

Moving Story

*how our church developed support for migrants
and helped form the Walthamstow Migrants' Action Group*

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St. Barnabas, Walthamstow

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Introduction

This is the story of our church community and its pastoral ministry with migrants. It's a church I've grown to love since becoming its vicar and one I've seen grow in its attention to, support of and action for migrants. We offer this story in the hope that it might inspire others to develop a pastoral ministry which is of increasing importance to the Church today.

St Barnabas is a Church of England parish in the heart of Walthamstow, a parish of around 30 streets and 8,000 people. The congregation meets in one of the most culturally diverse parts of London, in an area with good traditions of being a place of welcome for migrants. Walthamstow actually means 'welcome place' and has experienced significant incoming movements of people over the last 50 years, initially from South-East Asia and the Caribbean, and in more recent years from Africa, Eastern Europe, and from many other parts of the world.

The congregation reflects the history and diversity of the wider community, with long-standing migrant members from the West Indies - particularly from Barbados -, as well those born in Ireland, Antigua, Pakistan, Nigeria, Jamaica, Poland, Zimbabwe, Ukraine, Ghana, Dominica, and Sierra Leone, and elsewhere. There are also, of course, UK born members, including some who've lived in Walthamstow for many years and others who've arrived more recently. Then there is a sizable number from the Philippines. This grouping is from a very particular place in the north of the country known as 'The Mountain Province'. It was a part of the Philippines that was not colonised by the Spanish, and was evangelised by American Anglicans at the beginning of Twentieth century. The indigenous people of the area are known as 'Igorot' and through a few families migrating to Walthamstow in the 1970s, with others following since, St Barnabas has become the "spiritual home of Igorot Anglicans in the UK".

I knew St Barnabas and my predecessor a little before moving to the parish in 2009. I was attracted to the church, not least because of the brilliant work the congregation and the vicar had done in welcoming migrants over the years, including the Igorot. I was also attracted to the wider multi-cultural setting of the neighbourhood, in a parish where around half of the population is Muslim. But this is the story of the period I know best, from after I moved to St Barnabas, a story which has certainly seen development in the area of pastoral ministry with migrants as we have worked together in the ways I describe below.

A number of practices have been essential in developing our pastoral ministry with migrants - including our Sunday worship, our Bible studies, our social events, our community activities, and our annual pilgrimage - but one particular set of practices has been transformative of the development of this ministry, namely the practices of community organising. In late 2010 St Barnabas joined Citizens UK and since then has utilised the methods of community organising to inform much of our mission and ministry. Some in the congregation encountered these methods for the first time; others, especially the Filipinos, had experienced them elsewhere. Yet it was the intentional use of these methods as a whole church community which really formed the basis of how St Barnabas developed its pastoral ministry with migrants.

That is why this piece of writing starts with three chapters describing the process of developing our work and stressing the importance of the three practices: relationship building (chapter one); engaging in community listening (chapter two); and transforming energy into action (chapter three). It then describes three kinds of action which have developed from these practices: challenging anti-migrant narratives (chapter four), helping communities to integrate (chapter five) and providing support for vulnerable migrants (chapter six). Some of this work may not appear, at first glance, to be 'pastoral ministry', but its inclusion under this heading is very deliberate. Our experience at St Barnabas is that pastoral ministry is about all of the interactions within the life of the Church which help migrants to feel that are not only welcome but also full participants in the life of the congregation, and, furthermore, that the way a congregation takes action on the issues affecting migrants is as much about pastoral ministry as the provision of practical or other support.

Alongside my part-time role at St Barnabas I also serve as Executive Officer for London Churches Social Action, essentially a networking role on social action issues for an Ecumenical grouping of London Church Leaders. My work for them, based in Westminster, has informed and has been informed by my experience as a vicar rooted in a parish community. This has been especially true on the topic of migration, which in 2015 formed the basis of a theological enquiry, the outcome of which was the articulation of "London Churches' Common Reflections on Migration". This is attached as an appendix to this booklet. It contains key messages, Bible passages, and resources related to migration, and is included here as a resource to support the work of developing pastoral ministry with migrants.

As mentioned earlier, Bible study has been essential to St Barnabas' development of pastoral ministry with migrants, and the evidence of our theological enquiry across London is that Christian work on migration is very much informed by engagement with scripture. Whatever the political

challenges of migration today, one cannot ignore the extent to which migration informs the narrative of God's people within the Bible, the initial expansion of Christianity, and the experience of the Church throughout its history. We are a migrant Church, and at the centre of our lives is the worship of one who lived as a refugee and challenges us all to see the humanity of every person, not least those would say to us, 'I was a stranger and you welcomed me.' (Matthew 25: 35.)

This is the story of a congregation, set within a wider context, but it is also the story of numerous individuals who form the congregation and have benefitted from its pastoral ministry. Many personal stories could testify to this but I have chosen to highlight one story in particular, the story of Florence. As well as being a much-loved member of our congregation, Florence has fully engaged with all areas of our work with migrants, and, as we discover through this booklet, has benefitted herself from the pastoral ministry which she has helped to develop as a migrant member of our church. I wish to express my gratitude to her for sharing her story and to all members of St Barnabas for making it a church which, like the wider community of Walthamstow, is truly a 'welcome place'.

