



CHURCH FORA NEWSLETTER

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

DOING COMMUNITY THEOLOGY	1
EDITORIAL	2
REFLECTION ON WOMEN IN PEACEBUILDING	3
COLERAINE BOROUGH CHURCH FORUM	4
JOURNEY OF THE CROSS IN LIMAVADY	5
BALLYCASTLE CHURCH ACTION	5
BALLYMENA BOROUGH CHURCH MEMBERS FORUM	6
EXCEPTIONAL EVENING OF PRAISE & WORSHIP IN ALL SAINTS CHURCH	6
COOKSTOWN CLERGY VISIT PEACE BRIDGE	6
CARRICKFERGUS BOROUGH CHURCH FORUM	7
COOKSTOWN DISTRICT CHURCH FORUM	7
DUNGANNON AREA CHURCHES' FORUM	7
NEWRY DISTRICT INTER-CHURCH FORUM	7
WOMEN IN FAITH	8
FERMANAGH CHURCHES FORUM	8

DOING COMMUNITY THEOLOGY

Address (abbrev.) by Dr. Johnston McMaster at an event on June 13th to celebrate the Education for Reconciliation Programme 1996 – 2012

In 1994 the Community Relations Council contracted me to conduct a review of the Irish School of Ecumenics with particular reference to its Northern Ireland programme. The raft of interviews and focus groups produced many findings. I mention two because they connect with today. 'ISE may need to look again at the possibilities of offering the degree programmes at northern locations'. And so it came to pass. The other, more significant finding for today was that 'Many respondents did see the need for ISE to be more actively involved with local communities'. The last sixteen years of Education for Reconciliation were the answer to those criticisms

and suggestions. A community theological education model and practice came to pass.

Many of you here today have been part of that learning experience. We hope that this reflection will resonate in all sorts of ways, and that you will recognise a journey we all made through theology, history, politics and culture. What was going on over sixteen years? At least three things.

1 We were a community of edge-dwellers

For a lot of people the EFR courses provided a deep sense of belonging and community. And it was safe, accepting and unrestricted community. For some it was community the institutional churches no longer provided. Disillusionment or hurt pushed some of you to the edge and an EFR course became a community of faith at the edge. For others, there was still the connection with the church, but church theology or confessional theology no longer spoke in a meaningful way. You needed a journey to the edge, asking hard questions in relation to community life and issues, pushing the boundaries and going in a safe community to the limits of theological exploration. People not only do theology, at the EFR peak up to 1,800 people per year were not only doing theology but doing theology at the edge. To do theology at the edge people need to feel safe, and so we were a community of edge-dwellers.

2 We were doing zig-zag theology

Do you recognise it? Sometimes the theological exploration would push forward, stretching the horizons and boundaries, and then it would retreat. It would take refuge back from the edge, into a safer place. This happened for two reasons. The political climate always had an effect. Sometimes this was positive. The first inter-church fora developed immediately after the ceasefires of 1994. Another burst of fora followed in the two



Members of the EFR team pictured with Dr. Geraldine Smyth (far left) Head of ISE, and Dr. Salters Sterling (far right) Chair of ISE Trust steering group

EDITORIAL

Welcome to the 11th issue of the Church Fora Newsletter. You will read in this issue how church Fora across N. Ireland continue to strive to build relationships in the community, while wrestling with significant and challenging communal issues. It was fitting that an event on June 13th to mark the conclusion of ISE Education for Reconciliation programme, was incorporated into the bi-annual CONNECT conference - Church Fora and other inter-church groups have benefited from ISE Education for Reconciliation courses and conferences over many years. The approach adopted and the model of theological praxis used in the programme is one which has been adopted also in the work of many of the Church Fora. At the event Dr. Johnston McMaster, who directed the programme, and his colleague Dr. Cathy Higgins reflected on their experience of 'Doing Community Theology'. The celebratory event marked the launch of their book of this title which is also available as a free download at: <http://www.ecumenics.ie/resources/for-the-public/>

education-for-reconciliation/education-for-reconciliation-celebration-2012/

Elsewhere in this issue you can read the text of their addresses to the conference on June 13th.

In an insightful and visionary response to the 'Doing Community Theology' publication Dr. Duncan Morrow suggested the approach developed in the programme was 'an extremely important strand of church being' and emphasised the significance of the 'anthropological approach' which wrestles with the key question of what it means to be a human being - about which the Gospel has something important to say. The process involved enables us to understand what has been passed on to us and to reformulate it for today.

Representatives from five areas shared their experiences of the impact of EFR and the diversity, breath and depth of experiences shared, gave those present some sense of the significance of the programme. All of us are indebted to Johnston and Cathy for the scholarship and commitment they brought to this programme.

