



# IRISH CHURCHES PEACE PROJECT



## ICPP CASE STUDIES



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The Irish Churches Peace Project is a collaborative partnership between the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of Ireland, the Methodist Church in Ireland, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and the Irish Council of Churches.

Copies of this resource may be requested from the Irish Council of Churches and are available for download through their website, as detailed below.

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June 2015

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# Introduction

The Irish Churches Peace Project (ICPP) has been a unique partnership at national and local level between denominations and local churches in Northern Ireland with the aim of contributing to the building of a peaceful and stable society. From February 2013 to June 2015 ICPP engaged with local churches in six areas to stimulate positive contact, to build relationships and to design projects or programmes that would address local needs.

## Background

Each of ICPP's partner churches, the Catholic Church, Church of Ireland, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and the Methodist Church in Ireland, along with the smaller denominations represented by the Irish Council of Churches, had separately explored issues relating to the Troubles. ICPP, however, represented the first time that the churches had come together to deliver a significant project to address the issues. With funding from the European Union's PEACE III Programme managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), the Office of First Minister and Deputy First Minister and the Department Of Environment, Community and Local Government, ICPP employed six Good Relations Officers to work in the following exemplar areas:

- Armagh, Dungannon and Cookstown
- Craigavon Council: a provincial town with significant sectarian/racial challenges
- Enniskillen and the border area: a cross-border area
- Newry and Mourne Council area: a rural area with significant levels of deprivation
- North Belfast: an urban interface area
- Strabane Council area: a border area lacking inward investment

Three of the main objectives of the project agreed with SEUPB were:

- to facilitate 'challenging, sustained and sensitive dialogue' between churches and in the wider community on contentious good relations, reconciliation and peace work issues

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- to provide support to local inter-church or cross-community groups in the development of new grassroots initiatives that would contribute to a long-term stable peace in their setting
  - to facilitate learning in churches' good relations, reconciliation and peace work on a local and regional basis.

During the lifetime of the project ICPP's Good Relations Officers worked with churches in their areas to deliver single sessions, series of sessions and residential events exploring good relations issues. Several initiatives in which local churches worked together to address community issues were also developed.

Much of the Good Relations Officers' experience of developing and delivering meaningful dialogue between churches has been published in the form of resource booklets. These give outlines for sessions which any group can use to discuss issues such as identity, history, parades, forgiveness, migrants etc.

ICPP resources are available from the offices of the Irish Council of Churches or can be downloaded from [www.irishchurches.org](http://www.irishchurches.org)

## The Case Studies

This booklet contains case studies of several ICPP projects.

In Section 1 the general methodology developed by ICPP to engage with churches and to stimulate engagement and co-operation on good relations issues and projects in their area is presented.

The case studies are then divided into three sections. Section 2 contains case studies dealing with churches working together to connect in a positive way with the wider community. Section 3 focuses on encouraging churches to work together in areas with significant division or tension between communities. Section 4 concentrates on the organising of bigger, one-off events.

Each case study gives some contextual background and a description of the particular programme or project. They also include specific observations and learning points, that is, positive and negative things that have been learned from the experience in that area. It is hoped that these case studies will provide examples of best practice for engagement between local churches.

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# Section 1

## The ICPP Methodology

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ICPP developed a standard methodology for its work with churches in local areas. This methodology evolved during the life of the project and had to be applied appropriately according to each local context. ICPP's experience of successfully developing and implementing this methodology in a wide variety of localities indicates that it is a robust methodology for future projects seeking to do good relations work with churches.

The methodology consists of five steps. Depending on the local context and the response of participants the order of some steps may be changed and some steps may be omitted.

The first step is to engage with each of the local clergy or church leaders individually. This recognises the key role that they have within their congregation. These meetings allow the Good Relations Officer to introduce ICPP to the church leader, often seeking to address any fears or concerns they may have regarding cross-community engagement. It is important to emphasise that, although the Good Relations Officer will be facilitating the process, the participants will retain significant control over the pace and direction that the process takes. The Good Relations Officer does not come with a pre-determined programme, but rather, invites local churches to develop a process to build good relations between churches and the community appropriate to the local area.

Once the clergy have agreed to take part, the second step is to bring the clergy together. In some areas Protestant and Catholic clergy have had regular meetings for many years. However, in many areas this is not the case and this may be the first time that they have met outside civic events. Several meetings may be required in order to build relationships between the clergy. These relationships are the necessary foundation on which the trust required to work together is built. These meetings should be carefully structured to both allow relationships to develop and to explore the positive and negative dynamics of cross-community relationships in the locality.

The third step, once agreement has been given by the church leaders, is to begin a similar process among the lay people of the churches. Again, in many areas inter-church forums have existed for many years. ICPP practice has been to engage with such groups, acting as a catalyst and providing resources to assist with their programmes. This has often involved helping them to engage with a wider range of people or to develop new programmes. In areas where there has not been engagement between lay people a process similar to that for clergy,

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in which people are brought together to build relationships and explore local issues, is necessary. Even where inter-church forums have existed ICPP has found it beneficial to seek to engage other church members who have not had direct experience of working with other churches.

In the fourth step the Good Relations Officer leads the group of churches in a process of deciding what they want to do together. The group is led through a process in which they consider the current state of good relations between their churches and within the wider community. Other needs within the community are also explored. From this information the group decides on the course of action they feel is appropriate to their context, to the needs that have been identified and the resources available to the group. Thus, in some contexts a series of events designed to build relationships and address issues of reconciliation are appropriate. In other contexts it may be the churches co-operating in a practical project to address community needs.

