



CHURCH FORA NEWSLETTER

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IRAQ – REAPING WHAT YOU SOW

We watch aghast as Iraq enters yet another catastrophe. More war, more killing, more refugees. There is nothing new about this. It is the story of Iraq since it was cobbled together as a State after 1919. There was no Iraq before then and there may not be an Iraq when this conflict ends.

We have become familiar with places like Basara, Mosul and Baghdad. A century ago they were provincial capitals to Sunnis, Kurds and Shiites. After the end of the Great War and Paris Peace Conference of 1919 the British and French carved up the entire Middle East between them, imposing artificial borders. A potent mix

of ethnic and religious identities was forced together into the new State of Iraq. Britain gave Iraq independence in 1932 but carried on with indirect rule and a continued military presence for another twenty-six years. Outside interference continued when the West bank-rolled a monster called Saddam Hussein. The US invaded in 1991. The US and Britain occupied Iraq again in 2003 killing many thousands of innocent civilians. As with all wars and conflicts, it is not the military who suffer most. It is always the innocent civilians who are killed or displaced. Women and children suffer most of all. The Iraqi people have been victims of forces beyond their control at least since an artificial border was created after 1919. And Western colonialism and intervention carry a lot of responsibility for it.

There is a biblical truism which applies to history and politics. "You reap what you sow". The harvest reaped in Iraq is fierce, bloody tribalism; religious and political sectarianism; and innocent, human destruction. There is another biblical insight. "A harvest of righteousness, or right –relations based on justice, is sown in peace by those who make peace." Whenever this conflict ends, and even if there is no Iraq left at the end of it, there will be a long peace to be made and built. This region was, after all, the cradle of civilisation. We owe it a great deal and its long suffering peoples deserve better.

Dr Johnston McMaster

BALLYMENA CHURCH MEMBERS FORUM



*Ballycastle Church Action
May 24th Blessing of the Boats Service.*



Picture at 'Lest we Remember' event with with conference speaker Dr Johnston McMaster are StClair Beatty and Wendy Morton (co-chair) of Ballymena Church Members Forum.

The Irish School of Ecumenics (ISE) hosted a conference in Community Relations Week on the theme 'Lest We Remember: Ethics, Memory and the Great War' with Dr Johnston McMaster as keynote speaker.

The CONNECT conference also examined the implications and impacts of the new council structures for church organisations.

Taking part were representatives of church fora and interchurch groups from across Northern Ireland.

Wendy and StClair have every reason to look pleased in the wake of their spectacularly successful musical event on June 6th. The classical music group The Priests performed a special concert in Ballymena organised by the Forum in aid of Habitat NI's Ethiopia partnership. This July, 13 volunteers, representing 6 churches from the Forum, will work beside communities on a Habitat water and sanitation project in Addis Ababa. During the concert The Priests performed a special rendition of 'Love Can Build a Bridge'.

Speaking during the performance, Fr David Delargy, a Ballymena native, said: "The Habitat for Humanity team are building a bridge of love between the people of Ballymena and a community in Ethiopia. And the Ballymena Borough Church Members Forum are building bridges here and now in our own community in Ballymena." St. Patrick's Church Ballymena was packed to capacity for this wonderful event.

EDITORIAL

Welcome to the 15th issue of the Church Fora Newsletter. As always we have reports from across N. Ireland from church groups engaged in peace building and work to promote reconciliation.

We don't build peace in a vacuum. In Northern Ireland we need peace building and reconciliation that is firmly grounded in the context in which we find ourselves. For many it is not a comfortable place—we have to carry out this Gospel imperative in a context in which people hate, and until very recently have excluded one another for religious reasons as well as political and cultural ones; in a community where recent events have demonstrated sectarianism and racism continue to haunt us, where there are still high levels of fear, suspicion and mistrust. This is our reality but fortunately there are many committed people quietly working, doing what they can whenever, and wherever they can to make their community a better place.

Castlewellan is a good example of this. For more than twenty years a small group of dedicated people from different traditions have come together regularly in Castlewellan Area Bible Study and Prayer Group to reflect on the Word of God, to pray and to organise courses and events with a reconciliation focus. In February this year, as you can read in this issue, they formally launched as a Church Forum and they are to be congratulated on taking this further step on their journey in reconciliation, a journey described by Anglican bishops in Dialogue as 'a journey into God's intended future for humankind and all of creation'

Two conferences have recently been organised for Church Fora and Inter-Church groups. Both conferences have addressed some of the barriers to reconciliation in our community and in our world. On Thursday June 25th leaders of the EU assembled in Ypres to remember the outbreak of the Great War in 1914 a war which was

unprecedented in scope and savagery claiming some 14 million lives. Despite the vows of "never again," the outcome of the conflict only sowed the bitter seeds that led to World War II and more slaughter. And the nationalist tensions that set off the killing never really died — most recently resurfacing in Ukraine and Russia. At our June CONNECT conference with its theme 'Lest We Remember: Ethics, Memory and the Great War' participants explored attitudes to God and war responding to Dr. Johnston McMaster's challenging input on this subject.

