

# WE MAKE THE WAY BY WALKING

*Irish Methodist Conference 2022 Belfast*

*5.30-7.30pm Friday 10<sup>th</sup> June 2022*

## INTRODUCTION

*“Living wholeheartedly as followers of Jesus for the transformation of the world.”*

Discipleship is about following, and historically disciples followed their teachers around, giving rise to the oft quoted (though probably apocryphal) blessing *“May you be covered by the dust of your rabbi,”* and the early church was referred to as followers of “The Way” a number of times in the Acts of the Apostles.”

All of this sees discipleship as a dynamic process of change, meaning that we may be shaped by our past but not shackled by it. It is also not merely an individual process but has a corporate dimension, and will be shaped by the local context.

This has shaped the current Pope’s process of review of the life and witness of the global catholic church, which he has described as “synodial” referring, not to the “synods” that many denominations have used to describe formal meetings, but the Greek origin of the word ie syn “with” odos “way”, implying a process of “walking with” each other.

In this he was influenced by the Brazilian educationalist Paolo Freire, who referred to the Spanish poet Antonio Machado who wrote:

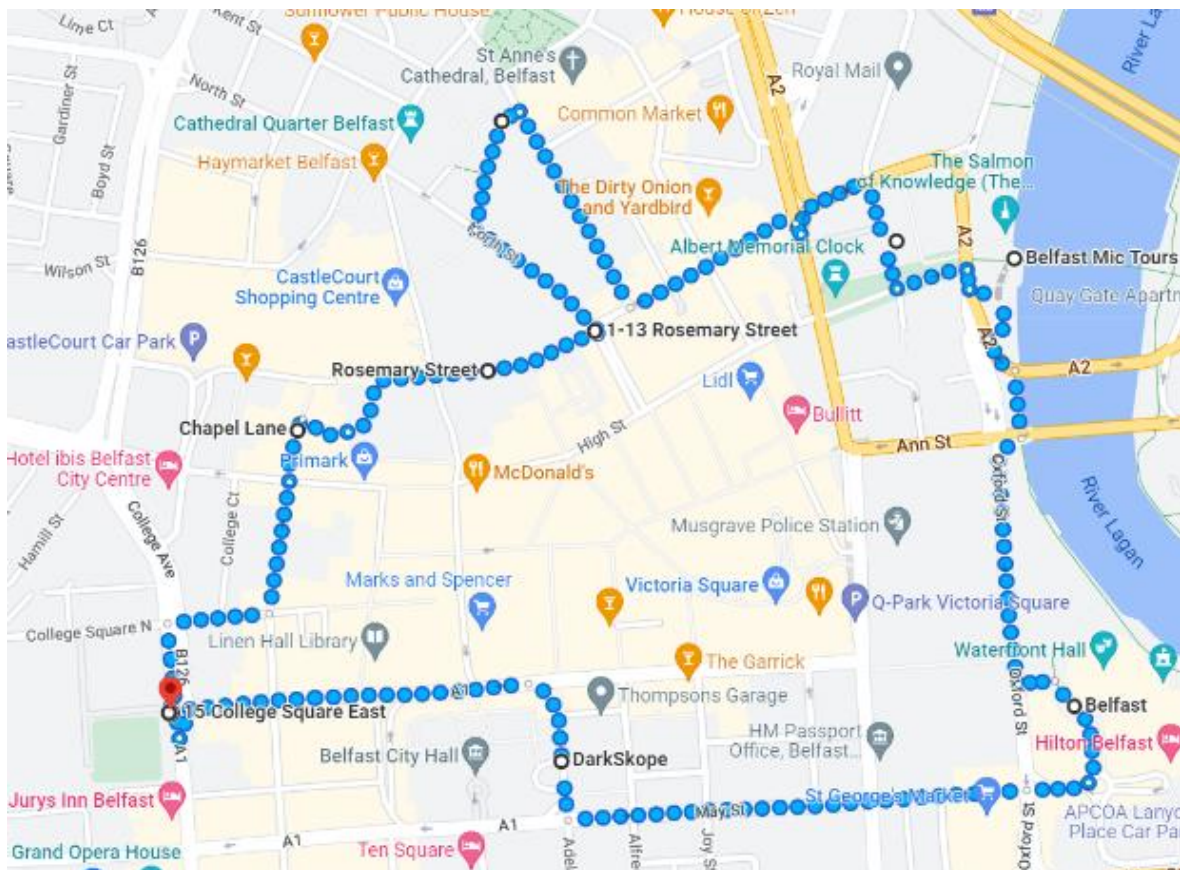
*“Walker, your footprints are the way, and nothing more; walker, there is no way, the way is made by walking. When walking you make your way, and when you look back you see the path that you will never tread again.”*

As we “confer” and consider how we live wholeheartedly as followers of Jesus, we invite you to physically walk together around the city in which we currently meet, looking at parts of its history and the church within it, through the lens of scripture and creative reflection, prompting us to prayer and conversations along the way, not just about the place where conference is meeting, but the places where we each have come from.

How might we creatively and transformatively walk the way where we are, and how might we better walk together as a connexion?

The walk you are invited to share in today, is circular, with no fixed beginning or end. Our transformative journey on earth also has no fixed end... and we are invited to start wherever we are...

