



NIMMA NEWS

March 2015

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Spring launch for new NIMMA book

NIMMA's new book, 'Both Sides Now', is due to be published in late March.

It will give 11 local people the chance to tell for the first time how they were affected as the children of parents who married 'across the divide'.

Speaking as the final proofs were being completed, NIMMA chair Ken Dunn said, "This book is the ultimate cross-community project. Printed on Belfast's Falls Road and bound on the Shankill, it will shine a light on the mixed marriage experience from the perspective of the children involved.

"These are stories about real people, with real life experiences that speak of courage and compromise, times of misunderstanding and prejudice, but mostly of love and how it can help bridge division.

"NIMMA has known for a long time that there is a tremendous demand for information about mixed marriage from prospective couples, the press, the churches, community groups and the education sector.

"Our first book 'Mixed Emotions' about the experiences of mixed marriage couples proved a success, particularly with young people, and was dramatised by both the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education and The Theatre of Witness group.

"Both sides Now, as a natural sequel to that, builds on that foundation, opens up the debate about the sharing experience that is mixed marriage in the 21st Century and allows the children of eleven of those marriages, ranging in

ages from 16 to 60, to tell their very personal stories. "We thank all those who have shown real courage in contributing to this unique paperback".

Mr Dunn said that he looked forward to the day when this book, funded by The Big Lottery and supported by the Esmee Fairbairn Trust, would be regarded as standard reading for young people in all local schools and a time when an organisation like NIMMA was no longer required.

Mr Dunn said: "In a society where sectarianism is institutionalised, NIMMA is the only champion for the acceptance of mixed marriage on this island, while it continues to lobby actively for increased integrated education and the wider availability of shared social housing".

Happy Ending



Bride and groom Suzie and Damien sent their best wishes to NIMMA from home in Newcastle-upon-Tyne as they had a happy ending to their mixed marriage love story.

See Post Box page 4

**NIMMA is here to help. Simply telephone
Belfast 02890 235444 or e-mail info@nimma.org.uk.**

“We are pioneers, not problems”

.....the Association of
Interchurch Families

NIMMA'S sister organisation in Great Britain, the Association of Interchurch Families (AIF), has confirmed that the Interchurch Families International Network (IFIN) will be lobbying the Vatican for changes in Roman Catholic restrictions that are causing 'embarrassment' to mixed marriage couples.

In a document that will be presented to the 2015 Synod on the Family later this year, the AIF say that the IFIN will pull no punches when demanding movement on Baptism, Eucharistic sharing and 'the promise'.

An AIF spokeswoman said: 'Interchurch families, like other Christian families, are called to mirror the reconciling love of God in Christ, on the pattern of Christ's love for his Church. In the covenant of marriage they form one church at home, but in their case this domestic church is related to two as yet separated ecclesial communions. Thus interchurch families embody Christian unity.

They also understand, from their daily life together, that 'exchange of gifts' which comes from sharing with one another the specific riches of their respective traditions. They practised 'receptive ecumenism' before it had a name.

The primary responsibility for the Christian upbringing and education of children rests with their parents. Interchurch parents, like all Christian parents, are together the first teachers of their children. From their earliest years they give witness to them by their actions and their words of the self-giving and reconciling love of God. It is natural that both parents will want to share with their children the treasures of the particular ecclesial communion in which they personally are members. They have to work out how to do this together, stressing unity in diversity rather than treating difference as a threat which will pull them apart. Many interchurch children grow up feeling at home in the traditions of both their parents, and feel themselves privileged rather than confused to have been brought up in this way

The parents share responsibility for their children's education, and celebrate their Christian development (baptism, first communion, confirmation or profession of faith) in as united a way as possible. They are hospitable to others, and sensitive to the needs of each,



This picture was painted for the Association of Interchurch Families in 1998 by one of the sisters of the Benedictine Community at Turvey in Bedfordshire, Sister Regina. Originally painted in oil on wood, it has been reproduced for publicity leaflets, post-cards and posters, and has proved to be a useful visual aid in trying to explain to others what interchurch families are all about, what they stand for.

so that nobody is obliged to act against their conscience. If the churches could assume some of these attitudes and actions, so essential if interchurch families are to flourish, their walk together on the road to Christian unity might become smoother.

The 2014 Synod on the Family, in a brief reference to mixed Christian marriages, said that they 'can exhibit great potential in favouring the spirit of ecumenism', but this does not happen automatically, and in spite of these positive words, there are still areas in which the Church seems to be pulling the partners in an interchurch marriage apart, rather than strengthening their unity. Interchurch families cannot fulfil their vocation and mission to be a sign and means of visible unity within their churches unless they are welcomed, understood and supported by their extended families, their local congregations and their pastors. What they need above all is a pastoral understanding that will focus on building up their marriage in respect for the unity and equality of the partners.

* Interchurch families would therefore like to ask for pastoral attention to be given to the way in which interchurch and mixed couples are prepared for marriage, and that the contribution that interchurch couples can make to marriage preparation should be valued. It would help if further education on the subject could be included in all seminaries.

