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CHURCH FORA NEWSLETTER

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ADDRESS BY THE MINISTER FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, MS. MARGARET RITCHIE, AT THE CONNECT MEETING ON APRIL 28th 2008

Since taking office as Minister for Social Development almost exactly one year ago, I have been greatly encouraged to see the progress being made possible by collaborative efforts to offer fair and equitable government for all of the people of Northern Ireland

Indeed the existence and continued growth of your own organisation, CONNECT, reflects the determination of local representatives from all sides of our community to engage with one another across traditional divides, in an effort to collectively make a positive difference in the quality of life and opportunities afforded to all. In a short summary paper describing CONNECT, I was intrigued by what I understood was a reference to yourselves as 'Easter People'. The paper goes further in defining Easter People as 'People of Hope in divided communities'.

I find it very encouraging that church based representatives



Politicians who addressed the Spring 2008 meeting of CONNECT. Ms. Margaret Ritchie, SDLP MLA, Minister for Social Development, Leslie Cree, UUP MLA, Sean Neeson Alliance Party MLA, Jim Wells DUP MLA. They are photographed with Dr. Johnston McMaster and Eileen Gallagher.

see themselves as catalysts for change; churches working within their community and as partners with one another; also churches working with statutory and voluntary organisations. Churches and faith based groups are now recognising the validity of a genuine 'social gospel and social enterprise' which values the contribution churches can make to the relief of poverty, disadvantage and social deprivation. Both Christian and non-Christian organisations have much to offer as together we seek to address the worst examples of community deprivation, prejudice and poverty.

My Department is earnestly looking for ways to help faith organisations play their part in reaching out beyond their traditional boundaries. To this end I have asked my officials to finalise proposals to initiate consultation on the establishment of a new Faith Liaison and Advisory Forum. This forum will draw representatives from across churches and faith groups and will seek to build more effective partnerships between

Government and the Faith Sector. The Forum will seek to maximise the potential of existing inter-church and inter-faith networks. Through this initiative we hope to enable faith groups to make a greater contribution to the shaping of future government policies, strategies and initiatives. Finally, I am struck by a recent visitor to Northern Ireland, Dr Jill Carroll, a leading University academic from America, who in addressing an inter-faith group said:

'The course of history is the product of choices made by ordinary people. The future will be also. This gives us hope that we can influence our future through making good choices.'

I feel this is a most worthy quote for you 'Easter People' to contemplate today.

I very much welcome your contribution to the debate on the potential role and contribution of the faith sector as we continue to progress towards a civil and just society for all the people of Northern Ireland.



Members of Church Fora listening to the Minister's address at Stormont.

WHAT ON EARTH IS ECUMENISM?

Some are mystified by this word. Others have mystified it! Some seem to fear it while few understand it. Most perceptions are way off the mark.

The root meaning lies in a Greek word, used with some frequency in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible and found in the original language of the Christian testament. The word is OIKOUMENE. It means the whole inhabited earth, the entire human community, and today

we have become conscious of the ecological community as well. OIKOUMENE is therefore the whole community of life in all its unity and diversity. The ecumenical vision is of nothing less.

In practical terms ecumenism involves three interrelated and inseparable foci. These three concerns are:

- Inter-church relations – the understanding and relationship between churches;

- Inter-faith relations – the understanding and relationship between the world's religions;
- Social ethics – the primary ethical challenges of the world which are justice, peace and the environment.

OIKOUMENE has to do with a great deal more than churches. An exclusively church-centred focus is a distortion. Ecumenism is concerned with the whole community of life in all its God-given unity and incredibly rich diversity. The vision of OIKOUMENE calls and commits us to pursue justice and build peace at every level of God's creation, local and global. OIKOUMENE is ultimately the vision of SHALOM on earth.

Dr Johnston McMaster



Dr. Cathy Higgins with Members of Coleraine Church Forum at CONNECT meeting.

