

PEACEMAKING NEWS

Presbyterian
CHURCH IN IRELAND 

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GUARDING SHALOM

There has been a lot of talk in Christian circles recently about the Gospel and specifically its relationship to the Kingdom of God and the hope of shalom, God's peace and wholeness pervading creation. This is, of course, to be welcomed and I hope it is no passing fad, but to ensure this we must continually work to maintain the biblical vision of peace.

I was reminded of this recently whilst reading some thoughts on the whole issue of shalom by the renowned Old Testament scholar, Walter Brueggemann. He warns us that the Bible is not romantic about its vision of shalom. It will never come automatically or naturally. It is a work of God to which we ought to give our commitment and our best energy. Brueggemann warns us that there are many ways in which we can compromise God's will for shalom. Here are just a few.

Firstly, we can ignore the vision of shalom by deceiving ourselves into believing that it is perfectly fine as Christians to live in a private way which embraces society's acceptance of injustice and exploitation. Take, for example, the famous words of the prophet Jeremiah:

"From the least to the greatest, all are greedy for gain; prophets and priests alike, all practise deceit. They dress the wounds of my people as though it were not serious. 'Peace, peace,' they say when there is no peace." (6:13-14)

Brueggemann argues that in a special way shalom is the task and burden of the well-off and powerful. They are the ones held accountable for shalom. The prophets consistently criticize the wealthy and powerful who legitimized their selfish prosperity. They incessantly stand against those who through willing self-deception pretend that the poor and victimized do not exist so that they can limit the vision and benefits of shalom to themselves. There is no place for such greed fuelled delusion in the great vision of shalom. As Brueggemann states, "Shalom is never the private property of the few".

But there is another way we can distort the vision and that, argues Brueggemann, is to take a short-term view. The prophet Isaiah records the story of King Hezekiah who was prepared to guarantee his personal present at the expense of his people's future. He is condemned for his selfish thinking that "there will be shalom and security in my days (Isaiah 39:8). But we surely in our present economic climate recognise the folly of such self indulgence. As Brueggemann puts it; "A moment of well-being can be had today with enormous charges made against tomorrow. Parents pile up debts of hatred and abuse for their children to pay off. But the prophet is clear. Shalom is never short-range; eventually someone has to pay dearly. Caring for creation is never a one-generational deal".

But thirdly, we can abuse shalom when we 'credit certain props as sources of life—for example, to idolize political or religious furniture and pretend it is the power of God'. We see this in Jeremiah 7 where Israel believed that the Temple assured them of God's protective power and guaranteed them peace from their enemies. But the prophet reminds them that the Temple itself is not the way of shalom. Rather it is the way of life that it was meant to symbolize that brings peace. Those who truly worship God at the Temple will care deeply for their neighbour. Jesus stated the same in Mark 7 when he tells the Pharisees that keeping their man made religious traditions at the expense of God's command to care for one another is a form of hypocrisy that destroys others rather than caring for their well-being, their shalom.

The biblical vision of shalom is something worth struggling for, but let us be realistic. It will not come easily and we must be wary lest we reduce it through the temptations outlined above. If the cross of Christ is the ultimate means through which shalom is guaranteed, then for us there will remain a cost as well. Shalom, argues Brueggemann, "comes only through the costly way of caring". Let us be vigilant over shalom by continuing to care deeply for one another, friend and, yes, even foe!

Rev Craig Mawhinney
Training Officer, Youth & Children's
Ministry

BUILDING PEACE IN KENYA

LAURA COULTER



It was my first visit to Kenya and Nairobi. My first impression was a city of stark contrasts; rich and poor living side by side; the efficiency of a modern city alongside the African view of time- no hurry!; the warm welcome of those we met with the constant need to be vigilant for thieves and people generally harassing "whites" for money.

I had been invited by the Presbyterian Church of East Africa to deliver 2 days training on peace and reconciliation for a group of Presbyterian Church leaders. My contact was Thomas Leramore, a Kenyan, who had been in Northern Ireland in 2007 with his wife (Naomi, a missionary with PCI). Thomas recently took up position as peacemaking officer with PCEA and he had used his time here to learn more about peacemaking and gain skills for his new role.

So, with some trepidation as well as excitement, we set off for PCEA University for the first day of the training. My husband, Stephen, (my assistant!) and I had prepared the programme carefully, but we also wanted to be as flexible as possible, given that we did not know the group at all. We spent some time on introductions (37 people had come) and more time trying to get the power point to work! There was also

a worship time, including a sermon. The Secretary-General (Rev Samuel Muriguh) arrived to welcome us and officially open the training conference. Finally it was time to begin.

