

*That we may be One*

*A Directory of Good Ecumenical Practice*

*in*

*The Diocese of Down and Connor*

*March 2007*

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## Introduction

This publication is the result of a recent recommendation by Cardinal Walter Kasper, President of the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. The cardinal described ecumenism as "a matter of making friendships, rather than simply accumulating documents on a shelf." He went on to say, "Ecumenism is a thing of personal encounter that enables people to overcome mistrust and make friendships." This brief publication describes how priests and people in different parishes in the diocese have "stepped out of the trenches", crossed the divide, and made a difference. Please God their example will inspire us all to begin, or begin again, the great work of "healing the wounds of sin and division" in our society.

**Part 1** of the directory deals with ecumenical events and activities 'on the ground' – i.e. parish by parish. This includes a brief summary of the engagements and commitments of the three bishops; of the work of Youthcom; of suggestions about initiating or improving clergy and laity fraternals, the Unity Pilgrimages of Clonard Monastery and the ecumenical experience of a North Belfast lay person and a Methodist minister.

**Part 2** of the directory attempts to give an overview of the situation in the diocese as a whole, and to make practical suggestions for inter-church activities and worship.

## **Ecumenical engagements and commitments of the Bishop and Auxiliary Bishops for 2005 – 2006**

The following occasions are a selection of events from the diaries of the Bishop and Auxiliary Bishops.

### **Bishop Patrick Walsh**

- 18th January 2005                      Church Unity Service in St. Bernard's Church,  
Glengormley.
- 16th/17th May 2005                      North West Triangle meeting, Liverpool.

### **Bishop Farquhar**

- 17 January 2005                      Delivered Lecture in Kylemore Abbey for Week of Prayer  
for Christian Unity.
- 18 January 2005                      Attended Church Unity Service in St Bernard's Church,  
Glengormley).
- 24 January 2005                      Attended Greenhills Ecumenical Conference.
- 31 January 2005                      Visited Aquinas Diocesan Grammar School with Dr Ken  
Newell, Presbyterian Moderator.
- 19 February 2005                      Attended re-opening of Whitehouse Presbyterian Church (rebuilt  
after a fire).
- 22-25 February 2005                      CCBI General Assembly in Swanwick.
- 16-20 March 2005                      St Patrick's Weekend - Preached at Mass and in Presbyterian  
Church in Seattle at invitation of Archbishop Alex Brunett, Co-  
Chair of ARCIC along with Reverend Barry Keating.
- 16-17 May 2005                      Attended North West Triangle Meeting in Liverpool (Heads of  
Churches of Glasgow, Liverpool and Belfast).
- 12-18 September 2005                      Rome, represented Irish Episcopal Conference at the 40th  
Anniversary of Dei Verbum.
- 29 September 2005                      Chair Advisory Committee on Ecumenism.

Irish Inter-Church Committee:

11 February 2005; 5-6 May 2005 (Gen Meeting in Cork); 27 May 2005;  
23 September 2005; 2 December 2005.

UTV:

10 March 2005; 7 October 2005; 14 December 2005: Religious Advisory Panel;  
6 April 2005: Recorded one of an inter-Church series of epilogues on  
Pope John Paul II, RIP.

World Alliance of Reformed Churches Dialogue:

22-26 June 2005: Worked on Final Report In Rome;  
26-30 October 2005: Drafting Group in Geneva;  
16 October 2005: Met at Church House with Dr Clifford Kirkpatrick, President  
of WARC;  
18 October 2005: Conducted Seminar for Clergy - Presbyterian and Catholic  
with Dr Kirkpatrick.

IARCUUM,

International Anglican Roman Catholic Commission on Unity and Mission -  
6-10 September 2005: European Subgroup meeting in London;  
10-16 November 2005: General Meeting in Palazzola in Rome.

US/NI/Presbyterian/RC Committee

21 October 2005: Represented Committee at Presentation of  
Business Initiative Certificates.

**Bishop Donal McKeown**

18 January 2005	Attended Ecumenical Service in St Anne's Church of Ireland, Cathedral, Belfast
22 February 2005	Chaired organising committee and led one day Conference on "Promoting Reconciliation through Education".
7 March 2005	Spoke at launch of <i>Acting in Good Faith</i> in Parliament Buildings, Stormont. This publication came from the Churches Community Work Alliance.
12 April 2005	Spoke at the launch of <i>Journey towards Healing</i> , a Government backed, faith-based resource on coping with trauma.
8 June 2005	Spoke at Social Responsibility Network (an Anglican organisation) Annual Conference in Belfast. (Conference Theme: Conflict Transformation – Process and Practice). Delivered Biblical Reflection on 'Incarnation through Reconciliation to bring Transformation'.

Bishop McKeown is also a member of the following working groups:

- Partners in Transformation' (Irish School of Ecumenics).
- Churches Community Work Alliance' (Belfast).
- Centre for Contemporary Christianity in Ireland.
- Chair of the Trustees of the Churches' Peace Education Programme.
- Member of Northern Ireland Equality Commission's Good Relations Forum.

### **Youthcom: The Down and Connor Youth Commission**

Youthcom's Strategic Plan sets out four priority areas for those involved in youth work and youth ministry within the diocese. One of these priority areas is 'Peace and Reconciliation' work.

Youthcom offers its support and experience to parishes and other community based groups in providing opportunities for young people of different traditions and cultural backgrounds to develop mutual understanding, tolerance, acceptance and respect and to be active participants in the building of a just and peaceful society.

One of Youthcom's signature programmes is the 'New Day' Peacemakers programme. New Day was established nearly ten years ago at a time when a shared future looked like a dream. Today the 'New Day' programme deals with the reality of a shared future and the contemporary challenges in the areas of community relations and ecumenism. As Ireland becomes more diverse and multicultural it is important that our young people develop mutual respect and understanding.

New Day is primarily a single identity programme with the overall aim of preparing young people and their leaders for a shared future and encourages participants to meet young people from different religious and cultural backgrounds. The programme explores young people's personal identity and also their cultural and faith identity. It also challenges young people to step out in faith to be peace makers and instigators for change within their own communities by having meaningful interaction with young people from different religious, cultural and political backgrounds.

Current areas of work in the peace and reconciliation area include the following:

- 30 participants trained throughout the diocese to be New Day facilitators.
- Youthcom is in the process of publishing a New Day Peacemakers' Programme Manual and resources that will be made available to all those involved in youth work and community relations within the diocese. An adult version of the New Day programme is also being considered for those involved in ecumenical work within the church.
- This year over 300 young people in the diocese will have taken part in the New Day programme.
- Working in partnership with Youth Link: NI in coordinating the involvement of young Catholics in community relations events and peace and reconciliation initiatives.
- Currently running New Day in a few schools and arranging for the young people to engage with young students from different religions through the Kairos programme with Youth Link: NI. Schools involved include St Comgall's Larne, La Salle Boys, Lagan College, St Genevieve's and St Patrick's Ballymena.

- Youthcom has also been involved in coordinating speakers from different religious backgrounds to speak in youth groups, schools and churches on peace and reconciliation.
- Other international exchanges have been an influential part of promoting mutual understanding and respect across cultural and religious barriers.

## **Clergy Fellowships**

*Father Daniel Whyte PP VF, St Mary's on the Hill, reflects on how these may be started*

“Local clergy usually get to know one another in the course of ordinary pastoral work and in the joint ventures across the divide with which we are now more familiar. Initially, invite these ministers to the parochial house for a chat particularly men and women who, from experience, one knows would be open to such a meeting. After this social occasion, one might progress to the discussion of local community issues, and, in the process, come to know and trust each other. Being seen together in public is another step forward. Prayer and sharing of services could grow out of that. Be patient, but do persevere. “Have no fear, do not let your hands fall limp” (Zeph 3:16).

“I believe the priest should take the initiative in these matters but always in a manner that is most sensitive to the feelings and perhaps misgivings of others. A parish priest was talking to me about this recently. He is anxious to establish a clergy fellowship in his area, and I am encouraging him to set up some sort of friendly, non-threatening dialogue with Protestant colleagues. There will always be people who will readily respond and are just waiting to be asked, and there are others who need a little friendly persuasion! It is vital to start small; just sow the seeds and let the Lord do what we know he is good at!

