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No put downs!

Jerry Tyrrell reflects on conflict
resolution work

Also:

Mary Hamilton and the experiences of
Tempo Historical Society

Brendan McAllister reports on a
USA Conference on Peace-making
and Conflict Resolution

CRC

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EDITORIAL

“YOU HAVE HISSED ALL MY MYSTERY LECTURES” is the apocryphal ticking off given by Dr Spooner to a wayward student. Unfortunately, despite our loudly proclaimed attachment to history, the truth is we know less than a quarter of what we think we know, and many aspects of our own history really are a mystery to us.

Mary Hamilton in this issue looks at the experience of the Tempo Historical Society and reflects on the reality of being a cross community organisation tackling the awkward issues of history, culture and identity. We think you’ll find it an enlightening read; the study of history has also has been an important jumping off point in a number of places for other educational and community ventures. And no apologies for the pun we used in the title of the article - we thought it appropriate in a number of ways!

Meanwhile, if you were wandering about the place last year you may have come across an elite who seemed to know what ‘NCPCR’ stood for (clue: it’s not a car park). Whether you finally cracked this puzzle or not, you need look no further as we publish two reflections on the National Conference on Peacemaking and Conflict Resolution (so that’s what it stood for!) which took place in Portland, Oregon in the middle of last year. Brendan McAllister shares the secrets of his soul - at least so far as it relates to this mega-conference.

Moving on to another set of initials, ‘QPEP’ is not a drug for helping you endure an overnight queue to get a 95" television for £5 in the January sales. The Q stands for Quaker before the Peace Education Project part of it. Well known in a number of circles at home and abroad for its excellent and innovative work, it is coming to the end of its 6 years but ‘Jentle Jiant Jerry’ Tyrrell (what was that about affirmative adjectives beginning with the same letter as your name?) reflects on some of the most important aspects of its work.

Finally, there is a review of a book and a couple of pamphlets on sectarianism written from a church and religious standpoint. We would like to include reviews of relevant books and publications in *Journal* - so next time a publication makes an impact on you, whether that’s good or bad, you can write us a review.

We are now into a second year’s cycle of producing this Journal. As part of an attempt to continue to develop its usefulness, an editorial panel will be meeting shortly. Your comments and contributions are, as ever, very welcome; material for the next issue should arrive by 10th May at the latest, but the sooner the better. You too can bare your community relations soul before a audience of, well, other interested individuals and groups at home and abroad and achieve the kudos which is your right!

‘Fervent’ Fergus Cumiskey
‘Robust’ Rob Fairmichael

○ *Mary Hamilton looks at Tempo Historical Society and community relations*

Upping the Tempo

Community relations is not the uppermost thought in the mind of anyone joining an historical society. However one could argue that community relations study cannot exist apart from a contextual setting such as religion, education, sport, politics, workplace - or history.

Sometimes an historical society may be formed with a particular area of interest in mind which will guarantee that the bulk of its membership will be drawn from a specified religious or political group. Examples of such societies are the Presbyterian Historical Society and the Ulster Society for the promotion of Ulster/British Heritage and Culture. The way it determines its geographical base may also reflect, for example, an episcopalian mind set (belonging to either the Roman Catholic or Church of Ireland churches) as in the case of Clogher Historical Society whose territorial base is the diocese of Clogher.

Mary Hamilton with Professor Finlay Holmes

usually consists of a litany of the heroics and sufferings of “our” righteous people and selected examples of the cruelty of the others. It is these sort of perceptions which keep many people away from a history talk which would be enlightening.

The most common type of historical society is founded to study the history of a particular geographical area. Tempo Historical Society falls into this category. It is also part of a phenomenon which has manifested itself in Fermanagh more than any other county and has earned it the name of “the crucible of local history”. These societies are of fairly recent origin (THS was formed in January 1988) and some of them cover areas that are without a town or village as a focus. The working class ethos of this contagion of new historical societies is one of its most heartening aspects.

The committee of Tempo Historical Society have learned on their feet how to run an historical society and in the process have inadvertently assisted in their own personal development. Chairman Peter Prunty has introduced and welcomed a bishop, reverend professors, a president of a national organisation, a titled lady, a Gaelic chieftain, the Belfast Harp Orchestra and many distinguished academics in different venues such as the old school in Tempo, the Milltown Manor, St Mary’s Community Hall, the Ardhowen (when our good friend Pat McDonnell staged his new play for our benefit) as well as the usual venue, the old farmhouse in the townland of Glenn.

We are constantly being told to forget the past, that it only opens up old wounds. History is seen by some as, like religion and politics, yet another taboo subject to be avoided in mixed company. It is our contention and experience that most people do not actually know a lot of history. The way which it is handed down through the common knowledge of certain key dates, the commemorations and celebrations which often antagonise “the other side” hardly constitutes a serious study. We might also mention “fireside” history which

At the beginning the committee members did not know much more history than the public we have been chiding two paragraphs ago but all have gained immeasurably from listening to many historians from all over Ireland. Tempo Historical Society has not taken the insular path of confining its interests to this small part of south eastern Fermanagh but, since 1989, has hosted a series of history talks which have covered many centuries, key

events and personalities in Irish history as well as crossing subject boundaries. Folklore, storytelling, music, song, literature, drama, map-making, crafts, Gaelic literature, sport and archaeology are some of the disciplines encountered.

From the beginning the committee expressed the wish that the society should draw its membership from “both communities”. It is an unfortunate but unavoidable fact that the Tempo Historical Society started off with an all Catholic committee. The result of this has been that Protestants think that the Society is Catholic while Catholics know that it is not! Thankfully, neither side “owns” the Society, but the corollary of this is that there is not the massive support that there is for church based activities.

small intimate space is the natural home of both instrumental traditional music and Sean Nos singing.