## Route



**2.2 miles 45 minutes** active walking plus approx. 70 minutes across 9 stopping points

All material was written by David A. Campton except for the excerpt of a poem by John Hewitt. The poems/prayers at the Waterfront, Thanksgiving Square and The Big Fish have been previously published in "Doodlings and Doggerel" a collection of poetry by New City Press in aid of the BCM "Copelands" project available at [BCM Superintendent turns poet with new book | Belfast Central Mission](#)

# 1. THE BLACK MAN/ROYAL BELFAST ACADEMICAL INSTITUTION\*

## **BACKGROUND** (*Accompanist/Assembly Buildings Lead*)

The school behind us is the Royal Belfast Academical Institution, or Inst, a boys' grammar school which is arguably the main rival to our own Methodist College Belfast, or Methody, in terms of rugby. However, it shares another similarity with Methody in that at one time both were not only schools but also theological colleges aimed at training clerics, with Inst being the theological college for Presbyterians until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It ultimately stopped being in no small part due to the campaigning of the man depicted in the statue with its back to it... the so-called "Black Man" even though it is green... The early 19<sup>th</sup> century Presbyterian conservative cleric Henry Cooke. Cooke was a complex man... He was a strong advocate for the poor in the developing city of Belfast and across Ireland... but he was also a ruthless demagogue and an implacably anti-Catholic supporter of Orangeism (although he himself was never an Orangeman)... But his antipathy to this establishment was because he was also a firm opponent of the Arianism... denial of the deity of Christ that was developing in Presbyterianism at that time under the auspices of those here and the Church of Scotland who were described as followers of the "New Light" – growing out of the rationalism of the enlightenment... which also resulted in the revolutionary movements at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> and into the early 19<sup>th</sup> century including the United Irishmen. It has been questioned whether he was primarily opposed to these revolutionary ideas with their sense of tolerance for all beliefs including Catholicism, or Arianism itself, as his earlier writings didn't seem particularly evangelical or pro-the Westminster Confession of Faith which became the test of orthodoxy for Presbyterians... But what and whichever, his set in train a form of conservative Presbyterian which resulted in the fracturing of the Presbyterians into what became the smaller Non-Subscribing Presbyterians, who wanted no absolute test of orthodoxy and maintained that radical identity, and the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, our hosts this week, who set up their own colleges in Derry, which became Magee College, now part of Ulster University, and Assemblies College in Belfast, which became Union College where some of us took some of our classes in training.

He was and is a divisive character. Some saw and see him as a paragon of orthodoxy, some as a demagogue who used division for his own ends. We may each have our own opinions but we are not his judge, although we have to make our own call on issues of perceived truth and unity, both of which are affirmed in scripture.

However, what is sometimes not known is that the Black Man is NOT the Black Man... Because it was not this statue that was originally called the Black Man, but the one that stood here for 20 years before this was erected by supporters of Cooke in 1875... The previous statue, which was a blackened bronze statue was one of Lord Belfast the second son of the third Marquis of Donegall who was a romantic poet, novelist, and composer who died in Naples of scarlet fever at the age of 25. A very different character...

**READING** (*Reader/Assembly Buildings 1*)

*I ... beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, <sup>2</sup> with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, <sup>3</sup> making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. <sup>4</sup> There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, <sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. <sup>7</sup> But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. <sup>11</sup> The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup> until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.*

Ephesians 4: 1-7, 11-13

**POEM: *The Black Man*** (*Performer/Assembly Buildings 2*)

Who do we put on a pedestal  
And promote as paragons?  
Those of blackened bronze  
Forged in the fire of certainties?  
Those who mark out the junctions  
Between one way and another?  
Who forever turn their back  
On those who dare to question?

Or the one who stepped down  
From his elevated position  
To tell stories to sinners and  
Allow doubters to touch him?  
Who stretched pierceable skin  
Over an eternal frame  
So that he could hold out  
His arms in embrace?

**PRAYER...** *(Reader/Assembly Buildings Lead)*

*Lord may we be wary of looking up to the wrong people*

*Or encouraging anyone to look up to us.*

*Indeed may we be wary of looking up to anyone but you,*

*But as we continue on our journey may we learn to look up.*

*AMEN*

**DIRECTIONS**

- \* En route discuss who are the spiritual heroes in your area?
- \* Are they healthy?
  - Cross the Fisherwick Road junction via the pedestrian crossing and proceed along Wellington Place on the southern side until you come to the front of City Hall on Donegall Square North.
  - Enter the City Hall Grounds and proceed around the building to the east until you arrive at the turning circle in front of the east entrance.