“If Catholic people know their priest is open and ecumenical they will feel free to be the same in their own circle. Indeed, people have taken the bit between their teeth when they are not getting from their priests the leadership they could reasonably have expected. But it is, of course, much more preferable if we can travel together. The shepherds need to lead, always intent on fostering unity and peace. Sometimes circumstances will be such that openness and fraternity between churches in a particular local area are not possible. That is no reason to let things stagnate. For example, there could be an outreach programme with another church community some distance away. The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step!”

### *A typical Clergy Fellowship*

*Father Sean Emerson Adm, Holy Family, reflects on the experiences of one such group in North Belfast*

This Fellowship can trace its beginnings back to Friday 21<sup>st</sup> July 1972, otherwise known as “Bloody Friday”. On that day, there was a car bomb which exploded at approximately 3.20 p.m. on the Cavehill Road in North Belfast. Three people were killed that day two women, Margaret O’Hare and Bridget Murray, both Catholics, and a young man, Stephen Parker, aged 14, from Fortwilliam Presbyterian Church. Afterwards, Stephen’s family emigrated to Canada, where they still live, each year sending a bouquet of flowers to be placed at the Good Friday Cross. This Cross is made up of two pieces of wood from the Cavehill Road explosion, nailed together in the shape of a cross. The cross moves around five local churches: Fortwilliam Presbyterian, Cavehill Methodist, Church of the Resurrection, Rosemary Presbyterian and St. Peter’s Church of Ireland, and remains in each church for one year. Recently, it was transferred on the occasion of the

Christmas Carol Walk which is organised by lay people from the churches.

The Clergy Fellowship has changed name, membership and direction over the past twenty five years. It owes a great deal to the Ministers and Priests who have spent time working in the area such as Father Michael Hurley SJ, Archdeacon Rolston, Father Martin Magill and more recently, Dr John Dunlop. At the beginning, its primary objective was to promote good neighbourliness and to encourage people to show greater respect towards one another. The Troubles probably had a greater impetus in this area, where the vast majority of sectarian murders in Belfast have been carried out. The Clergy Fellowship aimed to give witness to the need for Christians to respect and love one another and live together in peace.

Today, the number of clergy who attend the Fellowship has reduced for a number of reasons. We meet on a monthly basis and spend time discussing the influence the church should have on our community. There have been meetings with statutory agencies and politicians in regard to their role in the community and some of the key issues that need to be addressed therein. In the past year, the Fellowship has organised a Breakfast Meeting in a local restaurant, addressed by Duncan Morrow, Director of the Community Relations Council and attended by over fifty members of the churches. There have also been “pulpit exchanges” when Ministers have spoken at Mass in Holy Family Parish and Priests have spoken at Services in Fortwilliam Presbyterian, St. Peter’s Church of Ireland and Rosemary Presbyterian. Recently, a letter of support for the Mater Hospital was signed by the members of the Fellowship and was published in the Belfast Telegraph and the Irish Times. This, hopefully, gave clear leadership to the people in the area through witnessing as to how the churches must work together and also clearly indicating that there is often much more that unites rather than divides us.

One of the key principles of the Fellowship is the need for respect for our differences and the belief that small things done well can make a difference. From the Fellowship a partnership between Fortwilliam Presbyterian Church and Holy Family Parish known as ‘Transforming Conflicted Communities Partnership’ has been formed. It is hoped this project will encourage reconciliation and clearly demonstrate that the values and teachings of the Gospel can make a difference in all our lives.

### **The experiences of a Catholic layperson in North Belfast**

In late 2001, I began the practice of visiting a Protestant church for Sunday morning Service. At first, I visited churches in my immediate neighbourhood, where I already knew the minister concerned. For a year or more, I did this on about a fortnightly basis, gradually taking in more churches in North Belfast. In the end, I had built up a list of 16 churches – 8 Presbyterian, 4 Church of Ireland, and 1 each Methodist, Non-Subscribing Presbyterian, Baptist and Pentecostal. Every time I visited a new church, I felt slightly apprehensive, and was often tempted to turn round and go elsewhere, particularly when the church was in what I considered a strongly Unionist area. My fears, thank God, always proved to be unfounded.

From about the beginning of 2003, I felt able to make a commitment to visit one of these churches every Sunday, and created a rota to which I adhered, so that I now visit each church about 3 times a year. In this way, I have got to know at least some of the congregations and all of the ministers. In each church without exception I have received a warm welcome.

These visits have helped me to appreciate the richness of the graces with which the Lord has blessed the Protestant churches. My Sunday worship, which has commenced with Mass on Saturday evening and concluded with Mass on Sunday evening, has now, I feel, been ‘rounded off’ by joining on Sunday mornings with my Protestant brothers and sisters in prayer and praise of the Lord whom we all worship. Never once, either in the form of worship or in the sermon, have I heard a single word which has offended me as a Catholic. The cliché says, “More unites us than divides us.” I am now able to affirm this out of personal experience, for which I thank God. *(Terry Donaghy)*

### **The experiences of a Methodist Ecumenist**

I am grateful to Bishop Patrick Walsh for the privilege of making a contribution to the work of the Diocesan Ecumenical Commission. Let me explain how this came about.

I am a Methodist Minister and my entire ministry I have sought to pray and work for the unity and mission of Christ’s Church. From my teenage years I was concerned about the clear evidence of schism in the Church. Schism appeared to be contrary to the prayer of Jesus for his disciples ‘that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. [John 17:21] I have endeavoured to understand how these various schisms occurred in the course of history. But most of all, by prayer and the building up of personal relationships, I have tried to reach across the Christian community. As a result, discipleship has become for me a genuine, meaningful and dynamic experience.

This brief thumbnail sketch of my convictions concerning Christian unity may explain why in 2004, on my retirement as Principal of Edgehill Theological College – the theological college of the Methodist Church in Ireland – I wrote to Bishop Walsh to enquire if I might be able to serve in some voluntary capacity in the Catholic Church. He put me in contact with the Diocesan Ecumenical Commission and suggested that I might be able to assist in some way in the work of the Commission. I have been warmly received by its members and look forward to sharing in its work. If I can be of assistance in any way throughout the diocese, I will be glad to be of service. *(Dennis Cooke)*

## PARISHES

### **City and Mensal Parishes**

#### **Christ the Redeemer, Lagmore**

- Involvement with Ulster Project, Northern Ireland, that sends annually 340 teenagers on Cross Community ventures to the United States.
- Restoration Ministries Initiative with Rev. Ruth Patterson meeting monthly with local clergy to pray, listen and learn.
- Assemblies at local Oakwood Integrated Primary School.
- Youth Initiatives – a cross community faith-building programme for young people.
- Divine Healing ministry.

#### **Derriaghy**

- Parish Ecumenical Group fosters various initiatives with neighbouring Harmony Hill Presbyterian. Congregation.
- Quarterly Bible Study nights with the same congregation.
- Involvement of Parish Priest with Lambeg Church group.
- Involvement of Parish Priest with “Lisburn Churches Together”.
- 70% of parish marriages are inter-church, inter-community. This leads to a regular involvement of ministers from other denominations in church ceremonies.

#### **Drumbo and Carryduff**

- Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Visit by Rev John Aughmuty, Church of Ireland, Rector of St Ignatius.
- Women’s World Day of Prayer – address by Anne Harrington
- Bridging the Gap with Knock Presbyterian Church.
- Inter Church Couples special Sunday Service with Rev. Ruth Patterson.
- Redemptorist Mission with three other Christian Churches, the local Church of Ireland, Saintfield, Road Presbyterian Church and Carryduff Presbyterian Church.
- Thanksgiving Service in Church of Ireland with Bishop Millar at 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Church Dedication.
- Participation in Week of Prayer Ecumenical Service in Church of Ireland (January 2005).
- Carryduff Clergy Fellowship/ Ballynafeigh Fellowship.

#### **Greencastle**

- Ecumenical Carol Services in the district in one of the local churches.
- Ecumenical dialogue with Presbyterian Minister (Rev. Liz Hughes), Church of Ireland (Rev. Hayden Foster) and Methodist Minister (Rev. Peter Mercer).