A key partnership from the time that the society started to run history talks was with the Workers Educational Association. In fact, as the local history societies grew in strength the WEA also prospered and there is now a Fermanagh Branch which produces its own magazine of local history, arts and culture called *Spark*.

Classes which the society has run under the auspices of the WEA, in addition to local history, are patchwork and calligraphy (with Florence Creighton), a women’s class with Dr Phil Kilroy and Irish language for beginners (taught by Oliver McLoughlin) which is still going strong.

How successful were these classes in terms of community relations? What did they hope to achieve?

The first consideration in organising a class is getting sufficient students to make it viable. This is the number one problem in an under-populated rural area. After that one may look at the finer points such as the Catholic/Protestant ratio! All of these classes were cross community but all had a greater preponderance of Catholics.

The women’s class taught us an important lesson about venues. The Heritage Centre Glenn is rented from a Catholic. An opportunity arose to use a room in Tempo which came into existence as the base for a social and economic audit of the area (in which Tempo Historical Society are joint partners with Tempo Development Association). It was thought a good idea to move the women’s class to the village and to try and set up Tempo Women’s Group as an independent body. The audit’s room is rented from a Protestant businessman. The Protestant/Catholic ratio of the group turned right around! Neutral venue - MINEFIELD!!!!!!

The story of the Irish class is particularly interesting. Its background is impeccably cross-community. Professor John Barkley came to give a talk on “Presbyterianism and the Irish language” which was also attended by Aodán MacPóilin of the Ultach Trust. During the conversation afterwards an all day event exploring related themes was suggested (which resulted in a day of three lectures entitled *Local History and the Irish language* with Barry Irvine, Professor Nicolas Williams and Aodán MacPóilin) and an Irish language class.

A fiddle player entertaining the society

The first venture of the new society in 1988 was to stage an exhibition of photographs, household and farm items in a vacant house in the town belonging to a member of the committee. This exhibition was very well attended by all sections and age groups of the population. Following this event there was a quest for premises to enable the group to become active and to invite the public to its events.

Tempo Historical Society began to rent the old two storey farmhouse situated on the winding narrow country road between Tempo and Trillick in 1989. This type of building couldn’t be more suitable because old houses have a character and atmosphere which is simple and unpretentious. It has no modern amenities and is lit by gas and heated by turf fires. The premises are particularly suitable for music sessions because the fireside and

History talks with themes related to the Irish language are also a regular feature of the society. If only more Protestants would come to them they would realise that something as important as a language is bigger than the sectarian use that is often made of it! They would realise that in the past many Protestants valued and loved the language. In any case, Irish and Scottish Gaelic are dialects of the one language. To quote Aodán MacPóilin;

“Planter and Gael stereotypes ignore how the people of Ulster and Scotland intermingled for a thousand years before the Plantation.”

They might also pick up fascinating pieces of information such as the Jacobite, pro-royalist stance of many Aisling poets. Lillus O’Laoire, a recent guest, told us that Irish turns of phrase and ways of thinking are very much alive in our Ulster speech. He said that, as an Ulsterman from Donegal he felt that Northern people were his people and seemed quite delighted with his visit to Fermanagh.

This brings us to an important point when we are dealing with cultural issues. With increased knowledge any intelligent person will readjust their pre-existing perceptions to accommodate the new facts. Anyone who has attended all our events will have had the privilege of travelling on an intellectual journey. The problem is that very few people have given the society the chance. We have one member who jokingly says that she must be due a prize for being the best attender!

With the exception of a few friends, we are searching for our audience with every history talk and no two audiences are precisely the same. As we intimated in our reference to the talks about Gaelic literature people are inclined to come along to a talk on a subject they are already familiar with and which is risk free for them. Thus we had some GAA supporters and players when Peter Quinn came to talk about the history of that organisation, we had many more Presbyterians than usual when our guest was Finlay Holmes recounting the history of Presbyterianism, and a substantial number of parishioners came to hear Bishop Duffy tell us about Fermanagh Gaelic literature.

Terence P McCaughey in his book *Memory and Redemption* states that:

“young people can grow up living physically very close to one another, but knowing almost nothing of how things appear when they are looked at from the other side of the fence.... hearing how it appears to the others can be a deeply disturbing experience.”

A Scottish Gallic poet, Iain Crichton Smith said

“The anthology of the other is a book I had not reckoned with.”

Rev McCaughey, who is a native of Belfast and Senior Lecturer in the Irish Department in Trinity College Dublin, will be the guest of THS on Wednesday 6th April. His book is a valuable overview of the stories told by the Protestant/Unionist community and the Catholic/Nationalist community and an attempt to supersede both with a prophetic, positive Christian contribution.

The religious dichotomy is not the only one. There are divisions caused by gender and by the generation gap. We have found history to be attractive to both men and women although there are more male historians and men usually have the leading roles in the drama of history. Feminism is definitely in its infancy in Fermanagh!

We have solved the generation problem! His name is Bill Teare, storyteller! We had the most unusual experience ever when Billy’s fans from the local primary school turned out in strength. The uninhibited responses, the enthusiasm, the ability to enter into the spirit of the moment were a joy to watch.

A valued relationship is with the Arts Council of Northern Ireland. We are forever grateful to Ciaran Carson for allocating us a budget with which to pay musicians for our monthly sessions. We have had the McPeake Family, Andy Dickson and Trevor Stewart, Len Graham and his wife Pádraigin ní Uallachain and Fintan Vallely this season. It would be remiss not to mention the loyal support of two Tempo music lovers; Briege McNally accompanies our guests on the keyboard and Maggie Murphy sings songs she learned from her mother.