As Dr. Morrow pointed out in his address much work remains to be done in the area of relationship building. Given that we have political structures in place for power sharing some may be lulled into a false sense of security about relationships. The transformation of relationships, however, will not follow automatically, nor can it be legislated for - it can only happen through the hard graft of ongoing relationship building.

At a time when voices from churches and faith communities are pushed further towards the margins it is timely to reflect on meaningful and efficacious ways of bringing the Good News of the Gospel into public

discourse. The approaches adopted in EFR and in the Fora can not only provide transforming encounters, at a personal level for those involved, but can also empower people to influence the values which pertain in the public square. Walter Brueggemann suggests three core roles for the churches today - witness, dispute and advocacy. When Christianity lost touch with its Jewish roots its lost 'disputation' and it is worth recovering this since the value system operational in society needs to be challenged. The voice of the churches needs to be heard in the public square.

Eileen Gallagher

³Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony Dispute Advocacy. Walter Brueggemann Fortress Press 1997



Dr. Johnston McMaster addresses the conference on June 13th.

years after the 1998 Belfast Agreement. Confidence levels in parts of the community had risen. But sometimes the politics wobbled and the confidence dropped. Then theology zaged. Or when inter-church relations took a dip or became a bit rocky, it became difficult to push on both in theology and relationships. Theology also became zig-zag when it felt that the boundaries were being pushed a bit too far. If a theological insight had challenging implications for engaging sectarianism, or doing reconciliation, or it meant moving to a new place in relation to inter-faith dialogue, then it became easier to retreat to a safe

place or somewhere more traditional.

One of the inter-faith dialogue courses had really pushed the boundaries for six weeks. Christians and Muslims participated together in a course really looking at the challenges and implications for Christian faith in dialogue, though it was by no means one way traffic. The big questions of Christology and missiology were explored. Who is Jesus in a world of many faiths? What is salvation in a world of many faiths? On the sixth and final evening during the last ten minutes, a voice spoke and asked, why can't you Muslims just accept who Jesus said he is? Zig-zag!

But zig-zag theology is OK. It may retreat into the traditional and the safe from time to time, and yet it moves. We celebrate sixteen years of doing zig-zag theology.

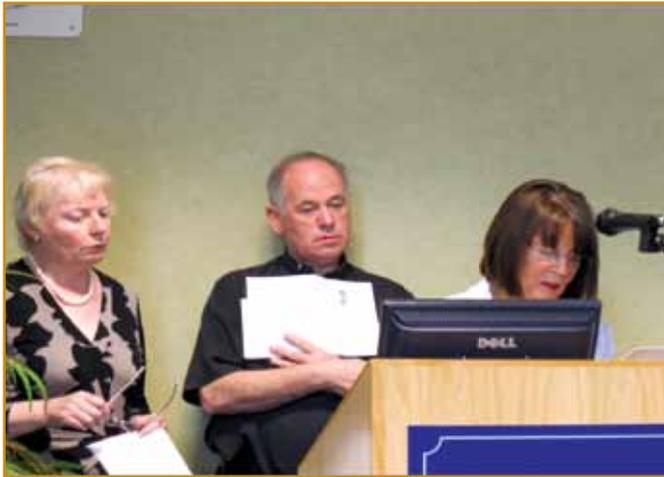
3 We were nurturing integrated complexity

Integrated complexity is referred to as IC. It rhymes with I see, a way of seeing things, the world, history, politics, theology, whatever. It moves through different levels. Level one is mono, just one way of seeing things, only one truth, one perspective, one way of doing. It's about simplism, literalism, it is fundamentalist politics or religion. That's level one and

perhaps we have all been there or are there.

Level 3 means seeing several points of view but like level one there is still no branching out or weaving things together. At level 5 you have several points of view, different ways of seeing things and you are beginning to integrate them. Some weaving together is going on.

At level 7 many points of view are integrated and woven together. You not only see different points of view, but you can see them in all their complexity. Nothing is simple. There is no simple point of view. But at 7 you have integrated the complexity. You can see and hold together



Fr. Kevin Mullan (Omagh) Wendy Morton (Ballymena) and Eileen Gallagher (ISE) lead the thanksgiving service at the EFR celebration

complex view points, complex ways of seeing things. You can now see the complexity in the others' perspectives. This is where conflict transformation and reconciliation praxis becomes win-win instead of the level 1 win-lose.

The whole range of themes and issues we dealt with over sixteen years had to do with reconciliation. We were engaging theology, ethics and reconciliation praxis. We were often struggling back and forward between the levels of integrated complexity. Sometimes we felt safer with the one point of view. Simplism was easier. But then we caught sight of many viewpoints, and held together the many in all their complexity. We were holding together the complexity of sectarianism, reconciliation, peacebuilding, the complexity of ethics, faith and God. EFR courses were about IC, integrated ways of seeing, nurturing integrated complexity.