Chapter One - Relationships

Like any new vicar, I started to get to know the St Barnabas congregation within the first year of arriving at the church. This was often seeing people in groupings, within worship, at meetings, and for events. But before the end of this year, I was asked by a Roman Catholic sister, herself a migrant from Ireland, if she could bring along a community organiser from Citizens UK to meet with me. So it was I met Lina, a Syrian refugee and an organiser with experience in Chicago and London. Lina persuaded me to enrol in Citizens' training which I undertook with others from St Barnabas. Of all the things we found striking, we were particularly affected by the emphasis the training placed upon building relationship through one-to-one conversations. We experienced the power of an intentional conversation, for even as little as 40 minutes over a cup of tea, as a means of discovering issues of meaning within the lives of others. These one-to-ones, as we were taught to practice them, were quite different from the kinds of one-on-one pastoral conversation which often take place between a pastor and a parishioner. They were about getting to know another people, but also about learning their motivations and passions, about what makes people tick, and, crucially, about the things they would like to see change.

One of our members, Chris, organised a "one-to-one speed-chatting" session after Sunday worship to introduce others to the practice, and this was one event in the early days of our membership of Citizens which really transformed how we were to develop as a church, not least in our pastoral ministry to migrants. Not long before we had held a "cultural evening". It was a super occasion with a programme which included European, American, African, and Asian sections, but I noted a tendency, which I had spotted ever since arriving at St Barnabas, for people to sit within their own cultural groupings. The "one-to-one speed-chatting" was very different, with people from different cultural backgrounds talking to one another, often for the first time, about what was important to them. People in the congregation, not just the vicar, began to open up to the experience of each other, listening to one another's challenges and hopes. It was the springboard for us engaging in more and more intentional one to one conversation with each other, and encouraged me to prioritise "one-to-one" time with members of the church and neighbourhood as a key tool for congregational, as well as community, development.

Conducting ones-to-ones brought me and others face to face with the migrant stories of congregation members and other residents within the parish. I came to understand that although we had a settled Filipino community in Walthamstow, lots of the Filipinos attending the church were relatively new arrivals, many on temporary visas for between six months and five years.

I could see the value for them of St Barnabas as a place where they could find a little piece of the Mountain Province in the UK, where they could worship with other Igorots, meet visiting Filipino clergy, eat Filipino foods and join in traditional cultural activities.

But we began to ask if there was more we could do to help the Igorots feel not only welcome but truly 'at home'. This is how we came to make greater use of Filipino resources within the liturgy. I visited the Mountain Province on sabbatical and returned to the UK equipped with the Igorot translations of Holy Communion and the Bible, as well as an Igorot hymnal. We now have a communion sheet with some Igorot elements which we use regularly in the church.

Our conversations also helped us to understand the importance of participation in church life, and the integration of new migrants with those settled in the area, including integration between different migrant groups within the congregation. Many of our conversations highlighted how many of our migrant members, and not just the Filipinos, had been devout and deeply involved members of their church communities in their countries of origin. We learned who had ministered as servers, Eucharistic assistants, Sunday-school teachers, choir-members, tea-makers, cleaners, maintenance-volunteers, readers, intercessors, church-council members, churchwardens and lay preachers – and we encouraged them to fulfil these roles at St Barnabas. We now have diverse teams of migrants and non-migrants participating in all areas of our worshipping life, and this is something which has been particularly affirming of those who had felt the wrench of non-participation in ministry which came through migration. Fostering this participation has certainly been an aspect of our pastoral ministry, as it has helped to afford migrants the same self-esteem and vocational nurture from ministering in church in the UK as they had experienced back in their home countries.

Furthermore we started to learn about the reasons why people had come to the UK, and we began to think more about the forms of support we could offer as a church congregation to those among us, and in the wider community, who were in need of support as migrants.

Florence's story

I am Florence Cayboen I belong to an indigenous people called the Igorot in the Northern part of the Philippines, which is well known as the "Mountain Provinces" in Philippines. Our Igorot ancestors had successfully resisted the 330 years Spanish Colonisation due to its fierce nature, notably the "head hunters" of this archipelago. In the early 1900s American Anglican missionaries progressively established their work in the Mountain Provinces. My forefathers who were pagans during the Spanish era started to build churches with the Anglican priests who would come and visit their houses to have an Anglican mass every Sunday, which had then become a tradition of many Igorot families up until the present day.

Like other peoples in this archipelago, our beliefs and traditions lies from nature which is the natural and simple way of living. We till our crops from the mountains using the indigenous way, which was the most natural way. Later on development came with multinational corporations such as the big mining companies that explored our natural resources including the people's labour. My family migrated to a mining compound where my family worked as miners and labourers.



Chapter Two - Listening

One-to-one listening, within the practices of community organising, is a prelude to people listening together as a community. Citizens UK often employs the language of “house meetings”, but for us these listening sessions largely took place every couple of months in the church hall after our Sunday morning worship. I remember the first of these when around thirty of us sat in a circle and described the things that were causing us anxiety in our lives. For some these were issues of personal safety. My teenage sons had been mugged in our own road, and many others expressed concerns about living in a neighbourhood where they did not always feel safe on the streets. Others spoke about problems with education, with unemployment, or with healthcare, all issues affecting migrants present for the listening session. Yet the most powerful testimony was that of some of the most vulnerable migrants in our congregation.

