Europe’s Peace Vocation

In the new and emerging world order, what is Europe’s place? No longer a hegemonic power in the changing world, no longer the most dominant or most important continent on the planet, Europe still has a role in world affairs and it brings to the emerging world order considerable global capital. The European Union is not all of Europe. There is more beside the 27 member states which will form the European Union after March 2019. But the Union is the significant block within the continent. Its role in global affairs is significant. The European Union has taken a leading role in the fight against climate change and made an important contribution to the significant agreement reached in Paris. The EU is the world’s largest trading bloc, and with its member states has contributed to more than half of the world’s development and humanitarian aid provided to the world’s most needy and crisis-torn regions. The EU has over thirty peacekeeping operations and civilian missions helping to maintain peace in several of the world’s trouble spots such as Mali, the Central African Republic, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.
EDITORIAL

Welcome to the 24th issue of the Church Fora Newsletter. It goes to print as the Brexit debate thunders on with what one journalist today describes as ‘project fear’ morphing into ‘project apocalypse’.

We are very much aware that churches and faith-based groups including our inter-church groups have an important contribution to make as the people of these islands seek to find ways to handle what the Conference of European Churches has described as the tensions that exist between ‘the desire for sovereignty and homogeneity on the one hand, and European cooperation and cultural diversity on the other hand’.

On December 1st we had our most recent CONNECT meeting on the theme of ‘Europe Beyond Brexit – the Challenge to Faith’. We were able to provide a space for listening to disparate voices as the meeting explored how churches and faith-based groups can respond to this challenge. We were privileged to have input from Rev Brian Anderson President of the Irish Council of Churches who in a thoughtful and inspirational address and in response to questions modelled a very different tone and approach which reflected the possibility of a better way of dealing with difference. Rev Anderson drew on Miroslav Volf’s concept of ‘soft difference’ - people who live the soft difference seek to win others without pressure or manipulation, allowing others space to be themselves, influencing others only through witness and invitation.

Dr. Johnston McMaster addressed ‘Europe’s Peace Vocation in the Emerging World Order’. As a new world order emerges, geopolitical power shifts with threats to global peace and security, there is need for a strong and peaceful Europe and Dr. McMaster made the case authoritatively and convincingly.

Wherever one stands in the Brexit debate it must be recognized that the vision for Europe shared by the Christian statesmen who came together after the horrors of the second world war went beyond reconciling states and aspired to unite the peoples of Europe around the notion of a “community of shared values,” values that are also at the heart of the Gospel message: Love your enemies, forgive others as you are forgiven, be in solidarity with the poor and the downtrodden, and share with your neighbour. In more recent years however in the EU social solidarity has been overlooked as neo liberalism gained ascendency and we now have a situation where a quarter of the EU population are at risk of poverty. People have forgotten that poverty and inequality have serious political consequences. Hence the need for a return to the founding vision and an emphasis on the values of equality, social cohesion and the ‘common good’.

When President Barroso president of the European Commission accepted the Nobel Peace in 2012 he quoted Spinoza:

“Peace is not mere absence of war, it is a virtue”, wrote Spinoza: “Pax enim non belli privatio, sed virtus est. It is “a state of mind, a disposition for benevolence, confidence, justice”.

President Barroso added ‘Indeed, there can only be true peace if people are confident. At peace with their political system. Reassured that their basic rights are respected. The European Union is not only about peace among nations. It incubates, as a political project, that particular state of mind that Spinoza was referring to. It embodies, as a community of values, this vision of freedom and justice’.

While the EU in some respects falls short of its founders’ vision it has for more than six decades championed reconciliation and human rights. Whether within the EU or outside of it the people of these islands have a vested interest in the promotion of these shared community values.

Over the past weeks Inter-church Fora have engaged in the Brexit consultation initiated by the Irish Council of Churches. The approach in this consultation is not one of promoting any side of the debate but rather in providing safe spaces for careful and respectful listening to all sides in the debate as people from different traditions journey together in a quest for greater understanding of the issues involved.

As we journey through Advent 2018 our world is facing many challenges globally, not just in Europe. We cannot allow ourselves to become indifferent to suffering in so many countries and the cry of the poor at home. Our Advent journey can be one of opening the doors of our hearts to compassionate sharing with those who need help.