In the Western conference 'Faith in a Uniting and Reconciling Community', participants had the opportunity to reflect on dimensions of reconciliation - political, economical, and ecological which need to be integrated with the spiritual dimension in the creation of a reconciled community. They had the opportunity to share ideas on a positive strategy for building a uniting and reconciling community in

Northern Ireland and within the totality of relationships in Ireland.

In N. Ireland we are on the brink of another uncertain summer. Elsewhere in the world Iraq teeters on the brink of meltdown and violent conflict continues in South Sudan, in Nigeria, in Egypt, and in Syria. It is a time to affirm again the work of peacemakers and peace builders. We recall the words of Dag Hammarskjöld: 'The pursuit of peace and progress cannot end in a few years in either victory or defeat. The pursuit of peace and progress, with its trials and its errors, its successes and its setbacks, can never be relaxed and never abandoned.'

May the God of love continue to inspire and directs all steps on that journey towards 'God's intended future for humankind and all of creation'

Eileen Gallagher

CHURCHES FORUM LAUNCHED IN CASTLEWELLAN

Castlewellan is the latest town in the province to launch a Forum - this Forum is the initiative of Castlewellan Area Bible study and Prayer Group and is supported by local churches and assisted by the Community Relations Development Section of Down District Council.

The Forum was launched on February 18th. After a lively prelude by young musicians from Newcastle Comhaltas a reflection with scripture reading and prayers was led by Violet McCombe and Noreen Magorrian. Dr. Ronnie Hamilton the group chair person welcomed the good attendance and paid tribute to Eileen Gallagher the Forum development officer with the Irish School of Ecumenics. He said: 'Castlewellan is privileged to have many organisations

working together to transform our community. The Churches Forum will give opportunity for the faith communities to be part of this transformation by promoting good relationships between the churches and the community and by sharing the Christian faith which can influence and set standards in civic life.'

Dr. Johnston McMaster the keynote speaker for the event chose as his theme 'Being Church in changing Times: Faith Matters in the 21st century'. He traced the history of the Church from a minority faith which had been persecuted for three centuries until Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire. Christendom then became politically powerful and the church imperialistic. That has all changed as we now live in a secular and multi-faith society where the church is no longer in a dominant role but like any other group has an equal right to have its voice heard. He suggested

the church here in the 21st century has a role to listen to other groups and challenge them with the Christian faith. Roy Crowe co-chair of Carrickfergus Borough Church Forum congratulated the group and spoke of the benefits of a church forum offering a community prayer fellowship, meetings to discuss ethical and theological issues and opportunities for shared action in the community. The launch was followed

up in March and with a very successful series of seminars on 'Forgiveness' The seminars were based on the documentary film 'Forgiveness - A Step Too Far?' by Lurgan filmmaker, Paul Moorehead. The film investigates an alternative to revenge: the idea of forgiveness. The film examines attitudes to forgiveness in the pacifist Amish community in Pennsylvania and also introduces people from N.



A New Forum in Castlewellan. Members of the steering group pictured at the launch.

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Ireland who have been directly affected by violence speaking about their attitudes to forgiveness. Here Christians aspire to forgiveness but in Pennsylvania, the Amish community consider forgiveness obligatory. Could forgiveness be part of the process of healing broken relationships here?

The seminars included a session on 'Forgiveness Prepared-ness: Nurturing a culture of forgiveness' and

"Forgiveness is Good for me: The psychology of forgiving' which was introduced by Dr. Stephen Coulter QUB. The title of the third seminar was 'Remembering and Living Memorials: Dealing with the memories'.

The series drew participants from many areas and Castlewella Forum are grateful to Peter McDowell ICPP for his excellent leadership and organisation of this series.

Since then this group have been very active organising weekly Lectio Divina, They have also organised a series of Lenten lunches which is now a tradition for them and which has over the past ten years raised £23,000 for Trocaire and Christian Aid. On Good Friday they organised a reconciliation walk around the churches in their town.

With an eye to their future programme they had a planning session facilitated

by Eileen Gallagher on May 27th and they will soon advertise their autumn / winter programme.