The fifth step is to find other groups or organisations with which the group of churches may partner or co-operate. Existing church forums are obvious examples as they represent people from local churches who are already engaged in building good relations. Depending on the type of programme or project that the group decides to undertake, there may be other groups or organisations with relevant interests or expertise, for example, community groups, para-church organisations, local Council Good Relation Officers etc.

In following this methodology ICPP has discovered that at some point it is necessary to determine the type and range of activities that each participating church is comfortable to participate in. It is at this point that the question of joint-worship often arises. It is often assumed that churches working together will involve worshipping together. The reality is that some individuals and churches do not feel that they can worship together. Insisting on organising joint worship will, therefore, cause these churches to withdraw from the process. This is a very sensitive subject for a group of clergy or lay people to discuss, yet if the conversation is well facilitated it clarifies the type of activity in which the whole group can agree to co-operate. It is, of course, possible for some of the churches within the group to continue to engage in joint worship activities, but it will be recognised that this is separate from the work of the wider group. This is an important conversation for the group to have, but it may most naturally occur in either Steps 2, 3 or Step 4, depending on the group.

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# Section 2

## Connecting with Communities

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# 2.1 Larne: Church in the Marketplace

## Background

Larne is a well-known coastal town situated north of Belfast in Co. Antrim. It is a predominantly Protestant community, with the 2011 census recording 68% of the population in the borough as being from the Protestant community.

As with many towns Larne has faced challenges in retaining its industrial base and town centre shopping. It has also suffered from negative portrayals in the media.

In 2013 five churches in Larne came together, supported by a Council funded consultant, to create a strategy for engagement in the town. The resulting document, *Dare to Hope*, was launched in October 2013, with the vision that 'Larne becomes a place where every voice is equally valued and that a sense of community is an inspiration and not an aspiration.'

## The Church in the Market Place

The *Dare to Hope* document provided a vision, but with no further funding from the Council ICPP was invited to support the process of turning the vision into reality.

A working group was formed, consisting of the clergy from the five churches and a number of community organisations. The discussions in the working group provided an insight into the range of activities and provision within the borough, the resources available and a realistic insight into what could be achieved.

ICPP funded a mapping exercise which gave further information about agencies and organisations providing services within the area.

Through these processes a picture of the needs within the community and the full range of services already available began to emerge. Relationships between churches, community groups and other organisations also began to develop, providing the basis for the next steps.

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A constant theme arising from these discussions was the need for a shared space in which the churches could be seen to be publicly working together in partnership with other organisations in the community. In partnership with the Larne Community Development Project it was decided to create a programme by which volunteers from the churches would provide support, information and training to the wider community each Wednesday morning during the weekly market.

The programme, called 'Church in the Market Place', was launched in February 2015 as a partnership between thirteen local churches and a range of local agencies. Each Wednesday seven volunteers are present in Larne Auction House to offer support, information and friendship to people attending the market. Each week a different agency is present to offer advice on a particular subject. Agencies have included Citizen's Advice, the Local Enterprise Agency, the local food bank, a local parenting group and suicide awareness groups.

A night time programme has also been running, including history talks and training workshops on parenting and family life.

The 'Church in the Market Place' programme is a neutral, accessible venue for the churches to be seen to work together for the good of the whole community.

## Learning Points

- **Engaging with the community sector.** The willingness and commitment of the church leaders to working with the community sector has been key to the success of Church in the Market Place. Through this engagement both the churches and the community sector have gained a more thorough understanding of the needs and provisions in the town.
- **Building relationships and trust.** The development of relationships between the various churches, both Protestant and Catholic, and between the churches and the community groups took time. Several meetings were spent discussing local community needs, resources and the role of each organisation. The time spent building relationships provided a strong foundation for a significant project for the local community.

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- **Working to each other's strengths.** Working in partnership has allowed the churches and community organisations to pool their various resources and to provide a programme that no one church or organisation could have delivered. For example, the Church in the Market Place has access to skills in training, health programmes, youth initiatives, funding applications etc. Free seminars on many subjects have been delivered to a significant number of people on Wednesday mornings.
  - **Stronger together.** The fact that the churches had worked together made it easier for them to relate as a group to the community organisations. The community organisations had often not engaged with churches partly because there were so many individual congregations. It proved much easier for them to relate to the single group. Also, now that there is a strong group of churches and community groups in Larne they will be able to lobby more effectively on issues affecting Larne.

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## 2.2 Enniskillen: Broadening Participation – Making a Tangible Impact

### Background

Enniskillen is located between Lower and Upper Lough Erne in the Fermanagh Lakeland and has a population of approximately 14,000. It was deeply affected by the Troubles, most notably by the Enniskillen bomb in which 11 people lost their lives and 63 were injured on Remembrance Day in 1987.

In spite of this there are few overt signs of sectarian tension, such as murals or peace walls, within the town. There is much to be celebrated in terms of respect, co-operation and accommodation. In fact, one of the most symbolic recent acts of reconciliation involving churches took place when the Queen visited St Macartin's Cathedral before crossing the road to visit St Michael's Catholic Church during her Diamond Jubilee Celebrations in 2012.

Some of the clergy and church leaders within the town have had good working relationships among themselves for many years. However, for others the only discussions they have had with people of other denominations have taken place outside Enniskillen.

### Broadening Participation

The ICPP Good Relations Officer for Fermanagh and the Border Region convened a number of meetings for clergy and church leaders to explain ICPP's aims and objectives and to listen carefully to their vision for their town.

