



CHURCH FORA NEWSLETTER

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BLESSED ARE THE HISTORY MAKERS

Andrew Marr, the political commentator and broadcaster wrote in a newspaper article that the 'Jews ... have enriched the world and challenged it'. This is true in a number of ways, especially in the way we see history.

The Jewish people emerged in a world that believed history was like a wheel, cyclical, it kept going round and round. So the old belief, still with us, that history repeats itself. We are on a wheel and we cannot get off. The Jewish people were the first to say that this is not true. History does not go round and round and we are never on a wheel, repeating itself. In a sense the Jews said, 'we want to get off the wheel'. History, said the Jews, is linear, we are part of history, which is a non-repeating sequence of events. Jonathan Sachs, the Chief Rabbi, has described history as 'a journey in which no stage is exactly like any that has been or will be'. Far from history repeating itself, every part of the journey has the possibility of newness, new beginnings, possibilities and relationships. The present and the future can be different. This is the Jewish and biblical way of looking at history. Unlike television programmes, there are no repeats, but possibilities for new things.

On the brink of a crucial decade in Irish history, when a raft of centenaries will remember big

events that changed Ireland between 1912-1922, this Jewish insight into history is vital to recover. It will be too easy, and plans are already in place, to re-enact the events of 1912 and 1916. But is re-enactment as an end in itself a wish for history to repeat itself? Is it being stuck in the past, as if now was the same as then? If all we do is re-enact 1912 and 1916 (or re-enact our interpretation of Covenant and Rising) are we not still on the wheel and subscribing to the view that history is cyclical?

This is where the Jewish and biblical insight challenges us. The great Jewish insight and gift is that the future can be different. We are the people who write the latest chapters in the story and every moment of history is filled with new possibilities and relationships. We humans are history makers, making new history, writing a new story. Nothing is static and nothing repeats itself, today and tomorrow can be new. More re-enactment denies that insight.

Central to the Jewish and biblical approach to history is the radical social, political and economic vision of covenant, a concept that unionists a century ago believed was the basis of the Ulster Covenant. But the Jewish covenant was much bigger than the Ulster Covenant and the vision of the Easter Proclamation. In part the Jewish covenant was God's challenge to a community to build and create something radically different from the status quo, namely a socio-political and economic community rooted in inclusive social justice, non-violence and peace or total wellbeing. Covenant was and is the challenge to make and shape a different history.

Faith, then, as understood in the Jewish-Christian tradition is openness to God's future, to newness, creative change, radical difference. Authentic faith does not try to recapture or re-enact 1911 or 1916. There is memory but above all faith expects to



The interior of Saul Church near Downpatrick. Here members of Carrickfergus Borough Church Forum spent time in reflection

EDITORIAL

Welcome to the 10th issue of the Church Fora Newsletter. We go to print at the beginning of Advent 2011, a time when Church people everywhere are struggling to cast the light of the Gospel on a context of global financial and economic crisis, which poses unprecedented challenges for the government, for local communities, for families and for individuals. As we reflect on the multiple challenges of our time it seems the capacity of humans to lose our way seem limitless and are all around us all of the time. As Christians and as people of faith we are called to respond to the complexities of our time; we are called to be bearers of the Christian gift of hope in the struggle to make straight the way of the Lord

Czech poet and politician Vaclav Havel says that hope is expressed in the determination and resilience of those who refuse to be undone by the sad fact of persistent deadly and dehumanizing behaviour; that hope is rooted in the conviction that doing good—sustaining dialogue,

empowering economic development, fostering reconciliation—is an end in itself.

‘Hope is a state of mind, not of the world. Either we have hope or we don’t; it is a dimension of the soul, and it’s not essentially dependent on some particular observation of the world or estimate of the situation. Hope is not prognostication. It is an orientation of the spirit, and orientation of the heart; it transcends the world that is immediately experienced, and is anchored somewhere beyond its horizons. It is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out.’

This perspective on hope resonates beyond the boundaries of Slovakia and chimes with the Advent hope of Christians everywhere in 2011.

