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Archdiocese of Armagh

2014 Ecumenical Report

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1. Broad Areas for Consideration

The year 2014 proved to be another eventful one in the Archdiocese of Armagh with the announcement on 8th September that Cardinal Seán Brady had retired and Archbishop Eamon Martin had formally succeeded as Archbishop of Armagh. A Mass on 7th October in St Patrick’s Cathedral, Armagh, concelebrated by Archbishop Eamon and the priests of the diocese, asked God’s blessing both on him and the Church of Armagh. A particularly poignant moment during the ceremony sawCardinal Seán lead his successor to the cathedra, marking not only the end on one episcopate and the beginning of a new one, but also the continuity of episcopal ministry within the diocese. In many respects it mirrored Cardinal Seán’s own installation as archbishop on 3rd November 1996 in the presence of his predecessor, Cardinal Cahal Daly.

Cardinal Seán’s commitment and work for ecumenism was duly acknowledged by leaders of the four main Churches in Ireland, not least by the Church of Ireland Archbishop of Armagh, Dr Richard Clarke, in his statement on the day the Cardinal’s retirement was announced. Cardinal Brady was the first Catholic archbishop to address the Church of Ireland General Synod, having previously addressed the Armagh Diocesan Synod. Archbishop Clarke hosted an informal dinner in the See House, Armagh, on 26th November to mark the Cardinal’s retirement and to thank him for his cordial and co-operative relationship with the Church of Ireland over almost two decades and looked forward to working with Archbishop Eamon in the years ahead.

1. Events

*Events during the Week of Prayer 2014*

As usual, a number of events took place throughout the Archdiocese between 18th and 25th January 2014 to mark the annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

Armagh

Cardinal Brady hosted the customary Ecumenical Coffee Morning in Ara Coeli on Friday, 24th January for local Protestant clergy and their wives along with the priests of the local vicariate.

The annual **Ecumenical Service** for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity took place in St Patrick’s Church of Ireland Cathedral on Wednesday 22nd January at 7.30pm. Most Rev. Richard Clarke, Church of Ireland Archbishop of Armagh, participating in the service. The two Deans of Armagh, Rt. Rev. Mgr. Colum Curry VG and Very Rev. Gregory Dunstan (Church of Ireland), Rev. Tony Davidson, Armagh First Presbyterian Church, Rev. Denis Maguire, Methodist Church in Armagh, took part in the service in addition to clergy from the various denominations in Armagh City and district. Most Rev. Charles J. Brown, Apostolic Nuncio to Ireland, gave the address. Refreshments were served afterwards in the Synod Hall, Church House in Abbey Street. Cardinal Brady

**Dungannon**

During the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity) a joint ecumenical service was held in St Patrick’s Catholic Church which was very well attended by all sections of the community.

Cookstown

The annual ecumenical service for the week of Prayer for Christian Unity was hosted in St Luaran’s Church of Ireland on 20th January, when clergy and people from each denomination in the town came together in prayer and fellowship.

Portadown

During the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, Epworth Methodist Church congregation hosted the annual Inter-Church Service on Friday 24th January. The previous Sunday, the annual reader exchange to mark the Week of Prayer took place with readers from the various congregations visiting each other’s services to read from the scriptures.

**Coalisland**

During the Week of Prayer the local clergy organised a school assembly in the secondary school led by the parish priest, Fr Paul Byrne, and the Church of Ireland rector, Rev. Andrew Rawding. That evening the annual Inter Church service was held in the local Church of Ireland church during which the address was given by Rev. Ken Newell. The Presbyterian minister in Newmills, Rev David Brownlow, was also in attendance.

**Drogheda**

On 24th January 2014, during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, there was an ecumenical prayer service jointly organised by St Oliver’s Pastoral Area (Mell, Mellifont & St Peter’s, Drogheda) and the Drogheda, Ardee & Collon, and Kilsaran Union of Parishes, held in the Church of the Assumption, Mellifont. The service was jointly led by Rev. Joyce Moore and Fr Sean Dooley. A joint choir from the three Catholic parishes and the Church of Ireland Union was assembled for the occasion.