So we were a community of edge-dwellers, doing zig-zag theology, nurturing integrated complexity. That's the nature of community theology and reconciliation praxis.

And this work is incomplete and on-going. That is why the final chapter in the Reflection is called Themes that Linger. These are community theological themes or theological themes that we have dealt with inadequately in one off sessions or have not had the time to explore, but which

need critical exploration and praxis. A few were flagged up in Connect conferences, but there remains a great deal to explore. During exit strategy discussions some of your groups were hoping to organise 2 or 3 get-togethers in a year to continue doing community theological reflection. We believe that in Newry you have already held a number of such theological reflections, a kind of theological forum. The eight themes in Doing Community Theology, by no means exhaustive, can provide a focus. The common good, ethical leadership, a new relationship between faith and politics, faith and gender, faith and ecology, economic ethics and the elephant in the room sectarianism, are the big contemporary themes. These are an agenda for edge-dwellers and require high levels of integrated complexity. History has made us very aware of a decade, decade commemoration, decade thinking. Community theological education has a decade agenda.

REFLECTION ON WOMEN IN PEACEBUILDING

Address by Dr. Cathy Higgins at event on June 13th to celebrate the Education for Reconciliation programme 1996 - 2012

The Women and Peacebuilding component of the Education

for Reconciliation programme ran for four years, from 2006 to 2010. It was a programme that empowered women, helping them to recognise the contributions women make to peacebuilding. It also was about the challenge to overcome barriers within church and society that stood in the way of a community of equals. The programme gave expression to particular dynamics. The first was:

1. Re-storying Women

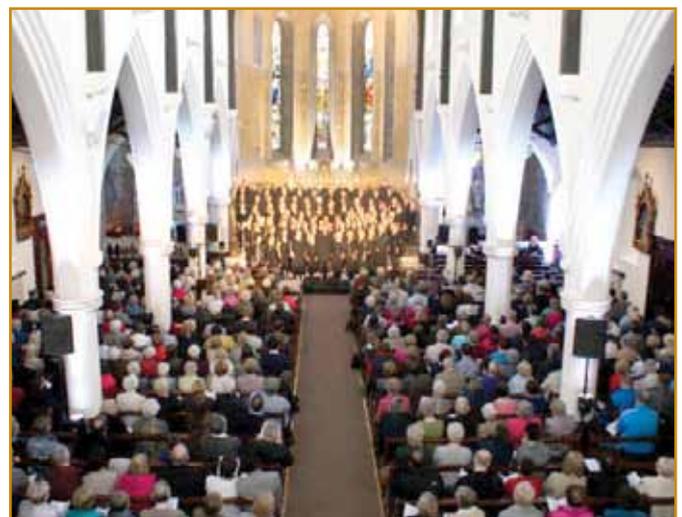
The Women and Peacebuilding programme recognised that contemporary and biblical stories, recounting women's contributions to peacebuilding, can provide inspirational examples for women searching for opportunities to engage a peace process, following the 1998 Belfast Agreement.

The word 'story' is derived from the Latin 'historia' which likely referred to "a row of pictures in the form of stained glass windows telling a story." The power of these pictorial stories was brought home to me on a visit to Christ Church Cathedral in Oxford. There I encountered the St. Thomas Becket Window dating back to 1320 CE. The window is a rare surviving portrayal of the Archbishop of Canterbury who was murdered in the cathedral by the order of the king in 1170. Unfortunately, his

face is not original, as at the Reformation, King Henry VIII ordered all images of Becket to be destroyed in an attempt to erase his memory and end devotion to him. This is a stark reminder that history is often a recounting of the stories told from the perspective of men in power, who could literally revision events to present them in a form that supported their power and domination.

Without story women do not exist in our narratives, and women need to hear their stories to discover who they are. Re-storying women, in the Women and Peacebuilding programme, was about filling in the gaps in our history, recovering suppressed or unknown stories that produce a more colourful, complex and varied picture of the truths that have shaped us. We all discovered we had a story, and that sharing our stories in an ecumenical setting undermined the divisive ethos of sectarianism that has pervaded this island.

Stories not only have the power to connect us with those who live in close proximity, they can also expand our horizons and stretch our imagination to empathise with our neighbours, those bordering us to the south and east; and those further afield. The telling of stories in the Women and Peacebuilding programme was about creating community; or to put it another way, we were



All Saints Church Ballymena packed to capacity for Church Forum event

expanding our understanding of who we belong to, and who we are accountable to.

In the specific lies the universal and not the other way around. Hearing the stories of specific women helps us recognise what women can aspire to and how each woman has something significant to contribute to the mending of our world. Participants on the Women and Peacebuilding programme took inspiration from Ireland's bridge-builders, Mary Robinson, Mary McAleese and May Blood, the Palestinian peace and justice activist Hanan Ashrawi, the Burmese Pro-Democracy leader Aung San Sui Kui, and the Indian Human Rights activist, Ruth Manorama. Their stories not only helped to underline our connectedness, their stories informed our stories, and in a way became our stories as we re-told them to others.

