



# CHURCH FORA NEWSLETTER

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### WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY, 2011

### ONE IN THE APOSTLES' TEACHING, FELLOWSHIP, BREAKING OF BREAD AND PRAYER

The theme of this year's Week of Prayer is based on Acts 2 v 42, one of several summaries of the early church's life. Acts is volume 2 of Luke's writing, the continuation of the faith community's narrative that began with a Gospel. The key themes of Luke's Gospel are continued in Acts. These include the centrality of the Spirit and the profound concern for the poor.

Acts has a double agenda which has a subversive focus. The first agenda is in relation to the church in its subversion of the Greco-Roman society in which it is placed. There are many encounters with powers and authorities and repeated affirmations of the disobedience of faith. In Ireland the relationship between faith and politics, church and state has changed radically and perhaps, irrevocably. Churches at the edge of power and politics have still to work out a very different relationship between faith and politics and what the nature of their unity is in this potentially creative place.

Luke's other agenda is subversive of the church itself. Acts was written when a movement was gathering pace to make the early church more organised and respectable. Faith, order, ministry and practice were to conform to a definitive norm.

This movement included putting women 'back in their place', by putting limits on and even excluding them from leadership in the church. By the beginning of the second century women were being silenced and denied equality and leadership roles and we see this reflected in I Timothy (100-110 CE). Luke writes against this movement with the Spirit poured out in 'all flesh', men and women, and with many stories of women in Acts, often in key church leadership roles. In 2011 when the centenary of the women's suffrage movement in Ireland is marked, there is still serious work to do in relation to gender equality issues in society and not least in the churches. Unity for Luke, and for us will include the unity and equality of the sexes in the community of faith.

### A SNAPSHOT OF THE EARLY CHURCH

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Luke offers a series of impressions or snapshots of the earliest faith community. The 'They' is inclusive, transcending class, culture and gender, the Spirit having been poured on 'all flesh' equally. The unity of the church is beyond humanity and patriarchy. Luke's snapshot subverts the organisation and pattern of Greco-Roman society and the movement within the church itself towards patriarchy and the control and disempowerment of women.

The 'apostles teaching' in Acts is not adherence or obedience to a body of theology, formulated and defined. It is ethical praxis, a way of being the community of faith in relation to economic sharing, social solidarity and being with the poor and marginalised. It is also the practice of inclusivity and equality.



Members of Newry District Inter-Church Forum Steering group pictured with guest speakers Fr. Peter McVerry SJ, Rev. Norman Hamilton Moderator PCI, and Mick Murphy Mayor of Newry.

## EDITORIAL

Welcome to the 8th issue of the Church Fora Newsletter. As you will read in this issue new Church Fora continue to emerge while the well established Fora develop and follow programmes reflecting an ongoing commitment to a ministry of reconciliation in the community. Congratulations are extended to the steering groups of Ballymena Borough Church Forum, Newry District Inter-Church Forum and Portadown Inter-church Forum all of whom have worked wholeheartedly and enthusiastically, over many months, resulting in successful launches of their Fora and first steps in their respective projects. As well as working on their own programmes over the past months, many of the Fora have been involved in responding to the government consultation document on 'Cohesion

Sharing and Integration'. This document sets out a framework for community interaction into the future and it replaces the earlier 'Shared Future' document. The new document, however, falls far short of providing a vision for a future in which the demons of division and sectarianism can be laid to rest. In order to facilitate reflection on this significant document among Fora and other inter-church groups, ISE hosted a well-attended seminar on the topic in October.

At the recent CONNECT meeting the theme considered was 'Faith and Trauma – A Role for Churches?' Peter McBride Chair of the Journey towards Healing Committee and CEO of NIAMH, together with his colleague Graham Logan shared their insights on this complex subject. In their presentations Johnston McMaster and Cathy Higgins discussed a theological

framework for addressing trauma. In the interactive group work which followed participants were able to add their own insights into a morning's reflection which was in many ways groundbreaking. Reconciliation, building for a better future, how we deal with trauma and its after effects, are all live issues in a community emerging from conflict - it is good to witness the very serious attempts being made to grapple with these.

In a changed, and still changing political environment and an increasingly difficult economic one, the words of Teilhard de Chardin the French palaeontologist have a wisdom we do well to heed. In a reflection on 'The Slow Work of God' he reminds us it is the law of all progress that it is made by passing through some stages of instability, and that it may take a very long time. He urges us to be

patient, not to force things - *'As though you could be today what time (That is to say, grace and circumstances acting on your own goodwill)*

*Will make you to-morrow. Only God could say what this new spirit Gradually forming within you will be. Give Our Lord the benefit of your believing that his hand is leading you, And of your accepting the anxiety Of feeling yourself in suspense and incomplete.'*

Echoes of this same theme abound in this Advent liturgical season of waiting to become, to discover, to complete, to fulfill.

