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## Lion & Lamb is a publication of ECONI

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## Stewardship

As a guiding principle for social engagement and community development the Christian concept of stewardship offers a radical alternative to the controlling forms of leadership and decision making that have characterised most organisations.

Traditionally leadership has been defined in authoritarian terms. Leaders make the decisions about strategy and policy and those below implement them. Although management gurus have advocated the redistribution of power as a technique for greater efficiency, by and large real power is still the prerogative of a privileged few, and this remains the form of governance that orders the major institutions of church, state and commerce.

Stewardship is essentially a willingness to take responsibility for our social institutions, community needs and political structures without resorting to over-control or the need to hold all the power. Stewardship emphasises ownership, empowerment and partnership as a value system at the heart of our organisations. It stresses that without the power to participate in the decision-making process people will not take ownership and responsibility for the outcome. For democracy to succeed and communities to develop, ownership and empowerment have to be experienced by all participants at every level. This is an insight slowly and painfully emerging from the failed politics and cultural exclusion of the past.

Partnership, as an expression of stewardship, is the experience of working with others for a common good through a balance of power. If a partnership is to be credible, joint power, and consequently joint accountability, are necessary. Partnerships are based on inclusivity, interdependence and the responsibility at every level to define the vision and values of a programme or organisation.

In this edition these issues are discernible in the concerns of our main contributors as they consider the relationship of the Church to the community. Although these articles wrestle with varied and complex problems, what they collectively raise are questions about the nature of the church's engagement with society and the values that undergird our service. I don't think it's unfair to suggest that the Church has not always been concerned about partnership and the practice of stewardship in the wider community. However, beneath our tendency to be exclusive and controlling lie other values that, if allowed to inform our engagement, will make our contribution a vital and transformative one. As Peter Block reminds us, the spiritual meaning of stewardship is "... to honour what has been given to us, to use power with a sense of grace, and to pursue purposes that transcend short-term self-interest".

# comment

Dorothy and David McMillan



## Process and Product

This is 'red' month in Paul's nursery school, so today he was working on making a red picture. First Paul chose a magazine page with a girl in black and white holding a collapsed, red umbrella. The teacher and Paul talked about the umbrella - what colour it was, how it got broken, what the girl might do with it ... Next he discussed with his teacher how he was going to cut all the way around the picture to remove the white edging. Then he did it - he took a pair of scissors and trimmed expertly around the girl with the red umbrella. Lovely! Now to stick it onto a red page with Paul's name on it and the job would be complete - ready to take home to admiring parents. Paul picked up the white trimmings, glued each one carefully to the red page and proudly declared the job complete. He moved away to play with the sand, ignoring the beautifully trimmed umbrella picture and leaving the teacher to ponder the reason why. Simple, really: for the three year old, process is more important than product. The job itself was fulfilling and rewarding, an end-product unnecessary. The prospect of a tasteful, red umbrella picture hanging on the living room wall does not feature in Paul's mindset. His priorities are involved with the here and now.

Dorothy McMillan - Playgroup Leader

This is a critical month in Northern Ireland and still the politicians are working to find a way of creating a new comprehensive and inclusive arrangement (well, some of them are anyway). The talks and negotiations seem interminable and many are left wondering how politicians and Government can sustain the investment of time, money and effort. The answer lies in the playgroup observation. No, it's not because our politicians are a crowd of three year olds. Northern Ireland is served by many very dedicated politicians on all sides. Part of our commitment in ECONI over the years has been to challenge the Evangelical community to recognise that fact and stop anathematising the world of politics and politicians, whatever their views. The lesson is this - and it applies to us all: we are happy to live for the 'here' and 'now' provided the 'now' is peaceful and doesn't disrupt our selfish way of life. We are in fact happy enough with process because we have no capacity to envisage a finished product. The Belfast Agreement was a statement of intended accommodation between competing aspirations, not a shared vision for the future. Each political party continues to articulate its supporters' vision of the future - we as a community have still adequately to articulate a vision of the future, a finished product for us all. Until we do we will continue to appear to the wider world like three year olds in a Playgroup, content to live with process because we lack the capacity to envision product.

David McMillan - Playgroup member

I can vividly remember where I was in November 1989 as the Berlin wall collapsed. Tucked away in Pitlochry Scotland for a Christian leaders management course I lay awake listening to the live reports on radio. Since then we have become accustomed to the political miracle. The last decade of this century has seen remarkable steps taken around the world as seemingly frozen political landscapes have melted in the thaw of a cold war brought to an end by a combination of popular revolt and the internal decay of totalitarian regimes.

We live in interesting times, which in some cultures is regarded as somewhat of a mixed blessing. Harold McMillan famously commented that what politicians dread is events. Somehow we all feel more secure in the certainties of our routine and ideological divisions. There is something deeply threatening to us all when the unthinkable happens and neatly compartmentalised opponents step out of their box and into our shoes!

As Evangelical Protestants we have had something of a hard time over the last ten years. Gone are the certainties of the enemies that defined us. Enter the complexity of a fallen world groaning for the redemption from on high. Liberal democratic capitalism to which we turned in our fight against godless communism may yet turn out to be the real enemy of the faith, corrupting with its materialism from within and growing in opposition to our certainties of faith from without. The monolith of Catholicism cracks and we fear that somewhere in its midst the Spirit may be at work among people God loves and for whom Christ died.

Yet we say we believe in a sovereign God who is active in history. We celebrate that in Jesus, in a seemingly insignificant life lived out in a remote corner of a totalitarian empire, God has dwelt among us and reconciled all things to himself by making peace on the cross (Colossians 1:15-20). We anticipate every week in our worship, in prayer and in sharing bread and wine, that God's kingdom will come, that God's will should be done on earth as in heaven.

It was such a radical faith that sustained the early church in the face of interesting times, from the first day that the persecutor Saul turned up at a prayer meeting to the long days and nights of beatings and martyrdom at the hands of despotic emperors. Life in this world was redeemed by the only reality that mattered – Christ in you, the hope of glory (Colossians 1:27). This was the perspective that made it possible to

fulfil their Christian responsibilities to government, to the community and to the believers.

This is the context to which we must bring our response to recent developments in Northern Ireland. We may rightly debate the use of the word historic, but we certainly live in interesting times. And the reality is that Evangelicals are not all agreed on the significance of the events which have seen Irish Republicanism embark and continue on a journey from militarism to politics.

As I see it we must not only face this fact but openly and honestly address it. The danger of not doing so is to allow politics to inform our faith relationships instead of faith informing our political responsibilities.

We must not baptise this opportunity to make peace with a kingdom significance that is not biblically warranted. Healing the hurt of our conflict is spiritual work but it takes place in the context where violence and veto, threat and terror has created the culture of hate which continues to mark many lives. Our yearning for the political miracle must confront the reality that the real challenge for peace is not the moment of change but the journey on which this is but one flawed yet significant signpost.

Equally neither should we demonise a process in which many of the choices at this time are primarily a matter of political judgement and not moral appeasement. The early church knew nothing of democracy and was called on to submit to the most immoral of regimes. Faced with being carried into exile by empires that had dealt violently with them, the people of Israel were required by God to work for the welfare of the community they now found themselves among. A desire for vengeance and bitterness born out of pain can too easily take root in our lives, hardening our hearts not only to our neighbour but also to God. The only spiritual remedy is to be found in the forgiveness and love of God, where God's justice is embraced by God's mercy.

The problem with interesting times is that they test the commitment we have, not only to do justice and to love mercy, but also to walk humbly with God and each other.

## ... a reflection on 1 Peter 2:11-4:6 Glenn Jordan

### Life on the Interface

The excitement of the early days of faith was now receding. The enthusiasm of missionary expansion was being tempered in the fires of persecution. Here was a new movement learning to stand alone in a world that was growing increasingly hostile to its existence. They had been scattered to the four winds of the empire and shorn of the shelter of an approved religion, now the first generation of its leaders was passing away and still their Lord had not returned.