## 2. DONEGALL SQUARE EAST/CITY HALL\*

### READING *(Reader/Assembly Buildings 1)*

*As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, <sup>42</sup> saying, 'If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. <sup>43</sup> Indeed, the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you, and hem you in on every side. <sup>44</sup> They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another; because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God.'*<sup>[b]</sup>

*<sup>45</sup> Then he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling things there; <sup>46</sup> and he said, 'It is written, "My house shall be a house of prayer"; but you have made it a den of robbers.'*

Luke 19: 41-46

### BACKGROUND *(Accompanist/Assembly Buildings Lead)*

Here we stand facing the site of the “mother church” of Belfast Methodism, Donegall Square, which opened on this site in 1806, with the current façade being part of a building erected in 1846. It finally and closed in 1994 after many discussions about whether and how it might be retained. In its lifetime it birthed many other congregations, its members played an active part in the commercial and civic life of the city and during the second world war and subsequently the early years of the troubles it also played an active part in ministering to a city under threat. The imposing building however, had inherent problems. The impressive Corinthian pillars look impressive, but are actually plaster over wooden lathe, and the whole edifice, indeed this whole square is built on a swamp... City Hall has had to spend millions addressing that problem, and Donegall Square Methodist Church certainly didn't have millions to spend on it, especially as their congregation shrank, as most did in the latter 20<sup>th</sup> century exacerbated by the Troubles. Eventually it was bought out by the Ulster Bank, but I am told that even they didn't entirely sort out the problems with the building that even after a £7million rebuild the carpark in the basement is still subject to flooding.

There is a plaque on the building to mark its history. Indeed there are many plaques and memorials in this area... especially in the City Hall grounds, not least the Titanic Memorial to our left.

This isn't the time or place to rehash old questions about whether we should have evacuated these particular premises in the centre of the city, but it does raise the question, that many churches are wrestling with across the western world, as to what presence should we have in the city centres? What relationship should we have with civic authorities? With financial institutions? With those who live and work and come to the city centre for entertainment? With those who sleep on its streets? And that question is pertinent whatever city, town or civic authority we come from...

**POEM: DONEGALL SQUARE** (*Performer/Assembly Buildings 2*)

What happened here?  
Did Mammon turn the tables  
Rather than flip them  
And drive Christ out of his temple,  
Rather than allowing him  
To whip their representatives  
From out of the sacred  
Heart of this scarred city?

The city is still sacred,  
And Christ still weeps  
Over the choices we make.  
But is he to be found  
At tables in pillared palaces  
And marbled halls,  
And places with plaques  
Telling us what to remember?

Or is he there in bread broken  
And wine shared at tables  
In cafes and bars,  
Rather than sanctuaries  
With their sanctified rituals?  
Or in broken brothers and sisters  
Sleeping on the city's streets,  
Inviting us to toss tables again?

**PRAYER...** (*Accompanist/Assembly Buildings Lead*)

*Lord as we look for you in the towns and cities where we live  
May you enable us to see you in all sorts of unexpected places  
Wearing all manner of unexpected and distressing disguises.  
AMEN*

## DIRECTIONS

- \* En route discuss what is the relationship like between the church and civic authorities in your area?
- \* Where might you creatively “break bread” with Jesus in your area?
  - *Exit City Hall Grounds onto Donegall Square East and safely cross square onto the east side pavement passing Ulster Bank/Donegall Square Methodist on left.*
  - *Turn left on May Street.*
  - *Walk straight along May Street noting the imposing Presbyterian Church on right en route. This was founded specifically for the ministry of Rev. Dr. Henry Cooke (“The Black Man”) the central Presbyterian leader of 19<sup>th</sup> century conservatism.*
  - *Passing the Courts on the left and St. George’s Market (reputedly one of the foremost food and craft markets in Europe) on right, turn left across the front of the Waterfront Hall.*



### 3. THE SHEEP ON THE ROAD/WATERFRONT HALL

#### READING *(Reader/Assembly Buildings 1)*

*I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, <sup>15</sup> just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. <sup>16</sup> I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.*

John 10: 14-16

#### BACKGROUND *(Accompanist/Assembly Buildings Lead)*

This group of life-size bronzes of six sheep and a shepherd may seem somewhat out of place. Why would a shepherd be driving his sheep through this part of the city outside the cultural hub of the Waterfront Hall, with concert-goers passing by and the law courts across the road? It was actually created in 1991 by Northern Irish sculptor, Deborah Brown, and was originally commissioned by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland for their sculpture garden at their then base at Riddell Hall in leafy south Belfast. In 1999 it was purchased by Laganside Corporation responsible for the redevelopment of this whole area, after the relocation of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, and they placed it here current heading towards what was once were May's Meadows, the site of the city's livestock markets.

In church we have carried over the metaphors and stories forged in an ancient Middle Eastern rural society and transplanted them into the modern west. Those of us who live in towns and cities have probably never seen shepherds at work except on TV... Yet we expect the world outside the church to understand our language and metaphors...

Even the word "pastoral" has overtones of shepherds looking after their sheep in a pasture... and while the phrase pastoral care has now been adopted into the world of human resources suitably shorn (no pun intended) of its spiritual overtones, do we speak language that accurately communicates the pastoral heart of Jesus not just to those who are part of our sheepfold, but those outside of it whom he laid down his life?

**POEM: *Sheep on the Road*** (*Performer/Assembly Buildings 2*)

The Lord, I am told, is my shepherd,  
But I don't need a thing.  
I need no guide through what once were meadows,  
Walking past a river it would not be wise to drink from,  
Despite the improvements of recent years.  
Google guides me along the right paths,  
for Jeff Bezos' name's sake.  
Sure, I am walking through a city  
Of concrete and glass,  
Not pastures and grass.  
What need do I have for songs of shepherds  
And their crooks?  
I need no shepherd's staff to comfort or correct me.  
All around me are tables in restaurants  
Where I can eat in luxury with friend or stranger.  
My cup is overflowing...  
Yet my head is not at peace.