- Annual Parish Pentecost Party held in Pastoral Centre.

### **Holy Cross**

- Regular Clergy Fellowship meetings with local church ministers including the Reverend Norman Hamilton, Ballysillan Presbyterian Church and Canon Trevor Williams, Rector of Holy Trinity and Emmanuel Church of Ireland, to promote good community relations in the area.
- At a recent meeting of this clergy fellowship they had David Stevens speak to them, and lead discussion on the issues raised in his book, “The Land of Unlikeness – Explorations into Reconciliation”. All present found this meeting particularly helpful. Topics of concern in the locality generally form the agenda. Meetings are normally convened by Canon Trevor Williams, Ballysillan Church of Ireland. Whilst the development of good relations within the local community has been slow, at least contacts have now been made and a trust has begun to build within the community where none existed in the past.
- In addition to this Clergy Fellowship, clergy from Ardoyne, Ballysillan, Ligoniel, Oldpark, Woodvale, Twadell and other inter-face areas have been able to come together in one form or another over recent years, “to clarify issues through their good offices.”
- Fr Troy and two local Protestant clergymen attended a meeting of “Churches Together in Britain and Ireland” which was held in Swanwick, Derbyshire. An Inter-Church group in Belfast paid their conference and travel expenses. They addressed the Conference on their experiences of working as ministers devoted to the Christian message in a deeply divided society.

### **Holy Rosary**

- Monthly meetings (except summer months) of the Ballynaveigh Clergy Fellowship.
- Annual Carol Service in Advent with participation from Holy Rosary, Rosetta and St Bernard’s Primary School Choirs.
- Annual Service for Church Unity Week.
- Saturday morning Unity Breakfast. People drawn from the local churches gather on the morning at 8.30am for a cooked breakfast. A well-known person is invited to speak for 15 minutes.
- Good Friday Service in the Ormeau Park.
- Speakers are invited to address monthly meetings on specific topics.
- Inter-Church summer schemes.
- Inter-Church Table Quizzes.
- Organised Inter-Church walk up Divis and Black Mountain.
- Taize Prayer held on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of each month at 7pm.
- Annual Welcome Mass with inter-Church attendance for newcomers to the parish with a cup of tea afterwards.

- An International Food Evening emerged from the above. The events are attended by Catholics and Protestants, with some Muslim, Polish, American, Japanese and French guests. Asian food was provided.

### **Nativity, Poleglass**

- The Elders of Kilmakee Presbyterian Church pay a visit to the Parish Pastoral Council.
- As part of the Unity Pilgrim Programme parishioners visiting Kilmakee Presbyterian Church on Trinity Sunday, Mission Sunday and Remembrance Day.

### **St Agnes'**

- Inter church service for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.
- Partnership with Ballygilbert and Kilmakee Presbyterian Churches
- Visitation of groups to local churches for their Sunday Services.
- Prayer Services in St Anne's Cathedral and Townsend Presbyterian Church for Brother David Jardine's Prayer for Peace campaigns.
- Representatives of St Agnes' at conferences about inter-church work and meeting similar groups with President Robinson.
- Habitat for Humanity
- Peace Walk from Rathcoole to St Agnes'. Visits by a Protestant minister from the Shankill area to St Agnes. .

### **St Brigid's**

- St Brigid's Parish is a member of a small group of local parishes or congregations: viz Fisherwick Presbyterian, St Thomas's Church of Ireland and Lisburn Road Methodist Church. This group meets frequently. Communal services are held in Lent and Advent, as well as January each year.
- St Brigid's also has a special relationship with St Nicholas' Church of Ireland and Windsor Presbyterian Church. Frequent meetings between members of these congregations take place.
- The parish councils of St Brigid's and Windsor Presbyterian organise meetings and concerts for immigrants.
- Members of St Brigid's also take part in Alpha courses at Fisherwick.
- St Brigid's is a member of the South Belfast Clerical Union which has a very heavy lay involvement. This wider group of churches and congregations meet six times annually. It also organises seminars and talks on such topics as safety for the elderly, protection from burglary, care of the sick etc.

### **St Colmcille's**

- Local church participation in activities of Belmont and District Council of Churches, such as, regular meetings chaired and conducted by laypeople to which clergy are invited.
- Joint ventures of a social nature and study sessions on topics of current political or religious interest. Last year an ISE inspired course conducted by Cathy Higgins and Johnston McMaster took place on biblical themes.
- Monthly fellowship meetings for friendly discussions.
- Contact with Gilnahirk Presbyterian Church, with trips to Botswana together on a building project.
- Church visitation organised by Belmont Council of Churches, under a scheme promoted by Clonard.
- Cross- Community prayer and discussion groups which emerged from the "Troubles".
- Cross-Community support group (CROSS) formed in 1975. This group cares for those who suffered family bereavement as a result of violence.

### **St Luke's**

- Contact with Seymour Hill ministers has been established over the last 7 years with lunch and prayers in each others houses.
- Preaching in local Presbyterian church
- Prayer walks
- Prayer meeting in Church of Ireland hall

### **St Mary's on the Hill**

- Very active Clergy Fellowship in Newtownabbey. The tremendous support for one another was most evident during the recent protest on the occasion of Cemetery Sunday in Carnmoney.
- Strong links with Protestant and Catholic congregations in our twin town of Dorsten in Germany.
- Encouragement given to congregation to visit other congregations, Anglican, Presbyterian and Methodist at least once a year.
- Ecumenical Services at Christmas and Pentecost.
- Official visits from members of the St Mary's on the Hill congregation on Trinity Sunday 2004 to two Church of Ireland, one Presbyterian and one Methodist church in the parish where they took part in their Sunday worship.
- Prayer group.

## **St Michael the Archangel**

- Membership of the Finaghy Faith Fraternity promoting ecumenical and cross community activity via Youth Link.
- Forum for young people in St Michaels to meet with other young people from Stormont Presbyterian Church
- ‘Sharing of Pulpits’, by clergy from different denominations.

## **St Oliver Plunkett**

- Monthly meetings for last 11 years, with Rector and group of parishioners from St Matthews Church Of Ireland.
- Scripture Study, faith exploration, discussion of social issues and shared worship in each other’s churches.
- Parishioners attended at St Matthew’s Centenary celebration and members of St Thomas’ congregation attended the St Oliver Plunkett parish mission.
- Members of both congregations participated in the Clonard Walk of Witness
- During the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity there were visits to Presbyterian and Methodist churches for worship and social interaction.
  
- There were return visits to our parish by groups from these churches.
  
- Parishioners visited the Belfast Islamic Centre and Belfast Synagogue for information meetings at which they were given a comprehensive overview of Islamic and Jewish beliefs and practices.
  
- The parish hosted the annual St Oliver Plunkett lecture in conjunction with Feile an Phobail. This was attended by representatives of all Christian denominations and political parties
- Our Prayer of the Faithful each Sunday includes prayer for Christian Unity.
- Proposed Ecumenical events are always highlighted in the Parish Bulletin
- Information meetings are held for all parishioners regarding ecumenism.
- Speakers are invited from different denominations to talk to congregations on relevant topics eg: the biblical response to current social issues.
- Liturgies and services are held, which all other denominations would feel comfortable attending eg; Harvest Service, Carol service, Reconciliation Service.
- The Education for Mutual Understanding programme is encouraged in school and opportunities are created for parents of children involved in cross-community projects to meet with parents from the partner school.
- An environmental project is currently underway in conjunction with neighbouring parishes of different denominations.

