

man dancin

an RE day conference for 16-19's



▶ developed by The Luton Churches Education Trust



dare2engage.org

encouraging a Christian contribution to 16+ education

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introduction

In November 2006, dare2engage piloted an RE day conference for a group of 120 sixth formers from Luton based on the Norman Stone film 'Man Dancin'.

The idea for the conference came from our interest in developing new and innovative approaches to 6th form day conferences, both in form and content. We were especially keen to see how film might be used to explore key topics in RE.

'Man Dancin' is a full length feature film released in British cinemas in 2005. Through it's story (see the synopsis below) it explores themes of prejudice, redemption and the role of the church. It also is a form of 'passion play', having some resonance to the Christian Easter story in it's characters and plot.

The conference itself was a huge success, with very positive feedback from students and, as a result, we have decided to make the outline of the day and the material developed available more widely.

setting the scene

Cardinal Newman High School is a Catholic school in central Luton with its own sixth form comprising around 240 students. Like many 16+ institutions, it is a challenge to fit spiritual development and RE into the timetable of students taking their 'A' levels. Consequently, a one day RE conference has lots of benefits not only in terms of enabling topics to be explored in some depth, but also as a way of maximising RE input during the term.

The conference was organised and run by The Luton Churches Education Trust (LCET), a local Christian youth project with considerable experience of working in Cardinal Newman and in planning events of this kind. A small team from LCET worked with the school over the course of the Autumn term in 2006 to develop the programme and content. One of the early decision made was to hold the conference away from the school premises. This not only gave a sense of anticipation and heightened interest to the students, but also enabled us to create a better content for showing a full length feature film away from school bells and other disturbances. A local arts centre was booked for the day, with a large room for the screening and several smaller meeting rooms. It's central location in Luton also meant that pupils could arrive directly there at the beginning of the day, saving the need to transport them from the school.

As a Catholic school, Cardinal Newman has a strong Christian ethos and presence, which creates both disadvantages as well as advantages. On the positive side, there was a keen emphasis from staff to explore explicitly Christian themes but, on the other hand, we recognised that the Christian element of school life may leave some students with a cynical or negative outlook towards the day we were planning.

▶ aims and outcomes

Our aims for the day were:

→ to create a content where students could explore their beliefs and ideas about the key themes raised by the film including prejudice, redemption and the role of the church.

→ to introduce to students the idea of exploring spiritual themes through film

In addition, the day was designed to be a chance to see how using film works in this kind of content. We were keen to see whether students would be willing to sit through a full length feature film and whether they would engage with its themes for themselves. The final section of the day's programme was therefore an extensive evaluation from those attending.

▶ man dancin synopsis

Man Dancin' is a gangster movie with a difference. After nine years in a Northern Ireland jail Jimmy Kerrigan (Alex Ferns) returns to his family home in a tough Glaswegian estate. It's only been a few years but the Glasgow that he knew has changed, and more importantly to those who knew him, so has Jimmy Kerrigan. Some think he's gone soft, others suspect he's found religion, but they don't ask and he doesn't say.

His old crime boss, Donnie McGlone (James Cosmo) and corrupt policeman, Detective Inspector Walter Villers (Ken Cranham) are sure it's all an act. There are deep suspicions that Jimmy plans to set up in 'business' on his own. Their inner-city empire could be under serious threat. Something needs to be done.

As part of his parole Jimmy is press-ganged into a local Passion Play run by local priest, Father Gabriel Flynn (Tom Georgeson). Though very reluctant at first, Jimmy finally commits to the project and soon takes it in a new and radical direction. But heads start to turn when Jimmy stands up to one of McGlone's pimps and befriends Maria Gallagher (Jenny Foulds). Two of her fellow ex-prostitute friends seek refuge with Jimmy and his play. This act of defiance sparks a change of mood among other people on the estate. If Jimmy Kerrigan can stand up to McGlone why can't they?

The more defiantly Jimmy dodges the grasp of his old life and associates, the more serious their threat becomes. The villains recruit Jimmy's disillusioned brother, Terry (Cas Harkins) as a paid informer and the pressure is soon turned on. First the church hall is firebombed then Jimmy's friend, and musician in the play, is killed in suspicious circumstances. Suddenly the play begins to represent much more than Father Flynn had ever intended. Jimmy is a fighter and is prepared to battle to the end. The play will continue' even if it's out on the streets.