With Joyce Rupp we pray:

God of all those who yearn for a glimpse 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! Enter into my memory and remind me often of the yearning of the people of history. Stir up stories of how the ancestors hung on to your promises, how they stole hope from tiny glimmers about you, passed on from one age to another. Help me to hear the loud, crying voices of the prophets who proclaimed that a new age would dawn!

God of Hope, come! Enter into every human heart that cries out for a glimpse of your love, for a sign of your welcoming presence, for a taste of your happiness. Be the one who calms the restless and gentles the aches of the human journey.

I wish you every blessing in this holy season.

Eileen Gallagher

African Republic and in the seas off Somalia. This is what you expect from a community founded on the ethical and moral principles of justice, peace and reconciliation. It is what an ethics based Europe does in the world and it is significant. (Europe’s Vocation to Promote Peace in the World, COMECE, 2016, p7).

But this same European Union and the continent faces threats to peace and democracy. At the 11 November commemoration of the ending of WWI in Paris, Angela Merkel feared that ‘blinaked nationalism’ threatens the European peace project born after WW2. ‘The peace we take for granted is far from being assured, and we must fight for it.’ Also
in Paris French President Emmanuel Macron said that France in its most patriotic hours, ‘believed in universal values, exactly the opposite of people who consider only their own interests. For patriotism is the exact opposite of nationalism. Nationalism is the betrayal of patriotism. When one says, ‘Our interests first and the others don’t matter’, one erases what is most precious in a nation... it’s moral values,’ (Irish Times, 12 November 2018). A week later in Berlin Macron spoke of nationalism without memче nationalism that forgets the horrors and history created by nationalism. Macron was concerned as is Merkel that the rise in nationalism in parts of Europe today and the USA is seriously forgetful of the catastrophic twentieth century. The twentieth century has been too quickly forgotten.

Merkel and Macron are the intellectual and moral leaders of the Atlantic-Western world, and it is hugely significant that France and Germany are the key players as they have been in the European peace project. Their voices are together in the vanguard of shaping a European peace vocation in the changing world order. As a new world order emerges, as geopolitical power shifts with threats to global peace and security, there is need for a strong and peaceful Europe, a Europe with a peace vocation in the twenty-first century world, a Europe at peace and for peace globally. The European Union is a peace project founded on values and especially at this point in history the EU and its member states have a moral responsibility to share and promote universal values beyond their borders. Europe cannot close in on itself and as Macron warned, it is not a time for isolationism or separatism. Europe has a role with and for other continents to help build peace in Europe and throughout the world.

Europe’s peace vocation has at least two strands. One is pre-emptive peace building which is the ethical imperative to prevent situations in which the only choice is between unacceptable violent alternatives. Making sure that a potentially violent conflict can be transformed and managed so that the use of force is prevented. Europe has a global role in such pre-emptive peacebuilding. This also extends to post conflict management and reconciliation. As the German Catholic Bishops said, ‘There is no peace without reconciliation and no reconciliation without truth and justice.’ (COMECE, pp12-14)

The second strand is peace through justice. As a Vatican II document stressed with reference to Isaiah 32v17, ‘peace is an enterprise of justice.’ The justice without which there is no peace is the justice of human rights, the justice of freedom for all and socio-economic justice and environmental justice. These are the commitments of an ethics-based Europe. (COMECE, pp 15-18). This is the shape of Europe’s peace vocation in and with the world, what Europe is for in a changing world order. And as the world order changes and a major threat to global peace and security is US-Chinese rivalry, a strong, ethical Europe of justice and peace is needed. There is no longer and there will be no return to European global hegemony, but there is a real European peace vocation in the world. It is beyond European self-interest and nationalistic self-interest. It involves a tenacious solidarity with the world, especially the vulnerable and poor of the world. Europe has a peace vocation. Let’s hope the vocation can be realised in this century.

In ending what does this mean for European Churches and faith communities? What does it mean for Irish churches and people of faith? As members of Protestant Churches we belong to the Conference of European Churches. As Catholics we belong to COMECE, the Catholic Commission/Justice and Peace Europe. Both of these are Brussels-based and together they frequently meet with the European Institutions. We need to be aware of their publications and documents, their faith and ethical policies in relation to European and global issues.

