

NIMMA News

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Core funding crisis threatens NIMMA future

NIMMA's future is in jeopardy due to a lack of funding.

The charity, which has been providing support and advice to mixed marriage people for more than 40 years, faces closure in a matter of months unless urgent core funding can be found.

Chairman Ken Dunn said, "We have been operating on a shoestring for a very long time and dependent on charitable trusts, foundations and the Irish government for our survival.

"Those channels have been exhausted and the prospect of closure looms larger as we seek financial support from an ever decreasing pool of funders.

"NIMMA is a small charity that, despite punching well above its weight in terms of impact in the community and even international recognition and is enjoying arguably the most successful period in its history, will close without an urgent financial injection.

"We receive no government support and rely entirely on grants from charitable foundations. Competition for these is increasingly fierce, given the current economic climate, and we are appealing to anyone who shares our concerns for the future to pledge his or her support".

If you feel you can help NIMMA, please contact its Belfast office on 02890 235444 or e-mail info@nimma.org.uk

Fermanagh Family go Dutch



Happy families in the Fermanagh Lakelands.

Mixed Emotions veteran volunteers Ann and Stephen Cairns, pictured at home in Enniskillen with their grandchildren, are the latest mixed marriage interviewees for the international media. Dutch journalist Lois Van Wijnen contacted NIMMA for just such a couple to feature in her latest project about a post-conflict Northern Ireland. Stephen, originally from Belfast, was more than happy to help. "I've told Lois to hop on a bus and come visit us in what is the best place in the world to rear a family. And one of the prettiest."



NIMMA makes the grade

Leeds University student Laura Smith, who visited Belfast last summer to meet with NIMMA and some of the NIMMA ‘book people’ in preparation for her dissertation, has earned her MA and graduates this month.

Laura was full of thanks for her Belfast benefactors, “Thank you so much again for all your help with my work. I look back at my time in Northern Ireland this summer with very fond memories, meeting such lovely people and I am sure that your work for NIMMA is still being an invaluable support for people. My work has now been graded.”

Laura’s project aimed to explore the complexities that arise from marriages across the Christian divide in a post-conflict Northern Ireland was described by NIMMA Chair Ken Dunn as a comprehensive and coherent piece of research.

He said, “We open our doors and our hearts to academics at every opportunity and Laura’s work is a welcome addition to the growing mixed marriage canon.”

Three questions dominated her research;

*To what extent can it be asserted that mixed marriages in Northern Ireland are a valuable contribution to peaceful relations in contemporary society?

*In what ways are ‘traditional’ gender roles and norms impeded or reinforced by mixed marriages and the decisions made to sustain peaceful wider relations within communities in Northern Ireland?

*How successfully can individuals in mixed marriages overcome difficulties in Northern Ireland as a result of their relationship?

Laura said, “Related to the first research question, this study’s findings have raised important issues about the nature of mixed marriages and the extent to which they offer a possibility for peaceful relations. In particular, because of the hostility experienced from participant’s own community, as well as their partner’s, this study suggests that acts of ‘everyday peace-making’ are difficult to maintain, because of persistent boundaries in wider society. Although there is significant debate regarding the specific characteristics of these communities, it is implied that there are limitations in the contribution that can be made from mixed marriages, because of the tendencies of participants to ignore or completely avoid discussing contentious issues.

Ultimately, the coping mechanisms adopted by participants to deal with the traumatic emotional legacies that persist negate the peace-making potential of this act.

However, even with these arduous insights raised, there is still a positive contribution of mixed marriages that needs these to be recognised, as their fundamental existence promotes communication across boundaries, which can lead to reconciliation through dialogue.

This study has also shown that gender plays a part in the specifics of mixed marriages. For example, it emerged that traditional male and female gender roles were reinforced in multiple ways, particularly with regards to expectations of who is expected to care and deal with emotional trauma or be a protective father-figure.

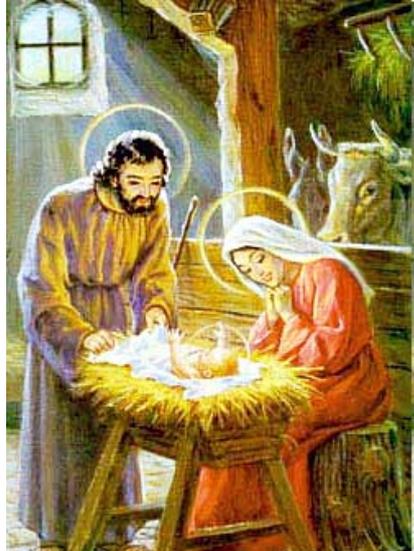
The implications of gender roles being reinforced through everyday peace-making acts such as this appear problematic for progressive definitions of peace which involve multi-faceted societal change, rather than just an absence of violence.

Ultimately, these inferences from the interview data contribute to the current literature by suggesting that in the case of mixed marriages, acts of everyday peace-making are experienced differently by women. This highlights the complexity of such an act, as they are situated within and affected by wider social relations. The findings outlined for this study have also revealed that there are variations in how mixed marriage couples can overcome difficulties experienced as a result of their relationship across the Christian divide.

Overall, it is suggested that how successfully individuals can overcome difficulties associated with an act of everyday peace is contingent on their own agency, the extent of division in society, as well as the extent of emotional trauma experienced. This study strengthens the ideas discussed by earlier studies concerning peace-making, with the principle theoretical implication of this study being that we need to recognise how complex everyday peace-making is, particularly with regards to gender and individual agency.

