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# CHURCH FORA NEWSLETTER

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**'There are core resources at the heart of faith which provide a value system for community building. The ethical vision of peace in the Hebrew prophets and Jesus can enable us to contribute to the building of an inclusive, shared future.'**

**Dr. Johnston McMaster**

Recently I watched a television documentary of a number of people driving from London to the Mongolian capital of Ulaanbaatar. The journey through Outer Mongolia was a nightmare, a road infrastructure not really existing in a country largely desert. Frequently they literally ran out of road. It took many extra days to reach Ulaanbaatar. There were many obstacles and often the roads were not there. Maps were of little use. The route to Ulaanbaatar may be like our journey to peace.

## COLERAINE BOROUGH CHURCHES FORUM - A PROFILE

Coleraine Borough Churches Forum had its origin in 1998 at a major conference for the churches in the North West in the wake of the Good Friday Agreement.

It was at this gathering that a suggestion was made to have a local forum to include the smaller churches and Fellowships along with the four main denominations.

A meeting was called and the journey had begun. A journey which has enriched all who answered that call. Since 1999 we have met on the first Wednesday of each month in a local hotel. A programme developed with two strands for each meeting: 'What does your church teach?' and 'Please tell us your faith journey.' Each denomination was asked to give a presentation involving clergy and laity. Members volunteer to tell their faith journey. The ground rules are that this is not a platform for argument but a genuine safe place where listening with mutual respect

We do have a political settlement, though it is fragile. The peace process is generational and we still struggle to develop our road-map to peace. Faith communities have responsibilities for peace building. We have something to contribute to acknowledging the past and healing of memories. There are core resources at the heart of faith which provide a value system for community building. The ethical vision of peace in the Hebrew prophets and Jesus can enable us to contribute to the building of an inclusive,

shared future. At the heart of the peace vision is social justice which can help faith communities engage with community development, community and good relations, and a society rooted in equity, diversity and interdependence.

Our peace process might be like the journey through Mongolia, or we can partner each other in creating and following a real roadmap for peace.

**Dr Johnston McMaster  
Co-ordinator of Education  
for Reconciliation**

and interest is paramount. This continues to be part of the programme.

As the months passed relationships and understanding grew. In the early days we did not attempt to pray together until we found, through hearing the members tell of their faith, the recognition of everyone's journey. Now each meeting starts with prayer.

As with modern organisations we had to have a mission statement. This was discussed energetically and helped us to clarify our reason for meeting together.

Mission Statement ; 'Our aim is to build a community of openness and acceptance by enabling people to discover who they are by understanding the richness of our diversity' It was time to look outside our selves. Invitations to the various political parties to send a speaker helped us to see the larger picture. As we became known people from other organisations wished to tell us their story This has included speakers from South Africa, America, Nigeria and from statutory bodies like the police the health service and other local community projects.



**Dungannon Area Churches Forum Festival of Praise  
20th May 2007**

The Forum has also arranged public events where the churches have worked or studied together: In Lent each year there has been a series of lectures given by ISE which have been well attended; A annual service during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity; Carol singing in the centre

of town; An Easter Sunrise service and this year a lecture on the history of the churches in Coleraine.

A list of these speakers and events both past and future can be seen on our website: [www.cbchurchesforum.co.uk](http://www.cbchurchesforum.co.uk)

As a result of the experiences of the forum activities members

have initiated Bridge Builders Groups in their own churches. These groups meet monthly to build relationships and understanding in a widening circle of people in the various churches and fellowships. So the journey continues.....

**Isobel McDonagh**

## DEVELOPING AND SUSTAINING GOOD RELATIONS.

Such was the theme for the Cookstown & District Clergy Forum, Spring School in Glasgow. A group of eight undertook the 4 day course which involved a variety of encounters with our Scottish counterparts, most of whom experienced the same sort of sectarian and secular problems we know only too well in Northern Ireland.

Arriving in Glasgow on Monday 21<sup>st</sup> May, we were hosted in the City Chambers by dignitaries of Glasgow City Council and the Churches.