One conviction we developed from the one-to-one listening was this: that our church had to be a place of welcome for all, regardless of immigration status. Some of our migrant members were settled in the UK, some after several years; many had acquired British Citizenship. Some of our members were on short-term visas, some in a process of appeal to remain in the UK, others intent on returning to their countries of origin. Yet some were undocumented migrants, largely people who had overstayed on visas, and these were some of our most vulnerable members. We listened to their experiences together: people trying to live under the radar, mostly working as labourers or domestics, despite being skilled workers back home; people working long hours, and working below the minimum wage, some in forms of domestic slavery, just to send home small sums of money; people sending the majority of their small earnings home, largely to pay for the education of children whom they had left behind in the hope of lifting them out of poverty into a better future; people self-medicating because they could not find a doctors’ surgery willing to register them without sight of a passport; people sometimes too scared to come to church for fear of encountering immigration officers at the tube station. Of all the things we heard through listening together, we heard that some of our brothers and sisters in Christ with whom we had shared fellowship were people living in fear, and that sometimes they did not even feel safe at church.

Organising meetings to listen to the experience of vulnerable migrants was not easy. There were trust issues. Would it be safe to attend a meeting about migrants? Would immigration officers be present? Here the importance of our earlier relationship building cannot be under-estimated, or the importance of trusted individuals, like our then churchwarden Jane, one of our Filipino migrants, who encouraged others to come, and provided food for everyone to enjoy! We also had the benefit of working in partnership, not only with Citizens UK, but with Kanlungan, an organisation which provides advice and support for Filipino migrants in the UK and is known and trusted by many of our most vulnerable members. We were also joined by a research student and volunteer with Migrant Voice called Mariko who engaged in conversation with many of the Filipina domestic workers in our congregation and also gained their trust. With the help of Citizens, Kanlungan and Mariko we organised three workshops to listen more to the experience of vulnerable migrants during 2012. The first two also provided advice on access to healthcare and legal advice; the last was a seminar which attracted members from our church and other churches, as well as local mosques, trades unions, the local Amnesty group, and other concerned individuals. It was this process of corporate listening that gave rise to the formation of the Walthamstow Migrants' Action Group.

Florence's story

When I moved to the city to work, I was able to find a job at the Episcopal Church in the Philippines and with the Ecumenical Church Load Foundation. I enjoyed my job, being involved with its advocacy work gave me the opportunity to grow spiritually and become active on issues that affect the integrity of creation and justice and peace. But I had to give up because the salary could not give me a decent life. With our natural resources slowly being depleted, people like me were forced to work abroad for a living.

In 2002, I saw a chance to make a decent life by coming to the UK since I was trained to earn every penny in order to survive. Anybody in my position would take this opportunity for a better life. Even if this means living with an irregular status, at least I have a regular job and not claiming benefits like what the media and politicians always say. At least I can send money to my mother who resides still in that mining compound. The multi-billion mining company and government pension cannot sustain her living. She's old and sickly now and dependent on the remittances I send to her I was able to find a job soon after I arrived in the UK. Although I was not able to practice as an accountant, I was able to find work and good employers who hired me in the domestic services industry.



Chapter Three - Action

Our community listening gave birth to a number of actions in our church and wider community. We took action on safer streets, for example, working with Citizens UK, and with the help of funding from Near Neighbours, to create a 'City Safe Zone' in our parish. We did this by forming relationships with shop-keepers, at the Algerian cafes and Pakistani grills, and securing their agreement to provide safe havens for any young person in the community seeking safety in their premises from the threat of violence.

Citizens UK helped us to cultivate a habit of action in our neighbourhood. We were energised by engagement in campaigns across our borough, city and country, with many of our church members attending Citizens' assemblies, including filling two coaches on one occasion with our neighbouring Evangelical parish and our Roman Catholic friends. An article in our parish magazine in December 2012 described one member's participation in three Citizens' events from the previous month: the Annual East London Assembly, a City Safe street walk, and the Diaspora Assembly. The article was written by Florence. She was particularly impressed by the last event, as were other migrant members of our congregation. They came away inspired by other churches and organisations who had converted their energy, even their anger, on migration issues into action.

One event which energised many in Walthamstow into action was the decision by the English Defence League (EDL) to march here. To many in our community the prospect of an openly racist organisation walking through our streets seemed a direct assault on the positive multiculturalism that characterizes life in E17. On the day itself less than a hundred EDL supporters descended on Walthamstow but over 5000 local people took to the streets to peacefully resist their presence in what turned out to be a joyful day of people from all sections of the local community enjoying one another's company. I was a speaker for the churches and many of my colleagues and other Christians from the Borough turned out. The day was particularly empowering for migrant members of our congregation, who felt safe and affirmed by such a positive display of support in the context of the venomous, anti-migrant rhetoric of the EDL.