PERSPECTIVES FROM EITHER SIDE OF THE BORDER

A feature of the ISE 'Education for Reconciliation' programme over the last eight years has been the cross border dimension. ISE realised that if our education programmes were to make a contribution to bringing about a new Northern Ireland, then this would also have to involve the counties bordering NI. Progress in the North could not be made in isolation.

So initially four venues in the Republic were chosen – Ballybay, Raphoe, Cavan & Dundalk. In the first three we were invited by local people interested in inter church relations; in Dundalk, we invited

ourselves! These groups were established, to link with groups in NI and form a partnership. So, Cavan linked with Enniskillen; Dundalk with Newry; Ballybay with Tandragee and Raphoe originally with Derry and later with Castlewellan. These partnerships have continued till the present.

While separate courses have been held in each venue, the groups have also met for cross border interchanges – on some occasions two groups for a day or evening conference; and for the last few years, two weekend residentials, each for four groups. Generally, the groups have participated in

the same programmes, so the conferences have developed the subject matter. And, probably even more important, they have given participants the chance to meet together to share experiences and form friendships.

It has been fascinating to hear the experiences of people from each side of the border. The years of violence and political uncertainty have affected the experience and outlook of participants from the North, making cross community contact more difficult. There is a more relaxed ecumenical atmosphere in the South, even if just a few miles away.

EDITORIAL

Welcome to the third issue of the Church Fora Newsletter. In this season the countryside is resplendent with spring's increased light and new growth. We are blessed by the beauty that surrounds us and we are grateful for the peace which prevails in this land.

Our Newsletter reflects stories of continuing efforts to embed peace and reconciliation securely in our community. Church Fora and interchurch groups right across Northern Ireland and in the border counties tell of their active involvement in creative local initiatives to build community cohesion.

In the present post conflict situation a key issue is how to deal with the legacy of the past. Two regional conferences organized for Church Fora and interchurch groups have wrestled with the theme of 'Acknowledging the Past: Remembering Together in Church and Society.' This issue of the Newsletter carries some of the reflection at the conferences.

In our work we encounter many misunderstandings about 'Ecumenism'. Dr. Johnston McMaster's article seeks to provide some clarity on the issue.

The spring 2008 meeting of CONNECT was hosted in Parliament buildings Stormont where representatives of all the political parties in the Assembly engaged in a conversation on the theme of 'Building Community: Churches working in Partnership' Engagement by interchurch activists with 'new nationals' is ongoing and reflected in the recent week-end Education for Reconciliation residential in Cavan, attended by representatives of the Muslim community.

I hope you enjoy reading this issue of the Newsletter and that you take encouragement from the many hope-filled developments taking place. Again I sincerely thank all contributors and I welcome your responses to the Newsletter.

Eileen Gallagher

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But there, long standing hurts can remain hidden and not addressed. Bringing people together has enabled them to share their own experiences and understand better the position of others.

Cross border encounter will continue to play a major part in the community education of ISE. It is not only central to our vision, but, as governments on both sides of the border realise, central to developing

a better community on our shared island.

Denis Anderson

Denis Anderson, Lecturer ISE Education for Reconciliation Programme.



EASTERN REGIONAL GOOD RELATIONS CONFERENCE 29 APRIL 08

ACKNOWLEDGING THE PAST:
REMEMBERING TOGETHER IN
CHURCH AND SOCIETY

ISE joined with the Eastern Region of Community/Good relations officers in Castlereagh, Larne, Ballymena, Lisburn, Antrim, Carrickfergus, Newtownabbey and North Down to organize this conference as part of Community Relations Week.

The conference examined the contemporary role of churches and faith-based groups in Peace and Reconciliation work and the commemoration of historical

events in a new context. Speakers included Rev Dr. Ruth Patterson, Pastor Gordon Graham, and Dr Johnston McMaster. The interactive workshops considered, among other issues, the role of churches as places of healing and reflected on the question – has the current context changed sufficiently to enable us to commemorate events differently?