May Advent 2010 be a time for hope, transformation and fulfillment in all our lives.

**Eileen Gallagher**

These are the Lukan themes which Peter's early speech on the Day of Pentecost has begun to express.

'Fellowship' is the rich word KOINONIA and it highlights the faith community as a shared partnership in which there is a mutual and profound regard for each other's spiritual and physical wellbeing. KOINONIA is also a shared partnership in diversity and it is a way of being church with radical implications for shared power as well as what it means to seek the common good.

'The breaking of bread' has been integral to the faith community's life together from the outset. It is the practice that highlights most the disunity of the churches at present. The fact that a shared partnership cannot share 'bread' together seriously negates all the marks of the church in Luke's snapshot. For some it is the pain of separation with which we have got to live. For others

the pain is inappropriate and unnecessary. For yet others the real pain is that in a world where the majority have no bread our division over the speculative and theological nature of bread is a denial of the gospel. The scandal of the Eucharist in the Corinthian churches was economic and therefore socially divisive. For Luke also the breaking of bread goes to the heart of economic sharing, and not surprisingly the ethical and economic practice of the KOINONIA had 'the goodwill of all the people' (Acts 2 v 47).

'The prayers' are not private but public prayers in which the faith community engaged with God and with the world of economic oppression and marginalisation, the militarism and violence of Roman society and the new trend towards the exclusion of women from power and leadership within parts of the church itself. Prayer is engagement with the messy life of the world.

Luke's snapshot takes us well beyond the unity of the church. The Spirit poured out on 'all flesh' breaking down all ethnic, cultural, class and gender barriers, and the constant interaction in Acts between faith community and wider society, including power systems and authorities, reminds us that

God's purpose is the unity of all humankind. Our shared prayer is ultimately for the unity of the whole inhabited earth, which is the essential meaning of OIKOUMENE. In modelling Acts 2 v 42, our prayer goes beyond Christian unity to the unity of all life.

**Dr Johnston McMaster**



Members of Portadown Inter-church Forum steering group pictured with former moderator of the PCI, Rev. Dr. Ken Newell OBE and Fr. Gerry Reynolds Clonard monastery at the launch of the Forum in the Townhall Portadown on Nov.6th.

## ISSUE 8 - WINTER 2010

**'FAITH AND TRAUMA' –  
A ROLE FOR CHURCHES.**

*Report on presentation by Peter McBride to CONNECT meeting on 27 Nov.*

Peter began with the history and context of PTSD (Post traumatic stress disorder) and the problems of definition. What exactly is trauma? As a starting point Peter gave a general definition; in psychiatry, trauma refers to an experience that is emotionally painful, distressing or shocking which often results in lasting mental and physical effects. The problem for pastoral workers when dealing with those who are traumatised is twofold; firstly, there is the challenge of containment, and secondly, there is the existential challenge.

Trauma by its very nature is difficult to contain both intra-psychically and inter-psychically. The person experiencing the trauma cannot contain it because it cannot be processed in the way that normal every day experiences are processed by the mind into memory. The pastoral worker is challenged in the pastoral role because what they are hearing and experiencing in the pastoral encounter does not fit into normal everyday occurrences. In effect, the principle of predictability has been ruptured. We tend to live our lives with the proposition that, as it was yesterday, so it will be today and henceforth tomorrow. A trauma breaks the predictability principle and the mind is launched into a trajectory of existential crisis. For people of faith who believe in a loving and benevolent God trauma can lead to a crisis of faith; how could God, to whom we pray for protection, allow such a thing to happen? For the pastoral worker the use of platitudes and even the use of sacred scripture will not be, at that particular point in the pastoral relationship, a balm

of Gilead to soothe the troubled soul or heal the traumatised mind.

An understanding of what trauma does to a person is essential for faith workers in the deliberation of their pastoral duties. This will no doubt involve seeking to support members of their congregations who have experienced the tsunami of trauma which leaves a trail of devastation. The symptoms traditionally associated with PTSD are threefold. Firstly, the person continues to re-experience the traumatic event – this involves a constant reliving of the traumatic experience. Secondly, this leads to a maladaptive coping strategy of avoidance in which the person experiences an emotional numbing; they may withdraw from family and friends and may even withdraw from the fellowship of the church itself. Thirdly, a repertoire of hyper-arousal symptoms kick-in and the person can experience a startle response to normal environmental stimuli where they are never off guard – they exist with the unrelenting stress of foreboding and irrational fear.