So it was not surprising that our third listening session on migration gave rise to the formation of the Walthamstow Migrants' Action Group. We had developed relationships both within and beyond the congregation on migration issues, and we had developed a habit of action through our work with Citizens and our response to the EDL. But the catalyst for setting up the group was a seminar at which the key speaker was Liza Maza, a former elected Representative in the Philippines and human rights activist. The seminar attracted around forty people, equally from the church and wider community, all wanting to do something about the injustices towards migrants that the seminar identified. A decision was made to take action, and the group was formed in the coming months. Sabina, a Bulgarian mother of a child in one of our church schools, designed the logo and flyers for the initial launch at a local community centre. We launched on International Migrants' Day, 18th November 2012, with a joyful party, sharing food and hearing speeches. People of more than 20 nationalities were present at the initial launch and even more diversity was on display at our bigger launch a few months later. We took time to plan the event and build the participation of over 200 people. We called the event 'Celebrating Migration'. It included local politicians and other activists as speakers, as well as cultural presentations, including the Igorot from St Barnabas. It took place in a venue run by a Christian organisation and aptly named 'Harmony Hall'.

Meanwhile work was underway on the formation of the group as an organisational entity. A constitution was approved and a full committee elected, with Mariko as the first secretary. Shaukat, a Pakistani migrant who'd lived in Walthamstow for some forty years, was elected as the chairperson. Other trustees included migrants from St Barnabas and many of our first meetings were held at St Barnabas or in our sister parish of St Saviour, which by then had a Filipino vicar. A very important aspect of forming the group was having clear aims. These were formulated as challenging anti-migrant narratives, helping communities to integrate, and providing support for vulnerable migrants.

Florence's story

Some of my co-workers in this industry who came ahead of me obtained regular immigration status as a result of a 10 year campaign initiated by Filipinos. Today, immigration rules are stricter, making it difficult for a campaign to become successful such as the campaign to recognise domestic work as work. Domestic work is not recognised as work and it's not under labour shortages despite the fact that a lot of people here in the UK are in constant need of skills in domestic work. Despite my immigration status I was able to find work in restaurants, pubs, offices and in private households. They need domestic workers to help them become productive in their own lives. They need people they can entrust their keys and maintain cleanliness and orderliness to their houses. I have been entrusted seven keys of different houses to manage here in London for many years. I also help parents to look after the kids while growing. The lives of their children and pets are entrusted in our hands while they are away.

Like regular citizens in this country, we are not exempted from paying bills. We pay our rent, which help the landlord to pay their mortgage. In my area, many landlords were saved from foreclosure during the financial crisis because of our contributions. In short, some of the money we have earned is returned to the economy that helps the UK industry.



Chapter Four - Challenge

Our Walthamstow Migrants Action Group was formed in the context of central government seeking to lower net migration to the UK, and of a great deal of negative language about migrants in media and political discourse. In 2013 then Home Secretary Teresa May published an Immigration Bill which stated the government's intention to create "a hostile environment" for migrants in the UK, announcing plans to increase immigration checks and to force landlords and health workers to check the immigration status of tenants and patients respectively. The mainstream media were regularly printing scare stories about the potential impact of Bulgaria and Romania becoming full members of the European Union, with headlines like 'We must stop the migrant invasion' (Daily Express, 6th June 2013). The United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) was performing well in the polls and electorally. The three main political parties were reluctant to speak positively about migrants. All these developments were noted with horror and anger by people at St Barnabas and in the emerging Action Group.

Then, in July and August of 2013, the government unleashed vans across London aimed at so-called 'illegal immigrants' and warning 'Go Home or Face Arrest'. These 'Go Home' vans were heavily condemned as reminiscent of the language of the National Front. Later, Teresa May herself admitted that they were too much of a "blunt instrument". These vans never actually came to Walthamstow but they were spotted in neighbouring boroughs. But Walthamstow was part of a related experiment, which also intensified the sense of hostility towards migrants felt by many migrants and others, regardless of immigration status. As a vicar, I recognised this as a pastoral challenge for migrant members of my congregation, with another layer of fear and anxiety being added to their lives.

This related experiment was a very heavy presence of immigration officers at two tube stations in London, Stockwell and Walthamstow. Such search and search activity by immigration officers had occurred before but the experiment in the autumn of 2013 led to a much larger, more consistent and much more intimidating presence at Walthamstow Central. This enraged me and other members of St Barnabas. Some of our members who travelled from elsewhere were too intimidated to come to church.

Many in the community felt they were being stopped on the basis of appearance rather than as a part of any genuinely random process. The tactics and manner of the immigration officers and accompanying police presence was generally considered to be threatening. Those of us who prided ourselves on being part of 'welcome place' regarded this as an assault, out of character with our community, and with the potential to stir up feelings of division.

In response to this the Action Group decided it was time to take action to challenge negativity about migrants in the UK, including the government's actions in Walthamstow. Our first step was to organise another workshop at which we listened to one another on the issue and planned our approach. The workshop also included input from the Anti-Raids Network, giving practical advice to people about what to do if subject to a stop - and - search action by an immigration officer. The Network provided us with leaflets giving simple advice and we decided to adapt these leaflets to give out at the tube station but with our own message of "Welcome to Walthamstow" added to them. So it was that one Saturday morning we gathered as clergy, congregation members, Action Group members, and friends from Citizens UK in a local café. It was there that we constructed placards reading 'Migrants are welcome' and blew up balloons also saying 'Welcome to Walthamstow'. Then for a couple of hours we stood outside the tube station and gave out the leaflets, smiling as we did so.

