

A festival in Belfast that unites faith, art and community

The miracle of the "4 corners"

Joan Patricia Back

In Belfast, a city still scarred by the "Troubles" (the Northern Irish conflict), an ecumenical festival is rewriting the narrative: no longer division, but dialogue, creativity and reconciliation. It is the 4 Corners Festival, which every year in February transforms the "corners" of the city into points of meeting and hope.

Born thirteen years ago from an idea of Father Martin Magill, a Catholic priest, and Rev. Steve Stockman, a Presbyterian minister, the festival is now coordinated by an ecumenical team including Methodist minister David Campton. "The goal," says David, "was simple but profound: to get people out of their geographical, religious, political and cultural corners to really meet, in truth and fraternity."

From divided city to shared city

The name of the festival recalls the four "corners" into which Belfast is historically divided: north, south, east and west. Divisions that are not only urban, but also of identity, and which have been born out of the religious and political conflicts that have marked the life of the city for decades. "They called us the city where Christians kill each other," David recalls, "but the peace process of the 1990s and the commitment of so many courageous Christian leaders changed the face of our land. The festival wants to build on that change."

A rich program, for all ages

The *4 Corners Festival* offers dozens of events every year: concerts, exhibitions, theatrical performances, prayer meetings, debates, historical walks, sports activities and creative workshops. All this takes place in different places in the city, precisely to push the participants to "get out of their corner".

The protagonists are mostly local, but there is no shortage of international voices: even Pope Francis sent a video message on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the festival. But, as David Campton is keen to point out: "It is not a festival of big names: it is above all an opportunity for relationships, encounters, and the discovery of the other."

A "jersey" that unites

Among the most symbolic events is *Knit and Natter – 4 Corners Together*, a meeting between knitting enthusiasts from all over the city, conceived by Irene Jovaras. "It is not just a manual activity," he says, "but a true ecumenism of the people. A network of friendship that continues throughout the year."

Volunteers, silent protagonists

Among the many volunteers, there is also Sally Campton, David's wife. "My birthday falls on the first of February," she jokes, "and the only way to see my husband is to be a volunteer at the festival!" But then she adds, seriously: "In reality, being part of this initiative is a gift. There is a sense of family, where everyone is welcomed and valued."

Towards a sustainable future

For some years now, the festival has also been committed to being carbon neutral. To offset carbon emissions, it finances the planting of trees in the hills around Belfast. "But we want to do more," David concludes, "to plant seeds of hope in people's hearts, in the four corners of the city... and, why not, of the world".

An open invitation

The *4 Corners Festival* is a concrete testimony of how faith, culture and collaboration can contribute to the healing of a wounded city. An experience to be lived, to be told and, perhaps, also to be imitated elsewhere.

For more information, to participate or simply to learn about this extraordinary reality, the invitation is open to everyone¹. Because change really begins... around the corner.

¹ <https://www.4cornersfestival.com>