

Swansong: Cork, Cloyne and Ross

The background to the Link & Parish Twinning was explained by Julia Cody, Vicar of the Church at Perton.

- Back in February 2018, as part of a national church leadership programme, I was privileged to spend three days on pilgrimage in Northern Ireland.
- During these days of pilgrimage, listening to many voices and packed full of encounters, a pervasive theme was a sense of fear for the future, given the very fragile 'peace' in Northern Ireland, and particularly in the light of the enormous uncertainty surrounding Brexit, even at that time, 3 years' ago.
- Following this deeply challenging trip, I was left with many questions, including what, if anything, Christians in the mainland UK can do to offer prayerful and practical hope, and support to Christians in the whole island of Ireland.
- In reflecting on this trip with Bishop Michael, he suggested that I explore the possibilities of creating some sort of relationship with the Church of Ireland in the United Dioceses of Cork, Cloyne and Ross, through his connection with their Bishop, The Right Rev'd Dr Paul Colton.
- On the back of this, myself and Revd Simon Douglas enjoyed a wonderful initial visit to Cork, as guests of Bishop Paul and his clergy, in September 2018.
- We had a wonderful time - a great craic! - my lovely Irish husband was quite jealous as he stayed at home with our hounds!
- We met lots of people and in three days managed to visit many different churches, chaplaincies, schools and the cathedral - it was great and we received a wonderful welcome from everyone we met.
- Following the trip, I emailed the people we'd met to thank them, and received many emails in return, and the one from the Venerable Adrian Wilkinson, Archdeacon of Cork, Cloyne and Ross and Incumbent of Douglas Union with Frankfield, included these words, which reflected many others:

Thanks Julia. Yes I enjoyed meeting you and Simon too. Hopefully some fruitful link between our Dioceses will emerge in time. The more I hear about Brexit and recent political developments in the UK, the more I feel we need to keep lines of communication, friendship and mutual support open. Best wishes and every blessing, Adrian

- Following our trip, Simon and I were invited to speak to Bishop Michael's Staff Team, reflecting on our visit and sharing our proposal of how we might develop ongoing relationships between the two Dioceses.
- The Bishop and his Staff Team were very encouraging and supported our plans to invite parishes or benefices/Unions, as well as schools, chaplaincies and fresh expressions to join a twinning scheme which we called "Friendship Links".
- The hope is that once links have been made, they will grow and develop organically and creatively, reflecting the diversity of each link.
- The overall aim of the scheme is: *To develop friendship, prayer, support, and mutual learning between churches, schools, chaplaincies and fresh expressions in the Dioceses of Lichfield and Cork, Cloyne & Ross.*
- This links into the Diocese of Lichfield's vision, which speaks about: reflecting richness and variety; partnering with others; and being people of hope, as well connecting with the Diocesan themes of discipleship, vocation and evangelism.

- It also links to the Church of Ireland's mission statement, which speaks about: ordering our worship and life in a manner that nurtures growth, promotes unity and liberates us for service in the world that is God's.
- We agreed to pilot the scheme with a couple of parishes; in addition Bishop Michael visited Bishop Paul; and I was due to spend some of my sabbatical in Cork seeking to embed the link - however COVID happened... hopefully the sabbatical and visit will happen next year instead!
- What has happened is that Bishop Paul asked the Revd John Ardis to become the Link Person for the Diocese of Cork, Cloyne and Ross;
- And on 27th October 2019, the first pilot link was created between The Church At Perton, where I serve as Vicar, and the Carrigaline Union of Parishes... it began with a live video link during respective Sunday services, and included praying together a prayer written by Revd Elaine and myself..... little did we know how video links and streaming would come into its own a few months' later!
- This is a fledgling link and I'm excited!
- Elaine will say a little later about our twinned parishes, but there are so many possible ways to develop this link - picking up ideas which had to be shelved e.g. cathedral links and choir trips; clergy visits perhaps to each other's clergy conferences; parishioner visits; linking schools; pilgrimage walks in both dioceses; creative prayer; use of social media; linking on specific things e.g. environmental matters.... as well as coming up with many other ideas...
- I think that's enough background!
- I'd now like to hand over to our two Bishops, who I know have been friends for some time, and listen in as they chat together for a few minutes about the possibilities....

Bishop Paul spoke of being known in his 23 years as a Bishop for mistiming and misfiring! During Brexit he engaged in conversations on Twitter and was told it had nothing to do with Ireland! In post-Brexit the link is even more important, perhaps crucial with the relapse in peace. We should remember we have something to do, something to offer and something to proclaim.

Bishop Michael expressed the hope that the link might mitigate some of this negative experience. He agreed that 'fledgling' was a great adjective – hatched but not yet ready to fly - needing needs nurture, attention and care. As restrictions are removed we must be ready to learn from one another – we are sufficiently different but also sufficiently similar. We will certainly involve Ireland in the celebrations marking the 1300th anniversary of St Chad next year, as we remember that it was the Irish who shared their Christian faith in England. We may be able, at least, to restore some civility to the relationship between our two countries.

The Rector of Carrigaline Union of Parishes, Elaine Murray spoke about the importance of the pariah link for her congregation. Despite Lockdown, these have been achieved through pulpit swaps for Harvest in 2020, and Candlemas and Rogation in 2021. Friendships are beginning to grow and have been nurtured through three Zoom quizzes, which have also raised funds for the Mothers' Union and Christian Aid; they were also delighted to join in the Perton session for the Diocesan Day of Prayer in October. It is hoped that Eco-church initiatives and fundraising will continue to strengthen the link until in-person visits can be arranged.

Break-out rooms offered an opportunity to chat and pray in smaller groups about the possibilities for strengthening this fledgling link such as:

- Choir visits & links between the two cathedrals
- Youth exchange visits & linking of church schools
- Monthly prayer links via Zoom
- Pilgrimage in both Dioceses
- Clergy conferences / exchanges
- Connecting parishes with similar contexts and concerns
- Reconciliation project – recognising that focus should be on relationships rather than issues
- Involving community as well as church – possibly civic life

The session ended with all praying together the prayer which had been written when the link was first explored:

Perton & Carrigaline Twining Prayer (*adapted*)

Loving God,

Thank you for our brothers and sisters in your Church
around the world;

Thank you for the developing friendship between:
the Diocese of Cork, Cloyne & Ross
and the Diocese of Lichfield.

Lord Jesus, you are the vine;
may we remain rooted in you,
each congregation a branch,
linked to each other in you.

Holy Spirit, flow through us,
enabling our friendship to flourish,
as we learn about and from each other;
and commit ourselves to pray for each other.

May we enjoy fruit as you grow your Church
and Kingdom in and through us all.

We ask this for your glory,

Amen.