



BELFAST CATHEDRAL

THE CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF ST. ANNE

A Tribute issued by The Very Reverend Stephen Forde, Dean of Belfast, and Father Martin Magill, PP St John's Parish, Falls Road, Belfast on the first anniversary of the funeral of Lyra McKee held on 24th April 2019.

Last Saturday marked one year since the shocking events of Maundy Thursday evening, 18th April 2019, when journalist Lyra McKee was shot dead while covering an attack on the PSNI in the Creggan in Derry.

As news of Lyra's death was relayed across our land and across the world on Good Friday morning, there was a deep sense of dread that the community was sliding back into a downward spiral of violence and murder. There was the fear that the gains of 20 years of peace-building under the Good Friday Agreement could easily be lost to a new generation, those who did not remember the killings and destruction of the long decades of the Troubles.

At the same time, Lyra left behind a grieving family - her mum Joan, her three sisters Joan, Nichola and Mary, her two brothers Gary and David, and her partner Sara. Also grieving her murder was the wide circle of friends whose lives were touched, shaped or challenged by the person Lyra was across many boundaries.

At the request of Lyra's family, we were privileged to lead Lyra's funeral service in St Anne's Cathedral, Belfast, one year ago, on 24th April 2019. It was an emotionally charged service for all who attended, including the Irish President and Taoiseach, the British Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition. Also in attendance were the leaders of all the political parties in Northern Ireland - then deadlocked in their inability to re-establish the Northern Ireland Assembly.

The cathedral was packed, inside and out, with those of Lyra's post-Troubles generation, who wanted to build a new and different community to one of sectarian division and deep-seated bigotry.

During his address, Fr Martin posed the powerful question "Why in God's name does it take the death of a 29-year-old woman with her whole life in front of her... to get us to this point?" This presented a challenge and created a turning point, not just in the service, but for all the politicians present.

Today, one year on, and in the midst of the coronavirus crisis, we want to commend the First Minister Arlene Foster and Deputy First Minister Michelle O'Neill, along with the British and Irish Governments, for seizing the moment of Lyra's funeral to find a way to re-establish the Power Sharing Executive at Stormont. Their working together, along with the Executive ministers, health professionals and ordinary people from every background, has been essential to support this community through this unprecedented coronavirus crisis.

Their working partnership is a fitting tribute to Lyra, whose passion was to bring together people who think they are divided.

At this time we also remember Lyra's mum, Joan, who did not live to see the poignant first anniversary of Lyra's death. In the face of today's health challenges, we encourage our politicians, community groups and individuals with the vision and passion of Lyra to continue to work together, striving to see our community emerge as that better society which Lyra had hoped for and lived for to her last day.

Dean Stephen Forde

Father Martin Magill PP