Business sessions took the form of seminars where members of the Clergy Forum met with representatives of the Glasgow Churches Together (GCT) Committee in order to explore our ecumenical environments, challenges, experiences and hopes. GCT is an initiative of seven Christian

denominations in the Glasgow area: the Church of Scotland, the Methodist Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Salvation Army, the Scottish Episcopal Church, the United Free Church of Scotland and the United Reformed Church. They enjoy good relationships among the member churches and with the local authorities. In recent years they have become more involved in inter-faith relations. Everyone who met in St Mungo's Cathedral on the Tuesday morning deeply appreciated the prayers at the tomb of St Mungo, founder and patron of Glasgow, and felt that the programme of workshops in the St Mungo Museum was very beneficial. We dealt with subjects such as sectarianism, multiculturalism, migrant workers, asylum seekers and the many changes in today's society.

Glasgow Churches Together, Ecumenical Officer, Br. Stephen

Smyth said of the visit "It was a great pleasure welcoming The Cookstown & District Clergy Forum group to Glasgow for their 'ecumenical pilgrimage'. The visit encouraged Glasgow Churches Together to do some serious thinking about its own ecumenical pilgrimage and consider how we might best share our experience with you. The element which most people have commented on was the sharing of your experience of the difficulties of the ecumenical journey in the Northern Ireland context. This makes us appreciate all the more the journey we have made here in Glasgow. We also really liked your initiative in organising these study programmes. Maybe we should 'go and do likewise'."

Br. Smyth went on to say "May the Good Lord continue to bless you and your congregations, local authorities and wider



**Maureen Doyle, Cookstown District Council Community Relations Officer, receives a plaque from Archbishop Mario Conti (front row, 2nd left), during the visit of the Cookstown and District Clergy Forum to Glasgow. Looking on are Forum members Des Hunter, the Revd Kenneth Hall, Fr Liam McKinney, Fr Garrett Campbell, Fr Martin McVeigh, Msgr Raymond Murray and Canon Norman Porteus.**

## EDITORIAL

Welcome to the second issue of the Church Fora Newsletter. Since Issue 1 in April we have had the 'kairos' moment of May 8<sup>th</sup> when political life took a hesitant but gigantic leap forward. We now find ourselves doing interchurch work in a changed and changing context and we rejoice even as we note the familiar old divisive wrangling sometimes emanating from the building in which our political leaders do business. We cautiously look forward with hope in this time of transition, undisturbed by episodic 'turbulence' a feature of the journey from a place of violent conflict, to a safer more peaceful and graced place. Issue 2 of the Newsletter reflects the myriad of ongoing Fora and interchurch events and projects which dot the landscape of community life in Northern Ireland. These activities stand as small beacons of hope lighting a pathway to a place where we can be a community at ease with itself, embracing the diversity that embellishes all of life.

Church Fora and interchurch groups are increasingly making it their business to engage with 'new nationals' providing welcome, hospitality, and supporting services which are so important to people who find themselves far from home, and walking among strangers. Many of our groups this autumn are following a course titled 'Christ in a world of many faiths', a course which aims to empower participants with Christian theological reflection and perspective which can form a basis for good relationships with people of all faiths. Sincere thanks to all those who contributed to this edition of the Newsletter.

I hope you enjoy reading Issue 2 and we look forward to your comments which can help to make this Newsletter a more effective vehicle of communication.

**Eileen Gallagher**

## ISSUE 2 - AUTUMN 2007

communities as you seek to build a better society for all your people. Thank you for sharing your journey with us.”

In our visit to Glasgow we realised very quickly that there is hardly a city in the UK that parallels the sectarian experiences of Ulster more starkly than the city of St Mungo - with its history of Irish - mostly Catholic, but also Protestant-Planter - immigration. Here we

I have been associated with the Fermanagh Churches Forum for about three years now, and it has been a thrilling and heartening experience. For me the Forum permits the practice of a radical hope which stands over and against the view that we have no choice but to worship in different houses. It appeals to my own personal place in community life – a place of being at the edge. Edges are interesting places because its there that you meet other edges, and as C Wright Mills noted, it is where things meet and join, what he called a nexus, that interesting things take place.

Whether we like to admit it, the churches occupy the fault-line that runs down the

have a culture that came face-to-face with the strong Reformed tendencies of the Church of Scotland - a Church with which many Protestants in Ulster have a common identity - and the growing Roman Catholic presence in Scotland coming from the immigration from Ireland of the 19th and 20th Centuries. For this reason alone, the choice of the city of Glasgow for our Spring School of the Clergy

middle of our community, and I think that they have been at least passively instrumental in sustaining that division. I feel that this structural division is one of the most important and urgent things that we, in this generation and in this place, need to address. For me, the Forum is a bridging point, a place of connection, with the prospect of a new community, and it is a source of joy to me to experience and enable the transcendence of fear and difference in my contact and conversations with other members.