These insights are of relevance to both practitioner’s and policy-makers, as evidence has been provided that everyday peace-making does offer potential to address sectarianism if appropriately supported. What is still unclear from this research are the specifics of how mixed marriages can be supported by other acts on a scale of peace-making activities. It is suggested that it would be beneficial to explore this gap, to ensure that mixed marriages across the Christian divide in Northern Ireland can be a positive contributor to social relations.”

*** Laura can be contacted at
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Our 20/20 Vision

Christmas is perhaps the happiest time of the year and we at NIMMA, despite the dark clouds hovering over our balance sheet, are looking forward to a joyful and peaceful Christmas and an increasingly reconciled year of 2020.

Since 1974, long before reconciliation became the industry it is today, NIMMA has been working quietly and effectively to help people get together. We broke new ground in those days when putting one's head above the parapet was a dangerous thing by tackling a subject, ie mixed marriage, that no-one spoke about. A subject that was to all intents and purposes Taboo. We continued to innovate over the years by first bending many rules to make life easier for folk in mixed marriages and finally helping to scrap those restrictions all together. It has been a long, sometimes hard, but always satisfying journey that has brought real results.

It is now so much easier to make a mixed marriage in this part of the world, although a powerful sectarian streak still threatens our society and leaves most mixed marriage couples happy to remain anonymous.

We all look forward to a time when an organisation such as NIMMA is no longer required. Sadly that time is still a long way off and I hope and pray that a financial disaster will not force us to give up our work when there is still so much to be done.

Our vision for 2020 is one of further reconciliation and good government made possible by the spirit associated with this time of year - Peace on earth and Good will to all men. Merry Christmas and a very happy New Year.

Ken

Presses start to roll for new NIMMA book



Head printer Denis Killen from Nova Print, Belfast, is in control as NIMMA's latest book rolls off the presses.

The paperback 'Exiles for Love', shown below, 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.

The book will be launched officially in the spring.



Obituary

Mgr. Ambrose Macaulay died in November 2019 aged 85. He was a good friend of NIMMA's. As chaplain in QUB, he guided many Interchurch couples into marriage. Such tasks were always carried out with care and a diligent concern for the details of each couple.

He maintained the same pastoral care when he became parish priest of St Brigid's Belfast.

In retirement he was able to give more attention to his passion for history, producing several books and many scholarly papers. During research visits to Rome he thoroughly enjoyed the relaxed 'restaurant culture', while at home he never failed to ask after NIMMA and its work. May he rest in peace.



A Car for Christmas

by Paul McLaughlin

We wandered around the toy department of Anderson and McAuley's Belfast store where new-fangled escalators stood shoulder to shoulder with a cage lift. The ancient and modern making light of the five floors to the top.

Half a dozen sixth form schoolboys, hair just a little too long, school uniforms mixed and badly matched like underdressed Commancheros. Too old for the toys on display, too naive to care.

Brendan was fixated on a gyroscope that could balance perfectly on the head of a pencil. Swaying from side to side, pencil in hand. he put the 'scope through its paces better than a oily-haired salesman. And he laughed a lot doing it. We all did.

Tony was getting a recognisable tune out of an electronic Stylophone that sounded like a Dalek with throat problems, having first opened its cardboard container. The sign above said 'Don't open the boxes', Tony had blanked out the forbidding 'n't with a navy blue marker from his geometry set.

Mickey stood staring at the four-lane plastic circuit that Scalextric had set up on a raised dais right in the middle of the Christmas arrangement, his mind racing along the electrical connections through wide, horizontal pins on a track held together by two integrated circular, spoon-shaped pins and sockets. He told me so.....several times.

The three of us left were transfixed by a train set of trans-Siberian proportions. A wintry scene of frosted glitter was the backdrop to the perpetual circular motion of a Pullman Express, complete with a trio of luxury coaches. We watched as it rounded cautiously wooded hillsides, painted in emerald green, and rocketed along a straight section the length of a snooker table. The little plastic people on the platforms looked happy. I would have been too if I had been five years younger and had had ten pounds to spare.

Andy and Macs as it was known was among the classiest shops in the city that Christmas of 1969 and looking confidently to the future and a centenary of service. The Troubles were going to be over in a matter of weeks according to the man who tended the boiler in our Christmas Brothers' school and a new decade of prosperity beckoned.

The Christmas mock exams had proved testing, but



this was the year with no formal examinations at its end and despite warnings from Brothers and lay teachers alike that 'no-one should take his foot off the pedal', I had been free-wheeling since September.

Christmas would bring me, despite my seventeenth birthday coming a week later, a stocking filled with an apple, an orange, a chocolate smoker's set of cigarettes, a pipe and a cigar and something special to wear that my mother would vet and buy. No 'outlandish' outfits like loon pants or tie dye vests and definitely no denims. I would have to get those myself from my weekend pub job.

We dispersed when a store detective called time on our shenanigans, the Stylophone going back in the box, the six of us back in a street that was bathed in darkness at just five o'clock.

I thought of earlier Christmases and my lucky escape when the painting-by-numbers set that I had had my heart set on for weeks had become a typewriter..... just in time. My artistic efforts had always caused amusement in school and any numerical, creative jigsaw would have been wasted on me.

At nearly 17, I envied the lads at school whose fathers had helped them over populate the school car park in recent months with a mixture of Austins, Fords and Rovers.

I had told my Dad and he had laughed and joked about Santa being good to well-behaved boys. That Christmas morning, Dad/Daddy Christmas was as true as his word.

"Your car is at the front door, Paul," he said through the blue cloud of a Senior Service cigarette. "Happy motoring."

I ran down the hall and saw it parked in all its glory at our door. A brand spanking new Morris Mini in racing green diecast, complete with yellow 'Dinky' box.