Fintan Vallely told us the story of a young girl studying music who expressed surprise that Protestants played “our” music (Irish traditional music), not realising that, in her father’s time, playing in mixed religion groupings was commonplace and that her father played in sessions with Protestants. In just a generation, said Fintan, that knowledge was lost.

Love of music crosses all divides. We have witnessed this particularly in the case of pipe music where pipers from a Protestant band like to come along whenever we have uilleann pipers as guests.

How arrogant to think and how frustrating to be told “You can’t listen to this - this is Catholic” or “You can’t learn about that - that is Protestant”. One of the functions of an historical society is to give people the knowledge to back up their stand against the absurdity of such attitudes - “Knowledge is power”.

In our current tragedy every aspect of our existence has been illogically thrown into the fray. Many parts of our

culture are clearly politically neutral and we are indebted to the many, many talented guests who have spent evenings imparting their knowledge of their special subjects.

As this is being written the news bulletin is describing an attempt being made to burn down the Linen Hall Library. John Gray, librarian, was our guest when, with the help of Peter Collins, we organised an all day event about the United Irishmen called *A Brotherhood of Affection*. John Gray’s talk was about his predecessor in the Linen Hall, Thomas Russell, United Irishman, Protestant, Republican and avid book-reader.

Historical societies are competing for people’s free time with pubs, hotels, television, mid-Atlantic culture and with Education and Library Board funded evening classes. They are voluntary, charitable and exist on a pittance. The next time you hear somebody blaming our troubles on history why not consider looking into the matter more deeply?

Mediation on the move

Brendan McAllister reflects on his time at the National Conference on Peacemaking and Conflict Resolution (NCPCR) in Portland, Oregon, last summer.

The NCPCR consisted of a two-day training institute, followed by a three-day conference. The overall theme was “Diversity, Justice and Peace”, exploring “the challenge and potential of diversity - how peace and justice can be created and sustained in a world where difference is inevitable.” (*Conference programme statement*)

This biennial event has established itself as a primary international forum for academics, trainers and practitioners in the field of conflict resolution. While the vast majority of the eleven hundred participants came from within the United States, the attendance list included Australians; South Africans; two Japanese; a Palestinian; participants from Russia and the former Soviet republics and from eastern, central and western Europe. The strong Irish ‘party’ (north and south) were possibly equalled only by the South Africans as the largest group from abroad. The scale of the event was impressive and it was very well organized throughout.



The NCPCR Institute

I attended three workshops at the institute. The first was a one-day event presented by a team from the Process Work Centre in Portland and entitled *Deep Democracy: the Bridge from Conflict Resolution to Social Action* and based on a method developed by Arnold Mindell.

I registered for this workshop in the hope of picking up tips for possible work with community groups on the sectarian interface in Belfast. It had seemed to offer a way of building bonds between Protestants and Catholics which would be strengthened through joint action on social projects. Unfortunately, the workshop did not meet my

expectations. While the first half of the workshop imparted some useful theory and gave an over-view of basic skills required for “Deep Democracy” work, the second half failed to consolidate the basic message of the workshop. Instead, it degenerated into a kind of encounter therapy session dominated by Americans struggling very personally with issues such as race and sexual orientation.

Later it became apparent that the Irish and South African participants shared a similar disappointment with the workshop. The various Americans, living in a country with basic political consensus and living in a culture which extols the individual, were more inclined to become pre-occupied with personal, individualistic issues. By contrast, the Irish and South Africans seemed to share a desire to emphasize the communal dimension of conflict. Nevertheless, the Deep Democracy workshop did contain some valuable elements: an exercise to help mediators regain neutrality; consideration of Democracy as a value underlying conflict resolution; the importance of emotional factors within conflict; the effect of psychological projection on conflict and the importance of ‘inner work’ and self-awareness on the part of conflict resolvers.

My second workshop was another experiential event, called *Consensus: A Decision-making Model for Diversity, Justice and Peace*, given by Diana Lee Hirschi and Page Wilder of “Circle Dynamics”, Utah. True to their name, these two trainers insisted on working with the group seated in a large circle and took some time to extol the benefits of circular seating in group-work, e.g. “when in a circle, we’re all equal”; “in a circle we can all participate”.

The workshop gave a lot of attention to group-process and ground-rules before moving to an exploration of the Consensus Model. Their group-work techniques and exercises were heavily influenced by AVP (Alternatives to Violence Project) which is in the process of being established in N. Ireland. The Consensus Model turned

out to be a collation of common sense and of well known skills in group-work. However, the trainers’ delivery was clear and refreshing and my experience of the workshop was a healthy reminder of the value of approaching ‘heavy’ subjects in group-work in a light-hearted, gentle fashion.

The most valuable workshop which I attended was given by James C Melamed from the Mediation Centre in Eugene, Oregon. His subject was *Advanced Communication Skills in Mediation*. This workshop took the form of a master class, with Melamed pacing backwards and forwards in front of a large audience wearing a radio mike and talking us through a hand-out on communication skills. His lecture was laced with anecdotes to illustrate his points. He also allowed the audience opportunities to raise questions and engaged in dialogue with us. Considering the range of expertise in the hall, Melamed proved himself to be a highly competent and confident conflict mediation practitioner who was delightful to observe.

There were many gems of simple but shrewd advice, such as:

“The most flexible component of the system controls the system. You, as mediator, want to be the most flexible component of the system.”

and;

“Your true effectiveness is only as good as the party who’s having greatest trouble.”

