

NIMMA News

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U.S. Academic gives NIMMA top marks for reconciliation

An Ivy League academic has heaped praise on NIMMA's work for reconciliation and described its book 'Mixed Emotions' as inspiring.

Harvard lecturer Ofrit Liviatan, who teaches at the Department of Government at the New England university, thanked NIMMA for its help in a letter to Association Chairman Ken Dunn.

She wrote, "Thank you kindly for sharing your important work and particularly the inspiring publication 'Mixed Emotions'.

"In the process of reviewing seemingly countless proposals for integration in Northern Ireland, your contribution to reconciliation speaks louder than words. I am looking forward to continuing our conversation.

"As part of my current research on good relations in Northern Ireland, I was very much hoping to learn from you about the challenges (cultural, social, etc) facing inter-church couples, factors impacting the choice of a marriage ceremony, and NIMMA's current work".

Dr Liviatan, who received her PhD from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, is also an associate of the



Dr Ofrit Liviatan

'Your work speaks louder than words'

Weatherhead Center for International Affairs. Her research focuses on law and politics, tensions between legal theory and practice, the role of legal systems in the accommodation of diversity, and religion and state.

She is a former law practitioner in Israel, specialising in constitutional, criminal and commercial litigation.

NIMMA Chairman Ken Dunn said: "It is good to know that so much of the hard work we have done in the field of reconciliation here for the past 38 years is bearing fruit at home and abroad and gratifying to see that it is appreciated by so discerning an audience".

NIMMA's book 'Mixed Emotions' is available, priced £5, by e-mailing info@nimma.org.uk or ringing Belfast 90 235444

Fermanagh couple face the future together

Stephen and Sharon Gault live in a small village in the Fermanagh lakelands. They have been married now for nearly seven years. Stephen, whose father was killed in the 'Poppy Day' bombing of Enniskillen, has suffered severe ill-health as a direct result of being in the same explosion. He is a Protestant, Sharon is a Roman Catholic. Their inspiring story featured in the NIMMA book 'Mixed Emotions' and more recently in the Belfast Telegraph and The Guardian.

Stephen and Sharon are pictured at the War memorial in



'Mixed marriage is all about compromise'

Enniskillen town at the service to mark the 25th anniversary of the bombing. "Mixed marriage is all about compromise", says Sharon, "We have learned to compromise and, hopefully, one day we will be blessed with children and will be faced with more decisions and more compromises about their upbringing". "Yes," says Stephen, "Trying to see the other person's point of view helps us all to see that little bit better".

The injuries Stephen suffered mean he is in almost constant pain and is unable to work. At this time of year, as Remembrance Day gets closer, he tends to feel much worse, physically and psychologically.

But there's one bright light in Stephen's life – his wife, Sharon. "She's the most loving, caring woman in the world," says Stephen. "She's bubbly and warm, and I'm so lucky to have her." Sharon believes that making their marriage work across the religious divide of Northern Ireland has been a kind of microcosm of the peace process that has changed the face of the province in the years since that day in Enniskillen.

They make a brave and loving couple who face the future together.

NIMMA CHANGE OF E-MAIL ADDRESS



NIMMA'S new e-mail address is

info@nimma.org.uk

NIMMA book puts new Secretary of State in the picture

NIMMA has sent a copy of its book to the Secretary of State with a lot of background material that she should find useful.

Chairman Ken Dunn wrote to Ms Theresa Villiers (pictured right) just days after her appointment and long before the current 'flag' fiasco, but his overview of where Northern Ireland is at was 'on the money'.

He said: "Congratulations on your appointment as Secretary of State. Over the coming weeks and months, I am sure that you will receive much advice and support as you go about familiarising yourself with Northern Ireland and its particular problems. I, as chair of the Northern Ireland Mixed Marriage Association (NIMMA), do not intend to compound that other than to introduce our organisation and explain a little of our ethos and history.

NIMMA was formed in 1974 when a group of young people got together at Corrymeela to "talk". The quiet coast of North Antrim was a world away from the battlefield that was the Belfast of those dark days, but the inspiration of Corrymeela saw a group of ordinary people face extraordinary times as they started a journey of many milestones.

