

NIMMA News

Email- info@nimma.org.uk

www.nimma.org.uk



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Pope shows 'personal touch' on intercommunion

Pope Francis has shown understanding and humanity by not saying 'No' to the prospect of changes in intercommunion, according to NIMMA Chairman Ken Dunn.

Mr Dunn said that the Pontiff had shown his very personal style in dealing with what is a very contentious issue.

He said: The Pope was addressing a congregation of Rome's Lutherans in an event dedicated to ecumenism when he answered a question from a lady from a mixed marriage about the hurt she and her husband felt at being unable to take communion together.

"His reply to the question, which had been carefully vetted prior to the meeting, that communicants should follow their conscience is a world away from the usual Roman Catholic stance on subject.

"His answer is almost certain to resonate broadly across the ecumenical scene and, to me, is indicative of his humility and compassion".

The Pope, who was given a standing ovation, said: "It's true that in a certain sense, to share means that there aren't differences between us, that we have the same doctrine – underscoring that word, a difficult word to understand. But I ask myself: but don't we have the same Baptism? If we have the same Baptism, shouldn't we be walking together? And you're a witness of a likewise profound journey, a journey of marriage: itself a journey of family and human love and of a shared faith, no? We have the same Baptism.

"When you feel yourself a sinner – and I'm much more of a sinner – when your husband feels he's



Not saying NO - Pope Francis pictured at Rome's Evangelical Lutheran Church.

sinned, you go forward to the Lord and ask forgiveness; your husband does the same and also goes to the priest and asks absolution, [thus] I'm healed and kept alive in my Baptism. When you pray together, that Baptism grows, becomes stronger. When you teach your kids who is Jesus? Why did Jesus come? What did Jesus do for us? You're doing the same thing, whether in the Lutheran language or the Catholic one, but it's the same".

As if to reinforce the point, in a move clearly decided in advance, Francis publicly presented the Lutheran pastor with a chalice which appeared identical to the ones he gave the archbishops of Washington, New York and Philadelphia during his late September US trip.

However, the Pope also stressed; "I would never dare to *give permission*, because it is not my competence. One baptism, one Lord, one faith. Talk to the Lord and then go forward. I don't dare say anything more".

Obituary

Fr Gerry Reynolds 1935-2015

NIMMA has lost an old and trusted friend with the death of Redemptorist ecumenist Fr Gerry Reynolds, writes Chairman Ken Dunn.

“We are shocked at the sudden passing of our friend and supporter Fr Gerry, who died in Belfast after a short illness. He had spoken to Paul McLaughlin, our development officer, just two days before, inviting us to the launch of a new book on ecumenism to which he had contributed a chapter and making special mention of a piece about NIMMA that it included. It was typical of the man that he should have thought of us at such a busy time in his life, but then this was the priest who, when Lagan College had nowhere to stage its Christmas carol service many years ago, opened the doors of Clonard Monastery with a warm welcome. His was that kind of warm and welcoming Christianity that won friends and admirers across this island.

His humanity and humour were evident in that conversation also when he asked Paul; ‘is that McLaughlin with an ‘O’ or and ‘A’, because I know you fellas can get upset if it’s spelt wrongly’.

Fr Gerry is renowned for his work for peace and reconciliation on this island and in this community and we are saddened that someone who played such a pivotal role in both areas has been taken from us.

Fr Gerry was a man full of the grace of Jesus who reached across divides, a rare being in this world. He ministered to NIMMA folk at Corrymela in the early days with compassion and consideration and his deep desire for the unity of Christ’s Church and Eucharistic harmony shone through in all that he said and did.



Reconciliation at work: Fr Gerry Reynolds and Ken Dunn at the NIMMA service of healing and reconciliation at Belfast’s Townsend Street Presbyterian Church in 2010.

He acknowledged difference, welcomed diversity and had that great gift of being able to listen to others with respect and a real willingness to learn. He showed us all by his example how to deal with our differences in the journey to Christ and he knew a thing or two about mixed marriage.

In the book ‘Ireland and Vatican II’ he said; “Since it began in 1974, NIMMA has given enormous help to couples. Members of NIMMA share their personal experiences and together discover ways of overcoming the inherent problems of mixed marriage in the social, cultural and political divisions of Northern Ireland. As an association, NIMMA has had a beneficial influence on the churches’ approach to such marriages and on attitudes to them at the local community grassroots”.

Yes, Fr Gerry was our friend and the news of his passing was devastating for all of us. He will be sorely missed by all who strive for true reconciliation in the Christian Church. May he rest in peace”.

Ken



From the Chair.....



‘Christmas - a shining example for the rest of the Year’

Christmas. Yes it’s that time of year again. Not the holidays or even the festive season as so many of the politically correct and marketing fraternity would have us believe, but rather Christmas, the celebration of the birth of the Christ Child.

A time for peace and good will, things that should last for a whole twelve months, to take centre stage, a time for giving and sharing that should be a shining example to the rest of the year.

Christmas is also a time for family and 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. Certainly, we have peace of a sort, although with the shadow of violence hanging over us. Unfortunately, reconciliation, despite the ‘Fresh Start’, still seems as stale as left-over mince pies.

Thank goodness for NIMMA. We are always optimistic and always looking forward, no matter what negatives come our way. Within the past few days that optimism got a shot in the arm when a former Moderator of the Presbyterian Church, Dr Norman Hamilton outlined ‘a new conversation about reconciliation that is needed urgently’.