In this issue of the Church Fora Newsletter you will read accounts from Fora members of their practical work as they seek to bring the gift of hope to the communities in which they live. These are

stories of active engagement with economic, social and cultural issues in the local context. This year many Fora are working to bring new and different perspectives to commemoration as we enter a decade of centenaries. The work of Fora for reconciliation in the community, and Fora engagement in environmental and social issues, is in many cases underpinned and sustained by theological exploration and education. The recent CONNECT meeting had as its theme ‘Theology and Ethics for 1912-1922’ and included reflection on theologies of Memory and Hope. The challenge, however, is not simply to reflect theologically but to bring those theological principles to life through application in concrete situations. The CONNECT meeting allowed time for planning actions at local level. This ‘praxis’ model of doing theology is a growing strength of Church Fora.

As we journey through this Advent season of waiting and expectation our imaginations are drawn towards the birthplace of Jesus, the town of Bethlehem. Timothy Lowe

who works at the Tantar Ecumenical Institute in the Holy Land reflects:

‘Living on the seam between Jerusalem and Bethlehem at Tantar Ecumenical Institute, we look out and see the ghastly wall that now encircles Bethlehem. Checkpoint 300 is the only way in if you are coming from Jerusalem. Israelis say it saves lives. Palestinians say it is the ultimate sign of occupation and imprisonment. There is no doubt we have lost our way. We assume help will come from Washington, Jerusalem, or perhaps a European capital, but alas this has not happened. Biblically speaking, the only help will come from voices outside of the establishment, voices from the wilderness not corrupted by self-interest, fear and greed. For our purposes this advent season, we best heed the voice of John and rediscover again in baptismal newness that Christ alone is the light’

May we have the courage this Advent to accept this gift of light which has the potential to dispel the darkness of our world.

Eileen Gallagher

be in a new time, full of new possibilities and relationships. The contribution of faith to a decade of centenaries is to make the Jewish gift and challenge clear. What new history, new relationships, society, community are we committed to making? What new ethical social vision will we commit to build in Northern Ireland, Ireland as a whole? Unless we are stuck on a wheel, history is for the making into something new, something different from the past.

**Dr Johnston McMaster
Advent 2011**



Saul Church is claimed to be the oldest ecclesiastical site in Ireland

BALLYCASTLE CHURCH ACTION

As one ‘Church Year’ ends and another begins we are happy to sound a note of fulfilment and of renewed expectation. BCA is an instrument of ecumenical cooperation and service set up officially by the three constituent local Churches: Roman Catholic, Presbyterian and Church of Ireland. In other words, it is not simply a body of interested individuals from the Churches. This imposes disciplines of genuine two-way communication between the leadership of the constituent Churches and BCA as a corporate body. Awareness

of the Churches acting together has continued to grow both within the participating parishes/congregations and between 'Church' and 'Community'. Effective cooperation between BCA, Moyle District Council, Ballycastle Chamber of Commerce and other community organisations has increased over recent months, especially in relation to our main Programmes

Internally BCA has developed its structure. The original BCA Committee has become a Board with four Committees: Good Morning Ballycastle, Peace and Reconciliation, Worship and Liturgy and Finance

i) Good Morning Ballycastle

Through this Project over one hundred elderly, isolated persons receive daily telephone calls by trained volunteers, with professional back up based on a town-centre office. Although recognising the value of this voluntary supplement to their own services, the Northern Health and Social Care Trust, who have supported the scheme from its outset, have been unable to continue to fund it. This has placed huge demands on the Good Morning Project Committee. As a Church body BCA have felt unable to apply for Lottery funding, and anticipated alternative funding for groups with such issues of conscience has yet to materialise from the NI Executive. Consequently the Project has been in real peril and remains uncertain. However, there has been blessing in the crisis. Organisations and generous individuals have rallied to the cause. So, for instance, Ballycastle Rotary Club organised a Breakfast and Ballycastle Golf Club ran a tournament in support; and the Churches have made additional contributions.

ii) Peace and Reconciliation

During 2011 the newly established Peace and Reconciliation Committee, having undergone an initial

course of personal and group awareness and organisational skills development mounted an energetic series of events, the main ones being:

* Supported by funding through the NE Peace111 Partnership, a series of Community Forums Faith in the Public Square, addressed by: the then-Moderator Rt Rev Dr Norman Hamilton (Faith and Politics), Rev Dr Harold Good (Faith in the Journey? –i.e. of peace-making) and the Most Rev Dr Noel Treanor (Faith in the European Context). These were a follow-up to two earlier forums on Victims and Victimhood, and another on 'A Shared Future'. We brought them almost literally into 'the public square' by holding them in a popular town-centre coffee shop, with the kind support of its owner and staff. Attendance was variously between 50 and 70