As Irish people of faith we need to develop a public theology around those two strands of pre-emptive peace and peace through justice, including the various strands of justice. At all levels we need to give in-depth thought and reflection to such public theology and articulate an applied social ethics rooted in universal values.

We need also to engage with the world or neighbour religions as the world order changes. The study and understanding of religions and value systems is more important than ever as we live in a globalised world. From formal school education to life long learning and Christian community education, we need an awareness and understanding of the world’s religions which in their essence and at their best are the world’s wisdom traditions. In the last two years I have been involved with the Catholic Archdiocese of Armagh in three programmes. In Armagh an accredited course through Maynooth University looked at Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Confucianism. A second diocesan course in Stewartstown looked at interfaith dialogue in relation to the three Abrahamic faiths.

Omagh Forum celebrate with Bob Longwood on a very special occasion.
A Dundalk course on one evening explored the image or vision of God or the sacred in Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Hinduism. These are the kind of courses we need to be picking up in local Fora, congregations, church bodies and in schools. Especially if Asia and China in particular are going to dominate our world, we will need an awareness of Confucianism and Hinduism. They are the wisdom traditions of the next two superpowers.

China and India.

In the next weeks we will hear again the Christmas narratives, those wonderful stories retold through readings or nativity plays or carols and choral pieces. Luke’s shepherds and angels will be to the fore. Don’t miss the use of so much Roman imperial vocabulary in Luke’s text. Maybe one word in particular as Luke puts forward an alternative vision and practice of peace in a Roman imperial, superpower dominated world. A ‘host of angels’ sing ‘peace on earth’. The word host is the Roman word for army, Rome’s mighty military machine through which the empire believed it’s conquest and military victory and control brought peace on earth. Luke is telling another story and singing another song. This is an alternative army of just peace makers who not only sing but are active in the world insisting that peace does not come through military might, military security, conquest, victory, but through justice, social, political and ecological justice. This is our vocation as people of faith in the world. It is also Europe’s peace vocation. Happy Advent! Happy Christmas! Peace on earth!

Dr Johnston McMaster
Advent 2018

BALLYMENA CHURCH MEMBERS FORUM

We held our AGM 2018 on Wednesday 26 September in Montgomery’s Restaurant Ballymena. Eileen Gallagher conducted the election of office bearers and steering committee. Jennifer McMerson and Phoebe McDonald were confirmed as Chairperson and Vice Chairperson respectively for a second year. Sally Ann Johnston, Wilbert Morton, Noreen Dorman, Norman Hamilton, Sean O’Boyle and John Stewart were re-elected unanimously as members of committee. After many years service St Clair Beattie retired from the committee. Barbara Hutchinson has since been co-opted to the committee. The AGM was followed by a challenging joint presentation from Reverend Stevie Stockman and Father Martin Magill entitled ‘Generous Grace in Faith and Fellowship’. Light refreshments were served to end the evening.

Small Worlds Café
In partnership with Inter Ethnic Forum (Mid and East Antrim) we ran a Small Worlds workshop on Monday evening 22 October in Montgomery’s Restaurant. Stephanie Mitchell, Belfast Friendship Club and Denise Wright, Embrace NI facilitated the workshop which was attended by some twenty members and friends of Ballymena Church Members Forum and interested people from several local congregations and fellowships. The café-style event made way for connections through short but meaningful encounters with people from diverse backgrounds who hosted tables around which participants circulated. Table hosts who had been studying, living and working in Northern Ireland for several years came from Bangladesh, Romania, Somalia and Syria. They represented a diverse mix of immigrants: university students, migrant workers, refugees and asylum seekers. The event was supported under the Good Relations Programme of Mid and East Antrim Borough Council. Advent Services

The annual interdenominational lunchtime services have been arranged to run on Thursdays 29 November and 6,13 and 20 December 2018. The services starting at 12.30pm will be hosted by St Patrick’s, First Ballymena Presbyterian, All Saints and Ballymena Methodist Church. Light refreshments will be served after each service.

Jennifer McMerson

CASTLEWELLAN CHURCHES FORUM

To be a witness to the Gospel and salt and light in our community we continue to derive inspiration from our Bible/Prayer Group which meets every Monday.

For the first six months of the year our programme centred on Lectio Divina, a study of the Gospel reading for the following Sunday appointed in the Calendar for the Christian year.

