, people now feel part of a community and are building a congregation sharing similar theological beliefs. This feeling of belonging is further strengthened by strong participation from the new residents within leadership groups, as the recent elections for the Congregational Committee show that almost half of the members elected on the Committee are non-Irish nationals. Abbey Presbyterian provides a primary example of good practice in supporting the new ethnic communities with their struggle to integrate and become actively involved in the day to day life in our society.

3.6. Comments and measures of integration and church integration

A multiplicity of factors influence the integration process of migrants:

- socio-economic situation, residence status and length of stay
- access to resources and structures which are an intrinsic part of society with its institutional and political structures
- the number of migrants
- the distance between country of origin and country of destination
- family networks
- inter-ethnic relations
- causes and course of migration
- subjective attitudes and expectations

All these aspects need to be taken into consideration when defining indicators. Research related to indicators of integration need to include comparison between relevant reference groups of the receiving society. Legal, socio-economic and socio-cultural frameworks are relevant for the elaboration of indicators of integration:

Legal integration: This concerns the elimination of legal barriers to integration and the establishment of equal rights for all members of society. This can be achieved by easier access to citizenship for migrants with the possibility of acquiring or maintaining double/multiple citizenship;

or by granting rights of status to migrants equal to those granted to nationals.

Socio-economic integration: This includes equal access to the labour market, access to training and to the housing market, as well as the potential for mobility in these fields. We highlight in particular the recognition of foreign qualifications and access to job specific permanent education.

Socio-cultural integration: Knowledge of language(s) is a key and a powerful vehicle for integration. If a migrant understands and speaks the language(s) of the country of residence, the possibility of becoming an integral part of society and playing an active role in it are greatly increased. Language tuition should be an essential part of any integration policy and should be accessible, affordable and available as soon as possible after a migrant's arrival. Fair and equitable access to jobs; educational, social and health systems provide the keys to equal opportunities, participation and shared responsibility within society. Important steps in this field are the participation of migrants in associations, developing shared decision making, having rights to choose the layout in the living and recreational sectors, and also including immigrants in the communal, child and youth work of the community. In this process, special attention must be given to the key roles played by women, mothers and culturally mixed youth groups. It is crucial to understand that individual achievements in integration can only be measured when the receiving faith community provides adequate opportunities for integration and when structural hindrances to integration are taken into account and effectively tackled.

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Annex II: Questionnaire based on integration guidelines

TEN KEY INTEGRATION GUIDELINES FOR PARISHES

PARISH COUNCIL QUESTIONNAIRE

There are three ways in which you can complete this exercise:

- 1. Take some time during an appropriate Parish Council (or whatever your local equivalent is) meeting to work through each question collectively, perhaps in small groups of three. When you are finished, reconvene together and collate all suggestions on a flip chart or board.*
- 2. Ask Council Members to fill out the form before they arrive, and collate the answers as above.*
- 3. Appoint three church/Council members with an interest in this field, to work on the questionnaire in their own time and then present their findings to the Parish Council for discussion.*

In all three cases however, encourage migrant participation as the implications of your decisions will affect migrants, therefore their advice will be pivotal and necessary for the ideas to succeed. As the Council may be the key decision maker in the parish, use the questionnaire to decide which ideas are achievable and begin working towards their implementation.

1. Mapping and Analysis

How could your parish efficiently and sensitively survey the ethnic diversity in the area?

2. Welcoming process

How would you define the welcoming process taking into account the particular circumstances of your parish area? How can you encourage everyone to be involved in the welcoming process?

3. Church Image

How could you make the outside image of your church more inviting and welcoming?

4. Symbols of welcome

How could your church display images and pictures reflecting the religious life of the cultures present in your parish?

5. Role of welcomers

Is there a need for welcomers in your church? What would be required for such a role?

6. Use of language

Is there a need for translation of services into other languages?

Is there an inclusive language or use of different languages used when communicating with people, so that immigrants can feel part of the parish?

How can masses and liturgies be delivered in a clear, uncomplicated manner?

7. Music

Does your congregation have the willingness and resources to utilise hymns or praise songs representing the diversity of the congregation sung during worship? How could such music be incorporated into worship?

8. Meals

How can the unity found in sharing food be used for bringing people together and help us understand one another? What national festivals or culturally specific Christian days could be celebrated?

9. Small groups

How could Bible studies, prayer groups or small groups be used to encourage relationships to develop and different perspectives to be shared and understood?

10. Participation

How could newcomers be encouraged to participate in leadership, project teams, etc...? How could newcomers be engendered with a sense of belonging and being understood and appreciated in your church?

Annex III: Indicators for measuring social and ecclesial integration/inclusion

These Integration indicators were devised by Bishop Nicholas di Marzio, Bishop of Diocese of Brooklyn, New York, USA.

Indicators of Social Integration

- 1. Labor force participation*
- 2. Language acquisition*
- 3. Education Continuance*
- 4. Military/Police Service*
- 5. Naturalisation Rate*
- 6. Voting*
- 7. Home Ownership*
- 8. Inter-marriage*

Indicators of Ecclesial Integration/Inclusion

- 1. Mass attendance/sacrament participation in native language*
- 2. Attendance at English language services*
- 3. Religious education attendance*
- 4. Vocations to the priesthood and religious life*
- 5. Parish Membership*
- 6. Parish Pastoral Council Participation*
- 7. Personal Parishes*
- 8. Inter-marriage*

This booklet has been produced by the Parish-Based Integration Project run under the auspices of the Inter-Church Committee on Social Issues. The project has been financially supported by the Office of the Minister for Integration.

The primary goal of the project is to provide support for practical integration of immigrants based around church communities. As part of that objective, this booklet is intended as a key resource for local use.

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