

INTERVIEW

BISHOP DARLING

A MUNSTER man by birth and a man who has spent the last 29 years in the North of Ireland has made a return to his native province. He was recently appointed Bishop of Limerick and Killaloe. This week we speak to Rt. Reverend Edward Flewett Darling and see how he finds his new home in Limerick.

"Naturally it was a big break for us but we are happy to be here," said Bishop Darling.

"We received a great welcome. Everyone made us feel at home. And even still when I walk down the street or stop for petrol people come over to me and welcome me to Limerick."

"They really show great affection for their bishops. It's a different set-up in the North where the bishop is treated more impersonally."

And not only was it a big break for Bishop Darling and his wife, Patricia, to leave the parish of St. John, Malone, Belfast, where they had spent the last 13 years but they also left three of their five children overnight.

"Normally children are accused of leaving their parents but in this case the opposite is true," said Bishop Darling jokingly.

None of the family have come to Limerick — Philip is involved in business management in Belfast, Alison studies French and German at Queens University and Linda has become a final year boarder at Methodist.

Shankill: blunt but great people

The Darlings have two more sons who are working in England — David a teacher in London and Colin who works in life assurance.

Born in Cork, Bishop Darling spent his boyhood in the city before moving to Skibbereen. After leaving secondary school, he went to Trinity College where he took an arts degree in classics and the arts. He also studied theology at Trinity.

It was there in Trinity that Bishop Darling met his Co. Down-born wife, Patricia.

"We are both great musical lovers and in college we were both involved in the Trinity Choral Society."

In 1956, following his ordination, Bishop Darling went to St. Luke's parish, Shankill Road, where he spent the next three years. He described his parishioners here as forthright and blunt but great people.

After three years he went to St. John's, Orangefield, in the Castlereagh area of east Belfast.

In 1962 Bishop Darling went to a brand new parish on the outskirts of Bangor. "I was more or less given a two-acre field and told to get on with it."

"There were two other parishes in Bangor and this nucleus of people gave us great support and within three and a half years we built a new church and our small community blossomed and within 10 years became a thriving parish."

Bishop Darling was appointed rector of St. John, Malone, Belfast, in 1972, where he remained until he was appointed Bishop of Limerick and Killaloe.

Accord a step in right direction

To promote peace and harmony — these are the main aims of our new bishop. And who better to bring the message of peace than the man who was in the North from the start of the troubles.

"At the start of the troubles in '69 I was still in Bangor which was rather remote from any violence but I can recall some massive bombs which did a lot of damage to the city centre."

"The South Belfast area where we were was a mixed area of both Catholics and Protestants who lived peacefully together unlike many of the ghetto areas where tension was always evident."

"It all became very weary after a while but people do become conditioned to these circumstances. It was normal to have continual searching and army patrolling."

"And all this violence and tension was particularly highlighted when I made visits to Cork to see my mother — everyone in the South appeared to be so relaxed."

"But for many young children it was their natural surroundings — they can accept it more than people of my generation but one wonders what long-term affect it will have on them."

"Of course the people of the North want peace but the I.R.A. and I.N.L.A. terrorism which is taking place in the North is only one example of the world-wide network of terrorism throughout the world," said Bishop Darling who sadly admits that all this has become a way of life for so many people.

"When the problem is so widespread, how do we achieve peace?"

"Reconciliation should be at the front of our minds. In



Bishop Edward Darling and his wife, Patricia.

Ireland we have two different races of people, and neither the North understands the South, or vice versa."

Bishop Darling believes that the Anglo-Irish Agreement was a step in the right direction. Its a move towards bringing the people of Ireland together.

"There is really a tremendous lack of understanding between the people of the North and the South," said the down to earth Bishop.

"But there are no political boundaries between the Church of Ireland, North and South."

And though Bishop Darling admits that he was very surprised to have been appointed Bishop of Limerick and Killaloe, especially since he was away from the South for so long, he was first asked if he was willing to allow his name to go forward.

"And again prior to my appointment I was asked if I would accept this appointment."

"Much of Bishop Darling's time is now spent travelling around his extensive diocese which includes Limerick, Clare, Kerry and parts of Offaly, Tipperary and Galway. There are five Roman Catholic churches to cover this area."

"In Belfast I only had a short walk from my home to my church and my parish but now my diocese extends from

was not 'pressured into his present role.

"When I first told my father of my intentions I didn't receive any great encouragement and he later told me that he thought I was doing it to please him."

"From an early age I was a choir boy with St. Nicholas's Choir, Cork, and I grew up to love the Liturgy."

There are many problems facing the diocese and one which is causing alarm to Bishop Darling at present is the number of small parishes in Co. Kerry who are finding it so difficult to remain viable.

"These parishes are now being grouped together with one rector to cover all — this immediately puts pressure on the rector."

Developing a ministry of the laity would be one solution according to Bishop Darling, "and we are hoping to train more people to do this."

"We are also hoping to train more auxiliary ministers — these people would be trained and ordained to do our work in an assisting capacity."

Bishop Darling is also hoping to form a stronger bond between Limerick and Killaloe who until a few years ago were separate dioceses. "The more we can do together the better."

A day in the life of the Bishop's life includes morning prayer, administration, spiritual reading and visits throughout the diocese. "It is very important to keep up to date with theological thinking. Reading is essential but we don't get the opportunity to do as much as we would like."

"My wife is also very happy to be here. She is very adaptable and has always been a great support to me. She has found the same warmth that I have here in Limerick."

"We see more of each other now and she always comes with me when I travel around

the diocese."

Asked if he thought that Roman Catholic clergy should be allowed to marry, Bishop Darling said that he saw both advantages and disadvantages.

"As there are so many pressures on one's time, the wife and family can often be neglected but on the other hand married clergy have a better understanding of people's problems."

"A priest's life must be very lonely, not that I can disclose very much of my work to my wife."

"And a bishop by virtue of his office is very much apart from the people. Its often said that the loneliest person in a tribe is the chief."

Speaking on the question of divorce, Bishop Darling said that the attitude of the Church of Ireland is not one of approval — "We are not allowed to re-marry people who are divorced."

But the bishop believes that if people are divorced then they must be treated with all the help pastorally that the church can give them.

"We should be able to offer them a blessing on their Civil marriage to show them they are not cast out."

A lover of music, especially classical, Bishop Darling plays both piano and organ.

Also a rugby enthusiast, he is looking forward to his first trip to Thomond Park. "One of the first things I had to do when I came here was to learn to cheer for Munster and not Ulster."

"Sport is one of the few mediums which brings North and South together. Look at the Irish rugby team, its one's merits as a player that one is selected and not where you're from and that's as it should be," said Bishop Darling, who is a regular visitor at Lansdowne Road for all international.

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