We spent the first morning telling them about Northern Ireland; our history, the story of our conflict and how the churches had responded. We also talked about what it was like to live in a segregated community and how we had coped with the violence going on around us. I then asked the group to think about their situation in Kenya and set them some questions to consider in small groups about why the violence had happened and how PCEA had responded. There is a general feeling of shock and surprise that tribal violence has erupted, as Kenya has always been viewed as a peaceful African country. People are grappling with understanding why it happened in the first place and how to respond as a church. There was plenty of discussion on these questions.

Day 1 continued with a session on the biblical mandate for peacemaking and a session on the nature of conflict and some reasons why those in Churches do not always handle it well. A young man in the group came to me and gave me a typewritten account of his experience of tribal violence,

which he was keen for us to use in some way. . It was a moving story and I took it away to reflect on how we could usefully include it the next day.

We were staying with Thomas, Naomi and their little baby, Aaron, and we enjoyed being able to relax over evening meals and talk about how it was going. We decided to make some changes to the programme for Day 2 to include what we felt was most important for the group, given the time constraints. We also decided that Stephen would use the personal story, given by the young man, to teach the group about the impact of trauma and how to recognize the signs.

Day 2 went well. I felt more relaxed as the group and the place were more familiar. I conducted sessions on the nature and reasons for violence and outlined some approaches to peacemaking. Stephen's session on trauma was well received and there were plenty of questions! All too soon, it was time to finish. Thomas had prepared evaluation forms for everyone and then we presented every participant with a certificate for attending the training conference.

When the time came to leave Nairobi, we were sad to say goodbye; it had been a challenging and moving experience. It was also encouraging that we had been able to bring learning from our experience in Northern Ireland into a totally different context. We know from our experience that the journey towards reconciliation is often difficult, but is an important part of our Christian witness to the community. The Presbyterian Church in Kenya is beginning this challenging journey. Our thoughts and prayers go with all those we met in Nairobi, as they return to their localities to put peacemaking into action.

AMARILLO STREETREACH

The story goes that Tony Christie's Maria was a Texan from Amarillo because it was the only place that would rhyme with 'willow' and 'pillow'. I had the opportunity to become more acquainted with this city when Rev Jeff Conway of Westminster Presbyterian Church in Amarillo, an old friend of the Board of Youth & Children's Ministry, contacted the YAC Office to find out if he could bring a group of young people to do some practical mission work in Belfast this summer.

With the Summer Madness 'Streetreach' initiative as our model it was agreed that the Texan team



could minister the love of Jesus to folks on the Tullycarnet estate in East Belfast and in the New Lodge area of North Belfast, both of these areas having been blessed by Streetreach teams in 2007. After several months of preparation on both sides of the 'pond' the team arrived on 30th June 2008 to spend 6 days partnering with Tullycarnet Presbyterian and Grace Baptist to bless the local community in whatever way they could – tidying pensioners' gardens, playing games with local children, clearing up rubbish from residential

areas, playing football and baseball with teenagers, worshipping in Sunday services and finally putting on a community event complete with barbecue, face-painting, bouncy castle and 'Tullycarnet's got Talent'! They then spent two days doing some maintenance work at the 174 Trust on the Antrim Road and hanging out with some of the youth groups there.

The 30-strong team of Texans joined by local young people did a fantastic job and were quick to grasp the essence of their work – simply being Jesus on the street, sharing the time of day with people, bringing to life the good news of Jesus, and seeking to 'make the community liveable again'. Following more than 30 years of conflict there is a real need for restoration in Northern Ireland and doing this kind of practical ministry on the streets of our communities is one way in which we can usher in the Kingdom of God.

