

How countries experiencing religious conflicts can learn from Northern Ireland's path to peace by Kaitlyn Amuso

Do you know which countries have had religious conflict? Northern Ireland, Iraq, France, Sweden are among the many that have experienced that problem.

There are many causes to these religious conflicts. The most common is that people do not agree with what others want to do, or fear what might happen to them. Some other less common causes are that people have different ideas on what the religion is telling people to do, trivial disagreements, and leaders enforcing laws that some people do not follow correctly.

How do countries in these situations resolve the conflicts that have arisen? Sadly, some places have not yet resolved these conflicts, but others have made laws to stop the fighting. They try to make agreements with each other and try to reason with each other. Most of the ways to resolve conflicts are similar and sometimes do not work as well as people may want them to. On the other hand, sometimes they are successful and solve the conflict.

The conflict in Northern Ireland was between the Catholics and the Protestants. It came about because the Irish-Catholics desired complete independence from Great Britain, but the Irish-Protestants feared living in a country ruled by a Catholic majority and wanted to stay part of the United Kingdom. The British and the

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Irish hammered out many acts and agreements to make peace between the two warring religions. Even with some of the acts and agreements, there was still some conflict. The "Good Friday Agreement" is an agreement that sets out a plan for developing government in Northern Ireland on a stable and inclusive basis and provides the creation of Human Rights and Equality commissions. The accord calls for Protestants to share with the Catholic minority, and gives the Republic of Ireland a voice in Northern Irish Affairs. In turn, Catholics are to suspend the goal of a united Ireland.

How can other countries learn from the Northern Ireland's path to peace? By making acts and agreements, Northern Ireland settled the conflict between the Catholics and the Protestants. All countries should be able to make some type of agreement to resolve the conflicts in their region or area. All countries should try their hardest and put all their efforts into finding new ways to gain understanding and peace with each other. All of the countries with religious conflicts can do the same thing as Northern Ireland and make acts

and agreements to settle the arguing and warring, and solve their problems.

Like Northern Ireland, Iraq has religious conflicts. Iraq is not much unlike Northern Ireland where religion is paraded as ethnicity and becomes a vehicle for communal rivalries. The game of numbers is in favor of the Shiites who make up 60 percent of the population. For this reason, they wholeheartedly embraced democracy. Disgruntled Sunnis, on the other hand, vested their fortunes in boycott and violence, hoping they would gain leverage in negotiating over the future. Iraq could look at what Northern Ireland did and try to make peace between the Sunnis and the Shiites. They could try to make agreements and find out ways to make things fair between the two disputing sides. To achieve this goal, they should try to use tolerance, patience, understanding, and willingness to listen to one another. All of these things can help to bring peace between two opposing sides.

Second Place

(St. Agnes School, Pittsfield, 8th grade teacher Ellen Conlon)

Éirinn go Brách !
Ireland forever!

ay-rin guh brawk

Lá Fhéile Pádraig sona duit
Happy St. Patrick's Day to you!

la ale-lah pawd-rig dit



How Thailand Can Learn from Northern Ireland’s Path to Peace by Byron Bixler

In this essay, I will discuss how Thailand can learn from Northern Ireland’s path to peace. Thailand is a country that has a 95% Buddhist population, and that percentage of Thailand is in conflict with the 5% of the Muslims that also live there. It took many years for Northern Ireland to achieve their main goal: peace. The feud in Northern Ireland has gone back many, many years, and that’s where my essay begins.

The conflict has gone back many years and contained much heated tension and hatred. In the beginning, Protestants controlled the government, and held many of the jobs, and the Catholics did not like it. They rebelled and started riots, strikes and marches (most marches were peaceful.) Protestants randomly killed Catholics and burned down their homes. Innocent people were killed every day, including children. In 1972, thousands of peaceful demonstrators walked the streets in Derry, when all of a sudden fourteen marchers were shot and killed by British military. Many others were wounded and injured. In 1981 a group of prisoners started a movement call the Hunger Strike. All of these events are a part of the long and violent war between the two religions, called the Troubles.

In Thailand, the fight is between Thailand’s Buddhists and Iraqi and Afghan Muslims. Once Thailand was a peaceful place of worship and prayers. But years ago The Buddhists were at-

tacked and overrun by Afghan and Iraqi Muslims. And similar to what happened in Ireland, violence erupted across the country, many of them centering in and around the capital city of Bangkok. These attacks on Buddhist monks and worshippers have scarred and disrupted the Buddhist community. There are numerous problems in Thailand currently, but let’s go back to Ireland near the end of the Troubles and the beginnings of peace.

