



CNI

NEWS FOCUS -

Thank God for people of faith who make our world a much better place

One of my favourite quotations comes from Dr Martin Luther King, the great African-American civil rights leader, Arlene Foster writes

Dr King was a great man who was motivated by his Christian faith to challenge the injustice he saw around him in the United States.

He said: "The first question which the priest and the Levite asked was: 'If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?' But... the good Samaritan reversed the question: 'If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?'" This basic desire to help the less fortunate and make the world a better place has driven many

people from a Christian faith background into the service of other people.

On Tuesday morning I was moved to tears by the story of Clare Theresa Crockett.

BBC's Good Morning Ulster had a report by Dean McLoughlin.

Dean's report was overlaid with Sarah McLachlan's song In The Arms Of An Angel.

The song is powerful, but so was the story.

One person after another spoke about Clare's "gentle" nature and her dedication to serving others through her faith.

A recording of Clare speaking about her call to that country told how she surrendered her life to serving others. This young lady gave up everything she had in order to devote her life to helping other people.

She was a talented actress and could have done anything with her life, yet she decided to become a nun working amongst the poor and needy.

Her tragic death in the recent earthquake in Ecuador at the young age of just 33 robbed her family and the world of a tender, caring person.

Yet withal, it is true to state that in her short life Clare Crockett probably had a more positive impact on the lives of people than many of us would achieve should we live to be 100.

The extraordinary example of Maud Kells from Cookstown is another instance of someone driven by their faith to engage in the service of other people.

For nearly 50 years Maud, who trained as a nurse at the Royal Victoria Hospital, has lived out her practical faith in DR Congo. Not content with helping others, Maud has shared her nursing skills with local people and trained others in nursing.

At 75 she was shot by bandits in the country. This did not harden her heart towards the people of Congo, and she continues to labour there in the service of other people.

These are two high-profile examples that many people will have heard about, but there are literally thousands of smaller ones all over Northern Ireland of people helping their

neighbours and friends as a living, breathing part of their faith.

Look at youth organisations: every day all across Northern Ireland boys and girls will meet in church halls as part of their Boys Brigade company, Girl Guides group or Campaigners.

Through these and other organisations friendships will be made that will last a lifetime, and values instilled: self-discipline, respect for others, kindness that make us better people.

These groups exist because people of faith decided they wanted to make a positive contribution to society.

They have endured because the children and young people who passed through the groups loved their time in them so much they wanted to become leaders and play their part in the work they are engaged in.

Throughout Northern Ireland churches provide a massive range of services that, were the State to pick up the bill, the cost would run into millions of pounds.

Because of the work of our churches there are thousands of older people who are not isolated and cut off from society.

Pensioners' groups and indoor bowling clubs exist in our churches because Christian people live out their faith by offering friendship to their neighbours.

On a recent visit to South Antrim I met a group of committed ladies from a church in Ballyclare who were providing food bank facilities - another element of people living the life of the Good Samaritan.

In recent times it has become fashionable for some to denigrate people of faith.

Faith in God is sneered at by some, and belief held up as foolishness.

Despite this we should all of us - believer or not - be grateful to our churches and faith groups. They enrich our community and make Northern Ireland a better place.

Arlene Foster is First Minister of Northern Ireland.

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