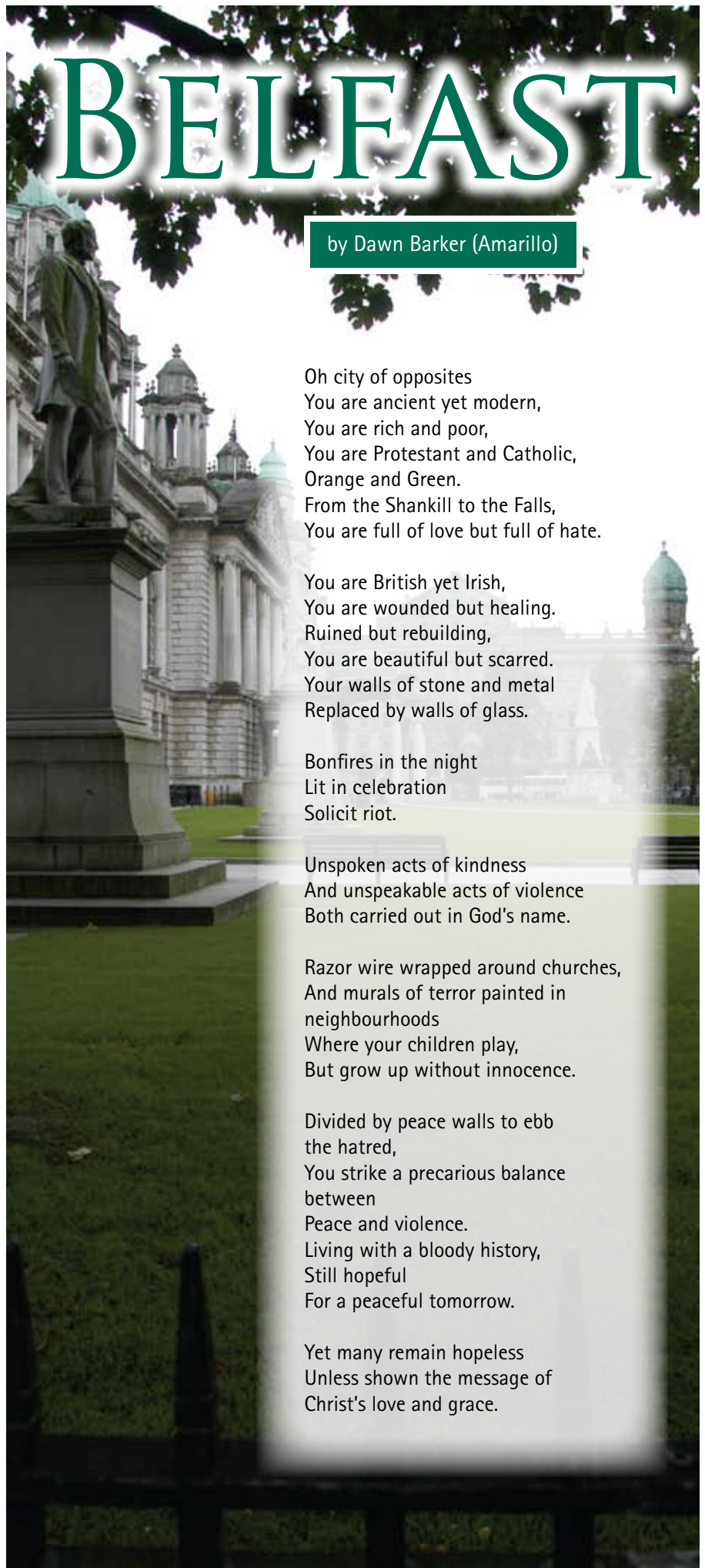
The churches in Tullycarnet may be perceived as 'struggling' inner-city congregations owing to their physical location in the heart of one of the most deprived wards of Belfast and the area is one where economic, social and environmental deprivation



have been a feature for many years. But look a little more closely and you will find these fellowships comprise people with a huge heart for the community of which they are a part and absolute commitment to walk in step with Jesus as they reach out to folks around them. In this sense these are congregations which are rich indeed and they do not hold back in seeking to bless others. The Texan team were on the receiving end of this blessing too during their time in Belfast. Rev Conway reflected that "a seed has been planted within the youth of Westminster Amarillo. It is a seed that continues to be nurtured by the Spirit of God and the memories of ministry and celebration of connection with the people of Tullycarnet." Moreover the experience has enabled the American young people to consider the needs of their own community as towards the end of the project I overheard some of them talking about poorer areas of their city where they could go and be a blessing and discussing how they could do Streetreach activities in their city next summer.