But maybe it's now not a matter  
of following this good shepherd.  
Maybe if I were to look around, I would find  
That in his goodness and grace, his mercy and love,  
The shepherd is following me,  
Ushering me home.

**PRAYER...** (*Reader/Assembly Buildings Lead*)

*Lord, whatever language we use to describe it  
May we continue to be aware of you walking with us  
Guarding us, guiding us on our journeys,  
Wherever they may take us.*  
**AMEN**

## DIRECTIONS

- \* En route discuss what religious language doesn't easily translate these days?
- \* What things do people need shepherded through where you are?
  - *Go straight along River Lagan (which means "River of the Low-Lying District") until reaching the benches facing the "Beacon of Hope.*
  - *Note the revitalisation of the Waterfront which, pre 2000 was a significantly neglected area.*

## 4. THANKSGIVING SQUARE/BEACON OF HOPE

### READING (Reader/Assembly Buildings 1)

*We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now;<sup>23</sup> and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.<sup>24</sup> For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes<sup>[a]</sup> for what is seen?<sup>25</sup> But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.*

Romans 8: 22-25

### POEM (Performer/Assembly Buildings 2)

from 'The Bloody Brae: A Dramatic Poem' (John Hewitt)

Heaven is here, and Hell is here beside it...  
and violence breeds like the thistle blown over the world.

...Hate follows on hate in a hard and bitter circle  
our hate, the hate I give, the hate I am given:  
we should have used Pity and Grace to break the circle.

... The metal has cooled and set and is harder to break:  
whenever the Irish meet with the Planters' breed,  
there's always a sword between and black memories for both.

...I only need a lamp to guide my landing  
that lamp is forgiveness...

and the hand which could hold that light would lift it up  
if I could throw my voice above winds and water;  
but I cannot alone; I need your help in the asking.

## **BACKGROUND** *(Accompanist/Assembly Buildings Lead)*

That is part of a poem by Belfast poet John Hewitt, and it seems appropriate for this place. The statue above us erected in 2007 and created by sculptor Andy Scott (who among other things designed the famous giant horseheads known as “The Kelpies” in Falkirk) is actually called the Beacon of Hope although she has variously been called Nuala with the Hula (credited to Gerard Doyle), the Belle on the Ball, the Thing with the Ring or the Angel of Thanksgiving.

The latter one perhaps reflects the name of the third of an acre space in which we find ourselves, which, even Belfast citizens might not know, is called “Thanksgiving Square”. The idea of such a square was proposed by Myrtle Smyth, a Christian Scientist pensioner from Belfast, a decade previously at the Opsahl Commission. She was inspired by Thanks-Giving Square in Dallas, as a space where people of all faiths and none could come together and give thanks for the peace we now enjoy and the hope that it offers us. As such it has no specific religious imagery.

When our own Stephen Skuce wrote his book “The Faiths of Ireland” in 2006, a year before this statue was erected he mused about this square becoming a focus for inter-faith events in the future... Sadly that has never really happened. But then again so many of the hopes that post Good Friday Agreement era have not yet been fulfilled, not least the words of Mo Mowlam on formally handing over this site in 1999

*“Northern Ireland has known much pain and suffering. Now we are at the beginning of a new era of peace and prosperity. Thee creation of this place of thanksgiving is symbolic of a better tomorrow for us all.”*

## **PRAYER** *(Performer/Assembly Buildings 1)*

Look up, in thankfulness  
That we are where we are  
Look up, in hopefulness  
for the unclaimed future.  
Thanksgiving and hope,  
Gratitude and grace,  
One feeding into the other  
In an unbroken circle,  
Breaking the old circle  
Of hopelessness and hatred,  
Unforgiveness and fear.  
Look up. AMEN

## DIRECTIONS

- \* What are you particularly thankful for where you come from?
- \* What is giving you a sense of hope at present?
  - *Continue along the west side of the river along Donegall Quay*
  - *Cross the roads safely at the pedestrian crossings at both the Queens Bridge and Queen Elizabeth Bridge*
  - *Proceed until you come to the “Big Fish” beyond the Weir and Millennium Footbridge.*

## 5. THE MOUTH OF THE FARSET/BIG FISH

### READING *(Reader/Assembly Buildings 2)*

*A river flows out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it divides and becomes four branches. <sup>11</sup> The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; <sup>12</sup> and the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. <sup>13</sup> The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Cush. <sup>14</sup> The name of the third river is Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.*

*<sup>15</sup> The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.*

*Genesis 2: 10-15*

### BACKGROUND *(Accompanist/Assembly Buildings Lead)*

Here we think, not of the origins of churches in this city as we do in other places, but the origin of the city itself. This Big Fish was commissioned to celebrate the regeneration of the River Lagan and stands over the outflow of the River Farset, from which Belfast gets its name “Béal feirste,” “The Mouth of the Farset/Sandy River”. It’s a printed ceramic mosaic sculpture by John Kindness and was constructed in 1999 with the outer skin made up of ceramic tiles decorated with texts and images relating to the history of Belfast, from Tudor times to present day newspaper headlines. The Ulster Museum provided of the historic images, while local schools/day centres located along the line of the River Farset were approached to provide drawings for the fish. Images were provided by Glenwood Primary School, St Comgalls and Everton Day Centres. It also contains a time capsule storing information, images, and poetry on the City.

