



Author Rev Dr Bill Addley (left) and Presbyterian Moderator Very Rev Dr Ian McNie at the launch of the Jack Weir biography

New biography of Presbyterian leader who talked peace with IRA

A church leader who is credited with being an early architect of the peace process is being celebrated in a new biography.

News Letter - Former Presbyterian Moderator Dr Jack Weir, who died in 2000 aged 81, never sought controversy but was often accompanied by it throughout his clerical career.

“Jack Weir: Missionary, Administrator and Peacemaker” has been written by the Rev Bill Addley and was launched on Wednesday at the Presbyterian Assembly buildings in Belfast.

Dr Weir was one of the group of Protestant churchmen who met with leaders of the IRA at Feakle in Co Clare in December 1974.

At the time the talks were criticised by many unionists. Ian Paisley, who would later work closely with Martin McGuinness as First and Deputy First Minister, slammed the group as “the Fickle Feakle clergy”.

The churches involved stressed that the men had been acting on their own, while the clergy – who liaised with government – exchanged a series of proposals and counter-proposals with the IRA on what would be required to secure a peace settlement.

A series of ceasefires followed but by Easter the IRA apparently felt they were not making progress and restarted their campaign of terror.

Nearly 20 years later, on his own initiative, Dr Weir, with Dr Godfrey Brown, broke the unionist taboo against engaging with Sinn Fein, and entered a series of talks with Gerry Adams.

In another initiative he controversially led a Presbyterian Church delegation to meet Pope John Paul in the Republic of Ireland in 1979.

Two years later he led a tour of US cities to counter the one-sided view of events being given by republicans.

Rev Addley said it is rare to find in one person the contrasting characteristics of a church administrator, missionary bridge-builder, bridge-crosser and peacemaker.

“Such a person was that giant of Irish Presbyterianism, Jack Weir.

“Even as Clerk of the General Assembly and General Secretary of the largest Protestant denomination in Northern Ireland he was not afraid to sail in stormy waters, most notably during the heated Assembly debates on the

Presbyterian Church's membership of the World Council of Churches.”

After his death Presbyterian minister Sam Hutchinson said the peace process had been a “fitting memorial” to him.

“The present peace process stems from the seed he sowed in earlier years when he met paramilitary leaders,” he said.

The publication can be obtained from the Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland at 26 College Green, Belfast, BT7 1LN or via www.presbyterianhistoryireland.org.

Too ‘simplistic’ to connect dissident violence to 1916

Connecting dissident violence in the North to commemorations of the 1916 Easter Rising is too “simplistic” according to a leading political historian.

Irish Catholic - In the wake of the attempted murder of a prison officer in Belfast, Cofl Bishop of Down & Dromore, Harold Miller said he was afraid dissident republicans will attempt further assaults in the North as we approach the centenary of the Easter Rising, echoing a



warning from PSNI Assistant Chief Constable Stephen Martin.

However, historian Dr Eamon Phoenix, head of life-long learning at Stranmillis University College in Belfast, told *The Irish Catholic* “to tie a dissident upsurge to the centenary celebrations of the Rising would be a bit simplistic”.

While agreeing that there were rising tensions during the 1966 commemorations of the Rising, Dr Phoenix said he didn’t “detect the same tension now in society”.

“There is a massive interest in the North in the 1916 Rising and the link between the Rising and the Somme. In the last five years there has been

a concerted attempt to really approach the decade of centenaries in an objective, balanced and inclusive way,” he said. “In the last two months, for example, I spoke to 300 people in a Church of Ireland hall in Co. Down on the 1916 Rising. The First Minister Arlene Foster attended a seminar in Christ Church Cathedral in Dublin last month and there have been numerous joint seminars and joint approaches to all of this.”

He said that “clearly the dissidents choose their moments” and “an organisation determined to commit outrages would like to do it during the Octave of Easter” when there will be a focus on the events of 1916, “but they are not doing it because of the Easter commemorations, they are simply doing it because that has been their policy since the Good Friday agreement”.