* Jointly with Moyle District Council Good Relations Programme the ISE Course on Ethical Remembering was successfully carried through on six Tuesday evenings in May and June. Led by Rev Dr Johnston McMaster and Dr Cathy Higgins the participants – around 25 on average – discovered fresh and often surprising insights into the major events of the years 1912-22. (Ulster Covenant, UVF, 1916 etc) A follow-up series is planned for early

2012, examining theological and biblical aspects of 'Remembering'. This hopefully may lead to dialogue with the District Council and other bodies as to how potentially divisive 'commemorations' could be planned in an inclusive spirit.

* In June, a two-day, professionally-facilitated, intensive course on The Dynamics of Conflict and Conflict Resolution attended by members of the Peace and Reconciliation Committee and the Ballycastle Corrymeela Cell Group

* Local dialogue with PSNI and others on matters relating to The Orange Order. This included planning for a harmonious Twelfth of July, Ballycastle being the venue of the 2011 Orange Order District Demonstration. Later BCA, with the Council's Good Relations Officer held an Information Evening for a number of church members from the three Churches, presented by Mr David Scott, the Order's Education Officer. Again, there was a useful exchange of views among the cross-community audience

iii) Worship & Liturgy

The most-recently established of the four Committees, Worship & Liturgy is dealing specifically with inter-church worship: cooperation in planning special



denominational worship Services, such as Harvest, Carol Services etc; joint worship, as in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity; and the Churches' joint participation in 'civic' events, such as the Christmas Carols & Lighting of the Christmas tree. The clergy are central to the activities of this Committee, but with significant member participation. While not directly involved, BCA also are supportive of an independently-existing cross-community Prayer Group and traditional events such as the (Women's) World Day of Prayer General

While the above activities are spear-headed by the respective Committees, BCA Board as a whole have a number of other roles in the community, such as providing a 'Hands Off My Friend' hate crime reporting base. Other matters on the Agenda include Faith in Policing – a scheme in which lay people join with the police in stewarding at weekends and festivals, especially with a view to



Cookstown District Church Forum members pictured at Titanic Quarter Belfast

assisting vulnerable young people; an easily-accessible 'contact' centre, especially for anyone in difficulties or distress; the further development of a thought-through Good Relations Policy, to be adopted by BCA member Churches as well as by BCA Board. The main consideration has to be 'capacity' – of personnel, time, abilities and finance.

But it's not hard having a Vision – or a Dream!

Gordon Gray
1 Dec 2011

DUNGANNON AREA CHURCHES' FORUM

When we last went to press we were preparing for 2 events. One was a visit from our link group, Riverbrooke, from Co. Sligo. This was a very enjoyable day. We met the group in the Trian, Armagh where we enjoyed coffee and scones together. After that we all went to the Church of Ireland cathedral (some walked, some went by car). There, we were given a conducted tour of the cathedral and were told about its history. From there we drove to the Navan Centre, which is a couple of miles outside Armagh, where we had lunch. Next the group went to the Roman Catholic cathedral where they had the opportunity to admire the



Colin Cobbs Titanic Quarter (front row centre) pictured with Members of Cookstown District Church Forum at their September meeting

beautiful building and hear about it.

From there the whole group travelled to Dungannon for a prayer service in the Col church, St. Anne's. This was led by the curate, Rev. Stephen McElhinney. We finished with tea and biscuits in St. Anne's before Riverbrooke group travelled home.

THE other event being planned was our annual Festival of Praise in Dungannon Park. The music was led by a group from East Timor. People from various churches in the area did the readings and prayers. The Mayor, Councillor Kenneth Reid, attended. In spite of an extremely wet afternoon,

there was a good attendance. At present we are planning a celebration event on 24th April 2012 to mark our tenth anniversary. This will be held in ST. Anne's Church Hall. Rev. Ken Newell has agreed to be the guest speaker.

Our 9th AGM was on Monday 21st November 2011 in Dungannon & South Tyrone BOROUGH Council offices, Circular Road. The guest speaker was Alan McBride from WAVE Trauma Centre, Belfast.

In September Norma McConville told us about her work for peace through the H.O.P.E. project(Healing Our Past Experiences).