Rev Dr. Ruth Patterson was ordained a Presbyterian minister in 1976, the first woman to be ordained in Ireland. In 1991 she became director of



North Down Borough Council area representatives with their Good Relations Officer Lesley Johnston and Gillian Fay at the Antrim Conference



Speakers at the Antrim Conference on April 29th. Pastor Gordon Graham, Elin Pentecostal Church Larne, Dr. Johnston McMaster ISE, Rev. Dr. Ruth Patterson.

Restoration Ministries, a non-denominational charitable trust at the forefront of the movement to promote peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland. She is author of the well-known book "A Farther Shore" and more recently "Journeying towards Reconciliation."

Dr. Johnston McMaster is a Lecturer at the Irish school of Ecumenics, Trinity College, and Programme Co-ordinator of Education for Reconciliation Programme in Northern Ireland.

As a theologian of standing and with a deep historical knowledge of Irish Christianity, Dr. McMaster sees its ideological use as a continuing and searching challenge for Irish Christians.

Gordon Graham is the Minister of Larne Elim Pentecostal Church, is Chair of the Inter-Church Tuesday Group, and Larne Intercessory Prayer Group, as well as being a Chaplain to the Loyal Orders and Larne Football Club.

REFLECTIONS ON MY EXPERIENCES AS A MEMBER OF THE TANDRAGEE GROUP

I have always had a strong interest in theology and been involved with groups exploring this from both feminist and Christian viewpoints. However these groups met either in Belfast, Dublin or Dundalk, so I was very excited to find that there was a local ISE group in the village where I had worked for over twenty years. In 2003, my first year as a member of the Tandragee group, we had visiting speakers from all the different denominations, and so were able to get a sense

of the diversity and history of their churches.

Then in 2004 we began a programme of more challenging discussions around difficult issues to do with community and reconciliation. There was a sense of consolidation and a core group developing with a common interest in working towards an integrated society. This core group of around 8 people has stayed remarkably faithful to our vision and we have become easy with each

other as we have worked and discussed together.

I have particularly enjoyed our discussions around difficult theological issues. In 2005 we were challenged to acknowledge that the violence in Northern Ireland is reflected in ourselves. We also looked at alternative ways of thinking: for example about 'sacrifice'. We often had a lively tossing around of ideas and opinions and I found it particularly helpful that we had sufficient

time with, and generosity towards, each other to let the discussion unfold.

The use of Old Testament sources was fresh and inspired. I remember in particular an illuminating session on the prophet Hosea and his critique of the political and religious elites of his time. Clearly relevant to our present situation! We were learning that the Bible did not have 'one clear answer' and that we could live with ambiguity.

In 2006 we looked at liturgies of lament and praise. I found very beneficial the suggestion that lament could be seen as an assertive and daring dialogue with God. On our residential week-end together with other

local groups we developed a powerful ritual around the theme of Lament.

We also looked at liberation theologies through the theme of 'hate-work'. Looking at the racism and sexism in our

own society and searching for positive role models was difficult but valuable.

The group has enabled me to feel more 'at home' in my local community and to make

friends with people from diverse backgrounds. I am grateful to our tutor/facilitator Denis Anderson and to ISE for making this possible.

Margaret McCullough

THE 174 TRUST

INTRODUCTION

The 174 Trust - a 'Christian Community Development' organization - was established twenty five years ago by a group of concerned Christians including members of two churches on the lower Antrim Road, North Belfast.

Premises at 174/176 Antrim Road were purchased and became a base for a work dedicated to tackling many of the problems confronting the local community and addressing the real needs of those living in a materially and socially disadvantaged area.

In 1995, after much discussion and consultation, the Trust took the bold step of purchasing the church buildings (including the manse, church halls and extensive grounds) formerly occupied by the local Presbyterian congregation. This not only gave evidence of the Trust's vision for and commitment to the area, but also provided a new, centralized base from which to operate its existing programs and then to expand its community-based work in providing leisure and recreational facilities, as well as employment opportunities and most importantly, maintaining a presence in what had otherwise become a 'hostile' and 'alien environment' for organisations with an evangelical ethos.

