

## **Bell's peal at Westminster Abbey to mark Queen and Duke's platinum anniversary**



**Photo issued by Camera Press of Queen Elizabeth II and the Duke of Edinburgh by British photographer Matt Holyoak, taken in the White Drawing Room at Windsor Castle in early November, pictured against a platinum-textured backdrop, in celebration of their platinum wedding anniversary on November 20**

Bells at the historic church where the Queen married the Duke of Edinburgh have rung out in celebration of their platinum wedding anniversary.

Seventy years to the day that 21-year-old Princess Elizabeth wed her dashing Greek and Danish prince, a full celebratory peal lasting around three hours and 20 minutes began at Westminster Abbey.

The Abbey's Company of Ringers started the complicated delivery of 5,070 changes or sequences, with the 70 an extra nod to the length of the couple's marriage.

It is a long-standing tradition that the Abbey bells are sounded for significant royal occasions and anniversaries, and the Queen is the first British monarch to celebrate a platinum wedding anniversary.

Prime Minister Theresa May sent her congratulations to the Queen and Philip on their anniversary.

"They have devoted their lives to the service of the UK and the Commonwealth - my best wishes to them both on this special occasion," Mrs May said on Twitter.

The fairy-tale royal wedding on November 20 1947 was a morale boost in the tough years that followed the Second World War and millions of people tuned in to listen to the ceremony on the wireless.

The young princess wore a Norman Hartnell dress made of duchesse ivory silk-satin which was hand-embroidered with more than 10,000 pearls and crystals.

War-time leader Winston Churchill summed up the occasion as “a flash of colour on the hard road we travel”.

For austerity reasons, very little extra seating was provided inside the gothic Abbey, with the number of guests kept to 2,000.

In contrast with later royal weddings, the only flowers in the Abbey were in large vases either side of the high altar filled with white lilies and chrysanthemums, pink carnations, roses, variegated ivy and camellia foliage.

The Grave of the Unknown Warrior was the only stone that was not covered by the special carpet.

The day after the wedding, Princess Elizabeth followed a royal tradition started by her mother of sending her wedding bouquet back to the Abbey to be laid on the grave.

Less than five years later, the Princess became Queen Elizabeth II on the death of her father George VI. Now 91 and having reigned for more than 65 years, she is Britain's longest-reigning monarch.

## **Down Mothers' Union members learn about gender-based violence as part of 16-days of activism**

A senior police officer has briefed members of the Mothers' Union (MU) in Northern Ireland about the extent of sexual and domestic violence in the area. Detective Chief Inspector Anne Marks, from the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) told members of the MU in Down and Dromore diocese that one in every 18 calls to the PSNI relates to domestic abuse; and that 1,393 reports of sexual assault were reported to the police in a 12-month period. The briefing took place ahead of the international 16-Days of Activism campaign, which begins on Saturday.



**Detective Chief Inspector Anne Marks from the Police Service of Northern Ireland, Down and Dromore Mothers' Union President June Butler, and Dr Olive Buckley from the Rowan Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC).**

The 16-Days of Activism is an international campaign which begins on 25 November – the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women – and ends on 10 December – International Human Rights Day.

The 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence is designed to galvanise action to end violence against women and girls around the world.

DCI Marks told MU members that while 1,393 sexual assaults were reported, the real figure is likely to be much higher, as research suggests that as many as 75 per cent of sexual assaults are not reported.

In addition, some 834 rapes were reported – and 153 cases – more than 18 per cent – the victims were children aged under 13-years old. She explained that most offenders are known to the victim. Sometimes they are members of the family or extended family, or are in a position of trust over them or are known to them socially.

During the breakfast-briefing, DCI Marks Anne explained how PSNI handle work in this area – beginning with the initial call from a victim. In addition to calling the police directly on their emergency and non-emergency numbers, victims can also call a dedicated domestic and sexual violence helpline, which encourages men and women to report either recent or historical abuse. To assist victims, there are specialist public protection units in police stations throughout Northern Ireland, she said.

In addition to investigating accusations, the police can help victims access local specialist support agencies, including the Rowan Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC). Rowan's clinical

director, Dr Olive Buckley, also took part in the breakfast briefing for MU members. She explained that the Rowan SARC is a one-stop centre, delivering a coordinated inter-agency response. It provides a full range of services to individuals who have been raped and sexually assaulted and operates 24-hours a day, 365 days a year. with support available 24/7, 365 days per year. The team will respond to all victims, irrespective of their age, gender, sexual identity/orientation, ethnicity, or geographical location.

“Olive gave a pithy description of her amazing work there, sharing real-life stories and giving some advice on what to do if someone discloses abuse or assault to you,” the Down and Dromore MU said on the diocese’s website. “She managed, at the same time to inject a good deal of Northern Irish humour.

