

Church News Ireland



Image of the day – Hazelbank, Whiteabbey

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The view from Hazelbank, Whiteabbey. Karyn Stapleton caught this view on the west coast of Belfast Lough

People and places

Athlone exhibition highlights reality of domestic abuse

An exhibition which walks viewers through the reality of domestic abuse takes place in St Mary's Church Athlone over the May bank holiday weekend.

'Souls of our Shoes – A journey into and out of Domestic Abuse' will be on display from April 28th to May 1st.

This incredibly powerful and compelling exhibition highlights issues around Gender-based Violence.

It is an initiative of Mothers' Union and its main purpose is to raise awareness of domestic violence.

"Souls of Our Shoes" is an exhibition of physical shoes accompanied by comments from those who have walked away from abuse.



The exhibition is to be launched on Friday evening at 8pm followed by open hours on Saturday Sunday & Monday (see notice for details). Individuals and groups are welcome to drop in during this time to view the exhibition and stand in solidarity with all who experience domestic abuse.

Woodschapel Mother's Union celebrates centenary

A wonderful evening of celebration and fellowship to mark 100 years of Mother's Union in Woodschapel Parish, was held recently.

Rev Alan Cross, Diocesan Chaplain, The Ven Dr Stephen McBride, the newly appointed All Ireland MU Chaplain, Canon Robert Boyd, former Rector and current Rector Rev Ruth Murray officiated at the Service. Mrs June Butler, All Ireland President gave the Address and Mrs Debbie Davidson, Diocesan President read the Old





Testament Reading. Miss Hannah Galway, Miss Courtney Weir and Miss Holly Weir sang two pieces My Shepherd and We Have A Lamb. Prayers were led by Mrs Elizabeth McClure, Hon Secretary and Mrs Lynda Galway, Enrolling Member. The Rev

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Alan Cross led the re-dedication of the MU Branch Banner and members of MU.

A delicious supper was served in the Parish Hall when several members were presented with certificates for long membership of MU, ranging from 30 to 60 years. Votes of thanks were given by June Butler and Debbie Davidson.

Give thanks for the people who believed in the future' – Dedication of Glebe school extension

There was joyous celebration in glorious sunshine on Thursday morning (April 20) when the long awaited extension to the Glebe National School in Wicklow town was dedicated and officially opened.

The whole school gathered in the newly enlarged school hall to witness Archbishop Michael Jackson bless the fantastic new building which includes four large bright new classrooms, two purpose built special education rooms and the principal's office.

The project has been about 17 years in gestation with generations of pupils of the Wicklow Parish school contributing to numerous fundraising initiatives over that time. The current pupils were joined by members of the school's board of management, the architect Ronan Rose Roberts, former principal Hilda Heavener, former Rector of Wicklow Canon John Clarke and a representative from the Department of Education, among others.



Members of the Glebe NS Board of Management with the Principal and the Archbishop – Lissa McPhillips, Wendy O'Donohue, Will Goodbody, Sandra Bryan, Archbishop Michael Jackson, the Revd Jack Kinkead, Dave Howell, Hilda Heavener, Canon John Clarke and Olive Conroy.

The Glebe School Choir, under the direction of Mr Thompson, got proceedings underway with a beautiful performance. The current Rector, the Revd Jack Kinkead, welcomed all the special guests. He gave thanks for all the people who had worked so hard to achieve the great goal of the construction of the extension and read Psalm 127.

The Archbishop praised the collaborative effort which brought the new school building to fruition. "The idea to extend the school came long before you were born. Now you have the opportunity to enjoy it. I'm really delighted to

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be here today to see this new extension. We give thanks for the people who believed in the future because we are now living in that future,” he said.



The Glebe School Choir performing at the dedication of their school extension.

He commended those who worked on the extension and the pupils, teachers and support staff who made the school such a happy place to be, to learn in and to be present in. He prayed a prayer of dedication and led the school community in the Lord's Prayer.

School principal, Sandra Bryan, who has overseen the project since its inception, said the Glebe's teachers, staff and pupils were all thrilled with the new extension which replaces three prefab classrooms which were located on the site. Another classroom inside the existing building has been turned into a staff room.