I am also involved with the Forum because I could no longer bear the sadness of our differences without doing something about it. As my faith has evolved and changed,

Forum was an inspired and most challenging choice. Here we learned that the self-same conflicts and bigotries that have dogged Northern Ireland since its inception had been part of the culture of the city of Glasgow - and to some extent remain there to this day. It was of special interest therefore to listen to the community and Church leaders of the city talking about the way they had faced

the challenges of that bigotry and sectarianism. We learned that respect for difference is crucial to the resolution of conflict; that structures and institutions that support this difference are vital; and that the healing process is bedded - as in Scotland - in social and economic development in Northern Ireland.

**Rev. Kenneth R. J. Hall**

## ON THE EDGE IN FERMANAGH

I could no longer accept that our acts of worship had to be, either in practice or theology, exclusive. It outraged me that the cosmic and immanent God had been carved up and tamed on our terms. When I think about that, for me the Gospels speak more of the experience of grace, mercy, forgiveness and renewal in this life and there is a sense of urgency about proclaiming that message, that possibility of hope to this generation.

I am on the wrong side of fifty now. Through living and working in this community, and through opportunities of working in other parts of the world with different cultures and belief systems, I have been persuaded that we have much, much more in common

in the challenges, sorrows and joys of being human than in our cultural, ethnic, racial and religious differences.



**‘Edges are interesting places because its there that you meet other edges, and as C Wright Mills noted, it is where things meet and join, what he called a nexus, that interesting things take place.’**

**Dr. David Bolton**

Women form over half of the Northern Ireland population, but are more at risk of social exclusion. Given the emphasis in A Shared Future (March 2005) on civic responsibility to facilitate the development of a shared community defined by a culture of tolerance, and the affirmation of the important role women play in the post-conflict reconstruction of society (UN Resolution 1325), ways need to be found to facilitate the involvement of women in active peacebuilding.

The Women as Peacebuilders component of the Education

for Reconciliation programme assists women, from rural and urban areas in Northern Ireland, and cross border locations, to develop their understanding of the dynamics and culture of violence, and of peace-building within church and society.

A Shared Future document recognises that patterns of division and a culture of violence have become ingrained in Northern Irish society, and that this legacy of conflict and violence must be dealt with. It underlines the important contribution educational establishments

can make through helping students unravel the complex causes of division, and by promoting a culture of active non-violence, mutuality and just peacemaking.

We have just completed the first year of the WAP programme, which engaged women from Dungannon, Armagh, Omagh, Monaghan and Belfast in a six week course run in each area on “The journey from Violence to Active Non-Violence: Learning from women’s voices and experiences.” The course addressed the reality that in the last two centuries women

in Ireland have been caught up in a culture of violence, both directly and indirectly, that has bought into the myth that when constitutional approaches to



**Dr. Kathy Higgins**

## WOMEN AS PEACEBUILDERS

conflict fail violence is the only solution. The course explored both historical and biblical women, in their particular socio-political contexts, who have either accepted or challenged the ideology of violence. Their stories throw light on the roots of political violence in Irish history, and religious violence in biblical history.

Participants in the WAP programme also came together at a day conference, in June 06 and June 07. The theme of the 1<sup>st</sup> conference was: "Birthing A New Way: Women As Peace Builders In Ireland", and the 2<sup>nd</sup> conference focused on "Women As Change Agents in Church and Society."

The 2<sup>nd</sup> course entitled "Just

Peacemaking", which the aforementioned groups will have completed by Christmas 07, draws on case studies, contemporary and biblical, illustrating effective peacebuilding strategies used by women in conflict regions, both locally and globally. Issues of class, race, gender, economics, politics, and age, are considered as multiple factors that intersect to disadvantage and oppress women. It is hoped that as women reflect on the strategies employed by other women to build sustainable, inclusive, and just peace, they will be both enabled and inspired to learn from them.