From the far-flung corners of the Empire word came to Peter of low level persecution of the believers. He remembered the words of Jesus, *“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first.”* So he writes a letter to these Christians in the backwoods of the Empire to encourage them in their trials.

Peter’s first letter is a call to holiness in troubled times, and a recognition that even suffering can yield fruit in the hands of God. He tells them that the Christian’s proper response to pressure is submission. The only weapon we arm ourselves with, he says, is the same attitude that Christ displayed when he suffered in his body (4:1).

Not much of a comfort, you might think, to those who were enduring the whip and the sword. But such is the way of radical holiness.

Does this letter have any particular relevance today in Northern Ireland? Many would identify this time as one of great uncertainty and anxiety. Some would even say that we are contending for the faith against those who would seek to destroy it. In a time when the Christian message is at best tolerated and at worst reviled, how should a Christian respond?

He spends a long time reminding them of the glorious salvation that is theirs, by comparison they were only passing through this world as aliens and strangers. But having encouraged them he turns to address their situation more directly.

From chapters 2:11 to 3:7 he is concerned with how Christians are to live on the interface with those who persecute them and he offers three case studies of circumstances in which Christians may be the victims of an

abuse of power. It is important to note that these case studies are given for general application and not limited to the particular circumstances they describe.

For instance, the instructions to slaves in 2:18-25 are not confined to Christian slaves, but are given as illustrations of how any Christian, as a slave to God (2:16), should behave when they are victims in an unequal power relationship. Similarly, his primary purpose in 3:1-6 is not to instruct women on how to dress, but, combined with the verses that follow, he uses the complexities of marriage relationships to instruct all Christians on how to behave in difficult relational contexts.

### 2:11-12 Life among the Pagans

These opening verses in the section serve as a summary statement for what follows. One writer describes them as the sketch of Peter’s battle plans for engagement with the enemy. A little too militaristic perhaps, better to say they describe the pattern for relationships with those who are not part of the Christian community. He describes the believers as *aliens and strangers* (a familiar theme cf. 1:1, 17) among the pagans (2:11,12).

Peter’s basic strategy for life among the pagans is that the Christians should live good lives and a little later on he spells out what that good life would look like. He is realistic enough to know that living good lives will not make them immune from accusation. In fact, given that believers are part of a heavenly kingdom, they may even **expect** to be accused of doing wrong according to the world’s values, when they are actually living according to kingdom values.

This inevitable conflict with society is not won by aggressive behaviour or by adopting the tactics of one’s accusers but by good conduct. There will come a day when what is being portrayed as being wrong will actually be seen to be right. But the victory may not be until *the day of visitation* (2:11). The challenge comes in waiting patiently for that Day rather than seeking vindication in advance of the Day.

### 2:13-17 Life with the State

Peter now moves on to give a series of examples of how this *good life* might look in a variety of relationships. The first example of public morality is the relationship to the state. The

general character of this relationship (as with all the relationships that are discussed) is *submission on account of the Lord*.

Now this verse is a little more complex than it might look, and some explanation is necessary. The kind of submission that Peter is describing here is voluntary and not conditional. Not only that, but it is primarily directed towards *every created human being* of which the Emperor and his Governor are given as the first example (perhaps because in the midst of persecution they might be perceived as the hardest to respect). Submission to everybody, and especially the political powers, is first and foremost for the Lord's sake.

The implication of this verse for a people undergoing persecution is profound in very practical ways. Christians, because of their commitment to God, are to pay proper respect to everybody, including those who persecute them, even to the political powers, who either sanction the persecution or turn a blind eye to it. They are to give up efforts to gain power and authority over other human beings and instead pursue the good of every one they meet. The believers are to respect and honour everybody, including their persecutors since even they are creatures of God, made in his image and thus worthy of respect.

## 2:18-25 Life as a Victim

Peter chooses the experience of household slaves to illustrate the proper response of believers when they are victims of an abuse of power. In doing so, he introduces to his readers the possibility that they may have to suffer for their faith. This is difficult teaching and must be interpreted with careful attention to the context in which it was written.

Given that he has already addressed the believers as slaves of God (2:16) it is appropriate to widen the application to all believers, using the household servants as stand-ins. In this way he subtly introduces the idea of persecution without necessarily directly accusing the state of abuse.

The original Greek words used, and their order in verse 18, indicate that servants are urged, out of reverence for God, to honour and respect their masters. Their motivation is respect for God who receives their service as if done to him.

This is crucial to Peter's argument since, if the service is done primarily to God, it means that their performance is not determined by the actions of their masters. So regardless of how their masters behave, they are to honour them as if they were honouring God. Those who bear up under such harsh treatment because of their reverence for God please God by their actions (2:19).

This is unpleasant teaching and so Peter offers an argument in the example of Christ. He did not yield to sin despite the unjust treatment he received. Peter makes it clear that following the way of Christ may also mean a share in his destiny on earth, which was death, so he tells them they should *follow in his steps* (2:21). Not a pleasing prospect, but part of the pattern left for them by their Lord. The pattern of Christ's life is also offered as an encouragement to them, that in their suffering they are identifying with Christ, and they like him can trust to him who judges justly (2:23).

In such a context as these people faced the use of words like death, life, wounds and healing (2:24) must have sounded acutely poignant. Peter's use of the Old Testament here (2:23-25), and especially of Isaiah 53:5 (2:24c) is surely significant in that he draws his readers' attention to the redemptive nature of the sufferings of Christ, sufferings which were unjustly inflicted. Furthermore, he reminds them that because of His sufferings they returned to the fold.

This idea of the redemptive nature of wounds inflicted unjustly is a new idea in the letter, and I hesitate to mention it given the great sensitivity surrounding the reality of the great numbers of innocent victims in Northern Ireland, but also because I'm not even sure of the theology. I mention it, though, because in combination with what follows there may be something worth exploring here. Peter speaks in the opening verses of chapter 3 of life in relationship, and the responsibility of living in relationship in such a way as to win others for Christ (3:1). This section is linked to the previous one by the connective *likewise* or *in the same way*.

He couldn't be speaking of husbands and wives behaving like slaves, since the relationship between spouses is clearly of a different order to that of slaves and masters. Is it possible that the connecting idea is that of the redemptive nature of unjust suffering?

Peter is clearly aware that a woman who resists her husband in the matter of religion, but who nonetheless chooses to honour him, will attract abuse. Likewise, the husband who honours his wife and treats her with respect and as an equal will attract, at the very least, ridicule.

Consistent with the cultural mores of his day, I wonder is Peter saying that suffering borne patiently and without retaliation by a believer can play a role in the redemption of sinners? Not that these sufferings have redemptive efficacy in themselves but that they point to the sacrifice of Jesus. Could it be that in some circumstances suffering is an essential evangelistic tool? I recoil mentally and emotionally from this idea even as I write it. And yet I think of the words and

actions of many victims who have spoken incredible words of forgiveness in the midst of terrible grief and pain, and I hear unmistakable echoes of the Gospel.

### **3:1-7 Life in Relationship**

In such a society it was expected that a wife would adopt the religion of her husband. It is interesting to note that Peter's instructions to a wife to honour and respect her husband do not extend to giving up her status as a member of God's family, and one of Sarah's daughters (3:5,6).

Peter continues in his optimism that society can be turned on its head, that by her behaviour and quiet faith her husband will break all the stereotypes and societal expectations and adopt the faith of his wife. But he is also realistic that this may not happen. Nevertheless the women must persist both in her faith and in her respect for her husband, whatever comes her way.

