

Responses to 'Church and Migration' from CCME

Evangelical Church of Westphalia material

Thanks to the Evangelical Church of Westphalia for producing this thoughtful and detailed study on the call to 'welcome the stranger'. My feedback follows and hopefully reflects my genuinely positive view of the material.

"Ich bin fremd gewesen und ihr habt mich aufgenommen" – there is use of lovely diverse images.

I appreciate the English translation. This potentially extends the readership, though I wonder how the material is being promoted beyond Westphalia church audiences? It begs the question – whom is the material targeting? My impression is that there has been an attempt made to seek to incorporate all interested parties. This is a challenging task. If it is to be used far and wide, then arguably tools need to be given to encourage people to engage with it.

The 4 sections could be more geared towards targeting certain audiences:

So section 1 for theologians and those responsible for church worship and preaching, section 2 for those interested in a historical and socio-political perspective, section 3 for church congregations, and section 4 for the church and general public encouraging action and reflection.

It is focusing on the German experience, which is right and proper! How much is there a wish, however, to reach beyond Germany to draw in other audiences? If this is the intention more would need to be done to break down the material into relevant paragraphs for different audiences ... I'm afraid I do not see people sticking with it to the end if they do not see relevance for themselves.

There is clearly hope for 'communication by the interactive internet version' – is it significantly happening? This begs the question again of how the material is being marketed?

Re the interactive section – the films are engaging and the directory of materials are in subject areas, though the list is long! The interactive template takes some finding, however. The 'click here and discover' under the picture simply shifts the photo ... could it instead take one to the interactive template, i.e. 'the introduction to the main template'?

This pictorial main template is effective but also needs greater clarity – can it be made clearer that ‘click here and discover’ takes one to a moving picture and that clicking on the crosses brings the picture to life and is a link to the thematic issue. There is not enough direction/instruction to use what is a clever interactive picture. I can only find the following:

Immediately start

If you want to start right away: here it goes to [the introduction of the main template](#)

Please also use the illustrations at the beginning of each page on your discovery tour. They provide a playful approach to content beyond linear reading.

In reflecting in more detail on the text, I find there is good contextualisation, depiction of current reality and openness to the issues, e.g.

- 1) displacement ‘is familiar to the war and postwar generation in Germany’ (and 2.2. Germany shaped by migration) – reality
- 2) ‘familiar world is changing rapidly and profoundly’ – need to recognise people’s fears
- 3) ‘we want to learn from the public debate’ – willingness to engage.

Re the Biblical section:

Old Testament - The overriding message is ‘welcome the stranger’ but it’s important that the narrative of hostility to the stranger is also mentioned (pages 13 and 14) ... bound up with ‘feeling of threat to their own/Jewish identity’ – similar feelings about German identity today. Can this parallel be used helpfully with the story of Ruth to reflect the positive aspect of including the migrant?

Could questions be made more prominent/clearer that they are prompting reflection? This would be more helpful in bible study or individual reflection.

Stories, e.g. of the Korean/German pastor almost always have more impact than text – so it’s great that they are shared through film too.

Use of some statistics and migration facts is important but perhaps needs to be more consistent and straightforward ... so page 12 – mention of 68.5 million displaced people but on page 23 it is 63.5 million in 2015. Why not use the more up-to-date figure especially as the previous figures about migration are

from 2017? The facts/stats are rather lost in the text ... would it be clearer if they were put in a box as on page 12?

Re the second section – society:

There is good information on the migrant history of Germany – ‘Gastarbeiter’, growth in church through new arrivals ... and it’s realistic in using both positive and negative reactions (page 26) and the mosque story;

Also in raising the issue of national identity and the lack of uniformity in right-wing populists (it’s important not to stereotype).

Does the ‘migrant church’ information and that in the church section link to the films too? The films particularly reflect the positive diversity of people, e.g. the Vielfalt tut gut festival and the Iranians worshipping.

It is said that integration is ‘long ignored’ in Germany – this is a hard critique but it’s good, therefore, that space is given to looking at opening ways to integration ... with an insightful description of the values of German society and concluding summary.

Re the third section – churches:

There are some good stories about working at ‘Being Church Together’, which share both the challenges and enrichment. The learning from experience is there but I felt it could be spelt out or described clearly as enhancing good practice, so for example – in the ‘Citizens with the saints and members of the household’ (with clever use of the questioning phrase), would it be helpful to share what were the learnings in that experience? e.g. taking the complaints seriously, sensitive follow-up and diplomatic interaction, digging deeper and listening, giving time to communication and preparation, respectful inclusion, believing in the end result of meaningful worship! It becomes more didactic but arguably clearer in the message.

And how about listing what supports ‘celebrating faith together’ (is conducive to fostering life-long learning)? e.g. fellowship (finding friends), diverse liturgies, courage of conviction, Bible-sharing ...

Information on ‘church welfare organisations’ is well supported by the film material. Can a link or mention be made to the reinforcing messages in the film interviews with employees from diverse backgrounds?

Re the last section – consequences:

I found the paragraph 'Practically speaking, this could look as follows:' a concrete description of what could be done to develop a more intercultural church ... otherwise the risk is that it remains an ideal/theory.

Similarly, the paragraph on 'Guaranteeing safe passage' is concrete action ... does it need updating? Where are the talks with the Federal Ministry of the Interior going? If advocacy is needed, ideas could be given for action and if/when a project were to emerge (e.g. community sponsorship), information could be added as to what this entails.

Is there scope for including suggestions for advocacy/lobbying/action? ... perhaps not in the finished written document but on the website when issues are current/pertinent, e.g. encouraging people to vote in the European elections based on values supporting inclusion and integration. Such a possibility requires close monitoring of the website, however, and decisions on what links to make and what issues to take up, so I understand that this may be too work intensive and controversial.

It's great, however, that the document concludes with the call 'Taking a position' on migration matters - it's prophetic and counter cultural - 1) in stressing the inviolability of human dignity (not to be underestimated when EU policies are condoning externalisation of borders and deaths in the Mediterranean); 2) promoting integration by encouraging 'a policy that takes account of the whole of life in society and supports disadvantaged population groups as well as migrants' and 3) and calling people to address rightwing populism.

Considering how the material could be helpful beyond the German churches to CCME and its members, two suggestions come to mind:

Hospitality (seen as the practical welcome of the newcomer/social outreach) and Fellowship (worship with the newcomer) are terms used by CEC and CCME and are evident in both your written and web material. Might these be made more explicit and the interplay/dynamic between them? – so, for example the pastoral worker might be praying with the newcomer and giving advice.

CCME is working on mapping the interaction between 'migrant' and 'mainline' churches. Might it be possible to direct attention to the sections that are relevant, e.g. the Iranian congregation and 'developing a more intercultural church'. Visitors to the site will tend to want to hone in on a particular subject.

Shari Brown, CCME, April 2019