A third WAP course will be taught

in 2008 entitled "Churches as Communities of Resistance." There is a need for a revisioning of the Church as both a sign, and means, of equality and mutual empowerment for all. This course will explore how power, authority, and leadership is understood in various models of Church, namely: New Testament, Celtic, womenchurch, and peace churches. The emphasis will be on the relational ethic alternative models of Church embody, and how these models both challenge and inspire new ways of being Church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Irish context.

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**Dr. Kathy Higgins**

## OMAGH CHURCHES FORUM

The Forum in Omagh brings together clergy and laity of the four main denominations who have neighbouring churches on the hill at the top of the town and whose clergy minister to smaller churches on the edge of Omagh, along with a cleric from the Catholic parish on the far side of the river, clergy from a few neighbouring hamlets and villages, and the pastor of a Community Church. Attendance from church districts further out from the town but still within the local government area – the original

intended span of the Forum – has lapsed after some initial years of involvement. This reflects the narrowing over time of the Forum's focus from themes and activities of broad civil and religious interest to the more confined issues of town life.

These days of wide engagement would have seen the visits to the Forum of significant players on the public stage, and the interaction of Forum members with them on the topics of the day. Cardinal Daly spoke on "Dominus Jesus". Dr Trevor

Morrow gave his insights as Moderator. Reverend William Bingham shared his thoughts from within the Orange Order. Representatives of the political parties discussed their aims and programmes. Those who had successful social projects across the North explained their goals and methods. One of our own introduced us to his doctoral thesis on Paul Tillich. Facilitators helped Forum members identify values and objectives and assemble them in year-on-year plans. Funding allowed the

employment of a development worker to implement decisions and manage strategies. There was support from the District Council and co-operation from the umbrella body for local community groups.

The days of that intense formation and activity are over but they established the Forum as a body within civic society that others in society felt some obligation to refer to at critical moments for the general community and on processing the visions that try to take

## PAUL CLARK AT FERMANAGH CHURCHES FORUM



**Broadcaster Paul Clark, meeting with members of the Fermanagh Churches Forum before addressing their meeting at the Killyhevin Hotel. Included are (from left) Barbara Rivers, Secretary; Eileen Gallagher, Joint Chairman; John Phillips, Committee Member and Liz Sheridan, Treasurer**

**The Forum is integrated into a number of shared experiences in the life of the town. Each of them is creating lasting bonds, and all of them together are a blessing.**

**Fr. Kevin Mullan**

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forward the modern urban identity and this particular town that must be renewed after major tragedy. The Forum has been granted a voice by others and thereby has an influence to exert, a grace indeed in a more secular age.

Over the past three years the **Raphoe Reconciliation Project** Churches Forum has held an annual series of evenings entitled "An Evening With..." During this time we have heard the views and life stories of such eminent people as Father Oliver Crilly, Bishop Gerard Clifford, Bishop Daly, Dr John Dunlop, Rev Harold Good, Rev Ivan McElhinney, Dean Houston McElvie and

The Tuesday group began in 1994 after the first ceasefire when a group of Cross & Passion Sisters asked themselves what they could do to further the peace process. A coffee morning was arranged for Drumalis and 25 invitations were sent out to the priests and ministers in each of the four main churches in the area of Larne. 27 attended a very friendly meeting, where people shared something of their "story". Meetings have continued on a monthly basis since then and while initially membership was clergy only, now lay people from the different churches attend as well and we have approximately 50 on roll. Average attendance would be about 30. The format of the meeting consists of some prayer, input by a chosen speaker and discussion in groups. Refreshments are always provided and the meetings are from 10.30 am to 12.30 pm. Recently Fr Tom Layden and Rev Tom Wilson have spoken to us on their work in Belfast when

The Forum, even in its current slimmed down and sedate version of itself has established partnership as the model for the clergy of the Christian denominations in the town and for those interested lay persons for whom separateness and

Duncan Morrow and have discussed topics as diverse as "The Churches Role in Reconciliation", "Women as Peace Builders" and "Education of Religious Minorities".

We held the first of this year's evenings on Wednesday, 19<sup>th</sup> September where we were delighted to welcome Sunny Jacobs, a lady who had spent years in a Florida jail charged

they put on a "Course in Prayer" for both Catholic and Presbyterian people. Rev Alan Lorimer, Methodist, and the local Church of Ireland minister spoke about their working together in Mossley and Rev Pauline Lorimer, Methodist, led us in our prayer morning before Christmas. Other speakers include Rev David Jardine, Lesley Spence (on Alpha Prison Ministry), Tony Macauley and Far Paul Symonds (on "Transformation").