Some of our members attended the Memorial Service for Father Michael Hurley, founder of Irish School of Ecumenics,. This was held in Fortwilliam Presbyterian Church and the service was led by Rev. Dr. Lesley Carroll.

Isobel Holmes

BALLYMENA BOROUGH CHURCH MEMBERS FORUM

Ballymena Borough Church Members Forum has embarked upon their 2011/2012 programme of activities.

The programme commenced on 27th September 2011 with an evening in the Braid Centre when Rev Dr Ken Newell O.B.E. DD and Fr Gerry Reynolds CSsR. spoke on the subject 'Building Healthy Communities Through Honest Friendships'. As part of that they explained some things about their individual journeys and then their journey together as participants in dialogue and peace-building during "the Troubles". We were very encouraged by the attendance of 75 people who filled the Studio theatre in the Braid centre to capacity.

For the second year running, we have organised a series of lunchtime Advent Reflections starting on Thursday 1st



Dwali Festival

December 2011 in West Presbyterian Church, followed by Ballymena Methodist Church on Thursday 8th December, All Saints Roman Catholic Church on Thursday 15th December and finishing in Saint Patrick's Church of Ireland on Thursday 22nd December.

All the reflections begin at 12.30 p.m. and aim to finish at 1.15 p.m. so if anyone is planning to do some Christmas shopping in Ballymena, we would encourage you to plan to do it on a Thursday and join us at one of our Reflections. In spite of the wintry weather last year the series was well attended and we are hoping for increased attendances this time around.

Starting on Thursday 16th February 2012 we have organised a course called Overcoming Sectarianism - the Theological Roots. The course runs for 6 weeks and ends on Thursday 29th March 2012 (there is no session on Thursday 8th March). It will be delivered by Rev Dr Johnston McMaster and Dr Cathy Higgins, both from the Irish School of Ecumenics. Prior registration for this course will be essential because numbers will be limited.

We are also planning a Prayer Walk and barbecue for Community Relations Week so the 2011/2012 season will be a busy one for Ballymena Borough Church Members Forum.

Wendy Morton

COOKSTOWN DISTRICT CHURCH FORUM

In Cookstown District Church Forum we chose as a theme for the coming year "A Decade of Centenaries and how will we remember them"

At our September meeting we had Colin Cobb giving a talk on the RMS Titanic. We followed it with a visit to Queen's Island Belfast to learn more about the building of Titanic and including visits to the Titanic Dock and Pump House, Slipways and drawing offices.

In October we had Rev Dr Johntson McMaster from the Irish School of Ecumenics. giving a presentation on "Ethical and Shared Remembering in a Decade of Centenaries"

In November a number of members of our Forum travelled to Enniskillen to join members of Fermanagh Churches Forum for a seminar on 'Barriers to Reconciliation' led by Barbara Walshe

COLERAINE BOROUGH CHURCH FORUM

The Coleraine Churches Forum continues to play an important role both in the church community and beyond. We are encouraged by the steady growth in membership which represent the majority of denominations in the area such as Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Methodist, Church of Christ, Church of Ireland, Seventh Day Adventist, Quakers, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Days Saints.

A strong part of our ethos is to stay connected to the community. Churches can be an important conduit for information and help. The past two forum meetings had guests from the PSNI speak on issues such as the "Church Watch Scheme." Sadly places of worship are targeted by thieves and vandals as much as other places. Inspector Catherine Magee presented a detailed talk on how we can increase security and vigilance in protecting our properties.

A similar programme was presented on the building of Neighbourhood Watch Schemes. Sgt. Sean Craig explained the procedure for setting up programmes which enable residents to run an organised watch programme. This proved to be very useful in areas where you may have vulnerable residents.

The Forum endeavours to be represented on as many community programmes as



A section of the audience in the Braid Centre Ballymena at the Church Forum Reconciliation event in September

possible the most recent project is the Coleraine Friendship Club, funded by Kilcranny House. The last Wednesday of each month one of our local coffee shops opens in the evening from 7 pm until 10 pm where we invite people to come together. They might be students who have moved into the area, ethnic minority groups or people who are living alone. So far it has been a resounding success. For the past four years we have been the invited guest to the Dwali Festival hosted by the towns resident Indian Community. There is a vibrant Multi Faith exchange in the Borough which we are proud of. The West Bann Community Centre hosted well over 100 people. The evening was officially opened by the Mayor Mr. Maurice Bradley. Events coming up for us include the annual Forum Carol Service held on December 19th. on Main Street Coleraine and finishing up at the Christmas tree outside the Town Hall. The speakers this year are Rev. Alan Knox and Father Rory Sheehan.