So why do we need to consider the relationship between faith and trauma? The fact is that trauma impacts every part of our being; the mind, body and the spirit. It affects interpersonal relationships, the communities in which we live, and wider society. Faith workers have a key role to play in dealing with the traumatised in our society, but have Churches stepped up to the mark? Individuals within the faith world are involved in a real way but what about monolithic Church structures? Have they adapted to the 'trauma' world in which we live? People often suffer in silence and cry out for a response from their church. Is there a case, for example, for adapting liturgy to be part of

the balm to heal the wounded soul?

There is a strong case for bringing the two worlds together in dialogue – the medical and the spiritual. The medical world considers PTSD in terms of treatment, medication and is individualistic in the quest for a medical cure. There are also issues of compensation when PTSD is diagnosed or not. On the other hand, the faith community deals with the human condition in terms of pastoral care where issues involving existential crisis and a crisis of faith are grappled with in a theological context.

In Northern Ireland today in a post conflict environment many live with the legacy of the past. Indeed, we all have been affected in some measure by what has gone before. There is therefore a compelling need to reflect on the challenges facing us and of seeing the whole picture. This involves considering the disruption of social cohesion when in conflict, as well as the legacy of fragmentation in our structures, our relationships, our thinking and work. We are all involved, both the medical community and the faith community, in the work of putting together the whole picture. The impact of trauma is holistic and thus the care of trauma must also be holistic.

The Journey Towards Healing International Conference has been organised to consider this vitally important holistic approach to trauma both in our society and indeed internationally. The title of the conference speaks for itself: Trauma & Spirituality: An International Dialogue. This ground breaking event takes place in the Europa Hotel, Belfast from 9-13 March 2011. This is an exciting opportunity for the medical and faith communities to come together, to converse, and to seriously consider the issues

around a holistic approach to dealing with trauma in the 21st Century. We would welcome your involvement with us in the journey towards healing for our society.

The Conference keynote speakers are Kaethe Weingarten and Fr. Michael Lapsley. Kaethe is the Associate Clinical Professor of Psychology at Harvard Medical School, who has worked with groups in Kosovo and South Africa on the personal and societal effects of witnessing chronic community violence. Michael is an Anglican priest who suffered personal injury in South Africa's anti-apartheid struggle and has since led trauma recovery workshops throughout South Africa and many countries around the world affected by conflict. For further details of the conference go to <http://www.niamh.co.uk/> and click on the Journey Towards Healing site where all the conference information is available.

**Graham Logan**

CARRICKFERGUS BOROUGH  
CHURCH FORUM

**THE CARRICKFERGUS  
FRIARY**

During October CBCF held a one day conference in Carrickfergus Town attended by over 120 people. The conference focused on the monastic heritage and in particular on the Carrickfergus Franciscan Friary which came into existence in 1232AD, just six years after the death of St Francis of Assisi, and remained an integral part of the life of the town for the next three hundred years. Those attending learned about the

friary itself and the medieval town of which it was a part. This included a short walking tour. They also learnt about the various events which happened in Carrickfergus during the friary's existence, including King John's stay at the castle and the arrival of the Black Death. They also heard about the life of St Francis, and about the Franciscan Order within the Anglican and Catholic traditions and asked if the Franciscan ethos has a relevance for today's world, particularly in relation to environmental protection and inter-faith dialogue. Keynote Speakers included Friars Fr Philip Deane (native of Carrickfergus now based in Killarney) and David Jardine (Anglican Friar) Ruairi O'Baoill (archaeologist, QUB), Freda Keyes, Dr John Barry (Environmentalist QUB), Philip Crawford and conference coordinator Philip Orr. The day concluded with a short meditation using the Saint Francis' Canticle of All Creatures.

### THE LABS

CBCF promoted and took part in a new initiative by the Gateway Church in Carrickfergus called 'THE LABS' which are a series of discussion based workshops relating to theological or contemporary news issues. They are open to anyone and are an opportunity to research, develop and road test your understanding of various faith

topics that will be under the microscope. The focus for Autumn 2010 was a book by the very exciting American, emerging church author Brian McLaren, entitled 'A New Kind Of Christianity'. The book outlines a new approach to the basic Christian message and asks 10 important questions facing Christianity in our post-modern age. (Other books by McLaren which may be of interest to inter-church groups include, 'A Generous Orthodoxy' 2004; 'Everything Must Change - Jesus, Global Crisis, and a Revolution of Hope' 2007; 'The Secret Message of Jesus' 2007.)

