



16 October, 1990

Mr Tony McCusker,  
Central Community Relations Unit,  
Stormont Castle,  
Belfast.

Dear Tony,

re: DRUMCREE FAITH AND JUSTICE GROUP

The Drumcree Faith and Justice Group was formed by a group of local people in Portadown in July 1985.

The Group first came together in response to Orange parades going through Nationalist areas. They wanted to:

- inform Orangemen about the way Nationalists feel about such parades;
- raise questions for the RUC about their impartiality in allowing such parades and not allowing similar parades to those in the Nationalist community;
- show the way Catholics and Protestants can and should get on with each other;
- witness to the truth and effectiveness of non-violent action as a way of dealing with conflict situations.

In 1987 the Group organised the first tea party on the Garvagh Road before the Orange parade. The Group were joined by Protestants from outside Portadown. Some Portadown Protestants also wanted to join, but they were dissuaded by members of the Group from doing so because of the danger to their lives. The demonstration had a deep effect within the Nationalist community by showing the possibilities of non-violent action.

Prior to this, reaction to the parades among Nationalists had involved either taking part in insulting, aggressive or violent activity on the one hand, or staying at home, filled with resentment, on the other. The tea party introduced new possibilities that not only took account of the Nationalist grievance, but attempted to understand the position of Orangemen, to be respectful to their traditions, and to build relationships between the two communities. It also helped to soften the conflict between the Nationalist community and both the RUC and Orangemen. It is not unreasonable to credit a fair proportion of the reduction in community tensions in Portadown since 1985 to the impact of the tea party and subsequent activity by the group.

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From 1985 on the Group has engaged in dialogue with different Protestant groups on both religious and political issues. Among these were Seagoe Church of Ireland parish, and Armagh Road Presbyterian Church.

The Group also acted as an effective informal liaison group with the RUC, and their good offices have on several occasions been sought by the RUC to act as a calming influence during times of tension.

In May 1990 the Group confronted the North Armagh brigade of the IRA who expelled three local men from Northern Ireland, apparently on the grounds of "anti-social" behaviour. Members of the Group did a door to door survey in Churchill Park of how local residents responded to this threat. Out of 162 houses approached, 4 supported the IRA position, 8 abstained, 122 condemned the IRA action, and the remainder were not at home. The Group subsequently publicised the results of the survey in the press and on radio and got wide coverage. This was a difficult action for the Group to take, but they were determined not to give in to this kind of oppression from the IRA.

The group have been invited to speak to PACE groups, to the AGM of the Committee of the Administration of Justice, to the Churches Central Committee for Community Work Conference, and their story has been told on ecumenical tours by Fr Brian Lennon, when travelling with Rev John Dunlop of Rosemary Presbyterian Church, and Rev John Morrow, leader of the Corrymeela Community, in the US, and at the Middle Eastern Council of Churches seminar the Role of Religion in conflict situations in Cyprus in Easter of this year.

Other projects on the Group's agenda are:

- the development of a cultural celebration of St Patrick's Day that will challenge the exclusive linking of this feast with Catholics and Nationalists;

- the publication of a pamphlet raising questions of civic responsibility for both Nationalists and Unionists from the perspective of Christian faith. This pamphlet is based on four months of discussion by Group members responding to Breaking Down The Enmity (published by the Faith and Politics Group) and is currently in its fifth draft;

- the publication of a regular newsletter raising questions about Community Relations within Portadown and Northern Ireland as a whole. This newsletter will be cross community based in its contributors. Churches in Portadown will be used as a basis for selling to ensure that the readership is also cross community;

- circularising local estates at Christmas on a door to door basis with a list of all those who have died in the conflict within the past year;

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- training and development in the use of street drama to express some of the ideas of the Group and to break down sectarian attitudes.

- establishing links between youth clubs in the Portadown area, specifically between the Oasis Club, St Mary's Youth Club, and the Cabin Club;

- developing links between both primary and post-primary schools such as St John's, St Columba's, Ballyoran Primary School, Portadown College, and Drumcree High School.

- encouraging and facilitating cross-community contact on environmental issues, such as Ballyfodrin Dump;

- supporting and facilitating cross-community local history ventures, such as the proposal to bring together all the people - now relocated - who were residents of John's Street in a specific year;

- continuing to support contact between Church groups and working towards reconciliation weekends with young people.

