

Pam Compton's Story

Pam came to Queen's as a student and saw on the notice board of the Presbyterian Student Centre different study and action groups advertised. She was particularly interested in a group which was going to explore the theme of the place of the community in the Church. She joined the group and the book they studied was called 'Living Springs' (New Religious Movements in Western Europe) by Olive Wyon. She found very interesting people in the group such as Bill Breakey, Craig Cameron, Des Rea, Ken Irvine, Trisha Gallagher, Rosemary Dunlop, Margaret Kyle (later Smith) and Norman Smith, Barbara Mol and Hilda Stewart. They also read a book by Frere Roger, the founder of the Taize Community. Part of the action of this group was a commitment to visit one of the communities they had been reading about. Some went to Iona, others to Agape or Taize. Pam went to Agape and Iona. These were important experiences. In 1962 the British Council of Churches organised a Youth Festival at Leicester University. A group from the Presbyterian Centre went to this event which became a key experience for them all. During that time Bill Breakey spoke to each individual and asked the question: are you serious about setting up a community in Northern Ireland? Pam's answer was yes. They felt there was a need for a place where young people could go and have an experience as they had had in Iona, Agape and Taize.

The group of students and some post graduate students were serious about setting up a community. For Pam it was also about giving something back to Northern Ireland which had been crucial in her finding her own identity and giving her a sense of freedom. Back in England she had always been the younger sister of Margaret. It was also the time of the hippies and of communes. Some of the group members had the idea of buying a couple of houses in Sandy Row where they could live together and find work around the University. They had no ideas how this would develop.

Pam graduated in 1963 and moved to England for training in library studies. She kept in touch with the group and attended meetings as often as she could. Ray realised that this group of students were serious and introduced them to another group also interested in community. It included people like Carrie Barnett, John Baird and Robert Carson. Tom Patterson heard about the site in Ballycastle and went to see it. He decided it was not suitable for the Church but thought his new group might be interested. Pam came back for the crucial meeting when it was decided to buy the site. She brought along her friend Maralyn McBride and before the meeting they had gone to visit Corrymeela. At the meeting each member present had to sign a document that they were financially liable. Other members of the group included Bill Boyd, Carlisle Patterson, John Barklay, Basil Clarke, Philip Breakey, Robin MacDermott, Tom Patterson Margaret Ritchie, Joyce Nice, Norah Fair, Diana Carson, Addie and Nancy Morrow, William and Eithne Rutherford, Kenneth (Paddy) and Eileen Patterson. Corrymeela was going to be a Iona type of Centre. Three members of the group were also members or associates of Iona, i.e. Dick Gordon, Alec Watson, and John Morrow. Corrymeela was going to be a place of adventure and spiritual challenge for young people. There were Community meetings every fortnight and spring and autumn meetings. Pam tried to attend as many as she could. She recalled getting a letter saying that she had to come back for a particular meeting at which Ray was to be appointed as the Leader of the Community because there might be a vote as some people felt Carlisle Patterson should be the leader.

Pam was four years in England studying and working and came back to Northern Ireland in 1968 to take up a post at the University of Ulster in Coleraine. For the first 6 weeks or so she

stayed at Corrymeela and travelled to work from there. At that time Norah Fair was living in two rooms at the Centre. She was the housekeeper. Billy McAllister had a room on the male side of the old house. The Centre was transformed in that the house was painted white and a lot of work had gone on in the place. Pam was involved in digging the trenches which would bring the electricity from the house to the cottages. Anna Glass and Clare Dornan both from Ballycastle worked in the kitchen. Most groups came at weekends. For Pam Compton, the involvement increased. She was on the Community Life Committee, attended the fortnightly meetings in Belfast and helped with the Autumn Fair, an important fund raiser for the Community. She also became involved in setting up the Coleraine Cell Group which met at Donald and Isobel McDonagh's home. At the time there were just two Members in Coleraine. The first meeting was arranged by Sean Quigley who had volunteered at the Centre and Rosemary Wilson. Pam remembered that one of the early actions was participating in a peace festival, held in the Arcadia Portrush, which was a bit of a flop as they had no experience of how to run and promote an event.

Corrymeela was exclusively Protestant at the beginning though it saw itself as an Ecumenical Community having Presbyterian, Anglican, and Methodist members. This was being more open and inclusive than most Churches were at that time. For Corrymeela it was important to get credibility among the Protestant Churches as they were suspicious of anything Ecumenical. One of their aims was also to be a question mark to the Churches. It was felt that Catholics could join when the time was right. This obviously was not the case yet when Diana introduced a new provisional member who was refused full membership.