Once again the wider application for all the believers is painfully obvious. Behave in such a way as to achieve the conversion of everyone you meet. And if this is not achieved, and you attract suffering instead, behave that way anyway!

The expectations placed on the Christian husband of an unbelieving wife by Peter are also demanding. It would be likely in that world that a wife would already share the faith of her husband, since even a Christian husband could compel it. But in this case, even if she doesn't the husband must continue to respect and honour her, because she is God's creation. He must resist the desire to oppress her or bully her and learn how to live with her. And if, as is likely, she is already a believer, he must treat her as an equal in the community of faith. Again, profoundly counter-cultural in his world.

### **3:13-4:6 Life for the Future**

Peter has made no secret of the fact that there is a strong likelihood of suffering if Christians seek to live according to the values of the kingdom. They must live in such a way as to make the Gospel message attractive. He is also very clear that, however difficult the circumstances there is no let-up in the responsibility to do good, whether that is in obeying an abusive political regime, honouring neighbours who slander or family members who are oppressive or bullying.

Wherever Christians interface with the world they are to be guided by the principle established in 2:12. *"Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify*

*God on the day he visits us."* Peter makes it clear that the conversion of a society may result from the behaviour of its Christians, and perhaps persecution borne stoically makes that possibility more likely.

His words in 3:13, therefore, may seem a trifle naïve or ironic. *"Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good?"* And yet, when set in the context of what follows (3:14-21) they sound a glorious eschatological truth if we only have the courage to hear them.

In the ultimate scheme of things no one can harm us for doing good! Oh yes, they can damage the body, even kill us, but for those who have set apart Christ Jesus as Lord, who have this hope that Peter talked about in his opening lines and repeats again and again, there is vindication.

Because of this, no matter what reception we may receive, we may consistently do good, even rush to do good to those who persecute and revile us, and in this way puzzle and confuse those who seek our ruin. For by being eager to do good, by honouring the government who persecutes, by honouring and respecting neighbours or family members who abuse we witness to a hope beyond this world.

The message of Peter's first letter is that there are simply no circumstances where bad behaviour should give the world cause to malign the Lord Jesus Christ. More than that, by our willingness to follow the example of Christ in bearing our undeserved sufferings, by rejecting the oppressive and aggressive ways of our persecutors, we may actually be preparing them for an encounter with the Prince of Peace.

**Glenn Jordan is a consultant researcher with the ECONI Centre for Contemporary Christianity.**

# readersurveyresults

Ruth Hutchinson

Early in 1999 a decision was taken to survey the readers of **Lion & Lamb**. Eighteen editions had been published and over that time circulation had steadily increased from fewer than 100 to almost 3,000. Style, appearance and content had altered, and from humble beginnings as a four-page newsletter it had developed into a full-sized magazine.

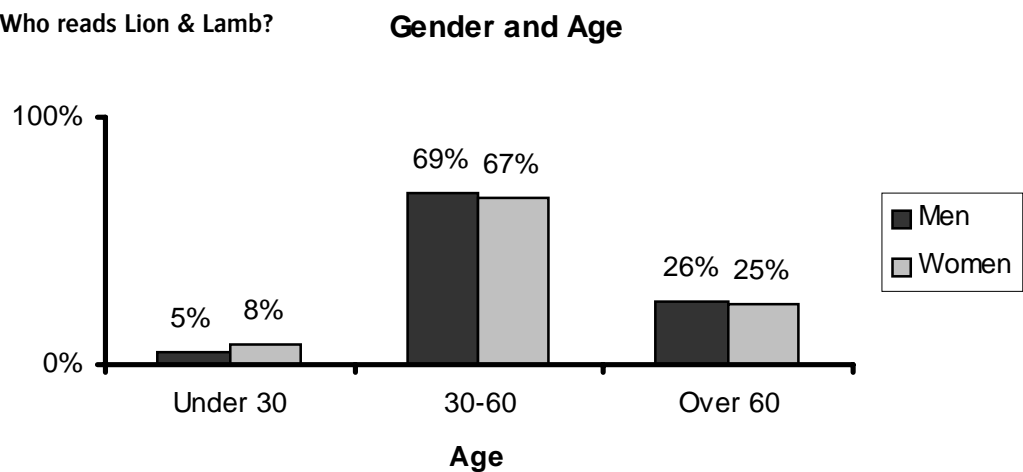
The Survey Questionnaire was constructed to provide answers to a number of questions being asked by our Steering Group. Who reads **Lion & Lamb**? From which age range do they come? Do they find the magazine informative, accessible, challenging, useful? How well are they able to assimilate the articles? The survey was circulated in March 1999 with Issue No 19.

## General

We have summarised what we believe to be the salient points. First a few general statistics. 144 completed forms were returned, representing 6% of the total sample. We are aware that 6% is not a large sample on which to base conclusions. However, several hundred names had been added to the mailing list only a few months before the survey was distributed. Since 83% of replies came from people who had been receiving the magazine for more than 1 year we believe it is safe to assume that those who responded were on the whole committed readers.

- 72% of the respondents were male.
- 67% fell into the 30-60 age group.
- 70% came from people resident in Northern Ireland.
- 83% had been receiving the magazine for more than 1 year.
- 67% had requested it.
- 66% stated they were willing to pay a subscription if asked to do so.

## Who reads Lion & Lamb?



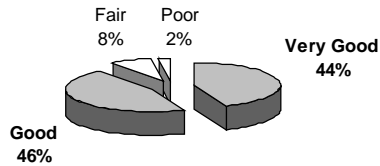
It would appear that the majority of our readers are middle-aged and it is disappointing to note that we are reaching so few younger people. The gender divide is also interesting, showing a ratio of 3 to 1 in favour of men. Two thirds of the complete sample stated that they held some form of office in the church, just over half apparently volunteers. Two thirds had requested the publication, and roughly the same proportion stated their willingness to pay for it if asked. Of the remaining third, almost all had some previous contact with ECONI.

So who reads **Lion & Lamb**? The typical reader seems to be male, between 30 and 60, resident in Northern Ireland, with enough money to pay for it! He is likely to be active in his local church, and is already interested in the work of ECONI. Some questions arise for our deliberation. Does the lower response from women indicate that fewer women read **Lion & Lamb**? If so why? Why do so few younger people appear to read the magazine? Is this an indication that the younger generation is tired of the debate? Have they already opted out?

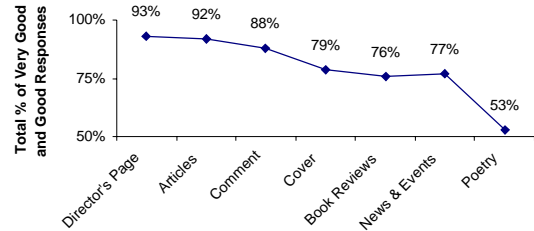
## What about the contents?

Results in this section were gratifying. Readers were asked to classify the contents as very good, good, fair or poor. Opinions were recorded both on separate sections of the magazine and the magazine as a whole. 90% considered the magazine as a whole to be either good or very good. A study of results by section shows that the Director's Page came top of the poll (93% G or VG) followed closely by the articles (90% G or VG). Other features followed, in descending order of popularity, with poetry bringing up the rear.

How Readers Rate L&L



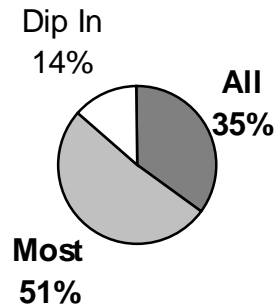
Popularity of Specific Sections of L&L



## How much do they read?

Given the responses in the previous paragraph it is not such a surprise to note that 86% of our readers read all or most of each issue. We are pleased to note this figure since so many publications come through our letterboxes and the temptation to 'dip' is strong. However we know that many recipients of the magazine have time only to scan the contents. Those who speak with warmth of the shorter, more accessible articles are often in this category.