Intercessors for Larne is a group of Christians from many of the denominations in Larne who meet on the last Monday evening of the month to pray for the town of Larne. The coordinator of this group is the local Elim Pentecostal minister. The group meets in a different Christian church each month. The Priest/Minister in whose church we meet gives the introduction to the evening. People break up into groups and pray for specific intentions regarding the town.

division are not good enough. There is a felt need to invite one another to be part of various happenings and to witness together to love and faith.

The Forum is integrated into a number of shared experiences

**RAPHOE RECONCILIATION PROJECT**

with murdering two policemen, a charge which was finally disproved but not before her husband had been executed and Sunny herself had spent 17 years behind bars, 5 in total solitary confinement.

The evening was attended by a large crowd who gave Sunny a standing ovation after hearing her talk of her life without resentment, bitterness

in the life of the town. Each of them is creating lasting bonds, and all of them together are a blessing.

**Fr. Kevin Mullan**

or vengefulness; truly an inspiration to all of us wishing to live our lives in a truly Christian way.

On Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> November the Churches Forum hosted a joint Harvest Thanksgiving Service with our friends in the Omagh Churches Forum. This service was held in St Eunan's RC Church, Meetinghouse Street, Raphoe.

**Margaret Lyon**

**INTERCHURCH ACTIVITIES IN LARNE**

Four Inter-Church Alpha Courses have been held in the Highways Hotel, Larne. The first was in January 2000 when the numbers attending were 70 Protestants and 68 Catholics. Each Alpha course continues for 14 weeks, with one meeting each week. A follow-up to the Alpha Course is currently being discussed. It may take the form of inter-church Scripture Groups meeting in people's houses.

Larne Borough Council offers the use of the Leisure Centre for Church Unity

Prayer Service each year and provides refreshments after the Service. Preparation for the Service takes the form of 2 or 3 meetings of local clergy – when an Order of Service is agreed on. Larne Millennium facilitates this. There is a good deal of participation by the local churches. A speaker is agreed on by the group. At least 7 different denominations were represented by their clergy and lay people at this year's event, when about 100 people took part. Music and mime are provided by a number of different Churches.



Participants in the Inter-Church Alpha Course, Larne share a meal.

During the summer of 2004 well over 100 people took part in the Annual Remembrance Sunday Service, Pilgrimage for Peace. This was another interesting and worthwhile experience. It must have been a powerful witness to the

public to see so many people from different churches united in their desire for peace, unity and acceptance of each other.

There are many other activities: Inter-church Scripture Study held fortnightly in 'Carmel',

Drains Bay; participation in the organising of the Annual World Women's Day of Prayer; coastal Clergy Fellowship monthly meetings; attendance at Global Day of Prayer at Stormont and also at evenings of prayer arranged to pray for

politicians; membership of YMCA committee have monthly prayer mornings.

These are some of the 'Good News' stories for which we are deeply grateful.

**Sr. Catherine C.P.**

## A CLASH OF CULTURES IN CARRICKFERGUS

By now you will be well aware that 2007 marks the 400th anniversary of what has become known as the 'Flight of the Earls', which is seen by many to mark the end of Gaelic Ireland as a distinct political system. Many events have been held across the country particularly west of the Bann to commemorate this event. However the East of the country too is marking the event. Carrickfergus, located in East Antrim, historically an epicentre of English administration in Ulster, has a strong but largely overlooked connection with the Flight of the Earls through the person of Sir Arthur Chichester, one time Governor of Carrickfergus and Lord Deputy of Ireland. Sent to Ireland as a senior military commander in 1599 after the death of his brother John in the Battle of Carrickfergus, Chichester helped suppress the Ulster rebellion led by the great Irish chieftain Hugh O'Neill, 2nd Earl of Tyrone. Following the Battle of Kinsale and the end of the Nine Year's War, O'Neill, although spared and allowed to retain his position, eventually realised that he could not maintain his authority under the rule of Chichester, his bitter rival, and fled to the Continent with a number of other Ulster Lords in 1607. Chichester immediately confiscated their lands and devised a scheme which culminated in the Plantation of Ulster, changing the political and demographic landscape of Ireland forever. It was a clash of cultures that was to reverberate down through four centuries of Irish history to the present day.