For the latter part of the year the group’s focus was on Paul’s letter to the Galatians and the lessons applicable to the church today. During our meetings members contributed personal reflections leading to a time of prayer.

The group developed a concern for community issues some years ago following LSE courses and the Irish Churches Peace Project. With the
support of the local churches we were reconstituted as the Interchurch Forum and became more visible in the public square.

On Good Friday we organised a Silent Walk of Witness through the town. Supported by many church members a cross was carried through the town linking St Malachy’s Catholic Church with St. Paul’s Church of Ireland.

During Lent we served Soup Lunches with bread and cheese every Thursday in the Community Centre.

This cross community event this year raised £2,000 for Trocaire and Christian Aid working for the relief of poorer communities overseas.

Our presence in the public square was significantly enhanced with the formation of an interchurch choir. No audition is required for 30 members who meet just for the joy of singing together. Their repertoire of gospel and popular songs has been performed in concerts, carol services, residential homes, churches, the Castlewelian’s summer festival and even the Horse Show.

There are 2 church fora in the Newry and Mourne and Down District Council Area. Through joint meetings we have formed new relationships, which have given us new perspectives and deeper understanding of other faith communities in a larger urban setting. Newry Forum invited us to visit Cavan County Museum where we experienced the challenge of life in the trenches of Flanders or the streets of Dublin in 1916. We invited Newry to join us on a summer excursion to Darkley House in South Armagh to learn about the Cross Fire Trust, building cross community relations in the border region.

25 years ago an informal Bible Prayer Group was begun by one man – Cahal King to bring Catholic and Protestants together and to a knowledge of God’s Word. Today the Castlewelian Churches Forum is his Legacy.

Ronne Hamilton

COOKSTOWN AND DISTRICT INTER CHURCH FORUM

After a lovely summer break Cookstown and District Inter Church Forum resumed in September with a Heritage Trip, from 11th – 13th September, to Athlone and Mullingar via Irvinestown, Co. Fermanagh. The theme was Exploring Celtic Christianity and the first stop was Irvinestown where we visited the Garden of the Celtic Saints and had a guided tour of the beautiful wood carvings of saints from different aspects of Christian life. These were carved by Jonas Raikas a native of Lithuania who came to work in Irvinestown in 2007. There is also a section depicting the Great Famine in Ireland. It’s well worth a visit. In the afternoon we travelled on to Mullingar where we stayed in the Bloomfield House Hotel and Spa and enjoyed fellowship and fun together.

The next day we travelled to Athlone to board a replica Viking boat for an interesting mini cruise on the River Shannon to Clonmacnoise. Clonmacnoise Monastery was founded in 548/549 by St Ciaran assisted by Prince Dermot. There is a lot to see on the site and a guided tour by a retired priest helped our understanding of its importance in Europe.

On the last day we spent the morning at Belvedere House and Gardens, a hunting lodge which was built in 1740. It is noted for its famous plaster work by a French stuccadore. There is a Victorian walled garden, a lakeside walk and the largest folly in Ireland built as the result of a feud between two brothers.

The guest speaker in October was Rev Dr Frank Sellars, a former moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, and he spoke on the topic ‘My Life, my Faith, my Work’. On Remembrance Sunday a number of Forum members attended the Remembrance Service at the Cenotaph in Cookstown and two members of committee laid a wreath as part of the wreath laying ceremony.

The guest speaker at the November meeting was Dr Trevor Parkhill who is a historian, a teacher, an archivist at the Public Records Office and former Keeper of History in the Ulster Museum. He was speaking on the topic ‘Who said it didn’t happen here? The Great Famine of 1845–1850’. This was most interesting as he addressed the various reasons for the famine, how it was managed by the government, and posed questions to which there are no answers. He related his presentation throughout to the Cookstown area which was of great interest to his audience who had many questions and comments for him.

In December a series of Advent talks will be held again from 12.30pm – 2pm on the four Fridays leading up to Christmas. The venues are the church halls and a light lunch will be served. In addition the annual Carol Service will take place in the town centre at the Christmas Tree followed by refreshments, tea/coffee with mince pies. That takes us up to Christmas and we would like to wish everyone a Happy Christmas and a healthy and Happy New Year.