The Methodist Bridge Builders are hosting Carols and readings from Advent on December 6th in the Methodist Church Coleraine. We wish all our Fora members a very Happy Christmas and peaceful New Year. Blessing,

Rev. Bert Ritchie
Chairman

FERMANAGH CHURCHES FORUM

The autumn has seen the Fermanagh Churches Forum exploring issues of reconciliation and co-operation across the centuries and the world. We began our programme in the Clinton Centre with an event to celebrate the four hundredth anniversary of the King James Bible. Dr. Laurence Kirkpatrick, Professor of Church History at Union College Belfast gave a fascinating illustrated lecture which was very well attended.

He placed the King James version in the context of previous editions of the Bible, especially the early English translations by Wycliffe, Tyndale and Coverdale. Each of these, and other translations, had its merits and adherents, but there was no single version acceptable to all in the Church of England. James 1, therefore, at the conference he called to examine "things amiss in the Church", agreed that a new translation should be commissioned. Professor Kirkpatrick spoke with erudition and humour of the scholars who worked upon the texts, the process by which it was produced and the many problems which accompanied its printing, including the famous misprints of the "Wicked" and "Vinegar" Bibles, of the perennial pirated editions and of the sad debt-ridden end of the printer himself.



Inspector Catherine Magee addresses Coleraine Borough Church Forum

He emphasised the extent to which the King James Bible was written in already archaic language that would be rich and resonant when read aloud (remembering that few people at the time would have the ability or opportunity to read it for themselves) and explained the process of revision over the centuries, especially following the discovery of early texts such as the Codex Sinaiticus.

The talk was followed by many questions; upon the manuscripts used, the process of establishing the canon and the nature of the revisions made. Members of the audience spoke particularly of positive experiences of reading the Bible with Christians from other churches and of the millions in the world today who still do not have the Bible in their own first languages.

In November we welcomed another speaker, Barbara Walshe, who led a talk and discussion on the subject of obstacles to reconciliation and how we can overcome them. We were particularly pleased to welcome several members of the Cookstown Churches Forum who joined us for the evening. Barbara spoke movingly of her own experiences, from the almost exclusively Catholic culture of rural County Clare to her first encounters with diversity, living near the border in Leitrim. Following the death of her husband and her son's injury in the London 7/7 bombings, she was inspired to

study peace and reconciliation and came to Belfast to do so. There she visited many different churches and discovered the ways in which other traditions of worship can enrich our own Christian lives. Barbara spoke of the series of radio programmes which she is currently making, documenting the often unnoticed cross-community work carried out by ordinary people in Northern Ireland. These are to be aired on RTE Radio 1 in the spring of 2012. As part of this work she interviewed men who had previously been involved in armed organisations and who spoke of the ease with which they were led into violence and much greater difficulty which they found in approaching dialogue and reconciliation. The problems faced by young people were highlighted; especially the dual difficulties of unemployment and consequent hopelessness and low self-worth and of the common feeling that they have missed out on the armed struggle carried on by the previous generation. Many other topics were covered, including the non-linear nature of the reconciliation process, and the damage that can be done by forcing people to try to feel forgiveness before they are ready to do so.

The experience of South Africa was also mentioned, and we were very fortunate to have the Reverend Ivan Ruiters in the audience to elucidate for us the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in his home country.

The evening ended with a positive and inspiring discussion about the ways in which the Fermanagh Churches Forum can facilitate the work of reconciliation moving forward in our community.

Meanwhile the Faith and Friendship group has been thriving in its new lunch time slot, this year exploring the concept of the Beloved Community. All are very welcome to join either the Enniskillen or Lisnaskea groups and details of the monthly meetings are on our website at www.fermanaghchurchesforum.org. Finally, we are looking forward to our AGM on 7th December in Fermanagh House at which David Bolton will be our guest speaker, to our service for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in January and to a major music event in February featuring Stephen Travers of the Miami Show Band.

