

# Fr Alec Reid

**Here we reproduce Ruth Patterson's reflections on peacemaker Fr Alec Reid's life given shortly after his death in 2013.**

During the last few days there have been thousands of words used as many different people have sought to express their thoughts and feelings on hearing of the death of our dear friend, Redemptorist priest and pilgrim for peace, Fr Alec Reid. Tonight I have been asked to reflect on the lesson of his life. There are others here who are far more qualified than I to comment on the effectiveness of his huge contribution to our peace process. My only qualification is that we were gifted with a friendship that I deeply valued. Like anyone who finds themselves on a road less travelled, his journey was a lonely one. And for him, Restoration Ministries, my community, was a safe place where he could drop in unannounced and simply be himself. For someone who had promises to keep and miles to go 'before he slept', to be able to make a phone call from any number of unnamed destinations and just talk was, I think, for him a gift and certainly for me a huge privilege. I cannot separate Alec the man from Alec the priest and Alec the peacemaker. He was his vocation – and the Spirit of the Lord was upon him, holding these three roles together in one person. He had feet of clay like the rest of us but, with deep humility, allowed himself to be seized by vision.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu once

described himself as a prisoner of hope. Alec was similarly convicted. He never ever gave up. One of the biggest challenges during the Troubles was to simply keep on keeping on, trusting that there would be an end, a good outcome. For such a frail-looking man, often plagued by illness, he had huge tenacity. A word used very often in the New Testament is 'endurance'. Alec had that in abundance. At the funeral of Martin Luther King, the president emeritus of Morehouse College, where King had been a student, said: 'He was not ahead of his time. Every man is within his star, each in his time. Each man must respond to the call of God in his lifetime and not in somebody else's time.' Alec followed the star that had risen for him and remained true to the light that had fallen into his heart, not only for a way out of our conflict, but also for so many who were and are victims of those hard years, including the families of the disappeared. His commitment to peace was not confined to Ireland, as we know, but was global, most notably in the Basque region in Spain. Like a bridge over the troubled waters of violence, loss and anguish he laid himself down. It was his time and it was the right time. The Spirit of the Lord was upon him.

For me, and many others, Alec was a beatitude person. If you break the



word down it simply means, 'Let this be your attitude'. First and foremost he was a citizen of that upside down kingdom whose hallmarks are mercy, humility, purity of heart, a hunger for justice, peace-making and a willingness to pay the price to see right prevail. Ray Davey of Corrymeela used to say to us, 'Jesus never ever said "Blessed are the peace lovers." He said, "Blessed are the peace makers."' This world has far too many armchair pundits for peace but too few of those who are willing as 'children of God' to embark on such a messy and costly journey. With eyes wide open, Alec set out on such a path. Why? For him there was no option. The Spirit of the Lord was upon him. Sheila Cassidy in her book *Good Friday People* speaks of those like Alec who travel this way, 'As they walk they will, each in their own good time, arrive at their Kairos moment, the point of choice, of

One of the biggest challenges during the Troubles was to simply keep on keeping on, trusting that there would be an end, a good outcome. For such a frail-looking man, often plagued by illness, he had huge tenacity.

decision, of a stiffening of the sinews because danger is in the air and there is no going back.' His attitude was shaped by his citizenship and inevitably he had an effect on the world around him.

Beyond his public persona, Alec had the maturity of someone who knows who they are and has moved beyond the either/or and the labelling, judgemental response that can characterise so much of our living. He re-

fused to let his actions be determined by the label others put upon him, nor did he categorise or box the other. What he always saw was another human being in desperate need of help. Within him there was a huge well of tenderness. Patrick Mathias says that tenderness ‘involves compassion, the capacity to suffer with the other person with the vision of a shared future’. If this is not too strange a comment to make, I think Alec already lived, in the now, that shared future, because he had been grasped by the vision of peace and unity. The Spirit of the Lord was upon him.

He had a love for the Church universal but was not blind to its shortcomings. He was able to say some hard things without being destructive. In many of our conversations he used to say to me, ‘Ruth – when this is all over (this meaning the Troubles), you and

I will have to sort out Mother Church!’ He was also a strong advocate for greater involvement of women in Church and state, being totally convinced that had there been more women in key positions of influence the conflict that affected all of our lives for so long would have been resolved much sooner.

In recent months Pope Francis has delighted Catholic and non-Catholic alike by his bias for the poor, by calling for a culture of encounter, making space for honest dialogue, a daring to enter into complex webs of relationships, a recognition that this is a kairos time to show mercy, an acknowledgement that the feminine genius is needed wherever there are important decisions to be made – and much else. In all of this Alec was truly his brother. The Spirit of the Lord was upon him.

---

## Petition

First Friday: 4th August 2023

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

All petitions received are placed on our Sacred Heart altar, and Mass is offered for them twice each week.

Send to:  
The Sacred Heart  
Messenger,  
37 Leeson Place,  
Dublin, D02 E5V0, Ireland.