These meetings resulted in a proposal for an event, centred around a meal, to which each church would send some of their key people, both clergy and lay. The meal would provide an opportunity for these key people to meet their counterparts from other churches and to have an honest discussion about some of the issues facing Enniskillen. It would also gauge their appetite for addressing these issues.

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Each clergy person identified and invited an agreed number of people from their congregation to attend the meeting, with the result that in February 2014 one hundred and eighteen lay leaders from seven denominations gathered in the Killyhevlin Hotel. The event was jointly sponsored by ICPP and the Fermanagh District Council's Good Relations Department.

Participants were seated in colour-coded seats at tables of eight, to ensure that people from the various churches mixed with each other. Each table was given five questions to discuss over the meal:

1. What do you believe are the issues in Enniskillen that prevent a more cohesive and confident community?
2. What is the cost to the community of these issues?
3. What Christian values do you believe are compatible with creating a more cohesive and confident community?
4. What is your shared vision for what Enniskillen as a community could be like in 2020 if these issues were addressed?
5. As a representative of your church, how can you and your church contribute to achieving such a vision?

It was striking that the conversation at the tables often began with people stating that they felt that Enniskillen was a 'cohesive and confident community'. However, as they talked they realised that there were concerns around flags, politics, youth and other issues.

The results of the table conversations were collated, identifying four key themes. Participants were invited to four follow-up sessions to explore these themes in more detail and to explore how the churches might engage with them.

As a result of these sessions a strategy setting out the vision of 'Community Together: Engaged, Understanding, Respectful' was developed and the Enniskillen Churches Good Relations Group (ECGRG) was formed. This group has started to implement the strategy, most notably in establishing the Island Community Youth Project, which now meets fortnightly and attracts young people who are enthusiastic about positively impacting their local community. The ECGRG is seeking to broaden their membership and is also working with the Council in order to becoming formally constituted so they can access funding.

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## Observations and Learning

- **Broadening participation.** Each church was allocated a certain number of places at the meal and the clergy were asked to identify and invite people from their congregation to attend. This ensured that there was a genuine variety of opinions represented. An open invitation to members of churches would probably have only attracted those already interested in good relations type activities.
- **A focus on areas of shared concern.** The process did not challenge any individual or church's identity, beliefs or practices, but focussed on areas in which the churches felt they could cooperate for the good of the wider community.
- **Reasons for not engaging.** While many churches did take part in the process, others did not for a variety of reasons. Some did not engage because of a lack of resources and other commitments. Others had theological reasons for not wanting to engage with other churches.
- **A larger number at the first event, smaller numbers at subsequent events.** One hundred and eighteen people attended the initial meal and conversation. The follow-up sessions had an average attendance of about thirty. It may appear disappointing that only one quarter of the people who helped identify the key issues attended the sessions designed to specifically address them, but it was encouraging to note that many of those who did attend the follow-up sessions had never previously engaged in this sort of dialogue.
- **The problem of busyness.** The possibilities for joint engagement on the issues identified were hampered by the busyness in the lives of congregations and individuals. Congregations are often focused on their own priorities and programmes with the result that there is a wealth of talent and ability within them that is not being channelled into community relations.

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## 2.3 Newry: Cross-Cultural Engagement

### Background

Newry is located near the border with the Republic of Ireland and has a population of almost 30,000. In 1992 it was granted city status as part of the Queen's Golden Jubilee celebrations.

Over the past few years Newry, like many other parts of Northern Ireland, has seen an increase in cultural diversity as people from a wide variety of countries have come to live and work in the city.

The Newry and District Inter-church Forum and Embrace had previously run an event celebrating cultural diversity. Embrace is an organisation that seeks to help churches and other groups to engage positively with asylum seekers, refugees and migrant workers. This event show-cased food and music from several countries, giving an insight into the cultural background from which people had come.

### A Cultural Journey

As ICPP began its work in Newry it engaged with the Newry and District Inter-church Forum. It became apparent that, while the previous cultural event had been successful and popular, there was a desire among the members of the Forum for deeper engagement with new residents.

ICPP, Embrace and the Inter-church forum developed a programme of events which would: help new residents learn about Northern Irish culture; allow relationships between local people and new residents to be formed; explore issues of cultural differences; and allow new residents and local people explore Irish history together. Newry and Mourne District Council's Ethnic Minority Support Centre was helpful in publicising the events among the migrant communities.

The series began with 'A Cultural Experience', a stand-alone event aimed at attracting local people and new residents. It was planned as an entertaining event which would highlight aspects of cultural diversity and difference in a positive and engaging way. It was also designed as an introduction to a follow-on series of events exploring the issues in more depth.

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The Cultural Experience had several elements. A music group opened the event with music from around the world and snacks from various countries provided a taste of cultural diversity. A table quiz was organised in such a way that a mixture of local people and new residents were at each table. The questions were designed to give some interesting facts about various cultures and to highlight some of the statistics regarding new residents in Northern Ireland and in Newry. Finally, there was a 'chat show' with a panel made up of new residents from various countries and a local person who had lived overseas. This 'chat show' allowed new residents to share the joys and difficulties of leaving home and seeking to make a new home in Newry.

As a result of the Cultural Experience event several people signed up for the follow-on series, entitled 'A Cultural Journey'. This series was designed to explore the issues of cultural diversity and difference in more depth, and consisted of two evening workshops and a residential. It was designed for a group of less than twenty people, to be made up of migrants and local people from both communities. The series was also designed to be highly interactive and to be of immediate and practical benefit for participants.