The following however is based on the oldest poem in western Europe, the Irish “Ballad of Amergin”

**POEM: *The Ballad of the Big Fish*** (Reader/Assembly Buildings 1)

I am the fish: that leaps the weir,  
I am the river: from moor to mouth,  
I am the cloud: that lours above,  
I am the rain: the tears of the sun,  
I am the gull: soaring and strutting,  
I am the seedling: in crack and crevice,  
I am the hillsides: embracing the city,  
I am the Word: bringing all into being  
In whom all things hold together.

I am the car: rushing on by,  
I am the bike: crossing the bridge,  
I am the lights: dictating the traffic,  
I am the sun: looking down on all,  
I am the boat: bound for abroad,  
I am the waves: on which it sails,  
I am the wind: blowing where it wills,  
I am the breath: bringer of life  
Hovering over the chaos.

I am the fire: of every hearth,  
I am the roof: for every head,  
I am the bread: on every table,  
I am the queen: of every hive,  
I am the heart: of every creature,  
I am the womb: of every life,  
I am the tomb: of every hope.  
I am the beginning and the end  
And every step of the journey in between.

I am...

**PRAYER...** (Accompanist/Assembly Buildings Lead)

AMEN

## DIRECTIONS

- \* En route discuss what you know about the history of the place where you come from?
- \* How does our history shape our present?
- \* What rivers run through us, nourishing us? What is the source of our spiritual vitality?
  - *Cross the road heading towards the Albert Clock*
  - *Turn right into Custom House Square and stop at the steps*

## 6. CUSTOM HOUSE STEPS/ALBERT CLOCK

### BACKGROUND *(Accompanist/Assembly Buildings Lead)*

This square reflects a huge range of the dimensions of Belfast down through the years. The Farset River runs under it and Belfast's origins as a trading town at the mouth of the Farset and Lagan Rivers is reflected in the erection of Custom House here in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century... one of the many buildings in Belfast (including Queens University) designed by Charles Lanyon. But McHugh's Bar across the square reflects another dimension in its origins as a port in that it dates from the 17<sup>th</sup> century and along with DuBarry's Bar that used to sit beside it were "houses of ill repute" frequented by sailors. The Albert clock (at its jaunty angle, caused by the foundations being somewhat unstable because of the river underneath) reflects Belfast's important place in the British Empire under Queen Victoria, Albert's long-mourning wife...

This statue is called "The Speaker" and was sculpted by Gareth Knowles in 2005. It reflects the fact that the steps of the Custom House were used as a speakers corner during the 19<sup>th</sup> and through the 20<sup>th</sup> century up to the time of the Troubles, with political speakers and evangelists, including many former Superintendents of Belfast Central Mission speaking here, often with significant crowds gathering in the Square... marked by the bronze footprints...

Now it is a square that regularly hosts political and other protest rallies as well as concerts and festivals hosted in temporary tents.

But the consistent question is, how should the church literally engage in the public square? St. Paul famously debated philosophers in what he saw as the idolatrous city of Athens... But in his later letter to the Corinthians he seems to question whether his earlier approach was correct...

## **MONOLOGUE** *(Performer/Assembly Buildings 2)*

Our journey through Greece was not turning out to be much of a holiday... Just like on the other side of the sea, wherever we went trouble seemed to follow... So much so that my friends smuggled me out of Beroea further up the coast and sent me on ahead of them to this idolatrous city... Everyone had always told me about the beauty of this place and the wisdom of its citizens... That everyone was a philosopher... But all of it was founded on myths and superstition. Every hole in the wall had a god wedged in there... They were covering all their bases in case they left one vengeful deity out of their devotions... I talked about this with fellow Jews in the local synagogue... But most of them thought that I was as much of an idolator as the Greeks because of my faith in Jesus Christ and Son of God... But I also got into discussions with some of the so called philosophers in the market place... It was as much a market place of ideas as food and other produce... And all the different philosophy schools were trying to sell their wares... The Epicureans encouraging people to enjoy life while they could, the Stoics suggesting that the only way out of misery was to stop caring and all manner of ideas in between... So I thought I would pitch in my drachama's worth... At first they didn't take me seriously because of my barbarian Greek from their perspective... But eventually some of them invited me up to the Areopagus... the Square of Ares, Mars... the god of war... where serious intellectual debate took place... and they gave me a platform to outline my "new teaching." So I thought I would be clever and butter them up a bit:

"Athenians" I said "I see how religious you are in every way. As I went through your beautiful city and inspected all the altars and shrines, I even found one among them with an altar dedicated 'To an unknown god.' Well friends, what you worship as unknown, I want to make clear to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, the one who is the real Lord of heaven and earth... he doesn't live in shrines and temples made by human hands, no matter how beautiful they may be... Nor does he need human hands to bring him offerings to eat and drink because he gave us everything we have in the first place... he made us all that we are... Giving us life and breath and everything else. From one starting point he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and it is he who allotted the ebb and flow of nations powers and the borders within they will operate... not our own strength or wisdom... We can search for God as much as we like and perhaps our groping in the dark may lead us to him—because he is not far from each one of us, indeed as your own writers have said "In him we live and move and have our being... we are all his children."