I believe that there is a role for the current generation to play in leading Northern Ireland to a life beyond conflict. The majority of our young people today have not had first-hand experience of life during the conflict here but yet they are living in a segregated society which bears the scars of that conflict and in a sense they have inherited the baggage of a violent past. However this project demonstrates the value of carrying out indiscriminate acts of kindness in the name of Jesus. In a sense this is peacebuilding work because peace is not just about the absence of violence or bombing but peace is shalom and shalom is concerned with all of life. Shalom will not be fully restored until Christ returns – we're living in the 'in-between'. But by communicating the love of Jesus through our words and actions we can rebuild and restore, and as God's co-workers in actively praying 'your will be done on earth as it is in heaven' we can seek the peace and prosperity of the estates, communities and cities around us.

Debs Erwin



BELFAST

by Dawn Barker (Amarillo)

Oh city of opposites
You are ancient yet modern,
You are rich and poor,
You are Protestant and Catholic,
Orange and Green.
From the Shankill to the Falls,
You are full of love but full of hate.

You are British yet Irish,
You are wounded but healing.
Ruined but rebuilding,
You are beautiful but scarred.
Your walls of stone and metal
Replaced by walls of glass.

Bonfires in the night
Lit in celebration
Solicit riot.

Unspoken acts of kindness
And unspeakable acts of violence
Both carried out in God's name.

Razor wire wrapped around churches,
And murals of terror painted in
neighbourhoods
Where your children play,
But grow up without innocence.

Divided by peace walls to ebb
the hatred,
You strike a precarious balance
between
Peace and violence.
Living with a bloody history,
Still hopeful
For a peaceful tomorrow.

Yet many remain hopeless
Unless shown the message of
Christ's love and grace.

RESOURCES AVAILABLE

- **Gospel in Conflict – Loving your Neighbour**

This 5 week course is an introductory course on peace-building for use in local congregations with adult groups. It is a resource to help Presbyterians reflect biblically on peacemaking as an integral part of discipleship. It can be used as part of services, home groups or mid-week Bible studies.

Available from the Peacemaking Department, Church House, Price £40, which includes manual, DVD and participants' folders.

For more information about running this course in your congregation, please contact Laura Coulter on 90417211 or email lcoulter@presbyterianireland.org

- Check out our new website,

which can be found at- www.presbyterianireland.org/peacemaking

- Workshops available to congregations/presbyteries on Dealing with Conflict in Churches; Building Good Relationships; Cultural Diversity- please contact Laura Coulter for more information.

- **New Loyalties- Christian Faith and the Protestant Working Class**

This new book by Philip Orr examines issues of social deprivation, the demise of the church's presence in the inner cities, the history of conflict in loyalist areas and the polarisation of class.

This publication will be a useful resource for church and community leaders considering the challenges of post-conflict mission and will be of value to anyone concerned

with the widening gap between the Protestant church and loyalist communities.

Available from Centre for Contemporary Christianity, Price £9.99

- **The Place called Reconciliation – Texts to Explore**

These biblical reflections on reconciliation and related themes have been written out of the author's (David Stevens) 40 years of involvement in the Corrymela Community. The book expands on the biblical reflections in the author's previous book "The Land of Unlikeness" and will be of interest to all working in the area of reconciliation

Available from the Corrymela Community, Price £6.99

SEMINAR ON PEACE-MAKING AND IDENTITY

UNION THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE
12 JUNE 2008 AT 8PM

SPEAKER: PROFESSOR STEPHEN WILLIAMS

Some 40 people gathered to hear Professor Stephen Williams develop some ideas contained in his article on 'Making Peace and Shaping the Future' which appeared in the May 2008 edition of the Presbyterian Herald. The speaker later invited those present to discuss in small groups three questions about peace-making and identity:

- **Is a Truth and Reconciliation Commission for Northern Ireland needed?**
- **Is Sectarianism the main barrier to peace?**
- **If someone says 'Jesus Christ has given me my identity', what does it mean?**

Stephen had been struck by the number of students on the Youth

Ministry Certificate course who had reported a deep interest in the question of identity.