NIMMA has enjoyed many successes during the intervening years, but unfortunately, Northern Ireland remains rife with sectarianism and NIMMA knows only too well that there is still a long way to go before a real sense of normality can be achieved. NIMMA is unique among the family of inter-church organisations. It seeks to address community and segregation issues that simply do not exist in other



countries and, while there appears to be a general perception within Northern Ireland society that the mixed marriage issue has been resolved, day-to-day experience tells us that it has not.

The nightmare stories that came to NIMMA at the height of the Troubles have certainly subsided, it is easier to get married that it once was, but there is still the reality that

many lay people and even some clergy are opposed to mixed marriages. It is clear that not everything has been resolved.

Institutionalised segregation remains and NIMMA's work is still needed and relevant to address it. Twelve years after the Good Friday Agreement, there is a tendency on the part of many who would revitalise the Northern Ireland economy to believe that multi-million pound, shared, shopping malls can somehow foster integration better than organisations like NIMMA. It is a short-sighted solution that owes nothing to vision. I wish you well in your new post and have enclosed our latest publication about the mixed marriage lives of real people from this part of the world.



MEMBERSHIP

**Interested in joining or rejoining NIMMA?
Simply ring us on Belfast
90 235 444 or e-mail
info@nimma.org.uk**



Northern Ireland Mixed Marriage Association

**Bryson House
28 Bedford Street
BELFAST
BT2 7FE**

Tel: 02890 235444

**Office Hours Mon-Friday
9.30 - 12.30
(Evening appointments
available, 24 hour answer
machine service)**





NIMMA seeks 'change for the best'

The past twelve months have seen NIMMA celebrate 38 years of service and support to mixed marriage couples and we continue to strive to maintain a high standard.

We broke new ground this year with the publication of our book, 'Mixed Emotions'. It features the real stories of ten mixed marriage couples from the Province, charting the single/married lives of the individuals in question – a first for mixed marriage anywhere on the island of Ireland – and documenting the difficulties, while highlighting the courage and commitment of the people in question.

It has been extremely well received, with orders coming in from as far away as Canada, Australia and South Africa and many ex-pats, themselves in mixed marriages, telling stories of forced exile as a result of their breaking with tradition.

The book paints vivid pictures of changing clerical attitudes toward mixed marriage over a period of nearly 70 years, while featuring a comprehensive history of the subject on the island of Ireland and, currently, we are in the process of preparing it for use in local secondary schools.

It charts how things have improved since the dark days of the 'Ne Temere' decree and shows how attitudes toward mixed marriage are indicators of the health of a society.

"Things have changed here for the better, but they haven't changed for the best", according to Northern Ireland novelist Glenn Patterson.

Glenn Patterson came to prominence during the late 1980s as one of the younger generation of novelists whose work began to develop fresh perspectives on the representation of the Northern Irish Troubles since 1969.

'Things have changed for the better, but not for the best'

We in NIMMA can appreciate where Glenn is coming from with his astute take on the present situation.

We recognise the distance we have come along the road to reconciliation, but, unlike some, who would have us believe that all the work has been done, we are only too aware of how far we have yet to travel. To that end, NIMMA continues to give talks to a range of community and educational groups, as well as universities, colleges and schools, produces a bi-monthly newsletter, which is distributed widely throughout the island of Ireland to press, clergy, educationalists, politicians, opinion formers and the general public.

It collates and presents reports to church bodies, networks with cross-community groups, represents Northern Ireland at international conferences, lobbies for extended integrated education and increased shared social housing and sees itself as an agent for real social change in Northern Ireland.