This Church Forum has emerged as the result of many years of commitment to peace building, reconciliation and prayer by what was originally a very small group of dedicated people led graciously by Dr. Ronnie Hamilton.

We wish them every blessing for their future work.

BALLYMENA BOROUGH CHURCH MEMBERS FORUM

Ballymena Borough Church Members Forum have had an extremely busy year and are now looking forward to a break during the summer.

It seems no time since we had our Advent series of lunchtime services in each of the main churches in the town each of the Thursdays in Advent. This was then followed up by our annual conversation evening which this year involved Archbishop Eamon Martin, the Roman Catholic Co-adjutor Bishop of Armagh and Dr Heather Morris, the President of the Methodist Church in Ireland in February in Gracehill Moravian Church.

However, all through the year we have been involved in preparations for the team from Ballymena that is partnering with Habitat for Humanity and are about to leave for Addis Abbaba, the capital of Ethiopia, on 7th July 2014 for 2 weeks working on a water and sanitation project. These preparations have involved many fund raising events

which were embraced by all the churches represented on the team and led to great mixing of the denominations involved. The crowning event of our year which was turned into a fund raiser for the team was the concert with The Priests in St Patrick's Church of Ireland on 6th June 2014. This involved a huge amount of planning and organisation but it was all worthwhile when the church was filled with people from various denominations who all tremendously enjoyed the evening. It was especially pleasing that the concert was able to take place in Fr David Delargy's 25th year of Ordination since he is Ballymena born and bred. Everyone, including the Priests and their accompanist Ruth McGinley caught the vision of the evening and to see a full church at the end of the concert standing holding hands and singing Love Can Build A Bridge was at the same time humbling and moving.

The Ethiopia team have had their commissioning service on Sunday evening 22nd June 2014 in Ballymena

Methodist church which was conducted by the minister Rev Maureen Hassard and involved Canon Stuart Lloyd of St Patrick's Church of Ireland and Fr Raymond McCullagh who is also leading a team to Ethiopia.

Ballymena Borough Church Members Forum is one of the community groups that have been chosen by Ballymena Borough Council to take part in a series of facilitation meetings to devise a sustainability and activity

plan for the next five years. The first of these evenings has already taken place and 2 more meetings are scheduled for the end of June and the beginning of August 2014. It is very encouraging to have been chosen for this kind of input by the Borough Council and is a recognition by them of the worth of the work we have been doing in Ballymena. We will all enjoy some time off during July.

Wendy Morton



'Faith in a Uniting and Reconciling Community' was explored in depth at Fermanagh Church Forum conference for Community Relations week.

BALLYCASTLE CHURCHES ACTION

Early in the year, Rev. John Stanbridge of Ballycastle Presbyterian Church brought to the attention of BCA the existence of the Causeway Foodbank and asked if we might be interested in joining the system.

The Causeway Foodbank is

part of the wider and well established UK Foodbank known as The Trussel Trust. According to statistics, 1 in 5 people in the Coleraine area go hungry and struggle to make ends meet. Those who are, for example, made redundant or suffer a family crisis, bereavement or serious illness can suddenly find themselves in dire straits.

The BCA Board were very much in agreement that we could be of help.

As meetings with Melanie who is Causeway Foodbank Manager/Project Co-Ordinator took place, we felt that the need in Ballycastle dictated that we should open our own Centre rather than have clients travelling to Coleraine for help. If they couldn't afford food, they wouldn't be able to afford



petrol, bus fare. Some of the Churches have permanently positioned trolleys in their porches for non perishable food donations. The two Primary schools in the town have had collections during a one week period.

Donated food is checked for damage and sell by dates, weighed and distributed to the various Centres. On production of a voucher provided by Social Services, GPs and other professionals, those in need are given a food pack containing enough for three meals a day for three days.

We are now well on our way to opening the Foodbank in Thyme & Co. the use of which was kindly offered by Tom and Eimer Mullin.

The first training of volunteers will be held on two dates, 17th and 31st July.

We pray that we will have the same degree of success with it as we do with BCA's first and longest running project 'Good Morning, Ballycastle'

On May 26th, as part of the Maritime Festival, Ballycastle Church Action held a Blessing of the Boats Service. As there were some very heavy showers, the service was held inside the Ferry Terminal. After the welcome we continued with a Bible reading by Kate Elliott, Co-Ordinator of Good Morning Ballycastle - Genesis 1 vs 26 - 28.