But what idol of gold, or silver, or stone, images formed by the, admittedly amazing art and imagination of human beings... What idol can give birth to us? God may have overlooked such idolatry in the past... but now is the time for us to change our hearts and minds... because he has revealed himself by raising Jesus from the dead."



Everything was going well until that point... but the mention of resurrection just led to mockery... Nothing new there...

But I thought I was being so clever... That my words would win them all over... A few did come to follow Christ, but the vast majority will stick with their more tangible deities...

I think my time here is at an end... When my friends get here I think we'll move on to Corinth... I've had enough of trying to prove myself to the wise men of Athens... Perhaps I will stick to proclaiming the foolishness of Christ and his cross.

### **PRAYER...** (*Reader/Assembly Buildings 1*)

*Lord may we continue to worship you and you alone*

*But may we be wary of any arrogance on our part*

*relying on our own wisdom and our own strength.*

*Rather may we willing to be seen as weak and foolish*

*So that your transforming grace may be revealed.*

**AMEN**

### **DIRECTIONS**

- \* En route discuss how well the church engages with the public square in your area.
- \* What is your modern local equivalent of the historic Custom House Steps?
  - *Cross Custom House Square diagonally onto Waring Street*
  - *Cross Dunbar Link at the end of Waring street and proceed along the west side of Dunbar Link to Dunbar Street on the Right*
  - *Note on the left the Salvation Army Centenary House Hostel which houses 68 homeless men every evening. There is now no dedicated women's hostel in Belfast.*
  - *At the end of Dunbar Street turn left into Talbot Street following it onto Donegall Street*
  - *Cross Donegall Street as safely as possible and proceed into Writer's Square facing St. Anne's/Belfast Cathedral*

## 7. ST. ANNE'S CATHEDRAL/WRITERS' SQUARE

### READING *(Reader/Assembly Buildings 2)*

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was with God in the beginning. <sup>3</sup> Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. <sup>4</sup> In him was life, and that life was the light of all humanity. <sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*

*John 1: 1-5*

### BACKGROUND *(Accompanist/Assembly Buildings Lead)*

St. Anne's is not the oldest Church of Ireland in the city... That honour is often claimed by St. George's on High Street... although it started as a chapel of ease of the older Catholic Parish of Shankill in the early 14<sup>th</sup> century. St. Annes was only established in the 18<sup>th</sup> century when St. Georges had fallen into disrepair, but it didn't become a cathedral until after Queen Victoria made Belfast a city in 1888... with the foundation stone being laid in 1899... It took over 80 years to complete... with plans for a spire initially being abandoned because the boggy ground of mud, sand and silt or "sleech" as it is known locally, on which it was built couldn't sustain the weight... But in 2007 the 80 feet stainless steel Spire of Hope was erected... the height matching the size of the Celtic cross on the north transept... Technically the tallest Celtic cross in Ireland. The cathedral holds another claim to fame in that it unusually contains only one tomb... That of Lord Carson who was buried there on his death in 1935. This required a specific act of Parliament... despite it being against his will!

But where we stand is Writers Square, dedicated to Belfast's rich literary tradition and the historic present nearby until recently of the main newspapers in the city... Across the Square are squares with quotations from local authors... Many of them either inspired by or influenced by Biblical and Christian tradition, or reflecting negatively on it sadly, indicating the interaction between faith and culture there has been here in the past...

Also sadly if developers and planners get their way, this square will be radically reduced in size to accommodate a vast new development of this area... the area has already started to change significantly with Ulster University moving a large number of its departments into the city...

Our joint chaplaincy with the Church of Ireland is already working across both Ulster and Queens University, as well as Stranmillis College and the Metropolitan College of Further Education to address this massive influx of students into the city.

## **ACTIVITY** (*Accompanist/Assembly Buildings 1*)

There is no sculpture in this space, which is odd given the presence of the College of Art nearby for decades, and equally strangely, in a space dedicated to writers we are not offering a poem or monologue.

Rather we will offer you a few minutes to read some of the squares on the square, and to write on these small post-it squares, the beginnings of a poem or a prayer... shaped by some of your thinking up to this point, and perhaps you might share it with us at some point in the future...

## **PRAYER...** (*Accompanist/Assembly Buildings Lead*)

*(after time of writing)*

AMEN

## **DIRECTIONS**

- \* En route discuss what you have read and written.
- \* How important are the arts to you and the expression of faith in your area?
- \* How well does the church interface with areas of culture and learning where you come from?
  - *Cross Writers Square and go through the Arch onto North Street*
  - *Turn left*
  - *Note immediately on the left are the headquarters of Storehouse, one of the earliest, most innovative and largest food pantry projects in Belfast*
  - *Proceed to the end of North Street and cross the road at the junction of North Street, Bridge Street and Rosemary Street*
  - *Behind you is the derelict building known as the Assembly Rooms. It was a until 2000 since when it has various uses, but before that it played a central part in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century Belfast having been built in 1770 as "The Exchange". In 1798 it was pressed into service as a temporary court for the trial of the United Irishmen rebels, and it was here that local Presbyterian dissenter Henry Joy McCracken was condemned to hang.*
  - *On the right as you turn into Rosemary Street is Extern, the primary agency for dealing with the effects of drug use on the streets in Belfast*
  - *Proceed along Rosemary Street until you reach "First Church"/Rosemary Street Non-Subscribing Presbyterian*

