



CHURCH FORA NEWSLETTER

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COMMEMORATION, MEMORY AND HISTORY

Who remembers Slobodan Milosevic? He was a hero to some. To others he was the 'butcher of the Balkans', the person who brought genocide and slaughter back to Europe after the Nazi atrocities earlier in the 20th century. Milosevic was a Serb, bent on eliminating all non-Serbs through massacre and rape. Eight thousand Bosnian Muslims were killed in Srebrenica. Milosevic stirred Serbian nationalism and violence through the manipulation of commemoration.

Within Serbia there was Kosovo. Its population was 85% Albanian, with only 194 thousand Serbs who had the better jobs, housing and social privileges. Milosevic invoked memory of the battle of the Blackbirds Field in 1389. There was already a Serbian national festival but not of the defeat of the Serbs by the Ottoman Empire as it moved into Europe. There was selective memory. Mainly through songs the commemoration honoured a Serb, Milosh Obravitch, who in 1389 had made his way into the Ottoman Sultan's tent and stabbed the Sultan repeatedly to death. The reality was that in 1389 the Serbs had been totally humiliated by the Ottomans. Whatever songs were sung about Obravitch, the humiliating defeat lived long in the memory. In effect Milosevic was repeating, 'remember 1389', 'remember Kosovo'. Serbian nationalists were also Eastern Orthodox and their nationalism and religion were

deeply intertwined. The 600th anniversary of the humiliating defeat at the battle of the Blackbirds Field was in 1989, and Milosevic made full use of it. The result introduced new words to our vocabulary, 'ethnic cleansing', in reality mass murder. Milosevic invoked memory and commemoration for very violent purposes.

Was Milosevic really concerned with history or were his actions in relation to commemoration due to psychology. J M Roberts, the historian, has said, 'It is only psychology which gives a special tone to centenary events' (Penguin History of Europe, p 644).

History, not only in Ireland but elsewhere, is always contested, no doubt because history is less about facts and always about interpretation. The tendency is to read the past through the lens of the present and present needs. It may be the need to dominate the other, to establish one's narrative as norm over the other. Or to interpret history from the perspective of our current fears, anxieties and angst. Commemoration may have more to do with the present than the past. In this sense it has more to do with psychology than with history.

If the word celebration is used of past events in our history, then part of the Oxford English Dictionary's definition is 'to perform a religious ceremony'. This is why high commemorative events have a religious dimension, or a pseudo-religious dimension. The deity or God is directly invoked or the ceremony is highly ritualised, a solemn or sacred occasion with an underpinning spirituality. Especially if the commemorative event recalls war or violence, then it has to be invested with the highest moral authority. Such religious or ritualised ceremony may need rigorous moral and ethical critique. It may indeed have more to do with psychology than history, memory, religious or moral reality.



Participants at the Carrickfergus 'Engaging Community' event in September

EDITORIAL

Welcome to issue 14 of the Church Fora Newsletter. Once again we have a smorgasbord of Inter-Church activities to report on and thank you to everyone for shared information, inspiration, and reflection.

Recent weeks have been dominated by controversies about how we deal with the past, how we commemorate and how we use symbols and flags. These are topics Church Fora have been reflecting on for some time. Our recent CONNECT conference explored 'Commemoration, Memory and History' and Dr. Johnston McMaster's article in this issue alludes to some of the challenges identified. Attorney General Larkin's recent comments provoked a storm of reaction which served to remind us how far we have to journey to heal the wounds of decades of violent conflict. There are immense issues to be dealt with - issues of victimisation, violence, hurt, suffering, memory, justice, forgiveness

and mercy. These are issues which are at the heart of our Christian narrative and we are challenged anew to make God's reconciling love visible in our context. John De Gruchy the South African theologian emphasizes that 'cheap reconciliation' is not Christian reconciliation and in a comprehensive examination of the roots of 'reconciliation' in biblical and historical theology he demonstrates that reconciliation and ethics are inseparably bound together - to be reconciled to God and to do justice are part and parcel of the same process¹. But what of justice? It is a topic on which churches have meaningful concepts and resources which can be offered to the community as the search continues for meaningful justice.

Justice in the Bible goes back to the concept of Shalom, the idea that we ought to live together in right relationship with our Creator, each other and with creation. Wrongdoing violates Shalom and the response is to find a way to make Shalom possible.

The Biblical concept of justice is justice grounded in compassion, mercy and healing and an understanding of God that goes beyond the vengeful judge - God's justice is seen as justice where people matter and where no one is disposable. This biblical vision of justice was not simply punishment tempered by mercy but a vision of justice that centres on restoring and repairing broken relationships. The vision is of a God who reaches out to reconcile, to rebuild to repair the brokenness. It is the vision of a God that suffers with the victims but refuses to let go of the perpetrators, to let go of the potential for healing and redemption in every situation. It is a vision of grace.

