THE CORRYMEELA STORY

THE ORIGINS
Ray Davey

In the summer of 1964 I can remember the meeting in my office at the Presbyterian Centre at Queen's University with John Morrow and Alex Watson. Both had the invaluable experience of membership of the Iona Community. We decided to call together those we believed would be keen to launch a Christian Community and begin the search for a suitable building. Some fifty turned up, Christians from all backgrounds. The group included housewives, trades and professional people as well as a number of interested students. The three of us realised very quickly that the others were most enthusiastic about the idea of a new community. This could counter the current apathy and complacency, and open up new possibilities. Of course when it came to concrete suggestions about the nature and location of the proposed community, it was difficult to find consensus. We knew that we had to take time so we continued to meet and pray together, that we should be shown the way.

Suddenly at a meeting early in 1965 someone very casually informed the gathering that the Holiday Fellowship Centre near Ballycastle in County Antrim, was up for sale. That news immediately concentrated our thinking. No longer could we indulge in rather abstract discussions on the nature of Christian community. Now we had to face a real choice, and our ideas and visions were put to the test. I knew the Centre well as I had often been past it when on holiday at Ballycastle, and from the start was utterly convinced that this was the place for us. The others felt that we should at least investigate the possibilities and so a group was appointed to visit the Centre.

I went along with three others and we had a very positive visit to Corrymeela, and became excited about its possibilities. It was ideal for our plans, with its delectable setting right on the beautiful North Antrim coast. We were thrilled to see the excellent accommodation which might now be available for us. I immediately began to visualise the potential for children, young adults and older people. There was plenty of space and a large

dining hall, lounge and conference room. In the grounds we explored twenty chalets, which could be used for additional groups. We also learned, to our delight, that the large field adjacent to the grounds would be available for sale. It seemed as though our dreams were beginning to materialise. Although much rehabilitation work was necessary, we could see that most of it would be within the range of voluntary labour. So in good heart we reported our findings to the next meeting, and it was unanimously agreed that we proceed with the purchase of the property. This was an act of faith as we had no funds, but we believed that together we could raise the money.

I immediately went to the estate agent and made an offer. He seemed quite convinced that we would get the site as no other offers had materialised. Even so the next weeks were anxious for me, and I phoned from time to time. Finally on the Friday of a holiday weekend I could stand it no longer. I went in person to the office and pressed the agent very strongly to accept our offer, which he finally did. I came home very excited with the prospects that began to open up for our embryonic community.

Next Steps

Next, the premises had to be put in order and much hard work was needed to renovate a building that had been unoccupied for two years. Here we had the priceless support and idealism of a large number of young, and indeed not so young people. The summers of 1965 and '66 at Corrymeela were just a series of workcamps. At the same time, money had to be gathered and the basic structure of the Community established.

Quickly our structure, which had been very loose, was formalised. A council was elected, my appointment as leader was confirmed and a treasurer and secretary elected, all on a voluntary basis. Indeed at that stage the only staff who were employed were non-resident domestic workers from Ballycastle. Billy McAllister became honorary Resident Warden. The survival and development of the community was due mainly to the voluntary efforts of a large group of lay people who gave unstintingly of their time, skill and energy.

The First Corrymeela Event

In June 1965 a group of some 40-50 people entered the Lounge at Corrymeela. It was a Saturday afternoon and the purchase of the premises had just been completed. This meeting had been called to express our gratitude and also to dedicate ourselves and the house to the work of Christian reconciliation throughout the country. It was not a very impressive event and perhaps a little self-conscious, as even then we stressed informality and also none of us were at all sure how it would all work out. This was indeed the very first Corrymeela event and somehow it almost took us by surprise, as the building itself was undergoing some long overdue renovations, and much obviously needed to be done before it would be fully functional. If I remember rightly I don't think there were even enough chairs to go round and some had to stand. I mention this because it seemed so much a non-event with no press and no television coverage. Yet it was a first step and something had happened.