The response was very encouraging. We hardly received any negative comments from passers-by and we received many really appreciate comments from Walthamstow residents, both migrant and non-migrant alike. In the context of so much negativity about migration in politics and the media, and on the back of the stop and search activities which felt like an affront to our community, there was a sense that we had redeemed our public space, played a small part in challenging the anti-migrant narrative, and re-affirmed the presence of migrants in our community in a way which was pastorally healing to them. It was the pastoral power of positive challenge in action.

Florence's story

Being undocumented makes me feel less human, it creates fear and insecurities day by day. My life is very limited and I have been unable to visit my family for 12 years. It is a very vulnerable life, that when you don't fight for your rights, you will be exploited and abused. We have no recourse to public services and protection from the state. We are deskilled and being undermined most importantly we cannot access health services. But thanks to the tireless work and support of people and organisations working for the rights and welfare of undocumented migrants, we were able to get healthcare services.

We are here for so long, we are like you: we have some employers, and we work diligently in order to survive. We were able to integrate and identify ourselves as part of this community. Contrary to what politicians and media says, we don't depend and never claim benefits on state. We have no access to even the most protection of our rights and wellbeing.

I dream of the day when am free to go home and come back here or elsewhere. That all domestic migrants have the freedom to travel and establish themselves wherever they choose. We are all worthy of opportunity and the chance to progress. We have all the right to a better life. Stop using us for the sake of politics. We want you to recognise our contribution, and give us the dignity we deserve.



Chapter Five - Integration

As well as challenging negativity about migration, the Action Group made an early commitment to encourage integration between migrants and non-migrants and between different migrant communities. At St Barnabas we had engaged with this work ourselves, consciously working to build relationships between different ethnic groupings in order to become a truly multi-cultural congregation. We realised that this needed intentional work on the part of congregational members who needed to make an effort to get to know each other, to become friends and not strangers to one another in the pews. We increasingly saw the beauty of this, as barriers were broken down and people formed relationships across difference within the congregation. In theological terms this felt like a foretaste of the New Jerusalem, with different nations coming together in peace. Indeed, I remember preaching on this and using this very phraseology in an Easter Day sermon.

We had also begun to take our experience of building relationship through one to ones into our interactions beyond the Church. We decided to invite others to join us as we developed the City Safe initiative and that a meeting with local residents might help to inspire and involve others to join in developing the scheme. At the same time some residents were talking about the idea of a local street party, aware that some money for this was available from the Council during the Diamond Jubilee year. So it was that we put leaflets through five hundred doors about a meeting to discuss City Safe and a street party. To our astonishment fifty people turned up to this meeting from the eight streets surrounding our church. It was a sign that people were longing for community spirit. People told us they came because they were looking for opportunities to meet their neighbours. A planning group started to meet and our first street party was attended by eight hundred people. We closed roads outside the church and installed bouncy castles, table-tennis, and marquees for the halal and non-halal BBQs. We used the church hall for activities as well, including a cake competition. People came from all sections of the community. Neighbours were transformed into friends. This was real multi-cultural integration. Afterwards we formed the Queens Boundary Community (QBC) organisation and we have engaged in many community activities together, with our fifth street party due soon.

The positivity of this integration work inspired us to encourage the Action Group to take up this theme. We had a sense of wider Walthamstow being a place where people spoke of multi-culturalism in general but rarely engaged in multi-culturalism in particular, i.e. they would talk about living in a diverse community but not necessarily have a diverse network of friendships.

We came to the view that integration is crucial to building change on migration challenges. Where migrants only engage with people from their own community, their capacity to build change is weaker than if they engage with other communities experiencing similar challenges.

Through Citizens we had seen the power of communities of difference working together to build change and we wanted this approach be part of our Action Group. It entailed commitment on the part of our members to reach out beyond their comfort zones and form new relationships. As at St Barnabas, people greatly enjoyed and benefitted from these new encounters. We celebrated this at an Action Group event close to Valentine's Day which we called 'Love Migrants', a wonderful event at which we shared each other's culinary and performance cultures, but also engaged in cross-cultural integration.

The 'Love Migrants' event was especially poignant for members of our congregation and others who were separated from loved ones, as was the case for many of the domestic workers at St Barnabas who were living in the UK, often separated from spouses for many years, in order to send money home for the education of their children. It was also poignant for those who faced separation as a consequence of the government's new family visa rules, introduced in July 2012. These introduced a new income threshold for bringing a non-EU spouse to the UK (£18, 600 for the spouse and extra for each child). This created a new problem for migrants who had a right to remain in the UK and had hoped to bring their spouses here, and a problem for any British person who had the fortune to fall for a non-EU spouse and not be earning enough to do so. This applied to a number of people connected with St Barnabas, including Florence, who had hoped to marry British Citizen Veli, even though he was too unwell to work. In wedding preparation I had to start warning people that even if married in the UK, a spouse not be able to remain here if the UK partner did not meet the income requirement. The Government had put a price on love.