### SECTARIANISM AND RACISM – INTENT OR IGNORANCE?

CBCF asked: "What exactly is sectarianism? Is it just violence on our streets? Or is violence just one manifestation of something deeper and more subtle? Is sectarianism just out there somewhere, in extreme situations, or is it something that effects us all in a divided society, both individually and corporately? Are churches immune? Why is denial so widespread?" It asked the same questions about Racism. With these questions in mind CBCF got involved, shaping and participating in CAN (Carrickfergus, Antrim, Newtownabbey) Peace III Faith Communities Programme which began in October 2010. Under the title 'weCANTalk',

the programme has three component parts,

(1) A 14 session course for individuals examining sectarianism from both a theoretical and experiential perspective.

(2) Creative Workshops for Church Groups comprising of 2 sessions exploring sectarianism and racism in an interesting and enjoyable way.

(3) An interactive website [www.wecantalk.org](http://www.wecantalk.org) Only a small number of people from the faith communities in the three council areas responded to the invitation to take part. However it is hoped that the programme which is to be repeated in Spring 2011 will serve as a model for churches to engage in the important work of tackling these twin evils in our society.

### CBCF MONTHLY INTER-CHURCH PRAYER AND FELLOWSHIP MEETINGS

These will continue in 2011 in St Colman's Church of Ireland, Larne Road, Gateway Church, Grosvenor Place, and St Nicholas' RC Church, usually on the second Tuesday of the month at 8pm.

### DUNGANNON AREA CHURCHES' FORUM

At our Festival of Praise at the end of May the theme was "The Love and Faithfulness of Our Lord Jesus Christ". The music was co-ordinated by David Thompson, organist in St. Anne's Church of Ireland, Dungannon. His choir Bella Voce, made up of young people from many churches in the area, led the singing. In June ten from Dungannon travelled to Sligo, at the invitation of our link Riverbrooke.

The journey passed the spectacular views of the Dartry Mountains and Glencar Lake before arriving at Calry Church Catacombs for a

coffee break. There they were welcomed warmly by Canon Derick Swann, Mary Daly and Jane Golden who explained that this part of the church had now been converted into an activity centre for pre school children.

Riverbrooke had prepared a programme for the day which included visits to four neighbouring churches.

The first call was to Sligo Presbyterian Church where their minister explained that his services were open to every denomination. Unfortunately the Methodist Church in Sligo was not available that day for viewing but the group was later invited to call at Collooney Methodist Church. Canon Swann spoke with some authority on the interior of St. John's Cathedral. It had become the Cathedral Church of the Dioceses of Elphin and Ardagh and some of its wall plaques related to the family of William Butler Yeats.

Close by, the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, which dominates the sky line was then visited. Its interior is unique as it is the only church in Ireland built in the Romanesque style. Father Tom gave an extremely interesting conducted tour.

The speaker at the Forum meeting in September was Mrs. Mary Caldwell, Chairman of Armagh Child Contact Centre. She talked about the establishment of this centre and the work of Child Contact Centres which provide a neutral space for absent parents (and grandparents) to meet with their children.

Still enthused by the enjoyment of their visit in June, in October twelve from Dungannon set off once again for Sligo to attend a seminar "Faith in Ireland To-day".

Patsy McGarry, Religious Affairs Correspondent of the Irish Times, spoke on the topic "Churches in Ireland; Issues and Challenges". He surprised us with many of his statistics drawn from the 2006 census.



Friars David Jardine (Col) and Philip Deane (RC) at CBCF Conference.



*Suzanne Rice, Good Relations Officer, Newry and Mourne District Council, pictured with guest speakers and ISE staff members at the launch of Newry District Inter-church Forum.*

1. In Ireland, Muslims are now the third largest religious grouping in the state. 68% of these are, officially, non Irish and are mainly of African and Asian origin.

2. There was a slight decrease in the percentage of Catholics to 86.8%. The Church of Ireland population was the next largest grouping of religious adherents.

3. The numbers of those professing no religion had grown and was more than the total of Anglicans, Presbyterians, Methodists and Orthodox Christians combined.

4. The average age of the Irish priest is now 63, so with retirement at 75, it leaves the Church with much reorganization to do over the coming decade. Following this, he said that trends indicate that Irish Catholicism will be a much less clerical church in the future and with less of a role in civil society.

