

PROFILES

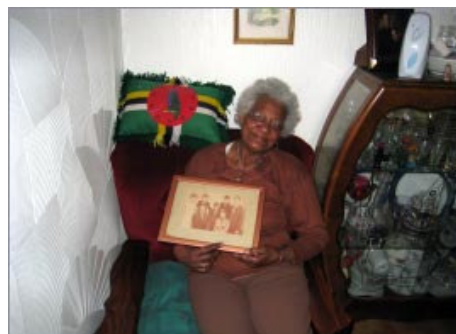
Name: Bernice Pascal

Age: 77

Family: Mother of six, including step-daughter.
Grandmother and great-grandmother.

Parish: St Nicholas of Tolentino, Bristol

Origin: Dominica, West Indies



Date of arrival in England: 1957. I went to Bristol with my husband. When I saw where we were living I cried for three months. I thought people in England would be loving because in the West Indies when a white person came, they were made very welcome. I didn't expect special treatment but I did expect to be treated like a human being in England, but people would spit at you in the street, and call you 'monkey'. Our post was sometimes destroyed and in a shop when you reached the top of the queue, other people would often be served before you. I did meet some kind English people too.

Professional life: I came to England with the intention of being a nurse, but it was so difficult that I decided to take any work I could get. I worked as a domestic in a shoe factory and then for 20 years in a children's home.

First experience of parish life: Terrible. It was horrible: no one would speak to you no one would look at you. When I came into the church with my six children, the whole pew would move away, so I would have the whole pew to myself. I came to Church to pray to God, but I was longing for the service to be over and was aware of the sideways glances at us. After Mass I was glad to be out of the Church, I was on edge through the service. But I persevered because I said to myself "I'm coming to Church to pray to my God and nobody's going to make me not come to Church." Now parish life is fantastic, everything is great. I am a special minister; I was on the parish council. I'm in the Legion of Mary and we evangelise outside Tesco and to some of the streetwalkers. I help with baptism preparation and at times do the readings at Mass. The turnaround in the parish really began with the last priest but one, and when our present priest, Fr Richard arrived, he just escalated the love. We have a wide variety of nationalities in the parish, and we are all very excited about the changes taking place.

Faith journey in England: The Church has helped me with my faith and finding out what being a Catholic really means, what a Catholic really is. I have a strong faith. A person might say to me "I don't want you, I don't need you," but I know that God wants me and he needs me, and I need him.