A significant discovery, then, in the Women and Peacebuilding programme was that recovering stories of women, historical, biblical and contemporary, was essential. Primarily because change occurs within individuals and community when we begin to hear the validity in the other's story, when that person, and the people she represents, are re-humanised. And secondly, such re-storying empowers women to bring about further change in society and culture. Thus empowered, women are better able to articulate their visions for justice, peace and the well-being of our shared world.

2. Seeing in Circles

A second dynamic of the programme was seeing in circles. Seeing in circles is about relationality; its concerned with bringing the outsider in and raising the profile and voice of the marginalised. Circle seeing is critical of hierarchies and dualities that reinforce divisions and are about power over and maintaining the status quo. Seeing in circles

is not interested in zero-sum politics or taking sides. Instead, it is interested in inclusivity and shared power.

One of the things I am grateful for during my years at ISE was the opportunity to pursue a doctorate in Feminist Theology. The programme was truly international, and was an opportunity to learn with and from women from Asia Africa, America and Latin America. This experience reinforced my propensity to see in circles. It pushed me to see beyond my white, European, middle-class perspective and recognise women's struggles to change relations of inequality and marginalisation on a global scale. This experience inspired the development of the Women and Peacebuilding programme and determined the content and ethos.

Letty Russell, who dreamt up and facilitated the learning on the doctoral programme, was someone who saw in circles and introduced me to a different type of leadership that she called round table leadership. In her words: ...the round table has become a symbol of hospitality and a metaphor for gathering, for sharing and dialogue. It speaks concretely of our experience of coming together and connecting at home, at work and at worship; it also points to the reality that other persons are excluded from the tables of life, both through denial of shared food and decision making for their community, nation and world.

3. Alternative World-building

The Women and Peacebuilding programme was also about alternative world building. World-building was an activity we frequently engaged in with Education for Reconciliation groups, and not just women and peacebuilding. Some here may well remember responding to the challenge to come up with a 2030 vision for Ireland or to imagine what life would be like if patriarchy was a thing of the past, or if sectarianism and racism were



Dr. Cathy Higgins addresses the conference on June 13th.

overcome. This was more than blue sky thinking, this was alternative world-building. So what; some might say? Does it achieve anything?

We thought of Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks, Oscar Romero, Nelson Mandela, Benazir Bhutto, Mary Robinson, Aung San Suu Kyi, to name a few. They dreamed dreams, imagined an alternative world, and inspired people to believe that change was possible. We realised, or re-discovered, that one of the most effective world-builders was Jesus, who drew on his Jewish prophetic tradition, in a radically subversive way to critique the imperial system, and the temple system. He called people to participate in God's alternative Kingdom, which was the antithesis of the Roman one, and also subversive of the institutional religious one.

Jesus sparked the imaginations of his listeners, showing them a way out of their poverty and hopeless suffering. But firing imaginations, encouraging adherence to an alternative world order is a dangerous occupation, as history shows. The Women and Peacebuilding programme, as with the Education for Reconciliation programme in general, was engaged in pushing theological boundaries and developing theological praxis

at the edge. Re-storying women, seeing the world in circles, and alternative world building, are essential skills for the development of a community of resistance and struggle. The Women and Peacebuilding programme contributed to the enabling and empowering of such a community. In their various locations, then, women are resisting and struggling on their journey along the rocky road to our desired future of just peace, not only for themselves, but for all people, and for the planet that sustains us.

McKenna, Megan.
We Live Inside A Story,
(Dublin, Veritas Publications, 2009), p. 1

Letty Russell,
Church in the Round: Feminist Interpretation of the
Church
(Louisville:Westminster John Knox Press, 1993),
p 17.

COLERAINE BOROUGH CHURCH FORUM

As is our tradition the churches Forum honoured its commitment on the day of reflection June 21st. St. Patrick's church of Ireland kindly made their church available for the readings and reflection. Prayers were offered for forgiveness and repentance as we seek to dedicate ourselves in securing a peaceful future. Our Forum maintains a hands on role in the community by practical ministry and staying



Conn Mulvenna

current with community projects. One of our guest speakers was Emma Kennedy who featured in her role as support worker in the controversial BBC documentary "The estate."