The next speaker was Ali Selim of the Islamic Cultural Centre in Dublin. He said the Muslim modern existence in Eire can be traced back to the early 1950s. The first trickle of Muslims was made by students from South Africa, followed by Muslim students from India, Malaysia, and the Gulf States. The 1990s, the era of the Celtic Tiger, witnessed a dramatic economic upheaval that encouraged professional immigration to Ireland. It became possible to find employment in a wide range of specializations.

The Muslim community in Ireland represents a particular religious and ethnic minority in the Irish society but within the last few decades the Muslim community has become the fastest growing religious community within the country and makes a considerable contribution in social, economic, ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue. Muslims are employed in Eire in a wide range of professions, e.g. about 4000 doctors, many business people in restaurants, the meat industry and Halal food. There is a large number of Muslim students in the Royal College of Surgeons. Education and qualifications are essential achievements, encouraged by Islam. The prophet Muhammad said "Seeking knowledge is incumbent on every Muslim". Muslims have chairs in three faith forums and are involved in the Irish government project of dialogue.

There are two Muslim national schools, though these can accommodate only a small percentage of Muslim children. On joining the second level of education Muslim students encounter a number of issues e.g. prayer and hijab. These are usually sorted out. The Irish Council of Imams has been formed to facilitate the process of integration and accommodation.

The resurgence of intolerance and discrimination against Muslims, after September 11th, had no serious impact

on Muslims living in Ireland. Some Irish people visited the Islamic Centre and handed over letters of solidarity with Muslims in Ireland. Islam means to submit your will to the will of your Creator. The concept of peace is firmly rooted in the Muslims' life. The Muslim greeting is "Peace Be Upon You". To stigmatize every Muslim for a crime perpetrated by a Muslim is just like stigmatizing every Christian with a crime perpetrated by a Christian.

The final speaker was Ven. Margery Cross, a Buddhist nun from the residential centre in Co. Cavan. There is another residential centre in Cork. She said the only reason for Buddhism being in Ireland is that Irish people travelled abroad, saw other religions and liked what they saw in Buddhism. The Cavan centre is fortunate in that the Catholic priest in the village allows the use of the Catholic Church for joint services with other churches and they are usually packed.

Buddhism is not evangelical. The main purpose of it is developing compassion (with wisdom) – showing respect for all living things. Buddhists believe there should be no killing, no aggression, no sexual misconduct, no lying, no drugs or alcohol (nothing to disturb the mind). Buddhists attach great importance to dying and believe that each person has many lives. Hospitals in Ireland have now learned how to deal with a Buddhist who is dying. Margery said she finds it difficult to say what influence Buddhism is having in Ireland. The seminar ended with round table discussion on the day in general and reporting back.

Some were glad that it had been an interfaith seminar while others would have liked to hear a Christian point of view during the day. The importance of showing respect for others, especially new people in our communities was stressed. Sincere thanks

go to Riverbrooke for arranging such an interesting event.

**Don Attridge and Isobel T. Holmes**

### **DECEMBER IS A MOMENTOUS MONTH FOR BALLYMENA**

The Ballymena Borough Church Forum under its joint Chairpersons, Mrs Denise Church and Mrs Wendy Morton have seen the first item on their programme of events commence in December 2010. A series of lunchtime meetings on the four Thursdays leading up to Christmas has started in All Saints Roman Catholic Church on 2nd December, followed by St Patrick's Church of Ireland on 9th December, then Ballymena Methodist Church on 16th December and finally West Presbyterian Church on 23rd December 2010.

Each meeting was designed to last 30 to 45 minutes with light refreshments served at the end of the meeting so that people could attend during their lunch break.

The Ballymena Forum is lay led but is open to any church member who lives in the Ballymena Borough whether clergy or lay members. The aim of the Forum is to add to, rather than replace the Inter-Church work that is already occurring in Ballymena and so other events are planned that do not interfere with anything that is currently established. There is a Clergy Fellowship in Ballymena that the Forum is trying to develop links with and it is hoped that these bodies will be able to work closely together for the good of everyone in the Borough.