We all then sang, 'Eternal Father, strong to save,' accompanied on the keyboard by Lesley Stanbridge and on guitar by Mary O'Driscoll of Rathlin Island Ferries. Kate O'Connor offered a short prayer before Paul Kerrigan, co-founder of Ballycastle Community Development Group read from Matthew 8 vs 23 - 27.

The next hymn was "Lead us, Heavenly Father".

Rev. Fr. Brian Daly, Rev. David Ferguson, Rev. John Stanbridge, from the three churches in the town and Rev. Patrick Barton from Rathlin Island/Ballintoy Parishes stood together and said the following blessing:

At the beginning of creation

Your spirit hovered over the deep, You called forth every creature and the seas teemed with life. Through your son, Jesus Christ, you have given us the rich harvest of salvation. Bless these boats, their equipment and all who will use them. Protect them from the dangers of wind and rain and all the perils of the deep. May Christ who calmed the storm and filled the nets of His disciples, bring us all to the harbour of light and peace. Grant this through Christ Our Lord. Amen

This led us into the words of "The Lord's Prayer" in which we all participated.

The next item was John Masefield's "Sea Fever", beautifully read by Christine Mitchell BCA

The final hymn, "Amazing Grace" which was written by John Newman, a seafarer who later took Holy Orders, was particularly appropriate to the occasion as it was in the middle of a dreadful storm when he thought he would perish that he had his conversion. He always referred to May 10th as the

anniversary of his "great deliverance". Everyone was invited to board the Rathlin Express. Over 100 people came to the Service and of those at least 80 of them went on the boat to see the laying of the wreath on the water.

The final prayer was for those lost at sea, and their families, before the wreath was laid on the water.

Kate O'Connor



Wreath laid for those lost at sea.



Carrickfergus Borough Church Forum

CARRICKFERGUS BOROUGH CHURCH FORUM- CBCF UPDATE

Greetings! Before last Christmas Cbcf was working at our Peace III 'Engaging Community' project. We commissioned our mayor and Community Forum chairman Mr. Billy Ashe to facilitate discussions with a range of community groups from 4 different districts of Carrickfergus asking some leading questions of the 90+% Protestant community groups as to their views, attitudes and reflections on church engagement within their

community area. This was followed in early December with a church and community leaders visit to East Belfast Skanios and Oasis and Templemore Ave both viewed as 'best practice' church/community projects which could inspire vision and practice for Carrickfergus.

Out of all this came an Engaging Community report which reflected some positive comments but also some very challenging negative ones on which we have had some initial reflection / discussions with some the clergy but which needs the inclusion of a wider group of Carrickfergus Clergy. This we hope to do in the next winter term with further facilitated conversation between Billy Ashe, Cbcf / church leaders in Carrickfergus and community activists - conversations on the way forward for community / church engagement.

Our annual 6 week course with Dr. Johnston McMaster and

Dr Cathy Higgins in previous years has tackled some of the heavy weight discussions on Sectarianism:- 'Are our theological interpretations and practices Sectarian?', followed last year by looking at 'Building an Ethical and Shared Future'. Living in what is becoming a multi-cultural and multi-faith community that is also more secular, last March we decided to look at the challenge of "Dialogue in a Multi-Faith World" with sessions on, Engaging a Secular World, The Challenge of Inter-Faith Dialogue, One World Many Faiths, Making Sense of Jesus in a Multi-Faith Context, Spiritual Encounter in a Global Age, Celebrating Differences and Living Faithfully. The course drew an encouraging registration of 25 with some first time attendees, a good Catholic /Protestant mix and a few different nationalities. We enjoyed respectful discussion while grappling with subjects

that took us from our comfort zones e.g. discussion on how we understood the 'The divinity and uniqueness of Christ in a multi-faith context.

In January we Celebrated the Week of prayer for Christian Unity, its theme being 'Is Christ Divided?'. This was held for the first time on a Sunday evening in Downshire Presbyterian church with clergy and lay people officiating and a very large and significantly joyful cross community congregational attendance. Our fellowships nights have rotated round St. Coleman's C of I, St. Nicholas RC, and Joymount Presbyterian with our discussions and prayer focused on both church and community needs in these areas. The Clergy/lay fraternity has continued to meet as often as possible and lately with a wider number of Protestant clergy having met with Fr. Tony Curran it is hoped that more may consider connecting

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with the Church Forum's activities and goals one of which is 'to promote healing and reconciliation within the Church and Community' and be a more united voice to the community. This is our heartfelt prayer.

