

St Patrick's Gateway Church officially re-opened by President



President Higgins and his wife Sabina being told about the story of the Mermaid Tile by Rev Dr John Parkin (Director, St Patrick's Gateway Centre) and Joe Stokes (Chairperson, St Patrick's Gateway Company).

President Michael D Higgins officially re-opened the St Patrick's Gateway Church in Waterford following its extensive refurbishment.

The Methodist Church is now used not only for a church but for concerts, community gathering and classes.

As MC, Councillor Mary Roche reminded the gathering, the building has gained "a great benefit and significance for inner city residents".

During his speech, President Higgins praised those responsible for retaining the building's integrity during its renovations and also commented upon the site's archaeological significance.

"Today we gather on a twelfth century site which recalls to us, yet again, that this city pre-dates the Norman invasion, and indeed that it takes its name from the Norse word Vedrafjord meaning 'haven from the windswept sea'," he said, "However, today is also a reminder of how Waterford continues to change and evolve - of how its roads and laneways and buildings and old family names span many decades and many different versions of the Ireland we know today."

President Higgins continued: "All areas have their own treasures - their old castles or schoolhouses or courthouses or, indeed, churches such as this one. They are important resources in linking us to our past, in allowing us to understand the history that shaped our community and in helping us to take a real pride in playing our part in the ongoing evolution of that community," "For some 350 years, St Patrick's Union Church has been an integral part of Waterford City, and today it still showcases part of the distinctive heritage for which the city is renowned. Like all great historic buildings, St Patrick's connects modern day Waterford with its past, providing an authentic link between contemporary Waterford and its rich and varied history. Throughout the years, residents of Waterford have come to St Patrick's to pray and worship, generation following generation to this quiet and hallowed space as, across the centuries, the world continued to evolve and change."

The President added: "Today we mark the beginning of yet another chapter in the story of St Patrick's; the creation of a new space of community for all the residents of Waterford".

“This historic building has been re-imagined and re-invented, not only through the creatively undertaken renovation and refurbishment of the Church and graveyard itself, but also through the vision of St Patrick’s Gateway Centre who have preserved the integrity of the building whilst also crafting a new resource for the social, cultural, artistic, sporting and educational needs of Waterford City.”

After the official element of the ceremony, President Higgins posed for photographs and exchanged greetings with members of Waterford’s African community.

The Rev Peter Murray, President of the Methodist Church in Ireland also spoke and spoke of his community’s honour at having the President in attendance. He told the gathering about the Cromwellian siege which was waged on the Western Boundary Wall of the city which flanked the site, and a bell and water font dating from 1723 and 1721 respectively were still in use. It’s believed that as many as 40,000 people are buried in the church grounds.

St Patrick’s Gateway Centre Project Chairman Joe Stokes praised the Methodist Church for leasing the building while Tom Hosford and David Flynn came in for special praise, along with many volunteers and Tús workers who has contributed to the refurbishment project.

The retired Reverend John Parkin, was praised for his vision and bringing the project to fruition, work that was continued by his successor Rev Dr Sahr Yambas.

Music was provided by the Voci Choir, who will also sing at the Church on April 25th.

The visit to St Patrick’s brought the President’s official engagements in Waterford last Thursday to a close, where he was presented with a copy of a film tracing the history of Ballybricken.