

PEACEMAKING NEWS

Presbyterian
CHURCH IN IRELAND



SPRING 2008

PEACEMAKING – IN THE EVERYDAYNESS OF OUR LIVES

When we begin to think about peacemaking what often comes first to mind are circumstances and events which have made the headlines. Over the years we have come to associate widely reported impasses in which the community has found itself, with the need for peacemaking. Jesus invitation to us to be peacemakers, though, is not simply an invitation to be involved in situations which may have become intractable. When Jesus spoke of the peacemakers being blessed he did so in the context of the Sermon on the Mount which was among the most radical explications of Christian living. Christian living is a matter of 'everydayness' and is about how Christians negotiate their way through life, not always managing to be perfect but always striving after a God-honouring way of life.

I have recently been reading Miroslav Volf's book, *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly In A Violent World*. He includes some interesting reflection on the ninth commandment – Thou shalt not bear false witness, or as Eugene Peterson effectively and concisely translates Exodus 20 v16:

No lies about your neighbor

Volf draws on Luther whom, he tells us, insisted that this commandment needed to be understood as the injunction to speak truthfully of our neighbours. Luther went considerably further than we might normally go in interpreting this commandment as he argued that we must not only speak the truth in love but we also have a responsibility, to some degree,

to cover up our neighbours misdeeds. He bases this in 1 Peter 4v8: Most important of all, you must sincerely love each other, because love wipes away many sins.

This, argues Luther, is to love neighbours as Christ loved them. All of this clearly has to be seen in the context of truth, what the misdeeds are and if there are legal implications, and obviously from the context of love. Volf is adapting his understanding of Luther's interpretation for his purposes, which are to make the case for remembering truthfully and telling truthfully in order to change our relationship with the past. For our thinking here it is interesting to consider Luther's view in relation to our everyday living. He points us to the question of how we speak of others on a day to day basis. Sometimes we are honest and straightforward and we would be better saying nothing. Sometimes we are mischievous in the way we speak of others not quite saying something which would leave us accused of damaging the character of another. Sometimes we are downright intentional in breaking down any existing peace between others by the way in which we speak of an individual or a group.

The art of being a peacemaker is an art that is honed, tested, grown and developed in our ordinary everyday lives. It is something that is to be part of our 'everydayness' which we can then take into more intractable situations. We are always, of course, making mistakes. In making peace and

developing a peacemaking culture we could not do without the privileges of repentance, forgiveness and grace for ourselves. They afford us the opportunity to take responsibility before God for our mistakes. It is this experience that we offer to others when we decide to live in light of the commandment not to bear false witness against our neighbour. The peacemaking vocation is summed up in Matthew 5 v9: You're blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That's when you discover who you really are, and your place in God's family.

Rev Lesley Carroll, Fortwilliam & Macrory PC

FORTHCOMING EVENTS SUMMER 2008

SEMINAR

Making Peace; Shaping the Future

You are invited to an evening at Union Theological College on Thursday June 12th at 8pm when Professor Stephen Williams will help us explore further this topic from a theological framework. The evening will take the form of a talk by Professor Williams, followed by discussion and questions. It is a free event and open to all. To register your place, please contact Laura Coulter or Deborah Erwin on 028 9032 2284 or email lcoulter@presbyterianireland.org or debs@pciyoung.org by Monday 9th June.

EASTER DAWN SERVICES IN COLERAINE BOROUGH 2008

Dawn services appear to be now a regular occurrence every Easter in the Coleraine area.

The ones I know about occurred in Portstewart; one at the Strand and one at the Harbour Hill, Downhill Castle, and the River Bann Jetty at Coleraine.

Most of these Services involve more than one congregation in various combinations. As a Congregational Peace Agent I would prefer cross-community inter-church services.

It has to be admitted however that any two or more congregations coming together at 6.30 am in the fresh air and meeting afterwards for

breakfast and fellowship feels right no matter who is involved. Indeed an event such as this has to be experienced by anyone interested, as united Christians, in taking the gospel to the people outside any church.

The travelling service took place as usual between four churches in Portstewart on the first Sunday of the New Year and on all these occasions we were blessed by fair weather. First Coleraine Presbyterian Church was also the venue for an inspiring Handel's Messiah rehearsed and performed on Saturday 19th January 2008 by a volunteer amateur cross community choir of over two hundred in number led by professional organist and soloists.

