

Services We Offer

DIALOGUE IRELAND TRUST SERVICES

The Schools' Programme – Northern Ireland Edition.

Generally most of us are shocked every few years when we hear about incidents like Waco, or the Solar Temple but say to ourselves it won't happen here! Many people think that the cult issue is no longer with us. They remember the cult scares of the 70s, 80s and 90s, with the Moonies and Scientology being the prominent groups that are remembered. Now with the collapse of religion in general there is no sense of the danger cults involve. It is only when someone close to them suddenly changes and joins a group that they become aware.

Unlike the drugs issue which is quantifiable, Cults are not so easy to evaluate. How many are there? What numbers are involved? We have no statistics, but from research in other countries we can say that up to 1–1.5 % of the population are caught up. That means that up to 60,000 people could be involved. Just because we are not aware of anyone being involved should not blind us to the need for this to be given some space in either the RE programme or at least somewhere on the school programme. I am getting calls on a daily basis from families whose adult children have joined this group or that and say to me, "if only they had had that talk!" These people turn to Dialogue Ireland for guidance and support. Such situations can be unbelievably painful for the people involved. Some have compared it to the death of a loved one without the funeral. Fortunately, the experiences of most people joining new movements are much less dramatic than this. Also the general culture is becoming more aware of the real possibility of mind control as we see ostensibly normal young people taking part in suicide missions where they are educated within very narrow parameters about a particular religious tradition.

Often when one goes to a school the young people in say Cavan are aware for example that the Goths gather at the Central bank in Dublin. In each school I am aware of a small group of Goths, who where black gear. Some are merely punks others become involved with the black arts. I was in Parnell Square one Sunday morning and saw a long line of people dressed in black waiting for buses. At first I thought it was some form of clerical event. As I got closer it was clear that it was the Goths on their way to a concert.

What service does DI offer?

N.I. Issues:

Dialogue Ireland has given talks in N.I. but it would be true to say that up till the last few years the main problem has not been the Sect problem, but rather the issue of sectarianism. This is the *intra* - religious conflict within Christianity itself. The non recognition of the other in a divided community. This contested reality led to little space for groups like the Moonies, Scientology and other New Age groups to emerge. However, as a political settlement has been achieved we now move into the long hard slog of reconciliation and clarifying religious identity in this new situation.

Normalisation will take on different shapes, for some a clearer recognition of difference. An ability to strong hold views in a moderate way. Some will move away from religion altogether, and other will be enticed to the supermarket of pluralism that is our post – Christian European context. This offer will involve the NRMs, Sects and Cults widely evident in Europe since the Second World War.

Also patterns of third level education are different in the north than in the south. The introduction of third level fees in the UK has closed off that area for the majority in the Republic. The case in the north is that there is a tradition of some coming south to study, but a lot who do not go to Northern Colleges tend to go to the UK. This can be a major change from the more provincial context in N.I. Hence our talk is wider than religious groups, but uses this focus to identify areas of challenge for third level students.

More...

First we have a web site that gives background to all the world religions and links to sites that cover everything. www.dialogueireland.org

In the context of the new syllabus which has a world religions dimension our presentations situate the NRMs in the religion it has arisen from. We do not so much look at cults, but the phenomenon of “Cultism”, which can happen in any human situation. This problem can be found in all Religions, Political groups, Corporations, Banks, Schools and Sports for example. Also we facilitate both sides of the debate by putting the web sites of the groups and their opponents for the public to make up their own minds about a particular movement. We also must stress that Dialogue Ireland does not call any group a cult. We encourage students to make these judgments themselves by the looking at the attitudes and tendencies around them. In this way they are able to discern these patterns in their own life, especially as they are about to embark on third level where new challenges await them.

We visit schools and especially try to address 6 years with the challenge, rather than the dangers of NRMs especially in the context of the transition to third level. We find this the best year to address when the issues are about to impact them. One can provide background to younger students when specific issues like the use of the Ouija board or they may have dabbled in occult practices or they are getting background on historical events like Jonestown, Waco or the gas attacks on the Japanese subways..

The content of the course is not a listing of the various groups, but rather engages the students as adults with role-play and real life encounters around the issue. We show the methods used in recruitment. We also do a section of Christian education explaining that people generally only join something when they are not involved with faith they grew up in.

It has been our experience that young people growing up in the country are more at risk than city kids are. Young people growing up in the city are in touch with groups often from the age of 14 onwards. So when young people move to college from the country they are often at the level of development of a 14 year old because they have not been exposed to cult groups growing up and are easier to recruit. Teachers in the country sometimes forget that their community will lose nearly all of their students to

the city. They sometimes think that there is no need to have a talk in the country as they do not face the problem of cults locally, whereas their young people are the most at risk and need the presentation before they leave. Another interesting statistic from my experience is that generally people with a high IQ get involved, but may not have a high emotional IQ!

It is better if a school can organise a visit with other schools in the area. e.g. When I go to a school in the north would also try to arrange to go to a few at the same time as well! This saves on transport costs and spreads the message wider on a single visit as well as being more time efficient.

Cost: £100 per double period + Travel expenses. One needs at least two class periods to cover the issues in any depth. If a teacher can organise a visit to a number of schools in their area that is best for DI.

We will hold our charges at the same level for 5 years as our contribution to the current economic situation. (2007 – 2012)