

# Corrymeela

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THE  
CORRYMEELA  
COMMUNITY

# QUEUE

John the Baptist appeared as a preacher in the wilderness; his theme was, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is upon you!" John's clothing was a rough coat of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist and his food was locusts and wild honey. They flocked to him from Jerusalem, from all Judea and the whole Jordan valley; they were baptized by him in the River Jordan confessing their sins. Then Jesus arrived and came to John to be baptized by him. "Do you come to me?" John asked. Jesus replied, "I need to be baptized by you."

Jesus, waiting in a queue with all the smitten-hearted;  
with all the guilty;  
with all the hopeless, helpless, hidden people.  
Jesus waiting in a queue behind self-loathing tax men,  
wild-haired, wanton women,  
behind broken, stumbling beggars, buskers, con-men,  
strange street people.  
Jesus waiting in a queue.

Jesus waiting in a queue still;  
with us on picket lines, in dole queues,  
in shaking snakes of psychiatric patients  
aching in locked wards for tablets.  
Jesus waiting under pitiless skies for bread, rice, water, vaccines,  
Jesus our brother  
waiting,  
waiting in a queue.

Jesus standing in water up to his oxters  
prepared to look ridiculous; a loser, a waste of space,  
siding – dripping – with the powerless.  
Jesus standing in the water with black-hearted, dirty people,  
waves lapping their twisted limbs, twisted minds, twisted tortured memories.  
Jesus standing in the water with perverts,  
ponces, the vile and the violent,  
understanding their longing to be plunged towards purity.

Jesus our Brother,  
(Siding with crazies and clowns),  
to glimpse you queuing in line a few places in front of us,  
or standing undignified, half drowned  
in the muddy waters of our lives,  
appears far more preferable to us than  
your sitting at the right hand of God;  
or even your magnificent, triumphant striding  
across the mighty sea.

Full reading:- Matthew 3 v 1-6; and 13-17

**Sylvia Sands**

Sylvia Sands has published a number of poems in the *Corrymeela* magazine. She has published two books and been an occasional broadcaster with the BBC. Sylvia has a deep concern for people on the margin.

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## MEET THE CONTRIBUTORS



**Susan McEwen** is the Irish Peace Centre Co-ordinator, connected to Corrymeela. She organised the women's house-building trip to Romania this summer and recounts the experience on page **12**



**David Markay** is a pastor at a multi-cultural Methodist congregation in Milano Italy and he attended the Dialogue for Peaceful Change training at Corrymeela's Ballycastle Centre in 2008 and offers a parable on page **16**



**Ronnie Millar** is former Centre Director of the Ballycastle Centre. He recently moved to Boston with his family and is working as Global Programmes Project Manager for 'Facing History and Ourselves'. He shares his reflections on his time at Corrymeela on page **26**



**Brian Lennon** is an Irish Jesuit, committed to the Northern Ireland peace process; author of 'So You Can't Forgive...? Moving Towards Freedom' he explores three myths of forgiveness on page **27** and **28**



**Peter Sagar** is a teacher, writer and human rights' activist, acting as a Regional Representative for the NE and Yorkshire Region of Amnesty International and also Trade Union Co-ordinator for Burma Campaign UK. He shares his account of working with the Karen people from Burma on page **33** and **34**

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# Does forgiveness matter?

**“Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other”**

Psalm 85: 10  
(Authorised Version)

JUSTICE MATTERS, as we have recently learnt from the response to the release of the Lockerbie bomber on compassionate grounds. Punishment is the punitive aspect of justice. We cannot do without some form of punitive institutionalised response to wrong-doing, no matter how inadequate and imperfect it may be. Punishment of the perpetrator is a statement that the injured person matters, that justice matters. Through the criminal justice system the perpetrators are called to account and held responsible for their misdeeds. The truth of what happened is hopefully revealed and the victim’s story told. Carla Del Ponte, Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal at The Hague, said this:

*For me, it started with the victims, continued for the victims and it ends with them. That is what I have to tell myself – if we have established the record of what happened to the victims then we have achieved something... At the end of all the trials, if we can say that we have established the fact of what happened, that will have been something.*

(The Observer, 2 December 2007)

The perpetrator pays for what he/she has done and this is reflected in the seriousness of the sentence. Retribution takes place. Punishment is one way in which respect is shown to the victims, and their families. And punishment helps restore the moral order of society. So giving up on punishment is not to be lightly done.

One of the difficulties with the whole Lockerbie trial process is that it is not clear whether the truth of what happened and who was ultimately responsible have been firmly established. We are in the realm of deep political ‘murk’. And the early release of Megrahi prevented his appeal from being heard, which meant that another opportunity for truth to be established disappeared. The truth about Lockerbie remains dangling and that is very difficult for many of the victims’ families. So truth matters too, but does forgiveness? In particular, does forgiveness matter in situations recovering from conflict, such as Northern Ireland?

Individuals cannot be compelled to forgive or repent, even where there is a communal disposition towards forgiveness and repentance, a political settlement broadly acceptable to a large majority of people, an end to violence and a move towards societal justice. These may facilitate interpersonal forgiveness and repentance, but they do not guarantee it. Some may not repent and others may

not be able to forgive. Thus we have to make room for the unforgiving and the unrepentant.

We have to distinguish between interpersonal forgiveness and political forgiveness and also between different categories of victims. Victims can be divided into three groups which correspond to different levels of suffering:

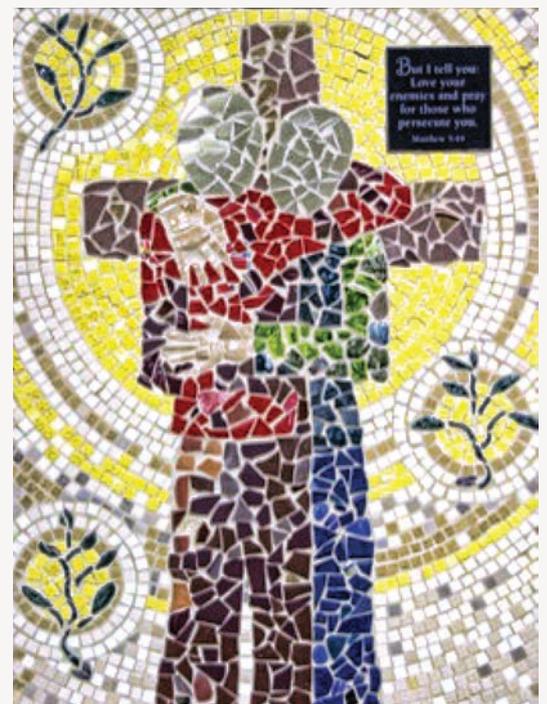
- **Primary** those who have suffered direct injury
- **Secondary** family and friends of primary victims
- **Tertiary** the wider community, political society itself.

Interpersonal forgiveness belongs much more to the primary and secondary levels, political forgiveness to the tertiary.

Political forgiveness is a process within a society involving political action, and makes particular sense in a context of political agreement. The American ethicist Donald Shriver argues in *An Ethic for Enemies* (1996) that a process of political forgiveness is marked by forbearance from revenge, empathy for opponents, concern for moral truth, and a desire for positive co-existence. These are things that our symbols, language, our politics, our legal, media, religious and academic institutions can create the conditions for. Politicians in some situations can representatively express repentance and, in particular, apologise. They can encourage



David Stevens is the Leader of the Corrymeela Community



forgiveness by showing mercy, magnanimity and generosity to political opponents and by forging a vocabulary of compromise and tolerance. They can pardon criminals and give early release.

Forgiveness in its fullest expression is much more personal. However, individual acts of forgiveness can encourage and empower other people to forgiveness as well, so that communities and nations may change. But acts of forgiveness and mercy may cause huge difficulties for people (particularly for victims and their families), because they do not erase the past. Closure is not always possible, particularly in the context of atrocity and radical evil.

And finally what about the claims of peace? Does peace not matter? Peace in Northern Ireland was a noble aim of British public policy. Better relations with Libya are of importance; trade deals will save British jobs; a non-nuclear Libya is devoutly to be continued. But the claims of peace may conflict with the claims of justice and truth. For instance, the relative peace we now enjoy required the early release of politically motivated prisoners. How do we weigh up the sometimes conflicting claims of peace, justice, truth and mercy? (I take forgiveness to be an aspect of mercy.) The answer is: not easily, and sometimes we are in the realm of the tragic.

We find ourselves in the 'broken middle' (in the words of the philosopher Gillian Rose), pushed and pulled between valid and conflicting moral demands. Broken, because as Kenny MacAskill, the Scottish Justice Secretary found, we have to choose and then we may be pulled apart. Middle because we find ourselves in the middle of a messy and confusing world where there is no position of innocence. We are caught in tension, contradiction and complexity.

**David Stevens**

## Dear Friends

It has been a busy time for us here at Corrymeela as we have been successful in our quest for funding applications to support our programme work out in the community over the next three years. However with every opportunity there comes the hard decisions about how to support the more risky but vital work that is at the heart of what we do but not fundable through grant aid. Our experience has taught us that by taking risks and working alongside those people and their families that are often overlooked we can live out our Christian values and share their need to be listened to in difficult times. By now you will have received our annual request for your Friends donation, for those who have already given Thank You! And for those who have yet to give please think of us and send your donation as this is the money that funds this vital work with people who are at risk of being forgotten as we all work towards sustainable peace in Northern Ireland. Your donation does make a very real and timely difference to so many people and I am hopeful that you can see this through the many stories in this issue. Forgiveness is an essential part of our journey but as you will read it takes many forms and is a deeply personal matter. Thank you for being our supporter, it makes all the difference to what we can achieve. As a recent participant at Corrymeela said "Alone we can achieve little but together we can achieve a lot."

**Jo Watson**

Editor

A big thank you to Alyson McElroy-Jones for her work co-editing this magazine.



## LETTERS AND EMAILS

Thank you for all your emails and letters, we love hearing from you. Our New Year edition is looking at themes of hope; if you have any personal stories, prayers or opinions around this subject please do get in touch.

To submit a letter please post to:

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8 Upper Crescent

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Or email: [editor@corrymeela.org](mailto:editor@corrymeela.org)



*Hope to hear from you soon, Jo & Ally*

CORRYMEELA MAGAZINE TEAM



## Dear friends

GREETINGS from sunny Massachusetts. Thank you so much for your very generous gift and wonderful send-off party for the Millar-Matthews family. We were overwhelmed by your kindness and love. Thank you!

We are slowly settling back into the States. Kelly has started work at Framingham State College and the boys started school on 8th September. Lots of new beginnings, hopes and fears...

If anyone is ever passing through the Boston area, please

do look us up. We will be looking for ways to stay connected to, and supportive of, Corrymeela. We learned so much during our time with you all. So, once more, thank you, take care, and may our paths cross again.

**“Go raibh mile maith agat. May there be a thousand goodnesses with you.”**

From Ronnie, Kelly and the boys

If you would like to email Ronnie please forward your correspondence to [belfast@corrymeela.org](mailto:belfast@corrymeela.org) and we will be delighted to pass it on.



## Dear Editor

THANKS SO MUCH for sending us the latest issue of your magazine. Robert had told me that it featured Jacob Jeyaseelan and I was so pleased to read his article - having met him last month, it was lovely to 'spot' him in a few photographs of the Corrymeela team. I would also like to say what a wonderful job I think you are all doing producing such an informative and fun magazine.

