



Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2023
Be-Longing: Praying for Unity Amidst Injustice

Dublin Opening Service, Christ Church Cathedral, 18th January 2023

Address by Ms Geraldine McDonnell of the Parish of the Travelling People



Good evening, everyone.

I'm Geraldine McDonnell from the Traveller community.

Thank you very much for inviting me here this evening.

So just a little bit on our community.

According to Census 2016 there 31.000 Travellers in Ireland, that's less than 0.7% of the general population.

Irish Travellers have been documented as being part of Irish society for centuries. We have a long-shared history, ancestry, traditions, language, culture and customs. We have always considered ourselves and identified ourselves as a distinct ethnic group of Irish Travellers.

In 2017 we got official ethnic status from the Irish state. Even though this was a great achievement for us and for all of those who have campaigned relentlessly over the years for this recognition, not much has changed for us in terms of Racism and systemic exclusion.

Only 3% of Travellers are age 65 or over. Life expectancy for Traveller men is 15 years less than that of the settled population and for Traveller women its 12 year less.

The suicide rate in our community is 7 times higher than the national average. (2010 All Ireland Health Study)

A Behaviour & Attitudes survey in 2017 (Traveller community national survey 2017 Community foundation for Ireland) had the following findings

Of those surveyed

- 77% of Travellers have experienced discrimination in the 'past year'.
- 43% of Travellers indicate they have encountered discrimination while accessing employment.
- 40% of Travellers indicate they or their children have been bullied at school due to their identity.

Travellers fare poorly on every indicator used to measure disadvantage: unemployment, poverty, social exclusion, health status, infant mortality, life expectancy, illiteracy, formal education and training levels, access to decision making and political representation, gender equality, access to credit, accommodation and living conditions.

We as Travellers believe some of our community are adapting their behaviour and the way they present themselves in multiple areas of life in order to 'fit in more'. For example some of our young people are hiding their identity to gain employment because they feel they won't get an equal chance or opportunity if their identity as a Traveller is known to the employer. Having to deny your identity to be accepted more by society has huge implications on our mental health.

In the face of all of this we are a very strong resilient community the experience of racism and discrimination has meant that us Travellers have always relied on one another for support. Our Traveller culture, our faith and family and extended family are very important factors in our lives.

The promotion and celebration of Traveller culture and heritage is important in showing respect for Traveller identity.

Respect for our culture has the potential to deconstruct centuries of internalised shame within our community and allow our future generations of Travellers to grow up with pride in their identity.

Ireland is a multicultural society, ethnic minority groups should not have to struggle for justice and equality, we are very proud of our Traveller Identity and culture.

We want to live life and not just survive it.