Like others in the Action Group, I responded personally to the challenge of integration. Inspired by a project called the World in London which showed photographs of people living in London from all the 204 participant Olympic 'nations', I decided to try and meet as many people as possible in Walthamstow who were born in different countries. These meetings formed the basis of a photography exhibition of my own in St Barnabas Church during the E17 Art Trail. Over a year or so I managed to sit down in Walthamstow with 130 people from 130 different countries. Their photos were hung around the church, forming a "house of angels", captioned in the introduction by the phrase from Hebrews 13: 2 'Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.' Many of the participants attended the launch of the exhibition at which our MP and others spoke and where we captured a photo for the Action Group of over 50 people gathered together, each one of a nationality, all part of the multi-cultural integration of Walthamstow.

Florence's story

In 2002, one of the first places I visited when I came here in London was Walthamstow. One family offered me a room to stay until I found a job. Most of the time they go to church on Sundays and they invited me to St. Barnabas. I felt at home, for I met more Igorot people and an Igorot volunteer priest! From then on, I made St. Barnabas as my base church while am here in UK. I move from one place to another because of the nature of my job but at the weekend most of the time I go to Walthamstow to eat Filipino food and do my church thing at St Barnabas. As a Christian my faith means a lot to me.

In 2007, I got sick and had no access to any health care because of my immigration status. Through Father Alfonso Caniwet, a Filipino volunteer priest at St Barnabas, I met Janima, a Filipino activist. She help me find a GP through Doctors of the World and introduced me to another Filipino group wherein she does work. She invited me in most events she supported. That is when I came across London Citizens and another group of Filipino Overseas Domestic Workers.

I met Veli in 2008 in East Ham where we both live. We became friends and because of the support he gave me during my stay here, knowing my status, our relationship got closer. In 2011, I was detained but because of my relationship with Veli I was able to leave the removal centre. After he came to church with me at St Barnabas despite him being a Kurdish Muslim and he joined me in most of my events, meetings and parties. Veli's mental health was affected after my detention.



Chapter Six – Support

‘Challenge’, ‘Integration’ and ‘Support’ were the three founding aims of the Walthamstow Migrants Action Group. Although the desire to provide support was as high a priority as the others, it was the one which took us the longest to put in place. This is perhaps unusual for a pastoral approach. Often establishing a service comes first and then the justice work follows, as has been the case with the development, for example, of foodbanks in the UK. But establishing support took time for good reasons. We knew what we wanted to do. Some of us had visited the Hackney Migrants Support Centre at St Mary’s Stoke Newington. It operates as a weekly drop-in, a social space with a meal, and with the provision of free immigration and other advice from professional legal advisors. We faced two challenges to starting similar in Walthamstow: finding a venue and finding volunteers. St Barnabas was in full use during the day times but our sister church St Saviour’s agreed to host a drop-in and we managed to gather volunteers from the Action Group, churches and wider community. With a bit of planning, the Walthamstow Migrants’ Support Centre was born in July 2015 and has since relocated to the Walthamstow Salvation Army building.

The Centre provides opportunities for church and other volunteers to engage in very direct pastoral work with vulnerable migrants. The regulation of advice-giving means that only the professional advisor gives formal advice but there is a lot the volunteers can do to help. First is the importance of a friendly, welcoming and safe environment which the church space and volunteers certainly provide. Each “guest” (not “user” or “client”) is allocated to a volunteer to accompany them in meeting the needs which have brought them to the centre. This could be help with filling in forms, contacting a company about a bill, but most commonly is the need for free, reliable and professional legal advice. By clarifying information with the guest before seeing the advisor, the volunteer is able to help the advisor get to the heart of the issue and then is able to help take any necessary follow-up actions. The advice is provided by another organisation, the Refugee and Migrant Forum of Essex/East London (Ramfel).

Guests come to the Centre with issues that are very often resolvable. Many have been subject to bad advice from rogue solicitors who have taken large sums of money in exchange for poor information and representation. Many guests have limited English and do not in any case know their way around the various systems that can provide them with help. The volunteers are able to signpost guests to other local services, including children's and health centres. Being a migrant can be a lonely experience and the accompaniment of volunteers in sorting out problems can be empowering, not least when people are coping with depression and other health difficulties. Some, including asylum seekers, are living on very low incomes and volunteers are sometimes able to point to other sources of help, with clothing, food, furniture, etc.

Volunteers are inducted into the procedures and policies of the organisation by the Project Co-Ordinator and supported on the day by the Lead Volunteer. Support for the volunteer, including help in maintaining boundaries and confidentiality, is so important. The volunteers accompany migrants who are facing many challenges in their lives, often following traumatic experiences in their country of origin and thereafter. Many are destitute, living in poverty, relying on charity. They come from many countries, with a variety of problems, including from countries currently associated with the refugee crisis. Values of compassion and solidarity, key values for Christians, are the best tools at the volunteers disposal as they seek to walk alongside others in their suffering. It is not all despair. People are very grateful for a warm welcome and for help. Often people can resolve their migration challenges once their legal position is clarified. Occasionally there is cause for rejoicing when someone is granted leave to remain or sorts out a benefit or housing problem. All the joys and sorrows of pastoral work are as present in pastoral support for migrants.