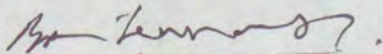
While the Group has achieved much during its existence it is finding it increasingly difficult to maintain projects it is currently involved in because of shortage of workers. All its work has to date been done voluntarily. It will be impossible to develop new projects without full time staff. Given the sensitivity of the Group's work, and the qualities needed in its staff, ACE workers would not be an option for the Group.

While it is possible to get funding for equipment and training, and such grants are needed by the Group, the prior need is for a full time development officer. Without this the Group will not grow in membership and good work will be left undone. Portadown is arguably the most sectarian town in Northern Ireland. The Group has solid links in the deprived sector of the Nationalist community, and a track record both of dealing with difficult issues and of forging links with Unionist groups and with statutory agencies. Tackling the problem of sectarianism on the basis of such a group seems a worthwhile task. Unless it is tackled effectively it is unlikely that community or economic development work within either community will be successful.

The Group are therefore approaching the Central Community Relations Committee for immediate funding for a full time Development Officer, and I attach a job description for your attention.

I look forward to your response.

Best wishes,



Brian Lennon, s.j.

DRUMCREE FAITH AND JUSTICE GROUP

JOB DESCRIPTION

TITLE: Development Officer

PURPOSE OF JOB: To promote better community relations between Protestants and Catholics in Portadown and Northern Ireland. To encourage the formation and development of cross community groups. To promote non-violent change. To work to counteract the impact of discrimination and prejudice.

RESPONSIBLE TO: The Committee of Drumcree Faith and Justice Group.

1. Establish and develop contacts with appropriate individuals, groups and organisations within the two communities and network with similar organisations throughout Northern Ireland.
2. Identify and agree issues of common concern to both communities which provide a basis for inter-community contact.
3. Mobilise the resources of individuals and families within their community, social networks and support systems to promote understanding and co-operation.
4. Identify, develop and provide learning opportunities for mutual understanding, co-operation and inter-community development, together with an appreciation of cultural differences.
5. Assist in promoting and developing anti-sectarian attitudes and other forms of anti-discriminatory practice.
6. Liaise with voluntary and statutory agencies to develop clear and explicit anti-discrimination and anti-sectarian policies in relation to programmes and services provided by them.
7. Research, collate and disseminate information on anti-racist/anti-sectarian approaches, strategies and work already in progress in other regions and countries.
8. To organise activities and projects aimed at enhancing the knowledge and mutual understanding of perceptions, interests and needs of the two communities with particular reference to youth.
9. Enable groups to identify and obtain access to the resources, financial and human, with which to establish and maintain cross-community activities and projects.
10. Produce a quarterly newspaper to be distributed within Portadown and other areas encouraging cross-community relations.



CHARTER

1. Our first allegiance is to Jesus Christ, not to flag or country.
2. Our primary task is to witness to Christ's justice and peace rather than necessarily achieving immediate concrete results.
3. We also aim to work in a non-violent way for justice and right relationships for Catholics and Protestants and for all people in Northern Ireland wherever we can.
4. We are a non-party-political non-sectarian group.
5. Membership is open to all who seek to work for peace and justice as Christ did in the Gospels and who are prepared to work through non-violent means.
6. Others who do not accept the Gospels, but who do accept the human ideals of the Group, may become associate members.
7. A person may become a member by accepting and signing the Charter of the Group at any ordinary meeting.
8. At each meeting of the Group there will be a short period of prayer and reflection on the Scriptures.
9. Decisions that are in accordance with the Charter shall be made by majority vote but every effort will be made to reach consensus.
10. Five members shall constitute a quorum.
11. Office bearers shall be appointed annually at an Annual General Meeting.
12. The Charter can be altered by two-thirds of members present and voting at the Annual General Meeting or at a Special General Meeting of which two weeks notice must be given to all members. Proposed changes in the Charter must be put forward by at least two members and circulated in writing to all members at least two weeks in advance of Annual or Special General Meetings.
13. At a similar meeting any member who, in the opinion of two-thirds of members present and voting does not in practice accept the Charter may be asked to resign.