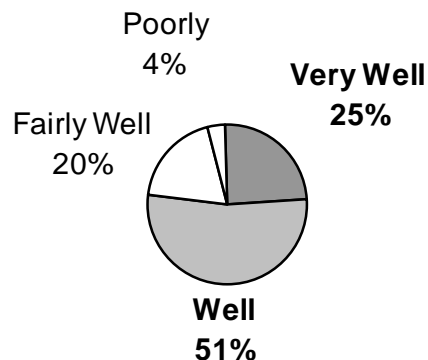
How Much of L&L is Read?



## Assimilation

Fears that the contents may be too academic or too hard to understand do not seem to have been realised. Approximately a quarter of the readers found it a challenge, and a small number admitted it was a struggle. But 76% assimilated it well or very well.

How Readable is L&L?



We must face the possibility that those who find the contents difficult or intense may not have completed the questionnaire. The sample was too small to be certain. But that said, it does not seem unreasonable to conclude that the magazine as presently presented is 'hitting the mark'.

The survey indicated that for 96% their original contact point was ECONI. It is likely that a high percentage of our readership is already committed to the aims and aspirations of the organisation. **Lion & Lamb** speaks largely to the 'converted'. Should we consider a wider market? How might that be achieved?

## Suggested Improvements?

There is no simple way to communicate the suggestions made. We have tried to categorise them in a general manner.

- 10% asked for more news or opportunity to engage in correspondence and debate.
- 10% requested more simplicity.
- 7% thought more graphics desirable.
- 6% were hoping for more news about grass roots practice or resources.
- 6% wanted us to keep things as they are now.

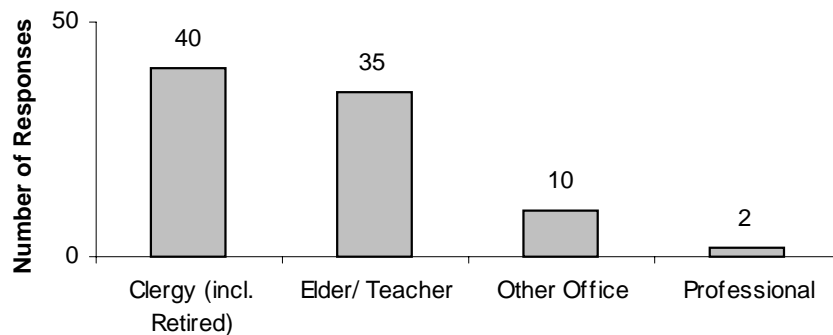
## Church Leaders

This section was included to give some indication of the magazine's possible usefulness to church leaders.

- 66% of the sample said they held some form of leadership.
- 40 were ministers.
- 35 were elders or had a preaching role.
- 12 held another lay position, mostly within their local congregation.
- (Many respondents held more than 1 office.)

- A breakdown by gender shows that 20 out of 38 women held leadership roles.
- 13 are located in Northern Ireland.
- 2 were ministers (1 from Northern Ireland).
- 2 others (aside from clergy) said they had a preaching role.

**Church Leadership**



The questionnaire asked those who had a leadership role to indicate whether or not they used **Lion & Lamb** as an aid to their church work. Though most were very appreciative of the magazine less than half (45%) used it directly in their work. Many however said they found it helpful for their personal instruction and preparation, or as an aid to prayer. Is there a possibility that **Lion & Lamb** could give more practical help to leaders?

In conclusion we wish to thank all those who contributed to the exercise. Though care has been taken to avoid drawing 'wrong' conclusions from the data, we are the first to admit that we are not experts in statistical analysis. It is therefore important that we acknowledge the help given at every stage of the exercise. Rosemary Black and Stanley McDowell advised on the content and format of the questionnaire. Jessica Smith recorded most of the results, and Tucker Ball created the charts that make the data more accessible. Fran Porter and Glenn Jordan helped us interpret some of the results. Lastly thanks is due to all those who took the time to complete and return the survey.

**Ruth Hutchinson** is assistant editor of **Lion & Lamb**.

# the local church and the local community

Amongst the many attempts in recent years to stabilise community life in Northern Ireland, one of the most important has been the attempt by government to fill part of the political vacuum by a huge investment in 'participative democracy' as a grass roots counterbalance (perhaps even as a creative alternative) to the more conventional politics of 'representative democracy'.

Many millions of pounds, dollars and euros have come to the province. Every District Council area has a Partnership Board in which elected representatives, community activists and senior staff from governmental agencies work through applications for funding for many different types of projects. In addition, the urban area of Belfast has seen further initiatives aimed at community regeneration such as those by 'Making Belfast Work' and by the setting up of additional local partnership boards throughout the city. Targeting social need, empowerment of local people, funding opportunities, partnership, community infrastructure and community development are terms that are now well known in many local communities, even if the theory behind them is at times rather difficult to pin down.

The phrase 'community development' is perhaps the most all-encompassing. One study in 1996 described it as:

*...a key concept within both the statutory and voluntary sectors in Northern Ireland as a vital component of any strategy to respond to social needs. ... At its simplest, it is about working with people to address their needs, rather than doing things for people. ... A key concept alongside community development in current strategy for addressing social needs is that of partnership.<sup>1</sup>*

As community development activity has increased over the past decade to the stage where, for example, there are over 300 separately recognised groups in the urban areas of North Belfast alone, so there has been a parallel decline in the local churches in these areas. As recently as August 1999 two local evangelical churches shut their doors for the last time on the same Sunday evening. This article draws on a study carried out in 1998/99 by the author under the Visiting Fellowship Programme of the Centre for Voluntary Action Studies at the University of Ulster at Coleraine. The study is amongst the first (and perhaps actually is the first) in recent years which tried to measure the relationship between the three largest denominational churches (Presbyterian, Anglican and Methodist), and the local community in a discrete area, rather than simply to describe that relationship.

The area chosen for the study was the Oldpark Electoral Area of North Belfast which had a population of just under 35,000 according to the 1991 census, of which 59% claimed to be Roman Catholic. Whilst the comments and analysis in this paper are drawn directly from statistical and other data collected for the research, they are offered to a wider readership in the belief that they may well be mirrored in other urban areas. In addition, the issues raised seem to have wide implications for the ability of many local churches to minister effectively in their areas. The article is written in the hope that it will help develop an informed debate on how to maximise the effectiveness of the local church in its local community. The words of the prophet Jeremiah still have a profound challenge built into them:

*Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper. (Jeremiah 29.7)*

There is hard evidence that one of the main effects of the community development movement on the churches has been the provision, within and by the community, of alternative avenues of help and support to those traditionally provided by the churches. Alongside this, but equally important, is the focus by the community on issues not normally perceived as being within the churches' remit.

When people are in need, not only do they have access to statutory agencies, but they also have access to locally provided and often publicly funded advice and support systems. Thus, as the charted steady decline in church membership and attendance indicates, the local community no longer sees itself as needing the local church the way it once did. For example, a previous and not too distant generation would naturally have turned to local clergy as a first port of call in time of need. In contrast today the advent of specialist advice centres has supplanted the experience and wisdom within the church on many matters. Serious pastoral issues can be, and often are, handled by specialist counselling agencies; social activity is often provided for local people in community buildings, where once it was provided in the church hall.

*A lot of community workers on the Protestant side resent the churches, and feel that the churches' only agenda is to fish for souls. The churches are equally suspicious of community leaders because they believe that their agenda is to undermine the projects the churches support.<sup>2</sup>*

These comments were echoing similar ones made in a number of papers going as far back as the early 1990s, and which kept on being repeated even up to 1998. It seems clear that there is a substantial task still remaining for churches to be seen to be acting with integrity in their relationships with local communities, even when they themselves are satisfied with their involvement, commitment and motivation.