Melamed expounded upon areas of theory, skill and competence, including the “Global Outcome Frame” for engaging the parties in an agreed aim for mediation; assisting them to clarify what they want; the value of “meta-frames” - a context for mediation which goes wider than the individualistic perspective of each party; developing rapport with the parties and “skills for assisting people to be at their best”. This was a high-quality performance by Melamed and at some stage I would hope to hold a seminar for practitioners based on the Melamed workshop.

The Conference

Conference plenary

The third day of NCPCR saw the start of the three-day conference. It began with a conference plenary addressed by Elizabeth Furse, a newly elected Congresswoman from Oregon with a record as an activist for civil liberties. Furse was followed by Jim Wallis of the Sojourners Community, Washington DC, who electrified the conference with an account of the gang summit which he had attended recently in Kansas. After a shooting during a service in a Boston church, one minister observed that if the churches did not go into the streets, the streets would go into the churches.

The Kansas gang summit was the initiative of two Baptist ministers who brought together 160 gang leaders from 26 cities across America. Jim Wallis was invited to attend as a facilitator. Addressing the NCPCR, Wallis was still flushed with euphoria and energy from the gang summit. In Portland, he threw down the gauntlet to the conflict resolvers gathered there from all over the United States, challenging them to reach out to the most embittered and violent sections of society. "Start with those most at risk and written off by society," he said, "those consumed with anger are the ones written off".

The gang summit had been managed in a way which enabled gang leaders to make peace with each other and produce a kind of manifesto for social change. The issue of race loomed large for Wallis. Observing the predominance of 'white' people at NCPCR, Wallis noted the structures of racism had even segregated those working in the conflict resolution field. (The August 1993 issue of *Sojourners* magazine had a detailed article on the gang summit.)

This does not take away from the value of single identity work in Northern Ireland, though it is a reminder of the value of Catholic and Protestant practitioners working together as models of cooperation.

Session on Conflict Resolution in South Africa

Consideration of the South African situation was one of the most stimulating aspects of NCPCR since there were many parallels with Northern Ireland. Of particular interest was the Peace Accord negotiated between the South African Government, the African National Congress and other opposition groups. South African participants at NCPCR included individuals who were responsible for implementing aspects of the Peace Accord or who were engaged in mediation projects at community level. There were, therefore, interesting examples of Afrikaners and 'blacks' collaborating in new initiatives and of American practitioners working on the ground in support of new projects.

Irish and South African participants decided to hold a fringe event so that a dozen of us could engage in joint reflection on NCPCR. On the day, more than fifty people turned up so that the Irish and South Africans became a spontaneous team of facilitators, dealing with people's questions on both our situations.

Two sessions on Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union

These were useful opportunities to hear from people in the vanguard of the embryonic conflict resolution 'industry' in these regions. A common feature was the work of the American based *Partners for Democratic Change* led by Ray Schonholtz. Since Schonholtz has previously worked with some of us in N. Ireland it was interesting to observe how he had developed his work as a mentor and consultant to conflict resolution commissions in central and eastern Europe. In all of the eastern block states, there are unresolved ethnic rivalries with the potential for Bosnian type conflict. Schonholtz has been resourcing strategically-placed academics and community leaders with conflict resolution theory and method as they develop structures to empower citizens who, by and large, have been conditioned into silent conformity.

The absence of democratic patterns in civic life has necessitated the development of a range of projects, from university courses to community committees, aimed at promoting new ways of addressing conflict. In many ways, we have a more advanced infrastructure in N. Ireland but Schonholtz' work carries implications for 'inter-ethnic conflict' as it expresses itself here.

Session on Northern Ireland

I participated as a panellist in this session chaired by John Darby of the Ethnic Studies Network, Coleraine. The other panellists were Derick Wilson ('Understanding Conflict' project) who focused on ways to support youth workers in cross community work here; Colin Knox and Joanne Hughes (University of Ulster) who reported on the work of community relations officers, and Marc Ross, an academic from Pennsylvania who has studied N. Ireland.

Ross observed that one of the features of our 'ethnic conflict' has been the changing interests of the parties during the course of the Troubles. For example, nationalists

had moved from campaigning for civil rights to challenging constitutional structures. Ross also asserted that a key issue was the way in which people here 'listened to the problem'. He suggested that we needed to go further than polite dialogue; that stories of mutual victimization had to be heard because 'healing is a pre-requisite to addressing each other's interests'. Ross affirmed the work of third-party facilitators who could find ways to give legitimacy to processes of dialogue.

Ross's respectful observations were a welcome endorsement of the ideas being developed by projects such as the Conflict Mediation Network. The principle of dialogue is well established here. However, circular, repetitive dialogue has undermined people's confidence in its potential in N. Ireland. Therefore, there is a need for practitioners to develop methods for creative dialogue. In this respect I found convergence with the views expressed by Derick Wilson since we both emphasized the importance of building relationships as a pre-requisite to progress.

The N. Ireland workshop had a full attendance of sixty to seventy people, including prominent people with a proven interest in studying our problem. I felt the workshop was lively and ended on an optimistic note.

Session on Making Mediation Culturally Relevant

This was an interesting workshop in which a dialogue developed between Americans from a variety of ethnic backgrounds (Latino, Native American, Korean, Black, Jewish and WASP). The Korean pointed out that in her culture people do not speak personally. Therefore, it was often inappropriate to use a face to face mediation method. Indeed, she added that "there may be times when conflict resolution does not serve justice".