Yours in Christ  
**Christina Hedderly**

SALT co-ordinator, Methodist Church, London

Each year The Methodist Church generously sponsor one of our Long Term Volunteers and we value their continued support.



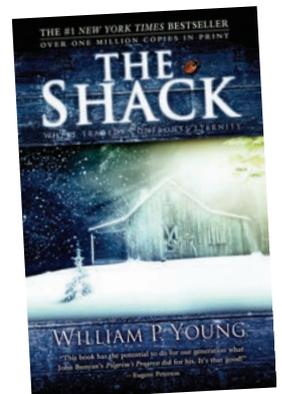
## The Shack

Dear Corrymeela, I was surprised to read David Stevens' rather critical review of 'The Shack' in the summer edition of Corrymeela. Although I personally dislike Christian fiction and rarely read it (the exception being C.S. Lewis), I think this book has much to commend it.

I found it a gripping read, hard to put down, and thought it most original, and unusual in concept. Towards the end it raised some theological points I am not sure I agree with, but the issues raised were so complex that I would have to re-read it several more times before reaching any conclusion.

Where I think it has

been particularly useful is as a tool for outreach. I know it has been passed around whole offices, read by people who would never normally read a Christian book, and started off all sorts of profitable discussions.



The last paragraph of David's review is more positive, and one I certainly agree with.

Yours sincerely  
**Irene Davy**

**BALLYCASTLE CENTRE**



Advent 2009

**‘STARS - A Ballycastle Nativity’**

is deeply inspired by, and yet different from, the original Christmas story.

Set in Ballycastle, ‘a small place people might not have heard of, like Bethlehem used to be,’ the play is a life-affirming piece that touches on the power of the birth of a child to bring joy and renewal to all, even the most cynical or world-weary members of modern society. The show features Gordon Fulton, Conleth Hill, Abigail McGibbon, Olivia Nash and a host of local amateur stars.

Act One will be staged in Cross and Passion College and Act Two in Ballycastle High School, which faces it across the Moyle Road. The audience will be processed across the Road, within the play.

There will be seven shows from 1st December 1 to 5th December, with 2 matinees, one on the 3rd and one on the 5th. The Matinees are at 3pm and the evening shows at 7.30pm.



Tickets for the family orientated matinee are £5; the evening tickets are £7.50 and the Gala performance, on Saturday evening, is £12.50, including supper. Tickets are from a dedicated ticket shop in Ann St, Ballycastle

Stars is being produced in partnership with Moyle Council’s Spreading Wings Programme, Ballycastle High School and Cross and Passion College.

**Christmas Open Day**

**Sunday 13 December 2009 (2:00 – 6:00pm)**

An open day for families including Christmas singing, music, arts and crafts, storytelling, and drama. With special guest visitor!

**Friends Weekend**

**Friday 14th – Sunday 16th May 2010**

Save the date, more details to follow.

**Enneagram Weekend**

**Friday 12 – Sunday 14 February 2010**

Time Out to Find Yourself. A tool for improving self-knowledge and relationships.

Led by Aidan Hart.

**Lectio Divina**

**Friday 26 – Sunday 28 February 2010**

A scripture reflection weekend led by Patrick O’Keefe and Ivan Bell.

**Lenten Quiet Days**

**Wednesday 3, Wednesday 17 and Wednesday 31 March 2010**

A time for reflection before the Easter Week.



**KNOCKLAYD RETREAT CENTRE**

For further information  
on all our events  
or to register log on to:  
**[www.corrymeela.org](http://www.corrymeela.org)**

## Sad news



WE REGRET to announce that Corrymeela member Anne Earle has passed away. Anne was involved in the early days of the Community and her husband, Michael, was Centre Director from 1985 to 1990. Our thoughts are with her family.

## Congratulations

WITH THE DUST barely settled from the Millar-Matthew's move stateside, we are delighted to pass on the news that Ronnie has accepted a prestigious new position in Boston as the Global Programmes Project Manager for 'Facing History and Ourselves.'

We wish him all the best in his new role and look forward to future collaborations.

## Legacies

WE REMEMBER James Murphy and sincerely hope that it brings a some comfort to his family to know that James' legacy gift will be put to good use.

## Reflection on the Members Weekend

IT WAS GREAT TO BE FREE on Friday night at the members weekend, just to catch up with everyone. Little did we know how hard we would have to work on Saturday.

The images of what we have done, and what I am doing to the planet, overwhelmed me with sadness. While a part of me always knew we needed community, the western work ethos has led to assumptions of 'I'm entitled...because I'm worth it!' and a belief that the earth is ours to plunder.

The weekend challenged us to think about our Christian faith. It is possible to be a member of WWF, RSPB, Greenpeace etc., and not have faith...so who is our neighbour? I come from a farming background and at this time of year, the harvest traditionally brought the whole community together to work, because their survival depended on it. We try to mould nature, to tame it, drain it, irrigate it and use fertilizers all to get more out of it! But do we share it with others?

I feel that as a

community, we have only started this discussion, but there so little time to make a difference. This weekend I learned from my elders and from the children of the community, that if we want a future for everyone, we must act, as well as talk.

So do something today!

**Joanne Robinson**

September 2009's members' weekend unfolded at the Ballycastle Centre. Joanne Robinson is a member of the Corrymeela Community and a member of the Infinity cell group.

## Robert Deignan... a life less ordinary

AFTER SERVING as the Volunteering Development Coordinator for the past three years, Robert Deignan has recently moved to Poland with his new bride Renata, to teach English. A life-long Cliftonville fan, Robert, hails from North Belfast. He came to us with a wealth of experience and skills which he gained as a Careers Advisor at the Northern Regional College in Newtownabbey.

Robert has always loved Ballycastle, and as a child he spent many happy summer holidays in the town, close to where his grandfather worked as the bank manager. His love of sea-fishing led him to spend many summer evenings on the Pan rocks, watching the sunset and reeling in the mackerel.

Robert came to us at a time when we needed

someone with strong leadership and management skills – a person who could live in community alongside those they were managing. A large grant from the International Fund for Ireland meant that we were able to further develop our volunteering programme by recruiting a more diverse range of volunteers, and to introduce a deeper, more structured training programme. Robert hit the ground running by starting his employment on the same day that his first long-term volunteer team started.

Throughout his tenure with Corrymeela, Robert was an outstanding contributor to our work. He led three teams of long-term volunteers, and managed dozens of midterm and short-term volunteers. He mentored and managed two volunteer support

workers, Jimmy and Sonja, and served on the Centre Management Team at a time when the Centre was going through major changes. With the construction of the new Coventry building, Robert had to put up with living in five different places in three years. The role of volunteering development coordinator is very demanding, complex, and often unappreciated. Robert gave his all, for which we are very grateful.

He has become a long-term friend to many Corrymeela community members, staff and former volunteers. Kate Pettis already has scheduled him to return to the Centre for Cover duties in a summer week. We wish Renata and him many blessings and much happiness in Poland.

**Ronnie & Rory Millar**

# Bridge-building in West Belfast

**ON THE FINAL EVENING of the recent West Belfast Festival, former president of the Methodist Church, Reverend Dr Harold Good, spoke on the theme of 'Hearts and Minds'. Few senior clergy are better qualified to speak on such a topic.**

Former Corrymeela Centre Director Dr Good has been a tireless campaigner for bridge-building, and in 2005 with Fr Alex Reid from Clonard, he helped to verify the Provisional IRA's decommissioning process. He also played an important role in the Human Rights Commission.

The fact that a former president of the Methodist Church was invited to give the annual St Oliver Plunkett lecture in the heart of Lenadoon is evidence that much has improved in the overall

'Hearts and Minds' approach to bridge-building in this city.

His lecture took place on the 38th anniversary of internment day when West Belfast, like the entire city, was a very different place. The current peace will remain vulnerable to seasonal and political strains for some time, but the entire community has moved on from the darkest days of the Troubles.

Bitter passions have subsided and old enmities have softened somewhat. This was noticeable during the festival when a senior UDA figure took part in a

public debate with a former IRA leader. This would have been unthinkable even a few years ago, and it confirms the important principle that former protagonists are learning how to agree to differ, without abandoning some of their life-long views and principles.

It would be naïve to suggest that there are no further hurdles to be overcome, and the party squabbling that still occurs at Stormont continues to frustrate people from all parties and their supporters, who truly want a shared society in Northern Ireland. However the path to peace is ever tortuous and it is sometimes the small steps that are as important as the major set-pieces.

The West Belfast Festival, which comes of age this year on its 21st anniversary, is a case in point. One of the objectives of its establishment was to give West Belfast a different focus and profile at a time when it was a by-word for violence and confrontation.

Over the years the



Very Rev. Dr. Ken Newell, OBE

festival has made its name in the arts world and has been able to attract renowned performers and speakers. The organisers have also attempted to broaden horizons, by regularly inviting contributions from people in different communities.

It is worth noting that Dr Good followed in the footsteps of a previous Presbyterian Moderator, the Very Reverend Dr Ken Newell, who delivered the St Oliver Plunkett lecture at Lenadoon during his year in office.

These have all been important steps on the long road to peace. There was also a welcome symmetry in Dr Good's presence in Lenadoon, as a former senior figure with the Corrymeela Community, which so long ago saw the need for practical reconciliation.

The Corrymeela message of reconciliation still rings true - after all these years, it is indeed 'better to light a candle than to curse the darkness'.

Courtesy of the Belfast Telegraph, Monday 10th August 2009.



Rev. Dr. Harold Good

# The 7th Generation Project

**‘In our every deliberation, we must consider the impact of our decisions on the next seven generations.’**

THIS GREAT LAW of the Iroquois inspired the name of a grassroots project growing in the heart of Belfast. It's called the 7th Generation Project, a social capacity and networking project that seeks to create an ecology of community through engagement of the interwoven layers of human, environmental and economic sustainability.

Co-founder Zandy Craig believes, "As a collective human presence, we need to take on the leadership responsibilities that have befallen our generation. This generation cannot escape the 'inconvenient truth' that we cannot simply go on destroying the ecology of the planet that gives us life."

The project has already made a name for itself. So far the 7th Generation website has nearly 150 members world-wide. The website is where

members share information and inspiration, engage in discussion and post events. But electronic communication is only one part of the puzzle and can never substitute for person to person interaction.

Zandy reflects, "To heal our relationships with ourselves and each other, we must heal our relationship with the earth, and to heal our relationship with the earth we must heal our relationship with ourselves and each other. This is the journey that has called the 7th Generation Project forward."

Monthly Community evenings have become the beating heart of the project. Taking place on the last Monday of the month, they offer an informal space of welcome and invitation to all those involved in the process of making a difference to the world. All are welcome. 7th Gen has also developed an experiential



Awareness Workshop that explores the linkages between environmental and human conflict through the questions: Where are we? How did we get here? Where do we want to go? and How will we get there? It has received much positive feedback and is under continual development.

By utilizing the vast expertise inside the 7th Generation network, the project provides access to a wide variety of formal and informal capacity building. A conflict mediation course

(DPC) has already been held for those who have completed the Awareness workshop, and a Green Economics workshop was held on 2 July in the Queens School of Politics by professor and 7th Gen member, John Barry.

Many Corrymeela members and volunteers are currently involved in the project and the Ballycastle Centre hosted a large Open Space event this month. Log on to our website to find out how the weekend unfolded.