Emma Kennedy, Threshold

Emma the outreach service worker for Threshold which is a service for alcohol users in the Ballysally and Churchland areas. The service is for people of 18+ years and Emma's present clients range from 19-74 years. The Outreach service aims to offer a free, confidential and non-judgemental service geared towards reducing alcohol related harm to the individual as well as the wider community. The majority of cases come from self-referrals but Emma also receives referrals from Women's Aid, Social Services, the Probation Service, the PSNI and churches if they contact Emma. One-to-one support is offered and clients can be directed to other agencies for additional help e.g. AA and Patchwork. To enhance the user's self-esteem, Emma has devised a programme of small, achievable goals in personal development e.g. in personal hygiene, money management, shopping and social skills. She also makes her clients aware of the effects of alcohol on themselves and their families and encourages them to attend their GP's regularly. The service is funded by the Neighbourhood Renewal Programme for

the Department of Social Development. Clients can come to the Healthy Eating Café in Ballysally where Emma has her office.

Conn Mulvenna

Conn was director of Kilcranny house prior to his sudden death earlier this year. It is a fitting tribute we share the news he was a welcomed guest at our churches forum prior to his passing. Conn told the meeting of a project supported by the Peace III Programme and managed for the Special EU Programmes Body by the NE Peace III Partnership. Conn had heard about the project operating in Derry and now the project will operate in the Coleraine, Ballymoney, Limavady, Moyle, Larne and Ballymena Council areas. It is called 'Hands off my Friend' and it has been developed as a web-based tool. On the website a person can stand up for his friend by inviting him to report the incident/crime or by reporting it himself anonymously. The NE Peace Partnership has worked with PSNI to develop the project. If hate crimes or hate incidents are logged on the website it is hoped that relevant agencies will engage in support mechanisms for individuals, families or particular areas. We had a good turn out at our Easter Sunrise Service with over 40 celebrating in morning worship. The fellowship continued with a breakfast in the local Parish Hall.

Bert Ritchie

JOURNEY OF THE CROSS IN LIMAVADY

As part of the observance of Holy Week, Limavady Churches Forum held a Good Friday 'Journey of the Cross' around the town, stopping on all the major roads round the town centre, finishing at the Roe Valley Arts and Culture Centre. The journey included Scripture readings and prayers based on the Passion narrative and Christ's journey towards the Cross. Representatives

of the churches were joined by representatives of St. Vincent de Paul and members of the public who joined in the readings and reflections.

The forum is made up of Christians from the Limavady area who seek to promote good relations, tolerance, trust and respect for diversity within the church and the wider community.

The Forum seeks to build positive community relations, to encourage understanding and recognition of and respect for different church traditions and beliefs.



BALLYCASTLE CHURCH ACTION

'Building Community: From Exclusion to Inclusion' was the title of a significant Conference with an international dimension, held on Friday 15th June at The Corrymeela Centre, Ballycastle. Marking the launch of Ballycastle Church Action's new year-long programme of Peace and Reconciliation activities, it focused on the continuing role of the Irish Churches in peacemaking, within the wider 'peace process'. Generously supported by Moyle District Council Good Relations the event drew over forty participants from the local community, Coleraine, Cookstown, Ballymena and farther afield, including two Japanese post-graduates researching 'Reconciliation', who travelling specially from Birmingham. After a welcome from Mrs Maeve Walsh, Chairperson of Ballycastle Church Action, the Rev Don Irvine, main organiser of the event, introduced the two main



Dr. Duncan Morrow addressing participants at the EFR celebration and June CONNECT meeting.

speakers. First up was the Rev Robert Penrith, Rector of a large Anglican Church in Port Elizabeth, South Africa. Referring to the apartheid era, its tension, discrimination and violence, "South Africa was a ghastly place to be" he said. "Then in the 1990s God did an incredible thing, raising up men and women of great stature with an ability to love" He named specifically Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela "people who were Christ in the world; people of incredible compassion and incredible desire to be agents of change". He illustrated his theme with moving and challenging stories of courageous actions of individuals crossing the apartheid barrier. His Church has a special relationship with a nearby township community. This in many ways was his main challenge to the continuing task of peace-building in our community. The task is not only to 'read the signs of the times', he said, but 'to act on their implications'. And this requires individuals to get involved. 'Peace cannot be built by more committees but only by individuals establishing new relationships'. This was also the theme of the second speaker, the Rev Dr Inderjit Bhogal, recently-appointed Leader of the Corrymeela Community. Stressing the Christian basis of Corrymeela he focused on three challenges for Christians, in terms of



Dr. Eamon Phoenix (centre front) pictured with members of Cookstown District Church Forum

'Building Community' arising out of major concerns of people today, as identified by the participants through group discussion. The speaker then summarised these as: The Economy, Extremism and the Environment. "In all of these issues it is the poor of the world and our own society who feel the pinch first", he said. For Christians, he stated, "The Cross is God's great question-mark against the world, challenging all relationships of exclusion and exploitative power". Underlining the ongoing task of peace-building "Peace is not the end goal: it is a pathway towards Reconciliation".