The Gospel reading in the short worship included several short parables from Luke with these words: "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him". A brief address followed with these sentences: "God is saying just that to us today: 'Have more faith in me, understand the sort of God I am. If you want a place where people can come together to know me better, where they can think about my world and my purpose for it, a place where my followers can come together, especially those from different parts of my broken body and learn to trust each other, if you want that, I want it infinitely more'. Let us try to see what he would have this place be, the role it can play in the life of this country, a place of training and meeting, of peace and renewal and of challenge and response".

The Opening

The time came towards the end of 1965 when we knew that we had to go public and let the wider community know that we had started and what we were about. So on a blustery October Saturday we gathered with our friends and supporters, some two hundred in all, in the Corrymeela Lounge. We had come together to open the Centre as a place for Christian Reconciliation in

Ireland. Among those who came there was a great mixture in age and tradition. It was a happy and relaxed day, beginning with the procession of work campers cheerfully wending their way up from the coast road. They were dressed in their jeans and T-shirts, and carried all the various tools they had used in the restoration of the House. They were a noisy and colourful procession, brandishing not only spades, shovels, picks and paint brushes, but also kettles, pots and pans, recognising that everyone had a part to play.

The climax for us all was when Tullio Vinay, who had come from Agape to be with us, entered the conference room and declared Corrymeela open. The short speech he made, in broken but most effective English, has remained ever since as a continuous challenge to us.

In this moment of deep emotion for me I wish that with the help of the Living Lord this centre may become:

> *FIRST: a place of preaching the New World as we see it in the person of Jesus Christ. The world needs to see this message in the real world of men. Here, living together, the New World in work and prayer, you may point it to all categories of men and push them to the same research, be they politicians, economists, sociologists, technicians, workers or students.*
> *SECOND: a place of encounter and dialogue with all men; believers and unbelievers. The believers need the presence of the unbelievers, because they represent a criticism of our way and life; the unbelievers need us if we have real news to bring. A member of the Italian Parliament once said to me: 'I am not religious but I am terribly attracted to Christ.'*
> *THIRD: to be a question-mark to the Church everywhere in Europe, so that they may review their structures and tasks, and be free from this instinct of preservation, to hear the time of God for its mission in the world.*
> *FOURTH: more than all, that you – being together – have always open eyes and ears to understand when the Lord is passing nearby, to be ready to follow the way He shall indicate to you. As a church we should not have an inferiority complex – not because we are or have something – but because every possibility is given to us as His instruments.*

In my response as leader I spoke of our vision for Corrymeela:

> *We hope that Corrymeela will come to be known as 'the Open Village', open to all people of good will who are willing to meet each other, to learn from each other and work together for the good of all.*
>
> *Open also for all sorts of new ventures and experiments in fellowship, study and worship.*
>
> *Open to all sorts of people; from industry, the professions, agriculture and commerce.*
>
> *This is part of our vision. We know we are only at the beginning and there is so much to be done.*

GOING FORWARD

The late sixties and early seventies was still a time of searching and assessment. There had been some euphoria at the start but that did not last long as the everyday problems of such an enterprise were faced. General parameters had been established at the beginning:

1. Training of Christian laymen to play a responsible part in society and the Church.

2. To give opportunity for retreat, that people under stress, or wishing to discover the meaning of life, may find quietness for readjustment.

3. To give opportunity to industrial and professional groups to meet for conference and study.

4. Through work camps to bring together craftsmen and voluntary workers in a realistic Christian fellowship.

5. Through youth camps to provide a meeting place for young people of this and other countries.

6. To provide a meeting point for reconciliation in work, community life and in the Church.

Of course it was idealistic and much had to be learnt by trial and error. The community concept is marvellous in the abstract, but in reality something that has to grow gradually. Even so it is true that out of all the menage of ideas, hopes and energy something did emerge by way of structure and programme. Emerge is the right word, because there was no pre-packed blueprint, but rather the shape and character of the place grew out of real life situations. Corrymeela, from the start was essentially about people in all their infinite variety, needs and concerns. This became much more true as the general situation in the country deteriorated in 1969 and violence came to the streets.