GREETINGS FROM OMAGH

In recent months the Omagh Forum has had several significant events including the marking of one very special event - the 100th birthday of one of the members who is very active in Forum life, Bob Lingwood; a public meeting during Community Relations week with speaker Fergus O’Ferrall and you can read an extract from his address below. The Forum also co-ordinated Community Carol singing accompanied by St Eugene’s Band and Hazel Ward Theatre children dramatising the Christmas story in the town centre on Saturday afternoon.

Extract from Dr. Fergus O’Ferrall’s address on reconciliation in Omagh

Christian reconciliation must be explored, understood and adopted as core to the mission of Christianity in Ireland— if currently divided communities are to move beyond ‘peaceful co-existence’ model – which has left the Churches ‘captive’ to their historic confessional tribes. I term this ‘moment of truth’ our Irish ‘Ephesian Moment’: in Ephesians chapter two the radical differences between Gentiles and Jews were subsumed into
a unity of diverse peoples into the ‘one body’ because there is only ‘One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism, One God’: only together could such different cultural and historic entities achieve their truly human flourishing in the household of God. Our Churches are called now to an ‘Irish Epiphany Moment’ in order to be effective in their ministry of reconciliation.

Churches working together in what needs to be new ecumenical instruments, resourced to bring forward a new ecumenical and contextual public theology centered upon human flourishing and reconciliation, will be enabled to offer the peoples on this island a new and alternative narrative and a new project of human flourishing. This costly pathway to dismantle all the institutional and doctrinal barriers that inhibit human flourishing requires what some of us have called a ‘Coalition of Hope’ which is so badly needed for the future. [See A Dialogue of Hope Critical Thinking For Critical Times, ed. Gerry O’Hanlon SJ, Dublin, 2017].

Churches, working together, need to bring forward a rich vision of shalom and reconciliation that eliminates fear of the ‘other’ and addresses positively the sense of victimhood so pervasive in Northern Ireland. Churches need to ensure that memories are rightly kept with the common purpose of building in solidarity the common good; to nurture the quiet attitudinal changes at local level – in the grassroots and underground where ultimately shifts in public opinion occurs. Churches are called, I believe, to acts of transcendence – to transcend not only their culpability for the past – through repentance and lament – but also many of their doctrinal differences – which are increasingly opaque and meaningless to the populations for whom they are in mission – but additionally to transcend their polite ecumenical contacts and to reimagine the potential for the Good News of Jesus for reconciliation which they all share.

The grim future for the Irish Churches who choose to be ‘captive’ to their past and to their own communities is that they will be increasingly marginal to secular and pluralist society mired in its own lost purpose and relevance as they decay. The Churches, however, still have a significant collective potential – and if they act together they gain immense credibility for their message – to exercise what may be called ‘soft power’ – the ability to set the agenda in ways that shape the preferences of others and which invite encounters between hitherto divided congregations: thereby they facilitate the laity and indeed the general public to become proactive in Christian reconciliation. Imaginative, courageous and prophetic leadership is now called for in our context to change the current intransigent agendas and the historic sense of fatalism that sees Northern Ireland doomed to endless cycles of sectarian division or even further conflicts.

The Irish Churches, I believe, are now challenged by the ‘signs of our times’ to what has been called in another vexed context ‘Living Reconciliation’. [see Phil Groves and Angharad Parry Jones, Living Reconciliation, London, 2014 and www.livingreconciliation.org

This does involve a costly corporate commitment by our Churches that by dying to their traditional maintenance concerns seeking to protect their institutions they gain new life in God’s mission as the Body of Christ in His service and ministry of reconciliation. As Archbishop Tutu said in his 1984 Nobel lecture:

“God calls us to be fellow workers with Him, so that we can extend His Kingdom of Shalom, of justice, of goodness, of compassion, of caring, of sharing, of laughter, joy, and reconciliation, so that the kingdoms of this world will become the Kingdom of our God and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever, Amen.”

Esther Millar

COLERAINE CHURCHES FORUM REPORT

Brexit featured in the conversations of the Coleraine Area Churches forum this autumn. The trigger for the discussion was the invitation of the Irish Council of Churches to provide constructive input on discerning a theological response to Brexit.