News reports

Lambeth Palace statement on GAFCON IV Kigali Commitment

Responding to ‘The Kigali Commitment’ issued by GAFCON IV yesterday, a spokesperson for Lambeth Palace said:

“We note that The Kigali Commitment issued by GAFCON IV today makes many of the same points that have previously been made about the structures of the Anglican Communion. As the Archbishop of Canterbury has previously said, those structures are always able to change with the times – and have done so in the past. The Archbishop said at the recent Anglican Consultative Council meeting in Ghana (ACC-18) that no changes to the formal structures of the Anglican Communion can be made unless they are agreed upon by the Instruments of Communion.

“At the ACC-18 meeting – which was attended by primates, bishops, clergy and laity from 39 of the 42 Anglican provinces – there was widespread support for working together patiently and constructively to review the Instruments of Communion, so that our differences and disagreements can be held together in unity and fellowship. Archbishop Justin Welby has welcomed this decision – just as he also welcomed last year’s decision by the Church of England’s General Synod to give the Anglican Communion

a greater voice on the body that nominates future Archbishops of Canterbury.

“The Archbishop continues to be in regular contact with his fellow Primates and looks forward to discussing this and many other matters with them over the coming period. Meanwhile the Archbishop continues to pray especially for Anglicans who face poverty, conflict, famine, discrimination and persecution around the world, and Anglican churches who live and minister in these contexts. Continuing to walk together as Anglicans is not just the best way to share Christ’s love with a world in great need: it is also how the world will know that Jesus Christ is sent from the Father who calls us to love one another, even as we disagree.”

Christian Aid on alert in South Sudan for looming refugee crisis

The international development charity Christian Aid fears the turmoil in Sudan could push refugees into South Sudan.

It’s working with its partners on the ground to prepare for the trickle to become a wave of displaced people crossing the porous and unstable border with its northern neighbour.

Clashes between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) are spreading into the bordering regions of South Darfur and Blue Nile, raising fears of a return to all-out-war in a country with a history of armed conflict.

There are also worries about South Sudan's fragile peace process from disrupted cross border trade, including food and fuel supplies. The country is dependent on neighbouring Sudan's oil infrastructure for its exports.

James Wani, Christian Aid South Sudan Country Director, said: "South Sudan is already facing a severe food emergency. There is a significant shortfall in humanitarian funding. If this conflict in Sudan doesn't stop soon, and refugees start crossing the border in large numbers, then this will exacerbate an existing humanitarian crisis."

Christian Aid is calling on the South Sudanese government not to diverge from its commitment to implementing both the peace agreement and formation of the government of national unity which requires citizen engagement.

The charity had to halt its church-led peacebuilding efforts in South Sudan after UK government cuts to aid budgets in 2021.

In the media

Archbishop Eamon Martin: I was very torn when Martin McGuinness died

The archbishop remembers growing up in Derry during the Troubles, and tensions between church and IRA, Patsy McGarry writes in the Irish Times.

Seen from the Walls of Derry, the Bogside looks very small. “There’s the cemetery where Martin McGuinness is buried. Over there is his house. Eamon McCann is on the same street, as was my aunt,” says Eamon Martin.

“John Hume was up there. And Nell [McCafferty] was up here behind the cathedral. It’s very much intimate,” the Catholic Primate of All-Ireland and Archbishop of Armagh declares, pointing to the houses.

Passing along the city walls, and the remnants of a recent storm, Martin is greeted everywhere, sometimes as Fr Martin, or as monsignor, occasionally as archbishop, and by one man who wondered how he was and where he is now at all.

Derry’s bitter social and political history is marked on the landscape: “This would have been crammed with houses because gerrymandering and housing discrimination meant that you squashed as many Catholics in as you could,” says Martin.

The deprivation was “awful”, he adds. “It was a terrible situation. The gerrymandering or the squeezing of everybody into the one area was to keep them all in this electoral ward which had only so many seats.”

Martin became a curate in St Eugene’s Cathedral, just a stone’s throw away, in 1987. “So you are right at the heart of what it is to be a Derry person when you’re here. It was a real joy for me to work here also as a young priest.”

Looking earlier from the gates of St Eugene's, Martin had pointed to William Street where Samuel Devenney (42) died in April 1969 – the first victim of the Troubles – after being severely beaten in his home by the RUC.