Almost, it seemed, in preparation for such a time, the pattern was emerging. A small staff at Ballycastle had come together. They

were unflappable, caring and untiring in facing all sorts of problems. It is staggering just to record all that was accomplished not only in the ever-increasing use of the centre, but in addition the arduous work of rehabilitation and adaptation of the old premises to new demands far beyond the original intention. The almost continuous redecoration of the Main House, the construction of the original Work Camp and indeed the improvisation of the Tara unit from old 30 year old chalets as well as the building of additional accommodation at the back of the Main House, all came into this period. But more important, the continual stream of young people who came to the work camps were a vital part of this period. From these early work-campers many of the leaders of Corrymeela emerged. But there were other features of this period, like the summer programme with the special emphasis on families. There were also various youth projects run mostly by students from Queen's University, and the initiation of 'Corrymeet' and 'Eastermeet' – "run by young people for young people". There was the increase of the Community's programme beyond Retreats and Friends Conferences. Then when violence did really begin it almost seemed that Corrymeela had been preparing beforehand, because it was able very quickly to readjust many of its programmes to meet the new challenges of people and families at risk in troubled areas, with intimidation, injury, bereavement becoming so much part of the scene.

THE SEARCH, THE PLACE, THE OPENING
Bill Breakey

The Search

The buildings sat squatly on its hilltop, surrounded by the chalets like a great green hen with her chickens. The withered remains of last year's weeds blew around in the strong wind off the sea as we put the key in the lock and entered. Exploring from room to room, our footsteps echoed along the bare and deserted corridors and off the dingy walls. This was it! I think we knew at once that the search was over, that we had found what we were looking for: a place to start our exploration of the meaning of Christian community in the Northern Ireland context.

Back in Belfast a few days later, we met with the other members of the group. Many of them had also made the trip to Ballycastle and had inspected Corrymeela. There was general agreement that this was the place we had been looking for and that we should go ahead with its purchase. Of course we had no money, but after two weeks we had got enough promises of gifts and interest free loans to indicate that our faith and hope were shared by others. We decided to go ahead.

The Place

For some of us, the idea of finding a place where we could put into practice the ideals of Christian community had been on our minds for several years. Some had been inspired by experiences in Iona or at Agape in Italy; others had shared in a form of community experience at Queens and others had been drawn in for a variety of other reasons. Several of us students had looked at sites in Fermanagh and in Donegal for a venture in Christian community. We shared a deep commitment to the Church, but dissatisfaction with its contemporary structures and a longing to see something different. In the autumn of 1964, Ray Davey brought us together with the idea that the moment had now arrived to translate the dreams of years into reality. We met on a number of occasions, students, teachers, business people, ministers, and by the end of the winter had decided that we should obtain a building for use as

a meeting place, a place to experience community living, a place of encounter. We would not affiliate ourselves with any particular denominational structure, but were anxious not to fall into the old Protestant trap of forming a new splinter group, so we resolved that we would all remain active in our own churches. We wanted to have for ourselves the richness of community experience and the power that a community can have. We did not feel called to a monastic type of community living and for most of us the notion of a residential community was not a practical proposition. We wanted to explore relevant forms of commitment for our time and situation and to provide an opportunity for the churches of Northern Ireland to rediscover the concept of community. Many local congregations and parishes, we felt, had become static and limited in their vision of the potential of the Christian life.

That was before the "troubles" erupted throughout Northern Ireland. It was a time of some optimism among liberally-minded people, because, although we were aware of many of the injustices in society and the iniquitous divisions among Christians, there was a sense that we were moving in the right direction and that things were going to get better. It was evident to us that bridging the Catholic-Protestant divide would be an essential part of any attempt to develop a concept of community in the Church, though this issue did not have the central importance that it came to have a few years later.

We decided, therefore, early in 1964, to look for a place that could be a centre for this type of community experience. When we got wind that Corrymeela, on the cliffs near Ballycastle, was up for sale, it seemed improbable that we could ever acquire it but we decided to go and take a look, and the rest I have already described.

Embarking on such a large journey into the unknown, forced us to consider very seriously the sort of commitment we were prepared to make to each other. We decided on the name "The Corrymeela Community" and had ourselves set up as a Company Limited by Guarantee in order to have the necessary legal status. The Community elected a Council to be its central governing body: Ray Davey, Craig Cameron, Bill Breakey, Basil Glass, Robert Carson, Joyce Nice, Angela Breakey, Tom Patterson, John Morrow and Bill Boyd.