This has not been the first discussion that members of our forum had on the topic. In 2017, one of our members, Christine Turner, had facilitated a series of meetings by the organisation, Initiatives of Change on the topic, with the purpose of stimulating healthy interaction on an issue that can be potentially divisive. Some elements of the response have remained constant between these occasions. On both occasions there were members who found it hard to be excited about the topic while there are others who have a stronger interest to engage. Among those who would have preferred to focus on other issues were some who felt frustrated by the fact that with the lack of particulars about the shape of Brexit, most discussion could at best be speculative and necessarily divisive. Some felt that the primary domain of Christian faith should focus on people’s life-experiences with less deference or judgement about the political sphere. Some therefore chose not to participate in the discussions, but among those who opted to engage, the discussion was constructive and searching.

The main discussion on the consultation document took place on Wednesday, 31 October. It was facilitated by Dave Thompson, who specialises in facilitating such discussions. The discussion started with an orientation exercise where members were asked to move towards a certain point in the room, or away from the point – depending on how they judged various aspects of Brexit. The physicality of the exercise served to make the discussion much more focussed on personal experience, and not just an intellectual exercise. It also revealed that there was a wide range of perspectives in the room, and at times this led to good, robust discussion.

Small groups were then asked to evaluate potential impacts of Brexit on a local, national, and international level, and then to ponder how the Churches might be able to respond. Many of the issues that were raised, have been well rehearsed in the media: A rise in tension between groups, economic impacts on local communities, concern about a regression in the process of addressing cultural and political divisions in a post Good Friday Agreement society. A more comprehensive summary of the discussion can be found on the Coleraine
Area Churches Forum Website.

Some hopeful perspectives were raised about the Church’s response. It was felt that we do have the resources and experience in modelling to society how to use language moderately and to help us listen to each other. The Church are called to be at the bleeding edge of the impacts of Brexit, the places where individuals in our communities are hurt or directly affected. The church also has the ability to give a global perspective of justice that transcends the needs of a particular nation state within an international economy, but to call attention on the issues of systemic poverty, violence and displacement that forms part of the bigger global landscape.

There are however also concerns about our efficacy in being a prophetic voice in this time. The experience of most churches in our community is that we are diminishing entities. Much of our energy are focussed on a struggle for survival – towards providing adequate care to the members in our parishes. In this context, Brexit does not naturally feature as the territory that many see the church to be about. In some cases our theology also vies against constructive engagement. One member suggested that for some the slogan is: “Bedrooms – not Brexit.” This refers to the churches’ obsession with Sexuality and personal morality, rather than broader political issues.

The consensus of those who participated in this discussion was that it was a meaningful exercise, and we hope that the church will be able to co-ordinate a constructive response that will make a positive impact on our society.

The Coleraine Area Churches’ forum continues to meet on a monthly basis on the first Wednesday of each month and welcomes all who wish to join in our endeavours. We are looking forward to some of the regular highlights associated with this time of year: our annual carol singing in the streets of Coleraine. Plans are also well under way for a service to mark the Week of Prayer of Christian Unity in January.

Weiers Coetzee

---

DUNGANNON AREA CHURCHES’ FORUM

‘Mid-Ulster Clergy Together’ planned several concerts in the area, with school children, to mark International Peace Day. These were attended by our Forum members; Forum members attended the CONNECT Conferences in June and September where they shared conversations with other Forum members and discussed what is happening in other areas.

We have planned a public event in January when Ms Diane Holt will share some of her knowledge about experiences in Rwanda in the aftermath of violent conflict. The title of her input is ‘Africa -Ireland joining the dots’. Diane works on a theme of community transformation. Later we will have Rev Ruth Patterson. Rev Patterson a Presbyterian minister, since 1988 has been Director of Restoration Ministries, a non-denominational Christian organisation committed to peace and reconciliation based in Northern Ireland. Ruth produces annual scripture guidelines for Faith and Friendship, an organisation in Northern Ireland inspired by Jean Vanier, the founder of L’Arche an international movement for people with learning difficulties. Jean Vanier is a close friend of Restoration Ministries.

We are hopeful these events will attract new people to work for reconciliation and help with the Forum programme.