The first evening workshop concentrated on the aspects of culture that lie beneath the surface. This included exploring the cultural values that were important to each of the cultures represented in the group. Most people discovered that they had not really examined these values, but had rather inherited them as they grew up within their culture. Also, setting out their cultural values alongside those of the other cultures gave an indication of where cross-cultural misunderstandings might arise. Another exercise had people from different cultures sharing the appropriate behaviour and expectations within their culture when a person has been invited to someone's house for a meal. This exercise was particularly helpful for new residents, many of whom were not aware of how expectations in Northern Ireland differed from those in their home culture.

The second evening workshop concentrated on finding positive ways of dealing with cultural differences and misunderstandings. This session featured role-playing activities and exercises showing how we can jump to conclusions which lead to misunderstanding. Several real-life scenarios and participants' own experiences were used to explore the issues.

The final part of the series was a residential for the group in Derry. The residential sought to achieve two objectives: the strengthening of the relationships between

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participants and to explore Irish history and its effects on contemporary society. Irish history was introduced by a tour of the city walls and a talk highlighting the key dates in Irish history.

Following this series of events the group has continued to meet together and is in the process of forming a Newry Friendship Group which will provide a weekly opportunity for local people and new residents to meet together. ICPP and Embrace have run similar series in other places and have produced a resource based on the material used during the series.

## Observations and Learning

- **Sharing cultures.** The series of events was deliberately designed for all participants to share their cultural practices and values. This enabled new residents to learn important aspects of Northern Irish culture, while local people were exposed to aspects of a variety of new cultures. The course also highlighted areas in which cultural misunderstandings are likely to arise and strategies for dealing with them.
- **Learning Irish history together.** Exploring Irish history in culturally diverse groups proved to be beneficial for both new residents and local people. New residents stressed how helpful it was to be aware of the historical context of Northern Irish society. One new resident commented that listening to local people's memories and experiences helped him understand why it was not possible for people to simply forget and move on. A local person commented that he now realised that new residents had a role to play in developing peace in Northern Ireland.
- **Relationship building.** The expectation was that the residential event would be the end of the series. The course was designed to provide an environment in which everyone was equally learning from each other. Over the period of the course this allowed relationships to form.
- **Responding to demand.** The expectation was that the residential event would be the end of the series. However, the group had formed such good relationships that they wanted to keep meeting and to provide the opportunity for others to join. ICPP have worked with them to explore different models and a Newry Friendship Group is being formed.

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# Section 3

## Cross-Community Programmes

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# 3.1 North Belfast

## Background

North Belfast is one of the most divided areas in Northern Ireland, with different communities living in close proximity often separated by peace walls. It suffered on numerous occasions throughout the Troubles and tensions have often remained high in certain parts of North Belfast. These tensions have had a direct impact on churches in the form of arson and other attacks.

ICPP has engaged with several small clusters of churches in North Belfast.

## Towards Greater Understanding

ICPP worked with a Protestant and a Catholic church in close proximity in North Belfast. On meeting with ICPP's Good Relations Officer the clergy of both congregations expressed enthusiasm for building relationships between their churches through a discussion series. This series was designed to allow the participants share different aspects of their church tradition and practice with each other in a manner that promoted respect and understanding. The series included tours of each of the churches in which people were encouraged to ask questions. It went on to look at participants' political and cultural identities.

The series was beneficial in providing a structure in which people felt safe to engage with a church community they had never had contact with before. An average of approximately twelve people attended the four sessions, however, the effectiveness of the series was hampered by the fact that it was not the same twelve people who met each week. This inconsistency prevented relationships being formed. The clergy also noted that participants gave them different feedback after the session to what they had said during the session. This could indicate that they had not developed enough trust in the group to state their honest opinions.

The material used in this dialogue series has been written up by ICPP and published as a resource called 'Towards Greater Understanding'.

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## Whitewell

In the Whitewell area of North Belfast there were existing relationships between the Catholic, Presbyterian, Church of Ireland and Methodist churches before ICPP's involvement. However, this group of churches was keen to develop their relationships with each other and to explore how they might engage with the wider community.

The ICPP Good Relations Officer worked with the churches to identify some key projects consonant with the desire for the churches to work together, which were achievable in a short space of time and which the churches had the resources to deliver.

A series of events for people from the churches was organised using the ICPP resource 'A Step Too Far: A Contemplation on Forgiveness'. This resource is based on an award-winning film produced by Paul Moorehead, a local film maker, and has been used widely by ICPP to generate discussion around the theme of forgiveness. The initial series of events was successful with participants stating that they would like the relationship between the churches to develop.

The series was run for a second time, with those who attended the first series inviting others to attend. This series attracted an average of approximately fifty people, showing the benefits of personal invitations.

Several of the churches in Whitewell expressed a desire to run 'Messy Church' in the White City area. Messy Church is an informal church service based around craft activities designed for families with children. For various reasons this was an initiative between some of the Protestant churches only. ICPP normally only engages with projects between both Protestant and Catholic churches, but because it was already involved with the wider group of churches in the area it gave support and advice to the Messy Church project. It is significant to note that because of the connections between the churches, the Catholic church was aware of the Messy Church initiative and asked the organisers to give them advice on how to develop their ministry with families and children based on the Messy Church experience.

The success of these ventures has given the churches confidence about working together and about what they can achieve. A group of clergy and lay people are working to further develop their engagement with the local community. ICPP has

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assisted them in this process by putting them in contact with a local community development association and providing facilitators to help the group define its purpose and an action plan.