For McGlone and Villers the gloves are finally off. Jimmy must be stopped once and for all. Twist follows twist until the final showdown. But even then the story is not over. Lives are changed forever and the future still lies open in this surprising thriller that grabs the heart and won't let go.

conference outline

introductions (20 minutes)

We started by introducing the aims and programme for the day. We also emphasised that the day was an opportunity to explore and express ideas and opinions, and that we would be giving plenty of opportunities for students to contribute.

film screening (117 minutes)

The film was screened in one segment, without breaks.

break

interview with Norman Stone, Director of 'Man Dancin' (45 minutes)

For this conference we were fortunate to be able to have the Director of 'Man Dancin', Norman Stone, present to talk about the film, including why and how it was made. Recognising that this will not be possible for future conferences, we suggest that this section is used instead for students to talk about their reaction to the film. A guide on how to approach this time is included below.

groups 1 (50 minutes)

Students were invited to take part in one of five workshops, designed to explore some of the themes and ideas raised in the film. The topics and basic outline of these workshops is included below.

lunch

film and faith (40 minutes)

Following the lunch break, we made a short presentation about the role of faith, especially Christian faith, in film.

groups 2 (50 minutes)

Students were able to choose a second workshop to attend.

conclusion and evaluation (30 minutes)

workshops

change: have you ever wanted to make a fresh start in an area of your life?

This session used art to explore what it would mean to make a new start in their life. Students were asked to imagine what they would want to change in their lives and why. This includes factors like:

- where I live
- who I live with
- how old I am
- what I do with my time
- what I'm like on the inside, my character
- what I look like

Students were invited to create a 'film storyboard' depicting various scenes in this new life, as though it were being made into a film. A wide range of art materials were made available and paper had been prepared split into storyboard squares for the students to use.

relevant: is Christian faith relevant to your life and the issues you face?

This session involved a group discussion with two of the team leading the day. The question was the relevance of Christian faith to everyday life. The two leaders took opposite views and began by briefly outlining their case. A vigorous discussion followed with questions to the leaders and debate among the group.

stand: do you believe in something strongly enough to stand up for it?

This session used Norman Stone, the Director of 'Man Dancin', to initiate a discussion and q&a about the role of Christians and the church in the media. Topics included the different approaches of Christians making films, from those that were closer to 'propaganda' to those that questioned faith and the church.

violence: would you ever use violence to defend yourself or your beliefs?

This group discussion focussed on a series of scenarios in which students were asked to break into small groups and consider how they might respond to 4 different scenarios. They included:

- an attack or mugging
- being called to fight in Iraq
- being stopped going into a church by a group of protesters
- being involved in a campaign to stop human trafficking

Students were asked to consider what they thought they would do themselves, the moral reasons for their choice and what role faith would have in their decision.

different: what's the purpose of church in our society today?

This group discussion was perhaps more specialised than some of the other topics, but nevertheless attracted a good crowd. The word 'church' refers to the general Christian church rather than a specific congregation or building. The discussion was centred around 4 questions:

- what do you like about churches?
- what do you dislike about churches?
- what makes you angry about church?
- what should the purpose of church be in society today?

These questions were put up on separate large sheets on the wall and students were invited to walk round and add their comments and thoughts to each one. Once this was completed, the group was drawn back together and the sheets were then talked through one by one, allowing space for further comments from the group.

Students were then split into smaller groups and asked to work together to imagine an ideal church. They were asked to prepare a description of this church: what it would believe in, what it would do and how it would interact with society. These descriptions were then presented back to the main group and created a final discussion.

feedback session

In lieu of having the Director present at the screening, we suggest using 45 minutes to enable students to reflect on the film and their initial response to it. The following two exercises are offered as possible discussion starters.

exercise 1: "the pie"

Sometimes young people find it hard to contribute to a group discussion. They may feel shy or that their contribution might appear silly. The first part of the session is therefore a chance for students to think about film and begin to develop a reaction to what they've seen in a way that everyone will have something to contribute.

