



### My Journey with Restoration Ministries



*Dr Miceál O'Neill is a Carmelite priest, at present living and working in Kinsale. He is a member of our Board of Directors & is crucial to our organisation in his deep understanding of politics, of world peace and religion, not only in Ireland, but around the world. His perspective & his spirituality constantly challenges and encourages us.*

**B**ack in the 1980s Restoration Ministries provided a way of understanding the situation in Northern Ireland that I found inspiring and convincing. The 'troubles' were already advanced in years and at this stage many lives had been lost and many families and individuals were carrying the scars of the bitter conflict on their bodies and in their spirits. There would be no lasting peace until those broken spirits were restored, until memories were healed, and the resolve to live in peace could be expressed privately and publicly by those who knew that the conflict served the interests of only the few.

Restoration Ministries represents the commitment of openness and friendship. It is more about people than structures. So while I

might think of the ministry that is carried on day in day out, I am equally or even more conscious of the people engaged in that ministry and the people who benefit from it. Lots of wonderful things have happened in Restoration House, some spectacular like the visits of well-known public figures, some much quieter and more hidden. The programmes have always been simple and modest but the ambition was always lofty, to see an Ireland, North and South, in which we had come to terms with our ancient wounds and were now happy to live and work together in ways that cherished the gifts of all.

I was conscious of being the Catholic, religious, from the South. As one from the South I was conscious of how little interest I had taken in the affairs of Northern Ireland. Yes, I followed the news as it unfolded. In those years I was living abroad and felt at pains to point out to foreigners that this was not a religious conflict between groups defending their respective religions, but still the headlines would appear that Catholics and Protestants were fighting each other again. At that time in my own mind I hated the inequality, the denial of jobs, houses and franchise to the minority. I hated the language and attitudes of the majority. Dr. Paisley represented all that was wreckless, hateful and irresponsible and unyielding about the 'other' side. The I.R.A. was going far beyond any mandate that the minority could have given to it. I could see and feel all of that from a distance. The distance was shortened greatly when I got involved with Restoration Ministries. Here I had the opportunity to come closer to what was happening and to know a little more about the people whose lives were directly affected by what was happening in the middle of all the political and religious posturing that was going on.

As a Catholic priest and religious I was challenged to discover Jesus and the name of Jesus in a totally new light. I began to learn that wisdom is what unites us: all that divides us is folly. Hurts, prejudices and our doctrines, too, are folly if they continue to be insurmountable obstacles to unity. Our understanding of our religion had become one of our greatest obstacles. I would sometimes think of the prophet Elijah, when he put it to the people: *“If the Lord is God, follow him; if Baal is God, follow him, but make up your minds. Do not go on hopping from one foot to the other”*. This same Elijah found God in the

sound of sheer silence. Sometimes there was a prayerful silence in Restoration Ministries when you knew that something was happening and God was at work. When ‘spin’ and deceit in speech had become so common-place the spirit and the language of Restoration Ministries was providing something real and genuine to help people discover their true worth and their ability to live in friendship, especially with people who otherwise might always have remained as ‘the ones on the other side’.

*Míceál*

## WHAT'S ON

### Monthly Meeting

Monday 23rd February

at 8.00pm

Title: Much Love

Facilitator: Chris Blake

### Lenten Reflection Day

Saturday 7th March

2.00 - 6.00 pm

Title: Lord make me....

Forward Together in Diversity  
(extract from Intercom magazine Feb 2009)

*Professor Vincent McBrierty reflects on the ecumenical gathering hosted by Restoration Ministries at the Dromantine Retreat Centre in September 2008 where Jean Vanier gave the keynote address.*

“...Jean Vanier reminded us of the cry of the poor and disadvantaged, noting that Jesus loves us in our brokenness, in our poverty, in our suffering, in our disability: the problem for the disadvantaged is often that ‘Jesus loves me as I am..(but) you never accepted me as I am.’ This rather stark reality presents us with a profound challenge, best articulated in the first words of Jesus: ‘What do you want?’ (John 1:38) Or where is your heart, why are you here?

How should we respond? In our relationship with others Vanier draws a clear distinction between ‘generosity’ and ‘communion.’ It is commendable to be generous: but it is not enough. We need to reach out at a personal level to ease the anguish and pain of those who feel unloved or, more profoundly, feel that they are not lovable.

Jean Vanier explained that breaking down personal barriers is difficult because it leaves us exposed and with a sense of unease when entering into communion with others, be they individuals or groups. He said the ‘communion is becoming vulnerable;’ and sharing involves personal risk. We must have the courage to overcome any sense of humiliation or fear of communion with others.”