Our AGM this year focused on the theme 'Christian perspectives on stress, anxiety and mental health problems in our modern era' with guest speakers Mr. Noel McCune, a psychiatrist working with the Youth Board and Dr. David Ross, a GP working in a challenging deprived inner city area of Belfast. Both shared about their work and practice, meeting the many challenging needs of their communities against the background pressures of work, family breakdowns, absent fathers, divorces, low youth self-esteem and celebrity image peer pressures. David shared about the Karis Project in Birmingham explaining that it was a great example where faith communities could provide services to people

in their areas. Low key services such as individual befrienders, day trips for young families, allotments, language services, advocacy centers and food banks are very important supports. What would be of enormous potential would be a register of services provided by faith groups for GPs.

Noel McCune a Psychiatrist working with children and young people explained the different treatments that are used including Cognitive Behavioral Treatment (CBT) and shared his views on Christian counseling. He emphasized that the most important thing was to have a warm caring relationship with the person doing the counseling.

This was followed by Q&A discussions exploring many other issues like the effects of community violence, the influence of paramilitary fears, intergenerational strife, breaking the cycle of negative environmental mind sets against the backdrop of educational disaffection

and poor vocational skill opportunities. We also discussed the complex issue of gender sexuality orientation confusion with respect to religious convictions and homophobia. Here the church needs to be more open to discuss this complex issue. Altogether a fascinating talk and discussion.

For further info on our past and present events visit our web www.carrickferguschurchforum.org or contact us on carrickferguschurchforum@hotmail.co.uk On behalf of Cbcf., Grace and Peace to all.

Roy Crowe & Philip Orr (co-chairs)



Participants in Carrickfergus Forum seminars which were led by Dr. Cathy Higgins and Dr. Johnston McMaster.

COOKSTOWN DISTRICT INTER-CHURCH FORUM

Cookstown and District Inter-Church Forum had set a theme of 'Understanding and Healing' for the Year of 2014.

In January we had Rev. Dr Johnston McMaster as our guest speaker and he talked on "The Good Friday Agreement, 15 Years On"

On Sunday 19th of January Members of the Churches Forum and people from Cookstown enjoyed a walk around the Main Churches in the town, with the Clergy Forum. The walk began with a short service in Derryloran Church of Ireland, before continuing to Holy Trinity Church and the Methodist Church, where there was prayer and reflection. The walk then finished in the Paupers Graveyard.

In February members of the group celebrated another year together with our annual dinner.

One of our Members, Alan Marsh, gave our March presentation with a talk on "Aspects of the Great War," a topic linked to 'The Decade of Centenaries'.

Also in March we had a follow-up to our October review and planning day. At that meeting on March 24th facilitated by Eileen Gallagher the October review report was tabled and discussed. The discussions included suggestions for expanding the work programme of the Forum and ways in which the Forum can link with other agencies in a new Tri - Council area. Steps for the implementation of suggested new activities were examined and action points identified.

We look forward to seeing the new developments taking shape in the next year.

Our AGM was held in May, in Lissan House, where our guest speaker was the Very Rev. Mgr. Raymond Murray, a former Parish Priest from Holy Trinity Church Cookstown. Special guests in attendance included Bishop Frederick Herve, 4th Earl of Bristol, and a Bishop from the Congo.

This same month we had our spring outing to Derry/Londonderry and Innishowen, with stops at the Peace Bridge, GuildHall, St Columb's Cathedral, St Augustin's and the City Gates. In Innishowen we visited Dunree Fort where we learnt of its military history during the World War.

Foodbank/Food poverty Initiative - Libby Keys and Margaret Hamilton took part in a number of discussions

with clergy, SVP, and other agencies on how churches and community could work together to support people in food poverty locally. Following the feedback at a consultation event in March, the Foodbank Steering group is likely to put to the side the idea to establish a central community foodbank for Cookstown District, and instead to focus on how we can work together to support people in poverty across the community. Pauline Marshall and Mary McIlroy also took part in Foodbank discussions as members of SVP.



AGM Committee Members with Guest Speaker Rev Msg Raymond Murray.

DUNGANNON AREA CHURCHES FORUM

Our first meeting of 2014 was held in Ranfurly House, which is a new facility designed and built by Dungannon & South Tyrone Borough Council. The speaker was Emily Brough, the Good Relations Officer for "The Irish Churches' Peace Project", She told us how this had been set up in partnership with the churches and financed by the EU to see how existing groups can be helped. The project sets up inter-church events, workshops and community projects e.g. a clergy conference had been arranged in the Dungannon area and Dungannon Area Churches' Forum is hoping to have a workshop instead of one of its usual meetings with a speaker.