## Observations and Learning

- **Work at all levels of engagement.** In North Belfast, and other locations, ICPP has worked with churches who have never had significant contact with each other. This initial engagement must be handled sensitively, balancing the need for it to be done in a way in which people feel safe, yet which also allows the real issues to be discussed. ICPP has also engaged with churches who have had contact with each other. In this situation the need is to work with the churches to find ways in which the relationship can be developed in meaningful ways.
- **Preparatory 'single-identity' work.** The 'Towards Greater Understanding' series of events between a Catholic and a Methodist church did provide important opportunities for participants to engage with each other. However, there was evidence that participants were not fully comfortable to be open and honest in the sessions. ICPP was focussed on delivering encounter programmes between churches, but there have been several occasions when Good Relations Officers have felt it would have been beneficial to conduct some preparatory 'single identity' sessions within the separate congregations.
- **ICPP as a catalyst.** ICPP has sought to act as a catalyst for engagement between churches, rather than simply running programmes. The process of engagement between churches and the development of joint plans has been seen as a process belonging to the churches which ICPP encourages and facilitates. This approach has ensured that there is maximum ownership of the process by the churches and should ensure that the process continues after ICPP finishes.
- **The benefit of 'quick wins'.** The experience in Whitewell shows that there is great benefit in a group selecting one or two projects that can be successfully delivered in a relatively short time-scale. This gives the group confidence and momentum at the beginning of its life.
- **The benefit of regular contact.** The Whitewell experience also highlights the benefit of regular contact between the churches. It was because of regular contact that the Catholic church was aware of the Messy Church project in the White City and was able to draw upon that experience in developing its ministry with young families.

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## 3.2 Coagh

### Background

Coagh is a small village of approximately 550 people five miles east of Cookstown, County Tyrone. According to the 2001 census, 26.4% of the population were from a Catholic background and 72.8% were from a Protestant background.

In terms of the Troubles, it has had a difficult history, with a number of people having lost their lives, including three local men killed by the IRA in Hanover Square in 1989, and three members of the IRA shot and killed during an ambush by undercover British Army members in 1991. A number of others lost their lives in incidents in nearby areas and many others will have suffered injuries, bereavement, stress and other indirect consequences of the conflict.

These and other incidents related to the conflict left a legacy of hurt, mistrust, and damaged relationships beneath the surface of this now fairly peaceful rural village. According to a community audit carried out by Cookstown and Western Shores Area Network (CWSAN) in 2005, only 50% of respondents from the area believed that the entire community worked well together, and 42% that there was real community spirit.

In addition, consultation with agencies in the area revealed that some earlier peace-building initiatives had been met with serious opposition from particular parts of the community. However, organisations such as CWSAN and Cookstown Council have provided support to local groups over the years, and a number of them endeavour to bring people together from across the community. ICPP became involved in the area towards the end of Cookstown Council's PEACE III Programme in 2013, with the aim of increasing the involvement of local churches in local community initiatives.

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## The Journey So Far

ICPP's involvement in Coagh began with the Good Relations Officer inviting the local Church of Ireland, Catholic and Presbyterian clergy to meet to introduce ICPP and to hear their views on the local needs. There was a shared concern to engage with the local community in ways that would contribute to building better relationships and community spirit.

It was agreed that a good starting point would be for the churches and schools to take the lead in organising a Christmas tree lights switch on event. The involvement of the local schools was important to ensure the participation of people from all parts of the community. In particular, there was an awareness that people from a Catholic and Nationalist background might not perceive Coagh as a place where they would be welcomed.

The event was organised in partnership with Cookstown Council's Good Relations Department. As well as involving the local schools, the football club was invited to steward the event and a cross-community choir and silver band took part. The three clergy read Christmas readings and prayers.

Approximately two hundred people attended the event, with many staying around to chat and enjoy refreshments afterwards.

Following this event ICPP and the Council Good Relations Officer facilitated a meeting involving churches, community representatives and the schools to discuss local issues and the possibility of continuing to work together for the local area. While there was general support for this, it was decided not to formalise the process by creating a constituted committee, but rather to continue on the basis of an informal network.

Subsequent meetings discussed issues facing the local community such as lack of youth provision, graffiti, symbols and mistrust. The process has resulted in new friendships and some other significant symbolic actions, such as the participation of the Catholic priest in the Remembrance Day ceremony at the war memorial.

In 2014 a second Christmas tree lighting event was held, which built upon the success of the previous year. The network of people engaged have continued to meet and will be supported by the Council and CWSAN when ICPP finishes.

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## Observations and Learning

- **Addressing common issues.** The process in Coagh began with local clergy discovering that they were all concerned about developing the community spirit within the village. This common concern provided a basis for them to work together. Identifying a symbolic but achievable goal, in the form of a Christmas tree light switch on, allowed them to engage with the wider community.
- **Recognising and overcoming barriers.** It was recognised that people from a Catholic or Nationalist background may not feel welcome in the heart of the village. Specific steps were taken to overcome this barrier, such as involving the primary school principals in the planning of the event. The involvement of children from both schools sent a clear message about the event and was a strong inducement for parents to attend.
- **A progressive process.** The process in Coagh has evolved as each step has been taken. It is not a process that is governed by a strategic plan agreed at the beginning. The strategic planning method has obvious strengths in certain contexts. However, in a context like Coagh a more organic process, in which a single event is planned, organised and delivered, followed by an evaluation and a decision regarding the best way to proceed, may feel safer for people.
- **Addressing sensitive issues.** The process in Coagh has, in some respects, been dealing with the more superficial aspects of the community relations in the village. To date there has been no significant dialogue on the incidents that have led to the fracturing of relationships in the village. However, the process has led to a building of trust between individuals and groups within the village. The planning meetings for the events have also allowed some of the issues to be aired and the feelings and perceptions of groups within the community to be expressed. It should also be noted that the feedback from people within the village has been that the Christmas tree events have been very significant in the life of the community.