As you will see in this issue of the Newsletter the work of Fora does not centre only on current political issues connected to peace-building, important as they are. Church Fora are supporting Food Banks, engaging with communities to identify needs and working to answer those

needs. They are also striving to be more inclusive as they reach out to younger people, to immigrants and seek to connect with marginalised groups. Some are trying to respond to human suffering and tragedy in other countries for example in Syria and in the Philippines

In this 2013 Advent season of waiting and anticipation we recognise again our world is not as just, not as loving, not as whole as we know it can and should be. Joyce Rupp expresses some of the longing in our hearts this Advent:

'God of all those who yearn for a glimmer of assurance on the long journey home to you, Come!

Come with a vast storehouse of renewed dreams, hopes and peacefulness.

God of Hope, Come!

I wish you all the blessings of this holy season

Eileen Gallagher

¹ John De Gruchy, Reconciliation: Restoring Justice. (London: SCM Press 2002.)

The Decade of Centenaries, 1912-1922 opens up huge questions around commemoration, how we approach it and how we use memory. It was a decade of violence as it was in the Balkans. Both the Balkans and Ireland were awash with guns and militarised politics. The middle part of the decade brought the framing event of all that happened in Ireland, the catastrophe of the Great War, 1914-1918, which was sparked in Sarajevo in the Balkans. The decade will see a number of key commemorative events. Will they be commemorative or celebratory? How much will be about history or psychology? And what do we do with all the guns, violence and industrialised killing?

We need to ask in Ireland, do we bring militarised mindsets to commemoration? Is there something of an

obsession with militarism? And how much are psyches dominated by the pseudo-theology of blood sacrifice, or supreme sacrifice, central to Patrick Pearse's view of the Easter Rising and the Ulster unionists' interpretation of their slaughter at the Battle of the Somme? It may be time to embrace a more critical commemoration, to acknowledge and unpick the psychology of our commemorative approaches. Uncritical commemoration may be an abuse of the past.

If we settle for selective memory and cherry pick our way through the events of 1912-1922, that will be an abuse of the past and an irresponsible way of dealing with history and memory. If we see our identity in one event more than another, or interpret a selected event to reinforce our imagined identity (and all identity is

imagined!), that will be more about psychology than history. Commemoration needs to bring to remembrance the good, the bad and the ugly. If commemoration becomes sectarianised, it will also be an abuse of the past.

So which narrative will we select, or will we be open to plurality and flexibility? Will we move beyond selective heroes and can we acknowledge and honour the courage, bravery and compassion of many in war and conflict without glorifying war or violence, or believing in the causes that put them in the mud and blood of the trenches, or into action wherever?

Celebration is not appropriate for any event in Ireland's decade or the Great War. We cannot celebrate death, violence and war. That is a culture of death and destruction. The alternative,

and there always was an alternative, all the way through 1912-1922, is to cultivate a culture of life and human and environmental flourishing. As for all the violence in this decade or any other decade, if commemoration invites more violence or a return to violence, that will be an abuse of the past and memory. Can the commemorations become a counter-cultural moment?

Inter-Church Fora can begin now to the show he way. What do we think about 2017? What was its impact on Irish religious and political history. Is it time for a new Reformation in a very different Ireland and Europe, and if so, what would it look like? What would it mean for all our Churches? How do we see the future of faith?

Dr Johnston McMaster



Women in Faith Members with 2013 Conference
Speakers Rev. Dr. Ruth Patterson and Sr. Anna C.P. (Drumalis)

SOCIAL ASPECTS OF A SHARED CHURCH

(An address given to Newry District Inter-Church Forum on the occasion of its anniversary event in October)

It is God's declared intention to bless every family in our society.

In the first book of the Bible, God promised Abraham " ... in you shall all families of the earth be blessed." (12:3) Heb. (6:13f) tells us: "When God made His promise to Ab., He swore by Himself... Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of His purpose very clear to the heirs of the promise,[ie all believers] He confirmed it with an oath."

God has solemnly committed Himself to bless every family in this society. What's hindering Him? Unconsciously, we, the Church, bear a large share of the blame.

God does things according to "the unchanging nature of His purpose. If we submit to His declared way of doing things, the blessing flows freely. If we do things our way, it doesn't. His way was for the blessing to be poured out through through a Church whose unity in love would have a decisive impact on unbelievers, as Jesus prayed just before His death:

"... that all of them may be one, Father, just as You are in Me and I am in You. May they also be in Us, so that the world

may believe that You have sent Me. I have given them the glory that You gave Me, that they may be one, as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be brought to complete unity, to let the world know that You sent Me, and have loved them, even as You have loved Me."