To find out more about the 7th Generation Project or to get involved, visit [www.7thgenerationproject.ning.com](http://www.7thgenerationproject.ning.com)

Check out monthly Community Evening dates in the Events section.

To request an Awareness Workshop be run in your area please contact [alex.craig.tides@gmail.com](mailto:alex.craig.tides@gmail.com).

# My Corrymeela links

From Nancy Solly in Wicklow, 3 August 2009

MY HUSBAND AND I first heard of Corrymeela around 1974, when we watched a BBC programme about its founding and work. We were impressed with what we saw; the building of a positive Christian community that was bringing together workers and volunteers of all ages and backgrounds to create a centre for Reconciliation. It was not yet in the height of The Troubles, but Corrymeela was already tackling various aspects of reconciliation, both personal and political.

In 1979, my husband Bob went on a cycle trip to Ireland. He was welcomed to Corrymeela on a wet, wild October night and was able to hand over a small sum of sponsorship money we

had gathered from friends. Raising funds back then was tough, as very few people in Kent had heard of Corrymeela.

My first visit was a Friends Weekend in May 1984. We brought a friend along with us who said her father would have been horrified if he had known she was in Northern Ireland - at that time it was considered a war zone by many in England. Yet all we met was friendliness and safety. A tour of Belfast in the Corrymeela Bus was an eye-opener, and the contrast between conflict zones and peaceful areas was very apparent. The closest we came to danger was witnessing bonfires marking the death of Bobby Sands during the hunger strike. Funnily enough, when we went down a street where

groups were throwing stones at the 'other' side, the young boys stopped when they saw the Corrymeela Bus and waved us through. Billy Kane was our driver that day.

Our links with Corrymeela continued and in 1989 my husband and I moved to Ireland and settled in Wicklow. We wanted to build bridges between Britain and Ireland, so we wrote many letters to everyone we knew, and sent videos and books of information about life in Ireland, North and South.

We went to Corrymeela several times and a highlight was Summerfest 1994, when we met people from many different countries. One of my most abiding and peaceful memories is of the primroses blooming on the

rocky banks on the shore road below Corrymeela, and the yellow gorse, so prevalent throughout Ireland.

In recent years, my visits have been less frequent, especially following Bob's death in 1999, but I have always kept my interest and am a long-term donor. I look forward to the Corrymeela Magazine and find the range of articles informative and thought provoking. It is good to read an unbiased and Christian-orientated overview of events. I am 79 now, and for health reasons do not travel much; Corrymeela is mentioned in my Will...so the connection will carry on.

Keep up the good work, and God bless all at Corrymeela!

**Nancy Solly**  
Corrymeela Friend



Corrymeela circa 1974

# What does house building in Romania have to do with peace building in Belfast?

**IN JUNE OF THIS YEAR eleven women headed off to Cluj in Romania to play their part in building a house through Habitat for Humanity.**

For some of the women in the group it was their first time going away without their family and for all of the women, it was their first time taking part in a trip where they would be doing something more strenuous than simply lying in the sun.

The trip came at the end of five months of intensive fundraising where, through a number of activities such as car boot sales, 70s discos and pub quizzes, the women had managed to raise in the region of £15,000, well exceeding their target of £11,000.

For most of the women, the trip also formed part of a different type of journey, one which started in September 2008 and saw them explore their life experiences as women, particularly in the context of leadership. This exploration encouraged them to look at the role models in their life from childhood onward, how school had played a part in shaping what they thought they could do in life and the influence their churches had in encouraging or discouraging them as women. In creating an opportunity for the women to examine their understanding of leadership, it also encouraged them to see themselves as leaders in



the context of their own lives as mothers, sisters, grannies, friends and, ultimately, nurturers of peace.

**“...it took them out of their comfort zones, it challenged them physically and emotionally and it helped to build their self-esteem.”**

The trip to Romania was a natural development of this investigation of leadership and it gave the women the chance to do something really important. It took them out of their comfort zones, it challenged them physically and emotionally and it helped to build their self-esteem. They learnt new skills such as using an electric saw, mixing cement and laying foundations. They realized that they have something to contribute.

This was without exception an extremely positive experience for all the women who went to Romania. However the challenge for them now is to work out how to translate what they have learned into the lives at home. They proved in Romania that they are capable women who can rise to a challenge in building a house. The hope is that they will go on to realize their potential here in playing their part in building peace.

**Susan McEwen**

Irish Peace Centre Co-ordinator, connected to Corrymeela



# An update from our friends in GB

**WHAT DO THE WORDS Chester, Bromsgrove and Exeter all have in common? The answer is that they represent activities, events and interests organised by, with and for, the Friends of Corrymeela in GB.**

Earlier this year people still associated with the erstwhile Chester Friends Support Group, organised a major exhibition of Corrymeela materials held in one of Chester's most popular tourist attractions, St Peter's Church, the Ecumenical Centre for the City of Chester. Chester Friends took this opportunity to inform people how to support and get to know Corrymeela both nationally and in the local area.

Bromsgrove represents the Community for Reconciliation Centre near Bromsgrove, where it is customary for us to hold the GB Friends weekend in November. Last year's weekend focused on the theme of 'Reconciliation and Collaboration – Living with Strangers' and centred on interfaith relationships. We were helped in our discussion by having the Rev Dr Inderjit Bhogal, with us, who is a past President of the Methodist conference and currently works as Director, Yorkshire and Humber Faiths Forum. He is a loyal supporter of Corrymeela. We heard also from the co-ordinator of the UK's first regional interfaith youth council and from a Birmingham resident – Mrs Patricia Earle who is the Leader of an ecumenical/interfaith peace group which has grown enormously over the years. The Birmingham Women's Peace Group is not just a circle of dialogue but also practical in nature in that it supports an orphanage in India and does work with refugees. It began as a prayer group for those involved in the Bosnian conflict and has grown to its present size and importance today. It is a fine example of ordinary people doing extraordinary things.

Exeter was the location in March 2009 for the Corrymeela Sunday weekend. This drew in people from Exeter, Devon, Dorset and Somerset. A Saturday conference held in the spacious surroundings of the Old Deanery in the Cathedral Close focused on issues of justice, peace and reconciliation. Help was provided by Laurie Randall from Mediation Northern Ireland

and David Oddie, senior lecturer in the drama department of the University College Plymouth and Director of the Arrow Programme (art as a resource for reconciliation over the world). David Stevens brought us up to date with issues regarding Corrymeela and Northern Ireland. The weekend concluded with a Sunday Service at St Stephen's Church in the High Street in Exeter, led very ably by one of the members of the Exeter group.

There are individuals among the Friends in GB who, while not involved in a specific Corrymeela Group, nonetheless undertake activities related to Corrymeela and raise significant sums of money. Two such are Peggy Tresise of Dursley, Gloucestershire, and Peggy Owens in Ealing, West London.

Each year in March, Peggy Tresise, together with her local church, organises a major lunch to which all the churches in the area send representatives. This raises a significant sum of money for Corrymeela – and the food is terrific! Peggy Owens has for years been responsible for a St Patrick's "Event" at her local Roman Catholic Church which also raises a very considerable sum of money to for Corrymeela. Peggy is standing down from the onerous responsibilities of running this particular function but has managed to find a replacement.

I know there are many interested Friends of Corrymeela who support the work in their own churches and encourage their parish or church meeting to continue to send funds from the church budget to support Corrymeela's work in Northern Ireland.

All of this gives cause for celebration, not least because by and large, Northern Ireland has slipped off the radar of most journalists in Britain, and also because financial matters in the churches have not become any easier.

Every day in churches and other groups, large and small, Friends continue to celebrate and rehearse the lessons of Corrymeela, both as they apply in Northern Ireland but just as importantly, in our own communities. We recognise that as in Northern Ireland, there is still much work to be done.

## Honor Alleyne

Long term Corrymeela supporter and English Co-ordinator based in Reading

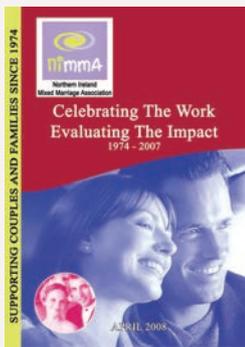


St Stephen's Church in Exeter



# Blessed with a love for diversity

**WHILE IT MAY BE DEBATABLE whether mixed marriages are made in heaven, what is certain is the fact that the Northern Ireland Mixed Marriage Association (NIMMA) was created at Corrymeela.**



Historic: The Northern Ireland Mixed Marriage Association report that calls for a nurturing of couples who put love before tribal allegiances.

Over the years, the sheltered haven of Corrymeela has proved fertile ground for a wide range of extremely worthwhile, cross-community ventures and under the watchful eye of Ray Davey and Dick McDonald, the seeds of NIMMA were sown more than 35 years ago, when a group of young people got together to ‘talk’. The Northern Ireland ‘Troubles’ had already claimed their 1,000th victim, the country was in despair and hope for the future in short supply when a small band of men and women, all of them either in or hoping to be in mixed marriages, made time to share friendship and offer support to others.

The quiet coast of North Antrim was a world away from the battlefield that was Belfast in those dark days, but the inspiration of Corrymeela saw a group of ordinary people face extraordinary times as they started a journey of many milestones. Recent research by American academic Jayme Reeves has identified many successes for NIMMA during years when bombs sounded louder than wedding bells, as well as in the post-

conflict period after 1998.

There’s little doubted that lobbying by NIMMA brought dramatic changes to many of the restrictions that hampered these marriages. Over time, requirements were dropped and promises were removed, and, although the areas of ‘shared’ Eucharist and Baptism remain contentious, the work to change rules and minds continues apace.

NIMMA’s primary function has been to provide pastoral care for its members and to impact on the religious understanding of intermarriage. The Association has always recognised that the need to change attitudes in this society, and within the religious communities of our country, will allow it to weave a network of relationships that can provide a voice and support for full integration.

As Jayme Reeves puts it, “Is not simply about changing the minds of clergy and family members regarding mixed relationships, it is about changing society as a whole to enable those who wish to marry to meet with less and less resistance as the years go on.”

Unfortunately, Northern Ireland remains rife with sectarianism and NIMMA knows only too well that there is still a long way to go before a real sense of normality can be achieved.

Social housing is proving a crucial area in which the association is helping to tackle sectarianism head-on. There





have always been areas where, because of economic conditions, both communities have been able to live in harmony, but these have been few and far between. NIMMA is working tremendously

hard with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to ensure that its visionary plan for shared neighbourhoods, inspired by the residents themselves and supported fully by the housing authorities, can make that a reality for people in the social housing sector.

Jayne Reeves describes NIMMA as 'unique' among the family of inter-church organisations. She writes, "It seeks to address community and segregation issues that simply do not exist in other countries and, while there appears to be a general perception within Northern Ireland society that the mixed marriage issue has been resolved, day-to-day experience tells us that it has not.

"The nightmare stories that came to NIMMA at the height of the Troubles have certainly subsided, and it is easier to get married than it once was, but there is still the reality that some clergy and parishes are opposed to mixed marriages. It is clear that not everything has been resolved.

"Institutionalised segregation is still rampant in a variety of areas and NIMMA's work is still needed and relevant to address it. Ten years after the Good Friday Agreement there is a tendency, on the part of many who would revitalise the Northern Irish economy, to believe that multi-million pound, shared shopping malls can somehow foster integration better than organisations such as NIMMA. It is a short-sighted solution that owes nothing to vision".