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## 3.3 Strabane

### Background

During the Troubles Strabane was the most bombed town in Europe, for its size, and the most bombed in Northern Ireland. Many civilians and members of the security forces were killed or injured over the course of the Troubles.

During this period Strabane also had the dubious distinction of having the highest unemployment rate in the industrial world and was one of the most economically deprived towns in the United Kingdom.

Historically there was little contact between the clergy and churches in the town.

### Exploring Culture

The ICPP Good Relations Officer initiated monthly meetings between the clergy of the Presbyterian, Church of Ireland, Methodist and Catholic churches. These meetings allowed relationships to develop. After meeting together a few times the group decided that it would meet together for lunch in a prominent restaurant before each meeting. This was a deliberate attempt to be seen together in public and thus to demonstrate good civic leadership.

During their meetings the clergy discussed local community relations issues and how they might contribute to diffusing local tensions. In May 2014 the Catholic and Church of Ireland clergy were able to discuss concerns about a parade which had the potential to cause tension in the area. As a result of their discussions they identified that tensions would most likely be based on a lack of understanding as to the meaning of the parade. It was decided the best course of action would be to speak with some key community leaders well in advance to inform them about the parade, that its purpose was to commemorate the beginning of World War One which involved people from both communities and that the main focus was a religious service. The clergy undertook to have these conversations and the parade passed off without incident.

The clergy group also decided to run a series of events to celebrate the cultural diversity in the local area. With the support of the ICPP Good Relations Officer a programme was drawn up at which cultural organisations representing local traditions and the cultures of ethnic minorities contributed. The purpose of the series was for people to learn about local cultures different from their own,

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to promote tolerance and understanding and to show the churches working together for the benefit of the local community.

The programme consisted of information and discussion evenings with contributions from the Strabane Ethnic Community Association, the West Ulster Bands Forum, the Gaelic Association, An Culturlann, the Bready and District Ulster Scots Development Association, the Ancient Order of Hibernians and the Orange Order. The discussion each evening focussed on: the importance and benefits members of each group derived from their membership; the values and activities of the organisation; its view of the peace process and; how it was contributing to peace. Each evening resulted in honest conversations, often dealing with contentious issues in a respectful atmosphere.

Following the series the clergy felt that it had been a significant first step for them and their churches in working together. It had been very beneficial for those who had attended, but the average attendance was disappointing.

The clergy group continues to meet on a monthly basis. The clergy have decided to invite a guest speaker each month to keep them informed about events, programmes and organisations in the area. To date speakers have included the Churches Community Work Alliance, the local community group and the food bank project.

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## Observations and Learning

- **The problem of busyness.** The group of clergy in Strabane have been keen to meet together and to initiate programmes to bring their churches together. However, as has been the ICPP experience in other areas, the time pressures on clergy are such that it is hard to find time to meet together. It was therefore important that the group agreed to meet regularly and that each member was committed to attending.
- **Attracting participants.** The series of events exploring cultural traditions resulted in significant conversations, which often continued after a session had formally finished. However, there was a general feeling that it would have been beneficial if more people from the churches had attended. ICPP has discovered that attracting participants to events is one of the most significant challenges facing churches engaging in building good relations. Busyness is not just a problem for clergy, as noted above, but for congregations and church members. There is also the problem that people often prefer to avoid talking about difficult topics, rather than take the risky step of meeting with and talking to people who are different.
- **Small but symbolic acts.** The clergy's decision to intentionally meet for lunch in a public place before their monthly meeting was a small but symbolic act. In a small town like Strabane the fact that they are eating together will be noticed by people, and sends an important signal to their church members and the wider community. It is also personally significant for the clergy, in that their friendship with each other and their engagement in this process is no longer private, but very public.

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# Section 4

## Special Events

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# 4.1 Portadown

## “All Things Family” Event

### Background

Portadown has a population of about 23,000. It suffered substantially during the conflict and like many other towns is continuing to grapple with the legacy of the past. Despite the onset of the peace process the two main communities in the town remain largely segregated with many barriers to integration still apparent.

In view of this, finding ways for the communities to work together through common interest issues has been central to the ICPP approach with the Portadown area churches. ICPP worked with the local churches to identify and prioritise these common interest issues. As a result of this process the issue of supporting young families was agreed to be the key issue for the churches to address together.

### The “All Things Family” Event

Once the issue of supporting young families had been identified by the local clergy and lay leaders within the churches, each congregation selected a few suitable members to represent them on a working group. In total eight churches, representing the Catholic, Church of Ireland, Presbyterian and Methodist churches, have begun working in partnership for the first time in Portadown.

The ICPP Good Relations Officer facilitating this process recognised that this was the first time the churches had worked in partnership and that the working group was made up of people who did not know each other. Therefore, the first meetings of the group were focussed on building relationships, including ice-breaker activities and a shared meal. The building of relations provided a foundation for the future work.