The difficulty of building a church/community relationship with integrity is compounded by the fact that there is often only a very limited amount of activity on church premises that actually engages on a regular basis with local people.

## what steps could and should be taken to help local peo

The only clear exception to this pattern appears to be the need for the local church to underpin local community youth work. One of the most significant statistics gathered in the research was that 75% of youth work carried out by the churches in Protestant areas was amongst 'un-churched' young people - i.e. those who had no meaningful connection with the church other than their attendance at or involvement in the youth organisation of their choice. This means that Presbyterian, Anglican and Methodist churches are major contributors to many local communities in the quality and quantity of their youth work, and are major sources of volunteer help and expertise. One community leader commented, "Even those with no faith still want their kids to go to the Boys' Brigade."

Yet from the churches' viewpoint there is a major issue associated with this youth provision. Whilst it is very large and often very well executed, it is clear that it leads to very few young people becoming full and committed church members. This suggests that youth work is often not motivated by evangelistic or proselytising desire, but by a simpler and more transparent desire on the part of churches simply to do the best they can for the young people in their area.

The issue of why churches do work which is of substantial benefit to the community is of considerable importance when placed alongside comments such as...

The church controls most activity and therefore the agenda is set by the church members, or the church leadership. Whilst this is entirely understandable (and maybe even inevitable), it does raise the question of exactly where and how evangelistic bridges are being built to those who have little or no worthwhile contact with the local church.

The figures that emerged during the research on the links that local people had with their local churches were startling. In the 1991 census, 8653 people in the area under study claimed to be Presbyterian, Anglican or Methodist. Yet fewer than 5000 were 'on the books' of a local congregation. Of these, only 1350 attended Sunday morning worship, and only 340 attended in the evening. Putting these figures another way, less than 16% of people claiming to belong to the three mainstream denominations attended morning worship, and only 4% attended in the evening.

It seems clear that the vast majority of Protestant people in the urban community simply have not come to church on a regular basis for years. Such figures once again raise hard questions for even the most publicly committed evangelical churches as to where, how and with whom effective contact, never mind evangelism, is taking place.

The research highlighted one particular group of churches where the strains with the community seem particularly acute. Congregations, which were heavily dependent on members who drive in from outside the locality, came in for particularly trenchant criticism from the local community, even though these members were carrying out the very youth work they so much appreciated. As one community leader put it, "People drive in, park the car, patrol the car park to protect the cars against the locals - not good."

There was a widespread perception that such congregations were not involved in their local communities, and so were not making an effective contribution to the area. The sense of remoteness by members led them to pay staff to do the work in the community for them, and that such a congregation was, almost by definition, a weak one.

The implications of these criticisms are considerable, and raise difficult, but by their nature very urgent questions. Are such congregations actually needed in their current form in an area where local people appear to be so heavily critical of them? Have such congregations the potential to be viable and

<sup>1</sup>Kinkead, M. (1996) Resources for responding to social need (pages 6-8) Belfast Churches' Urban Development Committee

<sup>2</sup> Speight, P (1997) The role of the churches in community development

Unpublished report on North Belfast commissioned by Making Belfast Work

## Can people understand the value of the churches' work?

vibrant over the longer term? In what ways might the work of a 'drive-in' church differ from that of a locally based congregation? What steps could and should be taken to help local people understand the value of the churches' work?

Amongst the pages of statistical data and comment produced in the research, perhaps the most worrying element was the almost total lack of any coherent theological framework for relating to communities which want to be treated as equals in their relationships with their local churches. The Biblical basis of social action has been widely accepted, but there is as yet little evidence of similar Biblical rigour being brought to bear on the ethos of and practices surrounding community development.

Community development is here to stay, so are partnerships and participative democracy. In the search for identity, local communities are becoming ever smaller and fragmented groupings. In urban areas, local churches are often only one of a number of contributors to the local community, with the result that their clear leading position of former days has almost disappeared. We would do well not only to ask but also to seek clear guidance from our living and sovereign God to the question, "What is the proper relationship between our congregation and the local community in which the Lord has placed us?"

**Norman Hamilton is minister of Ballysillan Presbyterian Church and a member of the ECONI Steering Group. The full text of the research paper referred to above can be obtained either as hard copy (84 pages. £5.00 including post and packing), or on floppy disc in Lotus Word Pro format (for £1.00 including post and packing) from Rev Norman Hamilton, 564 Crumlin Road, Belfast BT14 7GL Tel: 028 - 90714091 Email: [norman.hamilton@btinternet.com](mailto:norman.hamilton@btinternet.com)**



# hospitality

Models are dangerous. Teenage girls damage themselves when they measure their figures against Kate Moss. Our models of ministry damage us in the thin-ness of their bias and inadequacies.

The minister as manager - getting a job done through people.  
The minister as father figure - caring and keeping discipline in the church.

The minister as teacher - telling his people what to believe and do from the Word of God. These are all part of the picture but they leave large areas of the canvas without illumination.

Ministry as hospitality is no more comprehensive than any of these, but it shines a light on the softer, gentler, humbler area of ministry. For that very reason it is useful in Northern Irish Christianity.

## **Hospitality Explained**

So what is this grace of hospitality so often commended in the Scriptures? It is infinitely more than opening our homes, a cup of tea and 'wee buns'. We create hospitality by offering acceptance and safety. The other person comes into our world on his terms more than ours. Generous hospitality is not to offer love so long as the other person pays the price of

believing all I believe, doing things the way I do them and feeling as I feel. It is the construction of a sense of welcome and safety so they can be different without the fear of rejection.

In hospitality we see ourselves, the hosts, as less important than the guests and we serve. We create the loving space for the other person by drawing back ourselves. There is a Jewish tradition that God created the world by self-withdrawal. In the beginning he filled all space completely and there was no room for the created world. So, he withdrew himself to create space for the other. Time in Africa has taught me that the guest sets the agenda. We are there for our guest.

Hospitality implies encounter. When someone is invited into your private space, they encounter you, hopefully in as much reality as you can manage. Creating a free and safe space allows the host also to be transparent and straightforward. An atmosphere of acceptance is the best place for both to open the cupboards, the ideal place to confront.

the answer,” until we have understood the depth, the intensity, the sheer jumbled complication of the questions.

Ministers must try to create churches that are places of acceptance and safety, not fear and exclusion. Many Christians in many churches are afraid to admit to doubts, don't say what they really feel, fear to mess up. They keep quiet about the way they are different in thought, action and feelings. That is not church as it should be. Such conformity beyond Gospel issues is often policed by the minister, making shipwreck of his Christian hospitality and that of his church.

Modesty as to what we can do as ministers becomes appropriate within the hospitality model. A gardener does not give life or growth to a tender plant. The most he can do is keep the protective greenhouse in good repair and provide the water and nutrients. Ministers do not transform people's lives. They do not bring the Word of God home to the heart. They do not cause Christians to grow or the unconverted to be saved. All that is the work of the Holy Spirit.

# for ministers

## Hospitality Applied

The hospitality model of ministry is a little like those tinted glasses some line judges wear in tennis to see the yellow ball against the green background. Put on the glasses of the hospitality model and suddenly some things jump out and we see them clearly against the background of our ministry. What things?

Ministry is all about individual people, not the congregation en masse. You can 'put up' a hundred people if your house is big enough but hospitality is individual. It has been said of lecturing that it is like trying to fill 100 bottles by lining them up in rows and throwing a bucket of water over them. Preaching is a little like that, even allowing for the Holy Spirit to direct the water. Taking the bottles to the tap one by one in your own hands, that's ministry as hospitality.