Florence's story

I then decided to come out and face my status. First, I decided to be more active in groups that work for the welfare of migrants. At St. Barnabas, after hearing many stories from migrant parishioners, Father Steven Saxby and others initiated the Walthamstow Migrant Action Group (WMAG) with the support of some locals and migrant Filipinos, including me. WMAG, for me, became a channel to express my experiences as an undocumented migrant, be heard and gain support. I was empowered and convinced that coming out is the only way to be heard, to lead others and perhaps can make a change. I realized that remaining silent would not make me any better.

I was able to join the basic course on community organising run by Citizens UK. They are a group that promotes community organizing here in the UK. St. Barnabas is a member. The training had provided me the basic skills in community organizing, where we met and shared our concerns as a community and learned how to make action to make an impact in politics for a better change. I was able to share my experience of how I was exploited in seeking legal advice as an undocumented migrant. That led us to do some training and help create the "New Citizens Legal Service".

As we proceeded to our application for our church wedding the anti migrant rules were getting worst. With the help of Fr. Steven we were able to do it at St. Barnabas, with members and friends who became my family since I was here in UK. Facing with the difficulties of processing my immigration status on spousal visa leads me again to join the Citizens UK to campaign on this matter. With the help of the Joint Council on the Welfare of Immigrants and Jamima, I was able to get my leave to remain in UK.

My right for leave to remain means a lot to me, even it is limited. Veli and I have no more fear that one day we will be separated. It calms us both in facing our daily life regarding my status. For me, at least I can plan to visit our family in Philippines and Turkey. I can go back to school and upgrade



Conclusion

Pastoral work with migrants is not easy. It brings the Church face to face with stories of pain and desperation. Whatever thoughts individual Christians may have on the wider political challenges of migration in the UK, the Church has a pastoral obligation to support its members and those who are vulnerable and facing injustice in wider society. Christianity is a faith of migrant people. Jesus was a refugee. The Church's story is a story of migration, nor least in the UK. The Church's compulsion to seek justice and serve the poorest puts it at odds with those who promote a racist narrative and who stigmatise migrants. The UK Church is a huge beneficiary of migration and many vulnerable migrants are members of our congregations. This is the context in which pastoral ministry with migrants takes place.

At the same time there is a wider context in which the UK is currently dominated by a negative narrative on migration and with a government which is seeking to bring in even harsher measures which will impact upon vulnerable migrants. The global refugee crisis has, on one level, led to a more compassionate attitude towards refugees and migrants, but on the other has strengthened the narrative of those seeing refugees as 'deserving' and other migrants as 'undeserving'. Despite much evidence that migrants make a net contribution to the UK economy, they are typically depicted as seeking to take resources away from those in greater need. As our Action Group is seeking to assist the Council in the resettlement of some Syrian refugees within Walthamstow, we are keen not to lose sight of the wider challenges for other migrants that our group continues to highlight.

It is very heartening to have seen an outpouring of concern in Walthamstow and the UK in relation to the refugee crisis. Numerous groups have had collections of goods for refugees in Europe. A lorry load of goods was collected and stored at St Barnabas. Others have held jumble sales, collected olive oil, collected toiletries, and more. Many from Walthamstow have visited Calais. I myself led a delegation of church and other faith leaders for the Faiths Forum for London.

We have also been supporting the efforts of Citizens UK to re-unite children in Calais with family members in the UK. Our own Bishop of Barking has been one of the key leaders of this campaign. Inspired by a sermon, the children in our 3-6 year old Sunday School group, “the young Barnabarians” asked if they could collect money for refugees. They collected pennies, sacrificing pocket money, and sought donations from others. After a few weeks they had collected over a £100 which we passed on to our Diocesan Appeal for Refugees.

At the same time, the government put a new Immigration Act through parliament which got very little attention in the media but which will have a huge impact on migrants, including many at St Barnabas. It makes it a criminal offence to work, rent accommodation or drive in the UK as an undocumented migrant. It allows the government to seize earnings in bank accounts. It abolishes the right to appeal before detention, and it removes assistance for the children of failed asylum seekers, some of whom are still unable to return to their countries of origin. Our most recent workshop at St Barnabas focussed on the challenges for migrants in the context of the new ‘Right to Rent’ regulations contained in the Immigration Act 2014. Although we did our best to be in solidarity and build support for those most affected by this legislation, the conclusions we had to face were not heartening. I felt it a pastoral obligation to ensure my congregation is aware of these regulations, but it certainly was not “sharing the good news”. The pastoral response to migrants is not always easy, but it is indeed gospel ministry. We hope the story of St Barnabas may encourage others to engage in establishing many more contexts where migrants encounter the love of Jesus through the pastoral work of the churches.

Appendix:

Common Reflections on Migration from the London Churches Theological Enquiry

The process

- London Churches Social Action established a core group to guide a theological enquiry.
- We listened to migrants and those working with migrants across London.
- We held an extended seminar day in Barking attended by 50 people (including senior church leaders, Ecumenical Borough Deans, practitioners, social action advisors, The Refugee and Migrants Forum, The Jesuit Refugee Service, Hope not Hate, The Centre for Theology and Community, London Citizens, local ministers, academics; and people from Baptist, Independent, Pentecostal, Catholic, Anglican, Salvation Army, Methodist and URC churches).
- The core group reflected further and drafted some key messages.
- The messages were discussed, expanded and endorsed by the London Church Leaders as a toolkit of reflections for churches on migration.

