

Gill Michael's Story

Gill came from Scotland to Northern Ireland though she was born in Dublin. She had been a member of an Evangelical Church where her questions became a reason for her exodus. When she got to Coleraine, she tried to find a home in the Church of Ireland, and it was not easy. A colleague at the University told her that she should contact Corrymeela as this seemed to be a place for people who had stepped out of line. She was introduced to Pam who told her there was going to be meeting of the cell group that night. Gill was desperate enough to say yes and went. The meeting was at McDonagh's home. It was a group of Protestants and Catholics who talked and worshipped together. She felt at home having had some experience of sharing with Catholics and Protestants among her work colleagues in Scotland. It was also a place where she could talk about Politics. She was struggling with Northern Ireland and justice issues.

For Gill the major attraction of Corrymeela was theological. She also talked Politics with passion, especially about Ireland and justice in Ireland. When she arrived, she was suspicious of Northern Ireland as a political entity. She came from an Evangelical background where God had a plan for life. For her coming to Northern Ireland was a journey of faith.

She remembered participating in her first family week which is a key experience for Gill which still moves her deeply. She came as a member of the cell group which was responsible for the week. She was struck by the way children and babies were introduced and given name labels. They were welcomed in a way she never experienced in Church. They were honoured in the same way as adults were honoured. She remembered being the backside of a horse in the weekly concert, a new experience for a respectable middle-class woman. It was all a steep learning curve. Gill also remembers in a particular woman who had come with a number of children and was definitely in need of a break. They went on a trip to a forest and were told to put on good boots as it would be muddy. This woman came with slippers tied together with strings and Gill was wondering how she would cope. As they walked along this woman came up to Gill and said: I am worried about you because you are on your own and without little ones. For Gill the world was turned upside down. She thought to herself: How amazing Lord, you have brought me to worship with these people. It is about meeting with people around the kitchen table. Buildings and programmes are important but, in the end, it is about journeying in faith where you are at.