Isobel T. Holmes

---

NEWRY DISTRICT INTER-CHURCH FORUM

In August, the group spent a very interesting, informative day at Darkley in South Armagh where we learned more about the ‘Crossfire Trust’ led by Ian Bothwell. We were inspired by their ministry of reconciliation in an area deeply affected by ‘The Troubles’. In September, we welcomed our new honorary chaplain Fr. N. Mc Keown, whose participation is much appreciated. Glenn Jordan led a further talk and discussion on ‘Brexit and The Book of Ruth’. The Castlewellick group joined us on a trip to Cavan museum, where much has been done, especially with schoolchildren, to help us understand and appreciate our shared history. Another group from Swanlinbar who had intended to be with us had to drop out due to a more pressing engagement.

In October, members of ‘The Truth and Reconciliation Platform’ including Eugene Reavey and Alan Mc Bride, spoke to a packed auditorium. Their topic was ‘The Legacy of the Bomb and the Bullet’. Our annual Symposium took place on Saturday 20th October. We were fortunate as always to have Eileen Gallagher to as our Convener for the day. The guest speakers, Baroness May...
Blood and Jim Deeds gave us much on which to contemplate and left us uplifted. The new Methodist minister in Newry, Rev. Annie Deche, has kindly agreed to speak at our A.G.M. She has just arrived in Ireland from her native Kenya so we are delighted to hear her experiences. On 17th November, Dr. Eamon Phoenix and Dr Mark Grey are speaking on ‘Civil Rights, The Troubles and Reconciliation’. This will be a shared day with the Castlemelawen forum. We are very grateful to our hard-working Treasurer, Marie McShane who has been instrumental in the organisation of these trips and talks. We would also like to thank Owain Morgan and Sean McIlroy who have been deputising for Alex during her absence due to work commitments. Our former and original Chairperson, Brian Eggsins, has continued to attend despite struggles with his health. We appreciate his wise input and wish him every blessing.

Jeanette McConnell

BALLYCASTLE REPORT

Ballycastle Church Action in their attempts to reach out to other community and voluntary sector groups in Ballycastle had a very positive ‘Open Meeting’ which invited members of the public to hear what was happening with their own Foodbank project which is currently preparing Christmas hampers and, in a new development, will be coordinating with NHSCT, the preparation of food boxes for hospital to home discharges where a patient returning home may be otherwise unable to gather immediately needed supplies.

The meeting also featured updates from the Living Well Moyle project, which was launched in 2016 and aims to enable people in local communities, especially those who are older or require support to remain independent, to live the lives they want.

Ballycastle Church Action also hosted a series of historical talks by Dr. Johnston McMaster on ‘Reformations ‘Then and Now’ during October and November.

During these talks, Dr. Johnston McMaster explored the various Reformations, both Protestant and Catholic, which set in motion a long lasting revolution in European history.

Denai Cunningham

WOMEN IN FAITH REPORT

Women in Faith had a very inspirational opening meeting in September after the summer break. It was very good to see and meet with one another again and share news. The theme of the meeting was “Promoting Good Mental Health”. The speaker talked of her own experience of depression and how this impacts on the individual, the family, the community and society, but we also heard about the importance of finding ways to foster and encourage health and happiness and how we can help to promote this for ourselves and for others.

The other important feature of our pre Christmas programme involved the detailed preparation for our annual practical support for the work of the Meeting Point (on the Lisburn Rd.), which is a place of safety, comfort and much needed help for so many migrant people. Some of our ladies bring clothes or whatever is most needed to the meeting point, but in November we all contributed to the making and providing of a meal for eighty plus people. It is always interesting, educational and humbling to meet and listen to some of the stories of people who have left their native land, and have endured so much and suffered in ways we could hardly imagine.

Our next meeting will be a social one in which we will share in a Christmas lunch. We bring our filled shopping bags with parcels for the homeless and for food banks and we hope to have a speaker to share thoughts on these issues. We wish all our friends in Fora a very merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

Lorna McKee

Volunteers from WIF serving lunch in the Meeting Point Lisburn Road Belfast

CONTACT DETAILS

Irish School of Ecumenics, Edgehill College, 9 Lennoxvale Avenue, Belfast BT95BY.
(T) +44 (0)28 90775010 (E) eccgallagher@yahoo.co.uk

© 115346 | design+print | www.theprintfactory.com | T. 028905 325 325

Project part financed by the Community Relations Council.