Not to be left out, Carrickfergus have invited Dr John McCavitt, author, historian, and leading authority on both the Flight of the Earls and the life of Sir Arthur Chichester, to give a presentation entitled, 'A clash of Cultures - Sir Arthur Chichester and the Flight of the Earls 1607'. The presentation took place in Carrickfergus Town Hall, on Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> November 2007. It was a fully illustrated presentation as Dr McCavitt used images from his most recently published book, '**The Flight of the Earls an illustrated history**'. The chosen venue was particularly appropriate, standing as it does, practically on the site of Joymount Palace, Chichester's Jacobean Mansion which in turn was built on the site of a former Franciscan friary. Unfortunately the mansion no longer exists today. Dr McCavitt has been much in demand in this anniversary year and has acted as an historical adviser on the Flight of the Earls to both the BBC and the Ulster Scots Agency.

This event is being organised by the Carrickfergus Journey in Understanding Group, an inter-denominational cross-community group which has worked at bringing Christians together in the area for over 12 years.

The group intend to continue in the same vein in 2008 by hosting the ISE course, 'Remembering the Future: Responding to a Culture of Commemoration'. This will be

held on consecutive Thursday evenings in the Dobbs Room, Carrickfergus Town Hall, Antrim Street, at 7-30pm, commencing Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> January 2008 (with the exception of a break on Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> January).

In a country where commemoration is highly contested and where our different communities have their chosen traumas and chosen glories, the Course will ask, is it possible to remember together? As we leave conflict behind and move into a decade during which we will commemorate some of the most significant events in modern Irish history, how will we 'do' commemoration? Are we capable of deconstructing myths in a way that enables us to pick out positive aspects of our history which we might even begin to share and appreciate together? The course will

look briefly at six topics, (1) The Abolition of Slavery (1807); (2) The Plantation of Ulster 1609; (3) A Century of Modern Ecumenism 1910; (4) The Ulster Covenant 1912; (5) The Easter Rising 1916; and (6) The Battle of the Somme 1916.

Later in the year the group also intends hosting the 'Global Day of Prayer' on Pentecost Sunday afternoon, 11<sup>th</sup> May 2008, on the Castle Green, under the towering walls of the magnificent Carrickfergus Castle.

Other events will be held throughout the year, including a monthly 'Prayer for Carrick' intercessors meeting which will move around the churches. Keep in touch by visiting the group's website, [www.carrickfergusjiu.org](http://www.carrickfergusjiu.org)



**Chichester and O'Neill**

who embody the clash of cultures theme in Carrickfergus.

Cookstown Churches Forum is one of a number of Fora who have begun to develop links with interchurch groups south of the border. Dungannon Forum is beginning to explore a link with a Sligo group and Omagh Forum with Raphoe. Cookstown Forum has already exchanged visits with a group in Cavan.

**Mary McElroy** writes:

'In March twenty members of the Cavan group came North for a one night stay. Eight Cookstown Church Forum members met them for lunch at Oxford Island, Craigavon before accompanying them to Belfast for a tour of Stormont. That night they attended our St. Patrick's Celebrations in Derryloran Parish Hall, Cookstown, where Irish traditional music and dancing were enjoyed by all, not to mention the Irish stew. The visitors had an overnight stay in The Manor House, Moneymore.

The following morning members from both groups met for workshops and lunch and a date was set for a two night residential in Cavan on 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> September 2007.

On the afternoon of Friday 7<sup>th</sup> September twenty members of Cookstown Church Forum set off for an eagerly awaited residential in Cavan entitled "Hospitality Across Borders."

The stay began with a civic reception in the Court House

which was hosted by the Mayor of Cavan and fellow Councillors.

For many in the group the highlight of the weekend came on Saturday morning when we were privileged to hear presentations from Paddy Joe McClean, former Civil Rights leader and internee who now serves on the District Policing Board and from Julitta Clancy, Meath Peace Group. During the residential, much time

was devoted to workshops and dialogue sessions.

On Saturday afternoon we had a coach trip to places of historical interest in the Cavan area.

It was very appropriate that before our departure on Sunday, everyone joined in an ecumenical service.'

We, in Cookstown, are currently planning for how we can develop this cross-border project.



