



THE JUNCTION:
COMMUNITY RELATIONS & PEACE-BUILDING

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ETHICAL & SHARED
REMEMBERING

COMMEMORATION IN A NEW CONTEXT

REMEMBERING A DECADE
OF CHANGE AND VIOLENCE
IN IRELAND

1912-1922

Johnston McMaster in partnership with Maureen Hetherington
The Junction: Community Relations and Peace Building

DECADE OF COMMEMORATIONS

1912-1922

- ∞ **1912** Signing of the Ulster Covenant
- ∞ **1913** Church League for Women's Suffrage (Irish Branch - Anglican)
- ∞ **1915** Irish Catholic Women's Suffrage Association
- ∞ **1914-1918** The Great War
 - 1916 Easter Rising and Proclamation
 - 1916 Battle of the Somme
- ∞ **1919-1920** Anglo-Irish War / War of Independence
- ∞ **1920** Government of Ireland Act
- ∞ **1921** Partition
- ∞ **1921** Anglo-Irish Treaty
- ∞ **1922-1923** Civil War

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The contents of the booklet include 'narrative hospitality' which has been adapted from the work of Richard Kearney. 'Ethical analysis' has been adapted from the work of Seamus Murphy.

Our thanks to Ann Kelleher, some of whose work has been adapted for the latter pages of this booklet. Ann's full paper will be available as part of the training resources.

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BACKGROUND ‘TO ETHICAL AND SHARED REMEMBERING’ PROJECT

In 2008, Johnston McMaster wrote a chapter for the Junction on Remembrance and Commemoration. The chapter focused on Ethical Remembering incorporating the upcoming ‘decade of centennial events’ as a major theme and legacy of the conflict in Ireland. Given the significance of the upcoming centennial events, Maureen and Johnston developed a strategy and programme of work as a means of approaching the decade of commemorations creatively and constructively.

The Ethical and Shared Remembering Project was thus established as a means of exploring and constructing an ethical value base for the 21st century, based on the principles of an inclusive and fully integrated society. Addressing the decade 1912 – 1922 - a defining decade for Ireland and which shaped the Ireland of today - the Project seeks new discoveries and breakthroughs, as well as new ways of looking at old problems.

On securing funding from the Northern Ireland Development Fund, the Ethical and Shared Remembering Project was launched in the Everglades, Derry/Londonderry in September 2010, followed by a residential in December 2010, and a pilot training programme in the Junction.

Development and Implementation:

Since September 2010, the programme has been working, at different levels, with statutory, institutional, education, faith, community and voluntary sectors, victims and survivors, and ex-prisoners. An important element of the project is the engagement with key stakeholders who are directly involved with planning and implementation of key centennial events in the upcoming decade. The project has assisted in influencing and shaping policy including the Community Relations Council and Heritage Lottery Fund which jointly set up a programme to mark the anniversaries.

RESOURCES

The Ethical and Shared Remembering Project offers:

- Courses on the ‘Decade of Commemorations’ (4 x 2 hour and 6 x 2 hour sessions)
- Exploration of the Decade (one day programme)
- Seminars, information sessions and workshops
- Presentations and workshops on key themes within the context of the decade:
 - Nationalism/Identity – Then and Now: A Changing Landscape
 - The Role of Religion and its Diminishing Profile
 - A Decade of Violence: The Need for Ethical Change
 - Feminism in Ireland 1912-1922 – A Decade of Women
 - Literary Culture: Remembering Our Future from Our Literary Past
 - Remembrance and Commemoration: Memory and Myth
 - The Struggle for Social Justice: An Unfinished Story

Resources include:

- **A set of six booklets:**
 - Remembering a Decade of Violence and Change, 1912-1922
 - The Covenant and Proclamation: The Shared Values of Religio-Political Documents
 - Ethical Theological Responses to Shared Remembering
 - Lamenting in Hope: A Theology of Trauma and Healing
 - Living with the Legacy: Key Themes of the Decade, Past and Present
 - Ethical and Shared Remembering: Visioning the Future 2012-2022
- A book entitled ‘Signing Up To The Covenant: But Which One?’ offering an exploration of the Ulster Covenant and the Judeo-Christian Covenant (which includes a comparative analysis with the Easter Proclamation).
- The Project is developing a comprehensive training resource package for use by educators, trainers, facilitators, community development and community relations activists, faith groups and clergy. Training will be offered with the resource.

