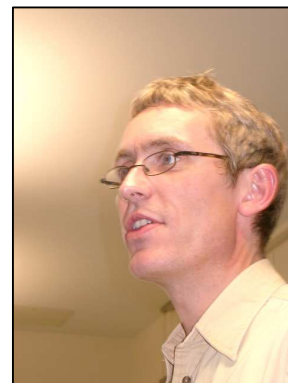


## **The Mission Impact of Migration: a report of the CTBI 'Four Nations Forum for Evangelisation' in Dublin 2007**

**Jim Currin, focal person for the Four Nations Forum for Evangelisation**

We hear new languages in our shops, see headlines in our newspapers and watch national debates on television about migration and related issues. Recently, national evangelism officers from the churches in Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England and several guests met for 24 hours to consider the 'Mission Impact of Migration'.

Informed by Rev Darrel Jackson, who is a researcher in mission and migration across Europe for the World Council of Churches, members of the forum shared their experience, knowledge and reflections on the subject, specifically in relation to evangelisation. This was mainly focussed on church life (as many migrant workers come from Christian backgrounds), outreach projects and church planting/ Fresh Expressions.



**Rev Darrel Jackson**

John Stevens, Methodist Minister of the Dublin Central Mission, described the new life and vibrancy brought by new migrant members. The church had nearly closed but then extended a welcome to people from overseas. They found a spiritual home in the congregation and brought friends. John first came to the city himself 25 years previously to start work, with just a suitcase. Though just from Belfast, he said his ministry has been shaped by that experience of being a migrant himself.

The current multi ethnic congregation is led by a multi ethnic staff and leadership. 160 on Sunday mornings are served by 5 staff including a Sri Lankan minister and Argentinean administrator; while there are people from the Philippines, Korea and Africa on the Council.

Hospitality, relationships, practical and pastoral support have been key. They intentionally want to be God's people together as a community, as this is how they have been called to be. John says other churches may well grow with ethnic congregations, with worship in their own language, but each church needs to find out the best way under God for them to grow. The multicultural congregation approach brings "many problems" and a "wonderful blessing" at the same time.

Another story was told about the 'The Solid Rock' church in Dublin by Jabulani Mwale. As well as a multicultural main congregation they have different Mission congregations, for example Nigerian and Cameroon, and plan for many more. They run both models of 'united fellowship' and diversity, which has led to considerable growth as illustrated on [www.thesolidrock.net](http://www.thesolidrock.net).

These different stories led to a forum discussion about the advantages and disadvantages of the various approaches to congregational diversity, compared to specific language, age and cultural groups meeting separately, worshipping and reaching out to their own people groups.

The forum discussed the much debated old premise of Donald McGavran that "people don't like to become Christians by crossing cultural barriers", and the relevance of research into this in our own day. We hope our churches and councils will do more work and research in this area.

Darrel Jackson observed that "when living in Hungary I was an 'expatriate'; in the Isle of Man a 'come over' and 'from away' in the Forest of Dean". There are different ways of describing the 'the other', and 'migrant'. Each word has a different connotation.

With this and many of the newspaper headline words like 'waves', 'floods', 'overwhelmed' and 'sponging' in mind, together with confusion over the closely related subjects of asylum seekers,

refugees and so on, the forum engaged with all issues from a positive perspective and noted the following points that raise lots of questions for further consideration:

