

" Beyond Forgiving".

A Report by Patricia Earle.



"Beyond Forgiving is a documentary film which depicts the incredible inner journey of two South Africans to bring healing and reconciliation to their country. In 1993 Letlapa Mphahlele, then director of operations for the military wing of the Pan-Africanist Congress, ordered reprisal massacres in response to the killing of black school children. Ginn Fourie lost her only daughter in one such reprisal. These two individuals, a black atheist man and a white Christian woman, somehow agree to meet each other and are able to rise above their pain, bringing forgiveness and hope out of their tragic circumstances. And continuing 'beyond forgiveness' in their work together for peace. A truly profound and remarkable story."

Approximately 100 ladies, with our usual interracial and cultural mix, watched the film together. We then asked 3 women to each speak for a few minutes on the very sensitive topic of Forgiveness, followed by a time of discussion and sharing from the floor.

Our first speaker gave a personal account of her tremendous suffering at the hands of her husband and family, after being married at a very young age. Her life was turned upside down, the pain continuing on and on, causing her to turn to her religion for relief, and to several books including 'The Secret' by Rhonda Byrne, and 'An Attitude of Gratitude' by Mary Jane Ryan. These placed an emphasis on thinking good thoughts, in order that good things come back to you, and gratitude which can create happiness, as without happiness it is difficult to forgive. Only when her feelings of gratitude and forgiveness could move from her head to her heart was she able to genuinely forgive and move on with her life.

Our second speaker, Rev Jackie Gayle, a minister involved in education and, more recently, chaplaincy in health-care, described how she loves to see transformation in people. She expressed her dissatisfaction with the dictionary definition of 'forgiveness', and described the reality of 'unforgiveness' - a state which causes one to express emotions in a negative, selfish way - anger, sadness, depression, which can cause much stress and even lead to physical illness. Jackie mentioned the importance of releasing

one's feelings, and felt that counselling could be a very important antidote in that respect. Forgiving is important in order not to become bitter, or say bad things against



others, gossiping and multiplying one's poison. If, and when, we are able to forgive, both myself and the other are set free in a sense. It's such a great feeling to forgive, and to feel forgiven. It can transform a community, and even a nation.



Our third speaker, Maureen, shared some very deep thoughts from her experience as a counsellor. She found the title of the film, *Beyond Forgiving*, and the journey which the two people undertook, very powerful. She described the stage before forgiving and forgiveness as 'wounding'. When wounded, we can retreat into ourselves, even to 'hide', or sometimes we can become aggressive, fight and lash out. Wounding and violation can affect not just individuals but even whole nations, as in South Africa and Maureen's own country of Ireland. She believes we are all 'wounded healers', and that we have the privilege of availing of, and offering, 'Healing Grace' into our own lives and the lives of others. Maureen recognised Ginn Fourie's acknowledgement of the complicity of her own, white community in the film, and her willingness to 'reach across the divide'. In terms of building a bridge, one person can build their half, but a bridge has to be built from both sides. She concluded by saying that a lot of bridge-building has taken place in the city of Birmingham, and that much peace-building has happened over the years in our Women's Peace Group. She finished with a simple, beautiful song : "Bless the road that carries you".



After several questions, and much sharing from a number of us in the room, we had a brief time of quiet reflection and prayer, announcements, and then refreshments and networking. The informal sharing in twos and threes continued for some time, and the quality of the ladies attending, bringing such a heart and desire for peace creates an atmosphere which makes us want to linger on together, long into the night.



Words from Patrick McGill, an Irish poet, provided by Maureen :

"I believe there is an Influence for Good, working through the Ages, and it is only by laying our wounds open that we can hope to benefit by the Influence. Who doctors the wounds that we hide from everyone's eyes?"