You'll need pieces of card cut into circles about 10cm in diameter. Use a pen to divide one side into 5 even 'cake slices'. Give a circle to each student and ask them to answer these questions, one a slice, writing in their thoughts and opinions.

1. One word to sum up what you thought of the film
2. A scene that you liked or hated
3. Would your mates or your parents like this film and why?
4. There wasn't enough....complete the sentence.
5. Was the film maker trying to make you (tick any that apply):
 - ⇒ laugh and have a good time
 - ⇒ cry and be moved by something you saw
 - ⇒ think about an idea or point of view
 - ⇒ understand something or a type of person
 - ⇒ change you views on something

exercise 2: character reflections

This reflective exercise gives young people an opportunity to begin thinking about how they felt about the film and the characters depicted. It is in two parts.

Everyone is given a set of cards which contain words that could describe characters in the film. The film's different characters are then shown one at a time and young people are asked to select the card they feel is most appropriate to describe that person. You may want to use the whole list or just a selection.

<i>character</i>	<i>actor</i>
Jimmy Kerrigan	Alex Ferns
Father Gabriel Flynn	Tom Georgeson
DI Pancho Villers	Kenneth Cranham
Donnie McGlone	James Cosmo
Maria Gallagher	Jenny Foulds
Terry Kerrigan	Cas Harkins
Johnny Bus-Stop	Tam White

Cardinal Newman 6th form RE conference

Man dancin'

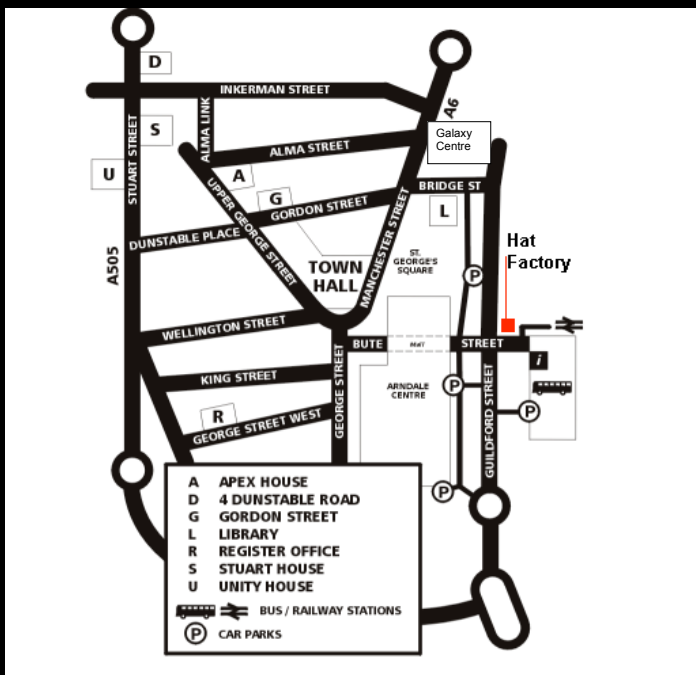
a film by Norman Stone



a day conference using film to explore philosophy, faith and values
with guest speaker, film director Norman Stone

- ★ have you ever wanted to make a fresh start in an area of your life?
- ★ is Christian faith relevant to your life and the issues you face?
- ★ do you believe in something strongly enough to stand up for it?
- ★ would you ever use violence to defend yourself or your beliefs?
- ★ what's the purpose of church in our society today?

9.00am to 3.30pm Friday November 17th 2006 @ The Hat Factory
film screening, workshops, discussion
buffet lunch included



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starring
Alex Ferns
Tom Georgeson
Kenneth Cranham
James Cosmo
Jenny Foulds

directed by
Norman Stone

produced by
Ray Marshall

what did you think?

Today was a bit of an experiment for us: using a film to explore spiritual and life issues. It would help us to know what you thought of the day, how it could be improved and anything else you want to say.

1. A sentence to sum up how you feel about today.

2. What was the highlight?

3. What would you change?

4. How relevant were the issues and ideas talked about to your life and experiences?

everything was relevant

some was relevant

nothing was relevant

something else _____

5. How would you rate the practical side of the day (1 = bad, 10 = excellent)

venue 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

food 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

being out of school 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

6. Anything else you'd like to add?

Thanks. We'll read all of your feedback and it will help us plan future events.