## **Whitehouse**

- Weddings and baptisms are celebrated in other churches and in Star of the Sea with the assistance of ministers from other churches.
- Ecumenical Christmas Carol Services are attended in UUJ, Whiteabbey Hospital and local Parish Churches.
- There is participation in the Remembrance Sunday Wreath-laying Service in Ypres Park, Newtownabbey.
- An Ecumenical Service is held in Ballyearl Courtyard Theatre along with an Historical Bus Tour to mark the opening of Abbey Historical Society's Cultural Week.
- Inter – Church Clergy Fellowship is active in the local area with regular clergy and clergy/laity meetings. Activities include talks, joint vespers and 'unity pilgrimages' on specific occasions throughout the year.
- A number of parishioners of Whitehouse attend Church services in the other churches and members of those churches attend Mass on that particular Sunday.
- Money was raised by Catholic parishes towards the rebuilding of Whitehouse Presbyterian Church after the fire. The stone-laying ceremony for rebuilding of Whitehouse Presbyterian Church and the Rededication Ceremony were attended by Catholic parishioners.
- Members of Star of the Sea Folk Group have played (by invitation) at Harvest Festival in Fortwilliam Presbyterian Church and at the Whiteabbey Hospital Carol Service.
- The Girls Brigade from Whitehouse Presbyterian Church has performed a liturgical dance for the Feast of Pentecost in Star of the Sea, Whitehouse.
- Inter Church initiatives including retreats, trips, Habitat for Humanity and fundraising for charity have all involved parishioners from Star of the Sea..

## **Country Parishes**

### **Aghagallon & Ballinderry**

- A series of meetings called 'Bridging the Gap' led by Rev Charles Leeke (Church of Ireland Reconciliation Minister).
- An Exhibition called 'Reconciliation through Art' arranged for autumn by 'Corrymeela'.
- A 'Morning Sunrise Service' Easter 2006.

### **Ballymena (Kirkinriola)**

- An inter-Church group meets in Ballymena monthly, on a Sunday. There are 50 to 60 members, and usually about 25 are present. The main driving force is a local Presbyterian church, although the Chairperson is a Catholic. Someone speaks on a topic, e.g., "Angels", "The Persecuted Church", "The Tapestry of Belief", and discussion follows.
- Inter –Church Clergy Fellowship. Well supported, in spite of some opposition. Meetings

- are held in an excellent atmosphere.
- Monthly meetings of clergy fellowship are held, bringing together Church of Ireland, Catholic, Methodist, Moravian and two of eight Presbyterian congregations in the town. The clergy meet in each other's homes, alternating most frequently between the Catholic Presbytery and the Church of Ireland Rector's home.
  - Church Unity Octave. There are joint services in alternate years in All Saints (Catholic) and St. Patrick's (Church of Ireland). In January 2007 the service is due to take place for the first time in one of the Presbyterian churches (West Church).
  - Civic Service. This has been held annually for the past 17 years in St. Patrick's Church of Ireland. All Christian traditions are well represented. A Catholic who was Deputy Mayor in 2001 read the lesson in that year – no protest, despite the presence of some who would have been expected to protest!
  - Inter-Denominational Healing Service, held four times annually in St. Patrick's. Very well supported, and Fr Paul Symonds gave the address in February 2004. In February 2006 the service was held in All Saints with Brother David Jardine preaching to a full church.
  - Good Friday Procession. This marvellous Christian act of witness is organised by the Inter-Church Group, and is usually attended by 40-50 people who process, led by their clergy, through the streets of Ballymena. Several crosses are carried by representatives of each denomination, and the event concludes in the central square with prayers led by the Church of Ireland Rector. Finally, there is a period of 15 minutes silent reflection. At least 10 ministers regularly take part.
  - The Alpha Course. This has been organised by Catholic lay-people, and is held in a Catholic school; nevertheless attracting some Protestants. A Town Alpha Course, sponsored by five local churches (Anglican, Catholic, Methodist and Presbyterian) is due to take place in the autumn of 2006, prepared by a team of lay people and clergy from the sponsoring churches.
  - Celebration of St. Patrick's Heritage. In 2004 for the first time, groups from All Saints and St. Patrick's as well as some Presbyterians held a service of song and praise and prayer in St Patrick's, to recognise the contribution of our patron saint to Irish Christianity. Quite well attended.
  - Charismatic Movement. This small Catholic group has regular attendees from the Presbyterian tradition, who are "a revelation in terms of their spiritual strength and commitment."
  - The Praise Group joined forces with the Church of Ireland Praise Group during Holy Week for worship in the Taize style in St Patrick's Church of Ireland and Our Lady's Church, Harryville. A similar service was held in All Saints following the tragic death of Brother Roger Schutz.
  - Personal Initiatives. A local Catholic headmaster reports a number of most fruitful personal initiatives – regular attendance at carol services and occasional Sunday evening services in local Protestant churches, attendance at Ballymena Academy as special guest of the then Presbyterian Moderator, Dr Trevor Morrow, attendance at Remembrance Day Service; and participation in a council-inspired initiative for one of the most deprived areas of the town – the Ballymena North Partnership. His involvement in the last initiative stems from his membership of the Ballymena North Churches Group, which has representatives from all the local churches, and works very effectively in a variety of fund-raising ways. (They're building a community centre for the deprived of the town.)

This group has produced a leaflet which gives the times of Masses and services in the neighbourhood churches.

- RE classes looking at different church traditions – working closely with Jeremy Gardiner, the youth pastor of High Kirk. Monthly meeting in St Patrick’s College to plan events with staff and Jeremy Gardiner.
- Community Voice – Transforming Conflict. This is community relations, rather than ecumenism as such, but is based in Harryville.
- A local “protest”, in this case at Harryville, seems to have had the effect of giving new impetus to efforts at building bridges. Many individual Christians from other traditions gave their support to the beleaguered parishioners, notably the then mayor of Ballymena, James Currie. What is not so well known is that Canon Stuart Lloyd, Rector of St. Patrick’s, cycled every Saturday evening and supported the worshippers by his presence in the church. This Christian gesture will always be remembered by the Catholics of Ballymena. There is also a growing fellowship between All Saint’s church and High Kirk Presbyterian Church, which took the initiative in organising a “clean up” operation involving members of most local Protestant churches after paint bomb attacks on the Catholic church in Harryville in the summer of 2005.
- Bible Study. During Lent 2006, Desi Maxwell of Belfast Bible College, gave a series of five talks on the Pentateuch in a local hotel. The talks, which came at the initiative of the Catholic Church, were also sponsored by four local Protestant churches and attended by members of many others. The response was very good with the audience growing weekly from 150 to 300. Desi Maxwell has been invited back in Lent 2007 to give another series, this time on the Lord’s Prayer.

### **Ballymoney & Derrykeighan**

- Annual Carol Service. Participants walk from church to church, read a lesson, sing two hymns in each of four churches, beginning with the Catholic and proceeding to Methodist, then Presbyterian and finally Church of Ireland.
- Shared Good Friday Service. The theme is prayers, scripture and hymns for Holy Week. Jim Frazer, retired Presbyterian minister, is the contact with the clergy fellowship on the North Coast.
- Experimental meetings to explain the principal tenets of faith of the different churches.

### **Bangor**

- The Prayer Group meets weekly, and is open to people from all Christian Churches. The leaders meet regularly with leaders of prayer groups in other denominations in Bangor to organise shared events. Among other things they have been involved in organising three inter-church Alpha courses and several ecumenical ‘Life in the Spirit’ seminars. The group has been in existence for about 30 years.
- Christmas Carol Walk. Members of the Catholic parish choir join members of the choir of one of the town’s Presbyterian churches for a walk between both churches, while singing carols. Refreshments and a friendly chat follow. It was lay initiated and is lay organised.

- Scripture Groups. Two inter-denominational groups are running, both initiated and run by lay people.
- Catholic-Presbyterian House Group. This comprises four Presbyterian married couples and three Catholic couples. It meets monthly, in each other's homes. It has been in existence for 27 years. Its focus is primarily religious, mostly but not exclusively, scripture study and prayer. One year the group examined in detail each other's religious practices. In addition to monthly meetings, it has occasional social evenings, particularly at Christmas, and a full day in Newcastle during the summer. At the full day's meeting, the past year is evaluated and the programme planned for the following year.
- In addition to these group activities, there are many lay individuals in this parish involved in ecumenical activities. For example, one layman is on the executive committees of the Council of Christians and Jews and the Inter-Faith Forum, gives annual retreats to an ecumenical prayer group in Donegal, currently runs ecumenical weekend Lectio Divina retreats in Knocklayde (Corrymeela's outcentre) and ecumenical weekends on Enneagram Spirituality and on Scripture in different parts of Ireland. In addition this layman has spoken to many ecumenical, Catholic and Protestant groups on a variety of religious topics; recently to Ploughshare in Bangor Town Hall on 'The Catholic Understanding of Holy Communion' and to Presbyterian congregations in Belfast and Coleraine on "Changes in the Catholic Church since Vatican II, for Better or for Worse?"
- Lenten Vespers. A minister from each of the four main Protestant Churches was invited to lead, along with the parish priest, the Evening Prayer of the Church for the Catholic congregation in Ballyholme Catholic church on each Sunday afternoon of Lent. It was very well attended and appreciated by the Catholic congregation.