Dundalk

Due to the recent transfer of the local Church of Ireland rector to Limerick, the annual ecumenical service to mark the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in the town did not take place as the local Presbyterian minister does not attend or participate in Inter-Church prayer services with Catholics.

***Events during the Year***

For over twenty years **Armagh** has celebrated the life of one its most famous sons, as the whole community joins in a week-long series of workshops, concerts and services focused on music in worship across all its main churches. This is what makes the **Charles Wood Summer School of Music** a unique event on this island and attracts visitors from far and wide. The aim is to provide a rich, rewarding experience for music lovers throughout the week and we are confident that, whether singer, choir trainer or organist, you will find lots of exciting things in store. This year’s Summer School took place in all of the main churches in Armagh, from 17th to 24th August 2014. The rich and varied programme featured lunchtime and evening concerts, religious services, and teaching and workshop sessions. On Sunday, 24th August, as in previous years, an ecumenical service from the Church of Ireland Cathedral was broadcast on BBC Radio Ulster.

A series titled **City of Faith** was screened on BBC Television. The series looked at the role of religious belief in the lives of people from the Armagh area. It explored individual stories, providing an affecting account of faith and its meaning for those taking part. The series was very thought provoking and was absorbing watch. It featured a number of people who belong to the different Churches in Armagh who described the role which faith plays in their everyday lives and how it has helped them deal with some of life’s great challenges. All of this is set was against the backdrop of Armagh, with its beautiful buildings and setting. Six half hour programmes were commissioned as part of the series and the first was transmitted on BBC1 Television on Monday 26th May, 2014.

Pádraig Murphy represented Archbishop Eamon at a **National Prayer Breakfast** event on Saturday, 29th November in Stormont, Belfast. Jeffrey Donaldson MP gave the address and music was provided by Jonathan Rea from New Irish Arts along with some of the group’s musicians and soloists.

The now annual **Christmas Message of the Primates** was broadcast on RTE on Christmas Day when following a longstanding tradition Archbishop Eamon Martin joined his Church of Ireland counterpart, Archbishop Richard Clarke, in giving a joint Christmas Day message.

3. Groups and Processes

***Armagh***

The Armagh Inter Clergy Fellowship continues to meet every second month.It is a very relaxed and informal gathering. The Church of Ireland primate, Archbishop Richard Clarke, will be the guest speaker at the January 2015 meeting. The clergy fellowship will visit the Spring Project in Mullacreevie Park, Armagh, for their March gathering to learn more about its work, which will be followed in May with a retreat day at the Benedictine Monastery in Rostrevor.

The Cathedrals Partnership met regularly during 2014. Appropriately in March the group organised a special evening “At Home with Patrick” which was an evening of music, story, poetry and prayer, celebrating the life of St Patrick. The Partnership also hosted a special 60 strong inter-church choir ‘Voices Together’ in April in St Patrick’s Church of Ireland Cathedral. It is an inclusive community choir drawing together members of different ages and backgrounds in Northern Ireland and is directed by Dave Stewart. Its diverse membership finds expression in a love of music from different times and cultures: world folk songs, spirituals, classical music and compositions by group members. During Lent the Partnership hosted study evenings reflecting on scripture for people from the different churches in the city. In September the Partnership organised an inter-church celebration in the ruins of the old Franciscan Friary. On the evening of Wednesday 10th December an Advent Meditation in music, poetry, prose and prayer was held in the Synod Hall of St Patrick’s Catholic Cathedral.

***Dungannon***

The local Clergy Forum works in close partnership with Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council, who provide financial assistance to it. While all the clergy in the borough are notified, the attendance is usually limited to 12 to 14 clergy, derived mainly from the Catholic and Church of Ireland denominations. The Forum has met regularly throughout the past year and focused on matters of common concern.

The Forum organised a Peace Conference in February 2014 to look at the role of the Clergy and the Churches in addressing the legacy of the Troubles. Following from the success of previous years, the Forum organised five evenings during Lent where people were invited to come together to reflect on a piece of scripture. In September an ecumenical ‘Service of Comfort and Hope’ was organised to mark World Suicide Awareness Day.Following from last year a ‘Walk of Hope’ was organised again for families affected by suicide on 30th November, the First Sunday of Advent. While the efforts have been modest, it is felt by the participants of the Clergy Forum that they have grown in depth and in friendship.