FROM ETHICAL THINKING TO ETHICAL DOING

The decade of centenaries, 2012-2022, present major challenges and call for a great deal of generosity and sensitivity. Any retreat into the rhetoric of the past and an exploitation of events for narrow political purposes will be unhelpful and even destructive of community relations and the generational peace process. There are ways of remembering that could draw another generation of young people into repeat violence. Such young people have no live memory of the most recent decades of violence, never mind the events of a century ago. Unless we learn some hard lessons from history, we may well repeat the past. The desired and shared future is the context in which we remember a decade which shaped Ireland for the rest of the 20th century, and still casts a long shadow over our lives together on the island.

The total context in which we remember is complex. There are various other strands as well as the important future we want to build. The project for the decade developed by the Junction in Derry/Londonderry is focused on 'Ethical and Shared Remembering'. This still developing framework has two important foci: remembering over the next decade needs to be ethical and shared. Remembering requires an ethical framework and it needs to be shared as an open and imaginative community relations project. The Junction methodology, therefore, is being built around five key strands:

- 1 Remembering in Context
- 2 Remembering the Whole Decade
- 3 Remembering the Future
- 4 Remembering Ethically
- 5 Remembering Together

1 Remembering in Context

It is a truism to say that the past is a foreign country. It is, and its language, worldview, thought forms and culture make it a strange place far removed from the world we live in a century on. To remember the past as though it was

the present is to delude ourselves and is an irresponsible way of remembering. Yet we often do find it difficult to remember outside contemporary political needs and pretence.

The world of 1912-1922 belongs to a different planet, so breathtaking and far reaching have been the geopolitical and socio-cultural changes in a century. To remember honestly and ethically means entering into the world and context of the past. It is a complex and multiple context. Space does not allow for a detailed unpacking, but the following contextual streams flow into the decade of 1912-1922, and we can make no sense of what happened in Ireland, without factoring in these influential streams:

- An era of imperialism, expansionism and three emperors.
- Late 18th-19th century nationalism – a recent and then dominant political invention.
- High profile religion – Christendom marriage of church and state.
- Suffragette movement and women's rights – European and Irish.
- Labour movement – 1907 and 1913 lockouts and birth of trade unions.
- Deep class divisions – world of 'upstairs downstairs'.
- Boer War – Irish on both sides and impact of South Africa events.

2 Remembering the Whole Decade

In the context of contested histories and community sectarian divisions, there will be the temptation for 'each side' to remember its own events. Nationalists and republicans may see no need, and feel deep antipathy to engaging with Ulster Covenant memory. Likewise unionists and loyalists may feel that the 1916 Rising has nothing to do with them. Either response would be an example of amnesia, and a limited and skewed view of history. Antipathy there may be to the Covenant or the Rising, to the foundation of the first Dáil or the first Northern Ireland Parliament, but history cannot be compartmentalised. Especially on a small island there are no self-contained events in this decade or any decade of Irish history. During the crucial decade of 1912-1922, one event led to another, 1912 led to 1916, both events militarised politics in Ireland, and 1916 led to the Anglo-Irish War which led to the partition of Ireland and to the

treaty and the civil war. A thread connects all of the centennial events including the Somme and there is a symbiotic relationship between all that happened between 1912-1922. Only a selective and skewed memory will isolate events and put them into self-contained boxes. Remembering whole, however difficult, even painful, is an ethical and honest approach to acknowledging the past and learning from history.

3 Remembering the Future

This is not about interpreting the past in the light of present ideological needs. Again there will be the temptation to use and interpret the Rising and what followed to push forward the realisation of a united Ireland, as if ideas of nationalism, the state and the world have not radically moved on since one hundred years ago. Likewise, there will be the temptation to use and interpret the Covenant to advance and try to guarantee a brand of unionism for the next one hundred years. Both attempts would be failures to realise that we are on a different planet from a century ago, and that our world is one dominated by globalisation for better and worse. We now live with an entirely different set of questions and assumptions.