Listening becomes a large part of the job. It is easy to give simple public answers to complicated private questions. But ministry is not re-formatting material from the commentaries or re-gurgitating our lecture notes. It is building a bridge between the Word of God and the people where they are today. For that, we have to really listen. We can't say, "Jesus is

Fellow minister, by all means lead the charge, lay down the rules, make the judgments, tell the truth. Please also give your hearts to us, quietly build the greenhouse, create some safe, open, peaceable space, listen to us, wait at our table. Then send us on our way in peace with some provisions for the journey, a decent road map and gratitude for the hospitality.

**Graham Cheesman is Principal of the Belfast Bible College.**

# too many

## Maurice Kinhead

In Belfast, as in the rest of Europe, partnerships appear to be everywhere. They distribute EU funding, co-ordinate local regeneration, promote business education links and develop a vision for the city. These are a few of the tasks for which partnerships have recently been established. There is obviously a real danger of confusion but, more importantly, a danger that in the establishing of so many partnership structures, we fool ourselves into thinking that we are actually working in partnership to address identified needs within our community.

Personally I believe that a partnership approach is essential in effectively addressing a complex issue such as urban regeneration, but such an approach will only work if we recognise that partnership is essentially a process, and not a structure. Setting up a partnership will not achieve anything useful, but working in partnership has the potential to achieve much more together than we can ever achieve working alone or in competition.

### The value of a partnership approach

Urban regeneration is the sort of complex task that demonstrates the value of a partnership approach. There are a wide range of interconnecting issues to be addressed, including education, health, housing, transport, economic development and training, and a mind-boggling plethora of organisations and agencies with an interest in, or responsibility for, each issue. Without a co-ordinated approach, contradictory action will be taken, agencies will compete on the same task, or gaps will develop in provision of services. It makes sense to co-operate as partners to address common issues in a co-ordinated fashion.

In Belfast, local area partnerships have been established within the Making Belfast Work initiative to co-ordinate urban regeneration by bringing together all key agencies and organisations from various sectors. This involves local councillors, public servants from relevant statutory agencies, community

workers and business people all working together on a broad regeneration agenda at board level, addressing particular issues in working group type structures.

While not without its difficulties, the value of such an approach is clear. Take an issue like the declining main arterial routes into Belfast, which in the past have served as busy shopping areas, but are now in many cases 'run down', with vacant shop fronts, derelict sites, graffiti and poor lighting. Who should take responsibility for their regeneration? Who should be consulted? Who might have the best ideas? The answer is a very long list of possible contributors to a solution, which could include the Roads Service, Planning Service, NI Housing Executive, Belfast City Council along with local residents and traders, who may well be represented by various associations and elected councillors. Each can address the issue from their own (often conflicting) perspective, and hope that the 'due processes' somehow work out to everyone's advantage (a very unlikely scenario). Or all can come together in a partnership arrangement to develop a solution to which they might be committed, and which together they have a much better chance of implementing successfully.

The advantage of working in partnership is that with all the 'players' around the table from the beginning, particular interests are not ignored, and a wider range of ideas emerges from which to develop workable solutions. However, in practice partnership is not so easy.

### Difficulties with partnership

While partnerships may have the potential to provide solutions to complex social problems, they are often by nature complex structures themselves, engaging in quite complex processes. The sheer challenge of organising a number of agencies to operate together is compounded by their very different nature, particularly the many different methods by which they make decisions. For

# partnerships

## not enough partnership?

example, attempting to reach consensus on an issue within a working group can be a very slow process if some members need to obtain their organisation's approval. In many cases the difficulty of making decisions in time to take any appropriate action can lead to frustration and disillusionment with the whole process.

A further problem with partnerships is that the mere act of setting up a partnership to address an issue can be a substitute for genuine 'partnership working'. Consensus and agreed action will not just happen; it needs to be worked at. Sometimes people can feel the task is more or less completed when all the right agencies have been brought together, whereas in reality the most difficult work is only just beginning. Allied to this can be situations where some 'partners' see their involvement as an end in itself, and do not see any need to engage truly with other partners. They have become involved because they think they should be, or are expected to be, but have no clear idea of the purpose or implication of their involvement, which leads to their lack of commitment to the process.

If a lack of commitment can cause problems, then so too can a perceived 'over commitment', where one or more partner(s) is viewed as trying to use or dominate other partners. This often arises when statutory agencies, with all their resources, are seeking to work in partnership with community organisations, who can feel overwhelmed and under-resourced.

### Issues for churches

Churches are a significant presence in urban communities, and yet are often obvious by their absence in partnership type structures seeking to address community needs. I believe there are a number of reasons why this is so, particularly within the Protestant churches.

Of course some churches do not see addressing social needs as part of their role; their purpose is to preach the gospel. While I do not intend to address the theological issues behind this position now - many have already done so elsewhere - I believe that their non-involvement deprives local communities of the significant contribution they can make.

Thankfully, most churches are involved in some way in responding to social needs within their communities, but why do so few do so in partnership with others? No doubt the reasons are many, and somewhat different in each case, but I feel there is a basic issue with which many church groups appear to struggle. In essence, partnership means working with partners who are in many senses different to ourselves. For churches this can mean working with groups and individuals who do not share their values and beliefs, and in many cases operate with values which they view as quite unchristian. They may feel that if they associate with such groups, this will reflect badly on the church, and may confuse others outside the church as to the church's values and beliefs.

Such fears are not irrational, because people will indeed be confused by churches working with a diverse range of 'partners' from within the local community. But not engaging with others to address community needs will also confuse those who genuinely feel the church should be involved. If churches are a part of the local community, along with schools, shops, pubs and community organisations, then surely it will appear strange if they are not involved in activities aimed at improving the quality of life in those communities. Churches should also remember that they are not the only organisations with something to lose by entering local partnership arrangements – all partners are taking potential risks of confusing their identity or damaging their own interests. Indeed, on more than one occasion I have heard local community organisations express concern about entering into partnerships with local church groups, mainly because of suspicion of their real agenda!

# too many partnerships not enough partnership?

## Successful partnership

So with so many inherent difficulties, how can the potential of partnership be developed? What makes for a successful partnership? There is no simple blueprint to ensure success, and certainly partnerships, like all human structures, will never operate perfectly, but I believe there are a few basic principles without which partnership will not happen.

Partnerships can work if partner agencies:

1. Are clear about their own goals and values
2. Recognise that they and other partners always need to act in their own interests
3. Work hard at listening, learning and working together.

Clarity about our own goals and values is essential if we are to work in any inter-agency process, as it will give us the confidence to contribute to consensus on the goals and values of the overall partnership. It will also give other partners confidence that they know who they are dealing with, as joint approaches are discussed, agreed and implemented.

All agencies have their own agendas and interests. Partnership will not work if we pretend this is not the case. Partnership is not so much 'working for the common good'; it is more a case of each partner recognising that their own interests can best be served by co-operating with others to their mutual benefit. This may sound cold and calculating, but it is also a sound basis for genuine partnership working, and of course through the process each partner can learn from, and be influenced by, the agenda and interests of others.

But even with clarity, and a recognition of each partner's interests, no partnership will happen without a lot of hard work and commitment to the process. People and agencies who come from different perspectives do not naturally understand each other, and often do not 'hear' what is really being said by other partners. Assumptions and interpretations are made on the basis of our own perspective. Time needs to be taken to listen to each other, to try to understand where others are coming from, and probably there is a need for some facilitated training to help in this process.

A partnership approach definitely has the potential to achieve much, particularly in contexts where there are a wide range of interested parties involved and inter-connected issues to address, but it will only happen if we make the effort. I personally hope that more churches will make the effort, and bring their contribution to the well being of the communities of which they are a significant part.

## Further Reading

For those interested in exploring partnership further, the following publications may be helpful. All are available for reference in the information bank of the Greater East Belfast Partnership.