**Members of the Cavan Inter-Faith Group pictured with members of Cookstown Churches Forum in the Great Hall in Stormont**

## CHURCHES TOGETHER IN PORTADOWN

Churches Together in Portadown has been in existence quite a number of years seeing and supporting its members through some very difficult as well as rewarding experiences.

Name changes through those years from **CLERGY FRATERNAL** to **PORTADOWN CHURCHES TOGETHER** to **CHURCHES TOGETHER IN PORTADOWN** are reflective of questions which have surfaced from time to time. A review of Minutes of meetings shows members asking, "Who are we?" and "What are we about?" These questions were dealt with in various workshops and gatherings facilitated

by a variety of people well known in Northern Ireland for their work in peace and reconciliation. Eventually an Identity Statement has evolved which now reads, "Churches Together in Portadown is a gathering of Christian Church leaders and religious who meet regularly for mutual support, friendship, prayer, growth, and understanding."

Seven denominations have consistently been represented and invitations have regularly been extended to those who for one reason or another have not been able to participate in regular meetings. The number attending the social gathering

in June which closed the past years meetings gave promise of the group being more truly representative of Churches in Portadown in this coming year.

Among the activities of which we are proud has been an Easter Morning Sunrise Service which has grown in four years from a handful of people to a large gathering. The chilly mornings have been a challenge but following the service as the sun rises the warmth of sharing among those present augmented by the cups of tea and scones gladdens the hearts of all who have participated.

In addition to our regular activities we look forward to expanding our interactions, not just among our members, but also our congregations as we look forward to celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. The changing face of the Portadown Community offers challenges to each of our congregations. It is hoped we can face these supported by one another while continuing to grow in appreciation of the gifts that differ among us and celebrating what we hold in common.

**Sr. Bridget Kavanagh**



**Sir Kenneth Bloomfield, Mary Daly, Bishop Michael Jackson and Dr. Johnston McMaster at the Opening of the Western Region Conference organised for Church Fora and other Interchurch Groups at Tara Centre, Omagh in November. The theme of the Conference was 'Acknowledge the past: Remembering Together in Church and Society'.**

Details of the Conference will be covered in the next issue of the Newsletter.

### SOMETIMES

Sometimes, like polluted water springing up in the mountains, Grief, pain, bitterness, fear, hatred come unbidden and ill to my head.

A face in a crowd; a building; a name; a shout; a crack; a flash.

These bring memories, experience, the bitter taste of the ashes of the past.

Sometimes a song fills my head with thoughts of a friend.

A comrade, a colleague; life destroyed, family blighted. Always there are funerals, too many funerals, To recall all those that were not necessary, men and women killed for bitterness.

Sometimes I cry about the past, I can't put it out of my mind.

Sometimes I think of those whose death kept others alive.

Sometimes I think of nights when the darkness covered fear, When thoughts were on children at home, waiting, sleeping.

**David Murray**

### DUNGANNON AREA CHURCHES FORUM - PROGRESS REPORT

Our Festival of Praise in Dungannon Park, in May, was well attended by people from many of the local churches. At our Forum meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> May, Paddy Monaghan, the National Co-ordinator of Alpha, was the speaker.

At the beginning of June members and friends travelled by bus to the Shaylyn Traditional Arts Centre in Co Leitrim. This is the base for a project exploring Scottish and Irish Dance together. We

enjoyed a demonstration of Irish dancing and a workshop on the history of both dance traditions after which some of us were persuaded to get up and dance. After lunch there was a short Peace and Reconciliation workshop.

September 5<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> in Dungannon was a time of celebration of the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Return of the Earls. The Borough Council organised an interesting programme of events which

culminated, on Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> with a service on Castle Hill "Hymns of Harmony". The Churches' Forum was involved in the planning of the service and the Chairman participated in it. This was recorded by BBC and an edited version was broadcast on Radio Ulster on 16<sup>th</sup> September.

At our first meeting after the summer break, we welcomed two speakers about youth work in the Presbyterian and Roman Catholic Churches

and another about youth work projects organised by Rotary International. Next year we will hear about youth work in the Methodist Church and in the Church of Ireland.

The speaker at the AGM on November 5<sup>th</sup> was Archbishop Alan Harper.

**Isobel T Holmes  
Chairman**

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