The political agreements have committed us to building a different and shared future. Whatever that means, it is a future, or needs to be a future with no resemblance to the past. It will be a future in which reconciled relationships, social justice and equality and active non-violence will be paramount, in a global, interdependent context. Remembering the decade will be through the prism of such a future vision. In fact we will not work from past, present to future, but in reverse order, from future vision to present, to past. Remembering the future is a different way of remembering.

4 Remembering Ethically

An ethical approach has been implied in all the above and is of key importance in dealing with the decade. Ethical remembering is critical remembering. The succession of events during 1912-1922 changed Ireland in a dramatic way. It was a decade of change, but it was also a decade of horrific violence. It was a

decade characterised by blood lust, bloodletting, at the heart of which was a theology of blood sacrifice, brutality, atrocity and sectarian killing. None of the centenary commemorations can or should deny the brutal violence. The use of the word celebration would also be totally inappropriate, as is the proposal to hold military style commemorations of the Covenant. Likewise a military style commemoration of 1916 Rising is ethically questionable in a context where we are trying to make a very different kind of history, in which militarised politics have no place and where the gun has been, or needs to be completely removed from Irish politics.

Ethical remembering is not about going back to the past in condemnation, nor to indulge in a blame game. Neither has any contribution to make to a desired and shared future. It is though, about raising critical ethical questions about the use of violence to deal with differences and the resolution or defense of political objectives or causes. Uncritical remembering is a failure to learn from history. Ethical remembering acknowledges the destructiveness of violence and its destructive legacy, and builds a different, de-militarised political future.

Ethical remembering also underlines the need for hospitality, a generous openness to each other, to dialogue, hear each other and be prepared to walk through contested histories together. Such hospitality in relation to the events of 1912-1922 is three dimensional:

Narrative Hospitality

We all have stories, personal and communal, and collective memory is strong and a significant part of who we are. At whatever level, our historical narratives are contested and diverse. Centuries of religious and political sectarianism have ensured that we are strangers to each other, even antagonistic strangers. Narrative hospitality is the readiness to hear each other's narrative. Thousands of people in Northern Ireland have been traumatised, as thousands were by the events of the decade. The phenomenon of the disappeared characterised in part the decade and also the most recent phase of violent conflict. There are many stories that need

to be heard, non-combatants, paramilitaries of all shades, ex-soldiers and former police officers. There are multiple narratives from 1912-1922 and from the recent 'troubles', and narrative hospitality is the generosity of spirit to hear these narratives, especially those outside our conditioned historical and narrative framework.

Narrative Flexibility

There is always more than one narrative. Ideology and politics, including religion will delude us into thinking there is a mono-story or a grand meta-narrative. There is often a battle for the dominant narrative, the single narrative that is norm, whether it be our narrative story of 1912-1922 or 1969 following. From within our tribal political or religious camps we might prefer an inflexible narrative, one shaped by certitudes and absolutes. Such inflexibility exists only in our minds and is a fictionalised invention of our tribal group. Narrative flexibility means acknowledging the many and the multiple. An ethic of narrative flexibility means acknowledging this and being open to and discovering understandings and fresh interpretations of the various events.

Narrative Plurality

Insisting on narrative oneness in the approach to history is a denial of the complexity of it all. It is the attempt to live in a one-dimensional world and that blocks our emotional, intellectual and social flourishing. We cannot approach the decade and remember in a reductionist way. There is not one Irish history but different versions and interpretations. Historians, like theologians never agree. Educational systems as well as peer education and local folk education shape us with different stories of the past. To be unaware of this is to live in a restricted, if not pretend world. There are Irish histories and stories told from different historical and experiential perspectives. Even the same event can be recounted differently. The past is always in dispute and always contested and there are no certitudes, absolutes or pure objectivity. Plurality is part of life, not least because we all have different standpoints, see things differently, and because none of us as individuals, groups, parties or organisations have 360 degree vision.