- McCabe A, Lowndes V and Skelcher C (1997) Partnerships and Networks York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation
- McDonagh R (1995) A partnership approach to regeneration Belfast: Making Belfast Work
- Barker V (1994) Promoting partnership through consultation Lyme Regis: Russell House Publishing
- N I Council for Voluntary Action report (1993) Partners or Adversaries Belfast: NICVA
- Walsh J, Craig S and McCafferty D (1998) Local Partnerships for Social Inclusion? Dublin: Oak Tree Press
- Wilson A and Charlton K (1997) Making Partnerships Work York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation

**Maurice Kinkead is Chief Executive of the Greater East Belfast Partnership, a local area partnership established to lead the social, economic, environmental and cultural regeneration of East Belfast.**

# **a restorative approach**

Debbie Watters

# a restorative approach

help. A graduated system of sanctions is used by paramilitary groups, escalating from a warning through beating and shooting to exile. This system has emerged as an acceptable, legitimate method of addressing crime within communities.

Punishment in response to crime and other wrongdoing is the prevailing practice, not just in criminal justice systems but also throughout most modern societies. Punishment is usually accepted as the most appropriate response to crime and wrongdoing in communities, schools, families and workplaces. John's punishment, however, did not change his behaviour. It served merely to push an already marginalized 'hood' further to the fringes of his community and increased his sense of living in a hostile world, a world that holds very little hope for a better or even a different future.

With the emergence of the cease-fires in 1994, communities like the Greater Shankill finally had the space and time to reflect on important issues within the community like paramilitary punishment attacks. It became widely recognised at all levels of community life, especially through the influence of politically motivated ex-prisoners, that punishing young people in violent ways does not necessarily bring about positive changes in their behaviour. This realisation, therefore, heightened the need for different ways of addressing conflict and violence within the community, and emphasized the need to revisit the concept of community justice.

## Restorative Justice

A philosophy that emerged in Northern Ireland at this time was the philosophy of Restorative Justice that sees crime and any wrongdoing not as a breaking of the rules, but rather as a damaging of relationships within community. The focus is placed on repairing the damaged relationship and making right the wrongs rather than on guilt or punishment. This philosophy is widely accepted and used throughout the world - America, Europe, New Zealand, Australia as a way of humanizing the real and true effects of crime and community conflict.

The approach is rooted in teachings throughout the Bible and is central to how Christ lived his life. Contemporary justice puts the state at the centre as an enforcer of law in contrast to Biblical justice that puts people and relationships at the centre, subjecting both law and government to God. Biblical justice sees justice as a whole and does not allow us to divorce issues of crime from issues of poverty and power. In addition, the social context of crime and wrongdoing must be

considered, and 'criminal acts or actors' cannot be divorced from the social or political context from which they come.

In an attempt to promote this philosophy of Restorative Justice within the Greater Shankill, the organization Greater Shankill Alternatives was formed with the remit 'to address justice issues in a non-violent manner'. Professor Harry Mika and Howard Zehr have compiled the following list of universally agreed key principles of Restorative Justice.

## The Ten Commandments Of Restorative Justice

When you do justice in a restorative way:

1. You focus on the harms/hurt of the crime rather than the rules that have been broken.
2. You are concerned about the needs of both the victim and the offender, involving them both in the process of justice.
3. You work towards the restoration of victims, empowering them and responding to their needs as they identify them.
4. You support offenders while encouraging them to understand, accept and carry out their obligations to the victims and the community.
5. You recognize that while obligations may be difficult for offenders, they should not be intended as pain.
6. You provide opportunities for dialogue, direct or indirect, between victim and offender, as appropriate.
7. You find meaningful ways to involve the community and to respond to the community bases of crime.
8. You encourage collaboration and reintegration rather than coercion and isolation.
9. You are mindful of the unintended consequences of your actions and programmes.
10. You show respect to all parties – victims, offenders, community members, colleagues.

## Greater Shankill Alternatives

Greater Shankill Alternatives is a community justice programme that seeks to address five inter related problems affecting the local community, the above principles of Restorative Justice underpinning all our practice:

1. Punishment attacks – Alternatives is committed to non-violent ways of working with young people. When a young person is placed under threat by the paramilitaries, Alternatives will mediate in that situation to have the threat lifted.

2. Socially harmful activities – Greater Shankill  
Alternatives recognises that socially harmful activities are destructive to victims, the community and the young people themselves. All of these areas need to be addressed for the harm to be made as right as possible.
3. Empowerment of the local community –  
Alternatives believes that local people experience the effects of conflict most deeply and therefore, need to be involved in looking at solutions and moving their community forward. We provide ongoing training on mediation skills and Restorative Justice for community members and all of our volunteers come from the community.
4. Conflict within the community – Alternatives is committed to using various non-violent forms of conflict resolution like mediation, victim-offender mediation and negotiation to help resolve community disputes in ways that meet the needs of all the parties involved.
5. Weaknesses within the formal criminal justice system – it is widely recognised that the formal system does not hold young people truly accountable for their actions and does not meet the needs of victims. Alternatives is committed to an inclusive approach that is based on building relationships with the Police and the formal system to help build structures that address the real needs of communities.

So how does this work on the ground? John was referred to Alternatives by some paramilitaries who felt that putting him out of the country was not the answer. When John first met with us, we explained the process that he would be involved in if he chose to work with us. He began working with Alternatives in February 1999.

During the first few weeks on the programme, John met with his support worker on a daily basis and was guided through a process of looking at how his actions have hurt his victims, the community and himself. He then developed a contract that focused on how he intended to make things as right as possible with his victims, the community and himself.

John participated in a face to face mediation with one of his victims that was facilitated by a trained community mediator. This very powerful exchange provided a forum for an elderly woman called Margaret whose home had been broken into to tell her story and to ask key questions. Margaret's story was one of anger, fear, powerlessness and pain. She had not been able to sleep since her home was broken into and had been living in fear that the intruders might return.

John heard this story and was able to answer some of Margaret's questions. For once in his life, he came face to face with the real human consequences of

his actions and began to understand the pain he had caused. Margaret also gained an insight into John's world and is no longer afraid that he will come back to hurt her. John agreed to pay restitution for the items that were stolen, a total of £250. He paid this off on a weekly basis. To make things as right as possible with the community, John chose to do 60 hours of volunteer work in a local community centre. He has completed these hours.

## Conclusion

John has made significant changes in the past few months. He has realised that his actions create obligations – obligations to the people and the community he has hurt. For the first time in his life, he has people to talk to - people who are interested in who he is, his ideas, his hopes and his dreams. He has chosen to attend counselling and a weekly GCSE maths class. When he first came to Alternatives, his dream for his future was not to be a doctor or a lawyer – his dream was to be the top 'hood' on the Shankill. This has changed. John now believes he is capable of more and wants more for his life.

Restorative Justice is not a soft option. Restorative Justice provides opportunities for accountability, healing, justice and mercy, a lifestyle modelled by Christ. John's story is one of pain and hurt. Today it is also one of hope. We continue to be actively involved in society so that young people do not have to 'tell their days by the flow of their tears and their lives by the moans of their hearts'.

**Debbie Watters is a Support Worker with Greater Shankill Alternatives.**

In response to suggestions received from several quarters, the editorial team has decided to experiment with a new feature. The following are a sample of letters received over the last year. We welcome communication from readers, and intend to reprint a selection in coming issues. Please write to us at **ECONI 1 Brunswick Street, Belfast BT2 7GE** or preferably by e-mail to [ruth@econ.org](mailto:ruth@econ.org)

January 1999

I must admit that I generally skim through my copy of **Lion & Lamb** quite speedily, though I always appreciate what I read therein at least to some degree. I was able to spend more time with your most recent edition (No 19) and was delighted with it. It would be unfair to single out any one of the contributors, because each of them had something to say, and said it well. What delighted me particularly about the edition as a whole was that the thrust of it was to stress inclusiveness, and its tone of humbly seeking for God's way in Holy Scripture. As Alwyn Thomson said, 'Perhaps both Protestants and Catholics have more to learn about Scripture, tradition and authority than they think.'

