

NIMMA News

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



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Mayoral reception is a first for NIMMA

Council leader recognises 40 year mixed marriage record

Alliance Mayor of North Down, Councillor Andrew Muir recognised the 'public service' of NIMMA with a formal reception at the council's Bangor headquarters.

Councillor Muir, who comes from a 'mixed' background himself, said: "I value greatly the courageous work that NIMMA has undertaken during its 40-year history supporting mixed marriage couples and lobbying for acceptance of diversity.

"I am proud to have provided the first formal Mayoral Reception at the Town Hall for NIMMA after nearly four decades of public service and wish the organisation well in the future".

Nearly a dozen NIMMA members attended the reception and enjoyed a tour of the historic town hall.

NIMMA Chairman Ken Dunn said: "In these difficult times when it is hard to see how we can sustain our work for the future, it is heartening to receive this kind of civic recognition.



North Down Mayor Councillor Andrew Muir pictured with NIMMA members at the Association's first ever civic reception.

"NIMMA works for everyone on this island, particularly in Northern Ireland where we are based, but, increasingly, in the Irish Republic as well.

"Ironically, our funding crisis comes at a time when we are at our most successful – with the drama based on our book 'Mixed Emotions' already making its mark with teenagers in local schools.

"This is the first reception of its kind that the Association has enjoyed, but we look forward to many more as our work for reconciliation and our advocacy of mixed marriage as a blueprint for a truly shared future for our country receive the reward they deserve".

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



NIMMA is needed and that needs to be recognised

Christmas is nearly upon us once again.

A time for family, peace and goodwill to all, a perfect time to ponder if reconciliation, so desperately needed in this part of the world, is any nearer to being achieved than it was last year.

Peace we have of a sort certainly, although with the shadow of violence hanging over us. Unfortunately, reconciliation, which has spawned a whole industry in recent years, is still very much on the Christmas wish list.

NIMMA itself faces a bleak future as we go to press. We are in serious danger of going out of business all together due to lack of funding and are urgently seeking finance from a number of trusts and statutory bodies to avoid such a disaster. For disaster it would be. NIMMA is the only advocate for mixed marriage on this island, the only information and support organisation for people who step off the traditional tribal paths, a dedicated battler for tolerance and acceptance of diversity and a champion of integrated education and mixed social

housing. We are needed and we need that to be recognised with an injection of either private or public funding before it is too late.

Ironically, NIMMA also has much to hope for as a New Year approaches. We have maintained a constant flow of information to our customers- that includes just about everyone in the Province - via our newsletter, enquiries to our hotline on Belfast 90 235444 remain constant, while statistics show that our website at www.nimma.org.uk is the first port of call for information about mixed marriage, academics from across the globe see us as the natural provider of research material and our educationalists recognise that our material, such as our book 'Mixed Emotions' , can make a real difference in local schools.

Political uncertainty mirrors our own economic problems and we look to real political leadership from above to make well-meaning reconciliation initiatives a reality. It is more than 15 years since the Good Friday Agreement and high time that the holy grail of a shared future became more than an aspiration.

On a lighter note, congratulation to our development officer Paul McLaughlin who took first place in the magazine, Ireland's Own, short story competition and a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to all as we look ahead to 2014 and continuing to play our part in building a more inclusive society for all of our people. God willing, NIMMA will celebrate its 40th birthday in February 2014.

**NIMMA CHANGE
OF E-MAIL ADDRESS**



NIMMA'S new e-mail address

info@nimma.org.uk



Let us have Christmas



by Paul McLaughlin

Thinking of Christmas has me reminiscing about my late mother. She loved this time of year and, while I make a huff and a humbug of putting up decorations, she was never happier than sitting among a hearth full of singing Santas that all sounded remarkably like Bing Crosby.

She'd sit busily threading baubles. "Some of these, the little bluebirds and robins were you're Granny's you know" she'd say more Decembers than I can recall and set about unravelling the ever-enigmatic fairy lights that lit and went out just as quickly. My father would fix them, magically it seemed to me, with a Phillips' number one while chugging on a Gallahers' 'blue'. Latterly, mother took to extolling the virtues of an optic fibre tree that owed more to Star Wars than Santa Claus and surrounding herself with even more swaying Santas and Christmas trains studded with multi-coloured bulbs.

My mother was also a great believer in Christmas being celebrated as Jesus' birthday. As a boy of eight, I can remember her telling me that Jesus was so kind and generous that, each year, he shared his birthday presents with children all over the world; hence the toys at the foot of our beds. My brother, who was four at the time, and a prodigiously articulate chatterbox, asked if the baby Jesus could lend him his fire engine like the one on the television. A second later, the word 'give' was substituted for 'lend'. I remember my mother laughing behind her hand just before we all said our bedtime prayers together that evening.

Sadly, I can't remember when that nightly ritual came to an end. Probably, when I became a teenager with a Dansette record player capable of playing ten single discs and hormones from hell that only a sulking teenager can possess. I had only five records to fit on the hi-tech arm of the turntable, but the hormones were innumerable.

I do, however, still say the same prayers that my mother taught us all those years ago. And better still, so does my brother. The little litany remains unchanged. The 'Hail Mary' is followed by the 'Our Father', before the 'Now I lay me down to sleep' rounds off the ritual. It is a comforting and familiar arrangement that hugs the thoughts, hopes and the concerns of the day and carries them upward.

Yes, thinking about Christmas is normal in Advent. It is a time of expectation when the season of goodwill, carols, and cinnamon-flavoured Yankee candles is tantalisingly close. This little poem has no such saving graces. I wrote it last April after a walk with my old woolly dog, MacDuff, through the 'Winter wonderland' that was a North Belfast Park in Spring. Unseasonal snow lay all



around, deep, a little sodden perhaps, but even underfoot and memories of Christmas past filled my head. Chocolate Santas, wrapped in silver paper hanging temptingly from our tree, ginger cordial tingling on our tongues, the primary colour strung decorations making our living room ceiling as ornate as a city hall and my mother singing 'Away in a Manger' in that soft soprano that melts my heart.

Take down the tree from the attic
Dress it with baubles galore
Tinsel and sprinkle with stardust
And let us have Christmas once more

Snow on the roof says that Santa
Is going to be early this year
Turn back the clock, tear the calendar up
And let's pray that he will appear

Weathermen blind us with science
But blizzards have magical wings
And an angel is christened in heaven
Each time a Christmas bell rings

Position the crib in the window
And settle the Bethlehem cast
Of shepherds and kings and heavenly things
And Mary and Joseph but last

Make way for the sweet Baby Jesus
And cradle him close to your heart
For Christmas begins with a whispering prayer
That says celebrations can start

Yes take down the tree from the attic
Whether sunshine or snow have their sway
For the Christ child is with us for ever
So let us have Christmas each day.