Catholic Bishops: 1916 centenary an opportunity to affirm hope for lasting peace and justice

After the Spring meeting of Irish bishops, in a statement covering their agenda, the following comment was made on the 1916 centenary commemorations:

The centenary of the Easter Rising marks the watershed moment of our political history. This pivotal anniversary provides an opportunity for us to deepen our understanding of who we are as a people and to affirm our hope for lasting peace and justice. We will be able to reflect on where we are as a society and on what we want to achieve for the future. People of faith will shape their understanding of this transformative event in the context of Christian values such as love of neighbour, respect for life, reconciliation, hope and healing.

On 3 April at 11:00am Archbishop Diarmuid Martin will participate in an inter-faith prayer service in Glasnevin Cemetery, Dublin, commemorating all those who died in the events of Easter week 1916. This service will focus on the Easter Rising (24 to 29 April 1916), and the executions that followed in May and August of that year. The prayer service will take place alongside marble plinths bearing the names of those who died, including children, rebels, civilians, soldiers and policemen. An Taoiseach will attend and leaders of several Christian Churches and the Jewish and Muslim faiths from all parts of the island, will participate. There will be particular inputs from young people from each faith tradition. Music from the ceremony

will be from the Army Band and the event will be broadcast live on RTÉ One television.

Archbishop Eamon Martin will be principal celebrant and Archbishop Diarmuid Martin will preside and preach the homily at the Annual 1916 Mass of Remembrance in the Church of the Sacred Heart – the church of the Defence Forces – in Arbour Hill, Dublin on Sunday 24 April, exactly one hundred years since the day of the Rising in 1916. President Michael D Higgins will attend the Mass as will members of the government and the judiciary as well as relatives of those executed following the Rising. The Mass will be broadcast live by RTÉ from 10.00am. Following the Mass an inter-faith prayer service will take place in Glasnevin Cemetery. The adjacent military cemetery is the resting place for fourteen of the executed leaders of the Rising including Pádraig Pearse, James Connolly and Major John McBride. Bishops commended a new publication from Veritas which profiles the faith of the 1916 leaders. *The End of All Things Earthly* is a series of essays, edited by David Bracken, diocesan archivist in the Diocese of Limerick, which gives a valuable insight into the personal stories of faith which accompanied the 1916 leaders.

Bishops hail ‘hugely significant’ Irish-language Missal

The Irish bishops have urged priests to make use of a new Irish-language missal, in a statement released at the end of their spring conference.

An altar edition of An Leabhar Aifrin Rómhánach (The Roman Missal) will be published later in 2016. In a [statement](#) released at the end of their spring conference, the bishops said: “This is a unique publication, and is hugely significant not only for the Church in Ireland, but for all who cherish our culture and heritage, particularly the Irish language.”

According to the statement: “Bishops encouraged priests to purchase a copy for use in their parishes.”

The new translation has been worked on over several years by the Sapienti Committee, which includes bishops, priests, and Irish-language academics.

It follows the new Irish translation of the Mass, first used in Irish churches in 2011.

The first vernacular Masses in Irish were celebrated on March 7, 1965. Later that year a Senator described the vernacular Mass as “a great step forward in aid of the Irish language”.

The Irish government has made efforts to increase the number of people who speak Irish. It is a compulsory subject in schools, but only around 80,000 people speak it outside school, according to the 2011 Census.

The bishops’ announcement marks Seachtain na Gaeilge, a festival of the Irish language which runs from March 1-17 this year.

Moderator urges prayer for TDs

Rt. Rev. Dr. Ian McNie, Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland said yesterday, “When the people of Ireland cast their votes a short while ago, many commentators predicted an uncertain and inconclusive result. These predictions have come to pass.

“As those elected to Dáil Éireann navigate through the complexities of forming a new Government in these difficult circumstances, I encourage them to work for the common good

and keep the best interests of the people at the heart of everything they do.

“As I have said before, the call to elected office and to leadership in the public square can be an onerous responsibility, which brings with it many challenges, but also opportunities. Christians are called to pray for those in authority and as the Dáil meets to try to elect a Taoiseach and form a government, TDs can be assured of my prayers and the prayers of many throughout our Church on the whole island.”

Downpatrick and Dublin events to mark the Feast of St Patrick

The music department at Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin, is hosting a Festal Choral Evensong on the Eve of the Feast of St Patrick, Wednesday 16 March, at Christ Church Cathedral Dublin at 6.00 pm.