For more than 15 years, the 'community care' model was the preferred way of tackling the social and welfare needs apparent in the community using paid workers (on a government funded employment scheme) - along with volunteers - to provide various services including 'meals-on-wheels', painting and decorating, crèche workers.

THE TIMES THEY ARE A CHANGIN'...

Whatever reservations, pros and cons, regarding the 'community care' model of working the government's decision to phase out the ACE employment scheme forced the Trust to radically review/rethink its position - even to the extent of questioning whether or not it still had a valid role in that particular neighbourhood.

The result of this process - which involved an intensive period of consultation with management, staff, volunteers, users and other community workers - was a renewed vision for the 174 Trust, replete with a new Mission Statement, which, in itself, signaled a new direction and way of working: 'The 174 Trust is committed to a process of community development based on building relationships with local people, working together to identify and meet local needs.'

The decision to embrace the 'community development' model (in preference to 'community care') was not taken lightly and was done only after much 'soul-searching' discussion - and sometimes heated debate.

Throughout this exercise Maurice Kinhead's definition proved particularly helpful: "Community development is about a process or a way of working... it is about working with people to address their needs, rather than simply doing things for people... Community development is about enabling and facilitating people and communities to identify and respond to their own needs, providing support and resources where necessary, but in such a way that does not lead to long-term dependency on our input."

As Conn and Ortiz affirm, when we work with people in the local community it begins a process of restoring their dignity and makes reconciliation with God

and their environment more likely. They also comment in this context:

"Not only should we look to the community for creativity, we must be willing to let the community control the process."

It became apparent to those involved, especially members of the Management Committee, that the 'community development' approach was the preferred option - prefixed by the term 'Christian', denoting, as it does, the distinctive ethos of the 174 Trust.

TRUST TRANSFORMED

Having experienced the 'transition blues' ('change' - often, with hindsight, a positive experience - is rarely welcomed by those involved) and survived, the Trust, equipped with a newly formulated Strategic Plan, began the new era with confidence.

This new direction and way of working (applying community development principles) became increasingly important as the Trust began, perhaps for the first time, to really engage with the local community and they, in turn, began to look to the Duncairn Complex as a venue for a variety of community activities. In addition, a growing number of groups and individuals made enquiries about the possibility of starting up new projects or relocating established ones at the former church buildings.

With a rapid increase in the number of 'stakeholders' - most from the immediate area

- the community's perception of the Trust (as well as the buildings) underwent a marked transformation. Locals had traditionally viewed the Trust, as a distinctly 'Protestant' organization whose aim, they thought, was to proselytize and something they were understandably hostile to. Now, in contrast, they started exhibiting a growing sense of 'ownership' which resulted in, among other, hopefully, more long term benefits, a noticeable reduction in vandalism to the property as the community began to take an active interest in the preservation and upkeep of the former Presbyterian Church.

The Duncairn Complex emerged as a focal point for people in the area, playing host to drama/sporting/leisure activities, community meetings on diverse topics from the debate on policing, poverty and housing.

This change didn't happen overnight but over a period of time, as more and more people from the area responded to invitations or attended meetings held at the Complex, perceptions were challenged and then changed. Now, having established itself as an integral part of community life, equipped with its own 'Community Relations Strategy', the Trust is in an excellent position and enjoying considerable success in fulfilling its goal of 'Building Peace and Promoting Reconciliation'.

Bill Shaw
Director 174 Trust



*Rev. John Dunlop, Rev. Ken Newell
and Fr. Gerry Reynolds at 174 Trust*

Fermanagh Churches Forum

ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE

I am a native of Ballymena but moved to County Fermanagh in 2001. I am married to a Fermanagh lady and have two wonderful children Rebecca and Sam. I commenced employment as Community Relations Officer for Fermanagh District Council on the 7th June 2004.

