



## From the Chair...

# Open invite to NIMMA report launch

Welcome to NIMMA News for July and news of important research that charts the history and impact of the association. Throughout NIMMA's 35 years, we have concentrated on;

- (a) helping our members and other couples to achieve their aim of living a **shared future**
- (b) working quietly to change the attitudes of the churches and the wider society.

Recently, we obtained a grant from the Anchor Foundation to employ a researcher to look at NIMMA's historical activities and ascertain our effectiveness in our aims.

### Historical

This research by Jayme Reeves is now being published as a report and will be launched in September. It shows that we have indeed been very successful. We have moved the churches forward to that they are more **accepting** of mixed marriage and we have helped many hundreds of couples and their families to fulfil their hopes and aspirations.

**NIMMA**  
The Northern Ireland Mixed Marriage Association (NIMMA), formed in 1974, has spent the past 35 years providing support and information to couples either in or contemplating mixed marriage. In a society where sectarianism is institutionalised, NIMMA continues to lobby for the acceptance of mixed marriage, integrated education and shared social housing.

The natural pride in our achievements is tempered with the knowledge that there is still much more to do to bring Ireland up to international standards. However, the report is to be celebrated and we want as many as possible to share in the celebrations. Come and join us for the launch of the report by Belfast's Lord Mayor, Councillor Naomi Long, in the Boardroom of Bryson House at 11.00 am on THURSDAY, 17th SEPTEMBER 2009.

■ **Simply phone Belfast 90 235444 or email [nimma@nireland.com](mailto:nimma@nireland.com) to confirm your place.**

*Ken*



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# News

July 2009

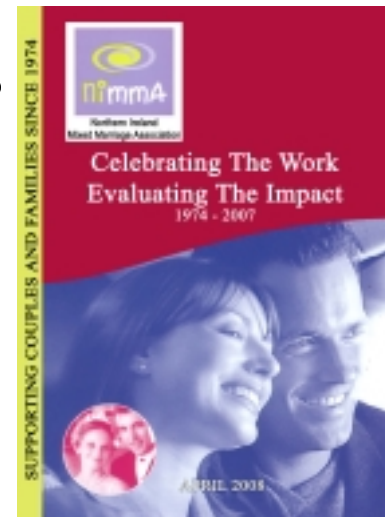
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## NIMMA report is "major milestone"

A report due out this September will highlight the work and impact of the Northern Ireland Mixed Marriage Association over nearly 35 years. NIMMA News will have comprehensive coverage of its contents in our next issue, but this month Church of Ireland Advisor, Rev. Edgar Turner, who has been associated with NIMMA since the 1970s, looks ahead to what he describes as a "major milestone" for the group with his overview of the report

### Support

He said: "In 1974, a few couples in the Belfast area who were living in mixed marriages came together for mutual support - little realising what they were starting would continue and grow for the next thirty-five years. Gently led by Canon Dick McDonald, they formed themselves into the Northern Ireland Mixed Marriage Association (NIMMA). Those who formed NIMMA and the many hardworking volunteers who have sustained it ever since, were continually addressing urgent and immediate individual needs, and so at times it was "difficult to see the wood



for the trees." They all knew that, while urgent needs were continually being addressed, a catalyst for change had been set in motion that would make a real difference to the lives of many people. But standing so close to the individual situations meant that it was not easy to see the whole picture. So, it was pleasantly revealing when this report by American academic Jayme Reeves built a series of slightly smudged remembrances into a clearly-defined account worthy of the work it portrays.

NIMMA's prime functions have been to provide pastoral care for its members and to have an impact on the understanding of intermarriage - both by the religious denominations and by society. By recognising the need to change these



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## “Milestone” report continued.....

attitudes, it has created a network of relationships that provides a voice and support for even fuller integration. This report outlines how NIMMA has been doing just that - quietly and for decades.

### Attitudes

The challenge could not be clearer, as the reports states: “It is not simply about changing the minds of clergy and of family members regarding mixed relationships; it is about changing attitudes in society as a whole and to enable those who wish to marry to meet with less and less resistance as the years go on.” NIMMA continues to bear witness to division that is bridged in a loving, yet differentiated way. There are always more bridges to be built, but long may we appreciate the benefits of mutual love and care in diversity.

### Reminder

The picture is much brighter today, but in a society where segregation is institutionalised, this report, while being a validation of what has been achieved, remains a vivid reminder of what still needs to be done.”



# People getting “what they want” in shared social housing scheme

**NIMMA has welcomed the news that a further eleven housing areas - from as far apart as Newry and Limavady - have signed up for a scheme that is providing shared social housing right across the Province.**

The Shared Neighbourhood project, funded by the International Fund for Ireland and managed by the Housing Executive, was launched in August 2008 to work with existing communities with the aim of developing 30 shared neighbourhoods over a three year period.

NIMMA Housing spokeswoman Anne Odling-Smee said: “This scheme is one of the ways in which a Shared Future for Housing is being developed for the many people who have stated that they do not want to live in segregated areas and who, until now, have been denied the option of a neighbourhood that welcomes everyone.”

Anne stressed that the scheme provides a choice and gives NIMMA something positive to say to the often desperate people who want the reassurance that an area is safe, well-managed and somewhere that they can bring up their families in peace.

She said: “Everyone involved is to be congratulated on the rapid but steady expansion of the committed

neighbourhoods.”

Social Development Minister Margaret Ritchie MLA, said: “More people than ever before are saying that they want to live in a neighbourhood where diversity is welcomed.

“These communities have translated the wish of the vast majority of people in Northern Ireland into a reality and demonstrated that sharing works.”

### Sectarian

Speaking at the launch, Denis Rooney, Chairman of the International Fund for Ireland, who instigated the project, said: “Over the last number of months, local families have again paid the terrible price of sectarian violence within our communities. The 11 communities coming forward today to publicly commit themselves to growing as genuinely shared spaces are a beacon of hope for all of us who want to build lasting peace and a stable society in Northern Ireland. Their courage and personal commitment to overcoming the challenges of decades of communities living separately and with the daily scars of sectarianism is inspirational.



**Belfast's Lenadoon which is one of the latest areas to take part in the Shared Neighbourhood project.**

“What makes the Shared Neighbourhood Programme special is that it focusses on the strengths, successes and lessons learnt by such communities who are already quietly working away to bring about change and to build shared neighbourhoods where everyone is accepted and respected.”

## ACCORD

**Interchurch Marriage Preparation Programme**

**27th & 29th September 2009**

**Comfort Hotel, Antrim**

**Contact Accord on 02890 233002**