**Carrickmore**

A historical walk to five venues within the parish took place on the last Saturday of August with approximately 50 people from both faith traditions taking part. The walk included a visit to the local Church of Ireland and Catholic Churches where the rector and parish priest, Fr Seán O’Neill, gave talks about their respective churches. It is planned to have a similar event early in 2015.

**Coalisland**

The local Clergy Forum continues to meet on a monthly basis.Fr Paul Byrne PP and Rev. Andrew Rawding (Church of Ireland rector) hosted a day-long conference attended by 50 clergy of all denominations in February on ‘dealing with the legacy of the Troubles.’ Both participated in the annual Remembrance Day service at the cenotaph in Stewartstown. 10th December witnessed the Methodists and Presbyterians joined in the community carol singing around the town for the first time ever.

Fr Byrne will participate in an event with the Presbyterian minister in Newmills on Christmas Eve. The Forum is also hosting a follow up day conference to last February conference. Sadly, until recently Presbyterians and Methodists in that part of Co. Tyrone haven’t been forthcoming in ecumenical matters. It is hoped that they will be involved in the annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity service in January. The Clergy Forum are organising a three-day gathering in February in Corrymeela.

**Cookstown:**The local Inter-Church Forum members host their monthly meetings in their respective homes on a rota basis. They organised a number of events during this year which were supported and facilitated by the Irish Churches Peace Project. In February members attended a Clergy Conference in Coalisland on the theme ‘Go Do Thou Likewise’. They joined the Dungannon Clergy Forum on a trip to Britain from Monday 3rd February to Wednesday 5th February when they visited the Gladstone Library, Church Lane, Hawarden, Flintshire. The Annual AGM was held in Loughry College in June. The clergy of the district marked International Day for Peace together from 12noon to 1.00pm on 21st September when they distributed prayer cards for peace in the town centre which was followed by a short prayer service. On 7th October they Forum held a planning day in An Creggan Centre and on 13th October John Smyth from Moneymore gave a lecture on ‘Amish Traditions.’ At 11.00am on 9th November they participated in the annual Service of Remembrance at the cenotaph. The following evening Damian Woods gave a lecture on ‘The Armagh Sunday School Train Disaster.’ In November they held a ‘Walk of Hope,’ walking together to the centre of town and remembering those who have suffered because of suicide and those who have suicidal thoughts. On 17th December the Forum members had their annual Christmas dinner in the Courtyard Restaurant, followed by concert by the Sperrin Choir in the Burnavon Theatre. The annual Carol Service around the Christmas tree in the centre of town took place on 18th December which was followed by refreshments in Cuppatinos. The following evening they led the annual Christmas Prayer Services in the Women’s Aid shelter and the local hostel for homeless.

A number of events are planned for the coming year. On 18th January, Dr Malachy O’Neill will deliver a lecture on the history of the O’Neill’s in Ulster, and the following month, the Annual Dinner will take place in Braeside Restaurant. Rev. Carmen Hayes, Church of Ireland rector in Draperstown and Tobermore, will give a talk entitled ‘My Journey from Sceptic to Shepherd’ on 9th March. On 7th March an Inter-Church Service will be held to mark Woman’s World Day of Prayer. The Forum has also organised a tour of Seamus Heaney Country on 16th April under the auspices of Eugene Kielt as guide, which will be followed by lunch in Laurel Villa, Magherafelt. The Forum’s AGM will take place in Loughry College on 11th May and its annual BBQ on 12th June.

**Portadown:** The Churches Together in Portadown Group continues to meet on a monthly basis in Seagoe Church of Ireland Parish Centre. The group comprises of Church of Ireland, Presbyterian, Methodist, Society of Friends, Salvation Army, Vineyard, and Catholic members. Each meeting begins with prayer at 12noon in which they pray for themselves as Church leaders, for their town and its people. Such prayer time isn’t a formal part of their meetings. Consequently, some clergy come and some do not.