On Ash Wednesday a number of us visited Lough Derg. We travelled by minibus from Dungannon to the boat and were joined there by many others for a day of friendship and prayer. We attended a service in the Basilica where the speaker was Rev. John Dunlop. After that it wastime

for lunch which was greatly appreciated. There was time for a stroll around the island before boarding the boat for our return journey.

We held an Open Night, again in Ranfurly House. We were fortunate to have been able to book Archbishop Richard Clarke as our speaker. He told us his life story and what he had learned from the various stages in his life. There were many questions from those attending.

Our annual Festival of Praise was held on Sunday 1st June in a marquee in Ballynorthland Park. Newmills Male Voice Choir led the singing and the music was co-ordinated by Mrs Marilyn Nesbitt.

Recently some members of the Forum participated in a study visit to Belfast with members of the Sligo Inter-church group with which we have been building up relations over a number of years. We visited the 'Peace Wall' in West Belfast and spoke with members of a community group working on the interface. We also had an opportunity to view the famous murals close up. We



Dungannon Forum representatives with Riverstown inter-church group on their recent study visit to Belfast.

visited another community group in North Belfast to hear first hand what it is like to live and work in this area which has witnessed many incidents of violence and conflict but is now determined to create a better life for everyone.

Many of our group were struck by the visible evidence of alienation and poverty and the evidence that in spite of the peace process many problems remain to be solved.

Isobel Holmes

FERMANAGH CHURCHES FORUM

As in previous years, 2014 began for the Fermanagh Churches Forum with the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. This year our service to celebrate the week was held on 23rd January in Enniskillen Methodist Church with guest speaker Ken Twyble, the Lay Leader of the Methodist Church in Ireland. The theme for this year was "Is Christ Divided?", especially appropriate for Northern Ireland in view of the failure of the Haas talks at the end of 2013. The service was warm and inspiring, particularly thanks to the involvement of young people from Enniskillen's church communities, who performed musical pieces and read the challenging intercessory

prayers, based upon the Millennium Development Goals. The service was followed by refreshments and a chance to make and renew friendships. Despite the difficult economic climate, the congregation gave very generously to the collection which was shared between Christian Aid and Trocaire.

In March and April these themes of reflection, reconciliation and giving were revisited in our Lenten lunches. These events have been hosted for several years now, and have become a significant part of many people's Easter preparations. We meet on four Wednesdays during Lent, one each in the central Presbyterian, Methodist, Church of Ireland and Catholic church halls. Each

meeting begins with a shared lunch, after which a lay person leads a time of Bible reflection, discussion and prayer. These are wonderful opportunities to take a break from the day's activities to share thoughts, insights and friendship, and we were again moved by the generosity of participants towards our charities Trocaire and Christian Aid.

Another generous and supportive partner in the Forum's activities has been Fermanagh District Council, who sponsored our conference in the Manor House Hotel on 24th May. The theme of the day was "Faith in a Reconciling and Uniting Community" and our discussions, led by keynote speaker Dr. Johnston McMaster, explored the sadly very topical issue of

Islamophobia and models for future development of an integrated society. On a beautiful spring day, against the background of Lough Erne, hope and inspiration seemed to spring up despite the political and social difficulties with which we were grappling, and we left feeling energized and ready to continue our part in the important work which lies ahead.

The Forum's autumn programme of events will be announced later in the summer, and we invite all living or working in Fermanagh to join us. For more information, please visit our website at www.fermanaghchurchesforum.org

Tanya Jones

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LARNE TUESDAY GROUP CELEBRATES TWENTY YEARS

Just under a hundred people from across Larne Borough and further afield gathered at the Drumalis Conference Centre on Saturday 21st June 2014 to celebrate the founding of the Larne Tuesday Group twenty years ago in 1994.

The Tuesday Group is a non-denominational faith based community group that seeks to promote religious harmony and to improve inter-church co-operation.

After refreshments and a welcome to Drumalis by Sister Anna, all moved to the Heritage Room where the chair, Rev Dr Ivan Hull, welcomed members and guests to the anniversary meeting of the Tuesday Group and invited the newly elected Mayor, Cllr Martin Wilson, to bring greetings from Larne Borough Council. Among the guests were the Deputy Mayors of Carrickfergus and Ballymena Borough Councils. Sister Margaret Rose, one of the founding members of

the Tuesday Group, gave an outline of how the Tuesday Group came into existence in Drumalis in the aftermath of the Ceasefire of 1994. She showed how the opening of the gates at Drumalis to all had helped many overcome religious divisions in the community and encouraged all to always 'wedge' the door open, irrespective of how difficult situations were as this openness encouraged dialogue.

