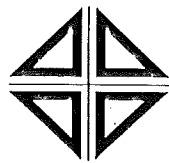


THE NIWANO PEACE PRIZE

1997



THE CORRYMEELA COMMUNITY



## CERTIFICATE OF COMMENDATION

The Corrymeela Community

To do away with fear, prejudice, and ignorance, and to build relationships of trust and mutual respect, the Corrymeela Community of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland has developed numerous grass-roots programmes for reconciliation in the midst of strife over the past thirty years.

It has provided a place for Protestant and Catholic leaders to meet and talk, has offered care for families who have lost loved ones in the conflict, and is deeply involved in education for mutual understanding among youths so they can transcend differences in faith and take part together in volunteer activities.

In recognition of the Community's great contribution to peace and justice in Northern Ireland in the name of religious cooperation and human dignity, the Niwano Peace Foundation is pleased to honour it with the fourteenth Niwano Peace Prize on this eighth day of May, nineteen hundred and ninety-seven

Niwano Peace Foundation

Nichiko Niwano, President

Motoyuki Naganuma, Chairman



Dear Co Member,

June 1997

Joyce and I are just back from what was a wonderful trip to Japan and Australia. As you know the 1997 Niwano Peace Prize for 'the promotion of inter-religious co operation and world peace' (their words) was awarded to Corrymeela. I asked the Niwano Peace Foundation if Corrymeela could be represented by both Catholic and Protestant, and male and female members. This they kindly agreed to. Council suggested that Joyce should accompany me and together with Carmel Heaney we set off for Japan. Carmel was with us for a little over a week and Joyce and I were in Japan for a very full two weeks trip.

We started off in Tokyo with a welcome party and the Presentation ceremony when Carmel Joyce and I received the formal 'Commendation' as printed on page 2, a gold medal, and a symbol of the prize (£100,000) The three of us delivered the acceptance speech, (a copy of the speech's follows). The British and Irish Embassy's were represented and many other distinguished guests. Corrymeela was introduced by Hildegard Goss Mayr, President of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation.

Then it was on to Kyoto, a previous capital of Japan, and now the religious and cultural national centre. This was for a symposium on the 'Healing the division' at which I gave the keynote speech and three panelists contributed to a discussion and answered questions on the theme.

We then went to visit Hiroshima. We visited the Peace museum which tells in graphic terms the story of the bombing of the city at the end of the second world war and seeks to promote peace and nuclear disarmament. The most impressive aspect of the visit for me was being shown round the museum by Akihiro Takahasi former Director, Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, who was a 14 year old school boy when he was 'exposed' to the atomic bomb. He bears the scars on his body of the horrific burning, and he suffers from serious liver damage, but his spirit is free from bitterness as he tells his story quietly in his desire to promote a nuclear free world. The museum has one and a half million visitors each year, half of million of which are school pupils. The town has

a commitment to reach the rising generation with the message of peace. It is very impressive. At this point Carmel had to leave us and return to her new job at the CRC (as training officer). Joyce and I went to Nagasaki and again saw the peace park and realised that a large Roman Catholic community in the town were victims of this, the second atomic bomb attack on a civilian population.

We then returned to Tokyo to meet members of Rissho Kosei Kai, the lay Buddhist movement founded by Nikkyo Niwano (who established the Peace Fund) The occasion, again rather formal, was broadcast by satellite to over 250 RKK centres in Japan. The warmth of their reception was a memorable experience.

The final part of the trip was a dialogue with the RKK President Nichiko Niwano, son of the Founder. The theme of our discussion was on the reasons for conflict and division, and what religious insights show us in finding a way to wholeness. I was amazed at the common themes and concerns that we shared, and how much we shared in common from our different religious backgrounds.

As well as the official events of the visit, we had personal tours of temples, shrines, and palaces; Japanese Gardens and other delights of a nation which cherish a profound simplicity and beauty of design. At numerous occasions we were wined and dined with Japanese exotica such as jelly fish, shark fin soup, octopus, raw tuna etc etc. It was the aspect of the trip that I feared most, but I loved it all - and its so healthy!

All in all it was a trip of a lifetime. Joyce and I are extremely privileged to have been chosen to present you on this important occasion. I trust that what we said, expresses something of the vision which makes Corrymeela an important part of our lives.

Yours in peace,

Trevor.

## **Introduction of the Corrymeela Community**

by Hildegard Goss-Mayr

*(President International Fellowship of Reconciliation  
and former recipient of the Niwano Peace Prize)*

Respected Officers of the Niwano Peace Foundation, distinguished guests,

It is a great honour for me to have been invited by the Niwano Peace Foundation to present to this distinguished gathering the representatives of the Corrymeela Community which has been chosen to receive the Fourteenth Niwano Peace prize.

By attributing this award to the Corrymeela Community, the Foundation brings to the attention of the world the importance of small grassroot communities for peacemaking on our planet. It underlines, by doing so, the truth that in areas of conflict, whether it is in Northern Ireland, on the Balkans, in Rwanda or Cambodia, political solutions must be worked out; these agreements, however, will not bring about peace unless intensive work at the grassroot level has opened the hearts and minds of adversaries to listen to each other to learn to forgive and to take to the path of healing. In fact, it is this patient effort, rooted in the belief in the presence of the Divine in every human being, which prepares the ground for true reconciliation. It is the merit of the Niwano Peace Foundation to bring these efforts, that are largely neglected by the media, to public attention and thus to obtain support for them.