During the past year the Group organised its usual schedule of events: an Easter Dawn Service at Craigavon Lakes, and a day of reflection in May for members at Moyallen Quaker House*.* The ‘Good Friday Walk with the Cross’ was organised again this year which took place in the morning when each Church group left their respective places of worship and walked into the town centre to meet up at the Plaza at St Mark’s Church of Ireland. Along the way the Passion narrative from St Mark’s Gospel was read. Seagoe Church of Ireland supplied a large cross for the Plaza at St Mark’s Church where the Gospel account of the Crucifixion was read, hymns were sung and a moment of silence was observed. Then the whole group walked up and down the street as people on the pavement stopped to look.

This year the Group decided to invite various speakers to their monthly meetings to speak on a variety of topics. Dr Johnston McMaster spoke on the ‘Decade of Centenaries,’ Dr Lucas Chan on ‘The Beatitudes and Their Virtues,’ Kenneth Twyble on his ‘Life as a Christian,’ Mrs jenny Power on ‘The Salvation Army,’ Dr Andrew Collins on ‘The Plight of Addiction,’ and Michael Ruddy on the revamping and ongoing development of Portadown Town Park. The Group hopes to continue this initiative on a bi-monthly basis. The Group, through the auspices of Rev. Ken Robinson who acted as a go-between, met with former members of Loyalist paramilitary groups. This happened outside the normal business of their monthly meetings and proved to be most worthwhile for those who attended. Occasionally some of the Group have attended CONNECT meetings, but sadly this seems to be petering out for a variety of reasons.

As a group they have also been engaged over the past few years with the Irish Churches Peace Project (ICPP). Their co-ordinator from ICPP, Yvonne Breen, along with Jerome Burns of the Department of Social services, attend their meetings on a regular basis to update them on activities that ICPP have organised and encourage them to promote these activities in their respective congregations.

The Interchurch Forum Group, a lay group comprising of representatives of the various churches in Portadown, meets twice a year (in June and December) closely with the Churches Together Group for lunch and a social. Both groups liaise with one another in order that they do not overlap in some cross denominational activities. The Interchurch Forum Group continues to organise the Pre-Christmas Service which this year took place on 12th December 2014 in St Patrick’s Catholic Church.The speaker for the occasion was Kenneth Twyble, a lay leader of the Methodist Church and a native of the town.

**Drogheda:** On 7th March, to mark the Women’s World Day of Prayer, there was a joint Catholic Pastoral Area and Church of Ireland Union of Parishes prayer service, held in St Peter’s Church of Ireland, Drogheda. A joint choir from the three Catholic parishes and the Church of Ireland Union was assembled for the event. This prayer service has become a regular feature on the Pastoral Area calendar, and it is hoped that it will remain so. During the annual Good Friday open-air Stations of the Cross in Drogheda, one station was prayed at St Peter’s Church of Ireland and another at the old Presbyterian Church in Palace Street.

**Mellifont:** An Inter-Church Prayer Service was held on 7th March in Tullyallen Church (Mellifont Parish) to mark Women’s World Day of Prayer.

**Dundalk:** The Church of Ireland Dundalk/Ballymascanlon Union of parishes had been without a rector for more than two years. The appointment of a lay pastor to lead the parish union during the past year will hopefully help inter-church contact in the region. It must be noted that the non-stipendiary curate, Rev. Richard Moore, has worked closely with local Catholic clergy on a number of activities like the annual ‘Walk of Witness’whichsaw a cross being carried through the streets of the town on Good Friday, 18th April, beginning at St. Patrick’s Catholic Church in Roden Place and ending at St Nicholas’s Church of Ireland. As in previous years, both congregations met on 7th March for Women’s World Day of Prayer which was held in St. Nicholas’ Church of Ireland. Parishioners continue to attend a number of services in the each other’s churches during the course of the year, most notably the parishes Carol Services.

4. Concluding Remarks

Ecumenical relations and practical ecumenism at grassroots level continues to grow in a slow but incremental way throughout the Archdiocese even though such initiatives can prove to be quiet divisive at times. It must be acknowledged that some Protestant clergy feel under pressure from their congregations where ecumenical ventures with Catholics are concerned. They are also reluctant to have ‘free church’ ministers involved in clergy fora/groups for a variety of reasons. Such a scenario coupled with a certain retrenchment and lack of interest among some Protestant clergy in the northern part of the diocese can determine the pace of ecumenical activity in any given locality.