



Good Friday Agreement architect Senator George Mitchell attends border prayer service



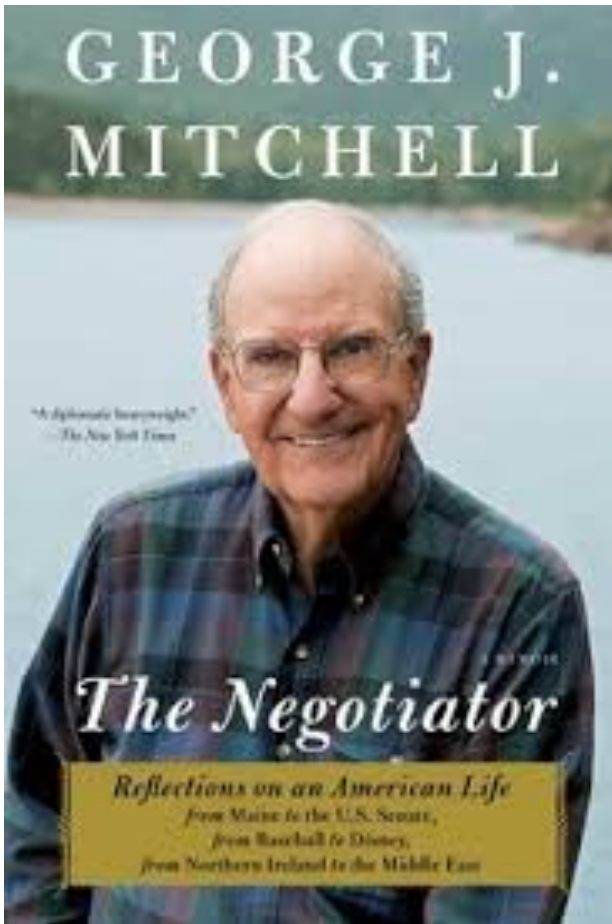
Former US Senator George Mitchell, one of the architects of the Good Friday Agreement, returned to the cross-Border bridge named in his honour last weekend, almost 20 years on from the historic peace deal, Jonathan Rainey writes in the Impartial Reporter.

The distinguished politician and diplomat, who acted as chair for the Northern Ireland Peace Talks from 1995 until 1998, attended an interdenominational prayer service and tree-planting ceremony at the Senator George Mitchell Peace Bridge at Aghalane, County Cavan, on Sunday afternoon.

The bridge, which is located between Derrylin and Belturbet, and connects Counties Cavan and Fermanagh, opened in April 1999.

It replaced the nearby Aghalane Bridge, which was destroyed by a bomb in November 1972.

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Senator Mitchell was present for a beam-laying ceremony at Aghalane on September 6, 1998, and 20 years later returned to the Border community.

He was invited to do so by Drumlane Pastoral Council.

The interdenominational prayer service was led by Rev. Tanya Woods, Annagh Group of parishes, Rev. Hazel Hicks, Arva Group of Parishes, Dean Nigel Crossey, Dean of Kilmore, Fr. Ultan McGoohan, Teemore, and Fr. Gerry Comiskey, Drumlane parish priest.

The attendance included representatives from the Roman

Catholic and Church of Ireland congregations in both Counties Cavan and Fermanagh.

Also present was the Cathaoirleach of Cavan County Council, Councillor Paddy McDonald, joined by colleagues from Cavan County Council and Chief Executive, Mr. Tommy Ryan.

Event organiser, Fr. Comiskey, welcomed Senator Mitchell on behalf of all those gathered.

He said that he was privileged to lead the prayer service for continuing peace in Northern Ireland and, most especially, in the Border regions.

“Peace is what people all over Ireland, north and south, have longed for, have marched for, have prayed and have fasted for, for several decades.,” said Fr. Comiskey before adding.

“A real opportunity now exists and a responsibility now rests on all of us to seize this opportunity to exploit all its possibilities, by every means in our individual and collective power.

