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Kingdom, and nationalists, who are mostly Catholic and who want to unite with the Republic of Ireland. The dialogues, Doug says, have helped build understanding and nurture relationships.

Rediscovering the heart of the gospel

“In the first 15 years of my ministry in Northern Ireland, we spent a lot of time debating whether we could accept one another as Christians, and how the answer to that should determine how we treated each other,” he says. The discussions have moved beyond that, he explains, because of a “rediscovery of what’s at the heart of the gospel, the command to love God and to love our neighbor and what that requires of us in the setting where our neighbor is different to ourselves in some respect.”



Doug and Elaine Baker

Religion has contributed to Northern Ireland’s division, Baker acknowledges. But if people look beyond religious differences, he says, “there is a growing recognition that the gospel itself, when truly understood and lived out, actually has the power to heal and unite.”

Mentoring future church leaders

Doug, who serves alongside his wife, Elaine, has invested much time preparing future church leaders. He teaches ministerial students about reconciliation and since 1994 he has been site coordinator for the PC(USA)’s Young Adult Volunteer (YAV) program in Northern Ireland.

YAVs are between 19 and 30 and serve for one year in communities of need in seven countries, including the United States. About one-third of YAV alumni go to seminary, and many others serve Presbyterian congregations as lay leaders. In Northern Ireland, the YAVs plant seeds of reconciliation primarily in their work with children and youth.

“I see them making wonderful contributions,” Baker says, “not only in what they contribute during the year they serve in Northern Ireland, but in the leadership roles that they are taking on when they return to the United States.”

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