In other words, some things are best left unsaid. There was general agreement with a Latino who argued that in cases where one party is much weaker than the other, the mediator should be prepared to become an advocate for the less powerful party as part of the conflict resolution process. I was surprised to find this piece of heresy so well received. People were agreed that mediating quick-fix, short term agreements was ethically wrong if mediators did not have an eye to social justice and structural change. In addition to agreements between the parties, work had to be done to support and sustain the parties afterwards.

This is clearly an issue for mediation practice in N. Ireland where we observe people shying away from mediation because they lack confidence that they will receive support afterwards, at a time when they may feel more vulnerable.

A final point of significance in this workshop of seasoned practitioners was the wide agreement that the mediation process was not cast in stone; that it should be very flexible in its various forms. This was evidence that in America, experienced mediators have become less dogmatic about favoured methods of mediation practice. There is a new emphasis on developing methods which are tailored to particular situations. This has encouraged me to build on work already done with CMN (Conflict Mediation Network) by John Paul Lederach (*see Journal #3*) which has pointed us in a similar direction.

Session on Working with Police

My last workshop at Portland involved two specialists on cultural awareness training with police. Both were former police officers. I had a particular interest in this workshop with its potential for work in N. Ireland. In this sense it proved useful.

They spoke of the police environment being militaristic and hierarchical. Therefore, workshops on cultural awareness presented trainers with particular problems, e.g. encouraging police officers to step out of role, aside from rank, and speak freely. Such exercises challenged the whole police subculture.

Another useful point was the trainers' preference for working with raw recruits who tend to be more motivated and open-minded compared to the seasoned, hardened, experienced officers who were inclined to be 'set in their ways'.

It was also important for trainers to have credentials which police would respect and for them to involve senior officers in the process in order to secure strategic support. This workshop also included the idea of addressing the concept of 'community' with police officers and asking if the public agreed with police definitions of community.

Perhaps NCPCR was most memorable for the human connections made there: South Africans struggling with communal conflicts and political instability, Americans developing new aspects of mediation practice, and Europeans starting out in the whole field. Altogether it was a marvellous opportunity to widen the horizons and contact of my world as a mediation practitioner and organizer.

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○ *Jerry Tyrrell reflects on some aspects of the Quaker Peace Education Project's work*

Affirmation, co-operation and communication; “Three bland nice” themes of conflict resolution?

“I was brought up to believe that self-praise was no praise at all”. With that statement, the principal ‘passed’ on the affirmation adjectives exercise, at an INSET (in-service training day). The exercise required the participants to write their name, and a personal quality with the same initial, on a label for themselves. As facilitator, I was tempted to argue the point. I didn’t. Instead I let him pass as he was entitled to do, and used relevant moments in the ensuing workshop to underline the theory behind affirmation. However since affirmation along with co-operation and communication are skills or attitudes that underpin QPEP’s approach to conflict resolution skills workshops, it did set me thinking.

For something that is parodied as “being nice to each other”, the promotion of affirmation consistently throughout the six years of QPEP’s life has been a struggle. A definition or two would help here.

“Affirming somebody is acknowledging and appreciating good and admirable properties and abilities in him or her. It’s possible to find such qualities in every human being. Therefore, every person can be affirmed.”
(Judson et al, 1984).

“Affirmation is the response to all that is positive in the people we meet; the expression of our belief in them. It does not seek to manipulate as flattery does and it springs from belief in ourselves - not the pretence that we are better than we are, but an objective awareness of our own strengths as well as our weakness.” (Bowers et al, 1989)

To affirm rather than put each other down sometimes challenges a habit of a lifetime in all of us. It also challenges the way we, particularly men, “naturally” relate to each other. Recently I was with a group of people at a coffee break; two of the men present who were good friends and colleagues began a bit of light-hearted banter. It was good-humoured and witty, and was appreciated by those present. It reinforced my sense of belonging to that group. I also appreciate the type of wit associated with programmes like *Clive Anderson*

Talks Back, and *Have I Got News for You*, two programmes that have made an art form out of putdowns. The traditional debating society is also the home of wit and sarcasm, where great stress is put on making “wounding” remarks at the opposition’s expense. This combination of the adversarial approach, the putdown and the lack of integrity probably makes debating the complete antithesis of conflict resolution as a form of communication!

The first school that invited QPEP to do a workshop, did so on the initiative of a teacher who I’d known in the Colmcille Debating Society. I asked him if he was still involved, and he said that he wasn’t, he had got tired of “picking out a part of a person’s personality that they might not be proud of, and then making fun of it.” He said it was one thing to highlight the positive, but the need to win led to a competitive element, with normally good people attacking each other insensitively.

In order to belong to any group, whether it is a debating society, a workplace, a school staff room, or in a coffee bar, we have to agree to spoken or unspoken rules, written or unwritten rules in order to survive in that group.

Jenny Mosley, an education consultant in Wiltshire points to Maslow’s *Hierarchy of Human Needs* illustrating that after physiological or survival needs, safety needs, and a need for love and affection a sense of belonging is one of the greatest human needs. Arguably a sense of belonging is a key to being affirmed, which is probably why we as human beings will do almost anything if we have a sense of belonging. The loyalist prisoner who cites his sense of belonging, as a measure of pride in his paramilitary group, underlies this.

We often do extraordinary things to show to ourselves and others that we belong. The principal mentioned above was a great practical joker, and his staff were encouraged to participate. One member of staff referred to a time when she was new at the school, when she was asked by the principal to play a trick on a colleague in another school. She did so because she was asked, and she was new, and referred to it as an “initiation”. This is not the time to explore the role of initiation ceremonies

Eileen Healy and Rainer Schultz lead a small group discussion

in establishing the ethos of a group, but I think that it does underline the need for ground rules at workshops, particularly where participants know each other well, or think they do.