## 8. FIRST CHURCH/ROSEMARY STREET NON-SUBSCRIBING PRESBYTERIAN

### READING *(Reader/Assembly Buildings 2)*

*you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, <sup>20</sup> built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. <sup>21</sup> In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. <sup>22</sup> And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.*

*Ephesians 2: 19-22*

### BACKGROUND *(Accompanist/Assembly Buildings Lead)*

This building is on what the congregation argues is the oldest place of worship in the original town boundaries of Belfast, being founded in 1644... Although the current building merely dates to 1783 by which time there were 3 Presbyterian Churches in Rosemary Street, a second formed because the first building wasn't big enough to contain all who wanted to attend and then a third because of a theological split. But as such the original church goes back to the days before splits in the Presbyterian church over doctrine culminating in the rise of Henry Cooke, whom we mention elsewhere, and the ultimate formation of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and the Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church to which this congregation is affiliated... with "Subscribing" having nothing to do with money, but rather ministers and congregations refusing to accept the 17<sup>th</sup> century so called "Westminster Confession of Faith" as an absolute confession of faith. Indeed many went further in the Enlightenment tradition of the time and refuse all formal confessions of faith requirements for membership. As such they have members and ministers who are trinitarian and non-trinitarian... Historically, particularly in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century they were also centres of political revolution with a blue plaque marking the birth here of William Drennan one of the founders of the United Irishmen and later Royal Belfast Academical Institution.

Laudably the current congregation also want to play down the perceived or divisive negative side of their history and emphasise their status as "First Church." They were also one of the first in the city to practice a radically inclusive approach to sexuality.

An early visitor to this building was a certain John Wesley who on his last visit to Ireland in 1789 said in his journal for the 8<sup>th</sup> June 1789 that it was "the completest place of worship I have ever seen..." describing it as "beautiful in the highest degree."

**DIALOGUE: *Building the Church* (Performers)**

Peter: Eh... Jesus...?

Jesus: Yes, Peter?

Peter: Its about that church...

Jesus: What church Peter?

Peter: The church... your church... the one you're going to build on me.

Jesus: Oh that church... What about it?

Peter: I was just wondering what it was going to be like...

Jesus: That depends...

Peter: Depends on what?

Jesus: The building material...

Peter: Oh right... See I fancied a big cathedral, a basilica... Made out of marble. I've been and seen the architect and he says...

Jesus: No I think you misunderstand me Peter...

Peter: Oh, you fancy something smaller... More cosy and comfortable... Made out of bricks and...

Jesus: No Peter... What I'm saying is that my church will not be made of bricks and mortar, or polished stone, but from living stones...

Peter: Living stones? Is that some sort of environmentally friendly stuff... Biodegradable building materials?

Jesus: I suppose you could put it that way... But I'm actually talking about people...

Peter: People!? Oh, I see, "living stones" that's one of your parable things again, isn't it... I like it... Very poetic... have to write that down to use that myself some time...

Jesus: Recycling my words... You are getting to be environmentally friendly!!

Peter: So you're not really going to "build" a church building... You're really going to form an organisation... Can I be the Chairman... John could be secretary... he writes well, but should we have Matthew or Judas as treasurer? And what about the constitution? Do we need to get legal advice? The lawyers aren't too keen on you, you know...

Jesus: No... its not an organisation either, Peter.

Peter: What? If its not an organisation or a building what is it then?

Jesus: Well, I suppose you could call it a body... or maybe a family...

Peter: Well, how can you become part of this family?

Jesus: Same way as ever... You're born into it...

Peter: Oh so this church will only take people if they have the right father...

Jesus: I suppose you might say that... When you are born again as a child of God...

Peter: Born again?

Jesus: Yes... Go and ask Nicodemus... I explained all that to him...

Peter: So can anyone be part of this family, this church?

Jesus: Yes.

Peter: Gentiles as well as Jews?

Jesus: Yes.

Peter: Women as well as men?

Jesus: Yes.

Peter: Children as well as adults?

Jesus: Yes. Yes. Yes. Everyone. Anyone. All sizes, shapes, colours, cultures, languages and inside leg measurements...

Peter: No restrictions?

Jesus: No.

Peter: But then how do you keep the riff-raff out?

Jesus: They are the very ones I want in...

Peter: Sounds like a pretty dysfunctional family if you ask me...

Jesus: I didn't...

Peter: But Jesus... You said you were going to build this church on me... Yet you haven't given me the slightest clue how its supposed to work... You haven't told me how it should worship... What songs it should sing... How it should be run... What we will call its leaders... What costumes we should wear...

Jesus: What does it matter?

Peter: What does it matter? Well, what happens if you disappear off the face of the earth, and I drop dead? What will happen then? Will the whole thing just disappear in a puff of smoke?

Jesus: Well, that would be an interesting way of choosing your successor?

Peter: What?

Jesus: Never mind... And never mind about the church... You're not the builder... God is. Just you concentrate on following me.

Peter: That's hard enough...

Jesus: I suppose it is... But its only when each living stone is following me, that they will fit together into a church which is useful and attractive.

Peter: A church that is useful and attractive... That's a nice idea... A multipurpose building with pastel colours, soft seats...

Jesus: Peter... How many times do I need to tell you? the church is not a building...

