

NEWS

Derry loses 'a true great' in Eamon Melaugh

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Eamon Melaugh has been remembered as a man of 'principle, compassion and wisdom' at his Requiem Mass in Derry.

Father Gerard Mongan told mourners that Derry lost one of its 'true greats' on Monday with the death of the late civil rights veteran who was aged 92.

"He was a man of peace who had a social conscience expressed in action that stretched from home to vulnerable people across the globe.

"We will never know how many lives were touched by his generosity that had room for everyone," Fr. Mongan said during his funeral homily at St. Columb's Church in the Long Tower on Wednesday morning.

A founding member of the Derry Housing Action Committee (DHAC) and the Derry Unemployment Action Committee (DUAC) in the 1960s, Mr. Melaugh was also the voice behind Radio Free Derry during the Battle of the Bogside.

Addressing the congregation on behalf of Eamon's wife Mary May and the rest of the Melaugh family, his son, Dr. Martin Melaugh spoke, of how his father had 'outlived most of his friends and political comrades'.

Dr. Melaugh observed how his politics were shaped by the social conditions he was born into on July 4, 1933. He had direct experience of the dreadful housing conditions in Derry during the 'hungry thirties'.

"His early years in Bridge Street were marked by poverty. They shared a house with seven other families. There was an outdoor toilet and there was washing in the yard as well so the water would freeze in the winter.

"He often told me that he was one of the last people to walk the streets of Derry barefoot," Dr. Melaugh remarked.

Eamon had to leave school at the age of 14 in order to support his family and worked various jobs.

The congregation was told how education had been a byword throughout his life and how Eamon had encouraged



The late Eamon Melaugh pictured posting 400 letters to leaders of the Christian churches on the issue of child poverty. (DER0214PG090)



Eamon Melaugh addressing a protest in the 1960s. Also pictured is Eamon McCann.

all of his children to seize all the opportunities available to them.

His early working life had included a stint driving the trams in Glasgow in Scotland where he had had to 'rely on his skills he learned as an amateur boxer in Derry to help protect his passengers'.

He returned to Derry where he married his wife Mary May McLaughlin in 1956 and raised a family of 11 in Creggan. The couple went on to foster 15 children who needed short or medium term care.

He was a ubiquitous presence during the civil rights campaigns of the 1960s.

"Eamon became well known in Derry during the civil rights movement and the various Derry action committees. His determination and belief in social justice helped drive a collective effort that led to the major reforms in November 1968.

"He regretted the later violence of the Troubles and the suffering it caused," his son said.

He remained active in politics and social justice activ-

ism with many people seeking his advice on employment and welfare issues.

During the 1980s and 1990s he contested several elections as a Workers' Party candidate without success.

In his later years he travelled widely. This included trip to South Asia where he was deeply moved by the deprivation he encountered.

"In India he witnessed the severe poverty amongst street children and when he returned to Derry he began raising funds to try and alleviate their condition and with

the help of family and friends he set up a registered charity called Action With Effect in 2005. It raised over £900,000 before closing in 2024 due to his ill health," said Dr. Melaugh.

In his funeral homily Fr. Mongan noted: "It was his own experience of poverty growing up that motivated his deep empathy for those street children of India.

"How aptly named was his charity, Action With Effect, a title made so real, concrete? Eamon's life was action and effect and surely Eamon's epitaph for a life well lived, a man of principle, compassion and wisdom."

As well as being a key actor during the mobilisations of the 1950s and afterwards, Mr. Melaugh was also an important documenter of those turbulent years.

When he was 13 his father Tommy taught him how to develop contact print and there began a life long passion for photography.

"His first camera was a second hand Box Brownie which he bought for 10 pounds from a pawn shop in Bishop Street and photography remained an important part of his life. During the Troubles he took a number of photographs and a

book was published in 2005," Dr. Melaugh recalled.

On behalf of the family his son paid tribute to the doctors, nurses and staff at Altnagelvin who cared for Eamon following a recent fall and period in hospital.

Gratitude was expressed equally towards the staff of Alexander House on Bishop Street who supported him through his long-time residence there and a dementia diagnosis during his latter years.

Fr. Mongan said: "There are no words to express how proud, how privileged we all are for having journeyed some or all of those times and seasons with Eamon."

The Parish Priest said his family took great consolation in the fact that Eamon had done everything he could 'to make this world a better place for all'. "We have lost a true humanitarian," he observed.

His son Melaugh reflected: "Given the circumstances he was born into he lived a full and meaningful life. He will be deeply missed."

'How Great Thou Art' was sung as the recessional hymn as Eamon Melaugh's casket was carried from the chapel. His remains were taken to the City Cemetery for interment.