

CREATING COMMUNITY



CELEBRATING DIVERSITY

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Newsletter No 30



“Stalwart” FCF Members and Friends Visit East Belfast Mission and Peace Walls

Ronnie writes: On 20 October 22 stalwarts set off at 8 a.m. to visit the East Belfast Mission Skainos Project and the Belfast Peace Walls. After a brief scone and a cup of tea in Moygashel, we reached the Upper Newtownards Road and the East Belfast Mission at 10.30. The director Rev Dr Gary Mason, a Methodist minister, and his project director welcomed us and gave us a fascinating briefing on this £19M Skainos project, recently opened in a part of East Belfast with much unemployment and political tension. Christian based, it was designed as a shared space, with educational, cultural and mental child and elderly day care, catering and retail facilities. There is an Irish language coordinator and a computer controlled vertical garden! An open and central worship space features notably. It was an open day when we visited and really buzzing with life. The theme of Skainos - a tent for all people - is impressively shown throughout in many thought provoking ways. We stayed two hours, rather than one, but that was not nearly enough to appreciate it all and to talk with the volunteers.

After a relaxed sandwich lunch at the Ulster Museum we met David McKittrick, noted journalist and our expert guide. Briefly we looked around the exhibition on the Troubles and the museum shop, then crossed the city to the North and West. David regaled us with an extremely knowledgeable and interesting commentary throughout, constantly alluding to the tensions and experience of life in areas as diverse as the Ardoyne and Shankill where he has spent many years reporting.

It was sobering, even shocking, to see the reality of the Peace Walls with house windows protected by grills and gardens by cages. Reconciliation in an inner urban area looked starkly more difficult than in our rural county. Sadly, we had no time to visit community projects in the West or North on this occasion.

We went home, after a fulfilling, challenging day, encouraged by evidence of great work that is being attempted to reconcile people and to create a peaceful place for us all.

For Your Diary

Faith & Friendship: Enniskillen: 12.30-2.00 p.m. Darling Street Methodist Halls, Wednesday, 16.1.13, 13.2.13, 20.3.13.

Irvinestown: 8 p.m. in Mahon's Hotel on Tuesday, 15.1.13, thereafter 3rd Tuesday each month.

Lisnaskea: 8 p.m., Tuesdays 15.1.13 & 19.2.13, in Trinity hall & 19.3.13 in Holy Cross hall.

Prayer for Church Unity Service: Thursday, 24th January at 8 p.m. in St Macartin's Cathedral, Enniskillen.

Lenten Reflections: 1 to 2 p.m. on Wednesdays, 20.2.13 in St Michael's parish centre, 27.2.13 in Darling Street Methodist halls, 6.3.13 in St Macartin's halls and 13.3.13 in the Methodist halls (Presbyterian led).

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Ethical Remembering of 1912-1922



Eileen welcomes Johnston McMaster to the library

Olive writes: Over five Thursday nights in November and December, Dr McMaster lead us through the momentous events of the decade 1912-1922, events that often led one to the other and which have shaped so much of Irish and British politics since.

He set the events in the wider context, including the class divisions of the time, the birth of the labour movement, the era of imperialism and nascent nationalism. He did not shy away from the brutal violence on all sides that was the outcome of militarising politics and was seemingly justified by the doctrine of redemptive violence. He brought alive the big personalities such as Carson and Craig, Collins and De Valera, with details that only a scholar of his calibre can bring. The combination of Dr McMasters's informative but accessible talks and having to consider our own, and others' reactions through the discussion groups meant that I, for one, went home each night more prepared to critically examine my views of the decade and of the current situation. As he says in his booklet, *Remembering a Decade of Change and Violence in Ireland, 1912-1922*, "Efforts will need to be made to remember together. Walking through our histories together may be the only liberating option."

Rostrevor Residential, November 2012

Eileen writes: Members of FCF management committee were blessed to be able to spend some time in the Benedictine monastery, Rostrevor in November. The purpose of the residential was to take time to review the work of FCF which marked its 10th anniversary this year, plan for the future and spend quiet time in reflection and prayer. As well as having group discussion sessions over two days committee members joined the monks in the chapel at prayer times. The group began their work with prayer and reflection on the call of Abraham and the concept of journeying linking this to our journey in FCF. In the review of our activities in the past 10 years we had the opportunity to share memories of activities including church, cultural and community events and educational courses. We agreed that while Forum work was not headline stuff it was extremely valuable and laid foundations for interchurch developments, not least the historic 'crossing of the road' from St. Macartin's Cathedral to St. Michael's by Queen Elizabeth in June of this year. In reviewing the present state of the Forum there was consensus that FCF needs to continue to witness, to be a symbol and to be Easter people in the community. Brother Thierry, a native of France, facilitated a discussion on the progress of the Forum, reminding us that in the parables of the Kingdom Jesus emphasised small beginnings – the Christian task is about building the kingdom of God and numbers are not important. He invited us to let go of a concern with numbers. Conversion of the world begins with our hearts – if our heart is in the right place, God is able to work through us. Fruitfulness is about *how* I am. We must learn to accept that we cannot see results, but trust God is working. Success and impact are not words found in the Gospel. Perseverance rather than success is what matters – work pray and weep for unity, and **be** rather than **do**. He suggested our mission is to cross the boundaries between churches, making holes in the dividing walls - so eventually they will crumble. Encouraged and inspired by his words, the following morning the group set about dealing with a number of questions and issues David Bolton had garnered ahead in discussion with committee members. The final task was to give thought to a programme for the coming

year. The emphasis will be on the core work of the Forum – reconciliation. The Forum will not try to do too much, but rather focus on what has developed as its core programme – CUWS, Lenten lunches, Community Relations Week conference, church trails and autumn seminars.

The beautiful and peaceful environment of the monastery, the warmth of the welcome extended by the monks, the support and affirmation of the Work of FCF, and the atmosphere of quiet reflection made this a truly spiritual and renewing experience for those fortunate enough to be part of it.

Annual General Meeting



Ruth Patterson gives the key talk at the AGM

John & Kate write: Rev Dr Ruth Patterson, returning 10 years after she spoke at the inaugural meeting of the FCF, gave an address that sought to inspire us for the journey still ahead. She chose three guiding themes visible in the Advent story: vigil, journey and encounter.

The human players at the first Christmas all kept vigil and if we follow their example we can hear and see what God is doing and how he is breaking into time and space, thus allowing us to join in with what He is doing.

Jean Vanier speaks of the three realities in life: hatred and all that flows from it, the tyranny of the normal and deafening silence of the good that is dominated by fear, and the trickle of peace-making. There is a need for us to 'die before we die' and to allow ourselves to be tipped from our normality, letting go of some of our securities, to confront the reality of those hatreds and move into peace-making. As a pilgrim people we find travelling companions from every community and if we have kept watch and are faithful on our spiritual journey we will be surprised by joy in the encounter with God in every human face. If we are embraced by Advent we cannot relate to people as before, we are not as we were and we go home a different way. Advent sends us out to be peacemakers, who bring hearts to prayer knowing that God is already waiting for us, picking up our vocation to be loved and tipping us over into fruitfulness.



FCF Committee (David Bolton unavoidably absent)