### **Carrickfergus**

- Exchange of Pulpits.
- Regular Meetings of local clergy.
- Inter-Church Alpha Course completed.
- Monthly Inter-Church Clergy Meetings.
- Monthly Inter-Church Prayer Meetings.
- Preaching Bi-Annually at Inter-Church Sunday Evening Services in the Presbyterian, Church of Ireland, and Christian Fellowship Churches.
- Introduced Redemptorist Unity Pilgrims to other churches in the Parish during the Redemptorist Mission last year and was well received.

### **Castlewellan**

- The Parish Priest is a member of the South Down Ecumenical Fellowship, which holds eight meetings per year. Clergy of South Down study and pray together.
- The Youth Minister, Frances McNally, has a link Youth Project with St Paul's Church of Ireland.
- Evening Prayer of the Church was celebrated for Canon Robin Greer and his wife Georgina when they left the parish after 28 years service, in St Malachy's Parish Church.

- Good Friday walk from St Malachy's to St Paul's for all who wish to pray for peace..
- Christmas Celebration for all senior citizens – St Vincent de Paul and GAA.
- Bible Group in Corncrane, supported by Baptist Church, Church of Ireland, Presbyterian Church and Catholic Church.
- Weekly meeting of the Alpha course in the Presbyterian Church.

### **Cushendall (Layde)**

- Cushendall annual carol service and installation of local Church of Ireland Ministers.
- Collection in Cushendall, Cushendun and Glenariffe for church restoration fund.
- Church Unity Octave services.
- Women' World Day of Prayer.
- Close clergy co-operation in hospital, hospice and prison ministries.

### **Dunsford and Ardglass**

- A shared Lenten Scripture Study Group in local church hall.
- Proposed inter-church Alpha Courses.
- Shared Carol Services.
- Prayer groups which are a means of breaking new ground and dialoguing with our Protestant neighbours and establishing new friendships.

### **Holywood**

- Local clergy meet over lunch in one another's houses on a monthly basis for prayer and the exchange of matters of current interest.
- Prayers for Holywood every month in all the churches or places of worship on a rota basis. A local minister organises his/her own service when their turn comes. Attendance averages around 30 with a larger attendance in St Colmcille's, with local Protestants making the effort to come.
- Annual services in local churches in which all local clergy are invited to participate; Harvest Festival, Carol Service, Folk Music.
- Preaching in local Church of Ireland and the Vicar has preached at an Ecumenical Service during Christian Unity Week.

### **Larne**

- Tuesday Group. This began in 1994 after the first cease-fire when a group of Cross & Passion Sisters asked themselves what they could do to further the peace process. A coffee morning was arranged for Drumalis and 25 invitations were sent out to the priests and ministers in each of the four main churches in the area of Larne. 27 attended a very friendly meeting, where people shared something of their "story". Meetings have continued on a monthly basis since then and while initially membership was clergy only, now lay people from the different churches attend as well, and we have approximately 50 on roll. Average attendance would be about 30. The format of the meeting consists of

- some prayer, input by a chosen speaker and discussion in groups. Refreshments are always provided and the meetings are from 10.30 a.m. to 12.30 p.m. Recently Fr Tom Layden and Rev Tom Wilson have spoken to us on their work in Belfast when they put on a “Course in Prayer” for both Catholic and Presbyterian people. Rev Alan Lorimer, Methodist, and the local Church of Ireland minister spoke about their working together in Mossley and Rev Pauline Lorimer, Methodist, led us in our prayer morning before Christmas. Other speakers include Rev David Jardine, Lesley Spence (on Alpha Prison Ministry), Tony McAuley and Fr Paul Symonds (on “Transformation”).
- Larne Millennium Initiative. This was founded in 1998. It is an inter-church group with representatives from local organisations who work together to realise a vision of church based community relations. This group tries to address issues of community relations by promoting dialogue and co-operation between the churches and individuals within the borough of Larne. More recently it has expanded its work to encourage a borough wide approach to community relations work through a variety of methods including photography, sport, language, music, youth work etc. Larne Millennium Initiative is run by a voluntary management committee, and is financed by Community Relations.
  - Intercessors for Larne. This is a group of Christians from many of the denominations in Larne who meet on the last Monday evening of the month to pray for the town of Larne. The co-ordinator of this group is the local Elim Pentecostal minister. The group meets in a different Christian church each month. The Priest/Minister in whose church we meet gives the introduction to the evening. People break up into groups and pray for specific intentions regarding the town.
  - Inter-Church Alpha Courses. Four of these have been held in the Highways Hotel, Larne. The first was in January 2000 when the numbers attending were 70 Protestants and 68 Catholics. Each Alpha course continues for 14 weeks, with one meeting each week. A follow-up to the Alpha Course is currently being discussed. It may take the form of inter-church Scripture Groups meeting in people’s houses.
  - Church Unity Prayer Service. Larne Borough Council offers the use of the Leisure Centre and provides refreshments after the Service. Preparation for the Service takes the form of 2 or 3 meetings of local clergy – when an Order of Service is agreed on. Larne Millennium facilitates this. There is a good deal of participation by the local churches. A speaker is agreed on by the group. At least 7 different denominations were represented by their clergy and lay people at this year’s event, when about 100 people took part. Music and mime are provided by a number of different Churches.
  - Annual Remembrance Sunday Service.
  - Pilgrimage for Peace. This was another interesting and worthwhile experience held during the summer of 2004. Well over 100 people took part. It must have been a powerful witness to the public to see so many people from different churches united in their desire for peace, unity and acceptance of each other. Fr. Tom Layden, S.J. and Rev Tom Wilson have worked together on a number of different projects.
  - Six sessions to facilitate growth in personal prayer were held in the Presbyterian Church on Tuesday evenings from 8.00 p.m. to 9.30 p.m. in February 2004. These were open to Protestants and Catholics.
  - Fr Tom Layden and Rev. Tom Wilson gave a course on prayer entitled, “In Touch with God” at the Magee Institute for Christian Training in Union Theological College, Belfast. This course extended over six weeks, with each weekly session lasting 2 hours. Both spoke about their inter-church work at the Tuesday Group in Larne.

**In addition, the following activities are reported:**

- Inter-church Scripture Study held fortnightly in ‘Carmel’, Drains Bay.
- Participation in the organising of the Annual World Women’s’ Day of Prayer.
- Coastal Clergy Fellowship meet monthly.
- Attendance at Global Day of Prayer at Stormont and also at evenings of prayer arranged to pray for politicians.
- Membership of YMCA committee – monthly prayer mornings.
- A talk given, by invitation, to the Mother’s Union in Glynn on Ecumenical Work in Larne.
- Attendance at Salvation Army annual get-together by invitation
- Attendance at Elim Church prayer mornings and at occasional services in the Methodist and Church of Ireland churches

**Lisburn (Blaris)**

- Ministers Fellowship, meet every month in each of the respective homes of the local clergy, – a bowl of soup and sandwiches to start, followed by Bible reading and reflection followed by discussion on different initiatives.
- Carrying Cross on Good Friday. Joint Christmas Carol Service/Concert.

**Loughinisland**

- Annual joint Carol Service in Church, followed by refreshments and social interaction in the Parish Hall. This takes place in alternate years between St Macartan’s Loughinisland and Loughinisland Church of Ireland.
- Ecumenical Service during the Octave of Prayer for Christian Unity, with social interaction with St Patrick’s, Downpatrick and various churches in Downpatrick, the venue rotating each year.
- Monthly meetings in Tobar Mhuire Passionist Monastery, Crossgar, of s Downpatrick and District Clergy Fraternal, involving discussion of a scripture passage in a prayerful context.

