Willow Creek Association Global Leadership Summit in Dublin inspires St. Patrick's Day hillside event in Virginia, Co. Cavan

Report by freelance writer Bob McCoy

Something wonderful happened on a hillside in Virginia, Co. Cavan, on the morning of St. Patrick's Day this year.

It all began when the Venerable **Craig McCauley**, the Church of Ireland Rector in Virginia, Co Cavan, and Archdeacon of Kilmore, attended the Willow Creek Global Leadership Summit in Dublin at the end of 2010.

At that time little did Craig know that within a few short months of attending the Dublin GLS he would publish the following notice in the newsletter of the Virginia Group of parishes – Diocese of Kilmore:

> **Saint Patrick's Day:** There will be a special shared community event on St. Patrick's Day this year. There will be a service on Murmod Hill at 8am. We meet at Alan/Vida Cox's shed at 7.30am. Walk up to Murmod (about 20 mins) and have a shared time of worship together celebrating our common recognition of Saint Patrick. Afterwards we will walk back down from Murmod Hill where breakfast will be waiting!

As Craig himself tells it, before one of the GLS sessions the **Rev Dr. Keith McCrory**, a GLS facilitator in Dublin for the last three years, told everyone how, after listening to Gary Haugen of International Justice Mission, www.ijm.org , address the GLS in 2008, he was inspired to establish the Saint Patrick Foundation: www.saintpatrickfoundation.org

The purpose of the foundation is to reconnect Saint Patrick's Day to the ancient story that gave it birth.



Climbing Murmod Hill on the morning of St. Patrick's Day
Photograph by Janet McGuigan

Its goal is to make St. Patrick's Day, March 17th, one of the most significant community and reconciliation events in the world's annual calendar.

The more Keith told the GLS Dublin participants about his vision the more Craig McCauley was inspired by what he heard.

He came away from the Dublin GLS with a deep sense of wanting to get involved. The question was 'how'?

So, when after Christmas the local Parish Priest in Virginia, Fr. Johnny Cusack, called him to discuss the service for Christian Unity Week, Craig mooted the idea that they might try something different this year.

After all, Craig reasoned, they never got more than a handful turning up for the unity service in previous years.

Craig told Fr. Johnny Cusack all about the Saint Patrick Foundation and the priest was greatly taken with the idea. Between them, they set up a small cross church group (C of I and RC) to

organise a St. Patrick's Day event and everyone in the group became deeply committed to its success.

They decided to go up to the highest point overlooking Virginia, Co. Cavan – Murmod Hill, for an early morning service on St. Patrick's Day. And after the service everyone would be invited back to a local farm shed for breakfast.

The organisers did their calculations and they estimated that they would have about 50 people attending – 50 breakfasts too!

It was agreed that the service would take place at the old Mass Rock* on Murmod Hill. It would include readings from the Confessions of St. Patrick (The 'Confessio') and those attending would be asked to re-commit themselves that day, as people of God, to bringing to others the same gospel that Patrick brought to our land so many years ago.



Breakfast afterwards at Alan and Vida Cox's shed
Photograph by the Venerable Craig McCauley

The programme also included hymns and bible readings (The Beatitudes and The Great Commission). In addition, bunches of shamrock were blessed and handed out to everyone who attended.

As St. Patrick's Day grew closer, the organisers began to sense that the idea had caught the imagination of many people in the local community. Estimates were revised and hopes grew that... maybe 75 people might turn up!

But what happened at 7.30am on St. Patrick's morning was totally unexpected. Long before the appointed hour people started arriving at Alan and Vida Cox's farm shed from all over Virginia and its surrounding area.

And they kept arriving. And they never stopped arriving. So by the time the service began, the organisers reckon that nearly 250 in total had turned up to celebrate St. Patrick together on that glorious morning!

It was a memorable and deeply moving sight to see so many people walking up the road and up the hillside – there were children and young families and even some older people in the their late 80's. People of all ages were present.

And, as they came together on Murmod Hill the crowd applauded as Craig acknowledged that they were gathered around the Mass Rock, a symbol of division in the past. It was clear to everyone that something wonderful and memorable was happening.

As **Craig McCauley** describes it: he knew it was something very unique and special and unifying. **God is Good!**

*A Mass rock (Carraig an Aifrinn in Irish) was a stone used in mid-seventeenth century Ireland as a location for Catholic worship. Isolated locations were sought to hold the religious ceremony, as observing the Catholic mass was a matter of difficulty and danger at the time. Because such activity was illegal, the services were not scheduled and their occurrence was communicated verbally between parishioners.