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“A particular responsibility rests on the shoulders of governments, party political leaders, politicians, and their supporters, on community leaders, and on business and professional people,” he said.

The parish priest also said that a “special responsibility” rested on church leaders, including those who had gathered for the prayer service.

He continued: “Public opinion, particularly in Ireland, will be very severe, history will be very severe, in judgement on any government or political party seen to have been an obstacle blocking this opportunity, or perceived to have been a cause of it being lost.

“May all of us turn to God in most earnest prayer for his help and may we obtain from his mercy that peace for which we long,” concluded Fr. Comiskey.

Impasse in Northern politics due to indifference says bishop

A bishop from Northern Ireland has blamed the current political stalemate in Northern Ireland on indifference. Bishop Alan McGuckian SJ, originally from Antrim, made his comments just before a series of events marked the 20th anniversary of the signing of the Good Friday Agreement yesterday.

“The reason why we are still stuck in Northern Ireland is that in our two communities or in our various communities we are happy enough the way we are and we couldn’t be bothered,” Bishop Alan McGuckian SJ told *CatholicIreland*.

In an interview after he celebrated a Mass at Stranmillis College, Belfast at the weekend, where he preached on St Thomas’s famous words, “Unless I see the holes the nails made and I can put my finger into them ... I refuse to believe”, Bishop McGuckian said the impasse in Northern politics was due to the indifference of Christians. “If our politicians are not leading us to really make peace and reconciliation work, it is because we are not demanding them to lead us. They are responding to us and that is a terrible

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wound that we don't even recognise because we are happy enough with it.”

In Northern Ireland we are aware of the terrible wounds that live on in so many people's hearts because of what they have suffered and continue to suffer as a result of the Troubles, said the Bishop of Raphoe, “but there's another wound in us, a wound on the face of the Church, of us Christians” – and that wound is indifference.



Bishop Alan McGuckian SJ at Building Community Together in Belfast.

“I have to see my indifference about this terribly serious issue as a wound. We have to experience that our indifference is a scandal. If it pained us then as believers we'd be able to touch the wound because it's a wound on the body of Christ, and that would be our way to new life, but we have to face up to it.” Otherwise, he said, we are just “sleepwalking”. He added: “I don't know where it will lead but it is not good.”

Bishop McGuckian joined 170 Christians from several denominations, including Church of Ireland Bishop Trevor Williams, at the all-Ireland Focolare weekend on ‘Building Community
churchnewsireland@gmail.org

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Together'. Former BBC security correspondent Brian Rowan, author of *Unfinished Peace*, gave the keynote address on Saturday.

Asked by *CatholicIreland* if there was any possibility of the collapse of the Good Friday agreement and a return to violence, Mr Rowan said he believed the war was over. "I am pretty convinced about that." The dissident organisations that emerged just before the Good Friday agreement in 1998 had not been able to "recreate the conflict" because there was not "the community support or community tolerance, not the wherewithal that would allow such a repeat of the conflict period".

He considered whether that meant we are not in danger of someone being killed tomorrow or the next day, answering that we haven't got to that point.

"I think the next phase of our politics is going to be a kind of tug-of-war between union and unity and here we are arriving at the Good Friday anniversary and the political institutions that are at the heart of it are no longer there. And we are in danger of them not being restored," he said.

Given how the huge hurdles of the ceasefire and arms decommissioning were overcome, Mr Rowan said if issues like the Irish language, marriage equality and a Bill of Rights could not be resolved, we don't deserve a Stormont.

"So when these international visitors come to us, [on the anniversary of the Good Friday agreement] they would give everything they have for what we've got," he said. "It may be a 50-year process but we are 20 years down the road and they are at a beginning. So there is some learning we can give them. But I do believe the war is over and the next bit should not be that difficult."