You could see out the window, police and army keeping guard, while inside guns and everything and a guard of honour. I said the rosary, last decade in Irish — Eamon Martin on the funeral of two IRA men in St Eugene's Cathedral

Being a priest at St Eugene's had its hazards. One night he got a phone call from the RUC asking him to check out a device at St Joseph's Place. If the police came to investigate it would cause a riot.

"I walked down and pretended not to look and walked around a wee bit, saw a bag there which wasn't a bomb but may have been a hoax," he says, describing himself as "a stupid young priest".

Priests, he said, were caught in the middle. On October 28th that year, while bishop of Derry Edward Daly was attending the Birmingham Six trial in the UK, two IRA men – Eddie McSheffrey (29) and Paddy Deery (31) – were killed by their own car bomb.

Daly had outlawed all republican funerals after shots were fired over a coffin in the grounds of Long Tower Church that spring, but the IRA insisted the funerals of the two men would take place in St Eugene's.

Just two months in St Eugene's Cathedral by then, Martin remembers how talks between Daly and McGuinness "went down to the wire", with the bishop agreeing that the coffins would allowed into the church, under protest.

Martin was sent to say the prayers at McSheffrey's home, where his Tricolour-draped coffin with two men in paramilitary uniform standing in a guard of honour: "You could see out the window, police and army keeping guard, while inside guns and everything and a guard of honour. I said the rosary, last decade in Irish."

Later, a new stand-off occurred when the police and military insisted on flanking the coffins on the way to the graveyard, with the IRA saying no: "They took the two coffins back up to the doors of the cathedral, sat them down there."

Hours later, an agreement was reached where the police would go in front, following two priests, including Fr Martin, followed by the coffins and pallbearers and family and, then, the rest of the mourners.

Soon, however, the pallbearers were changed, and then again every 100 yards putting more and distance between them and the police: "The further up the road we went, the further the police were getting behind," he says.

He was seen by all us teenagers as in charge ... I believe that later in his life he became a strong practitioner of his faith

— Eamon Martin on Martin McGuinness

Halfway up the road, scores of umbrellas were unfurled and a volley of shots were fired over the coffins, while mourners scattered in all directions under the IRA's instruction and the RUC batoned people. Everything descended into chaos.

The coffins fell on the ground, before there was "a very quick burial", says Martin. Afterwards, Daly and McGuinness reached a compromise, where no shots would be fired inside church grounds during IRA funerals.

Martin was always aware of McGuinness growing up, who was "seen by all us teenagers as in charge". By 1987-1988, he was in politics, regularly at a Mass in Irish at Nazareth House said by the man who would later become archbishop.

"I believe that later in his life he became a strong practitioner of his faith," says the archbishop, who remembers the brutal killing of alleged IRA informer Frankie Hegarty, whose family always blamed McGuinness for his death.

"Patsy Gillespie [who was strapped into a van carrying a bomb and forced to drive it into a British army checkpoint while his family were held captive, killing five] was another one," he says.

Later, Martin, who was president at St Columb's College from 2000 to 2008, dealt with McGuinness as Stormont's minister for education, where he was well liked by a lot of people, very charming and genuinely interested in education.

The archbishop remembers "being very torn" when McGuinness died: "I wanted to say something but I

remember being quite torn as to how to say – to pay tribute to his peacemaking – and that’s in the end what I did.

“I would say he played a leading role in bringing the IRA away from the bomb and the bullet, which has to be laudable. I found it very, very difficult to praise anything done during his years in active service, if you want to use that term.”

Martin was raised in the Pennyburn area of Derry. He had seen young people his age getting involved in riots, but he did not, partly because he lived in a quieter area and partly because he was deterred by his “very strict” parents.

“They were very nationalist, of course. We would have been very much John Hume. We would not have been in favour of republican violence. That would have been true of all of my family,” he says.

Eamon Martin was born in 1961, the eighth of 12 children. His only memories of the late 1960s “were of my brothers and sisters talking about the Troubles”, while Pennyburn slowly, then quickly, became Catholic.

Often he took a shortcut through the Bogside to get to St Columb’s, though he was not supposed to: “Shooting was common, shooting during the school day and shooting in and around the school.

“I can remember us getting down under the desks on occasions because foot patrols would be going through the school. Things like that now seem really mad, when you look back.”