She added NIMMA is, "a courageous, tenacious, prophetic and capable organisation and we must never lose sight of our original vision for the association. NIMMA's founders identified the needs of those who wished to enter into mixed marriages to get the advice, encouragement and support they needed to live healthy lives. As many of these trailblazing couples have lived out their mixed married lives in the years since 1974, they have borne witness to a division that has been bridged in a loving, yet differentiated way. There are more bridges to build and more trails to blaze, but long may we be blessed with that love for diversity."

### Ken Dunn

Chairman of NIMMA



# Difficult and dangerous: The story of NIMMA

AS IT CELEBRATES 35 YEARS OF EXISTENCE, the Northern Ireland Mixed Marriage Association (NIMMA) has launched a report: 'Celebrating the Work: Evaluating the Impact 1974 – 2007'. NIMMA came about as a result of a conference held at Corrymeela in 1974 and Corrymeela House was the contact point for people wanting to contact NIMMA into the early 1990s. So to this extent, we too are part of the story.

As Ken Dunn, the Chairperson of NIMMA says, "Compared with 1974, the picture is much brighter today, but in a society where segregation is institutionalised, this report remains a vivid reminder of what still needs to be done for a shared future."

People in mixed marriages don't fit in, or are out of 'place' in Northern Irish society and in our churches. When people are out of 'place' – when they have crossed or have moved into the wrong category (for example, people in mixed marriages) – they 'pollute'. In the context of a contested space like Northern Ireland, the shoring up of group identity becomes a high priority. Boundaries become more tightly defined and those who inhabit 'marginal' positions – people who bridge divides or don't belong – become the feared 'polluter', in that they are perceived as bringing harm and disorder. They are category violators. Putting love before traditional tribal allegiances is a dangerous activity in our society. How we handle the category violator is a test of how far we have moved out of sectarianism and created a shared future.

NIMMA has been a courageous witness since 1974; it has pushed the churches to extend their boundaries, to show compassion and exercise flexibility. Let us salute people who at the current time of the Troubles made time to get together to share friendship and offer support to others.

Yes, things have got better. The nightmare stories that came to NIMMA 30 years ago have subsided. It is easier for couples to get married across the religious divide. But not everything has been resolved. And NIMMA is working on new issues, such as shared neighbourhoods.

**David Stevens** Leader of the Corrymeela Community



# A parable

**“SO WHEN YOU ARE OFFERING your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift at the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.”**

Matthew 5:23-24

**“We both believe in our own political systems. He firmly believes in his; I firmly believe in mine. We are never going to change one another...”**



The only words that most of us had ever seen them exchange were shouts. At meetings, they never sat next to one another; always across from one another, as if in pre-meditated opposition. Across the table, they had challenged one another, insulted one another, and accused one another of various misdeeds.

One Sunday, during the Passing of the Peace, as members of the congregation greeted one another with “signs and words of the Peace of Christ,” one of the men worked his way through the crowd to the seat of the other. They stood face to face. Neither smiled. They kept their hands at their sides. The one who had traversed the sanctuary, his red face appearing to cork an eruption from within, almost spat the word, “Peace.” Then he inhaled, as if thinking what to say next; he continued “I have nothing more to add.” His lips firmly pressed together, he did an about-face, and marched back to his own seat.

At the height of East-West political tensions of the 1980s, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher met the then Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. Following this, the first meeting between the two cold warriors, she was asked her impression of Mr

Gorbachev. Her now famous response, “We can do business together.” No gushing compliments. No tearful renunciations of past policies. No warm hugs. In fact, she continued by saying, “We both believe in our own political systems. He firmly believes in his; I firmly believe in mine. We are never going to change one another...” Nevertheless, there was the possibility that they could do business.

Perhaps sometimes the reconciliation Jesus spoke of is just the willingness to agree to do business with the one whose actions we have, up until that point, detested. Nowhere does Jesus link reconciliation to warmth, to a smile, to a good feeling, to gushing apologies. Perhaps the walk across the sanctuary, a terse word through the teeth, is all we can manage. And faith is trusting that the exchange wasn't in vain.

## David Markay

David Markay is a pastor at a multi-cultural Methodist congregation in Milano Italy and he attended the February 2008 Dialogue for Peaceful Change training at Corrymeela in Ballycastle.



# ANNUAL REVIEW

2008 2009



The Corrymeela Community, a company limited by guarantee

The Corrymeela Community is a charity recognised by the Inland Revenue, reference number XN48052A

## Council members

Catherine Pettis  
*Chair*

David Mark  
*Honorary Treasurer*

Olive Bell  
Marian Brady  
Tim Foley  
Alistair Greer  
Andy Lane  
Carolyn Lowry  
Eamonn McCallion  
Mairead McLaughlin  
Gill Michael (*Retired*)  
Peter Montgomery  
Mike Mullan  
Seaneen Pettigrew  
Raymond Stewart  
Joyce Williams (*Resigned*)  
Angela Loudon took her place  
Mark Gandola (*Retired*)

## Management team

Dr David Stevens  
*Leader and Chief Executive*

Jo Watson  
*Fundraising Director*

Ronnie Millar  
*Centre Director*

Nicola Murray  
*Financial Controller*

A full copy of our Annual Review can be obtained from Corrymeela House 8 Upper Crescent, Belfast BT7 1NT or downloaded from our website [www.corrymeela.org](http://www.corrymeela.org).

## Message from the Chair

The past year has been one of transition.

In August we bade farewell to our Centre Director Ronnie Millar who worked tirelessly through challenging times and welcomed his successor Paul Hutchinson.

Prior to that our Volunteer Coordinator Robert Deignan left in July to live in Poland with his new wife Renate. Robert made a significant contribution to volunteering during his time with us and we wish him well.

We completed our new Coventry building, refurbished the Croi and are about to demolish the Village and the Cottages to make way for new residential accommodation.

To everyone who has contributed time, energy and finances to enable this to happen – a very big thank-you.

Reduction in funding has intensified the challenge to provide meaningful and vibrant programmes. In losing our full-time Family worker post we said ‘goodbye’ to Rachel Craig whose contribution to the life and work of Corrymeela over many years is gratefully appreciated.

We were however able to create a number of new projects:-

- Activism from the Kitchen Table (a Belfast-based faith and life programme)
- Inclusive Neighbourhoods Project (working with refugees in partnership with NICRAS)
- F2F (youth multi-faith conflict transformation programme)
- Forgiveness in Schools project (in partnership with Peacelines)
- Leading Ladies Project (within the Irish Peace Centres Consortium consisting of Cooperation Ireland, An Teach Ban, Glenree and Corrymeela)

All of the above is in addition to our on-going work in schools, with young people and with the churches. In total it demonstrates a dynamic approach.

With the deaths of both Kathleen Davey and John Morrow we have lost two of the founding generation of Corrymeela. Their gift to us is their constancy of spirit and faith and our task is to remain true to that.

The rhythm of life continues within Corrymeela. There will be more “goodbyes” and more “helloes” to people, to buildings and to ways of doing things and

that is not always easy.

Staff, volunteers, Corrymeela members and all of those who support us, thank you so much – without your efforts we could not continue.



**Kate Pettis**

Chair of Corrymeela Council

# Our Mission

*“To embrace difference, heal divisions and enable reconciliation”.*

## Achievements



**Coventry International Peace Prize,  
November 2008**



**Our Youth in Community Project  
scooped top prize in the Outstanding  
Achievement category of the  
Northern Ireland Youth Awards 2008**

## Community life and faith

The members sustain the life and vision of the Community and are hugely involved in its work on a voluntary basis. At the beginning of 2009 there were:

**135 members**

**11 provisional members**

**54 associates**

During the year two of the founding group of Corrymeela died – Kathleen Davey, wife of the Founder, Ray Davey, and John Morrow, second Leader of the Community. They will be much missed.

Trevor Williams, the third Leader of the Community, became Church of Ireland Bishop of Limerick, Killaloe and Ardfert during the year and Brendan McAllister became one of the Northern Ireland Victims Commissioners. Congratulations to them both.



*Kathleen Davey*



*John Morrow*



*Trevor Williams*



*Brendan McAllister*

## Staff and volunteers

On March 31, 2009 there were:

**29 members of staff (28 in 2008)**

Volunteering is central to the work and vision of Corrymeela and the monetary value of this work is equivalent to £450k per annum. We see volunteering as growing in importance in the future.

We usually have around **twelve** volunteers from all over the world who come to live and work at the Centre for a year. **At weekends and during the summer, up to two hundred and ten short term volunteers** come to provide that extra level of support and participate in our leadership training programme. We also have incredible support from **friends and members**.



*The Corrymeela Team at the NI Youth Awards ceremony in the Spires Centre, Belfast.*

International Fund for Ireland (IFI) funding for the Volunteering Development Co-ordinator post ended in February 2009. A further donor will be supporting a significant part of the salary in future. An evaluation of the IFI project was carried out and the recommendations are currently being implemented.

Corrymeela received a three-year grant under the Millennium Volunteering Scheme from the Department of Education through the Volunteer Development Agency to promote short-term volunteering for 16 to 24 year olds. We have created volunteer status Programme Assistant posts which aim to support the Programme Co-ordinator at the Ballycastle Centre in programme coordination and design, and in running programmes. Two positions have been created.

*Corrymeela has a long history of productive reconciliation work in local communities and organisations, involving children, young people, families and adults.*

## Programme

Much of the community-based programme work finds the unique transformational potential of the residential experience invaluable; and for this reason there is a close linkage between our community-based work and centre-based programmes.

The four-year, **Youth in Community Project** which won first prize at the NI Youth Awards delivered a personal and social development programme aimed at marginalised young adults, 18 to 25. This year it has been replaced by the **People Understanding Borders (PUB)** group a progression that enables these young adults from both North and South to pilot and develop their own programme over a number of residential weekends designed to help support the participants' work with young people in their own community or to volunteer within a Corrymeela context to work with other young people.

This year our School's programme worked with:

30 primary schools

1100 primary pupils

28 secondary schools

1300 secondary pupils

through both school-based and residential programmes. In 2008-2009 there have been a number of new schools interested in working with us and there are more schools willing to progress from a single identity programme to a cross-community one.

Jill Stringer was Primary Schools Worker to August 2008 and she was replaced by Nicola McKeown.



Nicola McKeown



Ann Marie White

The four-year **Community Partners (Interface) Project** came to a close in September 2008. This project had involved working closely with groups and individuals along interfaces – both urban and rural, and both physical and non-physical. We were fortunate in finding a way to continue this work through forming an **Irish Peace Centres Consortium** involving Co-operation Ireland, Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation, An Teach Ban (Donegal Peace Centre) and ourselves. We made a successful application for Peace III funding.

Corrymeela has worked closely with the Northern Ireland Community of Refugee & Asylum Seekers over the last few years and we recently received Peace III funding for the **Inclusive Neighbourhoods Project** to integrate refugees and host communities. Ann Marie White was employed from March 1 as Project Worker.



Emma Cowan



A new initiative, **Activism from the Kitchen Table**, was taken during the year to develop Faith and Life work in the Belfast area and in November Emma Cowan was employed as part-time Project Worker. The first successful event was held in February.

Family work continued during the year with a particular focus on the Moyle area. Unfortunately we had to make the full-time Family Work post redundant at the end of March 2009. We are seeking to continue the work by other means.

