

(Revised  
and delivery)

**THANKSGIVING SERVICE FOR THE LIFE AND MINISTRY OF  
THE RIGHT REVEREND WILLIAM McCAPPIN,  
FORMER BISHOP OF CONNOR**

**Belfast Cathedral 11 October at 3.30 p.m. Embargo until delivery.**

**ADDRESS OF THE MOST REVEREND DR ROBIN EAMES  
ARCHBISHOP OF ARMAGH AND PRIMATE OF ALL IRELAND**

Symbolism plays an essential part in the life of the Church. What something or someone represents in the perception of others can be of great significance.

On the mantle-piece of the lounge in the McCappin home at Carryduff stands a wooden Celtic Cross. Beautifully finished and varnished it was one of the prized possessions of Bishop William McCappin. Among the many gifts and momentos of his years as Bishop of Connor that Cross held a special place of affection. It was the work of a prisoner in the Maze prison. It represents hours of careful craftsmanship. It was given as a token of appreciation of the work and patient counselling offered at a time of intense tension in the prison to a bishop who cared, who listened and who tried to understand. It remains today not only a reminder of the gratitude of prisoners, but a silent witness to the calibre and nature of why they were grateful : the bishop had brought to them a Christian ear which listened and a presentation of the Church which asked quite simply : "can we help?".

As I think back to William McCappin, my episcopal colleague and friend in this city years ago, so many reflections present themselves to me. I think of a bishop across the river from Down and Dromore whose friendship I valued, whose company I enjoyed and whose support had never to be questioned. I think of a committed priest and bishop who knew this diocese of Connor intimately, who knew its clergy and their parishes well, who though steeped in the details of administration was prepared to see the human face beyond facts and figures and who was called by his Church to give episcopal leadership to its largest diocese at a time of great change and turmoil.

Following a brilliant academic career in Trinity College, Dublin, William McCappin was ordained for the curacy of St Mark's, Armagh in 1942. It was the time of war and he became a Chaplain to the Forces in April 1944 seeing service in Britain, north-west Europe and later in India and Malaya. In 1947 he returned to the diocese of Connor to be Curate-in-charge of Ardoyne. Four years later he became Rector of Jordanstown and in 1959 Rector of St Bartholomews on the Stranmillis Road. For twelve years he was Church of Ireland Chaplain to the then Stranmillis Training College. It was in 1965 that he became a Minor Canon of this Cathedral of St Anne. Then in 1969 he made ecclesiastical history when he accepted the post of the first full-time



Archdeaconry of the Church of Ireland and worked in close conjunction with a bishop he greatly admired and respected, the late Bishop Arthur Butler. This was a period of immense parochial re-organisation in Connor Diocese and I well remember, as I know many of you here today will do, the careful and painstaking paper work and consultation the then Archdeacon McCappin produced. He came to know the clergy and parishes of Connor as Archdeacon intimately and this turned out to be a period of preparation for the greater responsibilities he was to undertake in 1981.

On the retirement of Bishop Butler the House of Bishops elected William McCappin to the Bench and entrusted him with the episcopal over-sight of the largest diocese in the Church of Ireland. As his neighbour in Down and Dromore I remember calling at his home on the evening of his election. For William and Vivienne the call of the Church had come with suddenness that day but my abiding impression was of a man who was already deeply conscious of the weight of responsibility being placed on his shoulders - a man I was to come to know in the next few years as a close and cherished colleague and friend. Not for the last time I was aware of his perception of the symbolic as well as the actual concept of Episcopacy.

For the next six years William McCappin led the diocese of Connor through some of the worst years of what we call 'Our Troubles' in Northern Ireland. Parishes throughout the diocese, but particularly in north and west Belfast, faced the trauma of population movement, murder of parishioners and often violent reaction to events. The funerals of victims of terrorism, the words of re-assurance where people feared for their future, the on-going maintenance of normal parish life in the face of such pressure, the over-sight of Church life and the many facets of diocesan and central church administration demanded the attention of William McCappin. Through it all the pastoral care of his people and the many visits to rectories accompanied by Vivienne were to be a source of such encouragement. The course of events so easily drove wedges of suspicion and mistrust between people of different religious and political persuasion yet for Bishop McCappin the need to forge bridges of understanding between the Churches was a priority. He formed a close friendship with the then Bishop Cahal Daly and they worked closely together on many occasions. It is little known that at this time he held frequent lunch meetings in his home for Church leaders and politicians. At all times he urged a looking forward - a looking ahead to what might be if the great evil of sectarianism and the violence would end.

Behind the milestones of any career lie the constancy and personality of a person. A beloved father and husband, a devoted priest and bishop, a man who was asked to carry immense burdens of Church leadership in times of tension, a devoted and committed Anglican and scholar, a lover of music, a fisherman - such are the ingredients of a life for which we thank God this afternoon. Here in a Cathedral he loved, in which he was confirmed, where he sang as a choir-boy, and where years later he was consecrated Bishop we pause to remember with great thankfulness a man of so many parts.



For any bishop the tension between pastoral care of his people and the demands of day-to-day administration present a constant dilemma. In his interest in the post-ordination training of junior clergy in Connor Bishop McCappin frequently emphasised the true sense of duty as something based on the discipline of daily prayers and reading. This advice stemmed from his personal discipline and practice. He was a committed Anglican and he found in the ethos of Anglicanism an openness, a foundation of freedom in thought and a depth of experience which gave him such personal devotional satisfaction. He longed to see this Province at peace with itself. He frequently spoke of that longing. He gave so much of himself to building bridges with other Christian traditions. In time of war he had seen the ravages of violence. As a man of peace he worked and prayed for reconciliation - and he never retreated from any opportunity to reach out in love to others. This he saw as a priority in his Episcopate. But for William what I can only call the "Theological importance of the Episcopate" was vital. He embraced the role of Bishop. He gave to it particular dignity. He defended it with often dedicated determination. It played a very special part in his understanding of Ministry.

The Celtic Cross on the mantelpiece at Carryduff speaks so dearly of what gives us cause for thanksgiving. The pastoral caring of Billy McCappin for prisoners and his attempts to mediate in their disputes called for that simple action of gratitude. They chose to make a Cross. They valued his help and understanding, his compassion and interest. But they recognised why he did it. For them the symbol was the reality. He came to them and was with them as a witness to the Cross of his Saviour. He brought the love of his God - and they accepted him because of it.

After weeks of weakness borne with dignity and made so much easier by loving and dedicated care in Belfast City Hospital and surrounded by the love of his wife and family, William McCappin passed quietly into the arms of the God he loved and served. At a service in Carryduff Parish Church we committed him to God. Few who were there last summer could have failed to sense the great atmosphere of peace and thanksgiving. In the midst of our natural sorrow we thanked God for the release from earthly weakness. Today we gather to thank God for every remembrance of William McCappin, priest and bishop and we speak to Vivienne, Jennifer and Mark and the family words of affection and sympathy.

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