**Newcastle (Maghera)**

- South Down Clergy Fellowship meets once a month during ‘school year’.
- Inter Church services with prayers, hymns and reflection during Church Unity Week, and on Good Friday, Christmas and New Year.

**Newtownards & Comber**

*Theological / Spiritual*

- Carol Services in Newtownards and Comber.
- Lenten talks shared between four churches in Newtownards.
- Clergy fellowship in Newtownards and Comber.

- Prayer services in the public square on Good Friday.
- Attendance at Remembrance Sunday events.

### *Social*

- Cross community initiatives and events opportunities:
- Parochial Snooker club in Newtownards.
- Tennis Club.
- Music School in Comber.
- St Mary's Primary School in Comber is inter-denominational.
- Senior Citizens Club Newtownards.

### **Randalstown (Drummaul)**

- The attendance of members of the local Protestant churches at the opening of the new church was a source of great encouragement.
- The parish was very pleased to be invited to attend the opening of a Garden of Remembrance.
- The parish is involved in working with representatives of local community groups.
- The parish is involved in welcoming new clergy to the town. There are also very good relations reflected in the regular contact with the Church of Ireland Rector.

### **Saintfield & Carrickmannon**

- The parish joins Church of Ireland, 1<sup>st</sup> Presbyterian and 2<sup>nd</sup> Presbyterian churches annually for Church Unity Octave, each church hosting the event in turn.
- Every Winter/Spring they join in 'Bridge Building', a series of talks with local parishioners of the three churches.
- The ministers of the local churches have prayer meetings in the Monastery in Crossgar 9 or 10 times per year.

### **Saul and Ballee**

- A Thomas Merton Weekend, given by one of the Church of Ireland laity in St Patrick's Church of Ireland in June.

### **Strangford, Kilclief**

- Monthly ecumenical meetings of clergy in Tobar Mhuire, Crossgar.
- Annual ecumenical services in Strangford/Kilclief Parish.

## Clonard Unity Pilgrims, The Ulster Project and Youthlink NI

### Clonard Monastery and 'Unity Pilgrimages'.

In addition to the City Parishes, the Redemptorist Community at Clonard has been most active in ecumenical matters. Clonard's Unity Pilgrims have assumed a key role in the ministry of reconciliation with the Protestant Churches of Northern Ireland. Formed and moulded by Clonard's longstanding relationship with the Cornerstone Community and with the Fitzroy congregation, the Unity Pilgrims have discovered what they have come to call "the grace of the unity pilgrimage".

By previous arrangement they go as pilgrims to the holy places where their brothers and sisters in Christ meet.

Clonard's unity pilgrimages began in 1994/1995 with Sunday morning visits to Church congregations of the neighboring Shankill – four Presbyterian, three Church of Ireland and three Methodist. Over the years, visits of the Unity Pilgrims a few times annually transformed their relationship with these churches. Old fears and prejudices melt away and a new communion is growing between Clonard and the congregations of those churches – a sense of being at home with one another.

Being together in worship on the Lord's Day with a Protestant congregation in a spirit of faith and friendship gradually brings a new awareness of the Holy Trinity at work in the whole Christian community. The Unity Pilgrims learn to glory in what St Cyprian says of us all: "*The Church is the people who are made one out of the unity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit*". And so they become open to God's surprises.

The Unity Pilgrims take their inspiration in these simple visits from the words of St Paul: "*The eye cannot say to the hand 'I have no need of you'; nor again the head to the feet 'I have no need of you'*" (1Corinthians 12.21). Their guiding principle is a conviction that the command of Jesus "*Love one another as I have loved you*" applies to us not only as individuals but also as congregations of the Church. Unity Pilgrims believe that all the disciples of Jesus need to meet in him and to meet him in one another. They need to share their gifts "so that the world may believe" that Jesus was sent by the Father as the Saviour of everyone in the world (John 17.21). From February 2003 Clonard Unity Pilgrims began to develop a new aspect of their ministry of reconciliation. When the Clonard mission team is working in a particular parish they arrange with the local parish priest and the local ministers to make unity pilgrimages part of the parish mission event. Unity Pilgrims from Clonard link up with Unity Pilgrims from the Catholic parish to join in the Morning Services of the Protestant congregations of the area. The Clonard Unity Pilgrims have made the parish mission unity pilgrimage to the following congregations:

1. Presbyterian, Church of Ireland and Methodist congregations in the area of the Catholic parish of Waterside, Derry City, Craigavon, Co Armagh, Castleterg, Portrush, Magheralin, Magherafelt, Portstewart, Carrickfergus, Co Antrim.
2. Presbyterian, Church of Ireland congregations in the area of the Catholic parish of

Draperstown, Annaclone, Co Down, Beragh, Co. Tyrone, Dromore, Co. Down, Randalstown, Pomeroy, Co Tyrone

3. Church of Ireland congregation in the area of the Catholic parish of **Ardmore**, Co. Derry

Shortly after the Carrickfergus parish mission a parish council member sent the organizers this encouraging message:

*“I don’t think you will ever know just how much your unity pilgrimages meant to us. They have opened up all sorts of new possibilities for us in a part of the country where cross-community and inter-church relations are so important. We hope now to take this up as an ongoing initiative in our parish, giving others the opportunity, when they are ready to experience what we have experienced May your group’s influence spread to every town and village in the country”.*

Where the pilgrimages continue beyond the time of the parish mission, both the little group of Catholic pilgrims and the congregations they visit gradually experience a deep change of attitude. They begin to see themselves as for one another instead of against one another. Barriers break down, suspicion and mistrust melt away, people open up to one another. In country areas neighbours meet in a new and life-giving context. In city areas old friends from work days reconnect with one another. As in the meeting of Mary and Elizabeth (*Gospel of Luke 1.39/56*), many pilgrimages end in “an explosion of joy” - the strength of God for the further journey. Unity Pilgrims are motivated by the conviction that division among Christians “*openly contradicts the will of Christ, scandalises the world and damages that most holy cause, the preaching of the Gospel to every creature*” (*Vatican Council Decree on Ecumenism paragraph 1*). They make the prayer of St Thomas More their own: “*Lord, that which we pray for, help us to do*”! Rev. Samuel Kobia, a Kenyan, appointed General Secretary of the World Council of Churches in 2003, quoted Martin Luther King at his installation service in Geneva: “Eleven o’clock on Sunday morning is the most segregated hour of the week”. By going to worship with other congregations Unity Pilgrims are helping to end this destructive alienation from one another on the Lord’s Day which has lasted here in Northern Ireland for hundreds of years. Early in 2004 the Redemptorists formed the Youth Unity Pilgrims group at Clonard with help from a member of YWAM (*Youth With A Mission*). Once a month during 2004 the group made the unity pilgrimage to a Church of Ireland, Methodist or Presbyterian Sunday Morning Service. The Youth Unity Pilgrims are learning and affirming how the Lord’s Day Assembly of each congregation sustains the everyday mission of the Churches. Moreover they are discovering how “the grace of the unity pilgrimage” generates energy for the churches taking part.

### **The Ulster Project**

The Ulster Project was established in 1975 by Canon Kerry Waterstone, a Church of Ireland Rector based in Trim, County Meath. His primary purpose, with the blessing of the four main Church leaders at that time, was to promote ecumenical links between parishes and congregations in Northern Ireland and the United States of America that would lead to the identification of talented young teenagers in these parishes and congregations. They would then be involved in a

cross Atlantic project with the following aims and objectives:

- To promote reconciliation between Northern Irish Catholics and Protestants by fostering tolerance, understanding, and friendship among teenage future leaders;
- To present a programme that brings Northern Irish teens of differing Christian faiths together in a strife-free atmosphere that emphasizes acceptance of all people, regardless of creed;
- To educate and encourage persons, particularly supporters, committee members, and American Host Families, to appreciate their roles as peacemakers and mediators and to understand the purposes of Ulster Project;
- To encourage Northern Irish leaders and clergy involved in the programme to continue to foster the spirit of Ulster Project among the Northern Irish participants following each programme;
- To promote a spirit of community and commitment among American Ulster Project participants.