A meeting with the Forum in Carrickfergus is being planned and one of the highlights of the year will be a train journey from Ballymena to Derry with visits to places of interest in the city and a meal together. Ballymena Borough Church Forum has also completed its programme of meetings

to qualify for Peace 3 funding - special thanks is due to Phillip Rankin, the facilitator of these meeting for his skill and patience. The challenge will now be to use that money to the best advantage in furthering the work of the Forum in Ballymena

Of course the Ballymena Forum could not have come into being without the dedicated effort of both Rev Dr Johnston McMaster and Mrs Eileen Gallagher from the Irish School of Ecumenics to whom many thanks are due for the hours they spent and the wise counsel they provided so that the Forum could establish and begin to function.

The Forum has also been well received by the Community Relations Department of Ballymena Borough Council and recently there has been a very positive meeting with Mrs Jackie Patton. This is a link that the Ballymena Forum is keen to maintain and develop. While the Forum is overtly Christian, they have begun to invite representatives of other faiths worshipping within the Borough to come to meetings and give a short presentation of what they believe after which a short question and answer session will take place. It is hoped that the first of these meetings will take place early in 2011.

**Wendy Morton**

### NEWRY AND DISTRICT INTER-CHURCH FORUM

The Newry and District Inter-Church Forum was successfully launched on Saturday 23rd October in the Newry Arts Centre. The room was packed with over sixty people including clergy from different denominations. The proceedings were chaired by Dr Johnston McMaster of the Irish School of Ecumenics.

After a period of prayer and reflection, led by members the Mayor, Michael Murphy, gave us a warm welcome. The keynote address was given on the theme 'Building Reconciling Communities' by the Presbyterian Moderator, Rev Dr Norman Hamilton. He described the problems of the 'social apartheid' that permeates so much of Northern Irish society, illustrated by his experience of living and working at the margins of our communities within 150 yards of a 'peace wall'. He dealt with various aspects and problems of the Shared Future programme, including social apartheid, educational apartheid and the costs of division, expressed in the OFMDFM document 'Cohesion, Sharing and Integration' (CSI). A short session of questions and responses followed.

Harpist Patricia Daly then gave a musical interlude.

Fr Peter McVerry, S J, from Dublin addressed the problems of homeless young people and how to reach them with a meaningful gospel of the Kingdom of God, through which all peoples' needs may be met. He drew upon his experience working with the homeless and with young people suffering from addiction. He gave forceful images of the radical self-sacrifice of Jesus Christ in everything for the sake of His brothers and sisters and His solidarity with the marginalised to whom he came close in eating and drinking.

Fr McVerry challenged our Christian identity today in Ireland, North and South and our sectarian mindsets which deny who we are – our common humanity. He challenged the Churches for trying to control how people think and behave. Christian love allows others to be themselves.

After more questions and discussion the Mission Statement, Aims and Objectives of the Inter-Church Forum were presented together with some future activities.

The meeting finished with a buffet lunch. Many people signed up for membership of the Forum and others asked to be kept on the mailing list.

**Mairead Campbell and Brian Eggins**

### PORTADOWN INTER-CHURCH FORUM

On Saturday November 6th Portadown Townhall was the venue for the successful launch of Portadown Inter-church Forum. The seeds of this project were sown in spring 2009 when a public meeting was held in Portadown to discuss an Inter-Church Forum and as a result a steering group was formed to work on it. Members of the group met regularly, attended a foundation day and agreed a mission statement, aims,

objectives and an outline programme for year 1. The launch of the Inter-Church Forum was the culmination of this work and offered an invitation and opportunity to more people to become involved and to contribute to the work of overcoming division, and helping in the creation of a community which reflects the values of peace, justice mercy and compassion.

The theme chosen for the launch seminar was 'Building Healthy Communities Through Honest Friendship' The guest speakers were Very Rev. Dr. Ken Newell OBE former moderator of PCI and Rev. Fr. Gerry Reynolds Clonard Monastery Belfast. After an opening reflection prepared by members of the steering group, Rev. Newell made a presentation under the title: 'No Sitting on the Fence: Reconciliation in Scripture and on the Streets'. This was followed by questions from the seminar participants and responses. Fr. Reynolds and Rev. Newell followed this with a shared presentation 'Building Healthy Communities Through Honest Friendship: A Personal Journey' Members of the steering group presented the mission statement, aims and objectives of Portadown Inter-church Forum and the event concluded with a light lunch.

Tim Foley, steering group member, writes -

'PACE Portadown has done valuable work over the years, but as long as I have known it – the last six or seven years- it has struggled to find a role in the town of Portadown despite the real need. Portadown is still a divided town with a strong Loyalist identity and a reputation for not welcoming minorities and newcomers. While some of the churches do some things together and some church leaders meet via the local Churches Together gathering, the Churches as a whole are not well known for their



*Inside Down Cathedral members of FCF listen to an account of its history and savour the beauty and peace of this hallowed building.*

contribution to reconciliation. Too often church life is directed inward to the needs of the congregation to the neglect of the local community and the persistent challenge of sectarianism. The Forum has potential to address this, to give opportunity to any interested laypeople to get involved in their communities as Christians, to make a contribution to reconciliation inspired by the Gospel of Peace and Unity.