BCA's forthcoming Peace and Reconciliation Programme was then announced: an autumn Course on "Understanding the Theological Roots of Sectarianism", a further Faith in the Public Square" series of Community Forums over the winter, and in Spring 2013, "Christ and Other Faiths", focusing on the 'faith' dimension of relations with those of other ethnic origin.

Closing Worship was led by Yvonne Naylor and the Conference ended with lunch. The actual venue for the event was the new Davey Village, so named in memory of the Rev Dr Ray and Kathleen Davey, and due to be officially opened on 27th June.

BALLYMENA BOROUGH CHURCH MEMBERS FORUM

Ballymena Borough Church Members Forum reflect on their last two events of the church year and are very encouraged by the way in which their endeavours are starting to impact relationships within the Borough.

OVERCOMING SECTARIANISM Unearthing the Theological Roots

After a very encouraging Advent Series in the run-up to Christmas 2011, Ballymena Borough Church Members Forum organised a course entitled Overcoming Sectarianism – Unearthing the Theological Roots during February/March 2012 facilitated by Rev. Dr. Johnston McMaster and Dr. Cathy Higgins from the Education for Reconciliation Programme of the Irish School of Ecumenics.

It attracted around 30-35 attendees each evening who all participated fully and very honestly in the discussions making it a very worthwhile course.

EXCEPTIONAL EVENING OF PRAISE & WORSHIP IN ALL SAINTS CHURCH

On Thursday evening, 17th May 2012 Ballymena Borough

Church Members Forum organised a service of praise and worship led by the Voice of Hope Choir in All Saints Church as part of Community Relations Week.

This was the first time such an evening had been organised and it was extremely encouraging to see around 700 people packing All Saints Church to capacity.

The whole event was characterised by a spirit of freedom and worship which was set by the choir and in which the congregation participated fully. Many of the people were visibly moved by the experience, especially some who had never attended All Saints Church before.

Mrs Wendy Morton, Co-Chairperson of Ballymena Borough Church Members Forum, who had organised the event, paid tribute to everyone who had supported the event and made it such a success. She specially thanked Mrs Alyson Reid, the Director, and the Committee of Voice of Hope Choir as well as Fr Patrick Delargy and the Parish Council of All Saints Roman Catholic Church for their willingness to co-operate in putting the event together and for the way in which they had so readily caught the vision for the whole concept of the evening.

At the end of the evening, Elizabeth Pilson representing Ballymena Borough Church Members Forum presented Alyson Reid with a beautiful floral tribute and the congregation were invited to

make a donation as they left the church. These donations raised a total of £2220.00 which were divided evenly between St Vincent de Paul and Tear Fund.

COOKSTOWN CLERGY VISIT PEACE BRIDGE

Members of Cookstown and District Clergy Forum recently visited Londonderry on an outreach visit which included crossing the Peace Bridge. The new bridge was opened in June 2011 creating a new pedestrian link between the Waterside and city side of the Foyle.

At its opening Peter Robinson declared: "The bridge encourages the creation of a larger city - a shared city, a welcoming city, a city that is moving forward with a very real sense of pride, an abundance of talent and a lot of confidence and hope for the future."

Martin McGuinness captured the spirit of the occasion when he said:- "Change cannot happen without the full support of us all, so it is up to you, me, my colleagues in the Executive and the Assembly to continue to work positively together to build upon the good work that has already been done - recognising that differences still exist but respecting those differences." Bringing greetings from Cookstown, the Clergy Forum with Good Relations Officer, Sean McElhatton, visited a cross section of local churches



Discussion at Newry Theological Forum



Rory Jones playing at FCF Peacejam

– Ebrington and 1st Derry Presbyterian, St Columba's Cathedral and St Augustine's, and St Columba's Long Tower and St Eugene's Cathedral. For many of the group it was a first visit to the "Maiden City" and a fascinating experience to meet a variety of clergy and laity from a variety of backgrounds.

Canon Norman Porteus



Carrickfergus Borough Church Forum

CARRICKFERGUS BOROUGH CHURCH FORUM

This term Cbcf steering group has met more often to build relationship and plan for 2 major events. The first was our 6 week course in January 'Revisioning God'- doing Anti-sectarian theology. This was facilitated by Dr. Johnston McMaster & Dr. Cathy Higgins in Dobbs room Town Hall and it attracted a registration of 18, approximately 50/50 protestant /Catholic mix and from different protestant churches, some coming from outside the borough. For those not having done this course the themes for each