Some deaths stand out, including nine-year-old Bernadette McCool in June 1970, who died along with her father, Thomas, sister Carole (4) and two other IRA men when a bomb being prepared in the family home exploded.: “I remember our teacher saying prayers for her,” he says.

Near Free Derry Corner, the archbishop points to the mural of Annette McGavigan, who was killed aged just 14: “She was a couple of years older than me, and she was shot dead by the army here, picking up a rubber bullet.”

And he remembers being on the schoolbus in June 1974 when it came upon “awful scenes”: a bomb being planted at a supermarket by two IRA members – 17-year-old Gerard Craig and 18-year-old David Russell – exploded prematurely: “They were putting the coats over the remains,” says Martin.

**It was almost as if there was a justification, and you knew people in school who were joining
— Eamon Martin on growing sympathies to the armed struggle after Bloody Sunday**

The memories keep coming, including “an awful incident” when Manus Deery was shot dead in May 1972 by a British army sniper who claimed the teenager had been carrying a nail bomb.

“He was eating a bag of chips,” he said, noting that it was not until February 2019 that the British ministry of defence accepted that he was not armed and that his shooting breached military rules.

“Awful things like that fuelled the recruitment, fuelled the campaign, or the armed struggle,” says Martin, adding that he – like “other young fellas of age – were sort of sympathetic to the struggle, particularly after Bloody Sunday”.

“It was almost as if there was a justification, and you knew people in school who were joining”, though teachers “kept everything away from us” inside the classroom, leaving the discussions to happen on the playground and outside school.

Growing into his teenage years, however, he became “very much aware” of Bishop Daly and the Catholic Church’s position on the IRA: “Our parents would have brought us up very much close to the church, very active in our parish.”

For Martin, his knowledge of Northern Ireland’s Protestant community was developed by a love of music and choirs. “You literally harmonised together, you played music with people from all sides. It was fantastic.”

It was how he ended up playing trombone in a brass ensemble on the day of Bill Clinton visited Derry the first time in 1995.

Today, he looks back at the Belfast Agreement after 25 years and feels “a great disappointment” that not everyone has been able to acknowledge it as “a significant moment”.

More must be done on reconciliation, he believes, but the 25 years have been wasted in the efforts to bring truth and

justice to many: “A lot of the protagonists have moved on, died, and victims have died.”

Telling a sectarian joke or making a sectarian comment is not frowned upon in the same way as, for example, anti-gay or anti-trans [comments]

Church leaders could bring people together, he says, but a lot of the discussions that are happening are taking place among people of his age, rather than among younger people where it should be happening.

Referring to the row caused by members of the Irish women’s football team chanting “Ooh, ah, up the ‘Ra”, he says “a lot” of political sectarianism is due to young people not understanding their actions.

Young people today are, mostly, extremely careful about making homophobic, racist or anti-trans statements, or making derogatory remarks about disabled people, the archbishop says.

“[But] the problem is they’re going home and the sectarianism is still alive and well, so telling a sectarian joke or making a sectarian comment is not frowned upon in the same way as, for example, anti-gay or anti-trans.”

“I’m not advocating a cancel culture but can you imagine if sectarian comments were cancelled in the same way as some others are. That’s not going to happen because, yet, the will’s not there. Everybody is still tribal.”

Poem for today

Spring in Belfast by Derek Mahon

Walking among my own this windy morning
In a tide of sunlight between shower and shower,
I resume my old conspiracy with the wet
Stone and the unwieldy images of the squinting heart.
Once more, as before, I remember not to forget.

There is a perverse pride in being on the side
Of the fallen angels and refusing to get up.
We could all be saved by keeping an eye on the hill
At the top of every street, for there it is,
Eternally, if irrelevantly, visible —

But yield instead to the humorous formulae,
The spurious mystery in the knowing nod;
Or we keep sullen silence in light and shade,
Rehearsing our astute salvations under
The cold gaze of a sanctimonious God.

One part of my mind must learn to know its place.
The things that happen in the kitchen houses
And echoing back streets of this desperate city
Should engage more than my casual interest,
Exact more interest than my casual pity.

Speaking to the soul

Short reading and a prayer - daily on this site

Church News Ireland

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