This was followed by a period of identifying the needs of young families in the area, the provision already being provided by the churches and the skills and interests of the group members. The group also agreed on a name, the Portadown Churches Young Families Group (PCYFG) and a purpose statement, “To develop a range of family focused activities designed to enable the people of Portadown to come together and to let them know that the churches care.”

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The group recognised that as a voluntary and informal group they could only proceed on the basis of small steps. The idea of hosting a family fun and information day was considered something that they could achieve in the interests of reaching out to families across the community.

The planning for this event was done by the local working group, facilitated by the Good Relations Officer. Tasks and responsibilities were allocated according to the skills and interests analysis that had been done earlier in the process. Careful attention was given to selecting a venue that would be acceptable and accessible to people from all backgrounds in the community. A list of organisations to be invited to provide information stands, workshops or entertainment was drawn up and members of the group tasked with contacting them.

The 'All Things Family' fun and information day was held in Portadown Town Hall on 4th October 2014. The event was highly successful in that it saw twenty three family and community support organisations come together to provide up to date information on a range of issues, including child care, benefits, parenting and relationship issues, home safety, social media, health checks, education and learning opportunities etc. Furthermore, refreshments, a puppet show, a cookery demonstration, a climbing wall, as well as arts and crafts were all provided on the day, free of charge. Approximately 200 people attended, and many commented to the group members on the friendly atmosphere at the event and on how positive it was to see the local churches working together to put the event on for the community. The event received front page coverage, along with a two-page spread, in the Portadown Times.

The success of this event provided stimulus and encouragement to PCYFG who have since worked towards becoming a formally constituted group so that they can access funding for future projects. They have also drawn up a strategic plan.

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## Observations and Learning

- **Take time to build relationships.** The time taken at the beginning of the process to build relationships within the group provided a basis of trust for the group to work together. This was especially important in a context in which the Protestant and Catholic churches had not previously engaged in joint projects.
- **Close connection with the churches.** Clergy and lay church leaders are often already over-committed. Part of the success of this project is that the church leaders were involved at the beginning of the process and had ownership of it. Yet, it was vital that the process was then given over to people selected by each of the churches as having an interest in young families to actually plan and run the activities.
- **Importance of an achievable initial target.** PCYFG was the first joint venture of the churches in Portadown. It was also made up of people who did not know each other. The family information and fun day proved to be a wise choice for their first project. It was an achievable objective, yet demanded significant organisation and effort by all members of the group. It also had a widespread impact in line with the main purpose of the group. The success of this initial venture gave the group encouragement for their ongoing work.
- **The public impact of churches working together.** The feedback from people attending the event was very positive, with people commenting on the fact that the churches were seen to be working together. The event also received very favourable coverage in the local press.

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## 4.2 Addressing The Legacy of The Troubles

### Background

Coalisland is a small town in County Tyrone with a population of approximately 5,000 people. The overwhelming majority of the population is from a Catholic or Nationalist background, with a small minority linked to the Church of Ireland, Presbyterian and other Protestant churches.

Coalisland has had a turbulent history with twenty people being shot in or near the town between 1969 and 2001. There was also a particularly intense period of rioting between local nationalist civilians and British Army soldiers in 1992. Many people left Coalisland during the Troubles, with many Protestants in particular moving to outlying villages.

This difficult past has left a painful legacy in Coalisland, and it was recognition of this impact that led two local clergy, with the support of the ICPP, to organise a conference exploring the role of clergy in addressing the legacy of the Troubles. Wider consultation with clergy and Councils revealed that there was a need throughout Mid-Ulster, so the event was organised in partnership with Good Relations Officers in each of the three Councils and in consultation with clergy forums in the Cookstown and Dungannon areas.

Inspired by the story of the Good Samaritan the conference was entitled 'Go, and Do Thou Likewise' and took place on 26th February 2014, in Brackville Church of Ireland Parish Hall, Coalisland.

### **"Go, and Do Thou Likewise" Conference**

The main impetus for the conference came from two local Church of Ireland and Catholic clergy, who had previously worked together on issues such as suicide and drugs. In discussions with ICPP they expressed their desire for support in addressing the legacy of the Troubles in their area. Contact with other clergy confirmed that this was also a prominent issue for them.

The local Council Good Relations Officers responded positively to an invitation to be involved and to support the process. Clergy forums in neighbouring areas were also consulted. Arising from these discussions it was suggested

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that a residential for some clergy prior to the conference would be beneficial. This would provide opportunities for people to share their personal journeys in terms of the conflict, to build new relationships and to begin to discuss the issues facing clergy in dealing with the legacy of the conflict. This residential was funded by the Council Good Relations Department.

The conference itself was attended by fifty seven clergy. Three key-note speakers provided input to the conference. Dr Brandon Hamber of INCORE spoke on "What is the legacy of 'The Troubles?'" , in which he stated, 'The impact of the conflict is huge in this very small place...there is not a single day that is not an anniversary...every day is an anniversary...'

Dr Gladys Ganiel of the Irish School of Ecumenics explored the role of clergy in addressing this legacy, challenging Christians to acknowledge and even repent for the past.

Professor Peter McBride of the Northern Ireland Association for Mental Health, spoke about how clergy themselves can be victims and survivors. He highlighted the powerful role churches can have in addressing the legacy. He said, 'Trauma is at the heart of the Christian message...Christ on the cross...an image of violence of man's inhumanity to man, of our capacity for cruelty in the extreme...we have a wonderful mechanism to talk about suffering at its most cruel with a possibility of redemption and hope.'