C of I bishop - Behind much of this is the question as to when life begins

The Bishop of Limerick and Killaloe, Rt Revd. Kenneth Kearon, writes in 'A Letter to the Diocese'

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The Church of Ireland seldom takes an “official” line on an issue, especially on ethical issues where personal responsibility and conscience are paramount. Instead the church offers guidance and help to those making decisions while respecting the rights of all to differ from that advice and to decide freely according to their own conscience. It was in that spirit that the Archbishops of Armagh and Dublin issued their joint statement on the 8th amendment some weeks ago, and it is in that same spirit that I address that same issue now. In this letter I am simply responding to a number of questions I have received recently, and the opinions below are simply my own.

Traditionally, the Church of Ireland has been opposed to abortion, but also accepts that some exceptions have to be made, especially where the life of the mother is at serious risk, or where it is clear the future baby won't survive. Some would also include situations of conception after rape or incest.

For that reason, the Church of Ireland was generally opposed to the introduction of the 8th amendment to the Constitution in 1983, and so today it is entirely consistent to support the removal of that same amendment, as is proposed in the upcoming referendum.

I have greater concerns about the draft legislation which has been published and will be proposed should the referendum succeed – it will of course be open to amendment as it passes through the Oireachtas. This proposes termination on any grounds up to 12 weeks, and appears to be based on the pragmatic argument that this is already available through the internet, and so by making it legal it opens the possibility of medical supervision and assistance. That is hardly an ethical argument.

Behind much of this is the question as to when life begins. The Bible certainly speaks of life in the womb before birth (Ps 139. 13-14, Luke 1.41-45, Psalm 22. 9-10, and many other references), but none of these seek to identify the moment when life begins, and do not say that life begins at conception. When we look to the traditional teachers of the church, St Augustine and St Thomas

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Aquinas for example, we find speculation about the beginning of life, often equating it with ensoulment (when the soul enters the body) or with the time when the mother first “feels life” or movement, all of which are stages long after conception has taken place. Modern biology which recognises that very many conceptions do not continue on through the various stages of development to become births but are “lost”, does appear to support this line of thinking also.

So I would encourage legislators to adopt a more ethical instead of a pragmatic approach to termination of pregnancy, and I look for legislation which permits termination when the life (not just the health) of the mother is at risk, or when the future baby will not survive (not on grounds of disability), or when conception has occurred after violence or abuse, when having to carry a baby in addition to the violence surrounding conception can be genuinely described as destructive of a woman’s life. Hopefully any such cases would be rare, but provision does need to be made for them.

Legislators are in a difficult position at this time, and most are courageously seeking to approach this issue in a responsible manner. They deserve our prayers and our support at this time. So far the debate has been serious and respectful, and let’s all try to keep it that way.

These are important and difficult issues on which each of us has to make up our own minds in conscience. Do please consider these issues seriously and prayerfully in the coming weeks.

Lisburn Cathedral team working in Kampala, Uganda

A team of six from Lisburn Cathedral has safely arrived in Kampala, Uganda, for a two week mission trip with CMSI and local charity Abaana.



The team's first week will be spent working with Abaana projects in Kampala. On Sunday members had a great day worshipping for more than two hours at All Saints' in the city.

In a Facebook post, the team wrote: "The church was very big with a large crèche and children's church during their many services which are filled with great joy."

After the service the team met with the Abaana Children's Choir which visited Lisburn early last year. The team had a great time talking with them and seeing how much they have grown. "All the children were asking after their friends in Lisburn Cathedral and said hello," the team reported. "The other children in the school were very excited to see us and crowded round to greet and touch our white skin!"

The team has asked that people remember Derek, the young choir member sponsored by the Cathedral's Mettle youth group, in their prayers as he sits his exams to allow him to move up to the High School.

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On Tuesday, the team posted that members had visited the Heroes Street Kids in Kampala.

These are boys from the street who have given a commitment to enter into attending the classes twice a week, where they have a shower, have lessons, and get a small meal. “Our perception was that they are just wee boys, like any other boys, and the project is their ray of hope,” the team wrote.