United in love, we spread the aroma of Christ the Gatherer, the Good Shepherd – we become dispensers of the "commanded blessing" of Ps. 133.

Divided, we grieve the very Spirit Who is the blessing, the life of the Body. We become living, walking billboards proclaiming that for us, in this vitally essential aspect, Jesus is not Lord. For reasons that are more important to us than His will, we will not live a shared Church life. We are unmoved by the word of God which tells us that Jesus died to gather into one the scattered children of God. "It's too big a problem. It may be a priority for the Lord, but it's not for us. We have to focus on the renewal of our own church..."

The word of the Lord through Haggai is acutely relevant to us today:

"Thus says the LORD of hosts: These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the LORD."

Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins? Now, therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts: Consider your ways. You have

sown much, and harvested little. You eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill. You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm. And he who earns wages does so to put them into a bag with holes.

Thus says the LORD of hosts: Consider your ways.

Go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house, that I may take pleasure in it and that I may be glorified, says the LORD.

You looked for much, and behold, it came to little. And when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why? declares the LORD of hosts. Because of my house that lies in ruins, while each of you busies himself with his own house. Therefore the heavens above you have withheld the dew, and the earth has withheld its produce. And I have called for a drought on the land and the hills, on the grain, the new wine, the oil, on what the ground brings forth, on man and beast, and on all their labors."

We are called by God to be dispensers of blessing in our society by our life together in the Spirit, but we hinder the blessing by our disobedience, by our division. We model disunity and the world is starved of the blessing.

Yet the will of God remains unchanged: that we should come to complete unity so that the world might come to faith and enter into the blessing that He has sworn to give.

The basis for unity is active faith: "The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love." (Gal 5:6) The faith that Peter professed in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God, the faith that Jesus said had come from the Father. The faith that John underlines: "To those who believed in His Name He gave the right to become the children of God." The faith that justifies, and opens the way for the outpouring of what Jesus called "the gift My Father promised", the

long awaited fullness-of-the-promised-blessing: the Holy Spirit Himself, Who pours out God's love in our hearts, which compels us to be channels of blessing to those around us, to transform our space.

The structure for developing unity is succinctly outlined in Eph 4, -God's plan and provision for the building up of the body of Christ "until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." God has not abandoned His plan just because we have drawn up our own plans – many thousands of them. "I the Lord do not change..." Mal 3:6.

We need to agree with His way and continually pray for Him to restore it, to restore the full provision He deemed necessary to bring us into mature unity in the Spirit. We need to line up with Jesus in His continual intercession in Heaven and with the Holy Spirit interceding within us here on earth "with groans too deep for words... interceding according to the will of God." We need to pray: "In Your mercy, Lord, build us together in Your way. Empower us to relax our grip on our blueprints on which we have stamped Your name. For the honour of Your Name and for the saving and blessing of all these multitudes for whom Christ died, fulfill Your eternal purpose, build us into Your Church, the dwelling place of God, gather into one the scattered children of God throughout the earth, gather us together here in this little province. Empower us individually and together to co-operate with You in this task in the coming year with ever greater eagerness and perseverance – help us to be creative in finding new ways to open channels of blessing between the members of our different congregations. Strengthen the friendships we are already building and help us to broaden our contacts. Use us in whatever ways You can as instruments of healing for the divisions in Your body."

Division is a poisonous venom. We have become blinded to its potency by the dust of centuries. I recently read a little article which started a parallel chain of thought in this regard. It was entitled "Shot in the arm for snake victims," and ran as follows, in summary form:

Thousands of people in west Africa are to benefit from a snake bite antidote produced by a Welsh biotech company. The snake, the Nigerian Carpet Viper is very aggressive and is responsible for more than 1,000 deaths in the country each year. The Viper's natural colouring enables it to blend in with its surroundings to devastating effect. Many of

the victims... die as a result of suffering uncontrolled bleeding and paralysis. The process of producing the anti-venom starts with immunising a sheep with very small amounts of the snake's venom. The animal's immune system then produces antibodies to the venom. Blood samples are taken from the sheep and the antibodies are extracted from the serum. These are subjected to a purifying process to produce the antidote.