The service will be led by Archbishop Michael Jackson and Archbishop Diarmuid Martin and will be sung by the choirs of Christ Church Cathedral and the Girls' Choir of St Mary's Pro-Cathedral Dublin.

A spokesperson said, “The Feast of St Patrick creates a strong and positive sense of unity throughout the island of Ireland. At Christ Church they are seeking to reflect this sense of *community* with an ecumenical service promoting a shared desire for Christian unity symbolised by two cathedral choirs singing together as one ensemble.”

The Eucharist will be celebrated in Irish in St Patrick’s Cathedral, Dublin, at 9.15 am on St Patrick’s Day and at 11.15 am the Ven. Donald McLean, formerly Archdeacon of Derry, will be the preacher at the Patronal Eucharist which will be attended by the Friendly Brothers of St Patrick. At 5pm on RTE Radio 1 Extra Canon Charles Mullen will lead an act of worship with the cathedral choir.

The theme for this year’s Down and Dromore St Patrick’s Day celebrations at Saul Church and Down Cathedral is ‘In the Footsteps of Patrick – Proclaiming Christ’ and, fittingly, the first group of Diocesan Evangelists will be commissioned at the Festival Service.

Introduced in 2014, the Diocesan Evangelists Course is one strand of diocese’s leadership development programme. It has been co-ordinated by Captain George Newell of the

Church Army and is distance-learning based and accredited by St John's College, Nottingham, with the practical elements facilitated by 'Through Faith Missions'.

Eight individuals have completed the first two-year course and will be commissioned on St Patrick's Day before being deployed in the diocese. Seven more evangelists are in training.

Captain Newell is to give the address at the Holy Communion service in Saul Church at 9.15 am and the Diocesan Evangelists will lead the prayers on the pilgrimage from Saul to Down Cathedral. At the Festival Service, beginning in the cathedral at 11.45 am, Bishop Harold Miller will give the address. The service will be followed by the wreath-laying ceremony at St Patrick's grave and lunch in the marquee.

Unique Easter Walk returns to Belfast for one more year

A unique Easter experience, which invites people to walk the journey of the Easter story in the city streets, is to return to Belfast this year.

The Passion Walk will be back in Belfast by popular demand on Good Friday and Easter

Saturday, following the outstanding success of last year's event. More than 250 people took part in the Walk at Easter 2015, describing it as "moving", "inspiring" and "innovative".

The Passion Walk is an individual reflective journey in which the city becomes the backdrop for the events of the Easter story, from the garden of Gethsemane to Christ's death on the cross. Participants walk at their own pace with a specially designed audio guide, pausing at key locations to reflect on aspects of the story.

Originally developed in Edinburgh by writer Susan Mansfield, the Passion Walk was redesigned for Belfast at the invitation of a group of people drawn from across the churches.

Joy Gowdy, who was instrumental in bringing the Passion Walk to Belfast, said: "It was inspiring and a privilege to be part of the first ever Passion Walk in Belfast in 2015. People from all faiths and none took part, telling us it helped them re-focus on what Easter is about and why it is relevant to today. I'm delighted that the Walk is back for one more year.

"Doing the Passion Walk in Edinburgh in 2013 helped me prepare for Easter in a new and very relevant way, and I wanted to see that

experience brought to the city of my birth. No one tradition owns the Easter story. The events are for all people to reflect on and make their personal response to.”

People of all denominations and none are invited to take this opportunity to experience the Easter story afresh in the streets of their city on March 25th and 26th. Walkers begin their journey at Grosvenor House, Glengall Street, and walk in their own time, finishing with refreshments at the Dock Cafe in Titanic Quarter. Advance booking is essential.

Rev Steve Stockman, minister of Fitzroy Presbyterian Church, Belfast, said: “Take time to slow down to walking pace, then take in your city in ways you have never seen it before. And, while doing all that, get a chance to meditate on the Passion of Jesus in the sorts of places and hustle and bustle in which the original events took place - I can’t wait.”