It also makes recommendations that can and will make life easier for those in mixed marriages and sets out guidelines for the way forward to a truly shared future. NIMMA has achieved much since the despairing days of the 1970s, we have reached 'better', but we will continue to strive for 'best'. Let me take this opportunity to wish all our readers a very happy and holy Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

Ken



Keeping Christmas

It's not just for Christmas Day

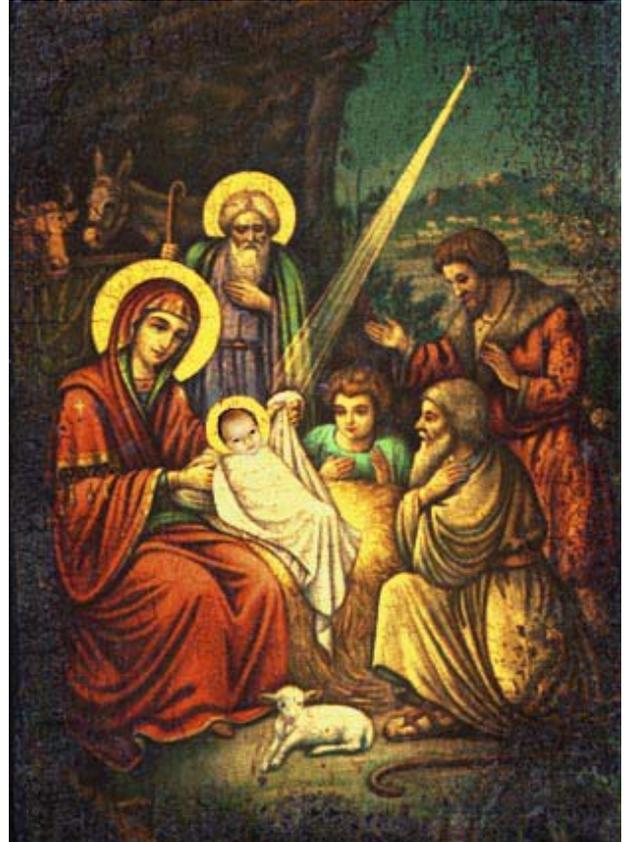
Halloween was hardly over when the first of the Christmas trees started appearing across the country. It is a marketing man's dream. A DISNEY Nativity that keeps the tills ringing for much of the year.

Now, I hope I don't sound Bah Humbug about Christmas. I most certainly am not. This is really the most wonderful time of the year that deserves to be celebrated fully, but I prefer the words of the late American cleric Henry Van Dyke about 'keeping Christmas' to all the gobbledegook cobbled together by copywriters and ad men. And Henry's words of a different age have more than a passing acquaintance with the reality of mixed marriage in the 21st Century.

'It is a good thing to observe Christmas day. The mere marking of times and seasons, when men agree to stop work and make merry together, is a wise and wholesome custom. It helps one to feel the supremacy of the common life over the individual life. It reminds a man to set his own little watch, now and then, by the great clock of humanity which runs on sun time. But there is a better thing than the observance of Christmas day, and that is, keeping Christmas.

Are you willing to forget what you have done for other people, and to remember what other people have done for you; to ignore what the world owes you, and to think what you owe the world; to put your rights in the background, and your duties in the middle distance, and your chances to do a little more than your duty in the foreground; to see that your fellow-men are just as real as you are, and try to look behind their faces to their hearts, hungry for joy; to own that probably the only good reason for your existence is not what you are going to get out of life, but what you are going to give to life; to close your book of complaints against the management of the universe, and look around you for a place where you can sow a few seeds of happiness—are you willing to do these things even for a day? Then you can keep Christmas.

Are you willing to stoop down and consider the needs and the desires of little children; to remember the weakness and loneliness of people who are growing old; to stop asking how much your friends love you, and ask yourself whether you love them enough; to bear in mind the things that other



An early Christian representation of the Nativity

people have to bear on their hearts; to try to understand what those who live in the same house with you really want, without waiting for them to tell you; to trim your lamp so that it will give more light and less smoke, and to carry it in front so that your shadow will fall behind you; to make a grave for your ugly thoughts, and a garden for your kindly feelings, with the gate open—are you willing to do these things even for a day? Then you can keep Christmas.

Are you willing to believe that love is the strongest thing in the world—stronger than hate, stronger than evil, stronger than death—and that the blessed life which began in Bethlehem nineteen hundred years ago is the image and brightness of the Eternal Love? Then you can keep Christmas.

And if you keep it for a day, why not always?

But you can never keep it alone."

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year from everyone at NIMMA.

Paul