The Corrymeela Community that we honour and celebrate this afternoon, has been witnessing for peace building and healing in one of the most divided and violence stricken regions of Europe. It has deeply impressed each one of us as we read the detailed accounts of the reasons for which it has been selected for this high honour. Allow me therefore to remind you of a few aspects of particular importance:

- Corrymeela is a Community: the fact that we have the pleasure to welcome three persons from among its leadership,

Protestant and Catholic, is significant. They give witness to the divided society of Northern Ireland that it is possible to overcome enmity, to discover as enriching the qualities of the "other" and to work and live together in harmony.

- It is also very important to note the way in which the Corrymeela Community is growing. During the 31 years of its existence, the Community has been with the suffering people, part of the suffering people. This has permitted them to develop step by step programmes responding to the real needs of the people; for example: to offer space for Catholics and Protestants to meet, to host displaced families, to give support to adults and children bereaved through violence of close members of their family, to offer peace education for young people, to provide training for conflict resolution etc. Their presence among the suffering enables the Community to respond with creative initiatives of healing and reconciliation.

- Finally we admire the perseverance of the Corrymeela Community. In his message to the Foundation, the Founder of the Community, Ray Davey, writes: "We must go on and on". During the 31 years of its existence the Community has seen little outward success. But they are convinced that no gesture, no action of love, truth and forgiveness is ever lost. It is an ineradicable seed of transformation of hatred, violence and fear into love, comprehension and justice. Corrymeela is convinced that it is helping to prepare a peaceful future for Northern Ireland. It is therefore an inexhaustible source of hope for the suffering people. By honouring the Corrymeela Community, the Niwano Peace Foundation is building a bridge to all continents and giving honour to all those groups and movements at the grassroots level who are patiently building peace and healing the wounds of brokenness.

It is now my honour to present formally the representatives of the Corrymeela Community to the Officers of the Foundation to receive the Fourteenth award of the Niwano Peace Prize.

The Rev Trevor Williams, Leader of the Community

Ms Carmel Heaney

Mrs Joyce Williams

## **Niwano Peace Prize Commemorative Address**

*by The Rev Trevor Williams, Ms. Carmel Heaney, &  
Mrs Joyce Williams.*

### **(Trevor Williams)**

I bring you the greetings of the Corrymeela Community. We are deeply moved that you have stretched out the hand of friendship and support to us who live on the other side of the world. We may be divided by distance, culture, and have differences in religious tradition, but we have discovered we share a common commitment to peace, and already Corrymeela has benefited greatly by what we have learnt.

Corrymeela seeks to be an inclusive community in a land with a history heavy the clashes of competing communities. These exclusive communities have thrown up extremist paramilitary groupings who have pursued their aspirations through terrorism. The number of those actively involved in terrorism may be small, but their deeds have caused immeasurable suffering with over 3000 deaths in a small population of just one and a half million. These two communities have larger more moderate sectors described as Nationalists and Unionists. Nationalists pursue their political aspiration for a united Ireland through constitutional politics. Unionists seek to defend the link with Britain through the democratic process. Almost all Nationalists are Irish and Catholic. Almost all Unionists call themselves British and are Protestant. Each community is the mirror image, the opposite of the other. We live in a contested society, and the identity, culture and religion of each side is part of the battle.

In seeking a new way, a way of peace, Corrymeela has a vision of an inclusive community. We seek in every way possible to work together as Catholics and Protestants and cross the other divisions of society. At the gate of our Residential Centre in Ballycastle is a sign which says

*Presentation Ceremony, Tokyo Hyatt Hotel on Thurs 8th May 1997*

*"Corrymeela is people of all ages and Christian traditions who, individually and together are committed to the healing of social, religious and political divisions that exists in Northern Ireland and throughout the world"*

Peace is indivisible. We actively seek ways of expressing this inclusive community, so we have been very grateful that the Niwano Peace Foundation agreed that Joyce, who is my wife and I, who are both Protestants, could be joined by Carmel Heaney, a Catholic, to represent Corrymeela on this occasion. This is very important to us and we thank you for accepting that. So this occasion will be shared between us.

I also wish to include some words of the Rev Ray Davey, the founder of Corrymeela who could not be with us on this occasion. He has sent this message.

Dear Japanese Friends of the Niwano Peace Foundation,

the news that you had decided to present us with a Peace Prize is most inspiring and encouraging. It makes us realise that though we live so far away from each other, yet we are very close in outlook and hope. Indeed your generosity makes us understand that we do live in the one world, that we live in the one global village. In the words of John Donne the 17th Century poet:

*'No man is an island, entire of itself: every man is a piece of the Continent, a part of the main ... Any man's death diminishes me because I am involved in Mankind'*

Hate and fear lie very heavily on our small country and there has been untold suffering and death. Our great task in this country is to



seek to replace the culture of violence with the culture of peace and that runs through all Corrymeela's work.

Our task is very clearly expressed by Nelson Mandela of South Africa: "No one is born hating another person. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate they can also learn to love". Or as one of our Irish Historians has put it "We have to believe in the force of argument, not the argument of force'.