A group of Catholics formed a society called Sinn Fein with Gerry Adams as president, and it was instrumental in some of the declarations and agreements made in Northern Ireland. Many other important parties and groups include: the Unionists, the Nationalists, the paramilitary organizations, the United Kingdom and the Irish Republic. They met frequently in the mid 1980s through the 1990s. They worked out, approved and signed a number of agreements and declarations. Among these are the following. The Anglo-Irish agreement of 1985 was signed by the governments of the United Kingdom and the Irish Republic. Ten years before this, a Constitutional Convention was convened to allow elected representatives from Northern Ireland to propose their own solution to end the fighting. James Prior proposed Rolling Devolution, which involved having an elected assembly and a committee system.

Other reforms included the European Charter on Human Rights, the Downing Street Declaration (the cease fire

of 1994) and the biggest – The Good Friday Agreement of 1998. Many important figures took part in these signings, including Gerry Adams, David Trimble, Mo Mowlam, James Prior, John Hume, James Molyneaux, Ian Paisley, Seamus Mallon, John Major, Roy Mason and Humphrey Atkins.

Today there is more peace in Northern Ireland than there was forty years ago. Even though there is still some violence, Catholics and Protestants are going to the same schools, and peace is starting to be achieved.

So, what can Thailand learn from all of this? A lot of things. One is patience. It took Ireland decades to settle and finalize a peace treaty. Another thing is understanding. The Catholics and Protestants had to compromise and understand a lot between them. Each side had to see what the other side was seeing and visualize what was going wrong and what absolutely had to be changed. The third thing that Thailand can learn from Northern Ireland is respect. The Buddhists and Muslims have to have and show respect for each other’s culture, religion and way of life. There is much that they can learn from Northern Ireland’s path to peace, and I hope that the very things needed for peace in Thailand that I outlined are carried out in the future.

Third Place
(Holy Cross School, Springfield,
8th grade teacher Phyllis Lund)

Try to answer these Irish riddles. Answers on page 8.

Neither fish nor flesh
Nor feathers nor bone
But still has fingers
And thumb of its own.

It was in the river but wasn’t drowned
It was in the grass but wasn’t cut
It was in the shop but wasn’t sold.

Two brothers we are, great burdens we bear
In which we are bitterly presses
The truth we do speak, we are full all the day
And empty when we go to rest.

Films are a continuing part of our programming

Since April 2008, I have written about the programs and events offered by the Center, focusing each issue on a different category: lectures, book readings, language opportunities, concerts, children's events, etc.

In this issue I will write about the plays and films we have sponsored. For the plays we traveled by bus: to New York to attend *Doubt* by John Patrick Shanley; Boston for the Abbey Players production of *The Playboy of the Western World* by John Millington Synge; and Worcester to the Pilgrim Souls Production of *The Loves of Cass McGuire* by Brian Friel.

In 2000 Vincent Dowling presented the play, *I Am of Ireland* by Edward Calan based on the writings of William Butler Yeats at the Elms. More recently, Pilgrim Souls Production of Worcester brought *Love in the Title* to the campus.

We had hosted films even before the official opening of the Center, most of them documentaries. Over the years some have attracted a larger audience than others, and all of them have proven highly successful. We have a loyal fan base that attends as many of our films as possible. How can you miss? The films are free, we serve green popcorn and Irish bread, and we

offer great entertainment.

Many were filmed in Ireland with Irish actors; they tell stories of a way of life dear to those who love Ireland, whether based on fact or fiction. Some of the settings include: Dublin, Belfast, Cong, County Mayo, Galway, Ennis, Wicklow, Kilkenny, Inch Beach, Dingle.

From 2001-2005, Sean Crane hosted a winter series by choosing the films, preparing an introduction and showing the films. Since 2006 Heather Lowe has taken over as the host.

Heather added a fall series over the past several years, often yoking two short films with similar themes: sports once and music another time. Those who have attended the events have seen classics, comedies, dramas, as well as films based on myths and on real events.

We have shown two films directed by John Ford: *The Quiet Man* and *The Informer*.

Prominent actors featured in the films include: David Kelly, Maureen O'Hara, Victor McLaglen, Liam Neeson, Daniel Day-Lewis, Pierce Brosnan, Aidan Quinn, Minnie Driver, Chris O'Donnell, Sinead Cusack, Gabriel Byrne, Colm Meaney.

We have shown films featuring the Travelers: *Southpaw*, a documentary of the boxer, Frankie Barrett and *Into the West*, a fantasy.