Within my remit as Community Relations Officer I have been very fortunate to be able to work in partnership with a very active Churches Forum. One of the many programmes I wish to mention is the annual conference where the guest speaker has been Dr Johnston McMaster from the Irish School of Ecumenics.

These conferences have explored many issues outside the traditional boundaries and comfort zones. One such theme was "The Role of Religion in Making Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland" which I found personally to be thought provoking and challenging.

Over the last few years County Fermanagh has witnessed a period of great social change that is mirrored throughout the western world. The phenomenon of inward migration by people from across the globe and especially from our new EU member states in Eastern and Central Europe, is all the more pronounced and relevant to us all.

In 2003 The Link carried out a piece of research in the town of Newtownards asking the question: "What is the relationship between the churches and the community in Newtownards?" The research brought clergy into contact with other ministers they had never met from other church as well as community representatives of statutory and voluntary and community groups.

An inter-church group already existed in the town which involved clergy from about 35% of the churches. They met together as a clergy fellowship once every two months and hosted joint engagement through a Carol service at Christmas, a Good Friday service in the town square and facilitation of the outdoor Remembrance Day service. The research showed that a larger number of churches would participate in a Forum

which focussed its energies on community, civic and social issues.

Initially clergy and church leaders from around 20 churches in the town came together and the first meetings focussed on listening to community representatives and finding out more about local community structures. One of the most important functions of the Forum for the community was that it acted as a point of contact to a large number of churches and some groups and statutory organisations gave presentations about their work or how the churches could offer support. The Forum provides clergy representatives for the local Community Forum, the Domestic Violence Forum, the Community Network and the Community Safety Partnership.

Some clergy wanted to do more and move faster whilst others were more conservative

We are no longer a society marked simply by two main traditions. We are rapidly becoming a multicultural society comprised of people from more than sixty nationalities who were born outside of Northern Ireland. The inward flow of individuals and their families is set to increase and poses real challenges and opportunities to all beliefs.

Fermanagh Churches Forum has taken up the chalice and been involved in many events and programmes promoting the work of the Forum, but also holding out a friendly hand to many people who have moved to this country.

I was recently approached by a lady teaching English as a Second Language to a group

of migrant workers seeking local people to interact with her class so that they could practice basic conversation. Fermanagh Churches forum members kindly offered to do this.

It has been a privilege to work with Fermanagh Churches Forum and I look forward to more conferences and programmes that promote Gods work

Tommy McLaughlin, CRO Fermanagh District Council



and because of this, and clergy workload a recent development has been to enable congregational members to actively engage with the Forum and take a leading role.

Churches in Comber have also be facilitated by The Link to work together for the benefit of the local community. Clergy were initially involved in looking together at the importance of working together to share resources and skills for the benefit of the local community. However, they felt early in the process that lay and congregational members would have more time and energy to dedicate to this work. Some initial facilitation work was done with a group of lay members of 6 local congregations and this led to the formation of Comber Churches Action Forum. The main focus of their work has been to provide a welcome to the local migrant worker population through welcome

evenings at a local restaurant. Representatives from the PSNI, Housing Executive, Citizen's Advice Bureau and local Council have all had the chance to give support, information and guidance to this hard to reach group, through the work they have done.

The initial research which led to the formation of the Newtownards Churches Forum can be downloaded from The Link's website www.thelinkcentre.org

Diane Holt



THREE ASPECTS OF THE FUTURE ROLE OF THE CHURCHES

In addressing the role of churches in society at the Tara Centre, Omagh, Conference, Right Revd. Dr. Michael Jackson Col Bishop of Clogher pointed to three aspects of the future role of churches. This is an abbreviated version of his address:

(1)