For all of us in Ireland the task of peacemaking was personified very recently by the life and example of an Irish shopkeeper. His name was Gordon Wilson and he lived in a town called Enniskillen. On the 8th November 1986 he and his daughter Marie, a 21 year old nurse, decided to attend a Remembrance Day Service at the town's war memorial. During the service a bomb, planted by the IRA went off. The Wilsons were partly buried in the rubble. Marie was mortally injured and Gordon was seriously hurt. Eleven others were killed and many injured. Gordon Wilson's response to this terrible event was remarkable. He decided to devote the rest of his life and all his energy to the task of peace making. He accepted an invitation to take a seat in the Senate of the Irish Government and spoke there frequently. He met representatives of the I.R.A. and pleaded with them to stop the killing. He spoke at meetings and rallies all over the British Isles. Then in spite of a further devastating blow, when his only son was killed in a motor

accident he continued his relentless schedule of meetings and interviews. In truth he did really work himself to death by his ceaseless efforts to further the cause of peace. By his commitment his courage and his faith he became a role model for all peace makers. One day he asked Alf McCreary, the editor of his biography "How can I go on saying such things about the lessons of Enniskillen again and again and again?" He was told in reply, "You have no choice, the events of Enniskillen have placed you on high moral ground. You must keep on saying those things again and again, because they contain eternal truth about love and forgiveness and they cannot be repeated often enough". How true that is for us all would be peacemakers. We must go on and on!

Yours in peace  
Ray Davey

It is not surprising that many peace movements arose from people's experience of war.

In war it becomes clear that violence is not a satisfactory way of resolving disputes within the human family. Corrymeela as a community of reconciliation is not a response to the present conflict in Northern Ireland which commenced in 1969, its foundation preceded it by four years. But some of Corrymeela's roots go back to lessons Ray Davey learnt during Second World War.

Ray was a young Presbyterian Minister deeply influenced by the pacifist movements after the First World War. However after hearing of the suffering of so many at the beginning of the Second World War, he felt he could not stand idly by. He joined the YMCA, the Young Men's Christian Association, as a Field Worker and was sent to care for the troops in Northern Africa. He helped establish a community centre in Tobruk which was used by soldiers

of all faiths for their worship and recreation during their short breaks from fighting on the front line of battle. However Ray was taken prisoner or war.

During the long days in the prison camp, with absolutely nothing to do, the prisoners found that their real enemy was not the prison guards, but boredom. Some of the soldiers couldn't cope. They became depressed, took to their beds, refused to eat, and some died. With others, Ray decided to invite the soldiers to meet together in the evenings. As the group began to trust each other, individuals began to tell others about their life, the home in which they grew up, stories about their mother and father, the good and bad time they had experienced and the people who were important to them. As they listened to one another's life story, deep friendships were formed. Although they came from very different backgrounds, with very different personalities, now they had something in common; the experience of telling your story and of being heard. They were building community through sharing their stories.

When Ray was released at the end of the war he was appointed as the first Presbyterian Chaplain to Queen's University in Belfast. There the lessons he had learnt about creating community were to become a central part of his Chaplaincy work. This in turn led to the formation of the Corrymeela, a community of Reconciliation. The community acquired a property as the focus for its work. It was a modest wooden structure which had been built as a holiday centre. People found community again, as they worked as volunteers, renovating the dilapidated building. The setting of the Corrymeela Centre is spectacular. The site is on a cliff top on the North Coast of Ireland. Looking beyond the rocks at the sea shore, across a short stretch of water to the Rathlin island you then see, in the distance, the hills of Scotland. The Corrymeela Centre exists as a place of meeting, where relationships can be formed across divides of our society, where trust can replace fear, and new understanding lead to the possibility of change.

**(Carmel Heaney)**

The Corrymeela Community is 180 ordinary men women and children of whom occasionally, extraordinary demands are made.

Corrymeela is groups of parents, teachers, doctors, lawyers, unemployed, lone-parents, differently abled, nurses, housewives, bus drivers, plumbers, builders, accountants, architects and artists. People like you and me who in addition to their ordinary life, choose a mantle of membership and who together weave a pattern of hospitality in a place of hostility.

Corrymeela is a space in a land harvested with hatred and fear.

Corrymeela is a space amidst historical claim and counter-claim.

Corrymeela is a sanctuary for women living with street and domestic violence.

Corrymeela offers families from Catholic, and Protestant traditions the chance to meet and pray together.

Corrymeela brings together young people who live amidst

paramilitary and military violence. Corrymeela is a place where

those who have had family members shot dead can find support.

Corrymeela is also a place where volunteers and staff work hard, make beds, clean toilets, wash dishes, cook meals.

Corrymeela is a place where young and old, those with an income and those without, work together.

Corrymeela is a place of difference, different opinions, weary people and too many demands.

Corrymeela has two centres, one in Belfast which offers much needed 'neutral' space for groups to meet in the city environment, and the other, 60 miles away in the beautiful coast of North Antrim in Ballycastle. Openness does not only apply to buildings, it also applies to human attitudes.

