

NIMMA Conference 2005

The **Northern Ireland Mixed Marriage Association** (NIMMA) Conference 2005 was held at the Derrynoid Centre. A core of active members and a new family enjoyed each other's company and made the visiting Hollins family feel as though we belonged. The lively group of primary aged children enjoyed crafts and games while the adults met. The speaker was Eion de Bhaldraithe, Abbot of Bolton Abbey, Moone, Co. Kildare. In his first address he reviewed what he had said 20 years ago to NIMMA, generally concluding (and people agreed) that while there is still a long way to go, the situation in church terms is improved for interchurch families today, and more sharing is possible. For Eoin, 'intercommunion' (reciprocity) is a key issue which he feels should be openly debated: could the Catholic church accept the possibility that sharing communion is a means rather than an end? Eoin's second talk was on 'Moving Beyond Sectarianism' and looked at ways that the community can be encouraged over time to move on. With the election results coming out as we arrived, it is very clear that sectarianism culturally is becoming more entrenched than ever, and ecumenism is not having much effect on it.

If thoughts of election results and sectarianism were a little depressing, an excellent meal followed by an enjoyable evening playing 'Who's in the bag?' soon cheered everyone up.

At the AGM, the new website was approved and will be launched this week - it is well worth a visit. William Odling-Smee agreed to continue as chair for another year, during which a new staff member for the NIMMA office will be appointed.

Do keep NIMMA in your prayers; theirs is hard ground to plough, and people in mixed marriages, whether or not they are interchurch, need support in an environment which may be improving ecumenically but is harder than ever politically and culturally. Integrated education offers some hope for the long term, but it is clear that for now NIMMA has a vital role to play in improving community relationships and being a source of reconciliation in Northern Ireland.

*Beverley Hollins
10th May 2005*