The seminar explored two themes which the core research team discerned through attending to those engaged in being, and being among, migrants in London. These were:

“How is the church and UK society being blessed/challenged by migration?”

& “Who is weeping about, with and for migrants today?”

We also attended to God through prayer and silence, seeking to discern,

“What is the Spirit saying to the churches on migration?”

We then asked:

“What from the treasures of our faith we can draw on towards responding to issues related to migration.”

What next?

- Use this in your churches and church leaders’ networks to ask ‘What now?’
- Use the key messages/texts and resources for Christmas sermons
- Do something together: Prayer Vigil? Open-letter to your MP/party leaders?
- Sign up to the London Churches Refugee Network lcrefugeenetwork@gmail.com
- Support the work of Citizens UK and others on resettlement - www.refugees-welcome.org.uk

Key Messages

- + **God's people are migrant people** – the Bible has a clear narrative about God's people being a people on the move; Jesus was a refugee; the Gospel spread through migration.
- + **London churches are migrant churches** – migration has hugely enriched the churches in London; very few congregations have no migrants; many are majority migrant & migrant led.
- + **Migration leads us to identify who we are** – migration challenges our understandings of identity and helps us to recognise our fear of the other; it leads us to identify God in the stranger.
- + **Migration challenges us to connect with gospel truths** – migrant stories help to engage Christians with issues of suffering, poverty, faith, hope, etc.
- + **Migrants are humans** – stigmatisation of migrants is an affront to a Christian understanding of the dignity of every human being; we all made in the image of God.
- + **Christians are at the heart of supporting vulnerable migrants** – there are many projects across London run by churches and including Christians, often accompanying the most destitute.
- + **God's generosity challenges narratives of scarcity** – political narratives of scarcity therefore challenge a key Christian understanding about God's world and the use of its resources.
- + **Evils should be addressed** – migration is often the result of suffering caused by war, famine, disaster, injustice, global inequality; the negative causes of migration need addressing.
- + **Christians should be speaking Christian language on migration into wider society** – a positive language accompanied by celebratory actions, actions which make abundance a habit.
- + **What does it mean to be prophetic?** – What should the churches be calling for in relation to migration policy?



Image by Elizabeth Gray King (2015), created at the London Churches migration seminar.

Biblical texts for use in relation to migration

Genesis 11: 1-9 - ‘That is why it was called Babel - because there the LORD confused the language of the whole world. From there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth.’

Genesis 12 - ‘The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.”’

Leviticus 19: 33 - ‘‘The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the LORD your God.’’

Deuteronomy 10: 17-18 - ‘For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing.’

Ruth 1: 16 - ‘But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.’

Psalms 19 - ‘Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.’

Psalms 90: 1 - ‘Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations.’

Ezekiel 47: 21-23 - ‘‘In whatever tribe the alien settles, there you are to give him his inheritance,” declares the Sovereign LORD.’

Matthew 2: 13-23 - ‘When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”’

Matthew 28: 19-20 - ‘‘Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”’

John 1:1-5, 14, 16 - ‘From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another.’

John 1: 10-11 - ‘He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.’

Ephesians 2: 19 - ‘Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household.’

1 Peter - ‘Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.’

Revelation 7: 9-10 - ‘After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb.’

Revelation 21 - ‘Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.’

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Resources

Organisations

Migrants Rights Network

Excellent briefings on migration, for example on the Immigration Bill 2015
<http://www.migrantsrights.org.uk/>

Migrant Voice

Resources on celebrating the contribution of migrants to the UK
<http://www.migrantvoice.org/>

British Future

Reports on attitudes to migration in UK politics
<http://www.britishfuture.org>

Citizens UK

Leading civil society organisation in the UK, engaged on migration & refugee issues
<http://www.citizensuk.org/>

Churches Refugee Network

A Network of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland
<https://ctbi.org.uk/churches-refugee-network/>

London Churches Refugee Network

London network under the umbrella of London Churches Social Action
<https://ctbi.org.uk/churches-refugee-network/>

Churches Commission for Migrants in Europe

European network of churches working on migration
<http://www.ccme.be/>

Jesuit Refugee Service UK

Works alongside vulnerable, including destitute, migrants
<http://www.jrsuk.net/>

Issues

Detention

Report of the All Party Parliamentary Enquiry on Detention
<http://detentioninquiry.com/report/>

Family Re-unification

Britcits and others are working to amend family migration rules
<http://britcits.blogspot.co.uk/>

Settlement of Refugees

Citizens UK and others are working with local groups on resettlement
www.refugees-welcome.org.uk

Refugee Crisis

A list of how churches are and might respond is available on the CTBI website
<https://ctbi.org.uk/how-the-churches-are-responding-to-the-refugee-crisis/>

[Message](#)

Pope Francis - World Migrants Day 2015

https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/migration/documents/papa-francesco_20150912_world-migrants-day-2016.html

Steven Saxby and Florence Cayboen, 2016