The Opening

The first, and mammoth task facing the Community was to renovate and furnish the building. It would have to be done largely with volunteer workers and with great ingenuity to keep within an extremely limited budget. We divided ourselves up into committees, prepared publicity materials, solicited donations of money and furnishing items and prepared for a summer of work camps. To some, the most revolutionary proposal came from our wonderful architect member, Robert Carson, who suggested that the buildings should be painted white. Corrymeela had always been green and the suggestion that it should be painted white seemed impractical and bizarre. How wrong we were! Robert prevailed and, as the transformation progressed over the summer, the new Corrymeela emerged in its pristine glory. One of the many miracles associated with the early days of Corrymeela occurred in the spring of 1965. That was the arrival of Billy McAlister. He attended a few of our meetings in Belfast and when we were feeling desperate about the need for a person to supervise the work of rehabilitating at Corrymeela, he stepped forward. Billy was not only a wonderful clerk of works and resident manager of the facility for many years, he was also a saintly and gentle presence who made a powerful impact on the lives of those who knew him. There were many other miracles that summer, for example that nobody fell off a high ladder and broke their neck, or that scores of mattresses and blankets were suddenly acquired, or that dozens of people with no skill whatsoever suddenly found themselves to be carpenters, cooks, painters and gardeners.

A date was fixed for an opening in October, which provided us with a deadline to work towards, and we made it. The opening was a great occasion, with our old friend and inspiration, Tullio Vinay from Agape, declaring the Centre open, while community members and work-campers stood around holding their shovels, hammers and paintbrushes, symbolising that our concept of community was very much rooted in the everyday realities of practical existence.

That was how it began. The process of learning the meaning of community for ourselves as Christians was only getting started; our ideas for reaching out were very poorly developed; the second centre in Belfast was far in the future and the idea that people in Coventry, London or New York might be interested in what we were doing never occurred to us. Subsequent events in Northern

Ireland, in the world and in the Church would have profound effects on the development of Corrymeela which nobody on that wet October day could possible have imagined.

PREPARATIONS AND OBJECTIVES
Craig Cameron

Queen's University and Belfast, as the 50's gave way to the 60's, shaped the vision. Students from Roman Catholic and Protestant homes were discovering each other's values and prejudices in a quite unprecedented way. The religious "communities" associated with the University were fostering a new openness and wholistic approach to life, while the political societies explored a 'new Ireland'. At the same time, Brian Faulkner was defending the system of local government in Londonderry as fair and Rev Ian Paisley was preaching in his Ravenhill Road Church on the theme of "Tickets for hell and where they are bought".

Encouraged by Ray Davey and the links he had already established with communities abroad, some of us visited Iona in Scotland (where Alex Watson and John Morrow were members of the Community) and took part in and led work camps, discovering how integrating and levelling an experience this can be, particularly when that work is dedicated daily to some larger purpose. Others visited the Agape Community in Italy with its emphasis on international dialogue and the Taize Community in France where the total commitment that comes from the vows of celibacy, community of goods and obedience was sharpening a group of men for "availability" and dialogue at the leading edge of the ecumenical debate.

Through Ray Davey our group widened and was focussing the vision at the time when Corrymeela House, Ballycastle came on the market. I shall never forget the challenge of marketing our vision, and experiencing the depression of rejection by some whom I felt should have understood, and the elation of support from others who caught a glimpse of the dream. With a '*place*' we made ourselves put the dream down on paper ....

... where we can go and spend a while together and get to know each other.
... where the sea and the sky and the mountains meet and reflect the glory of the whole creation.
... where there is peace and quiet and one can get away from the turmoil of our daily life to be silently recharged.

... where people can talk of the problems of life and together seek some sort of solution and learn to love each other and their God.
... where youth can work and play and learn in happiness and worship their creator.
... where our differences can be overcome and we can learn to live together.