The talks from Fr Gerry and Rev Ken were very special, with just the right balance of warmth, humour and challenge. They spoke of reconciliation as a journey, measured and sometimes discouraging, but central for those who would take Jesus seriously. To journey with friends, listening for echoes of the Gospel of peace, taking risks for the neighbour out of love, this seems to be a journey well worth taking.

It is tempting to think that the work of reconciliation is done. The current reduced level of physical violence can make it seem as if peace has been achieved. Yet there are daily reminders that the work is still at the beginning. On the way but far from completion. And this is especially so for those who exist on the margins, those from other countries, those who live in areas of poverty and exclusion where life is not moving in the right direction.

Rev Ken and Fr Gerry inspired us to make reconciliation a reality from 'the kitchen to the cosmos' - a vision for the whole of life rooted in the person of Jesus. Rather than something out there and for others it turns out that reconciliation begins at home, with our family and friends, even within ourselves, as well as in our community and in society'

**Tim Foley**

### BALLYCASTLE CHURCH ACTION

The ecumenical ship in Ballycastle sails mainly under the banner of Ballycastle Church Action. The successful Good Morning Ballycastle Project (107 elderly and isolated persons receiving a daily telephone call, Monday – Friday, from 20 volunteers, supported by two part-time staff) continues to grow, despite looming financial cut-back clouds. In addition, the past year has seen developments in another of BCA's aims, to enable the Churches to have a voice and a higher profile in 'the public square' on issues facing the wider community as our society moves from conflict and alienation to peace and inclusion.

So, when BCA were invited in the autumn of 2009 to participate in The Church/Faith communities Confidence-Building Programme of the North East Cluster of Peace III, a new sub-committee was formed, initially designated the BCA Peace III Committee.

#### Projects

Since May 2010 we have been involved in the following projects:

1) A Morning Conference on 'Victimhood', Corrymeela, Monday 21 June 2010

This date was chosen because it was the official annual Day of Private Reflection. Aware that there are other programmes dealing with Victims, we decided to focus on ethical and theological aspects of Victimhood and on how concern for Victims is reflected in the Churches' Worship and Pastoral Care. So invitations were slanted towards clergy and church leadership. Led expertly by



Rev Dr Johnston McMaster, we addressed two main questions: Who is a Victim,? And Is it Just to Forgive?

These were examined in the light of biblical teaching. In fact few serving clergy attended. Over-busyness? Day-off? Unavailability? Or could it be that the continuing plight of Victims is not in fact perceived to be a pressing issue for the Churches or church leadership? We must ask, but must not judge. However, those who did attend experienced real discussion and a sharing of personal experiences and haunting memories that was very moving. However, as this article is transmitted, we're looking forward to a follow-up on a similar theme, around 'Victims concerns'.

ii) An Evening Conference on "Forgiveness, Justice and Reconciliation", Monday 22nd November 2010, again at Corrymeela and led by Dr Johnston McMaster. Whereas in June the focus was on the perceived tension between "Forgiveness" and "Justice" this Conference explored the perceived tension between "Justice" and "Reconciliation". Must one come before the other? And what do these concepts mean anyway, in the raw realities of life together in this Province? We are attempting to engage not just church people but those in the business, civic and political areas of our Ballycastle community.

Over and above the activities of the Peace III Committee, BCA have been engaging with other issues such as local health provision and policing. We recently had PSNI Representatives outlining the Faith in Policing initiative backed by the Chief Constable. They are seeking volunteers to cooperate in, for example, late-night patrolling as clients emerge from clubs and pubs – sometimes a problem here in Ballycastle.



