

LEADER'S ADDRESS AT THE AGM ON 5th FEBRUARY 2004

What Corrymeela Is

Corrymeela is a number of different things:

- A symbol of hope for many people, both in Northern Ireland and elsewhere.
- A non-residential Christian community who live their lives in the world and who carry responsibility for the complex reality of Corrymeela.
- A looser penumbra of Friends, Associates, ex-long-term volunteers etc who identify with Corrymeela.
- (Seeks to be) a community at the Ballycastle Centre that invites people in, which worships, provides hospitality etc.
- A Centre that runs or supports programmes (mostly at the Centre but not always).
- A Centre that provides space for groups.
- A Centre that a varying number of young people identify themselves with and want to be at.
- A provider of encounter opportunities (particularly for young people – Close Encounters and Seed Group).
- A provider of training and learning opportunities (long-term volunteers).
- An employer of staff and user of volunteers (short-term and long-term).
- An administration centre in Belfast.
- A creator of off-shoots (Tides, Understanding Conflict Trust, Knocklayd, Treetops, football team etc) who have varying relationships with us.

And there are probably many more. This is a complex reality, which is very difficult to hold together and runs the risk of incoherence and unsustainability. It is not surprising that there are communication difficulties (a constant complaint). There are all sorts of tensions, one prominent one being between 'community' (putting emphasis on relationality, etc) and being 'professional' (being accountable, living within budgets, having a management team etc).

What we are being told

Tim Page at his worship at the members' weekend in January talked about the body telling us things. The Corrymeela body has not been coping well over the last few years. In fact the Corrymeela body has been showing morbid symptoms, pain and stress. This is not an issue of blame but of fact. Much of the burden of this situation has been borne by staff, many of whom carry the scars.

Some of the reasons for the corporate pain, morbid symptoms and stress have been:

- Our financial situation.
- A changing external situation, which includes increasing demands of funders, of Child Protection legislation, of health and safety and so on.
- Staff change and illness.

But one of the main reasons, in my opinion, is that we simply try to be and do too much. We are being told in all of this that we have to change.

A Perspective on the Task of Reconciliation

Reconciliation in Northern Ireland is a generational task; it will take 30-40 years. We therefore have to be attentive to sustainability. Sustainability is not only financial but also about vision, energy, spirituality, values, the tasks we do and how we pass the story on.

Sustainability

I have been giving a lot of thought to the sustainability question. One conclusion I have come to is that the Ballycastle Centre is not sustainable in its present way of working.

It is not sustainable financially. I think that the budgetary process for 2004-5 is telling us hard things.

It is not sustainable in terms of energy. Our energy should be re-directed to more joined-up, focused programme work in the community which the Centre supports.

I want to emphasise:

- That this is not about closure or blaming people but it is about facing reality.
- It is about finding new ways of working.
- It is about appropriate buildings, using volunteers and staff differently, thinking about the groups we have at the Centre and thinking about the role of community members.

All of this presents a profound challenge to members, Council, management team and myself, to find new ways of working. Our challenge over the next few months is to find these new ways of working.

David Stevens