1. Migration movements are not new. They happened before, in and after biblical times.
2. Jesus himself was a migrant and said that what we do for the least, we do for him.
3. One in ten British people live abroad so there is 'out' migration as well as 'in'.
4. Migration to and from the Four Nations has been observable for many years.
5. Congregations with an ethnic identity are not new either. Welsh speaking congregations, the Swedish Lutheran Church in Rotherhithe, and the American church in Euston are examples.
6. Studies in Spain and elsewhere show that people often lose their faith when they move, for many reasons (eg Spanish digital news service ACPress, 4 April 2007).
7. A good missional framework for evangelisation is: 'listen, serve, receive and share'. Another framework, is 'observe, interpret, and make it happen'.
8. For worship, find times which fit best for the workers: in Ross on Wye an agricultural workers congregation meets in the evening and in East Anglia a Baptist group meets midweek.
9. Recognise that some groups are 'invisible to us'. A Community Education Officer asked if a church building could be used for teaching Polish women living in a hotel around the corner in a small town of 2,000 people. The church didn't know they were there.
10. 'Keeping the faith' of the faithful is part of our mission responsibility. This is what Polish Roman Catholic priests who serve Polish communities seek to do.
11. Well established groups, like The Well in Glasgow which has worked with Asian people for 50 years, face new challenges when new migrant groups of people arrive, raising the question 'Who is it for?'
12. We need to recognise and be sensitive to tensions which can exist between different cultural groups.
13. We noted that both Islam and Christianity are evangelising communities.
14. We need to give consideration to the implications if Turkey joins the EU.
15. Many new Christian converts are very keen to evangelise in the contexts of Britain and Ireland, believing that that is part of their call as Christians and a reason for being here, as we did when we went abroad in fulfilment of the Great Commission.
16. As always, we need to be careful about stereotyping people before we get to know them. The Solid Rock church in Dublin provided a bus for Asylum Seekers in a resettlement camp 15 miles away to attend church. Many were found to be qualified medical staff.
17. Nearly all Christian groups engaged in direct outreach and work with migrants and asylum seekers subsequently get involved in issues of justice.
18. Although a Baptism certificate is helpful in an asylum seeker court case this has not been observed as a common example of people taking an advantage of the church.
19. People are finding a new faith in Jesus Christ. In East Anglia an outreach to Portuguese people through a café has drawn 10 new believers who have been recently baptised.
20. Statistics have shown that the fastest growing churches in London are the Black Majority and Ethnic groups. Graham Horsley reported that learning from evangelists and pastors for migrant group congregations is taking place in the Methodist Church.
21. There is no 'one answer fits all' model in all circumstances: responses need to be based on need, cultural relevance and a welcoming church prepared to change ... and change again.
22. We do well to remind ourselves of lessons learnt in previous generations about indigenous leadership, as explored by missiologists like Roland Allen.
23. A good place for specific mission would be Victoria Coach station where many travel to and change, 'without a friend in the world'. With no chapel on site could a Christian team work from a converted coach?
24. One model for a church which can work well is to have cell groups for individual ethnic identities and then for them all to join together in a central celebration, shaped by what the cell groups bring. Each cell group can have its own relevant outreach programme and natural geographic area.

Finally we concluded that:

- Many Christians coming to Britain bring a committed and fervent approach to evangelism which can bless and inform all churches.
- Whilst there are potential problems caused by a dominant host community evangelising a minority community, this should not preclude sensitive evangelisation.
- Any attempt at evangelisation which does not take seriously an engagement with the culture of the migrant communities is inadequate.
- A genuine offer of hospitality should always be the first point of meeting with migrant communities.
- We recognise the importance of working in partnership with those who work in areas of racial justice, community development and exclusivity as the churches serve migrant communities.
- We agreed that the 1989 San Antonio report sets a helpful theological framework for work with migrant communities particularly where they are from faith backgrounds other than Christianity: "We cannot point to any other way of salvation than Jesus Christ; at the same time we cannot set limits to the saving power of God."

**The Forum noted the following resources:**

We based our discussion on the CTBI booklet 'Migration Principles' CTBI 2007 which provides guidelines for all churches.

The United Nations website has links to International Migration figures for 2006.

The 'Caleb Project' has produced a new book 'The New Faces of Europe' ([www.calebproject.org](http://www.calebproject.org)) with the networks of Global Connection, Operation Mobilisation and Youth With A Mission.

Churches Together in England has produced a PDF, 'Inter Faith Contact' to help us work with people of other faiths on <http://www.cte.org.uk/Group/Group.aspx?id=59464>

For interfaith outreach, the Methodist church has produced 'May I call you friend?' available from [www.mph.org.uk](http://www.mph.org.uk)

The Baptist Union has a downloadable resource on Migration with 10 principles available from [www.baptist.org.uk](http://www.baptist.org.uk)

Alpha provides course material in Russian, Polish and Chinese, available from [www.alpha.org](http://www.alpha.org)

WycliffeUK has produced a website called [www.jesusinmylanguage.org](http://www.jesusinmylanguage.org) which provides sections of Mark's Gospel in 70 languages. It plans to provide more.

A book which explores the issues from a Christian Perspective is: 'A Christian Perspective on a Polarised Debate' by Nick Spencer. Paternoster 2004, with the Jubilee Centre, Cambridge.

A general introduction is 'International Migration: A very short Introduction' by Khalid Koser in the Oxford University Press 'Very Short Introductions' series (OUP 2007).

The Christian Enquiry Agency works on behalf of the churches in Britain and Ireland in providing literature and follow up to enquirers. Its address can be added to any printed material: Christian Enquiry Agency, Freepost WC2947, South Croydon CR2 8UZ.

An important general reference paper on mission theology and praxis is found in 'Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation: <http://www.religion-online.org/showchapter.asp?title=1573&C=1525>