People come to the residential centre as part of a summer or winter programme. Some 7,000 people a year come and live at the centre for either a 4 day, midweek period from Tuesday to Friday, or at weekends. People stay in one of three spaces, the house, village or the cottages,

In any given week, 12 different groups, 6 of whom are, Catholic, 6 of whom, are Protestant have been transported, fed and introduced to issues that the society as a whole conspires to keep silent and hidden.

Among the thousands who come each year, several faces remain,  
the stories touch the heart  
and change forever those who meet them. There is an old Irish  
saying that 'strangers' are friends that we haven't yet met.

One such man was Bernard. He was wheelchair bound, whose only movement lay in his index finger. He needed constant, 24 hour, round the clock nursing by a team of volunteers. He had to be washed, dressed and toileted by others. With his index finger he could communicate through a black board with the letters of the alphabet painted in a circle. Finger flying he would 'talk'. This broken man gave hope and new possibilities. He moved countries, left his friends and parents and began life in a new place. He studied and completed a four year degree course. He got involved in his local community and set up a Housing Association. He was a person who overcame physical limitations and lived life. In Northern Ireland it is very often the emotions and mental limitations that need to be challenged, fears often remain unvisited, and can stifle the generosity of mind and spirit necessary for new beginnings.

Maura a member of Corrymeela embodies the generosity of heart and hearth. Maura's son, Gerard was a first year medical student. 19 years old, he was preparing for his end of year examinations. He studied all of Sunday morning and attended evening Mass. He was shot dead upon leaving the church service. His mother, unable to take in what happened began to visit other mothers who had similar bereavements - Catholic and Protestant houses were visited by Maura. Those families met together for prayer and support, and came to Corrymeela. She continues that work today. Maura said that bitterness and revenge would only have been a 'double cross to bear'. It was from Maura that forgiveness became a reality.

Stories such as these are shared each week at Corrymeela in a series of programmes designed to address what the poet John Hewitt

called "the break and bond between us" These intentional programmes bring together people from all ages and backgrounds and religious traditions.

In the meetings, opportunities are given for people to speak about themselves and their lives, to speak about faith and the future. Such stories are voiced and people change their views of the 'other'. Such stories break down the historical myths.

In stable societies history belongs in a book. Everyone can agree about the facts. In contested societies one group's fact, is another's fiction. With intentional programmes Corrymeela names the unspoken difficulties and divisions that exist. People can then address issues of justice, security, employment, housing, authority, and sovereignty that arise in discussions. Such issues will only really be heard if people trust each other and new truths emerge, and the old lies, of fear and ignorance disappear- At Corrymeela discrete programmes address the key issues of a divided society by allowing people to talk and question with each other.

Questions are asked which have never been articulated before in 'mixed' company of Catholics and Protestants.

*Why do Catholics believe in Saints?*

*How do Catholics react when a policeman is shot dead?*

*What do Protestants fear in the Catholic faith and practice?*

*Do Protestants have a British or Irish passport..*

Those questions relate to the heart of identity and belonging in

Northern Irish society.

A society made up of memory-carrying people who too often remember the hurts, and rarely experience the healing. The big task ahead is to create a common memory for the common good of all

the citizens, and to become a community where in the words of the ancient Irish blessing  
'It is in the shelter of each other, that people live'.

**(Trevor Williams)**

As members of Corrymeela Members we made a commitment each year, confessing our own responsibility for the destructive conflicts in our society, to seek to overcome our own divisions and make ourselves instruments of peace.

The forms of peacemaking are as varied as our members. Joyce has been involved in a recent initiative with young children who have lost someone close to them, very suddenly.

**(Joyce Williams)**

**Love, Death, and Grief are big words to cope with when you're still a child.**

A family death brings grief to everyone involved. Often, the bulk of attention goes to the adults, leaving children largely overlooked. When the death is sudden, or violent, children are especially vulnerable and their distress can go unrecognised. Many children experience LOVE, DEATH and GRIEF and need to find ways to express their feelings and receive support.

4 years ago two members of the Corrymeela Community became aware of the needs of these children. We knew of children who had experienced the sudden death of a close family member. We knew of particular children who had witnessed the violent death of their parents. We knew of children who had behaviour problems in school because of a death in the family. We wanted to do something.

We started a small group called TREETOPS. It is a children's bereavement group for those between 8 and 12 years old. A group of 6 or 8 children come to Corrymeela House in Belfast on a Thursday evening for two hours. They have experienced the sudden death of a parent or sibling through violence or suicide, sudden

illness or road accident. We have fun and games together and bond into a close group. We also learn about grief. The children find it is a safe place and begin to talk and show photographs of the loved one who has died. They tell their story of how it happened and how life has changed for them.

Through drawing and art and simple drama they explore the feelings that are often pushed down and painful. They find ways to express their sadness and anger, their fear, loneliness, guilt and confusion. Together they discover that they are not the only ones for whom this has happened. Using drama they act out some of the difficult situations they find themselves in. At the end of each evening we sing a song, light a candle, read a story and say a short prayer together. The group meets together for six weeks. Together they find strength to go on to the next step of their journey.

Meanwhile the accompanying adults meet in a separate room. They are encouraged to share their story of grief and how life has changed for the whole family. They express their worries and fears for their children and learn of new ways to be alongside them.