Ground rules are a safety net. In its submission to Initiative '92 (*QPEP 1993*), a group of QPEP staff and volunteers drew attention to the Ground Rules that accompany nearly every workshop we do. They allow us to explore new ways of relating to each other. Two of the key ones are "No Putdowns", and "Look for and point out positive qualities in one another." This was once described by a lifer (to participants in a prison workshop after it had started), as "This is a mutual admiration society and I'm the chairman."

QPEP endeavours to provide alternative ways of dealing with conflict, and encourages choice. A choice between co-operation and competition, a choice between communication and non-communication, and a choice between a putdown and a put-up. Miedzian makes the point that "boys who have studied conflict resolution have learned to be good listeners, to 'put-up' rather than to put down, to co-operate, to see things from the other perspective. They are more likely to become patient, empathic, nonviolent fathers."

Once the need for a sense of belonging has been met, the next human need is self-esteem. "Self-esteem needs

involve the desire to have a positive image of yourself, and to receive recognition, attention and appreciation from others for your contributions." (*Mosley, 1991*).

If self-esteem is a universal human need then it comes as no surprise that "people who work consistently to make positive changes in society have three characteristics in common; they are optimistic and competent and have high self-esteem". (*Judson et al, 1984*). My experience is that this is generally true of community relations trainers, but there is a price for this, of course. The more optimistic and competent we are, and the greater self-esteem we have, the more likely it is for these to be taken for granted by others. Leaders deserve affirmation, as much as other participants.

To illustrate this point Judson invites her readers to think of a friend who "you consider to be extremely capable, intelligent and confident. If you were to tell this person directly how you perceive him or her, he or she would most likely deny or laugh at some part of your affirmation." (*Judson et al, 1984*) Most of us are doing better than we think; and certainly better than we feel. Affirmation can bring up the most mixed feelings in the recipient. That is why it is a struggle.

Dugald McCullough in his excellent article in the last issue of *Journal*, makes the point that "In some ways, it is the internalised oppression which is more serious.

Although oppression is always imposed from the outside to begin with, both on individuals and on groups, the great bulk of the damage is done by the effects of hurtful experiences continuing to operate.” (McCullough, 1993)

Affirmation has to be very powerfully communicated to break through this internalised oppression and contradict feelings of stupidity and worthlessness. Working with adult groups we have often done an exercise where participants are asked to say what they wish an adult had never said or done to them as a child. Invariably individuals come up with instances of mistreatment that if not abusive, are bordering on it.

With groups of all ages, we use an exercise called “Dummy Bump”. Firstly we encourage the group to “brainstorm” a list of putdowns, and then putups. Invariably the first list outnumbered the second. Then we act out the story of Dummy Bump, a child who looks different. At a crucial moment in the story the group is encouraged to shout out the putdowns, and later, the putups. This leads to discussion about times when they have experienced what it is like to be Dummy Bump. This evokes many powerful memories of when we were mistreated, and some of when we were affirmed.

Alice Miller makes the point that “we could not grasp why we were being humiliated, brushed aside,

intimidated, laughed at, treated like an object, played with like a doll, or brutally beaten (or both)”. (Miller, 1992)

The more accurate an affirmation is, in terms of being true, kind and important, the more of a contrast it is with the messages that we had internalised as young people. In the context of the classroom, where pupils often have no choice as to whether they take part in a workshop, they can sometimes be disruptive. As Bowers points out “affirming a disruptive member of a group - though often very difficult - is far more effective than censure.” (Bowers et al, 1989)

One criticism of affirmation is that it is forced, or artificial, particularly in a situation where an individual is under pressure to take part. The “you may pass” rule is in operation, but individuals feel under pressure all the same. The challenge of affirmation is that every person can be affirmed. We resent being put in a position of having to affirm someone we are unable or unwilling to.

The process of working through the emotions of doing so however, creates opportunities for transforming a conflict. Val Carpenter’s work is based on the assumption that for “one human being to be less than 100% respectful and welcoming of another human being means that they must be hurting. Usually this hurt is unconnected with present

Affirmation hands - a chance for each child to affirm others

reality and is connected with the past.” (Carpenter, 1993) There has been a debate within QPEP about affirmation being a “comforting pretence” on the basis that “this is very dangerous as it can ruin the benefits of sensible affirmation when they are needed.” (Caspers and Gallagher, 1993). I think that flattery is a comforting pretence, and that affirmation as defined at the start of the article, takes these dangers into consideration.

One thing I learnt from my experience in running workshops is that growing up we are more likely to have experienced and been damaged by inappropriate criticism rather than inappropriate affirmation.

I would argue that criticism without affirmation is oppressive. It either means the recipient developing a “thick skin”, or leaving him/her feeling incompetent, pessimistic and with low self-esteem.

According to a recent issue of *Mediation* (Winter 1993) “low self-esteem is widely recognised as an important factor amongst causes of low educational attainment, crime, sexual abuse, violence, loneliness and unhappiness.”

What options are open then to change practices or behaviours that are inappropriate, in the context of conflict? Val Carpenter in her clear thinking article in *Mediation* explores how the mediator can remain neutral “whilst holding on to and implementing our values and principles”, making the point that “to say nothing and remain silent is to side with the forces of prejudice and oppression.” (Carpenter, 1993)

The experience of QPEP in running workshops has been that adults, when asked, find the way they respond to a recent conflict reminds them of ways they were treated when children. I’m not the only parent who finds himself when chastising my children, saying the same words in the same tone as was used to me when I was a child.