“When they come to the room, there is a transformation from the scavenging on the streets and dumps, to a structured learning environment and clean haven twice a week for them. The children are so trusting of the haven that they opened up to us without any fear.”

The team also visited the Abaana New Life Homes project, the first place that the selected boys have their own bed and box of belongings since ending up on the street. “Whilst they are a group of boys thrown together, it is clear that they are a close set of friends who look after and care for each other!”

The team is made up of the rector, the Very Rev Sam Wright, Dean of Connor, his wife Paula, Margaret and Denis Fullerton and Jill and Martin Lester.

You can follow the team’s progress on the Lisburn Cathedral Facebook page.

Clogher Cathedral chapter appointments

The Bishop of Clogher, the Right Revd John McDowell, has announced two appointments to the Chapter of Clogher Cathedral.

The Bishop made the following prebendal appointments.

The Revd Canon David Skuce, Rector of Inishmacsaint and previously Prebendary of Kilskeery, is to be Chancellor and the Revd Canon Henry Blair, Rector of Magheraculmoney and previously a Canon without a prebendal stall, is to succeed to the prebend of Kilskeery.

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Announcing the appointments, the Bishop of Clogher said: “I am delighted to be in a position to make these appointments to the Chapter of the Cathedral. Chancellor Skuce is the longest serving member of the Cathedral Chapter as well as being a son of the Diocese and he now holds this most senior appointment.

“Like Chancellor Skuce, Canon Henry Blair is involved in many aspects of the work of the Diocese as well as being incumbent of a busy parish and his appointment to a prebendal stall with a voice and vote on the Chapter is an important recognition of his contribution as a senior member of the clergy,” added Bishop McDowell.

Public meetings in support of owners of Ashers bakery

The Christian Institute in Northern Ireland is organising a series of public meetings across the Province in support of the McArthur family, owners of the Ashers bakery company who are appealing



their case to the United Kingdom Supreme Court in May, the News Letter reports.

In 2014, the bakery was asked to decorate a campaign cake with a slogan calling for homosexual marriage.

Simon Calvert of the Christian Institute

After the McArthur family declined to fulfil this order, the Equality Commission launched legal action against them and a judge at

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Belfast County Court ruled that Ashers had discriminated on grounds of sexual orientation, religious belief and political opinion.

The Christian Institute supported the McArthur family as their case went to the Court of Appeal and the institute is now helping them appeal to the UK Supreme Court.

Meetings organised are: Monday, April 23 (8pm) - Seagoe Hotel, Portadown; Wednesday, April 25 (1pm) - Marine Court Hotel, Bangor; Wednesday, April 25 (8pm) - Templeton Hotel, Templepatrick; Thursday, April 26 (8pm) - Roe Park Resort, Limavady; Friday, April 27 (8pm) - Corick House Hotel, Clogher.

Belfast Mission starts fundraising page to help replace stolen volunteer tips

A safe containing takings and volunteer tips has been stolen from **East Belfast Mission** in an overnight burglary.

A spokesperson said the charity is facing a sizeable repair bill for damage caused by the three culprits.

But added that the break-in, which took place around 1.30am on Wednesday morning, will not deter them from their work in the community.

The not-for-profit organisation has set up a fundraising page to help replace the tips that were taken.

A spokesman said: "We are saddened, but it is not going to stop us doing the work in East Belfast where we make a difference."

Describing what happened, he added: "They came in through the front door on Newtownards Road into the cafe and broke into the staff office.

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“They stole takings and tips. A lot of our staff are volunteers and for their tips to go, is awful.

“Generally, the tips are used to organise a night out for volunteers, to help them out and do something nice now and again.”



East Belfast Mission supports the community through work with the unemployed and homeless, as well as a number of services including childcare.

The break-in caused “a fair amount of damage to the property” where the burglars broke through doors. “The bill for reinstating the office will be quite sizeable,” he added.

The PSNI is appealing for witnesses.

