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Archbishop of Canterbury tells Northern Ireland audience he is 'a little nervous' about officiating at royal wedding

Alf McCreary writes in the Belfast Telegraph

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The Archbishop of Canterbury confessed that he is "still nervous" about officiating at the wedding of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle during a visit to Belfast.

Justin Welby - who dropped the rings at his last **wedding** - will lead the ceremony set to be watched by millions in St George's Chapel, Windsor, on May 19.

The leader of the Anglican Church was here to take part in a British Council panel discussion with Denis Bradley and Maxine Mawhinney at Ulster University to mark the 20th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement.

"I am still a little nervous about the royal wedding," he said.



"During the last wedding at which I officiated I dropped the rings and at the rehearsal for the wedding before that, I forgot to bring a copy of the wedding vows.

"I would quite like to get it right this time. Prince Harry and Meghan are a lovely couple and it is going to be a great day of celebration. I'm looking forward to it but just hope that I get it right the first time."

Turning to Northern Ireland matters, he said that it might take 100 years for people to work out who played the key role in tipping the balance that brought about the Good Friday Agreement.

"I'm sure that a **great deal** of work went on behind the scenes," he said.

"Part of it is maintaining the pressure for reconciliation at grassroots **level**, and the greater the pressure, the more pressure it puts on political leaders to act.

"The church works best at the local level.

"People pay very little attention to grand statements by churches but they do pay attention when they see a trend, and the churches do this well."

He said that the 1998 peace accord has been a role model throughout the world, even though it is underestimated.

"We forget what an extraordinary moment the Agreement was, how deep the wounds went, and the courage that was required on all sides," he said.

"The Agreement is of real significance in other parts of the world. It shows it is possible to take a situation where people have been fighting for centuries - and during 30 to 40 years of the Troubles at a high intensity - and it is possible to form a new way of governing and to imagine something different. The key now is maintaining momentum."

Referring to the Anglican Church and same-sex **marriage**, the archbishop said that more than 90% of members throughout the world and the Anglican Communion do not approve of a church blessing on same-sex marriage.

"We are studying this all carefully and we are not going to pre-empt how that comes out. When we publish the Bishops' Teaching **Document** in February 2020, we will have to think carefully about the best way forward."

Dr Welby said he had "orthodox views" but the real question was "do we treat each human being as loved by God in Jesus Christ and of infinite value, regardless of their sexuality or anything like that?"

"Are we imposing rules and throwing stones at people who don't keep the rules, or do we treat people as those whom we love but on certain issues, including this, we have different views and we learn to disagree well."