“The reality, after all, is bleak; when clients range from babies to elderly women and the Rowan team has offered support, advice and direct care to more than 3,500 individuals since opening in May 2013.

“Sadly many, especially those abused as children, take their trauma to the grave without telling anyone.

“It was a revealing morning which began and ended, appropriately, with prayer. The 120 ladies who came along left more informed, better equipped, and with a real appreciation for those who work on the front line with victims of sexual and domestic abuse in Northern Ireland.”

The Mothers’ Union globally is an active participant in the 16-Days of Activism.

## **Irish church leaders call for end to paramilitary attacks on Children’s Day**

The leaders of Ireland’s Catholic and Protestant churches have called for an end to all paramilitary attacks in Northern Ireland, saying that violence continues to negatively impact the lives and wellbeing of children and young people.

Church leaders from several denominations made the appeal in a statement to commemorate Universal Children’s Day, instituted by the United Nations and held annually on 20 November.

Signers of the statement include Catholic Archbishop Eamon Martin of Armagh; the



Church of Ireland's Archbishop of Armagh, Richard Clarke; the President of the Methodist Church in Ireland, Rev Dr Laurence Graham; the President of the Irish Council of Churches, Bishop John McDowell; and, the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Ireland, Rt Rev Dr Noble McNeely.

In the document, church leaders lament the continued violence to which children are exposed, "either as victims of direct attacks, or as members of families subjected to attacks or intimidation."

They say the Peace Process – resulting in the Good Friday Agreement signed nearly 20 years ago – was meant to protect young people "from the violence that blighted the lives of previous generations."

The Northern Ireland conflict, also known as "The Troubles", began in the late 1960's and lasted until the Belfast or Good Friday Agreement was signed on 10 April 1998.

"We need to ask ourselves whether the legacy of violent conflict here has caused us to feel powerless to challenge the culture that supports the continuation of this type of violence," the statement reads.

## **Initiatives for children's wellbeing**

Calling on all members of society to make communities “safe and welcoming places”, Ireland’s religious leaders applaud the many people “working to give our young people better opportunities and help those at risk make better choices”.

These include youth and sports clubs, churches, and educators, they say.

Funding cuts, however, have left a cloud of uncertainty hanging over these important initiatives.

“In this context, it is more important than ever,” they write, “that we seek to lend our support to initiatives that offer young people the chance to achieve their full potential and challenge those who seek to trap them in never-ending cycles of violence.”

## **New group to help LGBT Presbyterian Church members**

A retired solicitor is planning to set up a new support group for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people within the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

Colin Flinn, a former Presbyterian, explained his aim was not to challenge the doctrine of the Church, but to see it provide welcome, safety and inclusion to LGBT people which, he believes, is currently lacking.

And he added he would like to emulate the success of existing groups such as Changing Attitude Ireland and Accepting Sexuality, which have been operating within the Church of Ireland and the Irish Methodist Church respectively.

Speaking to the Belfast Telegraph, Mr Flinn (70) — who is a board member of Cara-Friend and a long-serving volunteer with its LGBT switchboard service — said he aimed to establish a network with the help of like-minded people.

“Of all the Churches, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland has failed to support its LGBT members by obstructing any opportunity for dialogue,” he claimed.

“The purpose of my initiative is to find a way through this for LGBT Presbyterians, and to support them in their spiritual lives by seeing that the three pillars of welcome, safety and inclusion are implanted in the Church.

“These issues are complicated. Churches find the matter toxic and are, just like political parties, afraid of splits. Other Churches here have networks supporting LGBT members and these have been successful to the degree that these Churches are no longer talking ‘into themselves’, but tentatively finding ways to dialogue with LGBT members.”

Mr Flinn, who is a member of both the Equality Consultative Forum of Belfast City Council and Queerspace Collective, said he only realised he was gay in his mid-50s and spent two years ‘coming out’ after extricating himself from a 30-year marriage.

The father-of-four and former Sunday School teacher said he was born into and brought up by a liberal Presbyterian family “with my late dad as clerk of session in our local congregation”.

A former member of the Down Presbytery Youth Movement, he said it will be up to the people who get together following his clarion call to decide what shape the network takes.

“I’m merely facilitating the process as I have training in the areas required,” he added.

Report by Claire McNeill, courtesy of the Belfast Telegraph.

## **Victorian style at Whitehouse Presbyterian Church 150th anniversary**

A Newtownabbey Presbyterian congregation which had its church buildings almost totally destroyed by arsonists 15 years ago celebrated its 150th anniversary with a Victorian Lamplight Service.