Dr Hull then introduced the two keynote speakers, Baroness May Blood and Pastor Gordon Graham.

Baroness Blood is well known as a champion of the underdog and deeply committed to creating a better and more inclusive world in the Shankill Road area of Belfast. Knowing what it is to live in a loyalist ghetto, she is no stranger to knocking down walls and building bridges in order to bring people together for a greater good. In her stimulating and humorous talk she spoke of the importance of people engaging together

with the right attitude and courage and energy if we are to see change for the good. She referred to the importance of her Christian faith as the foundation of all she undertook, opening avenues and providing inspiration to persevere through testing times holding on to the hope of a better day.

Pastor Gordon Graham had been the minister of the Elim Church in Larne for thirteen years and chairman of the Tuesday Group for three years. His first visit to the Tuesday Group meeting in Drumalis convinced him that 'oneness in Christ' transcends denominational differences. That led to the overthrowing of his prejudices and his embracing enthusiastically what the Tuesday Group was seeking to accomplish. Gordon is currently studying at the Elim Regents College in West Malvern, Worcestershire, and engaged in inter-church work there. In his talk Gordon reminded those present that Christian unity begins at the cross and that teamwork is essential: Together Everyone

Achieves More. It is a pathway that demands compassion, courage, commitment and consecration. He encouraged the Tuesday Group to press on with its challenging work of "building bridges not walls."

Dr Hull thanked all for coming and the various speakers for their talks and invited everyone to lunch in the Drumalis Dining Room. Rev Tommy Stevenson brought the proceedings to an end with prayer and grace before lunch. All who attended were given a celebratory brochure with stories of how the Tuesday Group has impacted the lives of various people who have been associated with it and of its journey along the twenty years since it was formed.

The next meeting of the Tuesday Group is on Tuesday 16th September at Drumalis at 11am, preceded by refreshments at 10.30am. Visitors are warmly welcomed. Readers seeking further information may contact the Publicity Officer at 028 2827 2705 or the Tuesday Group's website at www.larnetuesdaygroup.org

NEWRY DISTRICT INTER-CHURCH FORUM

In the opening session our discussion group focussed on Christianity and Judaism and how anti-semitism came about. Following this Rev Dr Mark Gray from Banbridge talked to us about the Old Testament. He then surprised us by asking what we believed about the resurrection. From the varied responses we will go on to talk about what we mean by 'faith'. As a follow up in the Autumn we have invited Grant Weatherall, a Messianic Jew to talk to us.

Johnston McMaster led us in a six week course about Dialogue in and Inter-Faith World: Sessions included - A secular World, The challenge of inter-faith dialogue; A world of many faiths; Making sense of Jesus; Spiritual encounter; Celebrating differences and living faithfully. This course

was stimulating and relevant as inter-faith issues have been very much in the headlines and it is clear we have a long way to go in creating an inclusive and tolerant society. The film 'A Step too Far?' about forgiveness was shown twice, followed by discussion with its Lurgan producer, Paul Moorehead. This thought provoking film features Alan McBride's story and situations involving the pacifist Amish Community in Pennsylvania.

We ran a course in conjunction with Embrace NI and ICPP, a course on 'A Cultural Journey'. It started with an open meeting and continued with two group meetings, finishing with a visit to Derry/Londonderry over two days.

We held an evening of sharing our faith experiences. In the Summer when most church activities shut down, younger people, having finished their exams, have

free time. So we have planned a series of four discussion groups for them, hoping some new people will come and discuss any issue of concern to them, not necessarily just religious questions.

Two representatives of the Forum were invited to an event at which an assessment of Newry and Mourne Council was being made

for a Customer Excellence Standard Award.

Our monthly theological discussions have continued throughout the year and we are very pleased that a small number of young people continue to be involved.

Brian Eggins (Co-Chair)

Pictured (left to right) are members of Newry District Inter Church Forum (front) Kathleen McVeigh, Anna Hanna, Mary Sands, (back) Jeanette McConnell, Aneta Dubak and Father Gerry McArdle.



OMAGH CHURCHES FORUM

January to June has been a fairly busy time for the Omagh Churches Forum. Sadly we had to bid farewell to two of our clergy members as they moved to pastures new. Both Fr Joe Gormely, co-chair of the Forum, and Fr John McDevitt left Omagh to serve in Parishes in Derry. We would like to pay tribute to the work that each contributed to the Forum and also to Church and community life in Omagh. Rev Joe Sweeney also stepped down from his role as Co-chair having served faithfully, alongside Fr Joe Gormely, for the last two and a half years. We would like to thank both co-chairs for their enthusiastic and committed leadership of the forum.

