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TUESDAY
01/05/2007
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Ex-Army officer launches reflection day

On the 15th anniversary of the day the IRA murdered his good friend in a border bomb attack, a former English Army officer today helped launch a special day of reflection in a cross-community bid to draw divided communities together.

By: Press Association

Andrew Rawding is working with the Healing Through Remembering (HTR) group which seeks to ensure a peaceful future in Northern Ireland through focusing on ways of dealing with past conflict.

In Belfast the group announced the first Day of Private Reflection which it hopes people will use to make a commitment to a peaceful future while not forgetting the past. The Summer Solstice - June 21 and the longest day in the year - has been chosen for the special day.

The group said while considering potential dates they discovered there was not a single date in the calendar year which was not the anniversary of the death of at least one person in the Northern Ireland conflict.

Father Kevin Mullan said they had settled on June 21.

He said: "It is a day that is forward looking and backward looking at the same time.

"It is a day which represents a pause in the cycle of nature, a moment to reflect."

Sean Coll, chair of the HTR Day of Reflection sub group, said the day of reflection was a society wide initiative but no events had been organised to mark it.

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"Private is the key word as we invite people to take part. Participation should be entirely voluntary.

"Some people may want to reflect on their own, others may decide to do so within a family, a group or organisation."

The organisation hopes it will become annual and may organise events in future years.

Rev Rawding, a former Captain in the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers and now ordained into the Church of England, said: "It is all about providing an opportunity for all of us to acknowledge the deep hurt and loss caused by the conflict in Northern Ireland.

"It is an opportunity to remember all of those - men, women and children - who on a daily basis still live with the pain and consequences of conflict."

There was no specific reason May 1 was chosen for the launch of the day of reflection, but it happened to be the anniversary of the day in 1992 when his friend, Fusilier Andrew Grundy, was killed.

The IRA rolled a 1,000lb bomb down a hill and detonated it outside the army's main cross-border checkpoint on the Belfast to Dublin road at Killeen.

Rev Rawding remained in the Army until 1999 when he resigned his commission and took Holy Orders.

But the pull of the two-and-a-half years he spent in Northern Ireland's border region remained strong and he moved to the province, setting up home in Armagh city, and started working for reconciliation and peace.

He launched what he said was a voluntary journey to build a relationship with IRA members. "It was part of my reflections and dealing with my grief and anger at what had happened."

He added: "I came across and started to build a relationship with republicans and people who had been involved in the IRA in South Armagh to pave the way for there being some space for Andrew's family and others to come to South Armagh to come to terms with their grief."

In 2004 he accompanied his dead friend's mother and brother to the spot where he died. "His father wouldn't come anywhere near Northern Ireland," he said.

Rev Rawding is by no means the only member of HTR who has lost someone during the violence.

Maura Kiely has the terrible murder of her teenage son Gerard more than 30 years ago to reflect on come June 21.

The first year economics student at Queen's University Belfast was shot

dead alongside another student when loyalist gunmen opened fire on worshipers leaving a Catholic church after Sunday Mass near the university in 1975.

Mrs Kiely said: "We must think about how things might have been had the present peace process come about sooner - nearly 4,000 lives could have been saved, including that of my own son Gerard who was only 18."

Kate Turner, HTR project coordinator, added: "A Day of Reflection is only one small piece of the jigsaw necessary to address fully the legacy of the past.

"However, it could provide a way of enabling us to begin to both remember the past and go forward as a society."

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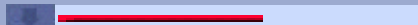
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