Many members of Whitehouse Presbyterian Church dressed in Victorian style for the special service where the preacher was former minister Rev Dr Allen Sleith.



**Alf McCreary with Rev Dr Liz Hughes**

The guest speaker was church member and Belfast Telegraph religion correspondent, Alf McCreary, who launched his paperback book *Amazing Grace*, the 150-year history of Whitehouse.

He said: "This is my special gift to Whitehouse which has given so much to me and my family over many years."

A special exhibition, put together by church members Billy and Isobel McDowell, was opened by 98-year-old Mrs Ruby Parkes MBE, the oldest active member of the church.

Next weekend the Presbyterian Moderator, the Rt Rev Dr Noble McNeely, will preach at the Sunday morning service to mark the official opening of Whitehouse Church on November 24, 1867.

Next Sunday evening there will be a service featuring guests from Rwanda, where Whitehouse has been supporting the work of the Gikondo Presbyterian Church in Kigali, as part of the Connected Church Programme in association with Tearfund.

Whitehouse Presbyterian Church has had a colourful and turbulent history. Its first two ministers spent less than 10 years at Whitehouse

between them, but the next two ministers served for nearly 100 years combined.

Rev Dr Robert Barron served from 1875-1925, and his successor Rev James Nutt was in post from 1926-1965.

In 1912, the Whitehouse children's church outing to Castledawson was mistakenly attacked by a local Hibernian group at the height of the Home Rule crisis, and the incident was hotly debated two days later in the House of Commons.

In May 1941, 35 adults and seven children died during the Belfast Blitz, and Rev Nutt conducted funeral services for 13 people on one day alone.

In 2002, the main church building was almost completely destroyed by arsonists, but was re-opened three years later. Part of the funding came from other churches including £10,000 from nearby Catholic parishes. In 2008, the church was again badly damaged, this time through severe flooding, but the congregation and friends rallied to help, and the buildings were fully restored.

In 2000, Whitehouse appointed its first female minister, Rev Dr Liz Hughes, who in 2014 was also the first woman to be runner-up in an election for the Moderatorship. Two years ago

she was awarded an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree by the Presbyterian Church, and will retire at the end of December. She said:

"Whitehouse church members have a heart to serve, and a heart for people. The congregation's life and energy, with God's spirit, lies in the army of unnamed volunteers who engage in its many ministries throughout the week."

## **Archbishop Michael Neary presents 545 young people with John Paul II Awards**

On Thursday, 16 November 2017, at Our Lady's Basilica, Knock, Archbishop Michael Neary presented 545 young people from across the Archdiocese of Tuam with their John Paul II Awards.

With over 1,200 people in attendance, Archbishop Neary welcomed the young people, together with their families, friends, teachers, principals, chaplains, priests, and representatives of the various parish and diocesan bodies. He welcomed local sporting hero Ms Cora Staunton, who came along to support and congratulate the Award recipients.



Speaking to the young people receiving their Award, Archbishop Neary said, "During the year I have been made aware of the very significant contribution which you yourselves have been making in so many ways throughout the length and breadth of the Archdiocese of Tuam. I have witnessed the way in which you, in your Transition Year projects, have presented various aspects of your local Church and the great pride that you take in your local Church. Your visitation of nursing homes brought great joy and hope to residents through your good humour, your music and song. At Mass and in the Sacraments many of you have been reading as ministers of the Word, involved in church choirs, others have accompanied young people as they were preparing for Confirmation in the "You Shall Be My Witnesses" programme; you have been role models for younger people who look to you for direction".

All 545 Award recipients, aged between 16-18 years, received their medal and certificate in recognition their work in schools, parishes, and communities during the past year. They were involved in everything from publishing a parish prayer book to teaching computers to the elderly, setting up a youth choir in their parish to

caring for people with special needs on pilgrimages to Lourdes.

The MC for the occasion was 17 year old Gold Medal recipient, Darragh Kennedy, from Saint Colman's College, Claremorris. It was Darragh's happy duty to offer the congratulations of all to Archbishop Neary on the occasion of his Silver Jubilee as a bishop.

Two Award recipients, one from Rice College, Westport and another from Saint Jarlath's College, Tuam, presented Archbishop Neary with a specially commissioned half and half Galway and Mayo jersey, bearing the number 25, in recognition his years of episcopal service, and the hashtag #ourfavbishop.

Siobhán Bradley, Diocesan Coordinator of the John Paul II Awards, congratulated the Award recipients saying, "You are a source of great hope and an inspiration to us all".

# CNI

**Help CNI grow...  
... Please commend  
CNI daily news to your  
friends**

**[www.churchnewsireland.org](http://www.churchnewsireland.org)**

**CNI**