Canon Waterstone retired from the Project in 2003 and has been replaced by Father John Forsythe PP of Christ the Redeemer Parish, Down and Connor, and Canon Norman Porteous, Church of Ireland Rector of Cookstown. Father Forsythe is assisted in the work of the Ulster Project in the Diocese by Father Colin Grant and the Project enjoys the support of various leaders within the four main churches. At the most recent conference of the Project held in Derry, a large number of American delegates were in attendance and enjoyed a warm welcome to the Maiden City. The next Conference will be held in St Louis in 2007.

### **Youth Link N.I.**

The following are examples of the excellent work being done by this inter-Church organisation, which recently celebrated its tenth anniversary.

- Kairos Project. This is designed to promote active citizenship among young people by enabling young people to reflect on and consider the issues of identity, culture, faith, politics and history in Northern Ireland;
- encouraging young people to listen to and share with other young people from backgrounds and experiences other than their own;
- developing trusting relationships and facilitating young people's participation in
- residentials, social activities and workshops;
- acquiring the skills to be creative peacemakers and builders for a new future;
- working together on a project which impacts positively on community relationships.

An example of all of these activities is the visit of a Kairos team of twenty four young people from St. John's Presbyterian Church, Newtownbreda, and the Catholic parish of Drumbo and Carryduff, who travelled together in the summer of 2002 to Romania, to work with an organisation called 'Forget-Me-Not', whose primary aim is to help street children. They worked

hard in little teams together at the Foundation owned and run by the charity, painting radiators, working in the fields, and building a red clay brick building to house a new generator. In the evenings, they had their own group time, when they prayed, sang hymns and studied passages from the bible. One participant commented: “The discussions were excellent, because everyone contributed.....and at times were very personal as individuals were prepared to be open and honest with one another.” They also interacted with the former street children who were in the Foundation, and, despite language difficulties, found solidarity with them in Christian worship. They also took these children for two trips – roller-blading, followed by MacDonald’s, and a bus and cable car trip to the top of a local mountain. This was followed by a farewell barbecue at the Foundation. The participant continued, “A large group comprising the children, the staff, the leaders and our lot had a great evening playing games, talking and eating but it ended with a difficult parting. There were, quite understandably, some emotional good byes demonstrating the relationships that had developed during our visit.”

## **A summary of activities presently being undertaken**

- 1 Personal contact with other church leaders working together
- 3 Stimulate growing together
- 4 Build up of trust – clergy and laity
- 5 Work in reconciliation
- 6 Use of the media to encourage reconciliation and publicise work for ecumenism, where appropriate
- 7 Twinning of churches / social interaction
- 8 Participation of parishes in cross community services.
- 9 Prayer groups / Prayer fellowship
- 10 Inter-church meetings – Pray / Listen / Learn
- 11 Church Unity Octave – Week of Prayer
- 12 Civic Services / Remembrance Day Service
- 13 Inter-Denominational Healing Services
- 14 Good Friday procession
- 15 Alpha Course (14weeks – 1 per week)
- 16 Celebration of St Patrick’s Heritage
- 17 Charismatic Movement
- 18 Carol Services / Carol Walks at Christmas / Christmas Card outreach
- 19 Coffee morning / discussion (Monthly Meeting)
- 20 Vision of church based community relations (dialogue / co-operation)
- 21 Inter-church scripture groups
- 22 Pilgrimage for peace / unity / acceptance
- 23 Clonard ‘Unity Pilgrimages’

- 24 Parish Mission – contact with local churches
- 26 House groups – monthly meetings – scripture study & prayer
- 27 Lenten / Advent Vespers – Cross community church involvement
- 28 Youth Link NI (10yrs in existence)
- 29 Social projects / prayer / hymns / study
- 30 Education for Peace
- 31 Active participation of our Bishops locally and internationally
- 32 Participation at weddings / baptisms/ funerals / interchurch services (words of welcome)
- 33 Folk group participation
- 34 Social / recreational events
- 35 Support agreed charitable causes
- 36 Habitat for Humanity
- 37 Mention the Minister’s name of a neighbouring church in the weekly bulletin
- 38 Women’s World Day of Prayer
- 39 Quarterly Bible Study (Interchurch)
- 40 Support couples in mixed marriages, particularly at key moments in the sacramental life of the children
- 41 Clergy collaboration welcome at funerals / weddings
- 42 Lenten Scripture Study Group
- 44 Welcome foreign nationals – formal greeting
- 45 Hurts resulting from sectarianism (confession / reconciliation / celebration)
- 46 Annual Parish Pentecost Party
- 47 Shared Holy Week Services – Prayer / Scripture / Hymns / Music
- 48 Experimental meetings to explain Tenets of Faith of different denominations

- 49 Information meetings ( Belfast Islamic Centre – Jewish Community)
- 50 Meetings on each other's ' home ground'
- 51 Growing confidence in sharing etc
- 52 Prayer of the Faithful – to include prayer for spread of Ecumenism / Prayers for local congregations and clergy of other denominations
- 53 Use parish bulletin to highlight parish forthcoming events (Cross community)
- 54 Biblical response to current social issues
- 55 Education for Mutual Understanding (EMU) – Create opportunities within our schools for both sets of parents to meet
- 56 Co-operation in hospital / hospice / prison / university ministries
- 57 Inter-church group of lay people – (monthly) meetings with invited speakers / bible study
- 58 Encourage 'spontaneous' prayer – (little experience of making up such prayers)
- 59 Encourage familiarity with the scriptures
- 60 Cross-Community support group (Cross 1975) family bereavement as a result of violence
- 61 Record how Catholics in everyday life influence political / social debates
- 62 'Morning Sunrise Service' ( Easter 2006)
- 63 'Reconciliation through Art ( Corrymeela Initiative)
- 64 'Ulster Project Northern Ireland – Inter Church venture to USA for 340 teenagers
- 66 Run a 'Christmas Celebration' for all senior citizens ( St Vincent de Paul / Salvation Army initiative)
- 67 Welcome Mass, with inter-Church attendance, held annually for newcomers to the parish
- 68 International food / meal evening – emerged from above
- 69 Meetings / Concerts for immigrants

## Epilogue

Jean Vanier, co-founder of L'Arche, writes:

*"In the early seventies, I gave an ecumenical retreat in Belfast. About sixty people were present, thirty from the Methodist and Presbyterian churches, thirty from the Catholic Church. Most of those present had never met anyone from the "other" church. On the last day, I asked each one to say a few words about what he or she had lived during the two days we had been together. A Presbyterian deaconess said: "Last night I was talking with a Catholic nun. I was surprised to discover that she loves Jesus." And she added: "I think she loves Jesus more than I do." I was deeply moved by her humility; she seemed to be so full of the Holy Spirit. It was a moment of wonder for me.*

*"Moments of wonder seem to shift things inside us. Our hearts are enlarged. We begin to see how God is working in people beyond our own church; how God loves them and is present to them. Such moments have helped me to discover and re-discover a new love and a deep respect for people from different churches. They have opened me up from a rather closed vision of "my church is the only one and other churches are less valuable", to the discovery of the work of the Holy Spirit in other churches. Through these encounters I have become more aware of how people, like that deaconess and the members of her church, are a source of grace, a channel of the Holy Spirit, for me as well as for many others.*

*"Such meetings give me a thirst to work for unity amongst all Christians, to launch out into the deep, but they also give me an awareness of the unity that already exists amongst us and which we are called to recognise, deepen and celebrate for the glory of God."*

(*"Pilgrims Together: a Vision of Ecumenism"* – Jean Vanier, 1999.)

## **DIRECTORY OF BEST PRACTICE – PART II**

### **Recommendations**

A brief questionnaire on ecumenical activities was sent out to all the priests of the diocese in September 2005. Responses were received from twenty nine parishes, as well as Clonard Monastery, Youth Link, Family Ministry and the three bishops. The areas of ecumenical activity undertaken are recorded in Part I of this directory. Responses varied from brief headings to detailed descriptions of activities undertaken either on a single occasion or regularly, but they do reveal a serious commitment to ecumenism within the diocese and it may be presumed that considerably more is happening in the area of ecumenism than even the impressive list of activities recorded or described in Part I.

