

Bishop Treanor gives families archive documents on 1971 killings



NEARING CLOSURE: Bishop Treanor and Gerry Adams MP with relatives of the victims who hope that Church archive documents will aid them in their quest for justice

'Unfinished business' of the 'Murph Massacre' addressed

BY PAUL AINSWORTH

A SENIOR Catholic cleric has described the 1971 Ballymurphy Massacre as the "unfinished business" of the Saville Inquiry, claiming the killings should have been the starting point for the Bloody Sunday probe.

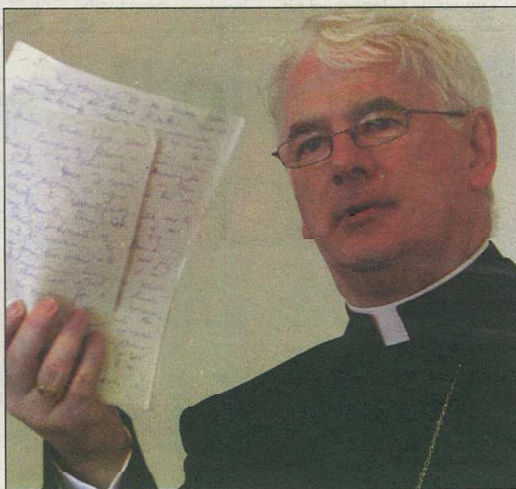
Bishop of Down and Connor Noel Treanor made the comments ahead of presenting families of the Ballymurphy victims with Church archive documents compiled at the time of the shootings.

The documents were handed over last Friday, and it is hoped the move will be a step towards the families' goal of establishing an independent international inquiry into the Ballymurphy Massacre, in which 11 people were killed by British Paratroopers between August 9 and 11, 1971.

Victims of the slaughter included a mother-of-eight and a local parish priest, while the some of the same Paratroopers went on to carry out the Bloody Sunday murders just months later in January 1972.

Prior to the presentation of the documents, Bishop Treanor joined relatives of the victims in a walk to the different spots in Ballymurphy where the killings took place. They were joined by local MLAs Gerry Adams and Alex Attwood, both of whom have also backed the calls for an inquiry, and the Bishop led prayers at the various sites.

However, despite comparing the West Belfast shootings to the massacre in Derry on Bloody Sunday, the Bishop told members of the press that those campaigning for the truth had no desire for an "expensive and lengthy Saville-style inquiry" into what happened, and stated that an acknowledgement and apology



ARCHIVE OPENED: Bishop Treanor with some of the documents

would help the relatives' ongoing healing process.

The church documents handed over on Friday consist of eyewitness reports taken at the time, including one from a man shot and wounded by soldiers as he tried to help fleeing women and children.

A shocking insight into the brutality of the soldiers is revealed by the report when a witness describes seeing Father Hugh Mullan shot and killed "before his eyes" despite carrying a white cloth in view of the firing Paratroopers.

Another key piece of evidence now in the hands of the families is a document handwritten by Corpus Christi Parish Priest Canon Padraig Murphy, who spoke to witnesses, while further witness statements include those from a serving British soldier at the time, a British Navy sailor, and an ex-Irish Guardsman.

Other disturbing revela-

tions include an account of how soldiers fired upon men wearing first-aid helmets and carrying medical kits, while other victims, along with Fr Mullan, were carrying white emblems – the international symbol of truce.

Following the Ballymurphy walk, Bishop Treanor spoke of how the Church uncovered the documents after almost 40 years, and of his hopes that relatives of those killed could be one step closer to achieving closure.

"I have met with representatives of the families on two previous occasions," the Bishop said.

"At the first meeting, the families asked me to establish what documents, if any, might be held in the archives of the diocese relating to the events surrounding the death and injury of their loved ones. An initial search yielded no significant results. However, thanks to some very helpful

suggestions from the families at the most recent meeting in June, we were able to initiate a more focused search of the archives and of other possible sources, such as parish records.

"This search will continue in the months ahead, and may yet yield further important results."

The Bishop also presented the families with newspaper clippings taken from an English Catholic newspaper published in the aftermath of the massacre. These contain quotes made at the time by the then Bishop of Down and Connor, who demanded a "most rigorous investigation in the interests of justice and truth" – a call that Bishop Treanor said he backed.

Referring to the events occurring in Derry months after the Ballymurphy slayings, Bishop Treanor continued: "Both were seminal events that profoundly influenced the future direction of the troubles. As in Bloody Sunday, the reputations of those killed and injured were actively besmirched and the evidence of reliable eyewitnesses was either ignored or actively discredited."

"This has led me to the view that the Ballymurphy killings are the unfinished business of the Saville Inquiry. Indeed, they would and perhaps should have been considered the necessary starting point for such an inquiry. That's not to say that I or the families are seeking an expensive and lengthy Saville-style inquiry into these events. It should be possible to find a mechanism of investigation into these and other events of the Troubles sufficiently efficient, robust and independent to contribute to a meaningful healing of memory and to a vindication of the truth for the individuals

and communities involved."

John Teggart, whose 44-year-old father was murdered opposite the Ballymurphy

army base, thanked the Bishop on behalf of the families and called for a meeting with British Prime Minister David Cameron over the issue.

He told Friday's press conference: "I welcome Bishop Treanor in joining our campaign for the truth. We will call for an immediate meeting with the Prime Minister to discuss terms of an independent investigation."

Quoting Mr Cameron's House of Commons apology following the Saville Report, Mr Teggart added: "Eleven innocent people were killed by the Paratroopers in Ballymurphy, and these killings were unjustified and unjustified."

Welcoming the presentation of the archive documents, SDLP MLA Alex Attwood highlighted the three key demands of the families.

"The publication of the documents will confirm the need for the families of Ballymurphy victims to receive the inquiry, apology, acknowledgement that they deserve," he said.

"The families have campaigned for justice in a dignified and resolute fashion for many years. When these documents are handed over, it will be a vindication of the truth. This information will be a further contribution to the families' quest for truth and justice that has been denied for so long."

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