In January the Forum had responsibility for organising

and leading the Christian Unity Service. This year we invited people from across the various caring sectors in Omagh to take part in the service. We had representatives from Nursing Homes, Hospitals, Social Services, Community Care Workers and Family Carers. The service was entitled Christian Care in the Community and Dr Frances Robinson, Palliative Care Ward, Tyrone County Hospital gave a short thought-provoking reflection on providing pastoral care to those facing the end of life. She finished by stating "When we ourselves confront our own powerlessness in the face of death we can come to practice a different, humbler but stronger form of caring. We do this when we sit, not as a carer but as one human being with another, listening with our hearts open to the

experience of the person we are with." This service brought a wide cross section of the community of Omagh together to give thanks for the united Christian witness expressed through our care of the most vulnerable in the community. In March the forum held an educational trip to St Patrick's Cathedral (CofI) in Dublin and St Patrick's College Maynooth (Catholic Seminary). This provided us with an opportunity to build and develop friendships with one another and also to experience Christian Worship in a setting different to our own. Choral Evensong in the Cathedral was spiritually uplifting and the opportunity to attend morning prayers in Maynooth College provided a reflective start to the day. We also had the opportunity to listen to Bishop Pat Storey, the first female Anglican bishop, as she shared her personal journey to ministry and had an interesting and stimulating lecture and discussion time with Professor Michael Conway, Director of the Irish

Centre for Faith and Culture, as he outlined the challenges of engaging with an increasingly secular younger generation in relation to issues of faith and practice.

In April of this year I was appointed as Co-chair of the Forum and as recently as last Wednesday Mrs Sheila Cunningham was appointed as the other co-chair on a temporary basis. I understand that this has made history as it is the first time that both a woman minister and also a lay person have been appointed co-chairs of Omagh Churches Forum! We are in the process of planning a day of reflection in the Island Of Saints And Scholars (IOSAS) centre in Muff in the Autumn and also investigating the possibility of engaging in some practical acts of service in the community to demonstrate God's love in action as we seek to "love our neighbours as we love ourselves". Mt 22 v9

Rev Jane Nelson

PORTADOWN INTER-CHURCH FORUM

Following a rather uneventful year in 2013, Portadown ICF invited Johnston McMaster, Eileen Gallagher and Emma McCabe from the good Relations Dept of Craigavon Borough Council to join us in early December 2013 for a review session to plan out 2014 activity...this proved to be very successful and gave us a basis for our programme for the year

The following evening, we had our annual Christmas service, held this year in Armagh Rd Presbyterian Church, where a large congregation were treated to an excellent programme of music and song by the very talented children from the local Presentation Convent School. The address was given by Rev Keith Marshall - the present curate at St. Marks Church in Portadown, and the retiring collection was donated to the Food Bank at Craigavon.

Our first event of 2014, was the latest in our series of "Why I am" when we invite local personalities to talk about their life and faith journey. The speaker on this occasion was Rev Neil Cameron... an ordained Presbyterian minister, who had become an army Chaplain and had seen service in many areas of conflict, most significantly during the War in the previous Yugoslavia. It proved to be a most interesting and thought provoking evening.

Following this, we had the viewing of the Paul Moorehead film - A Step Too Far - dealing with forgiveness, which was followed by a lively discussion on many aspects of the subject including its relevance to the Northern Ireland of today. The Chair of the Community Relations Council, Peter Osborne, visited Armagh and Craigavon on Monday 10 February in order to meet some of those organising CRC-funded community

relations projects. He met with representatives of our Forum in Portadown. The visit was part of a series of engagement events by the new Chair who took up his post at the start of January. He was accompanied by CRC Chief Executive Jacqueline Irwin.

Peter Osborne said: "It has been encouraging to see at first hand the positive and often courageous work that is going on in communities across Northern Ireland to address difficult issues arising from our history of division. In Armagh, Portadown and Lurgan the Community Relations Council has been supporting a number of local projects that are making a real difference in building a more peaceful and shared society. The Community Relations Council believes that this work needs to be supported and encouraged." Eileen Gallagher, Irish School of Ecumenics support officer for Inter-Church fora, said:

"It was good to be able to share the work of the Portadown group with Peter Osborne. We were encouraged by his acknowledgement of the role that churches can play in promoting peacebuilding."

Alan Turtle



Pictured with conference speaker Dr Johnston McMaster are Portadown Inter Church Forum chairman Dr. Alan Turtle and Tony Creaney member of the management committee.

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 (E) gallagei@tcd.ie



Project part financed by the
Community Relations Council.