

# NIMMA News

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## Book date

## Confirmed

NIMMA's long-awaited book about 'mixed' couples that left Northern Ireland is due to be printed before Christmas, according to Chairman Ken Dunn.

The paperback 'Exiles for Love' gives five couples the chance to tell why they left home after marrying 'across the divide'. It is the third part of a NIMMA trilogy that has put a previously taboo subject under the spotlight.

Ken Dunn said, "The project will, hopefully, reinforce the message of reconciliation that our first two books, 'Mixed Emotions' and 'Both Sides Now' are already bringing to local secondary school pupils and also highlight the position of the substantial mixed marriage community in the Province. I thank everyone, particularly our volunteer contributors, for their patience as the project took a lot longer than we had envisaged.

We are responding to the constant demand for information about both the logistics of mixed marriage and the actual experience itself from prospective couples, the press, the churches and community groups, but the stories of those, who either chose or were forced to leave Northern Ireland as a result of their marriages, are the final parts of an emotional jigsaw.

We have shown over the past seven years that our young people, in particular, are keen to know more about mixed marriage, how things have changed over the years and how compromise and accommodation within such relationships are like a blueprint for a shared future, but the untold stories of the exiles must also be heard.

There is still much to be done to create a situation where an organisation like NIMMA is no longer needed and the new book, like its predecessors, can be a catalyst for debate and discussion about what for so long has been a taboo subject. We see the book as entertaining, as well as educational, and we hope to have it distributed widely to teenagers in our schools."

## Eoin honoured



**T** rue to his word, Eoin Trainor, who featured in our book 'Both Sides Now' four years ago has earned an honours degree in studies relating to the media.

The Carryduff man told us at the time, " I hope to go to university here if I'm lucky enough to qualify and I'm working hard to that end, but I know how fortunate I am to be in that position and to be helped and encouraged at home. Further down the line is hard to see, but, at some stage, I would like to use my experience of media studies to get a job in that area. Perhaps, production and behind the scenes work, but who knows?"

Eoin is a young man with a bright future - we wish him well.

# What Funders want.....We hope

**NIMMA is continually seeking funding to enable it to maintain its work of pastoral care for individuals and couples and its drive for greater reconciliation within our society. Its development officer Paul McLaughlin, tells NIMMA News how the volunteer-based group, formed in February 1974 and a registered charity, sets out its stall when looking for financial support.**

“NIMMA has spent more than 45 years promoting marriage and fostering reconciliation on the island of Ireland. Throughout that times we have survived on a shoestring budget that has seen us scrape by from year to year. This year has been no exception, but sadly, as the number of potential funders has dropped, the number of applicants seeking funding has increased.

### Closing

We are in real danger of closing due to tight funding restrictions and have to make our applications as attractive as possible to prospective supporters. NIMMA’s main aims are to create tolerance and acceptance of mixed marriage, to provide pastoral care, information, support and advice, to help alleviate isolation and promote inclusiveness for a section of the community that is often ostracised, lonely and abused. We aim for a time of real reconciliation when an organisation like NIMMA is no longer required and provide a telephone helpline, comprehensive website and personal support from our small Belfast office. That in a nutshell is what we are about and what we want budding backers to recognise and reward. The generous and consistent support of a number of smaller funders in recent years has proved vital to NIMMA’s work of reconciliation. Despite a lack of Northern Ireland governmental funding, NIMMA, with the backing of several partial core funders, remains the only organisation of this kind on the island of Ireland, catering to a growing ‘mixed’ community – an integrated education survey suggests that as many as one-in-five ‘relationships’ is now mixed – the education and housing sectors.

We desperately need core support again if we are to continue to provide these unique services.

Sectarianism and bigotry are endemic in Northern Ireland society and must be challenged at every turn. NIMMA 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.

### Work

Political posturing by the two extreme parties in power, that see little elective value in promoting the middle ground, has led to a suspension of the Northern Ireland Assembly. Recent history of disputes, parades and overt sectarian hatred show us that Northern Ireland is a very long way from reconciliation.

Recent Work by the Association includes:

- \* a digital package of its two books for distribution to secondary level teachers right across the Province, courtesy of its partner the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education
- \*reaching the printing stage for its third book, ‘Exiles for Love’, about couples that left Northern Ireland after making mixed marriages.
- \* renewing its founder membership of The Stories Network. This is a group with experience of collecting stories relating to the Northern Ireland conflict that is lobbying government for the opportunity to tackle the contentious issue of ‘dealing with the past’ detailed in the Stormont House Agreement. That lobbying is on-going at time of writing
- \* continuing to provide information, pastoral care and support to individuals and couples either in or contemplating mixed marriage
- \* giving talks to a range of academics relating to mixed marriage and reconciliation

# What Funders want.....We hope cont'd

- \* producing a quarterly newsletter, which is distributed widely throughout the island of Ireland to press, clergy, educationalists, politicians, opinion formers and the general public
- \* continuing to lobby for extended integrated education through its partnership with the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE)
- \* lobbying for an increase in shared social housing through its partnership with the Northern Ireland Department for Communities

NIMMA is perceived as an agent for social change in Northern Ireland, is the first port of call for local media on topics such as reconciliation and advocates mixed marriage as a 'normal thing' in a healthy society and one that can provide a blueprint for a truly shared future. Its work for reconciliation impacts on thousands of people on this island through pastoral care that radiates through extended families, an educational strategy that targets secondary school pupils and teachers and by its commitment to integrated education and shared social housing.

