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NIMMA News

November 2013

Funding Special

Funding crisis could cause NIMMA closure

NIMMA is desperately seeking core-funding to ensure the survival of its all-Ireland operation, according to Chairman Ken Dunn. "At a time when we are enjoying arguably our greatest success", he said; "NIMMA finds itself threatened with complete closure".

"Extensive efforts have and are being made to seek other avenues of funding, but we have to face the fact that, after 40 years working for tolerance and reconciliation and long before it became an industry, we are in serious danger of going out of business. Ireland's only mixed marriage group, which was set up in February 1974, has faced reductions in funding for the past two years and, despite drastic housekeeping measures, will be forced to close its Belfast office within less than four months.

"The Association, which published the first stories of mixed marriage couples, 'Mixed Emotions' last year, has just seen its partnership with the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) produce a drama resource for teachers, based on the book, that will be used in local schools. This has been a major breakthrough and will be a useful tool in the battle against sectarianism for years to come".

NIMMA, which has helped thousands of couples, continues to champion diversity and advocate a united community by:

- * providing support, advice and information to couples and families;
- * raising public awareness and understanding of the experiences of couples and families involved in mixed marriage/relationships;
- * lobbying policy makers, churches and organisations to address the needs of couples and families involved in mixed marriage/relationships;
- * lobbying for toleration, more integrated schools and greater availability of shared social housing.

Ken Dunn said; "The many successes of NIMMA over its first 40 years have seen positive changes in Church practice, education and housing, but there is much to be done about acceptance of diversity in a society in which we have peace, but are a long way from reconciliation. Sadly, NIMMA is as relevant to-day as it was back in 1974. "There is so much to be done and we are capable of doing so much, but funding is a fact of life and without it, we are going to go under".

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

Comment

From the Chair



Facing the Future

NIMMA's work is ongoing, given the institutionalised sectarianism that is rampant in Northern Ireland.

And, although our ultimate aim is to become unnecessary and redundant, the lack of political will for a truly shared future makes this a very long-term ambition.

Sadly, mixed marriage continues to carry baggage of fear, suspicion and anxiety. A mixed marriage booklet published under the auspices of the PEACE III initiative only a few months ago, reserved the anonymity of its contributors until 2040!

This confirmed, if that was needed, that NIMMA's ground-breaking 'Mixed Emotions', with its stories and pictures of 10 volunteer couples, is only a start.

Unfortunately, tolerance and acceptance of mixed marriage are still a very long way off. We will continue to seek funding from a wide variety of sources, including governmental, to allow us to continue our work.

NIMMA's endurance for more than 40 years is predicated on its ability to consolidate and build on the successes that it, and others, have had in moving Northern Ireland to a better place. The significant improvement in the experiences of couples getting married in churches shows how much we have

achieved in face of institutional tradition and cultural intransigence.

This is a difficult time for the Association, as funding reaches a crisis point.

Ironically, we have formed a powerful partnership with the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education that will reap rewards in the education of our young people in the coming years. It is an area that has long been a NIMMA target and one in which we feel we have much to offer.

There is so much to be done to combat ignorance and bigotry in our country and we have shown that we have the expertise and experience to play a vital role in that battle.

We face the future with 'mixed emotions', as successes over the years, and particularly in the past year, have made us only hungrier for more, but the balance sheet dictates that we may yet be forced to fold.

I trust that I will have better news on all fronts before our next issue of NIMMA News is printed.

Ken

Follow Your Heart

Partnership with the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) has produced a play about mixed marriage to get young people thinking.

'Mixed Emotions', based on the book of the same name, uses humour, pathos and down-to-earth dialogue to get across the message that it is 'okay' to follow your heart - even if it means crossing tribal boundaries.

The cast and crew, along with Ken and Maura Dunn from NIMMA, playwright Andrea Grimason and Bernie Kells from and NICIE, whose vision and enthusiasm made the drama a reality, are pictured during an early try out at Newbridge Integrated College in Co Down.

We'll have feedback from teachers who got to see the play at its Belfast launch in our next issue.