Then at Easter when the trumpeters were not available I was able to obtain a volunteer from the local Catholic Church who provided mouth organ support to my violin and the singing of Easter Hymns. Words were provided by the resourceful Methodist lady Chair of the Coleraine Borough Churches Forum. An imaginative excellent breakfast was provided afterwards in the local Kilowen Church of Ireland Hall and was an opportunity for everyone to chat to old and new friends.

Jimmy Jack
Coleraine Presbytery Peace Agent

LOVING YOUR NEIGHBOUR IN NEWTOWNABBEY

In Carnmoney congregation we incorporated the Gospel in Conflict course into our midweek programme between September and November 2007. Following about 15 minutes of praise and prayer I delivered the basic content of the course, reinforcing the talk with a PowerPoint presentation as well as showing the DVD clips provided in the pack. Because there were normally more than 50 people present, small group work was not possible as envisaged in the course manual, but we had interactivity each week based around the flip chart or in open discussion. Individuals were also invited to respond personally as they found a spot on their own in the church to pray over some issue or seek forgiveness – these were amongst some of the most powerful moments. On the last evening we broke up into small groups and completed the "Footprints" exercise, which resulted in 19 practical suggestions being offered of ways in which we could begin to take steps

in building peace. One of these was done immediately and others are now under consideration in our Community Working Group.

In recent years we have integrated several courses into our midweek programme in this way and whilst we lost some of the impact that doing these courses in a small group might have made, this course became a very public part of our corporate life and disarmed some hostility among our leadership to the issues it raises. I illustrated the issues each evening with stories from my own experience as a Christian living in Northern Ireland all my life and as a pastor and church leader and this approach tied to a careful exposition of the biblical material suggested in the manual made this course and its vision accessible to many people who would never have done it in a group.

Rev John Dickinson,
Carnmoney PC

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Community Relations Week 26th April – 3rd May

Two upcoming events being run by Youth Link: NI in partnership with Youthcom and the PCI Youth & Children's Board:

Celebration of Church Peace Building Youth Work

**Black Box, Hill Street; Tuesday
29th April, 7.30pm**

**Contact: Jeremy Gardiner or
John Peacock 028 9032 3217**

Through story telling and music this event will celebrate church-based peace building youth work. It also will challenge and inspire young people and youth workers to build relationships towards peace.

CRAIC

Training and inspiring faith- based youth workers in peace-building work

**Charlemont Arms Hotel, English
Street, Armagh**

**From 7pm Friday 25th April
until 9pm Saturday 26th April**

**Contact: John Peacock
028 9032 3217**

This residential event will enable youth workers to build relationships towards peace across traditional divides. Training will be offered in peace building using the model of Youth Links's 'Kairos' programme. For information on all other CR events in your area, visit the CRC website at www.community-relations.org.uk

OVERSEAS NEWS

UNITED MISSION TO NEPAL

They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on earth, for people who speak in this way are seeking a homeland. Heb: 11; 13-14

We had spent the previous day planning, worshipping and studying the Bible to read what it said about being peacemakers, now we were on our way. We took two vehicles for the 2 hour trip to the next district along Nepal's southern border with India to keep a prearranged meeting with the Muslim leaders. This was in an area where a few months ago fierce rioting had flared in a short 12 hour orgy of violence and left 35 people dead, 300 flimsy houses destroyed and many still living in camps afraid to return home. No doubt tensions had been simmering for some time, 'ignored', some would say 'played on by politicians'. These two groups of people consist of Hindu mainly from Nepal's hills but now working in this Terai region, and resident Muslims supported by family and friends from across the open border with India.

The Lumbini Christian Society (LCS), a grouping of 11 Christian churches based mainly in the neighbouring district, are a UMN partner organisation working on HIV Aids education and peacebuilding and had arranged the meeting to explore if

there are activities both faith groups might be prepared to support towards healing and reconciliation.

Our group numbered 15, ten from LCS and five UMN staff. We expected to meet some 15 mainly Muslim leaders as well as some Hindus still living in the area. When we arrived at the Muslim Community Centre it quickly filled to a point where over 200 people gathered to watch and listen. Our plan for a quiet dialogue and sharing from the holy books on peace looked lost. Two police trucks with officers and their riot gear arrived and parked close to the centre.