At the same time, we defined our purpose

1. Training of Christian lay people to play a responsible part in society and the Church.
2. To give opportunity for retreat, that people under stress, or wishing to discover the meaning of life, may find quietness for readjustment.
3. To give opportunity to industrial and professional groups to meet for conference and study.
4. Through work-camps, to bring together crafts people and voluntary workers in a realistic Christian fellowship.
5. Through youth camps, to provide a meeting place for young people of this and other countries.
6. To provide a meeting point for reconciliation in working, community and in Church life.

In October came the opening at which Ray stressed the emphasis we were placing on Corrymeela as a lay-centre and on our ecumenical vision. "We cherish and respect the separate traditions of each church, but we are convinced that there are multitudes of things that are crying out to be done together, and it is high time we got on with them".

Tullio Vinay, the Founder of the Agape Community, prayed that we might be a place of preaching the New World, a place of encounter, a question mark to the churches and that we would always have open eyes and ears to understand and be ready to follow the way the Lord indicated.

THE EARLY WORK CAMPS
Desney Cromey

In the beginning there were the work camps. When Corrymeela began its journey in 1965 there were many young people, mostly students, who were in search of adventure and Corrymeela was in need of the youthful commitment of many minds, hearts and hands. Both needs came together and were met with enthusiasm in the 'pioneer' work camps.

The first work camp was in June 1965 when six of us, Joyce Nice, Agnes Kirkpatrick, Billy McAlister, Glen Rowan, Roger Cromey and I moved into a very sad and neglected Corrymeela site. The main buildings and chalets were a rather horrible shade of green. The kitchen was antiquated but lively; a massive wooden sink dominated the scene, but the eye was distracted by the racing activities of numerous mice busy in the open cupboards below.

Sanitary arrangements were quite primitive, as there was no running water for the first few days, and many a bucket of water was transported down the hill by our own Jack and Jill. There was little furniture downstairs and none at all upstairs. New work campers were welcomed with cries of: "Come on in. You'll have to make your own bed. Here's some wood and ask Billy for a hammer and nails".

What times we had; often rising at 6am for first breakfast and morning worship, followed by hard physical work until lunch time. The rest of the day was devoted to exploring the local countryside, solving the world's problems, cooking, washing-up. A never-to-be forgotten adventure was a late night expedition to Fair Head, when the local coast guards were called in to help locate our weary mountaineers, as they returned from the Greyman's path. Close friendships were made and many a romance, including my own, flourished in the work camp setting.

THE ORIGINAL VISION
John Morrow

When the Community was founded in 1965, the original group did not envisage that we would be so preoccupied with reconciliation in Northern Ireland. Part of our earlier vision was about the renewal of the church, the nature of Christian community, the vocation of lay people in the world and the wider issues of world peace and social change. This was expressed in the Litany of Dedication used at the opening of the Corrymeela Centre on October 30 1965.

Leader: For the training of Christian laymen and laywomen to play a reasonable part in society and the Church:
All: We dedicate this centre.
Leader: For quietness and retreat, so that people under stress or wishing to discover the meaning of life may find renewal:
All: We dedicate this centre.
Leader: For the meeting of men and women from industry, commerce and professional life for conference and study:
All: We dedicate this centre.
Leader: For the bringing together in work camps of craftsmen and voluntary helpers in a realistic Christian fellowship:
All: We dedicate this centre.
Leader: For the bringing together of young people from this and other countries and the increase of friendship and understanding:
All: We dedicate this centre.
Leader: For the ministry of reconciliation in working and community life and in the church:
All: We dedicate this centre.

The Influence of Iona

The influence of the Iona Community was clearly the most formative one for quite a number of the early members. Why? Iona gave many of us our first truly ecumenical vision; one which sought to heal the broken body of Christ in the Church and in the

world. Amongst those most touched by this experience in addition to Ray Davey and myself were Alex Watson, Minister of Harmony Hill Church in Lisburn, Craig Cameron, a former treasurer of the Community, and many others. But it was as much about transformation as unity and therefore wholly consistent with the tradition of the radical reformers of the 16th century. It seemed to offer possibilities for an open ended movement for renewal where people of all traditions could share together and learn from one another.

