

NIMMA News

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

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Drama based on NIMMA book to be produced for local schools

Plans are being produced to adapt NIMMA's book 'Mixed Emotions' as part of a 'drama resource package' for local schools.

The Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education has been liaising with NIMMA to have the book, which tells the real stories of ten mixed marriage couples, used by local teachers as a drama resource.

Writing is already underway with plans to trial with schools in early September.

Welcoming the news, NIMMA Chair Ken Dunn said; "This is a really great development for NIMMA and the NIMMA message of tolerance and reconciliation.

"NICIE have been instrumental in introducing the book to the education sector, which is, after all, exactly what we hoped for when it was being written.

"Doors have been opened for us. NICIE's knowledge and breadth of vision has show what is possible and we look forward to seeing the finished article later in the year".

Rev Dan to the Rescue



Retired cleric Fr Dan Whyte came to an eleventh hour rescue when east Belfast couple Melanie and Paul found themselves without a Roman Catholic priest for their daughter's christening.

With less than 24 hours notice, Bangor-based Fr Whyte, made the big date his first priority and assisted at baby Jennifer's baptism. He is pictured with the Church of Ireland curate of St Mark's Dundela, Rev Lynne Gibson. Relieved mum Melanie told NIMMA News, "We were let down at the last minute, desperate to get a priest to help make Jeninifer's day complete and can't thank Fr Dan enough for stepping in at the very last minute. It was very special.

"Thanks also to NIMMA for all your help. You made the day a great success and it is much appreciated".

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

TEENS HAVE THEIR SAY

Teenagers here are keen to live in a shared society, despite the negative effect of the ‘flag dispute’ on community relations, according to new research.

The Young Life and Times Survey - completed by more than 1,200 16-year-olds - is a joint initiative by Queen’s University and the University of Ulster that gives an insight into teenagers’ lives and their attitudes to issues such as community relations and shared education.

Family was the greatest influence factor for the majority of respondents (57%) in terms of their views on community relations. However, more than one in four YLT respondents also felt that their own views had changed the views of their parents either ‘a little’ or ‘a lot’.

YLT asked to what extent respondents felt public facilities in their areas were shared. The majority (86%) felt that libraries were shared, 83% felt leisure centres were shared, 80% felt that parks were shared, but just under one half (47%) felt that pubs were shared.

Only 8% of Protestants said they felt unfavourable towards Catholics, whilst 4% of Catholics felt unfavourable towards Protestants. Less than one quarter (24%) of YLT

respondents, who identified as either Catholic or Protestant, said they had no friends from the other main religious community.

The 2012 YLT survey took place at a time of tension when daily protests were held against the decision to fly the Union flag on the Belfast City Hall only on certain days.

One respondent commented:

The community is probably more divided than last year this time as the union flag was taken down from the City Hall

Despite of the flag protest tensions, 53% of respondents believed relations between Catholics and Protestants were better now than 5 years ago, and 45% thought relations would be better in 5 years time.

More than three in four YLT respondents believed that religion will always make a difference to how people in NI feel about each other.

75% of respondents said they would prefer mixed workplaces, 56% said they would live in mixed neighbourhoods if they had the choice, and half said they would prefer to send their children to mixed religion schools.

NIMMA’S NEW LOOK WEBSITE

NIMMA’s website is to get a radical make-over in the coming months and the Association is actively seeking customer input, according to webmaster Hugh Nelson.

Hugh told NIMMA News; “Our site has proved very successful since its introduction nearly 10 years ago and is still the first port of call for the vast majority of callers in need of information and support about the whole range of

topics that make up mixed marriage, but technology has moved on considerably in the past decade and we are determined to bring the site bang up-to-date.

“New developments in web design mean that there are now many packages – graphics and design-based – that can add value to the site by making it even more informative, entertaining and, perhaps best of all, even easier to use.

“We are currently trialling a number of these and early results augur well for the future, but contributions from satisfied and, importantly, unsatisfied customers can put the icing on the cake.

“Anyone wishing to comment/criticise/ on the present site – about any aspect at all – should e-mail us at info@nimma.org.uk

“All contributions will be welcomed and can make a great difference to those using the site in the future”.



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

NIMMA BOOK SENT TO TARGET TEACHERS

Nearly 100 copies of NIMMA's book 'Mixed Emotions – real stories of mixed marriage couples in Northern Ireland – have been distributed to teachers across the Province, courtesy of the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education.

NICIE project Manager Bernie Kells identified the target audience for the book among religious education teachers from right across the divide and NIMMA has provided the books and asked for feedback.

Bernie said: Our project, "Sharing Classrooms: Deepening Learning" is about encouraging reconciliation by bringing together children from different backgrounds into the shared space of the classroom.

"I feel that 'Mixed Emotions' has a role to play in that work and we hope that our teachers will play their part in developing a future role for this book and others to follow".

NIMMA Chair Ken Dunn wrote to the teachers involved.

He said: "Whether or not you have pupils who come from a mixed religion background, the enclosed book, 'Mixed Emotions', which features the real stories of ten mixed marriage couples from Northern Ireland, should make for a

stimulating read.

The Northern Ireland Marriage Association (NIMMA) has spent the past 39 years providing Ireland-wide support and information to young people either in or contemplating mixed marriage and the book, which balances prejudice, bigotry and even shunning with tolerance, perseverance and love, is the first to tackle the often 'taboo' subject in Ireland.

