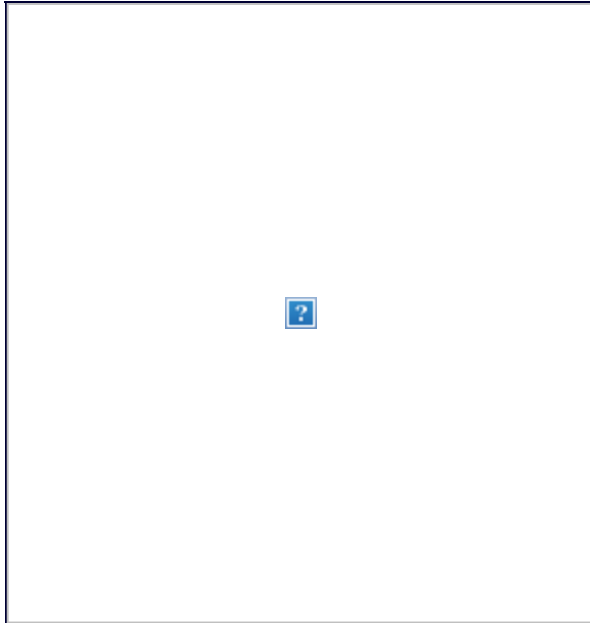


Mayor opens new Local Bahá'í Centre in Londonderry



The Mayor of Derry, Councillor Kathleen McCloskey, opening the Centre

THE OFFICIAL OPENING of the new Bahá'í Centre at 5 Clarendon Street in the historic city of Derry/Londonderry, Northern Ireland, took place on 1st May, 2003. The rented first floor premises have been used for community activities for more than a year and a conscious decision was taken by the Spiritual Assembly in 2002 to make the situation official, starting with checking with the fire and planning authorities what needed to be done if the venue was to be developed into a proper Bahá'í Centre. The authorities were more than helpful and a programme of upgrading, necessary alterations, and finally redecoration resulted in a Centre worthy of the Faith at this stage in its development in Londonderry. It is close to the city centre and prominently signed.

The Assembly decided that an official opening ceremony should be held. The Mayor of Derry, Councillor Kathleen McCloskey, was approached and kindly agreed to “do the honours”. Local Bahá'ís, friends, and especially non-Bahá'ís who had been particularly helpful in the process of establishing the Centre, were invited. Representation was sought from the Bahá'í Council for Northern Ireland and our own National Spiritual Assembly, of the Bahá'ís of the United Kingdom was informed of developments, as was the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the Republic of Ireland (the city is right on the Irish border and there is ongoing North-South cooperation with our neighbouring Bahá'ís in the Republic: Letterkenny in County Donegal is in fact our nearest neighbouring community).

It had been planned to have part of the ceremony outdoors, starting with the ribbon-cutting, but at the front door. However it became a “soft day” (translation for non-Irish readers: the rain started to pour down) so after the Mayor was welcomed by Elizabeth Palin, Chair of the Local Assembly, and had cut the ribbon for the benefit of the press and Bahá'í-photographers, proceedings moved to the main meeting room.

There, the Mayor delivered a positive and supportive message of greetings, and it is worth quoting her words in full:

“Good morning everyone, I am delighted to be here with you on May Day to celebrate the opening of the new centre here in Clarendon Street. The Bahá'í community in Derry has been growing in the city since 1971 and the Bahá'í ethos of unity in diversity is something that has inspired many people from all walks of life within the north-west and on a more regional and national basis too. Important contributions have been made by the local Bahá'í community on the proposed appointment of a Commissioner for Children and

the community has also done sterling work in the struggle to overcome racism, discrimination and prejudice within our city. Your community adds to the richness and diversity of life within this city and I look forward to many more years of Bahá'í involvement and good work within the wider community. I wish you all great success with the centre and many happy times here so now, without further ado, I am delighted to announce the new Bahá'í Centre open....”

The Mayor was then presented with a bouquet of flowers by one of the young members of the community (right).



The message of greetings from the National Spiritual Assembly of the United Kingdom, read by Derry Bahá'í Joan Catterson, referred to the new Centre as “a focal point of fellowship, love and activity”, while that from the Republic of Ireland National Assembly, read by Donegal Bahá'í Declan Devine, expressed the hope that it would “prove a valuable addition to the life of this historic city”. Patricia Irvine said a few words of appreciation on behalf of the Bahá'í Council for Northern Ireland and her Council colleague Eddie Whiteside read the Council’s message of greetings, which said in part:

“The Bahá'í community in Derry is an inspiration for Bahá'ís throughout Ireland. Individual members of the community have made sacrificial contributions to the development of the community in the United Kingdom, in Ireland and further afield. The community has been a feature of life in the city for nearly four decades and during that time has established a reputation for the way that it has handled its affairs. We are delighted to join with you at this time of celebration when you officially open your Centre. We know that the Centre will become a valuable focus for the community in the coming years and it is our ardent prayer that all your activities in the Centre will be blessed.”

Finally Dr Keith Munro, who served on the first Spiritual Assembly of Londonderry when it was established over thirty years ago, and has continued as a member since, said a few words. The formal part of the gathering closed with a prayer said by a local Bahá'í youth, Colin Palin.

Refreshments were served and the non-Bahá'í guests – including the press – were presented with an information pack about the Faith. At the time of writing the first of these papers to be published since the event has appeared – with a large colour photograph of the ribbon cutting – on its front page.

A slate plaque commemorating the opening of the Centre has been mounted on one wall of the meeting room as a lasting memento of the occasion.

Many people contributed in many ways to the development of the Centre and the success of the day’s events, and no disrespect is meant to their efforts if two are singled out by name: Lawrence McMinn and Adrian Temple who worked hard and in truly “handson” fashion to make such a success of the Centre and the day.

Iain S. Palin, Acting Secretary,
Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of
Londonderry, Tionáil Spioradalta
Bhá'ithe Dhoire.