There were also personal stories of the cost involved in offering pastoral care in the context of traumatic and violent events. Rev David Clements spoke of his experience as minister of a Methodist church at the time of the Shankill bomb and Fr Stephen Kearney spoke of his experience at the time of the Greysteel massacre.

The conference also included time for participants to discuss many of the issues in small groups facilitated by ICPP staff.

Feedback from the conference showed that participants had found it beneficial to explore the issues and that there was a feeling that providing support for clergy in dealing with the legacy of the Troubles was essential. To this end ICPP has produced a resource including video clips of the speakers and discussion questions.

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## Observations and Learning

- **The importance of consultation.** The genesis of the conference was with two particularly enthusiastic clergy, who continued to be the primary drivers behind the project. However, with the help of ICPP, they consulted with a wide range of individuals and groups who helped determine the focus and content of the conference.
- **The problem of pacing a process.** In the process of planning this event it became clear that not all clergy or churches were willing or able to proceed at the same pace in facing the issues of the past. A decision was made to harness the energy of the people most enthusiastic about directly addressing the issues in a conference, whilst maintaining communication with others and providing ways for them to contribute to the discussion.
- **A balanced programme.** The conference programme was deliberately varied. The keynote speakers were experts in their field who provided participants with an overview and a framework to understand the complex issues being addressed. The personal testimonies of two people who were willing to be honest about the cost to themselves in offering pastoral care to traumatised congregations moved the conference from a theoretical viewpoint to the practical and personal dimension. The small group discussions allowed participants to consider how the issues impacted on them and their congregations.
- **Follow-up.** Feedback from the conference showed that clergy felt the issues raised were important and that churches and clergy needed support in addressing them. Some follow-up events were organised, for example thirteen people attended an away-day which used video clips of the key-note speakers as a basis for discussion. However, an invitation to participants at the original conference to discuss how the issues could be dealt with in the longer term received a very small response. This may indicate that over-committed clergy may be willing to attend events, but do not have the capacity to commit to developing a process.

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# 4.3 Tour de Foyle Charity Cycle

## Background

Derry, officially Londonderry, is a city which has been at the centre of many significant events in the troubled history of Ireland. However, its recent history has been one in which progress has been evident in many areas, notably the management of tensions during the parading season and the very successful year as the UK City of Culture in 2010.

ICPP's work in Derry began with conversations with the Churches Trust, an organisation set up by the four biggest denominations to respond to deprivation in the city, and the North West Methodist Mission.

As part of the City of Culture year the North West Methodist Mission had organised a small scale charity cycle ride to Iona in Scotland. It was felt that this event could be expanded to involve other churches, local community organisations and individuals from across the city. The excitement generated by the Giro d'Italia was seen as a timely stimulus for this type of event.

## The Tour de Foyle Charity Cycle

After a series of planning meetings it was agreed by several churches to work together to deliver the Tour de Foyle Charity Cycle. The aims of the project were: to raise the profile of a food bank and a homeless hostel, both church initiatives for the local community; for the churches to be seen collaborating in highlighting and addressing community needs; to generate funds for the work of the two initiatives; to bring people from all sides of the community together; and to inaugurate an event that would become an annual fixture in the life of the city. The local church leaders endorsed the event and actively encouraged their members to attend an inaugural event run by ICPP. From this event volunteers were recruited to act as stewards, to provide refreshments and for other activities required to deliver the cycle event. Four full time church workers devoted a significant amount of time and effort to the planning and delivery of the event.

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The Tour de Foyle was supported by Ronan McLaughlin of the An Post Chain Reaction professional cycling team. His involvement was instrumental in the local cycle club supporting the cycle tour.

Two aspects of the event were planned. First, a fifty mile tour of Lough Foyle, from Ebrington Square to Magilligan, across the ferry to Greencastle, Co Donegal, back to the city and across the peace bridge to St Columb's Park. Second, a family fun cycle aimed at families with children.

One hundred and forty people participated in the Tour de Foyle and over £4,000 was raised for the food bank and homeless hostel. The majority of people took part in the main cycle tour of Lough Foyle, with the participation in the family fun cycle being disappointing. Feedback from the event was very positive. It also received significant coverage in the local media, with many participants being interviewed on local radio as they crossed the finish line.

## Observations and Learning

- **The importance of good event management.** An event such as the Tour de Foyle requires detailed event management. Publicity, health and safety, insurance and logistics all had to be researched and managed. The members of the organising group for an event such as this must be committed to the concept and be willing to invest significant time and energy to it.
- **Involving volunteers.** This event was very successful in engaging people from the various churches to work together. Over 50 volunteers played a part in planning and delivering the event undertaking duties including providing essential equipment, assisting in setting up event infrastructure, stewarding and catering.
- **Easy registration.** It was decided that an online registration system would be too complex to set up. However, this meant that a paper registration form was necessary. The post event evaluation indicated that the returning of paper forms may have discouraged people from registering before the event, with over eighty people registering on the day.



# The Irish Churches Peace Project (ICPP)

## Who are we?

The ICPP is a collaborative partnership between the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of Ireland, the Methodist Church in Ireland, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and the Irish Council of Churches.

## What are we about?

The vision of the ICPP is to deliver a series of initiatives throughout Northern Ireland and the Border Region to support *“a peaceful and stable society, with a shared and better future for all”*. Its work is accordingly focused on promoting reconciliation and the emergence of a shared and peaceful future.

## How are we funded?

Funding for the ICPP in the period July 2012 to June 2015 has been provided by the European Union’s PEACE III Programme managed by the Special EU Programmes Body.