week were:-1. Reading the Bible against Sectarianism. 2. Requiem for a Violet God. 3. "Many are called, few are chosen" how odd of God to choose! 4. Saved and satisfied! 5. Sacrament of Exclusion or Sacrament of Peace. 6. God Beyond our Certainties: Unknowing God for the 21st Century. For us this course build on our previous years course study on 'Unearthing Sectarian roots' and challenged us to examine whether our theological beliefs and practices might be viewed as inclusive or exclusively sectarian. The group was consistent in its attendance and for some it was their first cross community journey and all enjoyed deep respectful open discussions and better understood others perspectives on a wide range of social & theological issues. Our local newspaper reported one churches opposition to us running this cross community course, which simply exposes the reality that sectarianism is alive and well in Carrickfergus! Our second big event was in March with the launch of the drama '1912 – a hundred years on' in the Jubilee Town Hall Carrickfergus. The play is co-authored by our co-chairman local man Philip Orr and Alan McGuckian who's based in Belfast and has a deep interest in Irish history. This play which did a two week roadshow tour presented a balanced reflection on the prevailing cross community attitudes, convictions and fears that surrounded the troubled events of 1912, Home rule and Ulster Covenant signing. The launch of this successful event drew a full audience of 130 to the play, many staying on after tea/ coffee break to participate in fruitful discussion groups about it how the play had impacted upon them. The drama hopes to run again next autumn if they can get further financial backing. Our thanks again go to our Good Relations officer Fiona Surgenor for financial support for these events. Our Clergy fraternity continues to meet monthly and is

planning an away day to share together and reflect on future desires and developments.

**On behalf of Cbcf. , Grace and Peace
Roy Crowe & Philip Orr (co-chair)**

COOKSTOWN DISTRICT CHURCH FORUM

This year Cookstown District Church Forum devoted much attention to exploring the 'Decade of Centenaries' beginning with a course on 'Ethical and shared Remembering' delivered by Johnston McMaster of ISE. Don O'Donnell from the school for Peace Studies gave a talk on Poppies to Forum members, John Ritchie from Larne on Irish War Memorials and Dr. Eamon Phoenix spoke on Ulster Covenant(s). Our own chairperson Alan Marsh spoke on the Irish Rebellion of 1916. Speakers at our AGM and tenth anniversary celebrations this year were Rev David Armstrong and his friend Rev Kevin Mullan. Rev Armstrong currently lives in Carrickfergus while Fr Kevin Mullan is currently Parish Priest in Drumquin, Omagh. Because of their friendship in 1985 Rev Armstrong was forced to leave Limavady where he was the Presbyterian Minister.

DUNGANNON AREA CHURCHES' FORUM

The celebration of our tenth anniversary, on 24th April was held in St. Anne's Church Hall Dungannon.

The music was led by Bella Voce Youth Choir which also rendered several pieces. The evening was introduced by our Chairman, Miss Angela McAnespie, then the Immediate Past Chairman Mrs Isobel Holmes MBE told how the Forum was set up through the initiative of a group of women called "Friends in Faith".

Rev. Dr. Ken Newell OBE was the guest speaker. Several

other clergy , from different churches took part. Rev. Andrew Forster, Church of Ireland, opened the service with prayer, Rev. Clive Webster, Methodist Church, did a Bible reading and Dean Colum Curry, Catholic Church, led everyone in the Nicene Creed. The evening concluded with supper prepared and served by the ladies of St. Anne's catering committee.

Our annual Festival of Praise was held on Sunday 3rd June. St. Patrick's, Dungannon, Church Choir lead the music. At a recent meeting one of our members , Mr. Ernest Carroll, told us about his journey through life. At the May meeting, Rev. Andrew Rawding, who has recently come as a Rector in the area and was a Chaplain in the Royal Navy for 4 years, told us about his work. He entitled his talk " Against the tide- Royal Naval chaplaincy".

Several members of the Forum attended the recent EFR/CONNECT event in Stranmillis College Belfast.

Isobel Holmes.

NEWRY DISTRICT INTER-CHURCH FORUM

Our AGM in November 2011 was spiritedly addressed by Mrs Myrtle Kerr (widow of Rev Cecil Kerr, founder of the Christian Renewal Centre). We formally approved our constitution and elected a Management Committee with Jeanette McConnell and Brian Eggins as co-Chairs and Frances Sands as Secretary/ Treasurer. The management Committee continued to meet monthly. A few members attended the CONNECT meeting at the Seagoe Hotel, Portadown in December. Following the successful ISE course on 'Ethical Remembering – the Decade of Commemorations' run by Rev Dr Johnston McMaster and Dr Cathy Higgins, it was decided to have a further set of discussion groups on theological issues. These were organised by Sean McIlroy and Owain Morgan who had



both been teachers of religion in secondary schools up to [A] level. The first two of these was a slightly controversial consideration of the origins of the Gospels, which provoked some heated though good-natured discussion, with an introductory video about A N Wilson. Another meeting discussed the problems facing the Catholic Church, which was decidedly non-controversial. About twenty plus people attended regularly. In February we held a Migration Awareness evening led by Jenna Leichty and Aneta Dubek which was well attended.