From this meeting and sharing ideas of two Corrymeela members a small seed was sown. It is beginning to grow. Treetops is still small but now also works with very young children on a one-to-one basis. Last year we took families on a residential weekend to the Corrymeela Centre at Ballycastle. Next year a summer family week is planned. The first edition of a newsletter written by bereaved children for bereaved children has been published.

A Bereavement Education Network meets four times a year to bring together professionals and volunteers who are working with children and young people and to share information and ideas. Practical workshops on the use of drama and art, sand and clay have been oversubscribed. Support and training for teachers, social workers and church leaders is now also part of this work.

For me it has been an enriching experience to be part of something



small but which I know is growing and which is a growing experience to each person who comes.

**(Trevor Williams)**

For thirty two years now Corrymeela has been exploring another way of living in Northern Ireland, the way of inclusive community. We have sought to provide space for ourselves and all who will join with us, to share our stores, to listen, to understand, to trust and to change.

It is not the big political programme, though we debate and confront difficult political questions.

It is not the solution, for the invitation to a new relationship can never be forced on someone else.

It is more like a small candle, glowing in the dark.

Janet Shepperson, a Corrymeela member and poet put it like this at the opening of our Centre. It still represents Corrymeela well.

*I offer you this hope.*

*It is so small*

*the wind could blow it out.*

*Its feeble flickering*

*turns up in unexpected places*

*and seems to annoy those*

*with a big investment in dazzling light,*

*or in measuring the strength of darkness.*

*If this hope lives*

*it will be like swallow's wings,*

*erratic, unpredictable,*

*always on the move.*

*If this hope dies,*

*it will be buried shallow*

*like grass seed.*

Thank you for cherishing the light of one small candle.

## **Proposals for the 21st Century from Kyoto**

### ***Healing the Division***

*Rev Trevor Williams (Leader, The Corrymeela Community)*

The turning of a millennium presents an opportunity for reflection. The communications revolution and ease of travel have transformed the world into a global village. However although the means of communication is accessible, and the opportunity to meet across the geographical, cultural and religious divides has never been easier, we still live with division, misunderstanding, injustice, and violence. The cold war may now be slightly warmer, but the fear of a world war between superpowers has been replaced by the eruption of ethnic conflict bringing unimaginable suffering. The roots of ethnic conflict are difficult to understand to the outsider. They lie deep with the life of local communities and personal memory. The observer is deeply disturbed at how neighbours, who had lived side by side for so long, could suddenly commit such atrocities on one another. The sound bite of modern communication is unable to explain 'the why' of such violence. Belfast is 'bomb city' and that's all that most people in the rest of the world know about Northern Ireland; its a crazy place where Christians kill each other in the madness of a religious war. It just shows that our modern mass communications have become expert in showing the 'what' but poor in revealing the 'why'. However, in Northern Ireland our communication is just as flawed. We find it difficult to cross our cultural and religious groupings to understand the others. Rather we blame them for the troubles we experience. And in finding someone to blame, we blind ourselves from our responsibility to find ways of living together with those who are different.

The roots of Northern Ireland's violence lie far back in the mists of history. In the time available I will not deal with it adequately, nor is this the occasion to try to do so. What is important to say is that

Northern Ireland, or the North of Ireland as others insist on calling it, is a 'contested' place. Like many other 'contested' places they are the legacy of a settlement and colonisation, where the historically defined native and settler groups exist in relatively balanced proportions to one another. The contest remains unresolved through the inability of either group to finally dominate the other. What remains is an uneasy tranquillity. But beneath the apparent calm is uncertainty, caution and fear. Such insecurity leads to a view where life is viewed as a contest between 'them' and 'us'. There is little 'common sense' between the two sides. Each side claims to know the 'true facts' of any situation. At the same time nobody can agree on what are the 'true facts'. Two histories exist, two sets of attitudes and prejudices, two loyalties, two cultures, two sets of tradition. The common factor is a deep rooted fear of 'the other'. Education and employment become battle grounds for 'our rights'. Religious and cultural symbols can become badges of identity of who belongs to us and who belongs to the enemy. The distinguishing political aspirations, for union with Britain or independence from Britain is pursued by each side as a fundamental right and is non-negotiable. The differences between the two traditions are symbols of threat. Each new situation is interpreted to support the age old truths, the battle between 'them' and 'us'.

Since 1969, this psychological distance has been increased by deep suffering, the result of twenty seven years violence. Almost every family in Northern Ireland has suffered their own personal tragedy. These hurts and wounds have further hardened the hearts and minds. In the early seventies housing estates where Catholics and Protestants lived side by side, were targeted by the paramilitary forces claiming to represent the majority tradition on the estate, making sure that the estate was 'cleansed' of the others. The trend 'to live with your own sort' has continued since then so that today the majority of people in Northern Ireland live in areas which are predominantly Catholic or Protestant. Due to segregated housing and schooling many people never meet those 'from the other side' during their formative years. The other side continue to be feared

and blamed for the troubles. Those from one tradition cannot understand why 'the others' feel as they do. So the stereotypes generally held, remain unchallenged and attitudes and postures remain fixed. Political compromise is suspect and progress towards peace well nigh impossible. Its easy to fan a spark of fear into a flame of violence.