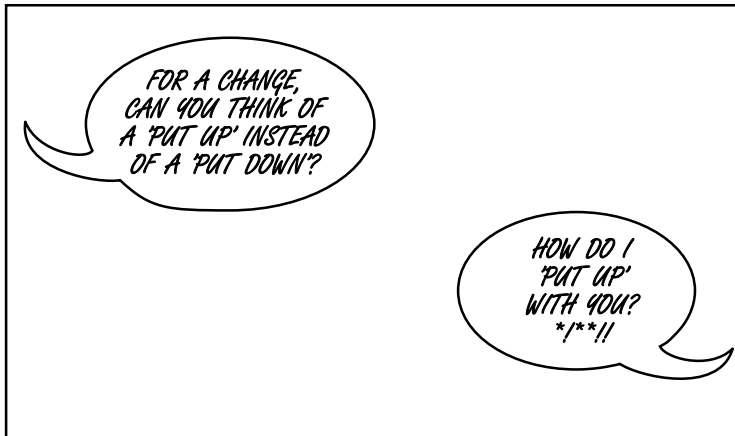
Our experience of criticism and affirmation as children colours our ability to take on board either as adults. One member of the QPEP team gives as an example of a put-up, or a word she heard as a girl that made her feel good, the word “Yes”. It was so rare a response to a request, more often than not it would be “maybe”, or “we’ll see”, or “no”.

Affirmation is not an easy option; but it is very effective once we have worked through the emotions. It is

particularly difficult in the midst of a conflict to remember that the person who is causing the aggravation (not us, of course), is somebody who we can affirm. We would rather not.

Of the three themes, affirmation is the one that is most misunderstood; and meets with the greatest resistance. The other two themes, or skills, are:

Co-operation. No problem here, we would agree with that.... Except we live in a world where business at least



makes a virtue of competition, a necessity even. “We have to be more competitive to survive....” The trouble with that is the we becomes an us, and the them, well the them become the losers. If like Val Carpenter, you start from a position that “people do not have intrinsically conflicting and competing interests”, it goes against

the grain. The devastating effect on adults of being “11+ failures” is an obvious example of the cost of competition.

There is exciting work being done about the nature of the learning process that knocks on the head the notion that without streaming in schools the slow children will hold back the quick ones. If the quick ones are involved in teaching the slower ones, both learn quicker. Paired reading schemes, cued spelling and peer tutoring programmes are examples of this.

Communication. Well, of course, we can all agree on this one. It’s better to talk than fight, to listen rather than ignore. Except, of course, it depends who you are talking to or prepared to talk to. The current political debate about who’s talking to who, and whether clarification is negotiation, illustrates that developing communication skills is a key element in conflict resolution.

For six years, QPEP has been leading conflict resolution skills workshops based on affirmation, co-operation and communication. Where has this been leading us? Arguably these skills, practical as they are, enable children to deal more effectively with conflicts, anyway. However one exciting project has involved QPEP going one stage further. Last Autumn we embarked on a pilot project with two local primary schools. We undertook a six week programme at each school, introducing a P7 class to mediation. As a result this term, the schools are committed to introducing mediation in the playground.

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Phone: 0504 - 265621 extension 5225;
Fax: 0504 - 260737;
E Mail: KJBC33 MG VAX.
Their 96-page (A5 size) Annual Report for 1992-1993 is available from the above address, price £1.50.

○ Clem McCartney

Co-ordinating training in the former Yugoslavia

Last October a meeting took place in Budapest of people involved in conflict resolution training in former Yugoslavia (a term people from that region do not like). It was organised by a group called the Co-ordinating Committee for Conflict Resolution Training in Europe (CCCRTE): a bit of a mouth-full but a structure we might have appreciated in Northern Ireland twenty years ago when overseas trainers began to descend on us to offer us their programmes and panaceas.

CCCRTE was set up after Adam Curle proposed the idea at the Helsinki Citizen Assembly in Spring 1992. He saw that many people were getting involved in former Yugoslavia, perhaps not understanding what was needed and without support and guidance. Since then CCCRTE has tried to co-ordinate efforts to develop conflict resolution skills in the new republics.

The Budapest meeting was intended to evaluate experience to date and brought together 25 people from Bosnia, Croatia, Serbia and Slovenia, and 15 other people from Western Europe who have been involved in training. Again such a gathering might have been a good idea in Northern Ireland at one time.

Actually the meeting was more of a group building exercise than a rigorous evaluation of practice. The meeting mainly used self awareness exercises as a method of work, which was very affirming but not very critical. But in any case the fact that so many people from the different republics were meeting, often for the first time, meant that the emphasis became more on building relations. However the bit that was missing was a focus on action and practical problem solving - feeling good was more important than making an impact on the situation and making things better. Perhaps this is too true of most training, including the projects going on in the Balkans. And is it not true of much of our own practice in Northern Ireland? When people are looking for help here they have turned not to conflict resolution practitioners but to clergy and other people they trust.

Some practical proposals did come from the meeting, including the idea that a group of activists from the republics of former Yugoslavia should visit Northern Ireland and meet people involved in conflict resolution work here. It should be of mutual benefit so let's hope it happens soon.

REVIEW

Churches and sectarianism

Reviewed by *Rob Fairmichael*

“BORING, BORING, BORING” might be your initial reaction to the thought of church studies on sectarianism - or perhaps also the thought that the subject had been done to death. However Duncan Morrow and Inge Radford have already shown up some of the deficiencies in knowledge in relation to this area. These three studies are well written and form a valuable addition to thinking on sectarianism and anti-sectarianism.

