



## Rethinking Community Relations: Building New Bridges

*In September last year we, Contemporary Christianity, had a conversation with a small group of Christian leaders to try to re-energise the public conversation on reconciliation and good relations.*

*We are pleased that the Community Relations Council has offered us a small grant to do a pilot / scoping research project on how we might help reinvigorate the discussion on reconciliation and good relations for both the faith sector and wider society. A summary of the project is below.*

*Your interest and support in this project, which we hope will lead to longer term conversations and actions would be appreciated. So may we encourage you to get in touch with us! Our contact details are below.*

**Project Duration:** August 2025 – March 2026

**Lead Partner:** Contemporary Christianity in with Clonard Monastery & Youth Link

**Supported by:** Community Relations Council (CR/CD Scheme)

### About the Project

Although Northern Ireland has made significant progress towards a peaceful society since the Good Friday Agreement, entrenched divisions remain across social, economic and psychological lines, with new challenges such as rising racist violence, ongoing segregation, political polarisation, and growing disillusionment among young people. The diminishing interest from faith communities and the waning focus on reconciliation and good relations / social cohesion in policy and policy discussions (as well as wider society) highlight a worrying lack of momentum. This context underscores the urgent need to reignite the conversation on reconciliation and good relations, ensuring that emerging leaders and communities are equipped and motivated to address persistent and evolving divisions.

This project is a workshop-based scoping study designed to **reactivate the role of the faith sector** in addressing community divisions and strengthening reconciliation in Northern Ireland. It will create spaces where faith leaders, young people, newcomers, and underrepresented voices can come together to reflect, share, and reimagine how faith communities contribute to public dialogue and good relations.

Through creative and participatory methods such as **Photovoice** (using photography to tell stories) and **Story Circles**, participants will explore issues of identity, belonging, and cultural diversity. Their insights will shape **policy-informed recommendations** for faith communities, civil society, and government.

### Why Now?

- ✓ Despite progress since the Good Friday Agreement, Northern Ireland continues to face **sectarianism, racism, political apathy, and segregation**.
- ✓ Recent events – including racist violence in Ballymena and rioting in 2024 and 2025 – highlight the fragility of peace and social cohesion and the need for new approaches.



- ✓ The **faith sector's voice in reconciliation / good relations has diminished**, yet there remains strong appetite for re-engagement and collaboration. This voice needs to go beyond the Christian voices and reach out to other faiths.

This project responds to these realities by reawakening a confident, credible faith voice capable of speaking across boundaries of age, race, class, and belief.

### Project Activities

- ✓ **8 Community Workshops** (Oct 2025–Jan 2026) – engaging around 100 participants across faiths, ages, and backgrounds.
- ✓ **Photovoice & Story Circles** – amplifying lived experiences through photography and storytelling.
- ✓ **Publication & Policy Recommendations** – an electronic report with photos and stories, offering practical proposals for strengthening reconciliation.
- ✓ **Public Launch Event** (Feb/March 2026) – exhibition and dialogue bringing together around 100 stakeholders.

### Outcomes

- A stronger **sense of belonging and cultural celebration** across communities.
- New **cross-community and intergenerational connections**.
- A foundation for a **long-term faith-based reconciliation network** in Northern Ireland.

### Who We're Looking For

We invite participation from:

- **Faith leaders and communities** ready to reflect and reimagine their role.
- **Young people and newcomers** whose voices are often excluded from reconciliation efforts.
- **Civil society partners, policymakers, and academics** interested in shaping future good relations strategies.

### Get Involved

If you or your organisation would like to participate, contribute, or stay updated on project findings, please email us at: [info@contemporarychristianity.net](mailto:info@contemporarychristianity.net)