



## Carmelite Spiritual Center

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### Life is Worth Giving

THE SPIRITUALITY OF ECUMENISM INVITES ALL PEOPLE

by Fr. Kevin Shanley, O.Carm.

Perhaps one of the most unusual academic motives anywhere in the world is that of the Irish School of Ecumenics: "Floreat ut Pereat" ("May It Flourish to Perish.")

The unusual school, located in Dublin and founded in 1970, recently celebrated its 30th Anniversary, a good time to examine an unusual motto and a unique purpose.

According to Dr. Geraldine Smyth, director, reconciliation and the promotion of mutual understanding are the central objectives of the Irish<sup>s</sup> School of Ecumenics. It is, indeed, an international academic institute, ecumenical in its ethos and inspiration, and inter-denominational in its structure and personnel who hail from various countries and Faiths.

In the words of its Mission Statement, the ISE exists to promote the unity of Christians, dialogue between religions, and to work for peace and justice in Ireland and other places through research, teaching and outreach activities.

From its main campus in the Milltown section of Dublin, and its full-time Belfast, Northern Ireland office, and through its cross-border (Irish Republic and Northern Ireland) and cross-confessional (Catholics and Protestants) activities with cross-community organizations, the ISE devises and implements a range of imaginative and active learning programs.

CNS/ Irish School of Ecumenics/ 2

"Although these are anchored in the realities of everyday experience of communal friction," added Dr. Smyth, the process of 'learning together' through dialogue, which is both interdisciplinary and respectful of different religious and ideological traditions, can lay enduring foundations for a reconciled society."

#### Activity Range

The School's range of activity includes postgraduate programs in Peace Studies and Ecumenical Studies. Students for these programs come from all parts of Ireland and overseas. The degrees are validated by Trinity College Dublin.

There is also an Adult and Community Education program both in Dublin and in Northern Ireland. Courses in Northern Ireland are operating in eleven centers, in association with District Councils and local voluntary organizations. And a two-year Certificate in Reconciliation Studies is offered in Belfast and Derry, in association with the University of Ulster, and plans have begun for a M.A. program in this area.

In "Moving Beyond Sectarianism," the ISE offers an action-research project which addresses sectarianism at all levels, mainly — though not exclusively — in Northern Ireland. The project works with the Churches, inter-community groups, women's groups, cultural development groups, and in the education sector.

CNS/ Irish School of Ecumenics/ 3

The school likewise offers field-work programs on an annual basis for degree and diploma students who spend a structured week in Northern Ireland meeting key figures in politics, churches and civil society. These visits are also arranged for visiting overseas students.

The ISE also offers Outreach and Resourcing work at many levels in Northern Ireland, such as collaborative initiatives with other cross-community and inter-church projects promoting peace and reconciliation.

#### Current Enrollment

The Irish <sup>S</sup>School of Ecumenics has about 60 graduate students and several hundred adult education students doing part-time courses in Dublin and Northern Ireland. It also acts as a resource and consulting group for churches, reconciliation and mediation bodies, and education groups working to overcome conflict, prejudice and sectarianism.

The school has a strong international and inter-cultural ethos with students from India, South Korea, Chile, Congo, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Australia, the United Kingdom, Spain, Germany, the U.S. and Canada, and several countries in central and eastern Europe.

Many of the graduates go into key decision-making work in churches and governments around the world.

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CNS/ Irish School of Ecumenics/ 4

For example, one graduate has a high human rights position in the government of South Africa; another is monitoring activities on the border of South and North Korea; a third is moderator of the East African Council of Churches; and a fourth is in Rwanda to set up new conflict-resolution training programs.

The recent developments for peace and political stability in Northern Ireland have given great hope for the Ecumenical Movement in Ireland and elsewhere. However, all concerned realize that the great work of reconciliation needs to be both encouraged and expanded in the years to come. Much of the background work to date of the ISE has been to create an atmosphere in which ecumenism and reconciliation may develop.

The Irish School of Ecumenics has become a beacon of light and hope not only in Ireland but in much of the world to bring peace and understanding in the midst of conflict. It has already accomplished great things in encouraging new dialogues between Christians and Jews, Muslims and Christians, Catholics and Protestants, and Christians and Buddhists.

May it, indeed, "Flourish to Perish."