Bringing a theological perspective to the connection between peace-making and identity, Stephen introduced, in sonorous Welsh tones, several related ideas:

- Our prime identity is as Christians; the noun 'Christian' may then be qualified by adjectives such as 'Protestant', 'Roman Catholic', 'Irish' or 'Welsh'; implicit is that the adjectival part of our identity may be subject to change as our theological perspectives change or as we move about, without our inner core or sense of our self being changed;
- Paul's statement in one of his letters that 'Jesus is our Peace' – this introduces a horizontal aspect of peace, which in New Testament times referred to peace between Jew and Gentile. The name 'Christian' replaces 'Jew' and 'Gentile' as the believer's core identity;
- The concept of the 'Children of God', starting with Abraham and traceable through the Israelites, the Early Church and the Protestant Reformers among others down to the present; a vertical God-Man

relationship that runs through time; closely related is the idea that it is as we recognise that we are loved by God that we realise our true value and identity

- The idea that a secure sense of identity is important if a person (or a people) is to be settled and at peace with itself and its neighbours; a horizontal aspect of peace and identity;
- On the question of whether the pursuit of peace is the same as the pursuit of justice, Stephen noted the influence of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German theologian who was driven against many of his principles to complicity in the July 1944 plot to assassinate Hitler, and whose writings contributed to the transformation of Polish society in the 1970s and 1980s. Many of these thoughts were pulled together in the reflection that Christ shapes our identity in line with himself, integrating us under his Lordship. With his peace within, we should live in His Will as People of Peace in the World.

By Lindsay Green, Member of Knock Presbyterian Church Peace Group

NEWS FROM AROUND IRELAND

Harmony Hill/ St Colman's Group, Lisburn

For the majority of parishioners, the work of the Harmony Hill/St Coleman's group is profiled in the Carol Service in Harmony Hill PC and the Church Unity Week Service in St Colman's RC, yet both these events reflect more the activities of the two churches and their congregations. Throughout the remainder of the year, the inter-church group meets monthly. The meetings are activity-based and open to all. They take the form of Bible studies or exploring topics of common interest, from a theological or social perspective. This year's themes have been Mysticism, Apostolic work and the Citizen's Advice Bureau. Visits have been arranged to the two cathedrals in Armagh and to St Anne's Cathedral and St Peter's Cathedrals, Belfast. Members agree that meeting as an inter-church group helps people to explore difference in a supportive learning environment. It also affords an opportunity to provide insight into each others' traditions and spiritual journeys. Anyone interested in coming along, please speak to Jim Donaghy or Joe Topping.

By Jim Donaghy
St Colman's, Co-Chair.

News from Monaghan

As the Peace Agent for Monaghan Presbytery, I was involved in the formation of the Border Minority Group in November 2001. Its main focus is to raise awareness of, and promote the cultural and community development of the minority Protestant community in counties Cavan, Leitrim and Monaghan. Current membership stands at 50 groups, including sporting,

musical, ladies, church and cultural organisations.

There is not a strong tradition of community development work in the Protestant community in the region. In addition to being small in number, it is also scattered, both geographically and in various religious denominations. This has meant that the Protestant community has not been a cohesive voice but a series of weak voices, easily overwhelmed or ignored.

Since May 2006, we have been delivering a project supported by Border Action through the EC Peace 2 Programme and part-financed by the Irish government under the National Development Plan. The project, entitled "Empowering our Communities, Building the Community" is designed to deliver a range of activities which will contribute to a greater awareness and understanding of our community among the wider community. Training programmes are aimed at developing the skills and confidence of the Protestant community. The funding has enabled us to employ a Project Officer and Administrator and maintain office facilities to run the programme.

One memorable event was entitled, "Gone but not Forgotten". It was held in Clones Protestant Hall and explored issues arising from World War 1 and the impact it had on many families on both sides of the border. Many of the attendants at the seminar hadn't realised that so many Roman Catholics from Southern Ireland fought and died in World War 1. The poppy is seen by many as a symbol of Britain. In November 2007, a woman

EVENTS

Autumn/Winter 2008 Peacemaking Panel Annual Conference C.S.I. Ulster

This major conference will take place on Saturday 8th November at the Jethro Centre, Lurgan. Starting at 10am and finishing with lunch at 1pm, this year's conference will explore the recent government concepts of Cohesion, Sharing and Integration. Speakers will examine the current "crime scene" in terms of our divisions and ongoing segregation. Presentations will be made of examples of good practice of cohesion, sharing and integration from around N.I. The conference is free and open to all. To register your place, please contact Laura Coulter on 90417211 or email lcoulter@presbyterianireland.org

in Monaghan town who was wearing a poppy was knocked down and the poppy was tramped. This shows the need for a better understanding of what the poppy and Remembrance Day represents. This seminar helped develop that understanding.

Like many other Peace funded projects, we are currently unaware of our future funding, but we are firm in our commitment to having a significant role in the advancement of our community in this region in the years ahead.

By George McConkey
Chairperson, Border Minority Group
Peace Agent, Monaghan Presbytery

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