

Mysterious Happenings in Irish Cathedral Don't Stop Worshipers

About 600 people gathered in St. Patrick's Cathedral in Ireland to help record a live worship album

A special worship event held in the “spiritual capital” of Ireland recently drew a capacity crowd who were undaunted by reports of mysterious incidents that had loomed over the event's preparations. More than 600 people attended the live recording of a worship album at St. Patrick's Cathedral in Armagh, the most venerated of Irish cities and the spiritual capital of Ireland for the last 1,500 years.

Preceding the gathering, flames had badly damaged the choir room at St. Patrick's, a relative of one of the backing vocalists died of a heart attack and a cathedral official hung himself. “The list of strange happenings was very extensive,” said worship leader Robin Mark.

But the popular Northern Ireland songwriter went on to lead the participants in praise—while a wintry storm blew outside. “[St. Patrick's] hasn't had a crowd that size for hundreds of years,” he told Charisma. It was in Armagh that Patrick—the great missionary who became known as the “Apostle of Ireland”—first set up his base in the fifth century.

The music of the evening was recorded for a new worship album,

Come Heal This Land, scheduled for release in the spring by Integrity Music. Mark has heard a rough mix of some of the songs and was impressed.

“It has captured the dynamism of the event,” he said. Mark’s previous Integrity album, Revival in Belfast, is still selling at the rate of 1,000 copies a week across the United States. The hopes are that this follow-up will have a similar impact.

“There was a great atmosphere,” said Ulster church leader the Rev. Paul Whittaker, who had the original idea for the Armagh event. “There was one point when all the instruments stopped. The band and the people sang, ‘Jesus, all for Jesus,’ and it was just reverberating around the cathedral.

“It was very haunting. Down all the hundreds and hundreds of years from when St. Patrick founded the place, there we were 1,500 years later, singing that song.”

Also attending was a team of intercessors from the United States who had been visiting Belfast. Their prayer support was appreciated—particularly because of the many challenges that threatened to choke the event.

“They went in a side chapel and just prayed the whole way through the evening,” Whittaker said.

Prayer-group leader Daphne Swilling from Georgia believes the gathering was more than just a recording. She said that the gathering was a prophetic picture of Ireland’s spiritual destiny.

"We know a well was open there that day in Armagh," she said. "Ireland must put on the garment of praise for her deliverance and destiny. Integrity [Music] and Robin are pieces of God's grand scheme."

In a bid to "unblock the wells" of that nation, the intercessors also visited other historic centers of Northern Ireland such as sites of the 1859 revival. "There was powerful prayer at all of these places but nothing quite like Armagh," Swilling said.

St. Patrick called Armagh "my sweet hill" and built his stone church on the hill where the cathedral now stands. There was no other place in Ireland where the gospel shined as brightly, and the city remains a place of pilgrimage. The 11th-century "High King" of Ireland, Brian Boru, is buried in the churchyard.

"The kingdom of God wants Ulster, and the re-establishment of a righteous altar of worship to the High King of heaven is the way," Swilling said.

Whittaker said that for all of its colorful past, Armagh is today a spiritually dark place. Sectarian violence has split the community, reaping a bitter harvest of distrust and fear.

"There are a lot of barriers to be broken down, and a lot of bridges to mend," he explained.

As chairman of the Armagh Diocesan Youth Council, Whittaker has sought to boost the faith of the younger generation by staging such events. He also cares for his own parish at Annaghmore in an area that's known as "the murder triangle."

And his faith is resolute.

Already, as a result of the Armagh worship event, church leaders there are talking about working together. Whittaker plans further worship initiatives and wants Mark to lead a time of praise at Drumcree Parish Church, regularly the scene of riots related to the struggles in Northern Ireland.

He also is proposing a “Celtic cathedrals” tour of the whole of Ireland—with the aim of holding strategic worship events at every major cathedral on the entire island. The itinerary would include Belfast, Armagh, Dublin, Cork, Limerick and Derry. “If it goes ahead, it will be tremendous,” Whittaker said.

Mark, Whittaker and intercessors and worshipers across the globe pray for Ireland—Northern and Southern—in hopes that there will be more of that revival legacy to come.