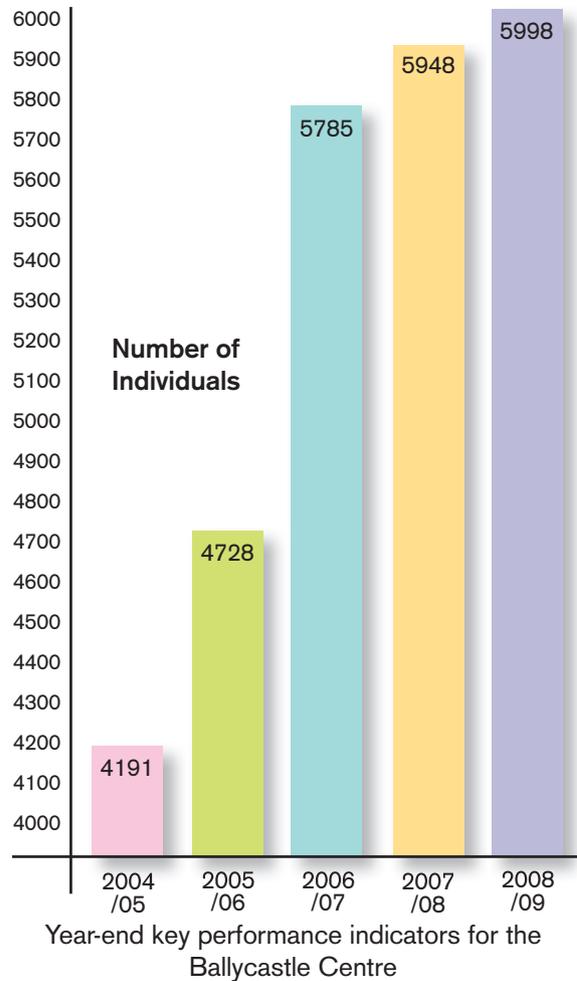


## The Corrymeela Centres

Over **7,500** people each year take part in individually designed residential and day programmes at the Ballycastle Centre. Around **900** people come to the Knocklayd Centre.

These people are primarily from Northern Ireland but also come from the **Republic of Ireland, Great Britain, America, South East Europe and different European countries**. Groups come from **schools, local communities, churches, youth clubs, universities; people come as members of families, carers, victims, prisoners' families, politicians, ex-paramilitaries and citizens** involved in work for reconciliation. The Centres run a number of residential conferences and open events throughout the year.

These groups and people have the opportunity to engage in dialogue, be involved in building a sense of inclusive community during their programme, listen to different stories and perspectives, share their experiences, explore alternative ways of moving out of conflict and violence and finding new ways forward together. This often includes creative use of the arts and experiential learning activities.





## Global ties

We hosted the national board of the **Facing History and Ourselves** organisation, leading an important community cohesion residential for Sikh and Muslim community leaders from England, and further developing the relationship with the Olive Tree programme.

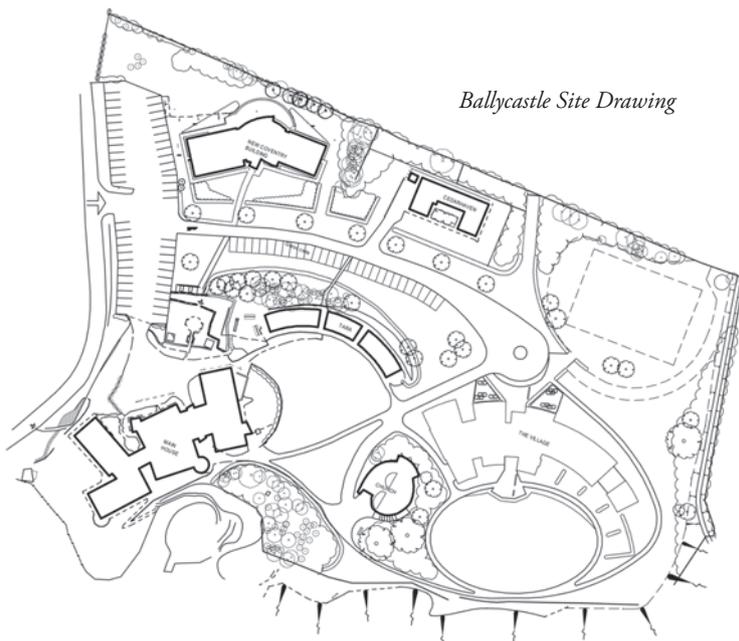
As previously mentioned the Ballycastle Centre also ran a number of successful open events (see full report for details), hosted 32 mid-week residentials for the cross-border schools programme; Young Enterprise and hundreds of children, youth and families from diverse backgrounds enjoyed the summer programme.

The combination of thoughtful programme work, hospitality, committed staff, volunteers and the specialness of the Ballycastle site makes the Centre a wonderful space for healing, peace-building and reconciliation.

The long-term volunteers moved into their new Coventry accommodation in November 2008.

The building was opened on April 3 2009 by President Mary McAleese, with a significant number of people from Coventry present.

The Croi was renovated during the autumn of 2008 and was finished in January 2009.



*Ballycastle Site Drawing*



*New Village Plan*

Designs for new Village accommodation were drawn up and planning permission granted. A significant grant from the International Fund for Ireland has been obtained and it is hoped the work will start in the New Year. A new meeting room was also created in the Main House.

Our carbon footprint: There are solar panels on the new Coventry building and we have obtained planning permission for a wind turbine. We are actively exploring a centralised biomass boiler to heat the buildings.

Corrymeela House in Belfast has been put up for sale. However, the current slump in the property market has meant that there has been no interest to date in the building.



## Communications

The Corrymeela magazine has continued to flourish as has the website with additional online communication through e-news letters, facebook and justgiving.

Another successful way to engage and retain supporters this year has been through events such as the concert, fashion show, coffee mornings, Indian evening, a book launch and the official Coventry opening.

# Fundraising

**£917,733**

is the total amount of voluntary income in 2008-9. This includes legacy income but excludes project grants.

**£1,093,616**

was received under the capital appeal

**£25,509**

was raised for the refurbishment of the Croi

## Income from grants

We are fortunate that a number of Trusts continued to support our work again this year. Our Trust and grant funders included BBC Children in Need and the British Council. We also received over £20,000 from the Volunteer Development Agency in support of Millennium Volunteering for the under 25's.

Capital grants in 2008/2009 came to over £1 million as part of the ongoing capital campaign, received from the International Fund for Ireland, the Ulster Garden Villages Trust, and Peace II monies through the Community Relations Council and other Corrymeela donations. This terrific achievement resulted in a contemporary fit-for-purpose building that will provide super facilities for volunteers at Corrymeela for many years to come.

This figure of £1,093,616 includes a restricted donation of £25,591 towards the Village that was made by John Fitzpatrick as the final payment of his four year pledge to Corrymeela.

## Voluntary income

The number of donors who give to Corrymeela has increased this year and more importantly the size of their average gift has also increased when compared to last year. The total raised from voluntary income has increased from £321,762 in 2007/8 to £359,004 in 2008/9. The main reason for this increase has been income received in response to specific appeals that are written by the Fundraising Director and sent directly to donors and potential donors. Restricted donations have more than doubled when compared to last year and unrestricted general gifts have increased. The capital campaign is impacting on the type of donation made with a greater number of gifts being made during

2008/9 that are restricted in how they can be spent, for example in response to either green energy or capital projects such as the Croi refurbishment.

We are indebted to our Corrymeela Friends in Great Britain who continue their loyal support.

## Legacies and Gifts in Memoriam

Corrymeela received a number of legacy gifts during 2008/9. We are grateful to these generous individuals who have made a lasting gift towards our work. We remember:

E G Moore  
Roland J Magill  
Vera Jane Annett  
Ivan and Dorothy Wheeler  
William H Rutherford  
A G Garrett  
Ralph C Hirst  
William Glass  
John Hugh Finlay  
Eleanor M Davis  
M. Isabel Kennedy  
Nora Jones

## Financial Review

**£3,132,665**

Yearly Income

**£1,193,751**

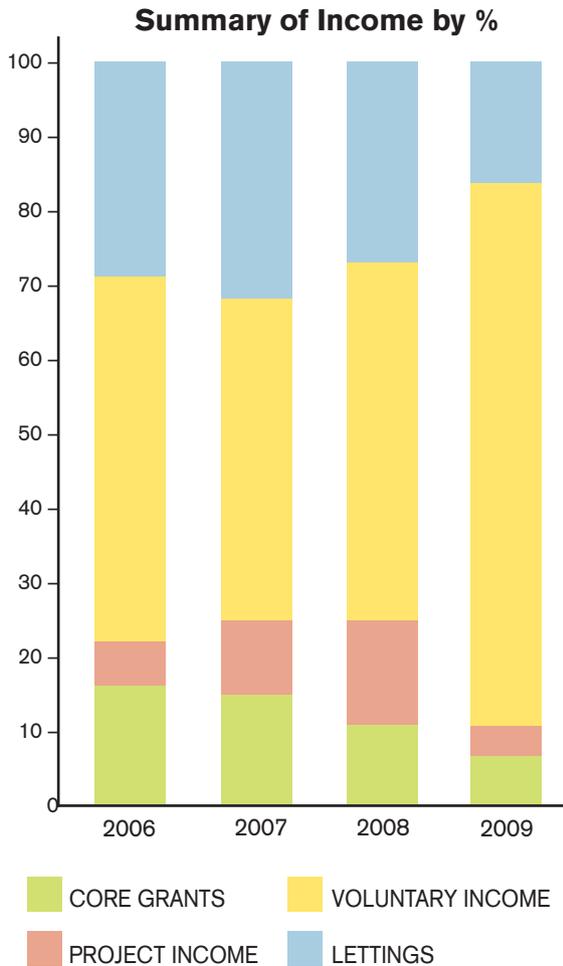
Up on last year due to capital works

We sincerely thank all our funders great and small for their invaluable contribution to the work of Corrymeela. Without you none of this is possible.





The Community has produced a fundraising strategy for 2007-2010 identifying potential areas of income generation, including targeting regular giving, and is in the process of implementing it. The following figures show trends for core grants, project income, voluntary and lettings:



Income from core grants, in particular, is under pressure as funders have less money to distribute.

## Reserves policy

The actual reserves at 31 March 2009 are £497,274. In calculating reserves, the Council has excluded from the total funds, fixed assets £3,204,983, the restricted funds £155,972 and £1,200,000 for further site development. The Council has been seeking to build up its reserves for site developments which started in September 2007. Work has been finished but there will be developments due to start in the New Year: replacement residential accommodation, site works and renewable energy installation. This work is costed at some £2m and will last another couple of years.

## Plans for future periods

The plans for further major site developments will be one of our major concerns in the next period. We have the funding in place for the New Village, although we still have to raise the money for associated site developments.

We have begun to implement our new fundraising plan for 2009 -2012 and with restricted funding will be relying more and more on voluntary income

The grant aid environment continues to be very uncertain and there are a number of our programme posts at risk in 2009-2010. The economic recession and the crisis in public finances are likely to have a big impact post 2010. European and International Fund for Ireland monies will disappear post 2013. In this context Corrymeela is likely to become more voluntary in future. We will need to focus on income generation, particularly at the Ballycastle Centre.