What I have been describing is not a unique story to Northern Ireland. Echoes of our experience can be found in many 'ethnic frontiers' in central Europe and elsewhere, and indeed between alienated communities in more settled societies.

The paramilitary campaigns of violence in Northern Ireland are based within the most socially deprived communities. unemployment rates are typically over 80% , where life offers little hope to young people, and where there are few facilities to enhance life.

Lack of hope can even make violence attractive. as was expressed in this poem by a Belfast teenager.

God no, please  
give me violence  
again, to drown this silence  
which is killing me.  
.....Big streets empty, full of little  
papers, cigarette ends, decaying spittle  
and walking here only causes dust to move.  
....The big wind blows  
all the dust to other footpaths,  
nice and empty....  
The snobby sun thinks he knows  
it all, looking down, and he can only see  
someone spitting here.  
It's only me!

The alienation of hopelessness where the excitement of violence, the commitment to a cause, the camaraderie which demands you risk your life for your friend, the esteem of the hero is so much

better than nothing. Violence thrives in a vacuum.

Corrymeela, as a Christian Community of Catholics and Protestants who commit themselves to work together to find a way of peace and reconciliation in a landscape where politics is paralysed by fear and where religion is impotent because it used as a symbol of tribal identity.

Corrymeela is seeking to find how faith can be part of the solution. In affirming the unique value of each individual and all life; in seeking to practise the gift of forgiveness which can open a new future liberated from the past; in providing a safe place where opposing sides can meet and recognise our common humanity, we have found that fear can be replaced by trust, ignorance by understanding, hostility give way to peace.

In following Jesus Christ, his life of non-violence, his solidarity with the victim and the oppressed, his creation of an inclusive community of love, his call to walk the path of justice and peace, this is the way Corrymeela has committed itself to.

For the one hundred and eighty members of the community, Corrymeela is about creating a 'a safe space' where those who enter, are not judged, but accepted as they are; where each one can learn of their unique value; where it becomes possible to meet others from a different background; where differences can be acknowledged, shared, examined, and sometimes appreciated; where its possible to learn to live with difference, without fear. In meeting in this way, in sharing the stories of our lives, our joys and sorrows, our difficulties and accomplishments in small groups, from both traditions, Catholic and Protestant, a new way of living in Northern Ireland is being discovered.

Instead of excluding 'the other', instead of fearing 'the other' blaming 'the other' demonising 'the other' we attempt to bring the enemy close. We believe that if we come close enough to recognise our common humanity we can find a new way foreword together. This process takes place in regular small group meetings of 10 or so members of Corrymeela, as well as in large community gatherings. We find that its in the journeying together with trusted friends of

both traditions, that we are open to learn of our own prejudices and stereotypes and are faced with the option and opportunity for change.

What we experience as members of Corrymeela in our Community meetings, we wish to share with others. We wish our centre at Ballycastle to be a place of welcome and encounter for Protestant and Catholics groups, of young people, of schools, of family groups, community and Church organisations. The groups come and live as a community for two or three days, or longer, at our residential centre.. Ground rules are explored and accepted by the groups with each person agreeing to treat others, in the way they would wish to be treated. Common themes frequently emerge. No one is put under pressure to speak; no one is interrupted; if questions are asked, the person asked doesn't have to reply, and has a right to know what the interest of the other is in the question; people are encouraged to speak for themselves about their own experience. Generalisations about others is discouraged, and confidentiality is respected. As well as formal sessions, time is taken to find other ways of exploring new territory, - from helping one another to walk safely up a river mid stream; to finding new ways to express yourself in arts, crafts and drama. And sharing the household chores together.

The sharing of stories is a favourite pastime in Irish culture, and is central to all our work. The shared story creates a binding force of community. In the shared story you learn not only the 'what' but the 'why'. As personal stories are shared and heard, the seeds of a new community are sown.

Not long ago during a residential programme with two schools, one Catholic the Protestant, fifty sixteen year olds, split into groups of eight four Catholics and four Protestants. One of our year long volunteers was facilitating the discussion on 'How years of violence have affected my life'. As is often the case the discussion wandered a little at first. And then one girl had the courage to say, 'My father was a member of the police and he was shot by the IRA'. She went on to talk about her father, and her feelings at his murder. How her family had been affected. In many contexts such a story could not be told in mixed company of Catholics and Protestants. The two

communities have very different views on the police and this girl couldn't guarantee a sympathetic hearing for her story. But the others listened, Catholics and Protestants listened until she had finished.

Then another young person told their story, and another, and another. In the end six out of eight of those young people told stories about how they had lost a close family member or friend as a direct result of the troubles.

There were a lot of tears. And the pupils comforted each other. After that group session the six young people, three Protestants and three Catholics, couldn't be separated. They ate their meals together, they went on walks together. They had so much suffering in common, even though at another time and place they could be expected to regard one another as the enemy. However I believe it was more than shared grief which brought them together. It was being able to tell your story to a member of that community from which the murderers came. To experience the other listening and hearing, and being moved with compassion. Then in turn to realise their suffering with so many opposites in it, was just the same. This was the real relief, that a new relationship was possible with those who had been the cause of so much terror.