*Participants at the conference on 'The Future Role of the Church/Faith Community In Addressing Sectarianism and Racism'*

A perusal of our logo will disclose a subtle 'B' and 'C' and 'A'. But sailors will readily sense that the spinnaker-like foresail and the jib-like mainsail would, in reality, tend to drive the ship in contrary directions. That, we suggest, is an apt symbol for the contemporary ecumenical movement, where even people of goodwill find it difficult to agree on the direction the Church should take, and some remain skeptical about the tasks of peace and reconciliation. But we in BCA, while saluting the politicians for political progress made thus far, are very aware of the dictum of our sadly-late friend Dr David Stevens, "What we have here is a peace of truce, not yet a peace of transformation" Underlying all the above activity is the strong desire that Christ's Name may be glorified through our ecumenical presence and voice in 'the public square' and that God's Will may 'be done in earth, as it is in heaven'

**Gordon Gray  
Ballycastle**

### COLERAINE

September was the climax of many weeks of planning as lead partner in the Peace III conference addressing "The Future Role of the Church/Faith Community In



Role of the Church/Faith Community In



Addressing Sectarianism and Racism.”

It was a fitting end to our 10 year celebration as a Churches Forum in Coleraine. The keynote addresses at the conference were given by Rev. Dr. Noel Treanor Bishop of Down and Connor and Rev. Bill Shaw Co-Chair of the new Northern Ireland Faith Forum and Director of 174 Trust.

The Forum was delighted to have the Presbyterian Moderator Rev. Norman Hamilton as guest speaker at this year's AGM. Rev. Hamilton made a thought provoking address to the audience in theme with the Forum's ethos to preserve a strong influence in addressing the understanding and diversity of faith within our communities. It was a timely message to equip us for the challenges of a New Year.

Doctor Hamilton told the meeting that before his call to the ministry he had been a civil servant. He has lived on an inter-face in Belfast for 22 years. The events surrounding Holy Cross PS were life-changing and forced him on to a steep learning curve. During his sabbatical he wrote a paper called, “Church and

Community Cohesion”. Dr Hamilton sees community relations as political theory for “Love your neighbour”. He believes we must not see peace-making and community relations separate from Biblical teaching.

The moderator was just back from South Africa. His feeling was that the people in N Ireland have settled into social apartheid. They seem to be content to live apart: 90% of the whole population in N Ireland lives in segregated areas. Some politicians do not seem to mind the continuation of separation.

**Bert Ritchie**

#### ANY QUESTIONS FOR FERMANAGH?

On October 20th, at the Clinton Centre in Enniskillen, the Fermanagh Churches Forum hosted a panel discussion entitled The Future of the Organized Church: Any Questions? The format was similar to the BBC television Question Time and radio Any Questions?, with the panellists answering questions posed by the audience, albeit with considerably more co-

operation and generosity than is usually heard on the media versions. The panellists represented not only a range of Christian traditions, but also a balance of ages, gender and backgrounds. Two were full-time clergy: Rev. David Cupples, minister of the Presbyterian church in Enniskillen and Canon Peter O'Reilly, parish priest of St Michael's Catholic church in the town. Zelda Kingston is a lecturer at South-West College and a lay preacher on the local Methodist circuit, Sister Elizabeth Fee a Sister of Mercy and retired teacher and Dr. Gladys Ganiel, originally from the United States, is a lecturer at the Irish School of Ecumenics. The discussion was very skilfully and sensitively chaired by David Bolton.

The questions raised covered a range of topics and issues, including the direct concerns of the audience members

The final question, which was submitted in virtually identical wording by two audience members, quoted Peter Robinson's recent description of segregated education as 'benign apartheid' and asked

the panel to comment. This subject, perhaps inevitably, produced the greatest discrepancy between the panellists' views. All were agreed upon the importance of a clear ethos within education, that of the child being the core of the school, created in God's image and infinitely precious in his or her own individual and unique gifts and needs. The perceived tension lay between the rights and duties of parents to choose an education for their children which reflects their own deepest beliefs and concerns, and the common good of society in Northern Ireland, in which our fragile peace is still threatened by sectarianism.

Following the event, audience members were agreed upon its success in terms of the serious issues raised, the imagination and careful thought with which the questions were answered and the great degree of co-operation and harmony between the different panellists' responses.

**Tanya Jones**

#### FORTHCOMING EVENTS

##### FERMANAGH CHURCHES FORUM

AGM and Christmas social gathering (with refreshments and music) will be on Thursday December 9th at Fermanagh House, 8pm

##### COLERAINE BOROUGH CHURCHES FORUM

annual ISE Lectures. This will run from March 15th through to April 12th.

##### CARRICKFERGUS BOROUGH CHURCH FORUM

Connecting Faith and Community Residential Fri/Sat 14th. 15th January 2011

##### TRAUMA & SPIRITUALITY: AN INTERNATIONAL DIALOGUE.

This ground breaking event takes place in the Europa Hotel, Belfast from 9-13 March 2011.



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#### CONTACT DETAILS

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