



From the Chair...



Getting brighter

The end of another year draws near, the dark nights are with us for the foreseeable future, but things are looking a lot brighter on the NIMMA front.

Good to hear that our "Mixed Marriage in Ireland" book is still a "best-seller" with couples about to take the Mixed Marriage plunge, that our website, www.nimma.org.uk, is now the number one target for the hi-tech betrothed and that NIMMA News is being issued every two months from now on, thanks to a grant from the Columbanus Trust.

Faith

Just as good, is the confirmation that St Patrick's Armagh Director of Celtic Spirituality, the Rev Grace Clunie, will be our guest speaker at the annual

NIMMA conference next March. Seems like a long way away at the minute, but something really worthwhile to look forward to when Spring has finally sprung and Rev Clunie charts the story of St Patrick, his exemplary spiritual journey and the wonderful legacy of faith that he left all Christians to share. It's an uplifting story about the past that signposts a better future, a shared future for us all. Meantime, let me wish everyone a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year from all of us at NIMMA. There.....I told you it was getting brighter.....**Ken.**

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Accord do it by the book

NIMMA's "Mixed Marriage in Ireland" booklet remains an important part of preparation for inter-church marriage courses, according to Deirdre O'Rawe, Regional Officer with ACCORD.

"The booklet is very detailed and comprehensive", she said, "And we use it on all of our inter-church courses".

Deirdre said that their research, based on psychological surveying, has shown that prospective partners in mixed marriages actually show greater "communication strengths" than their single church counterparts. She said: "It would appear that these couples focus more on communicating with each other better because of the outside pressures often associated with mixed marriages. If that is the

case, then it is a welcome spin-off." NIMMA members used to take part in ACCORD courses up until just a few years ago, but Deirdre said that, despite the obvious examples of shared life experience, ACCORD had not found this participation particularly useful.

"We include a session on the inter-church course that allows a panel of four clergy from the main denominations to outline the views of their respective churches on a wide range of issues affecting couples". NIMMA Chair Ken Dunn said: "I'm glad to hear that our booklet is still being used and being useful, but I really feel that a NIMMA presence on such courses would provide an historical background and practical advice and, indeed, the empathy and flexibility needed for really worthwhile inter-church marriage guidance."

Tackling intolerance head-on

NIMMA's Hugh Nelson is one of 100 contributors to a book of inspirational stories that challenge bigotry and intolerance. Hugh's story, which describes the difficulties faced by couples in mixed marriages as they face being stereotyped into one religious box or another, features in the "100 Small Steps" publication. He highlights how NIMMA is campaigning for government and its

agencies to include the option of mixed marriage or relationship on their forms.

Challenge

Hugh's story is carried in full in this issue of NIMMA News. The man coordinating the book, former rugby star Trevor Ringland said: "Our hope is that these stories will encourage us all to take steps to challenge bigotry, stereotyping and intolerance. "As has often been said, the longest journey begins with the smallest step."

Reaching Out

- Hugh and Paul attended launch of "100 Small Steps" at the 174 Trust in North Belfast on 13th October 2008.
- Paul met with Neil Irwin, funding adviser from NICVA.
- Paul met with Deirdre O'Rawe from Accord.

One Small Steptoward Recognition

by Hugh Nelson

Like many in a mixed marriage, my spouse and I do our best to integrate with both traditional communities. We recognise the enrichment to our lives we gain from each other with our differing backgrounds and wish to extend this benefit within our family circle. It's not without occasional difficulty of course, but the reward from both similarity and difference is plenty. Together we have formed a belonging to both religions, to both cultures and to both identities.

Reality

Yet when we are counted or classified by government, we are boxed into outdated, stereotypical definitions that simply fail to reflect how we view ourselves. Most job applications require you to identify yourself as a member of a single religion and do not recognise the reality of those who regularly attend both churches. Housing applications require you to indicate your

religion by designating yourself as one of three choices, Catholic, Protestant and Other. Similarly, the Census confines you to one choice. How can policy be inclusive and bring us together when the questions behind it seek to separate us?

Divisive

None of these choices allow me or my family to reflect the reality of our everyday life. One small step would be for the government and its agencies to include the option of "mixed marriage or relationship" on official forms. Many children in mixed marriages have grown up integrated into and feeling part of both communities. As they reach adulthood, they shouldn't be required to make so divisive a choice on their very identity before they can be considered for a job or a house.

NIMMA Annual Dinner
Friday 23rd January 2009
Malone Lodge Hotel
Belfast