As a Catholic, I can only admire the work you are doing, which is God's work of healing the wounds in Christ's body in Northern Ireland. We have no equivalent on the Catholic side, which is deplorable. The work of creating a climate in which genuine reconciliation can take place is a vital work, which requires to be undertaken with the sort of dedication ECONI has shown...

**Terence Donaghy (Belfast)**

June 1999

I have just received and have been reading the summer edition (No 21) and want to thank you for the Biblical stand that you make. It displays such courage. Thank you! My several visits to Ireland have left me with an aching and a longing to see reconciliation. I just want you to know we are standing with you at this critical time in much prayer.

**John James (Penarth Wales)**

October 1999

I have just pulled the last issue (No 22) of **Lion & Lamb** out of its plastic sleeve, and sat down and read the whole magazine from cover to cover. Thank you for every word of it... I reckon this is one of the finest publications I have read for a long time. The pieces on citizenship raise – and answer – the question of what it is to be 'church' at this point in our history. Lynda Gould's 'Comment' on our values and Graham Cheesman's piece on 'Beauty' are excellent. If this is the face of evangelicalism, I have no fears for the future of the Church in this island.

**(Canon) Hilary Wakeman (Goleen Co Cork)**

October 1999

I read with much interest the articles referring to the anabaptist movement by Alwyn Thomson and J A Sider. Although we want to give recognition to Menno Simons and his influence which led to pacifism being accepted by many within the anabaptist movement, the truth is that early anabaptists held different views on the issues of coercion and Church-State relations, and it must be acknowledged that the anabaptist movement had its own dark side...

...You are right to point out that many of them did have something worthwhile (and relevant to us) to say; you are unfair in not disclosing that militant anabaptists such as Matthys and Van Leyden gave the movement a 'Waco' image. Even Hubmaier (burned 1528) had to argue against militant anabaptists in his day. The 'peace image' of the anabaptist and Mennonite movements is rightly dated from Menno Simons onwards.

**(Rev) Stewart Jones (Bangor)**

October 1999

I appreciate it may not be your editorial policy to publish letters. Even if it is not, I feel sufficiently provoked by a number of aspects of the latest **Lion & Lamb** that I would like to outline and explain my reaction in any case. These remarks should be prefaced by saying that I found this issue very interesting and perhaps amongst the best produced so far. Nevertheless, I perceive (three) areas which could cause disquiet.

#### **Drew Gibson's 'prophetic word of communal self-destruction'**

His theoretical construct is certainly rather courageous but this does not guarantee it is right. What Dr Gibson seems to be saying, if I interpret him rightly, is that there could be a strong analogy between, on the one hand, the state of Judah in the seventeenth century BC and its relationship to the purposes of God and, on the other hand, 'unionist/protestant Northern Ireland' in the 1990s and its place within the plan of God. As a Christian (and an evangelical and reformed one who also happens to be a unionist) I accept that I have to be open to the possibility that Dr Gibson **could** be right. That said, I want to question both the coherence and applicability of his 'Judah = Northern Ireland' model.

OT Israel was in a special, covenantal relationship with God. Church, state, law, land and temple all had religious overlapping significances. I do not believe the 'unionist people/majority of Northern Ireland' stand in the same relationship to God as did the people of Judah. By implication, whilst the Sovereign Lord can obviously dispose of this land in whatever way he wishes, I doubt if he will impose an equivalent to the fall of Jerusalem/exile as a modern day punishment for disloyalty to the covenant. It would be ironic if Dr Gibson were assuming that the unionist people were indeed the covenantal people of God in Northern Ireland (hitherto ECONI-type writers have tended to condemn as arrogant any unionists or protestants who would make such an assumption). This would be a 'British Israelitism' with a rather cunning twist.

Any attempt to apply an OT model to contemporary society needs to be finely nuanced. The problem is how many of the features of Jeremiah's Judah should be read across? Is the Republic of Ireland really analogous to the bloodthirsty and militaristic Assyria? Mr Mitchel's article (L&L23) suggests not. Is it fair to liken Dublin to Babylon? In contemporary politics who is, or has been, cast in the role of Jezebel or Athaliah? Perhaps I am unfairly reducing Dr Gibson's model to the ridiculous but, once again, there is irony that his approach may overlap in method (if not in conclusion) to the wilder fringe of protestantism and unionism where, no doubt, some believed Mrs Thatcher and, more recently, Dr Mowlam were the latter day bad queens...

...Once again I would emphasise that I found all the pieces in **Lion & Lamb** very useful. My comments are intended to be constructively critical.

(Dr) Esmond Birnie (UUP Assembly Member South Belfast)

#### **Drew Gibson's response to Dr Birnie**

Firstly, thank you for taking the time to ponder and reply to what I wrote with grace and humour. This is a much underrated aspect of Christian fellowship for which I am grateful.

Perhaps the simplest approach is to address your criticisms in reverse order. Your third paragraph correctly shows the dangers of drawing simplistic parallels between Scripture and any

contemporary situation and the potential for descent into allegory which, you rightly identify, would make for entertaining preaching or great comic theatre but dreadful theology. I fully endorse your line of thought.

Your second paragraph is the foundation on which the third builds and it is here that I seem to have failed to communicate clearly. I was not attempting to argue from within a covenantal framework but rather from a consideration of the inter-relationship between the responsibility of the 'People of God' (however they might be defined) to God Himself and their responsibility to the society of which they are a part.

My contention is that God draws people to himself in order to be a community that, in turn, is his agent for drawing others to himself. In other words, we are elect for the purpose of mission. However, all Christian communities live as part of the larger human community and so have social and political responsibilities that they must embrace as part of their mission. It is the responsibility of the Christian community to embrace its social and political responsibilities in such a way that the mission that God has entrusted to them is promoted.

My belief is that the Christian community in Ireland (both the Protestant community in the North and the Roman Catholic Community in the Republic) have put the cart before the horse by making their mission to the larger community subservient to the political and social ends to which they aspire. Both have substituted a desire for security through the exercise of political and social power for the security of being a servant people. It is perfectly legitimate for Christians to exercise social and political power but if these operate in opposition to the missiological purposes of God then we cannot avoid the conclusion that they must be regarded as, at least, disposable.

The partition of Ireland brought about two states in which the Church claimed the right to exercise political power. In the Republic of Ireland this claim was institutionally made and was constitutionally recognised while in Northern Ireland the claim was informally made and informally exercised. Both Christian communities have failed miserably in exercising their political and social power and therefore my contention is that both Christian communities must be brought to positions of social and political weakness. This is not to be done merely as punishment but so that both might regain some measure of spiritual vitality and usefulness as agents of the *missio dei*. Could it be that the destruction of Northern Ireland as a political entity is the means by which the Protestant community is stripped of its privilege? Could it also be that the rampant secularising of the Republic coupled with the introduction of one million Protestants into the equation is the means by which the Roman Catholic Church is brought to a state of political weakness from which it might regain some spiritual vigour?

Ultimately, my theological foundation for applying Jeremiah's situation to Northern Ireland is not found in either Jeremiah or in the Old Testament. It is found in the cross. At Calvary the Son embraced all that he abhorred in order to gain that which he most desired. Paul's comments on this in 1Corinthians 1f specifically maintain that this was the embracing of foolishness and weakness in order to express spiritual power, thus setting down the principle of dying to live which pervades the whole of Scripture and is seen in the life of the nation of Israel at its sharpest in the Exile. It is this embracing of death rather than a simple parallel between Jeremiah and contemporary Northern Ireland which I find most challenging.

Drew Gibson (Bangor)

# andfinally

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