

NIMMA News

Email- info@nimma.org.uk
www.nimma.org.uk

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A Family at Play

Enniskillen couple Ann and Stephen Cairns, who told their story in NIMMA's 'Mixed Emotions' book, grabbed the headlines in the Belfast Telegraph magazine as it featured extensive coverage of the city's Lyric Theatre's first Northern Ireland production of the 100-year-old play 'Mixed Marriage'.

Ann, a former Olympic rower, and Stephen, pictured with their seven grandchildren at home on the banks of Lough Erne, took top billing as the subject of mixed marriage in real life complemented its staged counterpart.

"Making a mixed marriage was probably the hardest thing I have ever done" said Stephen, "But it is definitely the best thing and I hope that our small contribution to this book and article will prove an encouragement to other young couples facing the same challenges.

"We went to see the play, enjoyed it for the acting and drama, despite the prejudice and bigotry on show, and feel that anything; book, television or play that shines a spotlight on mixed marriage and what it means to people on this island has got to be a good thing. Ann and Stephen are no longer part of any organised religious grouping.

"We were put off by bigoted attitudes and negative experiences of people on both sides of the divide", said Ann, "But we like to think we have handed on a flame of tolerance to our family".

One in ten marriages here is mixed.



Fr Colin Crossey of the Holy Family parish in North Belfast said that the Roman Catholic Church was keen to encourage unity. "Any minister of another faith is very welcome to our marriage services and vice versa....for a celebration of unity".

The Rev Wilfrid Orr, formerly of St John's Presbyterian church in Newtownbreda, said at the launch of the NIMMA book that, on occasion, clerical attitudes had distanced some couples from the Church.

NIMMA chairman Ken Dunn said; "We've had the book and now the play and more and more people are now recognising that mixed marriage, for so long a taboo subject on these shores, is healthy, hope-filled and here to stay". Belfast playwright St John Ervine's protagonist, John Rainey, is a passionate Protestant who works in the Belfast shipyards and who militantly supports a strike for an extra penny an hour. So fervent is Rainey that, in the interests of class solidarity and to prevent the strike being exploited by nationalist agitators from Dublin, he is prepared to make common cause with Catholic colleagues.

The crisis comes when Rainey discovers that his eldest son, Hugh, wants to marry a Catholic girl. Despite the pleas of Rainey's wife, class loyalty comes into violent conflict with religious belief. The more things change.....

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

“To separate children by religion goes against the very order of nature”

Former Cistercian Abbot of Bolton Abbey in Kildare, Fr Eoin de Baldrathe, reflects on the history of religion and education in Ireland

Leading Irish clerics were calling for ‘integrated’ education on this island nearly 200 years ago, according to Kildare-based Cistercian Fr Eoin de Baldrathe.

In a letter to the Irish Times Fr Eoin wrote, “In the 1820s, the two archbishops of Dublin, Richard Whatley, Church of Ireland, and Daniel Murray, Roman Catholic, sat on a new body called the National Education Board and the two prelates produced a common syllabus. .

“Whatley composed a lesson which was to be displayed and taught in all schools. It can be summarised as follows: ‘Christians should love one another and even their enemies. We should not seek to force our religion on others, but treat them kindly and gently.’

Murray, for his part, said that there could be no possible objection to a Protestant teaching secular literature to Catholic and Protestant children together.

Another famous bishop, James Doyle of Kildare and Leighlin (RC), wrote a letter on the day the schools opened, commending Whatley’s lesson. On another occasion he said that the peace in Ireland was very fragile and separate schooling would endanger it. His famous words are worth quoting in full.

“I do not know any measures which would prepare the way for a better feeling in Ireland than uniting children at an early age, and bringing them up in the same school, leading them to commune with one another and to form those little intimacies and friendships which subsist through life.

Children thus united know and love each other as children brought up together always will and to separate them is, I think, to destroy some of the finest feelings in the hearts of men”.

“Strong words indeed: to separate children by religion goes against the very order of nature.”



This was to come to nothing however when, as Fr Eoin writes; “In the South, Cardinal Paul Cullen succeeded Murray in the See of Dublin. He refused to take his place on the National Schools’ board and was able to neutralise the influence of Whatley. He claimed that any contact with Protestant officials of State was a danger to Catholic faith. We can see the great difference between that and the views of his predecessor.