A partial listing of films:

New films: In America, Gangs of New York, Dancing at Lughnasa

Classics: The Quiet Man; The Informer; Darby O'Gill and the Little People

Comedies: Waking Ned Devine, Widow's Peak and The Matchmaker

Fantasy: Secret of Roan Inish and The Seventh Stream

Documentaries: Blasket Roots: American Dreams; the stories of Peig Sayers and Padraig Feirtear; Out of Ireland; The Emerald Diamond

Concerts: Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem: Reunion Concert; Absolutely Irish; Gaelic Storm

Films of the Troubles in Northern Ireland: The Maze, Bloody Sunday, Behind the Mask: IRA and Sinn Fein, Wind that Shakes the Barley.

Omagh, Hidden Agenda

Northern Ireland Peace Process: Endgame Part I and Part II

Stories based on fact: Michael Collins, A Love Divided, Evelyn

How many have you attended?



Do you need to renew your membership, or do you have a friend who would like to become a member? Cut out the form and return with your dues.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Individual membership enclosed of \$30.00 ____ Like to Volunteer? _____

Household membership enclosed of \$55.00 ____ Additional donation _____

Junior membership \$15 _____ Patron \$250 _____ Lifetime \$1,000 _____

County or town of origin in Ireland: _____

Northern Ireland's Path to Peace

by Mary Kate Sullivan

Ireland's path to peace dates to the year 1170. Ireland's trouble with England began over differences in religion, class and culture. Over the centuries, wars between Irish Catholics and the English monarch were common and caused great bloodshed. Ninety per cent of Ireland's land was owned by Protestants by 1649. Irish Catholics were forbidden to own property. Catholics opposed this division, and violence escalated. Irish Catholics living in Northern Ireland were discriminated against.

"The Troubles" was an event that lasted three decades from 1968 until 1998. It marked the beginning of the end of the control of Irish Catholics in Northern Ireland. The origins of the Troubles can be traced back to the formation of the Ulster Volunteer Force. It was a period of conflict involving Republican Loyalists, paramilitary organizations, political activists, civil rights groups and others in Northern Ireland. It was the result of discrimination against Irish Catholics by the Unionists' majority and Catholic Nationalists to British rule. The violence was characterized by the armed campaigns of paramilitary groups, including the provisional IRA campaign of 1969-1997, which was designed to end British rule in Northern Ireland and create a new united Ireland.

Three events stood out during this period that brought attention to the conflict and finally to the resolution. The first event, Bloody Sunday, took place on January 30, 1972 in Northern Ireland. A group of Irish protesters planned to go into Guildhall, but army barricades rerouted the march to Free Derry Corner. A group of teenagers broke through the barricades and marched into Guildhall. The teens provoked the British Army

to fight by throwing stones and insulting them. Thirteen people died and many others were injured. Since the IRA was unarmed, no one from the British army was injured.

Out of all this violence came a Nobel Peace Prize. Three children in the same family were killed in Anderstown when soldiers shot dead a car hijacker. Mariead Corrigan, an aunt of the victims, became one of the founders of the Women's Peace Movement, later known as the Peace People. Thousands attended the group's marches in Belfast and London. Corrigan and Betty Williams, a co-founder, were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1976.

A third notable action toward peace in Ireland was the Hunger Strike. This began on May 5, 1981 at Maze Prison in County Antrim. It evolved as prisoners refused to leave their cells and refused to wash. The Labour governments' decision to hold people without trial was another contributing factor. Anyone could be arrested without reason, and the Protestants made up most of the police force. Republican prisoners decided that one man each week would go on a hunger strike, which meant one man should die per week. Ten men died. Bobby Sands, elected to Parliament from prison, died for this cause.

Finally, Ireland's path to peace was realized when all parties began communicating. The Troubles were brought to an end by a peace process, which produced a document known as the Good Friday Agreement. The agreement included the declaration of cease fires by most paramilitary organizations, the reformation of the police and the withdrawal of army troops from the streets and sensitive border areas.

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England's Prime Minister Tony Blair, Sinn Fein leader, Gerry Adams and United States emissary, George Mitchell all worked together to achieve this important goal of peace. There are so many countries experiencing religious conflicts that can learn from Northern Ireland's path to peace. The conflicts are similar in that a group wants to control the religious practices of all. The unthinkable acts of violence result in no further control and only lead to more violence. The centuries of fighting in Northern Ireland caused senseless loss of life, and destroyed the quality of life for everyone involved. Iraq can end its war and come up with a peace agreement like the Good Friday agreement. The situation in Russia is similar to what occurred in Northern Ireland. The Russian government can bring peace by understanding and accepting the different religious values of all. Finally, there seems to be no resolution in sight for the dispute in the Middle East that dates back decades. It is unconscionable that the leaders of these countries cannot see the opportunities for peace by accepting all religions and faiths, and not viewing the religious differences as a threat.

First place winner of the middle school essay contest (Holy Cross School, Springfield, 8th grade teacher Phyllis Lund)