Peter: Sorry Jesus... Its hard to think of it in other ways...

Jesus: You'll not be alone in that Peter...

Peter: But I do like the idea of it being made of living stones...

Jesus: I'm glad... Actually, that reminds me of a joke... What would you say to a member of the church who practices medicine if you met him in the jungle?

Peter: I don't know, what would you say to a member of the church who practices medicine if you met him in the jungle?

Jesus: Dr. Living Stone I presume...

Peter: I don't get it...

Jesus: Don't worry, it'll make sense in about 2000 years...

Peter: Yes but will this church you're talking about still make sense in 2000 years?

### **PRAYER...** (*Reader/Assembly Buildings 1*)

*Lord may you build your church*

*And despite the frail nature of us, its building materials*

*May it be "beautiful in the highest degree."*

*AMEN*

### **DIRECTIONS**

- \* En route discuss the importance of the buildings your church operates from and its history.
- \* Are they a help or a hinderance?
  - *Continue along Rosemary Street.*
  - *Cross Royal Avenue carefully and go straight ahead into Berry Street*
  - *Follow the hoardings round to the left until they then take you round to the right again into Bank Square.*
  - *Straight ahead should be St. Mary's Church*

## 9. ST. MARY'S CHAPEL LANE\*

### READING (Reader/Assembly Buildings 2)

*In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, <sup>27</sup> to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup> The angel went to her and said, 'Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you.... Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. <sup>31</sup> You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. <sup>32</sup> He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, <sup>33</sup> and he will reign over Jacob's descendants for ever; his kingdom will never end.'*

Luke 1: 26-28, 30-33

### BACKGROUND (Accompanist/Assembly Buildings Lead)

In the census of 1782, there were only 365 Catholics recorded living in Belfast, but with the support of a collection from local Church of Ireland and Presbyterian congregations, funds were donated to the building of this first Catholic Chapel in the town dedicated to St. Mary the Mother of Jesus and it opened on 30 May 1784. In 1813, the pulpit from the then derelict St. George's was donated to the Chapel by the Anglican Vicar of Belfast. The irony is that this was the pulpit from which the Rev. George Royle reputedly preached a sermon entitled on the 15<sup>th</sup> June 1690 to King William III en route to the Battle of the Boyne entitled "Arise Great King", telling him that God "shall tread down your enemies. Then as by your faith you shall subdue kingdoms, so you shall secure that faith too from all the dangers of Popery and superstition." In 1954 the adjacent grotto dedicated to "Our Lady of Lourdes" was established and to many Protestant people of the city who would never have been inside a Catholic church this is perhaps the most well-known site of Catholic devotion in the city... But one young woman who was the daughter of a paramilitary leader in Sandy Row once said to her minister "Don't tell my Dad, but when things are getting me down, I pop round to the St. Mary's in Chapel Lane, because it's the only place open for prayer all the time in the town..."



**POEM: A Protestant's Prayer to Mary on the Quiet** (*Reader /Assembly Buildings 1*)

Mary, You haven't heard from me before  
so forgive me if I am distracting you  
from your more regular correspondents,  
but I'm one of the "other sort"  
so I'm not really sure,  
whether I should be bothering you at all,  
or whether talking to you  
will actually get me in bother  
with your son, a bit like  
telling one of my friends' mothers  
what my mate has been doing  
when she's not around.  
Not that I've anything bad to say  
about your son. Who would?  
Apart from those religious leaders  
who stitched him up in that kangaroo court  
back in Jerusalem, of course.  
But I suppose its because  
of other religious leaders  
down through the years  
that I just wanted to have  
A quick word. You see,  
because they taught us  
that we should only talk  
to your son and not you  
or any of the saints who  
are up there with you already...  
Well, I think its got out of hand  
so that, not only do we not  
talk to you or them, but  
we barely think at all about you  
or them (except for St. Nicholas  
and St Patrick on certain days,  
and I'm not too sure we are

doing them much justice then).  
You are highly favoured, the Angel said.  
Well, not by us, I would say.  
All generations will call you blessed,  
your cousin Elizabeth told you.  
Well, only the generations  
in certain parts of the church.  
And sadly we haven't seen them  
as blessed or highly favoured either.  
But we're learning...  
I'm just sorry it's taken this long.  
I long to be as open to God as you were.  
See you soon.

#### **PRAYER...** *(Accompanist/Assembly Buildings 2)*

*Lord may we be as open to you and your purposes  
As Mary was as we seek to live up to our calling  
To transform this world in your name.  
AMEN*

#### **DIRECTIONS**

- \* En route discuss relationships with the Catholic Church in the area you come from.
- \* What about other denominations?
  - *Turn left along Chapel lane.*
  - *Cross Castle Street carefully and go straight along Queen Street until you come to Wellington Place*
  - *Turn right into College Street*
  - *On the left at the junction of Queen Street and College Street you will see the Roost, one of many new student accommodation blocks that have sprung up in the city in recent years. Some are run by the Universities but many, like this one are run by private companies for profit.*
  - *Turn left into College Avenue*
  - *On the left as you walk along College Street is another of the new student accommodation blocks, this one run by Queens University. Across the road in the old Belfast Institute is another of the private "Roost" facilities.*
  - *Cross the College Avenue/Fisherwick Place junction via the crossing and assemble in the gateway of RBAI.*