We will also need to explore further the possibility of partnerships. Already this has meant a Consortium of Irish Peace Centres and a partnership with the Northern Ireland Community of Refugee & Asylum Seekers, to access Peace III money. However, this may be something to extend further in the future. It will mean focusing on key activities and key sites. How we continue to develop good reconciliation programmes in a context of financial constraint will require careful thought.



# I am... Paul Hutchinson

**I am...Paul Hutchinson, and I am delighted to have been appointed the new Centre Director at Corrymeela's Ballycastle centre, a place with an international reputation for peace and reconciliation.**

I am a poet, filmmaker, photographer, mediator, storyteller, father, husband.

**I am an East Belfast boy.**

I am the founder of Imagined Spaces, a company specializing in creative community relations.

**I am a senior associate with Mediation Northern Ireland, and a research associate with Institute for Conflict Research.**

I appeared on the now famous plinth in Trafalgar Square and read out the names of everyone who had been killed during the Troubles.

**I wrote a book called Writing the Changes which was published in October of this year, in conjunction with the Ulster Museum.**



My latest film Prods & Pom-Poms (made with Ben Jones), was broadcast on UTV last month.

**I was one of five shortlisted artists in the running to represent Northern Ireland in the London 2012 Cultural Olympiad as part of their Artists Taking the Lead project.**

I love living by the sea with my four fabulous females - wife Joanne, daughters Alice, 13, and Lucy, 6 and the family cat Rosie.



# RONNIE MILLAR

## former centre director, looking back and feeling grateful

*I have walked through many lives,  
some of them my own,  
and I am not who I was,  
though some principle of being abides,  
from which I struggle not to stray...  
Live in the Layers and not on the litter...*

The opening line of *The Layers* by Stanley Kunitz.

I FIRST GOT INVOLVED in Corrymeela sixteen years ago, when my wife Kelly was a long-term volunteer. I grew up in Antrim town, and was enjoying a career in technology, when I met Kelly in Dublin. After Kelly completed her year as a volunteer, we moved to the United States, where we were married in 1995.

While in the States, I made a career change into youth and community work, while Kelly taught at an inner city high school in Boston. We kept in touch with Corrymeela over the years, and were considering returning the Centre as the resource family, when the opportunity arose in early 2005 for me to apply for the Centre Director post.

Serving as Centre Director has been the most wonderful and deeply fulfilling experience, for which I am very grateful. I feel that my legacy includes supporting the Community Leader, David Stevens, and Council in the drive and transition to make the centre more sustainable, vibrant, and open. We welcomed more groups than ever before, increased revenue, reduced expenditures, and redeveloped much of the site. Some of

this was very painful and challenging for staff, volunteers and community members. It was certainly hard work for us all.

I want to thank the staff at the centre and in the Belfast office for all their support and friendship during my tenure. As I noted in my leaving speech, you were very patient with me, especially when I raced around at times like Basil Fawly. I learned so much from working alongside staff, volunteers, community members and the group participants. I feel that I have learned something about the complexities of building trust, relationships and reconciliation. Perhaps one of the most important lessons for me has been the need for us to catch ourselves on when we rival with others, and to try and figure out how we can find freedom and peace in our relationships with each other. As Derick Wilson often reminded us, one of our society's biggest challenges is for us to learn how to live at ease with those who are different from us.

I very much enjoyed the entire experience, but especially the opportunity to welcome and host so many people from a range of diverse backgrounds. What a wonderful privilege to have been part of the Corrymeela story; to have lived and worked in community, to have facilitated groups from Northern Ireland and from all over the world, and to have led and enjoyed worship in the Croi... there is far too much to say, and way too many people to mention by name.

We are now back in Boston. In spite of the distance, and how we all move on with our lives, I hope not to become a stranger to the Corrymeela Community. Thank you for your support, love and friendship. In keeping with the wider agenda of reconciliation, I am now working for Facing History and Ourselves, Kelly is teaching education and English at a local university, and our two boys are settling in very well to their new beginnings. As Kunitz closed his poem, I too share his hope for the future.

*...no doubt the next chapter  
in my book of transformations  
is already written,  
I am not done with my changes*

In peace and love...  
**Ronnie**

### Memorable highlights:

- Expanding volunteering input to the centre, and seeing volunteers develop skills and confidence during their experience
- Meeting His Holiness the Dalai Lama, President George Bush, President Mary McAleese, Hillary Clinton, Dermot Ahern, Peter Hain, Sir Hugh Orde, two US Consuls, and one American Ambassador (nice to see a photograph of Kelly's great-grandfather in that office)
- Ringing the bell upon the birth announcement of Simeon Hughes-Thierbach in Cedar Haven
- Overseeing the Young Enterprise contract which provided a temporary fix to the mid-week, mid-winter occupancy problem.
- Seeing our staff engage in community worship with Sheikh Bukhari & Rabbi Eliyahu McLean (Jerusalem Peacemakers)

### Character building challenges:

- Figuring out how to best support the LTV team in the context of having more short-term and mid-term volunteers and a major site development
- Increasing occupancy and lettings income with fewer staff and with programme staff less involved at the centre
- Running the centre without having Dessie for the past year
- Learning that rivalry, scapegoating, and model obstacles are as much a reality of living and working at Corrymeela as anywhere else
- Further engaging community members into the work, and open events at the centre (beyond weekend cover, presence, facilitation and mentoring)



# Three myths about forgiving

**Some time ago I asked two friends if they would forgive Josef Fritzl, the Austrian who was convicted of imprisoning his daughter in a cellar for 24 years, continuously raping her, fathering seven children by her and murdering one of them.**

Their response was immediate, vigorous and negative.

It turned out they assumed that forgiving Fritzl meant letting him off the hook, or minimising, excusing or even justifying what he did.

In fact forgiving involves none of these things. If it did, then we would be wrong to forgive.

Our language misleads us. If I say “I forgive you” I suggest that I give something to you. In fact I give you a new context in which to consider repenting. But I do not give you new life. You can only get that when you repent.

The real thing I do, however, when I forgive is to give myself something, not you. I give myself freedom and healing. I no longer have you in my head. I am no longer burning with anger and revenge. I can sleep at night. You no longer dominate my life. That is a wonderful change – for me.

Of course, forgiving is not all my work. For Christians it depends on God’s grace, usually mediated through others who help us with our

healing. It is often experienced as a gift. But it makes things a lot easier if those faced with the terrible task of forgiving realise that they are doing themselves a favour, not the wrongdoer.

So, the first myth we need to counter about forgiving is that wrongdoers benefit, not the person who forgives.

A second myth about forgiving is that it always involves a relationship with the wrongdoer. Michael Lapsley, the S. African Anglican priest whose arms were amputated after a letter-bomb attack during the Apartheid era, says he cannot forgive those who attacked him because he does not know them. For many years his answer made sense to me. Recently I changed my mind because I have been asking what is involved in completing the journey towards forgiving.

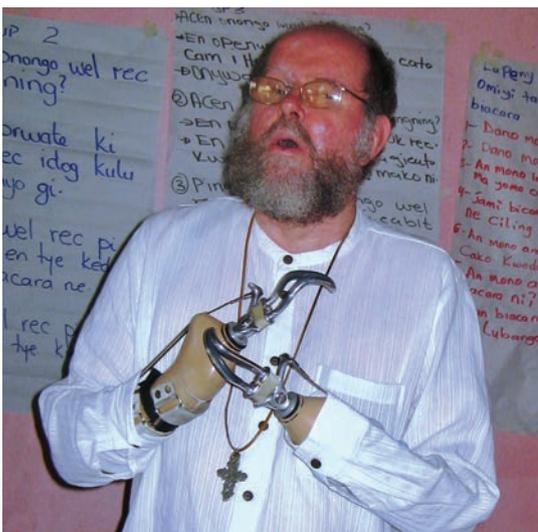
Take an example of a woman – let’s call her Jenny - whose husband was murdered by paramilitaries. Let’s assume that neither she nor her husband had any political involvement and that they would never meet the killers in their normal social or work life. Is she called to have an interpersonal relationship with them as part of her call to forgive, simply because these people have wronged her?

It might be argued that the answer is Yes because God not only wishes us well, but also reaches out to establish a new relationship with us, and we are called to imitate God.

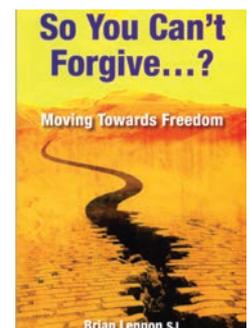
I think this is a false argument. God is a lover of all and in an inter-personal type of relationship with all. But we are different: each of us is called to love all, but not to have an inter-personal relationship with everyone. We pray for people all over the world whom we will never meet, but the number we are called to meet and to love at an interpersonal level is small.

Secondly, situations differ. In some, like families, there are pre-existing relationships. In

**“The real thing I do, however, when I forgive is to give myself something, not you. I give myself freedom and healing.”**



Father Michael Lapsley





The aftermath of the Enniskillen 'Poppy Day' bomb

others, such as Jenny's, there are not. In some the ideal may be to build a new relationship, or to heal an old one. But it would need a strong argument to show that all situations require the person wronged to seek out a relationship.

Michael Lapsley does not need to know his wrongdoers in order to forgive them. He does not need to have a relationship with them or even to encounter them. All he has to do – and this is very difficult – is to wish them well.

A third myth about forgiving is that it is always useful in political conflict situations. This seems obvious to the Christian – at first sight. But when we look more closely we can find problems with this idea.

Forgiving can only happen when a person or group has done wrong to another person or group. Without that there may be a need to let go of false resentment and other things, but forgiving is not relevant.

The problem in political conflicts is that those involved normally do not agree on right or wrong: one person's terrorist is another's freedom fighter. Forgiving in political conflicts generally arises in two situations: where one side has comprehensively beaten the other – which leads to the morality of the victor, or where the conflict is already over; for example, the Irish Government can now apologise for neglecting the men of the Somme.

Neither of these conditions apply to our situation in Northern Ireland; we do not agree who

did what wrong to whom in the past, and this still matters intensely to many. It seems to me therefore that we should give up notions of communal forgiving and/or repenting. (Individual actions are different and are needed for the freedom of those involved). Instead we should recognise and work for two things that are normally present in good work between divided groups.

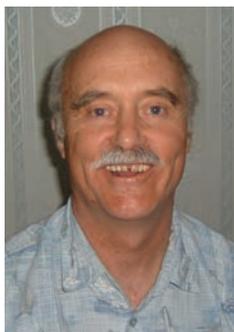
The first of these is moving towards understanding; this does not involve agreement, forgiving or repenting. Instead it means seeing that we might, in different circumstances, have done what our opponents did. It can lead to significant change and an openness to new relationships without any agreement about wrongdoing. It is one of the really positive outcomes of dialogue between seriously divided groups.

The second is recognition; again there is no forgiving, but rather an acceptance that the other side exists, that they are going to be around in the future, and that somehow our side will have to deal with them.

Myths about forgiving are dangerous because they can put wrong burdens on the most vulnerable in our society and they can divert us from focusing on more important work.

### **Brian Lennon, s.j.**

Brian Lennon, s.j, is author of *So You Can't Forgive...? Moving Towards Freedom*, (Dublin: Columba, 2009)



# Long-term Volunteers

## Meet this year's team

*“Corrymeela completely changed my life, my ambitions, the way I live, my values, and the person I want to be.”*

Former long-term volunteer

EACH YEAR, Corrymeela recruits up to 14 people from around the world to live and work together for a period of one year at our main residential centre in Ballycastle. We recruit people from diverse backgrounds and with a blend of complimentary skills and experience.