Interchurch Families continued...

* Interchurch families would like to raise the question of whether a pre-nuptial 'promise' in any form need be required; might it not be sufficient to remind Catholics of their responsibilities as parents, and ascertain that they seriously desire to share their faith with their children, without requiring that this be expressed juridicially?

* Interchurch families would therefore like to ask for respect for parental decisions on the baptism and upbringing of their children, and support for the whole family as they seek to walk forward together in growing unity.

* Interchurch families would therefore like to ask for an explicit statement that interchurch spouses who express a real need and desire for eucharistic sharing, and who fulfil the criteria for admission, can be allowed to receive communion alongside their Catholic partners on an on-going basis, whenever they are at

mass together. In many parishes if the Inter-church couple do not receive together they cause offence to the worshipping faithful. Indeed the attitudes of the faithful and the Magisterium are very divergent in many places. This causes unnecessary resentment and embarrassment to the faithful in an increasingly secular world.

* Interchurch families are greatly encouraged when their ecclesial communions see them not as problems, but as pioneers of Christian unity. They need pastoral understanding and support to liberate them to give this witness to the best of their ability. It is often the practical experience of Inter-church couples that the clergy are ill prepared to deal with them. The priestly formation of clergy often lacks practical exposure to the needs of the Inter church couple. The Anglican Church in Ireland has found that exposing their ordinands to a course/talks from Inter-church couples greatly enhances their pastoral understanding. They learn of both the pastoral needs and the ecumenical opportunities. Interchurch families thus ask for this kind of pastoral understanding of their vocation and mission'.



Absent Friends

Two of the contributors to NIMMA's 'Mixed Emotions' book have passed away in recent weeks.

Ruth McCreesh from Newry and Martin McCrossan from Derry were people of courage and insight, according to NIMMA's Paul McLaughlin.

"It was a privilege to have met, worked with and shared so much with two remarkable individuals", he said.

"They showed through their lives how the power of love can face down even shunning and physical violence and they had the courage to stand up and tell their stories for the benefit of others.

"I know that it was very important for Ruth and Martin to get across a message of tolerance to our young people in particular. They had the foresight to see that their examples, however unpleasant at times, would have much to say to this generation and the next.

"They were as unselfish in their support of our project as they were in life and they will be greatly missed. We in NIMMA offer our sincere condolences to their families".





Spreading the Word

Ignorance may be bliss according to the old saying, but it can certainly cause great unhappiness in the troubled waters of mixed marriage. NIMMA has prided itself in striving to break the circle of ignorance that has fed bigotry and prejudice for centuries by, primarily, providing accurate and up-to-date information about the subject to anyone who asks for it.

We have been pro-active, to use the marketing speak of today, with books, pamphlets and talks aimed at getting a message of tolerance across and our watchwords have been 'education, education, education'.

We have always felt that clergy of all denominations have much to learn from the wealth of expertise and experience that NIMMA has amassed over the years. We have lobbied over the years for more specific attention to be given to InterChurch marriage in the various theological colleges. We have always found that where the clergy know and understand the rich opportunities of InterChurch marriage then the number of complaints rapidly decrease.

It has therefore been a particular pleasure and privilege, over the last few years, for me to share our knowledge with the Deacons in their final year at the Church of Ireland Theological Institute in Dublin. The welcome and hospitality from the staff is excellent. The students are from diverse backgrounds but open to discussion and eager to learn, both in the lecture room and the dining room.

I would say that the Dublin experience has whetted my appetite for further educational forays into the world of the Christian clerical student and I am on record as being available to provide similar talks to Christians of whatever denomination. I await further developments.

Meanwhile, the international umbrella movement of inter-church families – or mixed marriages as we know them – the Interchurch Families International Network (IFIN) is preparing a proposal to the Vatican's 2015 Synod on the Family.

We feature a summary of the IFIN document on page two this month and heartily support its endeavours to act as a catalyst for change. We feel that several changes in areas such as Baptism and Eucharistic sharing are long overdue, but it is only by patient and reasoned argument that any progress will be made and NIMMA has been proud to have contributed to the draft document. We wish it well for the Autumn. Good news is spreading early in the year. We have our book about the children of mixed marriage due to be launched in the Spring, our case for funding from the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister is 'under consideration' and we have just received a donation of £4,000 from the William A. Cadbury Charitable Trust for which we are extremely grateful. It is both generous and timely, given our tightened circumstances.

Ken

POST



BOX

Howay the NIMMA!

Dear NIMMA,

You may remember that I rang you for advice about a dispensation in May 2014. Well it took five months and a lot of discussion, but we finally got it just in time for our wedding. My minister officiated with the help of Damien's uncle who is a priest and everyone had a fantastic day.

We were really grateful for your advice and just knowing that NIMMA was here if we needed help was really useful.

We doubt it won't be the last time we call on you. So thanks again and keep up the good work.

Suzi and Damien, Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

Ed's note: Suzie is from Northern Ireland, Damien is a Geordie.