“At this time, the Irish Party was very powerful as it usually held the balance of power in the London Parliament. Cullen was able to persuade the Government to appoint parish priests as managers of schools now regarded as ‘Catholic’. The separation that Doyle feared had become a reality. It may have been rather benign in the South, but it was certainly malignant in the North. According to Fr Eoin, some Roman Catholics remain pessimistic in not offering some hope of improvement. He writes; “I have often met this attitude among my fellow religionists in Northern Ireland: that ‘there is no solution’.

But some brave people have set up interdenominational schools. Lagan College is the showpiece of their success. It was a surprise for the directors when Cardinal Tomás Ó Fiaich praised their dedication. I heard his successor, Cardinal Daly, say that as a Catholic bishop he was bound to maintain the Catholic school system. Like him, many of his flock continue to be hostile to interdenominational schools, but those who are convinced must push forward with determination.

At present there are 42 integrated primary schools classified as either ‘controlled’ or ‘grant maintained’, catering for 12,113 children (information by courtesy of Ivor Graham, Statistics Office, Northern Ireland Department of Education). This is very encouraging, but still they cater only for about 7% of the school-going population.

All would agree that the peace in the north is fragile and needs careful fostering. So too with schools; patience and perseverance will be needed to get the children together and eventually break down the walls of separation’.



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“Let us Love one another”

by David Sheehan
Crowley, Texas, USA,

as he remembers with fondness his time spent in Northern Ireland

When I think about Northern Ireland and its difficulties, I must think of Christ.

What would He do if He was born in the Shankill or in West Belfast? How would He live? Where would He go to worship? How would He counsel people on the opposite sides of the Peace Walls? What would He say to couples struggling in a mixed marriage?

I do not know what words He would use, but I do know that He would act with kindness. Perhaps He would use the words of the first epistle of the beloved disciple, John.

1 John 4:7-19 (King James Version)

7 Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.

In September 2008, my wife and I, pictured at Port Ballintoy, visited Belfast as we toured Ireland to see the birthplaces of my father (Limerick) and my mother (Leitrim). Our first view of the city was coming in through the mountains from the northwest. We saw this incredible city hugging the coast line of the sea and we were hooked.

The next year, I came back for my “fix” with a group of Americans coming to work in the Shankill with the local Habitat for Humanity chapter. Most of the Americans knew a little about the “Troubles” that Northern Ireland had gone through, but not in much detail. For myself, it was a different story. I had been following the violence since 1972. I grew up in Chicago amid the “green” Irish. It was not until I moved to Houston, Texas that I met Protestants who came from Northern Ireland.

It was the kindness of one such man, Mr. Andy White from Belfast, that started the process of breaking down the prejudice I had. I was coordinating an Irish fundraising party and Andy was to play bagpipes to kick it off. He was just to play one tune and then another performer was going to star next. At the last minute, the second performer cancelled out. Andy, to his credit, picked up the slack and played several tunes to fill the gap. I thanked him then and thanked him again years later when I visited him on his deathbed in the hospital.

His kindness shed a little light into the dark corner of my mind and made me want to meet the “Orange Irish”, as I affectionately call them.

So, when Habitat for Humanity International organized a trip to Belfast to work in the Shankill, I could not wait to sign up.

The first workday in Belfast, we had orientation. The local Habitat chapter talked to us about the period known as “The Troubles”. Then they took us on a bus ride to see the



sights of Belfast and to hear some of the challenges that the local housing executive have in developing the inner city. It is one thing to hear about the “Peace Walls”, but quite another to see and touch them and to realize what they are: concrete and steel, separating people.

In another place, like Texas, these same people would enjoy each other’s company, laugh, drink a little, and intermarry with gusto, but this is Northern Ireland, and things are different here. Our second day, we began our work at the Habitat site in the Shankill and met the supervisors, Danny Burns and Rab Branney. Great men that they are, they kept us working hard while keeping the humor flowing like oil greasing the gears on a car. In the evening, we had dinner in an Italian restaurant near Queen’s university. It gave an opportunity for our hosts to showcase the diversity of Belfast. If I told someone in Texas that I went to Ireland to have Italian food, they would have locked me up!

Near the end of the week, we travelled to Downpatrick and visited my favourite spot in Ulster, St Patrick’s Chapel (Church of Ireland) in Saul. It is a small church, but its beauty and simplicity touch the soul within. We are told that Saint Patrick started here on his missionary quest to convert all Ireland to Christ. There is something here that speaks of a great mystery, a mystery of the past and a mystery to come.