Most centrally of all, Iona seemed to be recovering the heart of the message of the incarnation that in Jesus "the word was made flesh". As MacLeod once put it: "Jesus Christ was not crucified on an altar between two candlesticks, but on a cross between two thieves..." By turning Jesus into a remote stain glass figure we had lost his humanity, and in the process removed him from the common life of men and women. Only a fully embodied Christianity which took seriously the whole person and the life of the whole community, can be a witness to the kingdom inaugurated by the crucified and risen Lord. Only a vulnerable Christian community which engages with the world in challenge and service could speak a word of healing and hope.

Inevitably some of us began to ask what this implied for us and our divided society in Northern Ireland? Could we adapt this model to our particular circumstances? When the Corrymeela Community came into existence there were many marked influences from Iona in our structures and thinking.

Our early relationships were forged in the work camps at Ballycastle and the close integration of work and worship, faith and life, was an obvious reflection of the holistic model of Iona. To this day the Corrymeela Centre remains a place where people live together and share in community and not a mere conference centre; but even more so in the "earthy" flavour of every aspect of the Community's life. It is the material world which is the arena of God's work. The Christian Community is not meant to be a religious ghetto but a witness to God's purpose for all creation.

Corrymeela sought to reflect that biblical and Iona sense of "the word made flesh" by rooting its life and work in a shared common life, open to all who were willing to join us on a new ecumenical journey of faith; open also to those who were sceptical,

disillusioned with their past experience of the church and to those who were victims of injustice, discrimination, intimidation and fear in our society.

This fundamental solidarity with people from every background, around the table or the sink, where we meet one another in wholeness, provides the basis on which, through mutual acceptance, we can recognise and receive each other's gifts. But there was so much more in the contacts which Iona opened up for us too. Not the least of these was the value of this model of a dispersed Community which offered a pattern that was adaptable to different situations and was open to the average lay person living and working in society.

THE CORRYMEELA WEAVE
David Stevens using material supplied by John Morrow

There were a number of interweaving strands of influence on the group of people who came together with Ray Davey in the early 60's and out of whose meetings Corrymeela arose. Many of these derived from the wider European context:

- The growing ecumenical vision which understood the church to be called to be a sign and agent of the purpose of Christ to draw all humankind in unity, and not simply an agent for the salvation of individuals;

- The search for new ways of expressing Christian community embodied in centres of renewal such as Iona, Taize and Agape; and

- The concern to support and equip Christian lay people for their vocation in the world, as was particularly being expressed in Dutch and German lay academies.

Closer to home, the need to respond to the challenges of a divided church and society also occupied the group's attention.

As we sought to translate these themes into the particular setting of Northern Ireland, the theme of reconciliation emerged as one which encompassed many facets. It gave special focus to the task of breaking down enmity and distrust, it expressed the sense of going on a new journey into new relationships, and the hope that we might be a catalyst for social and political change in church and society.

The Corrymeela Vision

Our work is rooted in the conviction of the *Lordship of Christ* over all. Our vision is of a renewed and transformed universe. Modern insights confirm the Hebrew understanding of the universe as wholly *relational*. The Kingdom of Christ is the Kingdom of right relationships. To understand Christ's life and death and resurrection and to participate in this work is to begin a journey to

renew *all* our relationships; with God, with ourselves, with all humankind and with the earth and the universe. All things find their unity in Christ. But paradoxically, He is *the Lord who is the servant* so we can only understand this Lordship as we are turned around and rediscover one another in mutual service as brothers and sisters in God's family. Service without solidarity is paternalism. Today we are called to rediscover the meaning of faith *in community*. We are invited to be a sign of the new community and a catalyst for its creation locally and internationally. As we do this, we will inevitably be seen by some as a threat to existing structures or to those with vested interest in the status quo. So the way of peace is often the way of the cross. Some have already experienced that; others of us have not been really tested yet. We need to rediscover that the way of the cross is the way to share in Christ's risen life.