In little groups like yours up and down the country God by His Spirit is producing an antidote for the poison of disunity. He implants a desire in people's hearts to reach across the

denominational divides and they begin to gel together. In time, pressures arise to split the group: disillusionment, misunderstandings, theological disagreement, personality clashes etc. But if they stand firm and weather the storm, if they rely on their immune system – the Holy Spirit within them – to bring them through these viral attacks, then antibodies, as it were, are formed which have far reaching effect within the wider Body. It's the process of what the Scripture calls "preserving the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." It demands great humility and courage, continuing prayer and the enabling power of the grace of God. But it is a

labour of love that God uses in the effecting of His eternal purpose to bless all mankind through the Church that Jesus builds. Such people carry the antidote to division in their person. They are Christ's unobtrusive ambassadors, dispensers of the blessing.

May you know God's pleasure in what you are doing, and His guidance in all you undertake in the coming year to encourage mutual trust and friendship between members of the different church congregations.

May you grow from strength to strength!

Eugene Boyle



BALLYCASTLE CHURCH ACTION ECUMENICAL ACTIVITIES 2013



The tragic death of much loved Margaret Gray, wife of Rev. Dr. Gordon Gray following a road traffic accident on 27th May 2013 shocked all in Ballycastle and all those further afield who knew this gracious lady. Margaret was a faithful follower and supporter of BCA, giving unstinting support to Gordon's Peace & Reconciliation activities in BCA. Margaret is deeply missed by all.

Dr Gray is known to many members of Church Fora across Northern Ireland

as he has contributed to numerous events, sharing his insights on Peace-building and Reconciliation here. He and the family remain in our thoughts and prayers.

- The monthly meeting of "Friends of the Way" continues. This group, mostly retired clergy, from all denominations, gather for fellowship and reflection.
- Sponsored by Peace III, Ballycastle Church Action's Peace & Reconciliation Committee organised two major series of talks this year: "Faith in the Public Square" Community Forums – main speakers being Rev. Dr. Houston McKelvey on the subject "Insights from a Journey" on ministry experiences from a Loyalist Estate to City Cathedral, via the Church of Ireland Education Office. Rev. John Bach, JP talked on "Crime, Moral Panic and the Real Challenge to the Church" on religion, morality and the justice system; Alf McCreary, Religious Affairs Correspondent, Belfast Telegraph talked about "Behind the Headlines" on religion, the churches and the media; Dr. Cathy Higgins, Adjunct Professor

Trinity College Dublin, Senior Researcher/Writer with The Junction Derry's Ethical and Shared Remembering Project talked about "Women's Place is"

- "Christ in a World of Many Faiths" led by Dr. Cathy Higgins and Rev. Dr. Johnston McMaster was a joint venture with Dunseverick Community Association when we looked at the subject of "The Challenge of Inter-Faith Dialogue; Christianity and Religiously Plural Environment; Confessing Christ in a World of Many Faiths; Inter-Religious Prayer and Spirituality; Celebrating Difference and Living Faithfully". We also visited the Peace Bridge and the Walls of Derry and had a very open and informative visit to the Apprentice Boys Museum and Exhibition and the Bogside Murals, kindly arranged by Maurice McCurdy of Dunseverick. The Lord Mayor of Derry warmly welcomed us to his city.
- 24 Hour Prayer Vigil - BCA were asked to help organise and support this venture on Monday 26th November.

Sharon Wilson from the Church of Ireland initiated this.

- BCA's "Good Morning Ballycastle" telephone and befriending project continues to flourish and we are delighted to acknowledge Lottery Funding for the next three years.
- Christmas Carols are the next on our list of activities. We will visit each others' churches and lead the town's Switching on of the Christmas Tree Lights" with a joint choir from Cross & Passion College and Ballycastle High School – sponsored by Moyle District Council and Ballycastle Chamber of Commerce. We will also do a tour of the residential and nursing homes in the town as well as the Dalriada Hospital and Knocklayde Special Care home.
- The next ventures for BCA are a "Foodbank" in Ballycastle and a Parenting Course to support families.

Maeve Walsh

Chairperson:
Ballycastle Church Action

BALLYMENA BOROUGH CHURCH MEMBERS FORUM

Since the start of our new season in September, Ballymena Borough Church Members Forum have been busy delivering our programme of activities.

We held our Annual General Meeting on 26th September 2013 and were encouraged with the attendance in Ballymena Methodist Church hall. Some Councillors and a representative of PSNI in Ballymena joined with us to hear Mr David McIlveen MLA give a talk on human trafficking. This talk was very informative and at the same time challenging.

We are currently having our series of Advent Reflections at lunchtime on each Thursday of the weeks leading up to Christmas. This series takes place, starting at 12.30 pm in each of the main denominations' churches that are in the centre of Ballymena. We started on 28th November 2013 in All Saints Roman Catholic church and will move, on each succeeding Thursday, to Ballymena Methodist church followed by St Patrick's Church of Ireland and finally West Presbyterian church.

