



On the 20th anniversary (10th April) of the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement, the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, Rt. Rev. Dr. Noble McNeely (above), has said in a statement that ‘even in this period of political uncertainty, we need to remind ourselves - and the generation that has grown up since - of where we have come from and how far we have travelled.’

The Moderator's statement reads -

“We tend to forget the difficult and challenging times that the dawn of 1998 brought and the fractious months that ran up to 10th April that year. I am sure that few people then could have imagined the genuine sense of optimism and hope that day would bring.

“Two months later, at our our General Assembly in June, we recognised the importance of the Belfast Agreement, as well as the pain and hurt that would be caused by the early release of paramilitary prisoners, which many people continue to struggle with today. As we mark this anniversary twenty years on, we affirm the foundational principles that underpinned the Agreement and their lasting significance that have, along with other agreements, enabled us to move forward.

“As we look back, there was an obvious task of healing and reconciliation that required a spirit of generosity and goodwill. While we have seen much progress, that task still remains. Today we remember those victims and survivors who continue to look for answers and justice and acknowledge the pressing need to find a way forward to deal with the legacy of the past.

“Opportunities still exist to honour and respect each other, to build relationships that can lead to a better shared future and place to live. As we know, this has not been an easy task and we all fail at times to embrace these values that are at the heart of what it means to love our neighbour, as our Lord Jesus commanded.

“This is a genuine challenge for those of us who profess a faith in Christ. As a Church we recognised this in our *Vision for Society Statement*, part of which says, ‘We confess our failure to live as Biblically faithful Christian peacebuilders and to promote the counter culture of Jesus in a society where cultures clash.’

“For there to be individual and community healing there must be a commitment to openness, generosity of spirit, integrity and

cooperation for the common good, personified in personal and collective demonstrations of goodwill and empathy for one another.

“The Good Friday Agreement taught us what can be done. Twenty years on, many issues remain, but the mountain before us doesn’t loom half as large as it did then. As we stop and reflect on this anniversary, even in this period of political uncertainty, we need to remind ourselves - and the generation that has grown up since - of where we have come from and how far we have travelled.

“I am thankful to God for how far we have come, for as we remember our calling as Christians to “seek the peace and prosperity of the city...” (Jeremiah 29) and to pray for those in political leadership, I also pray for boldness and courage, so that they might renew their efforts to find a way forward for the good of all. Everyone involved in this critical endeavour can be assured of my prayers and the prayers of many across our denomination.”

Statement on the ‘Loyalist Declaration of Transformation’

Following yesterday’s (9th April) ‘Loyalist Declaration of Transformation’ statement the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, Rt. Rev. Dr. Noble McNeely, issued the following statement.

“When people genuinely desire to move away from violence and criminality, and go out of their way to reconfirm such a commitment, that is clearly something to be welcomed and encouraged.

“In the past some who have expressed such sentiments have gone on to make a real difference in helping to build a better society. However, while uttering fine sounding words, others have continued on a destructive path often exchanging one form of criminality for another.

“Statements of intent to work for a transformed society, if to be more than simply aspirational words, must be accompanied by a total and unreserved backing for law and order. This will include the support

of the police in their work on the ground, by the provision of information that will lead to criminal elements being taken off the streets, brought before the courts, convicted and sentenced.

“It is by such clear support for bodies such as the Paramilitary Crime Task Force that will make a difference in communities that for too long have been held hostage by criminals who have masqueraded as defenders of the very people they were and are in fact oppressing.

“The work of transformation towards a truly peaceful, law abiding and reconciled society is a necessary and vital endeavour. Those genuinely committed to that task, so that loyalist communities in particular can live in peace and truly flourish, have an important role to play in society and will have, I’m sure, the support of all people of good will.”