I myself have often said that Northern Ireland suffers just as much from religious indigestion as it does from religious hunger. A result of this is that the conventional language and ideas of religion are not 'new news' to anyone, nor indeed are the caricatures of the convictions and practices of people who try to live a religious way of life. The first suggestion which I have as a role for the churches is that they or we, if we are part of them, be honest about the chain reaction, and often the causal link, between denominational conviction and rank sectarianism. One of the big, bad scary words in today's society is: pluralism. But if religions embed themselves in exclusivity as a primary definition of who they are and what they do, then their shelf-life is limited when people generally are no longer looking instinctively to religion or to religious practice to enhance their understanding of their own self-respect. One of the basics of Christianity is that, in a primary way, it exists for others and for those outside the church. In technical terms, this is called mission. Too often mission has been understood as little more than recruitment of someone else to a set of

religious practices and ideals, the philosophy behind which is already obvious to you yourself. Such an exercise has also frequently suffered from that fatal practice of comparing the best expression of one's own tradition with the worst expression of someone else's tradition. The unchallenged articulation of exclusive certainties diminishes trust between individuals and erodes cohesion in society. While we luxuriate in a sophisticated two-party denominationalism, there is an Inter Faith reality to be addressed already in our midst. My first role for the churches is one of generous humanity in this new society.

(2)

Religion needs not only to do an autumn tidy-up in its own garden but needs to be confided Ireland. If I may indulge myself with another modern cliché, I do not think that the church as an institution in our societies is 'no longer fit for purpose.' But it does have to re-focus after a radical re-appraisal. In a post-modern world, political correctness has the capacity to draw out of people both defensiveness and aggressiveness. Those who feel that things which matter are slipping away from them in the new marketplace of ideas become increasingly protective, not knowing what is next for the shredder. Those who are impatient to 'set out their stall' feel that every opportunity for a fresh expression or a new make-over needs to be taken. Appropriate dealing with the past is a casualty of both scenarios. And so we can move



Community Relations Officer Jane Dunlop (Back Left) with representatives of Ballymena and Newtownabbey Groups at the Eastern Regional Conference

into a situation where – dare I say it once again - the churches bicker with one another and other people wonder why they cannot offer any recognizably common Christian witness to the world around them and beyond them. Over the next ten years, a thoroughly divided Christian witness will become an increasing conundrum and a focus of impatience to more and more people. The churches, individually and together, have a role and a powerful one in the Northern Ireland of tomorrow if they give expression to the divine invitation to find God present and at work in today's Ireland. I think that the churches can and must do this work time and again within all aspects of contemporary life – ipods, internet access, consumerism, ecology, justice issues – precisely because of the fact that they did offer hope and compassion in the decades of human suffering, intimidation and death. Most people think that normality is something which is always there. I disagree. Normality

is something which needs to be fought for, constantly re-asserted and thought through from first principles. So, my second role for the churches is to be agents of courage and confidence.

(3)

A third area where the churches have a role is in revisiting the use of language. Let me give you an example. Stick to your principles, whatever you do! How often have we heard it, or even said it? Yet very few of us, I imagine, are willing to own up to having prejudices. Prejudices are what other people have. As I see it, a principle is a beginning, a starting-point to which we return again and again to find our bearings, to re-position ourselves, to set out once more on the same sort of journey of life which we all must take. A prejudice is a mental attitude or decision where a judgement which we made once - in particular circumstances which we are convinced have not changed, or on the basis of something which we took over from

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others without really thinking it through for ourselves - holds fast and we will not, or cannot, deviate from it. The irony is that it may well have started out as a principle but developed into something non-negotiable, that is a prejudice. And this brings me into a further area where the churches, through their title deeds and through the personal example of Jesus Christ, can play a role in challenging the many noxious misunderstandings of power and authority. Not only is authority earned, it is also derived. Power, on the other hand, needs constantly to be tempered and challenged by a critical assessment of any entitlement to use it over against other people. It is not of itself bad but, all too often, is used to dismantle the authority of others – particularly children, women, disadvantaged, disabled, poor people – and to zap their capacity to ask for equivalence of status or make a contribution which they alone, from their perspective and position, can make. The churches have the role of being the place where this sort of human accommodation is modelled. So, my third role for the churches is to be upholders of honourable first principles.