In addition, we are putting together a cross-community team to go to Addis Ababa in Ethiopia under the auspices of Habitat for Humanity. This

team will depart on 12th July 2014 for a 2 week period and to date we have 9 participants confirmed from a variety of faith and social backgrounds. We are very grateful for the support and encouragement given to us by the local office of Habitat for Humanity in Northern Ireland, especially Patrick Marshall their representative who has been working with us.

On Tuesday 4th February 2014 we will welcome Archbishop Eamon Martin, the Coadjutor Bishop of Armagh and Dr Heather Morris who is the President of the Methodist Church in Ireland and the first female to hold this position. They will be in conversation

at Gracehill Moravian church, just outside Ballymena at 7.30 p.m. Prior to the public meeting we will be hosting a reception for invited guests in the church hall.

We are also organising an event which we hope will raise funds for the Habitat for Humanity team but the details are not yet finalised. This will be a significant undertaking and will be publicised as widely as possible so "watch this space".

Members of Ballymena Forum wishes all a very blessed and meaningful Christmas.

Wendy Morton

CASTLEWELLAN AREA BIBLE PRAYER GROUP

At our weekly meetings in a local hotel we follow a programme of Lectio Divina, meditating on the Gospel reading for the following Sunday according to the churches common lectionary. Prayer for our community and people in need is an integral part of our meetings.

We have investigated the beliefs and practices of different faith traditions by inviting local clergy to discuss these issues with us.

We reached out to the local community with our popular Soup, Bread and Cheese Lunches during Lent in the Community Hall. The donations were given to Trocaire and Christian Aid who nominated the group for an International Development

Award for our support of these charities over many years. Although short listed we did not receive the award but were honoured to be present at this prestigious event at Parliament Buildings.

On Good Friday a walk of witness and reconciliation took place in Castlewellan from St Malachy's to St Paul's.

At Christmas we organise an interchurch choir to sing carols within the town and at a community carol service.

During the summer the group visited the centre for Celtic Spirituality in Armagh whose vision is to inspire others on their spiritual journey. That is our aim also.

Following on from a planning session in May the group hope to have a formal lunch in the New Year and to initiate

a series of seminars on forgiveness based on the DVD 'A Step too Far' It is a thought provoking documentary, unpacking the Christian concept of forgiveness through the thinking of Anabaptist communities.

It also tells unforgettable stories of those who have experienced and practiced this doctrine of forgiveness. This film challenges Christian complacency about forgiveness and secularism's lazy assumption that Christianity has nothing to offer the public square.

Ronald Hamilton



Carrickfergus Borough Church Forum

CARRICKFERGUS BOROUGH CHURCH FORUM

Greetings from Carrickfergus Church Forum which has now reached it's 5th birthday and for some of us (I was reminded) it's the continuation of a 20 year journey that began with a cross community

prayer conference held in Carrickfergus Castle back in November 1993! For much of that we have appreciated Johnston's support over these years. Last June at our AGM we welcomed Mrs. Kathleen Brown and Mr. Robert McKee unto our Steering group. We enjoyed hearing Mark Houston, Mission Director of East Belfast Mission and ex Pastor challenge us about 'Building Church/Community relationships' . Mark noted his past pastoral church work was focused on 'Church maintenance & bums on seats' and not on serving community which has disconnected from a church that preaches Good news with little or no impact, but fails to show the love of God in practise. He pointed out that 'Loving your neighbour' is about Social Justice, that Jesus had a bias for the poor. 'Suffer the little children', 'When did I see you hungry, naked, in prison...as much as you did it to them, you did it unto me!' , and stressed the importance of Missional Networking. God engages with us as we get to know the people & community. Jerm 29 ' Seek the welfare of the city- In its welfare you will be blessed.' If They win,- You win! Resulting in Shalom or lack of it depending on how the Church invests in community.



Pilgrims on the Peace Bridge



The management committee of Newry Inter-Church Forum pictured with speakers from the Salvation Army at the A.G.M.