After introductions on both sides of a long table and with the huge crowd of onlookers now crowded also on both sides of the table we endured a polite but tough round of speeches mainly condemning the government for years of neglect and marginalisation especially concerning land, jobs and resources. The four Nepali MPs present were in full flight speaking in loud animated terms of what happened in the riots, victims spoke tearfully of dead relatives and every now and then a ripple of agreement went through the crowd of onlookers.

Occasionally someone said they too had to shoulder some of the blame,

but this more conciliatory note was lost in the welter of blame. After an hour of patient listening and when clearly some of the built up steam had been released I was asked to respond.

I told them my heart was sore for them. I felt their pain and anguish; it was real enough to touch. I then shared briefly some of the hurt I too had experienced from N. Ireland. Then I produced a small Bible and held it up and out for all to see. I said that we as Christians were there because this book says we should be peacemakers. We had come to hold out the hand of friendship and compassion and to search with them for ways forward towards peace and reconciliation, a road that would be long and hard. I said we had not come to tell them what to do but to stand with them in their hurt, sorrow and sadness. I then posed 3 short questions for them.

- 1 How can UMN and the LCS help them make it better for their children and youth so that the future is better than the past and present?
- 2 Our Holy Book instructs us to be peacemakers with Jesus as the model. What do their Holy Books say about peace?
- 3 How might they work with the Lumbini Christian Society to promote peace and harmony in the community?

As expected the Imam identified himself in the crowd and smiling said "our books say the same as yours". He went on to say we were most welcome. He said UMN and the LCS were the first group that did not come to them with short smart answers to the huge issues they faced. He said we were the first people to mention the long road ahead but that he and others were ready to begin the journey. They wanted the Hindu people who had fled to return to live among them and invited us to tell them this.



One of the LCS pastors spoke briefly of wanting to help both sides in the conflict.

The meeting adjourned for a short time and the crowd drifted away. The two police trucks now left, satisfied there was not going to be a riot today. When things reconvened we were in small groups discussing possible programmes and joint action with LCS.

It's a small step, and many more need to be taken and much work lies ahead. We will meet the Hindu groups next week although it is doubtful if they are ready to return.

There is talk of sessions for women on "listening for trauma" and some sessions on mediation, and perhaps peace education in schools. But the main need is for the rebuilding of trust, LCS and their new friends will need patience and energy for the steps ahead.

Outside the Muslim Community Centre before we got into our vehicles for the journey home we gathered in a small circle for a moment of prayer for the village and thanksgiving for God's presence.

Joe Campbell, Senior Technical Advisor, Peace and Conflict Transformation, UMN

DATE FOR YOUR DIARY

The Peacemaking Panel are planning their annual conference for the autumn.

It will take place on Saturday 8th November 2008. More details to follow.

FAITH IN ACTION

Earlier this year, PCI's Peacemaking Officers, Laura and Debs, along with a few game volunteers rolled up their sleeves, donned hard hats and mucked in with the builders on Habitat for Humanity's mid-Shankill building site.

It was a great opportunity to put faith into action by helping to build homes for people in need and contribute to regeneration and reconciliation in a local community.



THE CONCILIATION PANEL

One role of the Conciliation Panel is to be a resource for congregations and presbyteries when conflict arise by offering the assistance of impartial mediators who can help those involved work toward a mutually agreed resolution. A refresher training day for our panel of conciliators was held in February. In addition 6 PCI ministers/ members have recently participated in an OCN accredited Foundation in Meditation skills training course, along with a number of individuals from the Church of Ireland and the Methodist Church in Ireland. The course was co-led by Laura Coulter, PCI Peacemaking Office. Ministers, Clerks of Session and Presbytery Clerks are all reminded that assistance or advice in dealing with conflict situations can be obtained by contacting Laura Coulter on 90417211

Another role of the panel is helping to foster a culture of conciliation

throughout the church. One way that this is done is through training sessions in understanding and handling conflict, which is a natural part of church life. Training focused on facilitating decision-making is also available. In the past year a number of Kirk Sessions and two presbyteries have requested such training events. Keep this possibility in mind as you plan in your own setting. Conflict prevention and early intervention is always preferable to allowing conflicts to fester or situations to escalate. There are lots of simple things all leaders can do to minimize destructive conflict or address it early enough to lead to healthy outcomes. Spending a few hours exploring this before you are in the midst of a conflict might save a lot of energy later on and allow that energy to go into positive areas of ministry instead of sorting out the messes which too frequently do develop. Again, either Laura or I can be contacted to arrange training events.

Rev Doug Baker,
Conciliation Co-coordinator, PCI.

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