



GNR NEWSLETTER

PEACE & RECONCILIATION IN A PLURAL SOCIETY

by Lynda Gould (Centre for Contemporary Christianity in Ireland)

One of Adrian Plass's lesser known books is *Broken Windows, Broken Lives*, where he tells the story of a Lives Residential worker in a school for 'maladjusted' boys. Hiding away in the closing chapters is an intriguing story where the hero hits a boy following an exasperating head-on battle of wills. Devasted by his action he goes to his flat, opens the wardrobe door, climbs in and waits ... and in the darkness and silence of the wardrobe, he is present to his situation and anticipates the impending consequences of his action.

As I read it again, I was thinking about the ways in which I am pushed towards success. The background noise of my life seems to have been 'do well and you'll be happy'. I've never been encouraged to have 'wardrobe' moments where I can be present to loss, disappointment or failure. Even in the company of other Christians I am drawn towards the language of efficiency and negotiation but don't have the words for confession, grief, affection or disappointment. Yet I believe these are the words that I need if I am to live faithfully for Christ in these days.

As our society moves towards 'A Shared Future', Christians face two major challenges – how to speak about the hurt and loss of the past 35 years and how to live with difference in an increasingly plural society.

In my role as Programme Director for 'Peace and Reconciliation in a Plural Society', I am exploring ways in which the Centre can help Christians and churches address these challenges. I believe that we can change the culture around us if we change the conversations we have with one another. Therefore, a way forward is to start with difficult conversations that are not about activity or doing things, but are about feelings – feelings of fear, betrayal, confusion or mistrust. As these conversations happen, then questions about the place of forgiveness or the possibility of reconciliation can be asked and answered. We already know that these conversations are making a difference for individuals and churches.

As Christians we need to look back to the past while keeping our eyes on the horizon of our future. It is my hope that the programmes we are offering will resource and equip Christians for the challenges that lie ahead and I invite you to pray for us as we seek to serve the church in this way.

ENGAGING WITH LOYALISM

by Derek Poole (Centre for Contemporary Christianity in Ireland)

The Centre has been active in seeking to understand the current political climate and community attitudes in what is broadly defined as 'Loyalist communities'. This has involved conversations with Loyalist leaders, community and church leaders working in Loyalist areas, and denominational leaders who are concerned about the growing distance between the church and these communities. Also, we have been involved in direct conversations with paramilitary leaders. This work has been encouraging, giving us opportunities to offer our perspectives on peacebuilding, renewing communities in a post-conflict environment and creatively challenging the dysfunctional aspects of Loyalism. We will continue to be active on various commissions and in the capacity of 'critical friends' in the work of transforming Loyalist communities. We are also committed to challenging the church to include Loyalist communities as part of its programme of social witness. I have been taking every opportunity to remind the church that 'Loyalists' are our neighbours too. Speaking to 100 Church of Ireland ministers at the Down and Connor diocesan conference, I invited the participants to see Loyalist communities as a struggling part of the Protestant family and as people who should be neither demonised nor patronised but engaged with graciously.

**VOLUME 1, ISSUE 2
JULY 2006**

UPCOMING EVENTS

Regional Meeting—Africa

February 19-23, 2007

Kigali, Rwanda



If you are interested in participating or learning more about this event, please contact [Voltaire Cacal](mailto:Voltaire.Cacal).