He then highlighted ways of hearing and effectively engaging with community. Philip Orr facilitated our follow up on this in September at YMCA Carrick with our Peace III project 'Engaging Our Community' with guest speakers Don Gamble (Cof I- North Belfast), Norman Hamilton (Ballysillan Presby & Moderator) and Gary Mason (Supperint. East Belfast Mission) sharing from their church/ community experience to an interchurches clergy and lay mixed group of ~23. The speakers challenged us to explore ways of working together to meet community need that are bigger than any one church can handle. The need to bridge the gap between the Church - with its wealth of facilities' and resources - and a working-class Protestant community that has disengaged from its church culture was the focus of how the church needs to respectfully hear their felt needs and re-engage with our community. Phase 2 of this project was employing our Mayor and Community Forum director Alderman Billy Ashe to meet with community leaders and a visit was organized on December 2nd for church / community leaders to East Belfast Skanos Centre, Oasis and Templemore Ave as 'best practice' church/community projects to inspire vision and

practice for Carrickfergus. We aim to follow up on his report to encourage further community/church engagements in the New Year. Having our grant application accepted by Carrick Good Relations Department, we have planned our next Six week course for Tuesday 4th March to 8th April 2014-facilitated by Dr. Johnston McMaster & Dr. Cathy Higgins on the theme "Dialogue in a Multi-Faith World". Its subtitles are - 1) Engaging a Secular World, 2) The Challenge of Inter-Faith Dialogue. 3) One World Many Faiths, 4) Making Sense of Jesus in a Multi-Faith Context., 5) Spiritual Encounter in a Global Age, 6) Celebrating Differences and Living Faithfully. In our growing secular, multi-cultural, ethnic and multi-faith communities, it will raise challenging questions for our once privileged and majority Christian faith, as it also does in fact for all faiths. This course will explore some of the issues that the encounter of other cultures and faiths present. It will offer an approach to engagement that takes dialogue seriously, commits us to better understanding, and suggests ways that celebrate diversity and builds a truly inclusive shared future. All are most welcome to join us on this journey. We rejoice in further additions to the Carrick Clergy fraternity

and wider interchurch cross community developments with funded plans in the New Year for a Clergy day away meeting with the Churches Together fraternity in Downpatrick.

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 over the Christmas season.

Roy Crowe & Philip Orr
(co-chair)

COLERAINE BOROUGH CHURCHES FORUM

Coleraine Borough Churches Forum are happy to announce we have officially committed as partner in the Causeway Borough of Sanctuary which was launched by Rev. Dr, Indergit Bhogal on November 27th.

City of Sanctuary is a movement to build a culture of hospitality for people seeking sanctuary in the UK. Our goal is to create a network of towns and cities throughout the country which are proud to be places of safety, and which include people seeking sanctuary fully in the life of their communities.

The guest speaker at our November meeting was Sean O'Conaill

Sean opened his talk by telling the background of his interest in the topic, "the challenge of secularism": he was a history teacher from 1969 – 1996; he realized some of his students did not believe in 'all this Jesus stuff'. As a history teacher he had to explain why there was sectarianism in Northern Ireland and through his study he realized that both sides fed off each other. When thinking about the topic of secularism Sean surmised that the pattern of secularism and consumerism is connected with man's need to climb the social ladder.

Clergy at this time were failing to highlight the problems that young people were going through in having a career and making a life for themselves. Sean felt so strongly about this topic that he wrote a book in 1999 called 'Scattering the Proud' and several articles. Then to expound his ideas on secularism in a visual way, not just in words, and to bring the statistics up-to-date he designed a power-point presentation entitled 'Unsolved problems of secularism today'. He also wanted to highlight the simple wonder of the great commandment, 'to love one another'.

Sean then illustrated the inequality of wealth distribution and its consequences by using statistics from the United States. Higher income correlates with higher education achievement and the U.S. prison population also correlates with the education gap.

In February 2013 when one thousand UK teenagers were asked, 'What would you like to be?' 54% replied, 'I want to be a celebrity.' In society today we can also see the onslaught of consumerism: the need for must-have objects.

Coleraine Borough Church Forum's Strategy and Action Plan were discussed at our November meeting. This was led by forum member Tony McGonigle

1. Communications Group

Everyone was reminded of the Networking Breakfast on Tuesday 26 November from 8.30 – 10.00 am in the Lodge Hotel. The group felt that an appointment of a PR officer was essential for successful communication between the Forum and wider community.

2. Youth Working Group

The members were reminded that the strategy remit was not to start a Youth Churches' Forum but to engage with those organisations and

individuals working with youth.

The Networking breakfast held on Nov. 26th was attended by members and clergy from Roman Catholic churches, Presbyterian, Church of Christ, Church of Ireland, Methodist and Church of Jesus Christ Latter Day Saints.

Robert Ritchie

COOKSTOWN DISTRICT CHURCH FORUM

Cookstown District Church Forum began its autumn programme with a talk from Rev Andrew Rawding with the title 'Treading the Verge of Jordan'

In October they had a day of review and strategic planning facilitated by Eileen Gallagher. This was an opportunity to revisit foundations, looking again at the original mission statement and aims; reflecting on changes in the context and barriers to progress as well as affirming the successful work done in the past decade.