Sectarianism: a Discussion Document is the collective paper put together by a working group of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting, which has representation from both Catholic and Protestant churches. This study is 159 pages long including useful appendices giving further background information; it's a snip at £5. Its anecdotal style in detailing some of the current effects of sectarianism makes that part easy reading.

Its section on family attitudes places part of the groundspring of sectarianism where it rightly belongs - in the home. To misquote a well known slogan from the past, home rule can be bigoted rule; it's not that we intend it so, but even nice, liberal parents who are as mixed as they come can give out signals that are picked up and amplified, or fail to challenge other signals. “We may not notice ourselves doing it. We may deem ourselves noble, decent, goodhearted but the twisted, cancerous outcomes of our tuition, conscious or unconscious, are all around us.” (p. 71)

As a survey of the current situation, and an analysis of the malaise that exists in Northern Ireland, I would recommend this book and it should be treated as its subtitle suggests - a discussion document. It concludes with recommendations. There are some aspects of the situation I would feel it doesn't deal with. One is the extent to which the possibility is developing of being unionist/loyalist and anti-sectarian, or nationalist/republican and anti-sectarian. Can people be persuaded that they damage their cause, whatever it is, by being sectarian? How compatible is anti-sectarianism with key elements of republicanism, loyalism or middle-of-the-road-ism?

There is another aspect of the situation which I would feel is neglected in a study which focuses on the issue from a

church perspective; that is the extent to which a distortion of Christian beliefs upgirds people in their military struggles (on all sides including the state). I am referring here to the way in which all sides tend to feel “God is on our side” and that “we fight a just war”. While there have been occasional prophetic voices crying way out in the wilderness, the churches as a whole have not done a good job in helping people to examine violence, ‘just war’ teachings, and the Christian message on killing. Where comment has come it has tended to be either simplistic (“Thou shalt not kill” when killing is regarded as satisfactory in other situations) or purely condemnatory.

Joe Liechty's *Roots of Sectarianism* (51 pages) is a really excellent study of the developing relationship, through history, of religion and politics. It is clear and concise, looking at key points in Irish history to illustrate the theme. If you wanted one short publication to look at the historical roots of division in Northern Ireland then this can be it. As an antidote to despair he ends with the anti-sectarian example of the Protestant and combatively evangelical minister in famine times who threw himself wholeheartedly into fighting starvation and died from his work; here's to the memory of Rev Robert Traill.

Gary Mason's brief paper of 6 pages of text looks at commonalities with the (Roman) Catholic tradition from an evangelical perspective; it is a valuable contribution on that front asking the question: *How do we speak the truth in love?*. Johnston McMaster's forthcoming publication (CRC) on possibilities for non-liturgical cooperation should prove useful here in a practical way.

Sectarianism; a Discussion Document is priced at £5 (postage within UK 79p); *Roots of Sectarianism in Ireland* by Joseph Liechty is £1.95 (postage 36p); *How should we evangelical Christians handle our differences with those in the Roman Catholic church?* by Gary Mason is 50 pence (19p postage). Available from some bookshops or direct from; Irish Inter-Church Meeting, 48 Elmwood Avenue, Belfast BT9 6AZ.

They are also available from the Community Relations Information Centre, 31 Castle Lane, Belfast (tel. 0232 - 311881).

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Trainer's Network Meetings Winter/Spring 1994

Friday 18th February, 10.00am - 12.30pm: *Cultural Traditions and CR Training*

This first meeting will feature Richard English and Mark Adair. Richard was commissioned by the Cultural Traditions Group of the CRC to critique cultural traditions work and its underpinning values and assumptions last year. He will talk through his analysis and Mark, Project Officer with the Local Cultural Traditions Group, will respond. Richard has posed some stimulating discussion questions to follow his input in the morning.

Friday 25th March, 10.00am - 12.30pm: *Bubble Dialogue*

Jim McCorry demonstrates a computer package for cross-community dialogue, particularly effective in working with young people. Jim will provide a hands-on opportunity to demonstrate and practice use of the package.

Friday 22nd April, 10.00am - 12.30pm: *Identity Structure analysis*

Peter Weinrich, psychology lecturer at the University of Ulster, will provide an overview of his identity structure analysis questionnaire and its implications for the evaluation of community relations training and education programmes.

European Conference on peace-making and conflict resolution

THE STEERING COMMITTEE of the ECPCR met in January and plans are going ahead for the next conference. It is happening in San Sebastian, Spain from 8 - 12 October 1994, and invitations to take part should be going out during February. Everyone involved in Peace-making and Conflict Resolution in Ireland is welcome to attend and also invited to talk about their work and experience.

The conference will be in two parts. The first two days, called the Institute, is an opportunity to offer and take part in training and to share and experience each other's practice. Sessions can be from half a day to the whole two days so it is an opportunity to do something reasonably substantial. What we are doing in Ireland is often of great interest to others so we should think of offering some training or demonstrating our practice.

The last three days of the conference will be shorter sessions, usually two or more speakers introducing a topic from different perspectives. There will be plenary sessions with guest speakers, but we can offer to contribute to other working group sessions, and again our experience is very helpful to others. Some themes have been selected already but we can suggest other topics and appropriate speakers. *If you want more information contact Joe Hinds of the Community Relations Council, or Clem McCartney.*

A Guide to Grants for Community Relations Work in Northern Ireland

The Community Relations Council has produced a 64-page guide to grants available to support community relations work. In addition to the Council's own grant schemes the guide includes information on independent trust funds and statutory agency sources such as the Youth Council, Education and Library Boards, District Councils and the Central Community Relations Unit. Free copies of the Guide are available from the Community Relations Information Centre (tel:0232-311881).