We are a Christian community and twice a day worship is held in our worship centre called the Croi, which is the Irish word for 'Heart'. Everyone is invited to come, though no expectation is attached to the invitation. Worship is simple and short, it involves a reading from scripture, relating to what has been happening in the groups some singing and prayer. At the end of another residential the person was concluding worship and asked if someone was concerned about some other person, they may like to ask the group to pray in silence for that person. One girl responded and said, 'I would like you all to pray for a man in prison tonight. He is very worried and his family is also very worried. He is about the very his sentence. I would like you to pray for him'. Later she was asked, Who was it, you asked us to pray for? She said, quite simply, He's the man who murdered my father.

In Belfast there are huge barriers 16-18 foot tall walls, erected to keep neighbours apart. They run down the interfaces where Catholic areas meet Protestant areas. These huge structures mean that some people have to keep the light in their kitchen all year round because they live in the shadow of these 'Peace Walls', as their called. At the one time they are symbols of security, and symbols of fear. We have been bringing families who live on both sides of the Peace Wall together. They had decided to try to do something with the fear, and find a new way forward.

The dialogue started with a feelings box. Each person put a single word on a piece of paper representing what it felt like to live in the shadow of the Peace Wall and put them into a slot in the box. Then the pieces of paper were taken from the box and read out anonymously. People were free to add something if they wished. It was impossible to tell from which side of the wall they came.

Whether they were Protestant feelings or Catholic feelings. Sadness was the most common. Sadness at the loss of loved ones, the lost childhood for their young people growing up with constant violence on the streets where they lived. Several people put in the word hatred. As 'hatred' came out of the box one woman said, I don't mean to say that I hate anyone. What I meant was that I don't wish to carry on knowing that I am hated, and that my children are hated. That's what we hear, as the young people yell abuse as they see if they can throw bricks over the massively high wall.

The group went on to discuss what they understood as 'community'. Both sides had no problem agreeing what was important for them. They talked about what they hoped for in the year two thousand. Both sides wanted peace, and better amenities for their children, and jobs. At the end of their residential the Catholic Group and the Protestant group decided they needed to work together for the development of their area. One of their dreams was to have a common community centre where both communities could continue to meet and support each other. Despite the resumption of violence, the relationships between these two groups continues.

Meanwhile the children were meeting. They watched a clown as he



came into the room, dressed in an outlandish costume. The more the children laughed at him, the sadder he got. Until he was crumpled up on the ground sobbing. They recognised that feeling, being laughed at because you were different, and both sides talked about their experiences of bullying, in school.

They then began talking about their favourite pastime throwing bricks over the Peace Wall. Since they met a day ago on arriving at Corrymeela, Paddy and William, a Catholic and Protestant had become the best of mates. Paddy was the best shot in the district.

“Paddy what if you hit William”.

“Oh I wouldn't”

“How is that.”

“I'm a good shot. I wouldn't aim at Paddy.”

“But sometimes you can't see who you will hit, the wall is too high. Paddy thought, long and hard. “Yea you're right. I'm going to have to climb up to the top of the derelict house where I can get a really good aim.”

“But Paddy, last weekend you could have injured William with a stone, because then you didn't know him. How would you feel about that now.”

“Bad!” said Paddy.

Eventually Paddy and the rest of the group decided that they would stop throwing stones.

The person who led that programme was passing through the area where they lived a couple of weeks later and saw some of the children hanging around opposite the one place where you could see through the wall. She was curious as to what was going on. So she stopped. The children said they wait there everyday on the way back from school, to wave to their new friends on the Protestant side. Its the way they keep in touch with their new friends.

When we hear one another, a new reality is created between us. Corrymeela is about creating space for that new reality. Creating space where the new, the unexpected can be encountered as people meet tell their stories and face new choices about their future together.

As we face the new millennium the task of healing the division remains. May I commend the example of Rissho Kosei-kai and the

*Symposium at Rissho Kosei Kai Centre in Kyoto, Saturday 10 May 1997*

Niwano Peace Foundation and what you have taught me, and others members of Corrymeela, about building peace through generosity, trust, and partnership. As a community of faith may you continue to be at peace and be affirmed of your vital part in achieving world peace. Thank you.

## **Greetings to members of Rissho Kosei-kai in the Sacred Hall**

*Rev Trevor Williams (Leader, The Corrymeela Community)*

One of the highlights of being honoured to receive the Niwano Peace Prize, has been the invitation you have extended to me to cross the barriers of distance - to come and visit you in this wonderful country; to cross the barriers of culture; to experience your way of life, your traditions and values, and to cross the barrier of religion, to explore through friendship, and listening and responding, and to see the reality of your faith as it is lived out, in everyday life.

Your invitation has been the start of a new journey for me. Northern Ireland where I live has a population of just one and a half million. We too are an island people. However we have no massive industries to attract people from other countries. As a result the communities of people representing other countries and cultures, other religions and traditions, are very small. Already I have learnt much on this new journey. I am struck by how much we share in common in our search for peace. I am stimulated by the richness of your distinctive culture and traditions. It has enabled me to see the valuable resources which inter faith co-operation can harness for peace making.

Peace is indivisible. There can be no real peace when that peace does not encompass all of reality. There is a tendency to define peace as merely the absence of war. When in 1994 the paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland called a 'cease-fire', some people imagined that peace had now come to our part of the world. However, it wasn't long before the animosity between people in Northern Ireland became all too evident in the way they talked about one another. Violence of speech had replaced violence of weapons.