The kindness of the people of Northern Ireland brought my wife Peg and I back in 2010. This time, we stayed exclusively in Ulster, seeing Belfast, Derry/Londonderry, Donegal and Down. We hope, in the future, to come back maybe one more time, as we will be in our 60s by then.

There will be no goodbyes then but maybe a couple of “see you later’s”.

Meanwhile, remember, “Perfect love casts out all fear.”

God bless!
David



Love changes everything....

Historic changes in mixed marriage within the past three decades have given us a vision of how Irish history might have been so different if only they had come earlier.

In this the age of the internet, we can be very impatient for change. Perhaps, it is only by zooming out and looking at events in the long term that we can appreciate the changes that have already taken place in the making of a mixed marriage.

Listed below are the canons – the rules and regulations - concerning mixed marriage from the Roman Catholic codes of 1917 and 1983. The difference between the two highlights the degree of change that has been achieved – with organisations such as NIMMA to the fore in making that change a reality – and just how greatly that change was needed to provide equality for all.

1917 Canon 1060 “The Church everywhere most severely forbids the contracting of marriage between two baptised persons of whom one is a Catholic whereas one is a member of a heretical or schismatical sect ...”

Canon Brian Mayne 1934-2012

A great friend of mixed marriage, Canon Brian Mayne, sadly died before Christmas 2012. Brian was a convinced and active ecumenist who always wanted to do what was best for the people in his pastoral care.

He guided a host of mixed marriage couples through their getting married and family life and could recall them in great detail decades later. Due to his ecumenical efforts, he always had Roman Catholic clergy to call upon to assist at weddings in either church.

After a meeting in Dublin, Brian insisted on driving Canon Turner and myself to Belfast (he then lived in Downpatrick) so that he could make sure he was doing the correct thing in an upcoming tricky mixed marriage.

After an hour we had solved all the problems and settled the details. I often meet mixed marriage couples who were married under Brian’s care and they recall him with great fondness.

eventually!

Canon 1061 “The Church does not dispense from the impediment of mixed religion unless: (1) there are just and grave reasons therefore; (2) the non- Catholic party shall have given a guarantee to remove all danger of perversion from the Catholic party, and both parties shall have given guarantees to baptise and educate all the children in the Catholic faith alone; (3) there exists moral certainty that the guarantees will be fulfilled, The guarantees are, as a rule, to be required in writing.”

Canon 1102 “In marriage between a Catholic and non-Catholic party all sacred rites are forbidden; in case it is foreseen that graver evils will result from this prohibition, the Ordinary may permit some of the usual ecclesiastical ceremonies, excluding always the celebration of Mass.”

1983 Canon 1124 “Without the express permission of the competent authority, marriage is prohibited between two baptised persons, one of whom was baptised in the Catholic Church or received into after baptism, the other of whom belongs to a Church or ecclesial community not in full communion with the catholic Church.

Canon 1118 “A marriage between catholics or between a catholic and a baptised non-catholic, is to be celebrated in the parish church by permission of the local Ordinary or of the Parish Priest, it may be celebrated in another church or oratory A marriage between a catholic party and an unbaptised party may be celebrated in a church or in another suitable place.”

Canon 1125 “The local Ordinary can grant this permission if there is a just and reasonable cause. He is not to grant it unless the following conditions are fulfilled: (i) the catholic party is to declare that he/she is prepared to remove dangers of defecting from the faith, and is to make a sincere promise to do all in his/her power in order that all the children be baptised in the catholic Church. (ii) The other party is to be informed in good time of these promises to be made by the catholic party, so that it is certain that he/she is truly aware of the promise and of the obligations of the catholic party. (iii) Both parties are to be instructed about the purposes and essential properties of marriage, which are not to be excluded by either contractant.”

We see that we have gone from the marriage only taking place before the Roman Catholic priest, but not in church, to a situation where the marriage can be in the bride’s church, which after all is traditional, with both clergy present and taking an active part.

The upbringing of the children is now secondary to the success of the marriage and is the sole responsibility of the couple, which is as it should be.

Surely, if the 1983 regulations had been in place in 1908 at the time of the Ne Temere decree, Ireland would now be a very different place!

Ken