Tanya Jones



Carrickfergus Borough Church Forum

CARRICKFERGUS BOROUGH CHURCH FORUM

For Cbcf this has been the new season of changes and evaluation. Our AGM last June saw a few changes to our steering group. Thanks to Martin Murray who stepped down as co-chairman after the 3 years faithful service within Cbcf and Martin is continuing to support us in the work of the forum. Our thanks also go to Philip Orr for filling this role and a welcome is extended to Hugh Henderson and Rosin White who are joining us and to Monica Donnelly who stepped down after 3 years service.

Beginning a new term, we were thankful to have Eileen Gallagher with our Steering group to help us evaluate our past aims, objectives, and achievements while evaluating where we felt Church and community were at, and to set priorities for



The Co-chairs of Ballymena Forum, Wendy Morton and Denise Church pictured with Fr. Gerry Reynolds and Dr. Ken Newell

our future development. One of these was the need as a Steering group to meet more regularly to discuss and plan things together. Another was the need to take time away together to get to know each other better through sharing something of our life and faith journey together. This we did by enjoying a Saturday morning at Saul Church Downpatrick where Rev. Henry and Gerry Hull made us most welcome with homemade soup and scones, tea coffee & shortbread all around a cheery open fire in the old church hall. We enjoyed hearing and appreciating one another's stories and took time in meditative walk together around Saul church and nearby prayer room. At the end of our time together Henry led us in a contemplative reflection in the church.

Since then Cbcf has met for interchurch fellowship in St. Coleman's Cof I and in St. Nicholas RC.

In the New Year we are planning to follow up on the excellent success of our March course on 'Unearthing theological roots of Sectarianism' when Dr. Johnston McMaster will be leading us in a 6 week course on 'Revisioning God: Doing Anti-Sectarian Theology'. which will run on 7.30pm Wednesday Jan.11th>Feb.15th 2012 in the Dobbs room and Education room in Carrickfergus Town Hall. The themes for each week are:-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. All our welcome to join us.

We are also looking forward to the staging and discussion of a play which Philip Orr was involved in writing- '1912 one hundred years on' This play will be running as a road show next March and staging its launch night on Friday

9th March in the Jubilee hall Carrickfergus (tbc?).

We are greatly encouraged in the clergy fraternities' regular fellowships over lunch and warmly welcome Rev. David Armstrong who has retired to live in Carrickfergus. On behalf of Cbcf. , Grace and Peace to all over the Christmas season.

Roy Crowe & Philip Orr (co-chair)

PORTADOWN INTER-CHURCH FORUM

The Portadown Inter-church Forum Committee has continued to meet through the Autumn, to plan and explore ideas, and specifically spending time getting to know one another.

Time has been set aside at several recent meetings for members to share something of their own "faith journey". This has been found to be an enriching experience, with numerous remarkable experiences shared - even long-term friends have learned from the approach. One member shared from his family's night of prayer through the "Belfast Blitz", and their wonderful deliverance. The group hopes to continue this over coming months, ensuring that adequate time is allowed for each individual.

It was decided to run an "occasional series" under the heading "Why I am..." The concept is that we invite perspectives from the margins, rather than the broad categories of Catholic/Protestant. In October the guest was Caroline McMullan exploring "Why I am a Quaker". Caroline works with the Irish Society of Friends Yearly Meeting as Youth Development Officer, and she shared from her family background as well as her adult convictions. Caroline's presentation was followed by a lively period of questions and conversation. Plans are being developed for guests representing Evangelicals,

Jesuits, Pacifists and Soldiers - amongst others.

A Cross-Community Christmas Service is planned for December 16th, hosted by Seagoe Church of Ireland, just to the east of Portadown. A musical feature by Portadown Integrated Primary School Choir will be a highlight, as will be supper in the brand-new Parish Centre!

The Portadown Forum also hopes to have a panel discussion/question-time with local politicians before Easter - the event will focus on community relations but will also explore wider issues

NDICF ANNIVERSARY MEETING

The Anniversary Meeting of the Newry District Inter-Church Forum held in the Holywood Arts Centre on Saturday 22nd October was a great success with over fifty people attending. After some introductory music on the harp by Patricia Daly and a reflection by Fr Gerry McArdle, the Mayor, Councillor Charlie Casey welcomed everyone and spoke warmly about the work of the Forum and gave thanks for the work of the Community Relations Department of Newry and District Council, who were sponsoring the meeting.