Christian theologians looking back at our Jewish roots, and the Hebrew word 'Shalom' have described 'Peace' as the 'Kingdom of Right Relationships'. One theologian put it like this

“This beautiful Hebrew word (from a verb ‘to bring to completeness’ ‘to make whole’) speaks of a totally integrated life with health of body, heart and mind, attuned to nature, open to others, in joy with God; of sharing, mutuality and love; of justice, freedom, interdependence, reciprocity”

In this understanding of peace, it is impossible for me to find perfect peace in Northern Ireland, if you have not found it in Japan, and if we have not found it together. Such is our common task.

### ***Being at Peace***

In observing human behaviour, it is not difficult to see that each of us has the potential for violence. In our relationships with one another we desire what the other person has or desires. If you put young children in a room with enough toys for all, you can be sure that once one of the children picks a toy, that is the toy every child will want to play with, disregarding all the rest. Rivalry seems to be an almost instinctive response, and as rivalry escalates we become closer and closer to violence.

One of the tasks of communities of faith is to find other ways of relationship. When we are at peace with ourselves, we gain the freedom to cease craving what others have. When we are at peace, the need to dominate others diminishes. When we are at peace, forgiveness becomes possible as we let go the hurts others have caused us.

How is this possible? In the Christian faith we affirm that this transformation comes to us as a gift. Jesus Christ, in giving himself selflessly for others, for each one of us, reveals God's unconditional love for us. In receiving that love, we become aware that we are accepted as we are, that we are uniquely valued. This is the ground of our personal healing.

In our development in childhood, if we have been loved, so we gain the capacity to love others selflessly.. However none of us has experienced a perfect childhood. Others have let us down, hurt, and wounded us. This has left us with a sense of bitterness and resentment which in turn leads us to self centred behaviour, which destroys relationships and causes others great suffering. To know that the Lord loves us, that we have our unique place within the totality of life, that this is given as a free gift; this is a source of inner peace which enables us to live in peace with others.

Jesus said, Love one another as I have loved you (John 13.34)  
And again, "You have heard it said, Love your neighbour and hate your enemy. But I tell you: Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven."  
(Matthew 5. 43,44)

It has been a wonderful experience for me to recognise the same truths, expressed in a different form in your President's book *A Buddhist Approach to*, and I look forward to learning more.

### ***Being at Peace in Community***

Relationships within a community display similar characteristics to relationships between individuals. The extent to which a community is at peace, whether we are talking about the family as community, or our town or village, or much larger communities to which we belong, will depend on the individuals personal peace.

Human beings realise their full potential within community. It is within community that the diverse gifts of individuals complement each other to the benefit of all. It is within Community that the meaning of love is most clearly seen. By 'love' I mean more a way of behaving rather than a way of feeling, 'Love is acting for the good of the other'. You may call it 'benevolence'

In Northern Ireland there have been talks between political parties over recent months. They have failed to make any progress. The reason for such a tragic failure so far, is a sense of fear and insecurity. Each side in the talks feels deeply fearful about the

*Address in the Sacred Hall, RKK, Tokyo. Thursday 15 May 1997*

future. They fear that their identity as a community will be lost. So, paralysed by fear it is not surprising that the political talks have made little progress.

What is needed, I believe, is a group of people who can demonstrate another way of 'being together' which is not dominated by fear, but is based on trust. In such situations evidence is needed that it is possible for people from different traditions and backgrounds, with different political aspirations, to respect one another, and to work for the good of one another. To live out this 'way of peace' requires a higher calling which can embrace the welfare of the other community, as well as the welfare of one's own community. I believe that people of 'faith', who have found something of the freedom of 'inner peace' have much to contribute here to the well being of our communities. We need people of faith to demonstrate that it is possible to 'love your enemy'

Very often we may feel powerless in the scale of national events and world conflicts. Be sure you are not. In living in peace, you are making peace possible, you are showing what peace is like. Without that evidence the hope which empowers peace making may be lost..

### ***Being at Peace in the World***

I return to what I said at the start, 'Peace is Indivisible'. The peace of human kind is inextricably linked to our ability to live in right relationship in all the world. If industrial development has no regard for the cost of that development on our environment, its resources, its life forms, that progress will have within it the seeds of its own destruction. Just as the peace of a nation, depends on the peace of all nations, the peace of local communities depends on the peace of the other communities, and the peace of the individual will depend on relationships of peace with other individuals. Our destiny is linked much more closely together than we could ever imagine. My peace, depends on your peace. Peace is the product of right relationships. We cannot achieve it without co-operating together.. We are partners for Peace.

*Address in the Sacred Hall, RKK, Tokyo. Thursday 15 May 1997*

### **Conclusion**

So may I thank you for this opportunity to greet you as members of Rissho Kosei-kai. May I commend your commitment to making your faith real in your personal lives, in the life of your movement. And I am confident that your influence for peace in the world, will continue reach out, as you have reached out to the Corrymeela Community in Northern Ireland, in building relationships across traditions, religions and the nations of the world, and by so doing, show others the way to peace.

Peace to you!