Dr Hamilton wrote in a morning newspaper; *“I want to suggest that reconciliation is fundamentally the restoring and healing of fractured relationships. It is about the quality of relationships between people, communities and even nations who were, and still are, estranged from each other, often because of the intense pain and hurt inflicted and experienced.*

“This leads me to the best day-to-day description of reconciliation that I have: working together for the common good, with generosity of spirit and care for the other at its very heart”.

That seems like a ‘Fresh Start’ to me and one that should be a compulsory New Year’s resolution for all of us.

NIMMA continues to be the only advocate for mixed



marriage on this island, the only information and support organisation for people who break with tradition, a dedicated battler for tolerance and acceptance of diversity and a champion of integrated education and mixed social housing. An organisation that seeks to build relationships, to heal relationships and to put relationships first. We are needed more than ever right now and we need that to be recognised, particularly by the Northern Ireland executive with an injection of much-needed funding.

NIMMA 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 on the island - 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 reconciliation and mixed marriage, academics from across the globe see us as the natural provider of research material and our local educationalists recognise that our material, such as our books ‘Mixed Emotions’ and ‘Both Sides Now’, can make a real difference in local schools.

This month we even had a Polish researcher from reconciliation remains top of our Christmas wish list. That’s why we are optimists after all.

I hope that your Christmas brings you peace, goodwill and reconciliation as I wish you a *very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to all and look ahead to 2016 and to continuing to play our part in building a more inclusive society for all of our people.*

Ken



A Family Favourite

by Paul McLaughlin

Never mind what the marketing gurus try to tell us about the great retail God that we should all worship at this time of year, Christmas is about family and always has been. The birth of the Christ Child completed the Holy Family and our celebration of his nativity brings our own families sharply into focus. Even for an old cynic like me.

‘Christmas was only two days away and, already, the turkey hung on the back of our coalhole door. Jimmy, my talkative eight-year-old brother, said it looked like a corpse, although he had never seen one I am sure, while I, four years older and, in my opinion, considerably wiser, examined the body forensically each time I was despatched for a shovel of coal. It was cold and limp and hung upside down like St Peter in the catechism picture at school. **“Tell you what, Jimmy,” I said on my first fuel trip after Sunday lunch:**

“This time last week that bird was running about without a care in the world. “It seems wrong that it was killed to give us a Christmas dinner.”

“Wrong, nothing. You’ll not be thinking that when he’s covered in cranberry sauce and crying out for the carving knife.”

Jimmy laughed as he headed out the back door with his football boots draped over his shoulder, amking bobble noises and running a hand wickedly across his throat. He had had the boots since his birthday in February and he and the pair were inseparable; they even hung on the end of his bed like unwelcome honeymoon presents.

I shovelled the coal and turned toward the scullery, shuddering, as I felt the wing feathers of the suspended bird brush against my cheek.

“Goodwill to all men”, I thought: “But good-bye to turkeys”.

I’d spoken to my mother about the bird on the day my father had brought it from the market in town.

“Mammy, Christmas is supposed to be about giving and charity and celebrating the birth of the baby Jesus, so why is it that all we seem to do is kill innocent animals for our own greed?”

She had looked stunned, standing in her usual spot in front of the sink, drying the dishes, and told me that Jesus wanted families to celebrate his birthday and gave people the animals to make that celebration complete, **“Just like it says in the bible”,** she said reverently.

“Well, I don’t know about that,” I said sullenly, weak on bible study, even weaker on parental backchat: “But Daddy shouldn’t go around calling him “Tony the turkey”. Teacher says that we shouldn’t eat anything with a face and our turkey’s got a name AND a face.”



Radiohead: Cliff Michelmore. What he lacked in hair, he made up for in voice.

Mother waved me away with a chequered dishcloth, a look of genuine bemusement and just a whisper of “vegetarian eejits”. I knew her well enough to realise that the discussion was at an end, so I left it at that. My protest had been registered and my conscience cleared. A portent surely for future days.

The Echo radio whistled and hummed from the living room as my father scrolled up and down the tuning dial looking for the Light Programme. I had watched him place a threepenny bit on top of the sound valve “to ensure the connection” he said and I was always surprised that it made any sound at all. Suddenly, however, the static cleared and the beautiful voice of Jane Froman filled the room. “With a song in my heart, I behold your adorable face”, she sang as the signature tune to the popular request show “Two way family favourites” made its weekly appearance in our house.

“This is a special request for British Forces Post Office 50 in Munster”, started Cliff Michelmore the presenter. In pictures in the Radio Times, Cliff always reminded me of Bobby Charlton’s father as I had imagined the man, but what Cliff lacked in hair he certainly made up for in voice. It was warm and friendly and welcoming. I liked him without knowing him. In the same way I suppose that many people hate others without ever meeting them. There’s just no logic to it, but it happens all the time.

I also thought Cliff’s geography was wrong and said so without really thinking.

“Daddy, how can the British Forces have a Post Office in Munster when that’s in the Free State?” I said thinking myself ever so clever. I had just come second in the Christmas geography test and there was no holding me.

“Ach, son dear, this is Moonster not Munster. Moonster’s in Germany where the soldiers are stationed.”

That explained a lot of what I had considered to be duff requests over the previous six months or so, but I still resolved to read up the school atlas after the holidays. Daddy was never wrong, as far as I could see, but I wanted to be sure before bringing up the matter in class. If wanting to appear clever is a fault and my mother insisted that it was, then I was going to make sure I was at least in the right before I made another clever appearance.

Jimmy and his boots returned from the football as Cliff was signing off for another week. Goodbyes were said that sounded warm as embraces and genuine as any you would have heard in any family. I listened and looked forward to the special edition that would send Christmas greetings half way across Europe and hoped that Moonster, now that I had a vague idea where it was, would be on the receiving end’.