Members of the management committee of Newry District Inter-Church Forum at their recent AGM with speaker Mrs Myrtle Kerr (front 2nd from left)



Members of Fermanagh and Cookstown Church Fora with Barbara Walshe at a recent reconciliation event in Enniskillen



Then Dom Mark-Ephrem Nolan, Abbott of the Holy Cross Benedictine Monastery in Rostrevor, spoke about the need for churches to come together with open windows and doors. He deplored some narrowness of vision and excessive attempts by some to control their church, to wall it in and restore it to a perceived former glory. Churches must reflect God's all embracing love. Too often they are afraid and keep out others who do not match their tight definitions, narrowness and boundaries. There is a need for reform and restoration. Some old structures must be dismantled to allow the church to be rebuilt. He compared his vision to the Nolan show where 'the people have the power!' Finally Fr Mark reminded us that former Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple

said, 'The Church is the only organisation that exists for those who are not members'.

After some questions and discussion Rev Dr Gordon Gray, retired Presbyterian Minister, who was for many years minister of First Lisburn Presbyterian Church and who had done much work with the World Council of Churches, continued the theme of the need to break down the walls of separation. One can ignore them, breach them or build bridges over them as with Derry's new Peace Bridge. In discussion he said that sharing of Holy Communion presented a conscientious challenge and gave examples of some joyous occasions of such sharing, including one in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. He told us that, 'Divided Churches cost lives'.

Then Gladys Thomson of the Salvation Army summarised the activities of the Forum over the past year which included an EMBRACE course at Bagenal's Castle, a 'Culture Meets Culture' afternoon, a Day of Retreat at the Holy Cross Monastery, joint CONNECT meetings with other Church Fora including one at Stormont. We had supported other inter-church activities and especially the Irish School of Ecumenics courses on Ethical Remembering - the Decade of Anniversaries from 1912 to 1922.

Brian Eggins, Co-Chair of the Forum, then outlined some of the proposed events for the coming year. These will include the AGM; follow-up discussion after the ISE course; sharing of faith journeys over fellowship meals, a Holy Thursday Jewish-style Passover meal at

St Patrick's Church, continued links with the outreach work of the Salvation Army and link with PIPS, the suicide prevention group. Seamus McCabe from PIPS then gave a brief account of their work.

Eileen Gallagher of ISE who had chaired the meeting and Brian Eggins then thanked all those who had made the event possible, particularly Suzanne Rice, Community Relations Officer of the Council, and the funding support from the Council, backed by the OFMDFM, flowers from Philllips Florists, Hill Street, balloons from Ballooning Fantastic, Belfast Road and Patricia Daly's harp music.

The event concluded with more personal sharing over lunch.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

COOKSTOWN DISTRICT CHURCH FORUM

December 15th Carol Service with Cookstown Silver Band at Town Centre Christmas Tree at 7.30pm

Dec 21st Visit to Burnavon theatre for 'A Choral Christmas Cracker'

January 9th 2012 Presentation by John Ritchie Larne on Irish War Memorials

January 15th Clergy Forum Prayer Walk

CARRICKFERGUS BOROUGH CHURCH FORUM

Revising God: Doing Anti-Sectarian Theology'

Six Session Course on WEDNESDAYS

Wed 11th January 2011: Reading the Bible against Sectarianism.

Wed 18th January 2011: Requiem for a Violent God.

Wed 25th January 2011: "Many are called, few are chosen" how odd of God to choose!

Wed 1st Feb 2011: Saved and satisfied!

Wed 8th Feb 2011: Sacrament of Exclusion or Sacrament of Peace.

Wed 15th Feb 2011: God Beyond our Certainties: Unknowing God for the 21st Century

FERMANAGH CHURCHES FORUM

Christian Unity Week Service Thursday Jan 19th in Presbyterian Church Enniskillen

BALLYMENA BOROUGH CHURCH FORUM

Advent Reflections being organised by the Ballymena Borough Church Members Forum began on Thursday 1st December in West Presbyterian Church on the Ballymoney Road.

The other services will take place as follows:

Thursday 8 December - Ballymena Methodist Church

Thursday 15 December - All Saints Parish Centre (Please note that it is in the Parish Centre beside the Church due to the church being currently renovated)

Thursday 22 December St. Patrick's Church of Ireland

Prayer Walk and barbecue for Community Relations Week



Project part financed by the
Community Relations Council.

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