NIMMA

NIMMA exists to counter sectarianism and create tolerance. It stands alone as the advocate of mixed marriage on the island of Ireland, supporting those who put love before tribalism, while continuing to lobby for a fully-integrated education system in Northern Ireland and mixed social housing for all who need it.

What is NIMMA?

The Northern Ireland Mixed Marriage Association (NIMMA) was formed in January 1974 after a number of people in mixed relationships got together at the ecumenical centre at Corrymeela in Co Antrim to create a social and self-help group. The Northern Ireland 'Troubles' were, arguably, at their worst at this time, but NIMMA took a stand to represent people in mixed relationships and since then has worked to be an advocate on behalf of diversity and to help build a united community.

Why is NIMMA needed?

Sectarianism and bigotry are endemic in Northern Ireland society and must be challenged at every turn. NIMMA, which has been a registered charity since the early 1980s, has helped make it easier to make a mixed marriage, but the 'fall-out' of such a marriage, to marry outside one's 'tribe or tradition', continues to cause problems, and fear and suspicion are common. Mixed marriage has been the elephant in the room for generations. NIMMA seeks to create tolerance and acceptance of mixed marriage through publications, public relations and education and its aim, quite simply, is to help create a Northern Ireland in which there is no need for an organisation like NIMMA.

Recent history of disputes, parades and overt sectarian hatred show us that while Northern Ireland has a peace of sorts, it is as far away as ever from reconciliation. NIMMA is the only organisation providing support and information on mixed marriage on the island of Ireland, the only organisation that lobbies on behalf of mixed marriage couples and children and the only organisation that is actively working to put itself out of business. Marriage is at the centre of people's lives, it connects or divides families and communities and it brings to the fore fundamental issues such as where to live, baptism and education for children and even which music is 'acceptable' and which sports can be played.

Couples in mixed relationships and their children have learned ways to address these issues, to conquer divisions and derive richness from diversity. These are issues that need to be shared if Northern Ireland is to become a healed and normal society. Reconciliation has become an industry in Northern Ireland, but NIMMA has the wit, expertise and experience, garnered over nearly 40 years, to realise that the personal impact of mixed marriage and its acceptance can act as a blueprint for a shared future for all.

PAST and PRESENT

NIMMA Successes

- **Changing Church Practice** - A major breakthrough came only in 1983 with the publication of the Roman Catholic Directory on Mixed Marriage in Ireland. NIMMA had a major input to this document with six of its eight major proposals accepted. Our request that normally the wedding should take place in the bride's church with both clergy present was granted, as was a proper understanding of the promise on the upbringing of the children.
- **Extending Education** - NIMMA became a champion of integrated education from its earliest days with members taking up governorships of schools and chairs of education committees. NIMMA is still regarded as a driving force for integrated education and a teacher's drama resource, based on its book 'Mixed Emotions' is being made available to local schools. This will help provide an understanding of the hurt caused by sectarian segregation and an inspiration of how division can be overcome.

- **Helping Housing** - NIMMA has worked with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive for more than ten years to ensure the availability of mixed social housing in the Province. It was instrumental in the development of the Shared Neighbourhood Schemes - 30 of which now exist right across the country. Further success on the housing front came when a special 'mixed' category was included on all housing application forms.
- **Pushing the Boundaries** - NIMMA's website continues to provide vital information for those who, often anonymously, seek to find their pathway through the complexities of marriage, baptism and education for those in mixed relationships. It also reflects world-wide interest in resolving conflict and has stimulated international research exchanges and visits exploring mixed marriage and Northern Ireland's wider societal problems.

What is NIMMA doing?

1. Promoting acceptance and tolerance of diversity, marked by openness and a feeling of freedom to speak out in support of mixed marriage
2. Encouraging Northern Ireland schools, youth and community groups to use mixed marriage education resources and literature as the norm
3. Providing vital information and support
4. Lobbying for Government services, such as social housing, to become 'mixed'
5. Promoting change to Government statistics, such as the Northern Ireland census, with 'mixed' category acceptable for religion question
6. Extending the NIMMA website as an information sharing resource to stimulate wider research into the contribution of mixed marriage to conflict resolution