The Long-term Volunteer Programme runs from September to August, therefore volunteers make 12 months commitment to live and work at the Ballycastle Centre and to share in the organisation's ethos.

Volunteers play a vital part in creating a

welcoming atmosphere at Corrymeela and help with all aspects of the daily running of the Ballycastle Centre; working with and participating in a group or individual's visit to Corrymeela. The volunteering role requires an ability to work with a diverse range of adults, young people and children – some of whom may be challenging, always remaining calm and being sensitive to their needs.

Volunteering though at times demanding is a very rewarding experience. The volunteers live together in the newly finished Coventry building at the Ballycastle Centre and each have the chance to build their own community with the support of Corrymeela. Living and working in acceptance of our differences has many rewards; this is the cornerstone of our volunteer programme and all applicants must be committed to sharing in all facets of this journey.



Hello  
 My name is Sarah Logan; I am from Lisburn and I have just finished my A levels. My parents are members of the community and so I regularly come to Congmeela. I chose to apply to be a LTV because I realise how amazing and beneficial the work is to the families and other groups that come up to the centre. I love the fact that everyone is accepted at Congmeela and I really want to give something back to the place that has given me so much over the years. After taking this gap year, I hope to study speech therapy at university.  
 Sarah x



**SARAH LOGAN (18)**

Hi,  
 I'm Ethan Young and I have recently finished working with VSO on their Global Xchange programme, spending 3 months in Wales and 3 months in India working on various community development projects. I left my old job as an accounts assistant to pursue my interest in the area of Peace and Reconciliation and I hope to follow a career in International Peace Building.  
 Much love,  
 Ethan



**ETHAN YOUNG (26)**

Hi I am Eamonn from Ballycastle. I first got involved with Congmeela just over a year ago as a short-term volunteer and I decided to apply to be a long-term volunteer. Over the past few years I have done a lot of work in the local community with young children and teenagers, working on various projects. My hope is to go to university and study either youth work or social work. I am hoping that my experience over the next year will help me make that decision.  
 Eamonn



**EAMONN MAGUIRE (22)**

Hello!  
 My name is Lindsey Pike, I am from Valparaiso, Florida USA and I recently graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Literature. I stayed at Congmeela last summer as part of a short-term study abroad trip with my school. My father is a retired US Air Force Officer and so my childhood was filled with travelling and new places. A cup of coffee with good company and good conversation is one of my favourite things. I look forward to becoming a part of Congmeela and this amazing privilege of working with the fantastic people who make it possible.  
 See you soon!  
 Lindsey



**LINDSEY PIKE (22)**

I am Sangluai from Mandalay, the Second Capital of Myanmar. My father is a Methodist Church Minister and I studied at Myanmar Theological College for four years after completing my degree. I returned to Myanmar in 2008 after six months in Britain and worked at World Vision-Myanmar, Child Development and Protection Project for one year. The aim and purpose of my life is to be a Peace Maker, not only for our church, our community but also for our country, where everybody thirsts for peace, reconciliation and development. And I hope that I'll get so much knowledge regarding peace, reconciliation, development, etc from the Congmeela Community.  
 Peace Sangluai



**SANGLUAI (22)**

Hello  
I'm Raziyah Ali and my name means 'hope' and 'satisfied' in Arabic. I'm of Pakistani origin and a Muslim. I was born and raised in sunny Wolverhampton and my Mother refuses to learn English as she's afraid of her children losing their heritage, so this means I can speak Urdu and Punjabi fluently; I can also sign but my abilities there are pretty basic! I'm a second year university student studying English and Philosophy, and I plan to teach at secondary level. I can't ride a bike or drive a car but I can roller blade erm.



**RAZIYAH ALI (21)**

I am Kathleen Campbell from Rhode Island, USA. I learned about Corrymeela from my older sister, Eileen, who was a short-term volunteer in 2006. My grandfather is from Donegal, so I am thrilled to be living near my Irish relatives for a year.  
I have previously volunteered in schools tutoring children and also helping to rebuild homes in Mississippi following Hurricane Katrina. I am most looking forward to learning from all the people and the community at Corrymeela.



**KATHLEEN CAMPBELL (22)**

Hi! I'm Maximilian Haberland from Hamburg, a city in the north of Germany. Having just finished school, I really wanted to do something totally different to gain new experiences. I heard about Corrymeela through EIRENE, an international peace service and for me Corrymeela seems to be perfect, because you live together in a community with people from all over the world to work on a conflict solution in many different ways.  
I am interested in people, photography, literature and different cultures, and will try to get to know as much as I can about Irish culture and people during my stay.



**MAXIMILIAN HABERLAND (19)**

I am Molly Gorman from Cushendun and although I've spent the past four years in foreign parts (England, India and America) I have returned home a few times to be a Corrymeela summer volunteer. I love the community spirit in the centre, where everyone is made to feel welcome and accepted. The craic is great too! I hope that this year I can help to keep it such a special place.  
Corrymeela is near the town I grew up in, but I think the experience of living and working there, meeting people from all over the world every day, will be very different and exciting. I am so happy to be a long-term volunteer and can't wait to meet everyone and get started!



**MOLLY GORMAN (22)**

Hello everybody!  
My name is Elisabeth Beckert and I am from Germany. I am fond of life, open-minded, curious, talkative, optimistic and creative. I am interested in acting and getting to know new people and travelling to explore new cultures and getting to know this world better. I decided to apply for a place as a LTV because the atmosphere and the way of life at Corrymeela offers a shared experience, free of prejudice. I also believe it is God's plan for me to be here and to support the diffusion of reconciliation between different denominations. I am really looking forward to my time at Corrymeela and I am happy about this possibility.  
Lots of love  
Elisabeth



**ELISABETH BECKERT (18)**

# When should we forgive?

**WHEN THE LATER SENATOR GORDON WILSON told the BBC that he bore “no ill-will” towards those who had murdered his daughter, Marie, in the Enniskillen Cenotaph Bomb detonated by the Provisional IRA, the media reported this as, “Father forgives daughter’s killers.”**

**“Sometimes, in my opinion, forgiveness seems too easy to those who have not felt the pain.”**

This made a good headline, but it was not strictly true. Some years later I talked about this in depth to Gordon when I was researching and writing a book about Marie’s life and death.

It was clear to me that Gordon had never said he ‘forgave’ the killers, and he agreed with me. So I asked him, Why not? Surely Christians are supposed to forgive? It was a particularly brutal question, for I knew that I was entering a difficult area. However it was a question that needed to be asked.

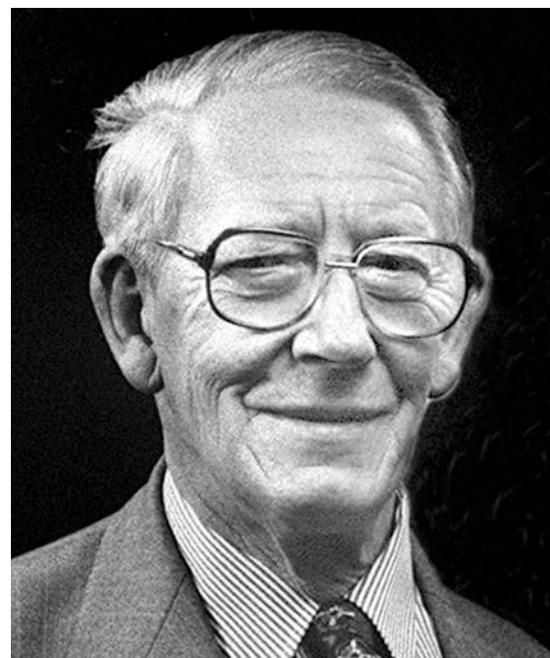
Gordon paused, but as ever, he did not duck the question. He replied slowly, “Yes, you are right, I did not ‘forgive’ them, but I bore them no ill-will.”

He continued, “Their crime was so heinous that only God can forgive them, if they repent. However, I pray for them every night.” This was a straight answer to a straight question, and it attempted to answer honestly the whole complex question of forgiveness.

Gordon Wilson was severely criticised for allegedly ‘forgiving’ the IRA murderers. His critics thundered, What right has this man to forgive these people? It is a question that is still being asked, no doubt wherever people still feel the pain and injustice of being innocent victims of violence.

Sometimes, in my opinion, forgiveness seems too easy to those who have not felt the pain. There is a danger that because forgiveness is a Christian imperative, it is therefore taken too lightly by people who believe that this is just part of a complex bundle of beliefs and actions which is generally labelled ‘Christianity.’

Yet without forgiveness, Christianity is greatly diminished. Over this summer I have been looking at a number of books on this difficult topic, including Brian Lennon’s challenging publication *So You Can’t Forgive?* He suggests that we may not be as spectacularly ‘forgiving’ as Gordon Wilson,



Gordon Wilson

but he suggests that a story like his if heard properly can be an encouragement.

Michael Henderson, an English author, has also written a most thought-provoking book on forgiveness on a world scale. In his book *No Enemy to Conquer* he suggests that the political advances which we have made in Northern Ireland need to be underpinned by those who can build relationships and trust, in order to help heal the deep bitterness that remains.

This is easier said than done. In my own life there are people who have hurt me deeply, and I still find this difficult to forgive – even though I know that by forgiving them I will be freed from that burden. Perhaps my peace from forgiveness will come some day.

In the meantime I still find the words of my old friend Gordon Wilson most helpful. If you feel that you cannot ‘forgive’ it is important, at the very least, not to bear ill-will. Resentment and bitterness will poison you and not those who have hurt or harmed you. Forgiveness, however, is not easy. If it was so, we would all be doing it, all the time, which, of course, is exactly what Christ told us to do.

## Alf McCreary

Alf McCreary is Religion Correspondent of the Belfast Telegraph and the author of a wide range of books, including *Marie Wilson - A Story from Enniskillen* and *Gordon Wilson - An Ordinary Hero* both published by Marshall Pickering. Brian Lennon’s book is published by the Columba Press and Michael Henderson’s by Baylor University Press.

Gordon Wilson image: courtesy of Alan Lewis, Photopress.



# Living on the margins

*The following is Peter Sagar's account of working with the Karen people from Burma*

**“GOD OF ALL, it's so hard to live on the margins – lonely and forgotten, despised... dependent... Remember me, put back my confidence, restore my dignity and walk down the edges with me... Then knowing you Lord, I shall rise... rise in hope”**

Imagine a country where in recent years, people have died fighting for the democratic right to elect their leaders. A nation where a huge army of 400,000, without any major external enemies, bullies a population of 45 million civilians. A country where people are prepared to brave a long, arduous journey through mountainous terrain, a free-fire zone and a minefield, to reach the relative safety of a refugee camp. That country is Burma.

The people of Burma are struggling and dying for the democratic right to be able to choose their leaders. I have spent some time visiting and supporting those who are working and campaigning for human rights in Burma, and teaching those who have had to flee from the brutal SPDC military regime.

In April 2000, I had my first visit to a Karen refugee camp, one of many along the Thai-Burmese border. The first thing that struck me was the smell of smoke. It hung in the air from the breakfast cooking of the 7,000 inhabitants in the camp. I was there as a teacher and my class was a lovely group, so keen to learn and so ready with their

smiles. Yet there was often a sadness behind their smiles, perhaps as they thought of loved ones back in Burma, whom they had lost or had not heard from in a long time.