The part of the Gospel which speaks so eloquently to us here is the letter to the Ephesians and the whole New Testament witness to the breaking down of the enmity between Jew and Gentile. That enmity is deeply rooted in us all as a result of the historic conflicts in this island. As we struggle to find a basis for a pluralist society in which both Irish and British traditions are recognised and given free expression, and where all sections of our society can feel a sense of belonging and have a real chance to participate, we know that our deeper fears and wounds can always block the way. Tragically our churches have sometimes given a higher loyalty to political causes more than to the Servant Lordship of Christ. Only a rediscovery of the Servant Lordship of Christ and the depth of His healing love can unite us and *free* us to create the new structures which are necessary for a new society. The love which can both expose the selfish pride and fear in our hearts but which also reaches out to win enemies over to friendship. If we realise that Christ loved us whilst we were His enemies we can work without self-righteousness with those who oppose our way and not become cynical or embittered, as we seek to create a more inclusive community.

Over a period of time, the vision eventually came to be expressed in the form of the Corrymeela Commitment.

Pursuing the Vision

In order to pursue this vision, we formed ourselves into a loosely structured dispersed community and, in order to ground our vision in visible concrete form, we decided to establish a residential centre (sometimes called the open village) where we could learn how to be with each other in new ways.

In addition to being a kind of spiritual home for us all, the Corrymeela Centre became a place where we could invite groups and individuals from our local communities and actively promote initiatives to address the fear, enmity, ignorance and prejudice which were widespread in church and society in Northern Ireland. It was a place where we could learn to accept each other and to share our experiences and gifts. Because our vision arose partly from influences in the wider world church, we also encouraged the continuation of strong international contacts, personnel and volunteers etc from overseas, and an awareness of some of the issues common to us all.

From the outset, there was a strong volunteer ethos at the Centre and throughout the Community. A lot of the early work at Corrymeela was done by workcamps. In the middle 1970's we developed a "Serve and Learn" programme for one-year volunteers, as a positive initiative expressing our values as a Community and not just a way to staff the Centre.

The establishment of Corrymeela House in the early 1970's in Belfast was equally important as a means to root our work in the city and to maintain contact with members.

Programme

The programme developed slowly in the early years, with an emphasis on workcamps and a few significant conferences, and this allowed some relationships of trust to develop amongst a core group. The context of that period was one where changes in church and society were beginning to be addressed but there were also signs of strong resistance to change emerging. By 1969, society was moving into violent conflict and we were challenged to respond to the situation in more urgent ways.

This response included summer play schemes and caring for refugee families which threw us into more intimate contact with people from districts suffering severe violence. Support for families led to youth work in Belfast and Ballycastle, partly to enable young people to sustain cross community friendships. Eventually a new youth village was established at Ballycastle, to further develop this work.

There were a number of political initiatives in this period in which some members and friends were involved, such as the New Ulster Movement, a political think tank, and the formation of the Alliance Party and the Social Democratic and Labour Party. Attempts were also made to promote reflection and analysis of the roots of our problems through conferences on education, the role of the media, policing and local communities, etc.

SIGNIFICANT CORRYMEELA EVENTS

1965	House at Ballycastle purchased (June) House officially opened (30th October) Community established – Ray Davey becomes Leader
1966	Conference addressed by Terence O'Neill, Prime Minister of Northern Ireland
1967	Work Camp Chalet Village erected
1968	Extension to Main House
1970	Annexe built Cedar Haven prefab erected Ray Davey becomes full-time Leader
1971	Tara unit completed Cross of Nails presented (25th September) Belfast Centre opened
1973	Original playground in memory of Sean Armstrong opened
1976	Village Unit opened Coventry House opened Corrymeela Link established
1977	Cottages (bedrooms) completed New wing to Main House completed Workshop completed
1978	Cottages (main block) completed Extension to kitchen completed
1979	Opening of the Croi (16th June)
1980	John Morrow becomes Leader
1981	First Summerfest (July)

1985	Belfast House – re-structured and refurbished
1986	Opening of children's adventure playground in memory of Sean Armstrong (May) Two new Cedar Haven family units opened (June)
1988	Corrymeela Football Team founded
1993	Trevor Williams becomes Leader Knocklayd gifted to Community by Valerie and Peter Tennant
1994	Treetops Children's Bereavement Group established
1995	New Tara Unit opened (July)
1996	Last Summerfest
1997	Niwano Peace Prize awarded to Corrymeela
1998	New House opened (June)
2000	Corryfest
2004	David Stevens becomes Leader