People attended various cross-community carol services, a PIPS Newry service and various Church Unity Week services. There was a cross-community St Patrick's Day service at St Patrick's Church of Ireland Church, Newry at which the preacher was Fr Stanislaw Swiderski from Newry Cathedral. Two members received a great welcome at a Salvation Army rally on 19th March. As part of the Decade of Commemorations the play "1912 - One Hundred Years on" was presented in Newry and was followed by a lively discussion. Brian Eggins went with Seamus McCabe of PIPS Newry to a liaison meeting in Armagh Hospital. On Holy Thursday several members participated in a Jewish Passover Seder celebration in St Bronagh's Parish Church, Rostrevor, led by Mary-Lynn McCormack.

At the May meeting we had presentations by Sylvia McLroy about the Gateway Club and by Milanda Key about the forthcoming theology certificate course at Dromantine. There is ongoing discussion about the possibility of a plaque to remember local architect Thomas Duff, who designed

many local buildings including the Cathedral and St Mary's Church.

Special thanks to Frances Sands for helping to set up a savings account and for producing member's lapel badges showing the NDICF logo.

Brian Eggins

WOMEN IN FAITH

Women in Faith continue to bring people together from different religious traditions. They hold monthly meetings at the Irish School of Ecumenics Antrim Road Belfast and extend an open invitation to anyone interested in promoting reconciliation. Last autumn they had a breakfast event titled 'Joy in All Circumstances' at which their speaker was Ms. Linda Nielsands. They also organised a significant conference on 'Suicide Prevention' and are planning another conference for Sat. 10th Nov. 2012. The main speaker at the forthcoming conference will be Lady Eames and the title of the conference is 'Going Forward with Hope'. The venue is The Holy Family Parish Centre, 120 Cavehill Road, Belfast.

Lorna McKee

FERMANAGH CHURCHES FORUM

The Fermanagh Churches Forum's new year began early and thoughtfully with our AGM in December. David Bolton, a longstanding member of the Forum, and Director of the Northern Ireland Centre for Trauma and Transformation, spoke on the subject "How can we live with trauma? A look at the impact of

traumatic events on our lives and community." It was a perceptive and moving talk, focussing on the experience of trauma and of the work of the Centre both within Northern Ireland and in supporting communities affected by war conflict throughout the world.

In January 2012 it was the turn of the Presbyterian Church in Enniskillen to host our annual service celebrating the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Around a hundred people gathered to share worship, prayer and music and to hear the powerful address by the Very Rev. Russell Birney about the urgency and priority of the call to unity among Christians. At the end of February the Forum hosted a new venture, PeaceJam: music breaking down barriers. The intention of the event was to celebrate the role of music in dismantling prejudice, inspiring hope and creating a vision for a truly shared future. Our guest speaker was Stephen Travers of the Miami Showband, who spoke with passion and commitment of the band's cross-community makeup and appeal and the way in which they brought together divided communities through the worst years of the Troubles. Stephen himself, and his fellow band members, of course paid a terrible and tragic price for this vision, making his conclusions, that dialogue and continued co-operation are vital to our future, both heartfelt and compelling. Stephen was introduced by Fr. Brian D'Arcy and his talk was followed by performances from young local rock bands and musicians. The event attracted a large and appreciative audience, especially of young people in their teens and twenties, and the Forum look forward to hosting similar initiatives in the future.

During Lent we again held

our Lenten lunches on four successive Wednesdays, each in one of the Enniskillen town centre churches with a reflection led by a lay person. It is the third year that we have organised these, and they have proved very popular and successful.

On May 26th Fermanagh Churches Forum in conjunction with the Good Relations Department of Fermanagh District Council and the Irish School of Ecumenics organised a conference - 'The state we were in : 1922-1949' This was a follow up to last years community relations conference on the 'Decade of Centenaries'. Members of Cavan Inter-Faith Forum joined FCF members and participants from voluntary groups in Fermanagh in lively discussion of influential legislation from this period including health and education legislation which is still impacting on our lives now. In leading the conference Johnston McMaster provided insights on political leaders of this time and highlighted some less well known aspects of their contributions to public discourse at this time.

Finally, we are looking forward to a Big Picnic at Crom Castle at the end of June, part of the nationwide Big Lunch initiative, and to a range of varied events in the autumn. For more information and details of how to join the Forum, please visit our website at www.fermanaghchurchesforum.org

Tanya Jones



Community Relations Council

Project part financed by the
Community Relations Council.

CONTACT DETAILS

Irish School of Ecumenics, Trinity College Dublin, 683 Antrim Road, Belfast, BT15 4EG
(T) +44 (0)28 90775010 (E) eccgallagher@yahoo.co.uk