It is the goal of Part II of the directory to highlight a few ecumenical activities which as many parishes as possible are encouraged to undertake. Not every activity to be described in this section is necessarily suited to every parish. Parishes should select those activities, even just one, which best suit their particular situation.

### **Alpha**

This is a course in basic Christianity, those aspects of the Christian faith which are common to most, if not all, denominations. It was devised by an Anglican priest, Nicky Gumbel, and launched in Holy Trinity Church, Brompton, with a primary aim of introducing the Christian faith to those with no or little knowledge of Christianity. It spread rapidly and was taken up by other denominations, including the Catholic Church, where it has been applauded by the highest authorities, including the late Pope, John Paul II. The Alpha course has been useful not only for introducing people to the Christian faith, but also as a refresher course for those already committed. It is especially well suited to inter-church use. As can be seen from Part I, there have been a number of very successful inter-church Alpha courses, especially in Larne. Alpha is an effective way to foster the growth of communion and mutual understanding, and integral to the course is discussion and a simple meal at each meeting. The course can be run using video tapes or by inviting a series of speakers to address the specific themes. A parish may wish to run the course internally to begin with, to get the feel of it and be comfortable with it, thereafter twinning with a neighbouring Protestant congregation for a joint Alpha course. Alpha can best be run by a group of lay people, supported and encouraged by the parish clergy.

### **Clergy Fellowships**

When lay people see their pastors reaching out to each other and building relationships and friendships across the denominational boundaries, they will feel increasingly comfortable about doing the same. Many clergy fellowships already exist and it may be a question of a priest appointed to a new parish being integrated into such a fellowship, to which, of course, he will bring his own unique contribution. Sometimes, though, the challenge may be to take the initiative in establishing such a fellowship. Fr Dan Whyte has offered practical suggestions about how to go about that in Part I.

Often a clergy fellowship will meet on a monthly basis and use a book of scripture or some other spiritual book to foster shared reflections. It is important to combine the formal side of any meeting with some recreational time such as a meal or coffee together. A goal should be to foster trust so that deeper sharing can take place, enabling the members to get to know each other beyond the denominational labels and to understand in a respectful and non-threatening way why our different doctrines and practices are important to us.

### **Twinning**

Where possible it is very advantageous for a Catholic parish to twin with a neighbouring, or even distant, Protestant congregation. This opens up many possibilities such as attending each other's services, exchange of pulpits, shared Bible study, joint social action in the service of a local community, recreational activities, joint pilgrimages, etc.

### **Pre-marriage courses for couples embarking on a mixed marriage**

When each partner is seriously committed to their respective church, a mixed marriage can be enriching, but it requires careful preparation and sensitive support. There is an Irish tradition of the wedding taking place in the church of the bride, but participation of the minister or priest who is not the officiant is to be strongly encouraged.

A marriage service, rather than a nuptial Mass, is preferable because then greater participation is possible for all. Whilst remaining clear about their own denominational identity, couples in a mixed marriage should be encouraged to feel at home in each other's church services and to share in the life of their respective faith communities. A specific choice has to be taken with regard to the church of baptism of any children, but clergy from the other churches should be invited to take some part in the service and the fact that we are all united in the one baptism should be stressed.

It is important to encourage the couple to give serious thought to the question of the baptism and education of any children and reach agreement before the marriage. Even then tensions can often arise when the children are born and these need to be handled sensitively by the respective clergy. The pre-nuptial enquiry form stresses the paramount importance of the "unity of the partnership" and it is in that context that both parties must try to fulfil their responsibilities in the upbringing of their children.

### **Praying for other Churches**

A positive form of spiritual ecumenism is to include prayers for other churches in the Prayer of the Faithful. This could be done in a systematic way, praying for the Church of Ireland one week, the Methodists the next week and so on, or even on a daily basis, such as praying for Anglicans on Monday, Methodists on Tuesday, and so on. Ideally, a specific local church should be mentioned, together with the name of the Minister.

## **Shared worship – Ecumenical Services**

Whilst Catholics are encouraged to take part in services in other churches and so learn to appreciate what gives them their particular identity, there is also a place for shared worship, or ecumenical services, prepared jointly by Christians from different church traditions. This is especially desirable during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in January, but would also be appropriate at other times, such as around World Day of Prayer for the Sick (perhaps in collaboration with Brother David Jardine's Interdenominational Divine Healing Ministries), the Women's World Day of Prayer, Pentecost, times of local or national emergency. The list could go on. The ecumenical service for the 2006 Week of Prayer for the Unity of Christians, prepared for the third time by a group of Christians from Ireland, could serve as a model for such services. It can be found on the website of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting. ([www.irishchurches.org](http://www.irishchurches.org)).

## **Pastoral Councils**

Where there is a Pastoral Council in a parish there should be an ecumenical sub-group to explore ways of praying and working with our Protestant neighbours. Ecumenism is not only about worship and Bible study together, but also about social outreach together, the practical expression of Christian love as described in the second part of Pope Benedict XVI's encyclical *Deus caritas est*.

## **Ecumenism in schools**

As ecumenism is an essential part of being a Catholic today, it is very important to help the students in our Catholic schools to appreciate the principles of ecumenism as laid down especially in *Unitatis Redintegratio* of Vatican II and *Ut Unum Sint*, the encyclical of Pope John Paul II; the *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism (1993)*, as well as many other documents.

Contacts with Christians of other denominations, clergy and laity, should also be facilitated in our schools. Commitment to CEM and EMU programmes is therefore strongly encouraged, indeed every school should produce an EMU policy document. Advice about drawing up such a policy may be obtained from local education boards.

## **Youth Groups working in the diocese under the patronage of the Churches**

**Education for Peace.** An example of many projects undertaken is the partnership between Kilmakee Presbyterian Church (Seymour Hill, Dunmurry) and St Louis House (West Belfast). The partnership began when both groups took part in preparatory programmes (Preparing Youth for Peace and New Day), and 22 young people expressed an interest in participating in this inter-church initiative. Over a prolonged period the group met and explored together many of the social, economic and political issues affecting their lives. Regular meetings have gone on since December 2002, and a residential was held in Gortin, Co. Tyrone. The group also organised an evening with politicians which included a meal, and an opportunity for the young people to engage in discussion with five MLAs, David Ervine (PUP), Alban Maginness (SDLP), Alan McFarland (UUP), Jane Morrice (NIWC.) and Edwin Poots (DUP).

## **Making contact with other Churches**

We give below the websites for the member Churches of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting (IICM):

Antiochian Orthodox Church	<a href="http://www.antiochian-orthodox.co.uk">www.antiochian-orthodox.co.uk</a>
Catholic Church	<a href="http://www.catholicireland.net">www.catholicireland.net</a>
Church of Ireland	<a href="http://www.ireland.anglican.org">www.ireland.anglican.org</a>
Coptic Orthodox Church in Ireland	<a href="http://www.copticcentre.com/three.html">www.copticcentre.com/three.html</a>
Greek Orthodox Church in Britain & Ireland	<a href="http://annunciation.orthodoxireland.com">http://annunciation.orthodoxireland.com</a>
LifeLink Network of Churches	<a href="http://www.cfc-net.org/who.htm">www.cfc-net.org/who.htm</a>
Lutheran Church in Ireland	<a href="http://www.lutheranireland.org">www.lutheranireland.org</a>
Methodist Church in Ireland	<a href="http://www.irishmethodist.org">www.irishmethodist.org</a>
Moravian Church, Irish District	<a href="http://www.moravian.org.uk">www.moravian.org.uk</a>
Presbyterian Church in Ireland	<a href="http://www.presbyterianireland.org">www.presbyterianireland.org</a>
Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church	<a href="http://www.nspresbyterian.org">www.nspresbyterian.org</a>
Religious Society of Friends	<a href="http://www.quaker.org">www.quaker.org</a>
Rock of Ages Cherubim & Seraphim	<a href="http://www.rockofageschurchcs.org">www.rockofageschurchcs.org</a>
Romanian Orthodox Church in Ireland	<a href="http://www.orthodoxireland.com">www.orthodoxireland.com</a>
Salvation Army (Ireland Division)	<a href="http://www.salvationarmy.org">www.salvationarmy.org</a>