Plans for future development will be finalised at a meeting in the New Year. In October Forum guest speaker was Imelda McGucken from Charis Cancer Care. As a group forum members attended Remembrance Day Service at the Cenotaph on November 10th. In November also Pat Rutherford gave a presentation to the Forum on "The Ballinderry flowing through Time and Space."

A number of members attended the recent CONNECT conference in Armagh where they had an opportunity to meet and reflect with members of other Fora on the current issue of commemoration and its implications for reconciliation and peace-building.

'A Christmas Celebration' in the Burnaven Centre presented by Cookstown Arts and Culture Development is planned for December 13th.

Pauline Marshall

DUNGANNON AREA CHURCHES' FORUM

We were blessed with good weather for our Festival of Praise in May and it was well supported. The Mayor and his wife attended.

At our first meeting after the Summer break, Rev. Andrew Rawding, Rector of Brackaville, Donaghendry and Ballyclog told us about his recent visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The highlight of 2013 was our visit to Co. Sligo in September, to meet up with our link, Riverstown Church Forum, Co. Sligo. We left Dungannon just after lunch on Friday and travelled by minibus to Sligo Park Hotel. After a meal, members from Riverstown joined us for a meeting at which Rev. Canon Derick Swann (formerly Rector of Drumglass Parish, Dungannon) and Mary Daly, from Sligo, spoke to us. Canon Swann talked about the difference in Marian theology in the Catholic Church and Protestant Churches. On Saturday we all travelled together to Lough Gill for a boat trip and on to the ruins of Parke's Castle. The next stage of our journey took us to the Marian shrine at Knock in Co. Mayo. This was a first time visit for many of us and our guide presented some of the history of this Marian shrine. On our return journey we stopped in Riverstown at Teac Ceoil where we were treated to local Irish traditional music and dancing. We are very grateful to our friends in Riverstown for hosting this visit and contributing generously to the expenses.

At our recent AGM the speaker was Kevin Donnelly Assistant N.I. regional manager for Trocaire.

Isobel Holmes

NEWRY DISTRICT INTER-CHURCH FORUM

Our 'Theological Discussions' have continued with two meetings discussing Miracles. At the second of these in November we were joined by fourteen members of the Coleraine Churches Forum. We discussed the nature of miracles, and whether they violate physical laws, as we know them at present. Strictly a miracle is a very improbable event that has religious significance. We looked at contemporary healings, including a healing from cancer by the Chairperson, as well as the more important spiritual healings. We considered people who had visions, especially the visions of the Virgin Mary by three children at Fatima in 1917 which led to a positive change in the attitude of the Portuguese Government towards the Church.

Hugh Montefiore, from a well known strictly Jewish family had a vision of Jesus which led to him becoming a Christian. He was ordained an Anglican priest, was Dean of Caius College Cambridge (when I knew him) and he later became Bishop of Birmingham. We also considered the total miracle of creation from the beginning as described in Genesis to the end as described in Revelation.

The Anniversary Symposium in October was well attended and very successful. The speakers, Mr Eugene Boyle, Bishop Harold Miller and the introductory reflection by Fr Gerry McArdle all focused of the need for moves towards greater Christian Unity, an imperative emphasised by Jesus himself. The event was chaired by Eileen Gallagher. There were many questions and contributions from the audience and people said that they were really inspired by the day. Spiritual unity is needed to break down sectarianism, establish trust in order to develop a shared society. Sadly we do not always understand each others' traditions (or perhaps



On a study trip to Ypres members of Omagh and Fermanagh Churches visited some of the vast World War 1 cemeteries in the area.

not even our own!). We have mythological ideas about each other's beliefs often based on out dated documents from the times of the Reformation.

Three of us attended the launch of the Irish Churches Peace Project at Malone House in Belfast. I had met our local representative of ICPP, Peter McDowell in the Summer.

The speaker at our AGM on 13th November was Major Carol Harris (Divisional Commander of Salvation Army). Also present was Major John Parrott who works between Newry and Dublin. Carol gave us an account of the origins of the Salvation Army, their emphasis on the gospel of Jesus Christ and their involvement with community problems such as alcoholism, drug abuse and modern forms of sex slavery. There was a lively discussion, questioning why they like the Quakers do not use the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion. The audited accounts were accepted. The new committee was elected, including three younger members, a Presbyterian Co-Chair, a Salvation Army Secretary. The committee includes a Quaker and a Church of Ireland member, the others being Catholics.

On December 4th we had an evening of review and strategic planning facilitated by Eileen Gallagher. There was a full attendance including two sixth form pupils who have been attending the



Theological Discussions. Their input greatly enriched our discussion on next year's programme as we strive to broaden our appeal and involve more young people.