CONCLUSION

The churches have no automatic role in the future of Northern Ireland. The churches however, in my opinion, individually and yet at the same time from an agreed common perspective, have a strategic role of both service and leadership because: they are, as we hear endlessly, present throughout



Members of Carrickfergus Churches Group with Norman Heuston, Carrickfergus Borough Council and Sean Neeson MLA.

The Churches Group are in the process of forming a Church Forum. They have had a number of meetings and a day of reflection at Drumalis Retreat Centre where they drafted vision statement, aims, objectives and a constitution.

the total community; they have principles and practices which too often have become confused with prejudices and exclusivities and yet, once rethought in the fresh contexts into which they wish to speak and act, can act as yeast. They, in fact, need the society at large to ask more not less of them, rather than allow them to move increasingly into the lay bys and cul-de-sacs of an emerging society because not enough is being asked of them. The society, in all its good and bad manifestations, will be experimental for quite some time and will change whether or not the churches decide to take up the role which lies at their feet, if not yet in their hands as a strong force for honesty, healing and cohesion. Members of a fledgling democracy such as ours in Northern Ireland,

living through the birth-pangs of political maturity and mutuality, have little time for theoretical musings. They, that is we, will be receptive to practicalities and living examples of generosity towards others. They will also, whatever their creed, be sustained by a Christian witness which derives

the parables of its teaching from unpretentious, complex contemporary life. And they will undoubtedly respond to an institution and its people who make the first move.



Eastern Region Community/Good Relations Officers who together hosted the Antrim Conference 'Acknowledging the Past: Remembering Together' in Church of Society on 29th April 2008



NEWS AND FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Dungannon Area Churches' Forum

Members enjoyed their visit in February to Enniskillen where they met with members from Co Sligo and from Brookeborough. They exchanged information about the events which each had organized. We are now looking forward to meeting again when we visit Lough Derg later in the year.

Three members of Dungannon Area Churches' Forum were recipients when Maundy Money, given for Christian service in Church and community, was

distributed on 20th March by Her Majesty in St. Patrick's Church of Ireland Cathedral, Armagh .

Recently we carried out a survey among members of the ethnic community in Dungannon. The questionnaire was translated into the appropriate language and was anonymous. It was amazing how many expressed pleasure at being here and commented on how friendly they found the local people. The biggest issue for most was the language problem. There are several English classes, in the area, for speakers of other

Cookstown & District Inter-Church Forum

Cookstown Inter-Church Forum has been following a busy programme with a trip in April to Holy Island, Durham Cathedral & York Minster and a Community Relations Week workshop addressed by Trevor Ringland on 'Shaping the Future'. In May they had a very successful seminar chaired by Paul Clark, well-known UTV broadcaster – its title was 'A Journey Towards Healing'. Speakers included Alan McBride. You will be able to read details of these memorable events in the next issue of the Newsletter.

Members are looking forward to their AGM on June 9th when they will be addressed by Most Revd. Dr. Alan Harper Archbishop of Armagh.

The annual barbeque will be held on June 5th.

Coleraine Borough Churches Forum

Members of Coleraine Churches Forum have their usual busy schedule of events and are beginning to put plans in place for the celebration of their 10th anniversary.

Fermanagh Churches Forum

Members of Fermanagh Churches Forum are planning a June visit to Armagh Cathedrals and a meeting with members of Armagh Churches Forum.

Church trails - which have been features of the FCF programme for a number of years - this year takes them to the town of Pettigo on June 1st.



Catherine Black (centre front row) Good Relations Officer Larne with representatives of Larne Borough Council Churches Group

languages but we have been told by the local college that the retention rates are best where the language is taught in

conjunction with social activity.

Over the last year we have been learning about youth work in the different churches.



Members of Cookstown Churches Forum with Dr. Johnston McMaster at CONNECT Meeting.

Members of Fermanagh Churches Forum, Lilian McKibbon and Emma Rutledge, with a representative of the Muslim Community at the recent Cavan Education for Reconciliation Residential.



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