Narrative hospitality, flexibility and plurality offer a more ethical way of remembering. How we will remember in 2012-2022 will require honesty, generosity, openness and hospitality in relation to each other, a three dimensional hospitality.

5 Remembering Together

We can of course sit out the decade of centenaries with our own bit of the story, cherishing our tribal memory, happy with ourselves alone. But in remembering solo we will distort the decade, skew memory and risk yet another replay of political violence. Never again is an ethical imperative and commitment. It may only be possible if the remembering is shared. Efforts will need to be made to remember together. Walking through our histories together may be the only liberating option.

A practical and creative example of this was experienced in a recent conference shared by ex-republican and ex-loyalist prisoners. At their request the Junction project facilitated a critical and comparative exploration of the Covenant and Easter Proclamation texts. The texts of two iconic documents, seen by many as the foundational documents of the respective parts of Ireland, were critically compared and explored together. This walking through historical documents together did not become stuck in the past, but opened up creative reflection on future vision. Three signposts to the future emerged:

- The need now for separation between church and state.
- The need for an ethical vision of society, north and south.
- The need to develop ethical leadership, north and south.

This practical example of remembering together suggests a model for the forthcoming decade which may enable not only a positively critical acknowledgement of the past, but a creative visioning of the future.

The developing ethical and shared remembering methodology provides a framework in which the centenaries of 1912-1922 can be remembered in such a way as to contribute positively to healing and community peacebuilding.

6 Ethical Analysis

An ethical approach calls for a critical analysis to the events of the decade. It is for this reason that commemoration is a better word than celebration. There is nothing celebratory about the brutal and sectarian violence of the decade. To attempt to celebrate any of the centenaries would be unethical. There are three dimensions to a critical analysis:

Personalities, Characters and Motives

The events are dominated by key personalities. In examining the Irish personalities involved, there is Carson and Craig on the Unionist side and Collins and De Valera on the Nationalist side. It is important to explore just who they were, where they came from and what were the forces that had shaped them. Why were they so involved in the decade? But this was also British history and there were key British players in the decade. At the beginning of the decade there was Prime Minister Asquith and Conservative leader, Canadian born, Ulster-Scot, Bonar Law. For much of the decade Lloyd George was Prime Minister and Churchill was heavily involved in a ministerial role. The same critical questions need to be applied to them as to the Irish players. What were their motives, characteristics and war time constraints?

Actions and Policies

Carson applied a politics of violence, either as a threat to the British government or from the belief that only through violence could peace be achieved. The latter was the ancient myth of redemptive violence, at the heart of all historical imperialism, peace through victory or war. Pearse led an armed insurrection deeply rooted in a combination of theology and mythology, believing that blood sacrifice would bring redemption or liberation for Ireland.

Lloyd George was a war-time Prime Minister pre-occupied with the blood-letting of Europe and then as key negotiator in the post-war peace treaties. At the same time he was struggling with the Irish question and played each

side against the other. Collins and De Valera in the end each held different visions of Ireland, the former a more democratic vision, the latter holding on to the republic.

Consequences and Outcomes

All policies and actions have consequences, some good, some bad. Critical questions need to be asked of these. Where did the Ulster resistance and gun running lead? Where did the outcomes of the Easter Rising lead? Did 1912 make 1916 inevitable and did both then settle the partition of Ireland? It is not an easy question to ask, but was partition the only outcome of a decade of brutal and sectarian violence? And did the violence of the decade leave us the tragic legacy of the most recent phase of violence, post-1969? Ethically there is no avoiding the critical re-appraisal of the violence and to ask was the violence necessary or justified in 1912-1922 and that of the subsequent legacy?