Burma's population comprises a number of different ethnic groups. One group in particular, the Karen, has been targeted to provide slave labour on a number of huge projects, including road building and the construction of a pipeline to take gas from the Andaman Sea off Burma, to Thailand. The Karen are the major target for the huge Burmese army, known as the Tatmadaw, who regularly attack their towns and villages, destroy their homes, schools, churches and other places of worship. The Tatmadaw have murdered and raped many Karen civilians and have forced tens

**“Life in the camps is hard. Very few houses have electricity and there is usually no electricity at the camps' schools.”**





**“But the Karens I have met are a lovely, brave, yet gentle people who deserve more than life has given them.”**



Peter is a teacher, writer and human rights activist, acting as a Regional Representative for the NE and Yorkshire Region of Amnesty International and also Trade Union Co-ordinator for Burma Campaign UK.

of thousands into slavery. These attacks continue, even as I write this report (September 2009). Indeed, recently the Tatmadaw launched its biggest offensive against the Karen people in nearly ten years.

As a result, about 150 000 Karens have fled to the relative safety of refugee camps along the Thai/Burmese border. Many others have had to adopt an equally precarious living as migrant workers in Thailand. Life in the camps is hard. Very few houses have electricity and there is also usually no electricity at the camps' schools. Only occasionally can a generator be used. This means that there are no interactive whiteboards, no video or DVD players and no computers. Even paper and pens can be hard to come by. Nor do the children in the camps have the same chances in life as we have. One person in Mae Ra Ma camp told me there was no further education and that, “When young people finish high school (there are) no higher education or professional courses.”

The camps provide some degree of safety, as the Burmese army rarely crosses the Thai border to attack them (although it has been known to do so). However, for the most part people are stuck in the camps. There lives children of about five years old who were probably born in the camp and who have never been anywhere else in the lives. Perhaps the most depressing aspect of life in the camps is its unrelieved tedium. One of the most exciting days in the month is salt day. People have to go and collect the salt when it arrives and this relieves the monotony of their everyday routine.



An election was held in 1990, which saw the party of Aung San Suu Kiyu, the National League for Democracy, win 82% of the seats in the proposed Burmese parliament. The military government immediately declared these results null and void and many of those elected as MPs were imprisoned, some dying in prison. But the Karens I have met are a lovely, brave, yet gentle people who deserve more than life has given them. They are courteous and polite and really value education; they know it is one of the main keys to escape from their present predicament. They also know that one day the military government in Burma will fall and there will be a free, democratic Burma. They want to work hard so that they are ready for that day.

**Peter Sagar**

# Fergal goes east

THIS SUMMER I was part of an international residential in Germany. Irish participants came from throughout Ireland, north and south, with many of them furthering their experiences of Corrymeela's People Understanding Borders youth group. Other participants came from Poland, Hungary, U.S.A and Germany. The title and theme of our 12-day seminar was the Message of 1989, the year in which the Berlin wall fell.

The residential offered a truly diverse range of experiences. A typical day involved topical group work with the different nations present. It was



**It was truly amazing to share various aspects of each others cultures on a daily basis..."**

amazing to share aspects of each others' cultures and I learned a lot about all the countries represented. Our views of history often varied immensely, even within the communities of one country, let alone between nations. In comparing our experiences, we found that some textbooks and education systems teach very biased views of history, and we explored how this has affected our prejudices, and international politics. The seminar was very educational and brought about great personal





development. Our daily reflection groups were also important, and we learned much about ourselves through the Message of 1989.

Daily study visits let us see the beautiful murals which cover the remains of the Berlin wall, as well as the horrible torture methods employed by Communist Berlin in the Stasimuseum. We also saw just about every statue in the city! We ate in lovely restaurants, had time to shop around the city and learned to say cheers in lots of different languages!

However, the programme brought its own challenges. Fervent political discussions meant that group sessions often over-ran their allotted times and groups had to overcome barriers ranging from personality clashes to language difficulties. But everyone mixed well and dinner tables often consisted of one person from each represented nation – which made for amazing conversations.

Our host facilitator, Martin, had first-hand

experience of communist Berlin and he brought us to places that highlighted contemporary issues. We visited a mosque which had come a long way in being socially accepted, and we also spoke to community workers in very deprived areas of the city.

The trip was a huge success, being both fun and educational. I've made awesome friends from the trip, and I hope to visit some of them. On behalf of the Irish participants, I'd like to thank Ivan Cross (PUB Project Co-ordinator) for giving us this opportunity, putting in a lot of work and delivering an excellent programme.

**Fergal Ross**

Fergal is currently studying on an Open University course while continuing to contribute to the development of the Youth programme at Corrymeela.

**“The trip was a huge success, being both fun and educational.”**



# ‘MEANWHILE THE MUSIC OF MY SOUL PLAYS ON’

A TRIBUTE TO ITA McMICHAEL

STANDING RECENTLY in the pristine surroundings of the new Coventry House lobby, I spotted a guitar in an alcove. I was there to show my daughters a future space for sharing and breaking down barriers. However, I was immediately transported back nearly thirty years to the former building where there had been a bilingual broadcast made by Radio na Gaelteachta. One of the organizers, my late mother Ita Mc Michael, had helped round up local singers, musicians and Irish speakers. The programme was produced to inform isolated listeners on the western Irish seaboard of the visionary and courageous endeavour that was Corrymeela during the 1970’s.

Born Ita Bergin, in 1925, she was educated at St. Dominic’s High School Falls Road in Belfast, where, she claimed, she was encouraged to think for herself and seek the truth (as per the Dominican motto ‘Veritas’). One of five children she went on to study midwifery and eventually took up a post at the Dalriada Hospital in Ballycastle during the early fifties. She went on to marry James Mc Michael, a local chemist, and settled down to have seven sons.

With James’ support while rearing the family Ita was able to get involved with the Corrymeela Community in the early seventies and helped to plan one of the first Cultural Conferences. Through this she was introduced to several traditional musicians from across a wide political and religious spectrum. She immediately could see that music provided a great common language, ‘opening many doors’ as she put it.

During those years she frequently held ‘sessions’ in her front living room. She thrived on the fact that ‘Gael and Dissenter’ from North Antrim could enjoy playing traditional Irish and folk tunes with one another, from orange flute to uilleann pipes. Many’s a Corrymeela volunteer back then got a bowl of Irish stew from the Aga stove not leaving until the early hours. On many of these occasions, she invited Americans from the Church of the Latter Day Saints (Mormons) who were boarding in a local hostel while on ‘mission.’ One Presbyterian minister was so taken with the atmosphere at these ‘ceilis’ that he persuaded Ita to bring her entourage to play at his country manse.



Ita passed away earlier this year.





As more international groups began to meet at Corrymeela, she then helped to host impromptu sessions and concerts drawing on local artists as well as her own family. She seemed to have a gift for making people feel at ease and welcome, such was her understanding of human nature.

In an age when there were fewer volunteers or staff and certainly no mobile phones, the word got round that she was a useful contact if you wanted to get a flavour of the local area. She took great delight in giving a sense of meaning and place to people from flashpoint areas in Belfast coming for the first time to North Antrim.

She promoted the beauty and ethos of Corrymeela by encouraging locals to get involved. She even got some entertainers filmed on-site to send a video to America (with her sister who was going on teacher exchange). Before the advent of web technology, she was corresponding with some of those she had met at Corrymeela. One such person was a Rev Robert Helm, who ministers in Holy Trinity Church on west-side Manhattan in New York. They focused on the issues that united them in faith and he gained fresh insights into the Northern Ireland 'Troubles'. Two of Ita's sons later worked voluntarily at his summer neighbourhood scheme. Following her death in Nov 2008, Dr. Helm and some of his Congregation kindly organized a Thanksgiving service for her life.

Ita always seized the opportunity to voice her quiet courage in facing challenges as well as celebrating diversity with a sense of humour whether she was with family, friends, neighbours, in a prayer group or the safe haven of Corrymeela workshops. The Corrymeela ethos of reconciliation was integrated into her own everyday experience. So many people have shared their wonderful memories of Ita and tell their stories about her. All mention her great capacity to love and care about the things that really matter.

Her involvement with Corrymeela gave her the opportunity to develop her talent for writing. Initially she composed poems or songs to mark staff leaving or retiring. She was able to capture a moment of history in word, such as when she wrote a tribute to Ray Davey in 1980:

The birth of Corrymeela in Summer'65  
Saw a spurt of action in an effort to revive,  
The Dutch Barn building high above the  
sea at Turnaroan,  
Purchased by some optimists who had  
gathered up a loan.  
They took a step in faith, to provide a place  
to meet,  
For people under stress, or wishing to  
retreat.  
They introduced the workcamp for  
international youth,  
To provide a meeting place for fellowship  
and truth.

(Extract from March 1980)

After retiring from nursing, Ita attended the Ballycastle Creative Writers Group. She later gathered her poems together for publication and her family enjoyed sharing the book launch with her in 2004. Her poems record her journey in life by describing her own lived experiences and memories. The themes range from childhood summers spent on her grandparents' farm in Donegal, recalling home births in Shankill and Falls to the riches she found in being a mother and grandmother. She dedicated one poem to St Brigid since she enjoyed making crosses from local rushes each year. She loved exploring the spiritual significance of the scriptures and her poems about the local Moyle landscape particularly reflect her quest to seek God in all things. In Ita's own words:

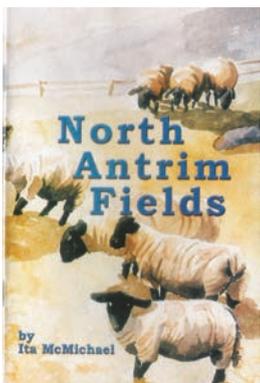
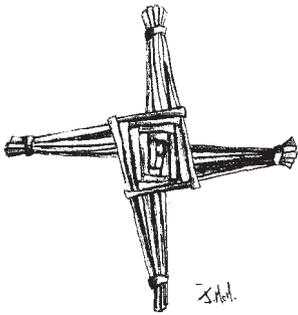
**NORTH ANTRIM SPRING**

With Baa Baa Bleats  
North Antrim Spring is ushered in,  
Tightly curled unblemished fleece  
Dotting white the green.  
Their mothers warn of my approach  
See me drawing close  
Touched by attractive innocence  
Something I had once but lost.

North Antrim fields  
Have God attired in a woollen coat;  
Metaphors were used by John  
Shepherd, Lamb and Sheep.  
I am searched for, sought,  
My face individually known, unique.  
Meanwhile the music of my soul plays on  
And duly in the course of time  
I will be caught.

**Eoin Mc Michael**

Eoin is Ita's son and a friend of Corrymeela.



# CHRISTMAS ESCAPE

Unnoticed I hurriedly slip through the door  
Out to the garden to my favourite spot  
Fleeing the clamour of the counterfeit Christmas,  
To savour the silver silence of stars.

If I stay out and wait just long enough,  
Despising chill winds, the sharp frosty air  
I may quieten down and tune my mind  
To a far distant sound – yes, the angel's song.

**Kathleen Davey**

Kathleen Davey, wife of Corrymeela founder Ray Davey was also a founder member of The Corrymeela Community. She passed away one year ago.

# Catch up with Corrymeela



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### www.corrymeela.org

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