Brian Eggins

WOMEN IN FAITH ANNUAL CONFERENCE

The Conference was held this year in Cavehill Methodist Church Hall. The theme was "Going Forward in Faith"

The speakers Rev. Dr. Ruth Patterson and Sr. Anna C.P. (Drumalis) gave very interesting talks on the theme. Both were very well received by an audience of almost 80 ladies. The beautiful music and singing was provided

by Susie Campbell with the audience participating in the joyful hymns.

There was time given for discussion, sharing and reflection. Everyone enjoyed the camaraderie.

FERMANAGH CHURCH FORUM

On a lovely September afternoon, members of Fermanagh Churches Forum and people from Irvinestown enjoyed a walk around the main churches of the town. In each church we had time for some prayer and reflection. We started at Sacred Heart Church where we were welcomed by Fr. Michael McGourty who talked about the church's recent centenary celebrations and encouraged us to look around the church and especially view the tapestry of the Devenish townlands and historic sites. We continued to Derrymullen North, Church of Ireland where Rev. Glenn West gave us a short talk on how the church was built in Victorian times and dedicated to the Irish St. Tighernach. We then walked to the Methodist church where we were welcomed into the church and new church hall by Rev. Eleanor Hayden. After that it was a short walk to the Presbyterian Church, to be welcomed by Rev. Charles Clements. The church had been completely rebuilt since our last visit in 2005. It has a very interesting layout with refreshingly light décor and high plain glass windows through which the sun shone. We ended our walk with a cup of tea prepared by the ladies of the Church of Ireland congregation.

Omagh and Fermanagh District Council Study Visit to Ypres.

In early October, 8 members of Fermanagh Churches Forum, some members of Omagh Church Forum and another cross-community group from Omagh, took part in a 3-day visit to some of the WWI battlefields, cemeteries and memorials in Belgium and France. We were based in the town of Ypres, which was so badly destroyed by bombing that it had to be completely rebuilt after the war. Our itinerary particularly focused on this time of division in our history back home in Ireland and how at the Battle of the Somme the regiments of the 36th Ulster Division and the 16th Irish Division came together to oppose a common enemy. There was a lot for us to learn about our two traditions and how the fallen were remembered as heroes by the Unionists while many were wiped from the memory of the Nationalists, especially in the Republic of Ireland. We visited the grave of Willie Redmond brother of John Redmond the Irish Nationalist MP. Willie was wounded at the battle of Messines and after being transported by stretcher bearer, John Meeke from Ballymena, died at the Catholic Hospice at Loche. We also visited the German cemetery at Langemarck where over 44,000 German soldiers are buried in mass graves.

Other visits included the Ulster Tower, The Thiepval Monument and Tyne Cot Cemetery. At all times we were struck by the number

of young men who died and of the number of names on monuments of those men who have no known grave. We also visited the Island of Ireland Peace Park, which is dedicated to Irish soldiers of all political and religious beliefs who died, were wounded or remained missing. It was opened by President Mary McAleese and Queen Elizabeth II on 11th November 1998. On our last evening we attended the nightly service at the Menin Gate where we laid 3 poppy wreaths from Fermanagh, Omagh and the representatives of fallen family members. All participants experienced this trip as highly informative and at some points emotional as we were brought face to face with the terrible waste of human life.

Study Visit to Derry/Londonderry

Our day trip to Derry/Londonderry City of Culture 2013 was a visit to view and understand the modern city rising above its past and showing the world what it has to offer both spiritually and culturally. We started by walking in the footsteps of Pilgrims from St. Columba's Park on the Waterside facilitated by the Derry/Londonderry Churches Trust. After learning about the ruins of St. Breacan's church and the voyage of St. Columba/Colm Cille to Scotland we passed through Ebrington Square where so many concerts have taken place over this special

year. We continued over the magnificent Peace Bridge to the City side. Entering the walled city we walked to First Derry Presbyterian Church where we learned how they had come through the 30 years of the troubles. We walked part of the walls where we were able to look across to a less intimidating Free Derry Corner and also the Long Tower RC Church. We had an interesting stop at St. Augustine's Church of Ireland within the walls and carried on to the Carlisle Methodist Church.

We were picked up by our coach and taken to Clooney Hall, HQ of the Methodist City Mission where we had the opportunity to discuss our experiences of the day. After lunch we had a short presentation from Michael Doherty chairman of the Derry Peace and Reconciliation Group who detailed some of the issues in the city which are still causing division and still need attention. This visit was worthwhile culturally and spiritually allowing participants to see how people can rise above a traumatic past and create a vibrant community.

Barbara Rivers



Project part financed by the
Community Relations Council.

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