HISTORY MAKERS or HISTORY COMMEMORATORS

The following attempts to provide a helpful set of clear, coherent, and practical steps to move away from a sense of unease about ethical remembering and into a useful process for achieving it. The following suggestions are organised into three sections:

- 1 **Practical ideas about the ethical basis for action.**
- 2 **Assumptions flowing from the ideas and guidelines for ethical thinking.**
- 3 **Moving from ethical thinking to commemoration planning.**

1 Practical Ideas:

The following provides a useful template when planning commemorative events that have the potential to be (a) a throwback to the past or (b) remembering for a shared future:

- **Utilitarian Approach** – ethical actions provide for the balance of benefit over harm.
- **Rights Approach** – individuals and groups have rights and also have responsibilities to ensure that the rights of others are not violated.
- **Fairness/Justice Approach** – Favouritism and discrimination diminish others and become an injustice.
- **Common-Good Approach** – The ‘common good’ can be understood as general conditions that work to everyone's advantage. An individual's good is inextricably linked to the good of the larger community, and community members are bound together with common values and goals.
- **Values Approach** – Commonly accepted character traits and values such as honesty, compassion, fairness, reciprocal respect, and responsibility enable us to act in ways that develop our highest potential as people and communities.

In developing an ethical value base for the 21st century; towards an integrated and healthy society, it is important to take on board that actions will have

consequences into the future. With this in mind, the following questions might be useful:

- What benefits or harms will be produced as a result of each event commemorated?
- Will the commemoration advance the common good?
- In what ways may the commemorative acts develop ethical values?
- How will the contribution of women to the cultural and socio-political discourse of the decade be acknowledged?
- How will the decade of commemorations enhance the contemporary equality agenda in relation to women?
- Are ‘exclusive’ commemorative events or re-enactments appropriate within the context of building an inclusive and integrated society in the 21st century?
- What will the upcoming commemorative events say to future generations?

2 Guidelines for Ethical Thinking

The questions above provide the basis for the following assumptions that can be applied directly to thinking about commemorative events:

- Inaction is not an option if existing circumstances do harm, violate rights, create injustice, threaten the common good, and erode ethical values.
- People in a society hold a variety of ethical principles they apply to complex and controversial events, and at least some of the principles will be in dispute. A conflict society intensifies dispute.
- Agreed ethical decisions require actively seeking out the variety of ethical principles held by diverse people.
- Comparing and contrasting ethical principles can produce contentious, highly charged conversations that are both healthy and necessary. This requires mutual respect and positive tolerance for the democratic process to work.
- Ethical thinking requires developing alternative plans of action and evaluating them according to their probable consequences.

- Effective implementation of a plan of action includes an ongoing re-evaluation and feedback process based on consequences.
- Ethical thinking takes into account the future long-term effects of actions on the whole society.

3 Planning Commemorations Ethically:

Applying the decision-making processes suggested below to commemoration planning will prove a difficult task both practically and emotionally. Yet sponsoring and supporting public events means the reactions of people in the larger society should be taken into account since what happens will affect all who experience the commemorations in one way or another. This decade of commemorative events will also shape the destiny of future generations - as potential 'history makers', this generation can charter new ways of being with each other. Crucial to this is inter-community dialogue and shared remembering now and into the future.

Commemoration Planning:

- Seek out alternative ethical principles, perspectives, and points of view: This avoids one dimensional thinking and exclusive remembering.
- Consider the effects of planned action: There is responsibility for consequences.
- Be open and flexible to alternative planning that could improve community relations.
- Reflect on examples of how commemorative events can happen differently: This corrects the idea that nothing can be done differently.
- Include not only what 'is' but also what 'ought to be' in the planning: Taking the future into account places commemoration events in the larger social context.
- Develop monitoring strategies that will enable critical examination of the events, achievements and consequences. This will provide correctives for subsequent commemorations in the decade.

As we approach the upcoming decade of centennial events, ethical and shared remembering will mean a completely different approach to the way in which commemorative events have been remembered in the past. Ethical commemoration does not diminish people or blame people for the past, but rather represents their actions and motivations fairly and in the context of their time.

As such, even long established traditions evolve and change to meet current needs and development contexts. If we are traditionalists or purists we need to be clear as to the motivations behind re-enactments and exclusive remembering and take seriously the consequences for future generations. How we commemorate leaves a legacy for better or for worse.