The people who took part tell their stories, which document the difficulties and highlight the courage and commitment of people breaking with tradition in a tradition-obsessed society, in their own words and pull no punches in a publication that courts controversy.

I'd like you to read it, keep it and, if at all possible, discuss it with the young people in your charge.

NIMMA is currently working to develop materials to support learning around the book and your feedback can help make that resource as comprehensive and targeted as possible.

Please don't hesitate to e-mail your thoughts, comments and observations to NIMMA at info@nimma.org.uk They will be of help".



BOOK BOUQUET

'Mixed Emotions' has been the subject of several favourable reviews and received its share of bouquets in the past year, but Newry woman Kathryn Cunningham's comments are certainly worthy of an airing.

She wrote: "I just wanted to send a quick email to yourself to let you know what a fabulous job you have done with the publication of your book mixed emotions. I am 27 years old and next year I will marry my best friend and we will enter into a mixed marriage. I found your book so interesting and at time I have been brought to tears!

I read an article in the Belfast telegraph over valentines weekend the story about Ruth and Pat who I actually lived beside in Newry my whole life until last year and had been on search for the book to hear more wonderful stories. At a teacher training course I was handed the book (not because of entering into a mixed marriage) but it was part of the course material I thought it was Christmas! I got on the phone to Barry to tell him and we sat and read the book together.

Barry a church of Ireland non-attender and myself a Roman Catholic I must say for us as a couple we have

not come across the difficulties as of yet in our relationship that many have had and for that I am thankful. My parents brought me up to respect others and their believes and attending an integrated school helped me keep an open mind! Coming from Newry I was the girl in the short skirt that went to the Protestant school but that passed with age! My parents who both are teachers and have friends from both religions accept Barry for who he is and how much he loves me! We bought a wee house in Killyman as it was central for our jobs and have met more couples from mixed marriages here our two sets of couples friends are the other way round the boys are catholic and the girls Protestant but we laugh about it and it does not and will not bother us!

The most difficult thing for us at present is trying to find Barry's baptismal certificate as we will marry in the Catholic Church with my family friend Fr. John Byrne marrying us. The main purpose of this email was to say thank you for opening my mind about how others have had it had and for us to be thankful for what we have"!





Reviews, Refunds & Respect

Chair Ken Dunn looks back over the past year

Traditionally, this is the time of the year when the taxman comes calling, AGMs are the flavour of the month and we all tend to look over our shoulders. Our ‘look over the NIMMA shoulder’ review of the past year sees another positive 12 months, with success on the PR front shaded slightly by disappointment in funding.

We have established the NIMMA brand firmly with local media, our website continues to drive enquiries and our core activity - helping couples – continues with more than 50 couples, that did not find sufficient information on our web site, talking to us directly. Most of these were about baptism.

Our web site continues to prove popular and successful, with more than five serious visitors each day. Feedback tells us that, combined with our booklet *Mixed Marriage in Ireland*, most couples have their problems or potential problems solved in this way.

Response

We continued to be funded by Dublin DFA with some additional funds from Volunteer Now and we are most grateful. Our Belfast office is the first and fast response to queries – telephone or walk in, an immediate, friendly response helps couples to tell their story and air their problems/fears and this would be impossible without a manned HQ. We had an unexpected call from Harvard Law School. Academics there are interested in the interaction of the law, politics and the community. In Northern Ireland, this means the working out of the Belfast Agreement and, for example, the requirement to facilitate Integrated Education and a Shared Future. We are dealing with Prof. Orfit Liviatian and we may be the best thing she has found. With our real, practical knowledge of education, housing and the churches, we provide accurate and up-to-date information. The NI civil service gave her very dated views of integrated education – “only for middle class children who failed 11+ or its equivalent”. Stuff like that. We look forward to further conversations with Orfit.

Wearing my hat as a Church of Ireland representative on the Ballymasclon/Irish Interchurch Meeting Standing Committee on Mixed Marriage, I asked that ordinands in the theological colleges having some training in mixed marriage and they agreed. As a result I was at the Church of Ireland Theological Institute on Valentine’s Day (14 Feb) talking to the deacon interns. It was a successful morning. One ordinand had already read *Mixed Emotions* and found it fascinating, but disturbing. As a result I have been invited back next year with more allocated time.

The Lyric Theatre put on a play called *Mixed Marriage* set in 1907 Belfast amidst labour unrest. They interviewed me on video to be shown on their website and displayed NIMMA material throughout the run. Oh.... the play was very powerful, showing how love can indeed overcome tribal loyalties.

Thank You

This month is also big for ‘thank yous’ and quite rightly so. So, thank you to our Development Officer, Paul for his efforts throughout the year, a big thank you to Mary, our Treasurer who continues to keep us in financial control and argues persistently with the Inland Revenue on our behalf. Special thanks also to Hugh, both as a committee member and webmaster, who continues to provide wisdom and innovative ideas for the way forward. Hugh has a new-look website under construction (See Page 2) and is actively seeking customer feedback.

Finally, we had a lot of frustrating months trying to ‘break’ the education sector with the *Mixed Emotions* book. Frankly, it seemed impossible! But, things are now on the move and looking very positive for the school year ahead. That piece of good news reinforced what I have always believed; that one major characteristic of NIMMA members is a dogged persistence as we make our case. It has proved so once again with a lot of help from Bernie Kells at the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education.

There is still, of course, so much to do before mixed marriage receives the respect and toleration it deserves, but we will battle on and persevere.

Oh..... and in these days of the approaching taxman, NIMMA even managed to get a refund.

Best wishes, *Ken*