Fr Martin Magill, of Sacred Heart Parish, North Belfast, said: “I found it very meaningful to take part in the Passion Walk through Belfast last year. It was valuable to take time to reflect on the suffering of Jesus through the lens of the streets of a city which has known an immense amount of suffering over the years. There was something

very poignant about walking, reflecting and observing Belfast in the run up to Easter.”

Rev Richard Clutterbuck, principal of Edgehill Theological College, said: “The story of Good Friday is central to the Christian faith, but it can feel distant and unconnected from where and how we live now. That’s why artists and poets through the ages have used their imagination to relate it to the present day. This is what the Passion Walk does for 21st-century Belfast. Experience the walk and neither the story, not the city, will seem the same again.”

More information on the Passion Walk is available at www.passionwalk.org. We ask for a donation of £5 per person (£3 concession) to help cover costs. All participants should book in advance via the website, or by phone on 07879 014344.

Bishop Miller to be Trustee of Tearfund

Tearfund has appointed Right Revd Harold Miller, Bishop of Down and Dromore, to the Board of Trustees.



Bishop Harold Miller (right) has been appointed a Trustee of Tearfund

Bishop Harold has been involved with Tearfund since the beginning, in the late 1960s, and has served on the Tearfund Northern Ireland Advisory Committee for more than 12 years. During this time he has visited Tearfund partners in Cambodia, as well as participating in fundraising initiatives with Great British Bake Off's Martha Collinson, and Olympic medal-winning rower Peter Chambers.

Clive Mather, chairman of Tearfund, said, "We are delighted to welcome Bishop Harold as a trustee. As a member of our Northern Ireland advisory committee he has been a wise advisor

to Tearfund for many years and as a Vice President he has been a fantastic ambassador for us, our partners and the people we serve. We now look forward to having his passion, warmth and insight on the Board as we continue to explore how best to follow Jesus where the need is greatest.”

Bishop Miller said, “After many years of local involvement with Tearfund and six as a Vice President, I am delighted to have joined the Board. There remains so much need in our world and it is a privilege to contribute to the work of a charity whose aims and approach I so passionately believe in.”

News links to reports on faith, politics and education

Christian Today/Premier

Reports that Canon David Porter has been announced as the new Chief of Staff and Strategy at Lambeth Palace (see CNI yesterday). David takes over from Kay Brock, who retires this month after four years at the Palace. He is currently the Archbishops' Director for Reconciliation and will start in his new role in early May. The Archbishop is quoted on the appointment.

<http://www.premier.org.uk/News/UK/New-Chief-of-Staff-for-Archbishop-of-Canterbury>

BBC/Christian Today/Guard/Ind/Times

Plans to overhaul Sunday trading laws in England and Wales have been dropped after they were rejected by MPs. The Commons opposed proposals to allow councils to extend opening hours as 27 Conservative MPs voted against the amendments in the Enterprise Bill. Ministers had sought to limit the rebellion by promising to trial the changes in 12 areas but said afterwards they would respect MPs' views. *CT* quotes CARE CEO Nola Leach saying this is a "victory for families, workers, small businesses and all the other groups who opposed these wholly unnecessary and unpopular plans".

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-35768674>

<http://www.theguardian.com/business/2016/mar/09/cameron-defeated-in-commons-over-plans-to-relax-sunday-trading-laws>

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/sunday-trading-government-defeated-by-rebels-as-labour-calls-for-bill-to-be-withdrawn-a6921576.html>

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/business/industries/retailing/article4709679.ece>

Times

Reports the development of *ChurchApp* which allows worshippers to donate directly or to text a number that sends them a link to a donation site. Currently more than 100 parishes used the app to receive donations, which can be used for one-off or monthly donations. Gavin Courtney, who runs it, expects more than £2 million to come through the app this year. Bishop of Islington, Ric Thorpe, is quoted saying apps can encourage the spirit of Christian generosity.

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/faith/article4709418.ece>

Spectator

Charles Moore recounts a recent visit to Christ Church Oxford noting the oak-built Bishop (George) Bell altar which was donated by Her Majesty The Queen on a visit to the college (scroll down).

<http://www.spectator.co.uk/2016/03/brexit-is-none-of-mark-carneys-business/>

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