Education is the key to breaking the cycle of ignorance that continues to breed and nurture prejudice and sectarianism in this part of the world and NIMMA's trilogy of books are proving useful tools in that battle.

Our children are our most important asset and NIMMA's work with teenagers in schools, teachers and educationalists has shown clearly that young people want to know about

reconciliation, want to have role models and want to talk about difference and diversity. This was unheard of until just a few years ago, yet now two NIMMA books are being used extensively in integrated schools and on shared campus across the Province.

We in NIMMA know all the problems we face in this Province, how self-interest among political parties reinforces division and how mixed marriage is viewed with suspicion, disapproval and often contempt, particularly in those sections of our society which continue to suffer from social deprivation, but we remain confident that all these redoubtable challenges can be addressed. We have been doing just that for the past 45 years

## Response

Mixed relationships are on the increase, it is now easier to make a mixed marriage – thanks to the work of NIMMA – and there is a substantial 'mixed community' out there that needs a strong voice to fight its corner.

We hope that by highlighting the problem and our pastoral response to that problem that charitable trusts and foundations will consider NIMMA for funding and, perhaps, more structured partnerships that would allow us to flourish over a number of years. It is a big ask."



# Welcome Funding



An Roinn Gnóthaí  
Eachtracha agus Trádála  
Department of  
Foreign Affairs and Trade

**NIMMA Chair Ken Dunn has welcomed the continued support of two of the Association's most consistent funders in recent years.**

The Souter Charitable trust, which is a Christian organisation based in Scotland, and the Irish Republic's Department of Foreign Affairs have pledged a total of £5000 to help cover some of NIMMA's running costs.

Ken said, "We are delighted that two of our old friends have come on board once again.

They recognise the importance of our work and its impact on reconciliation and tolerance in this part of the world. This timely backing will allow us to maintain our pastoral care of individuals and couples throughout the island.

We have established a good relationship with both and appreciate their understanding and concern for the problems we are facing.

We have a peace of sorts in Northern Ireland at this time, but, sadly, we appear as far away as ever from the reconciliation we need and deserve. There is still so much work to be done before we can fulfil our own mission statement of winding up the Association when NIMMA is no longer required.

Meanwhile, we will continue to provide pastoral care, to challenge sectarianism and prejudice and to do all that we can to foster reconciliation through example and education.

We in NIMMA know all the problems we face in this Province, how self-interest among political parties reinforces division and how mixed marriage is viewed with suspicion, disapproval and often contempt, particularly in those sections of our society which continue to suffer from social deprivation, but we remain confident that we can address all these redoubtable challenges with the help of funders like the Souter Charitable Trust and the DFA."



# Time for government to dig deep

**This is the October newsletter and I can safely say that there is good news and no news as we slip into autumn.**

**Our third book, 'Exiles for Love' will be in print before Christmas and that'll be good news to the ears of our ever patient contributors who have borne with us through the project for so long. No news on the funding front as we await the outcome of several grant applications that will impact dramatically on our future.**

**No news also on the search for new premises after the sale of Bryson House. We are house hunting at the minute and hope that no news is good news for the New Year.**

**Funding is the life blood of a small charity like NIMMA, funding dependant on the goodwill of the Irish government and a number of charitable trusts and foundations and this issue majors on how NIMMA sets out its stall to achieve what it needs to survive.**

**Unfortunately, we are one of very many in the same boat.**

**I wish I had a pound for every person who has told me in the past year that NIMMA is funded by the Northern Ireland government. Not only do we not have such a thing, we didn't get a penny from it when we did.**

**It is a common misconception that local statutory funding, that covers everything from bonfires to big festivals, must surely take financial responsibility for the fight against sectarianism. It does not and hasn't for a very long time.**

**In fact, many would have us believe that the 'sectarian problem' has gone away and somehow been replaced by an ethnic or immigration one. Any such problem is a blight on our society and should be tackled head on. We've been doing our bit on a shoestring for decades. It's time either a local administration or a direct rule set up dug deep to make its contribution.**

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# Programme to reunite Lovers

**There is something haunting about the idea of a lost love; a relationship that never quite ran its natural course and could be reignited someday.**

Perhaps it's not surprising that one in five people long to get back with an old flame, and now a new television show from ITV is searching for pining lovers in Northern Ireland.

The team that makes 'Long Lost Family' have been reuniting people with missing family members for a decade; now they want to bring romantic soulmates together after years apart. They have approached NIMMA for help, believing that the recent history of Northern Island may have indirectly resulted in a few star-crossed lovers.

The turbulence of The Troubles and waves of migration to and from Northern Island in the latter part of the 20th century mean many couples may have been separated by circumstances. If this sounds like you, they want to hear your story.

There is it seems, good reason why tales of love that has been lost-and-found-again, feature so heavily in

popular culture; because for all of us who shudder at the thought of reigniting a teenage flame, there are plenty who try it ... and succeed. An American study of over 1000 re-kindled relationships found that their success rate was staggeringly high with 72% staying together long term.

This is because 'Rekindlers' were initially separated for situational reasons: perhaps their family moved away, or their parents disapproved. In other words, their love was interrupted rather than concluded. The study found that the connections that we make between 14 and 25 are often the strongest of our lives because they occur during our formative years. 'Rekindlers' typically grew up together; they have a shared history and similar backgrounds which are both good starting points for any long-term romance.

**So, if you want to reconnect with someone special from your past call 020 3301 8577 or email [longlostloves@walltowall.co.uk](mailto:longlostloves@walltowall.co.uk). (All applicants must be single and 18 or over. All information will be treated as confidential).**

*Ken*