

Patrick Prendergast, Provost of Trinity College Dublin, Speaks at 244th Friendly Sons Gala

By Marita Krivda Poxon

On March 14th, The Society of the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick hosted their 244th Annual Banquet at the Union League to a sold out crowd of nearly three hundred. Leading the group was president Bernard Buckley who introduced the honored guests including: Joan Burton, Tanaiste/Minister for Social Protection; Michael J. Stack III, Pennsylvania's Lt. Governor; and both Consul General Barbara Jones and Deputy Consul General Anna McGillicuddy from New York's Consulate General of Ireland.

The Friendly Sons selected as their keynote speaker and guest of honor, Patrick Prendergast, provost of Trinity College Dublin, Ireland's ancient seat of learning, founded in 1592 as one of the seven ancient universities of Britain and Ireland.

Prendergast referenced two radical 18th century Trinity College patriots, Henry Grattan, a politician and Irish Volunteer who fought for Ireland's freedom, and Henry Flood, a statesman who campaigned for an Irish Parliament. Their founding in Dublin of the Irish Patriot Party occurred during the American Revolutionary War when the American colonists fought to free themselves from British rule. Many of these radical colonists were members of the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick. Very much aware of the 1771 founding of the Friendly Sons in Philadelphia, Prendergast said:

"I like to think there is a special connection between your society and my university, Trinity College Dublin. Two days ago was your annual Patriots' Salute. In Dublin, at the time of the American war of independence, a group of politicians founded the



Some Philadelphia area students currently attending Trinity College Dublin, are here with the Provost in Parliament Square in front of the Campanile. (L-R) Francesca Crooks of Gwynedd Mercy Academy High School '12, Elizabeth Maguire of Gwynedd Mercy Academy High School '12, Provost of Trinity Patrick Prendergast and Daniel O'Brien of LaSalle College High School '12

Irish Patriot Party: inspired by the American example, they pushed for legislative independence from Britain."

Before the dinner in the Lincoln Ballroom, Prendergast met informally with a small group of Trinity graduates who were gathered together under the leadership of Paul Maguire (BBS Trinity College 1980), chairman of the Pennsylvania Trinity Alumni group. Prendergast hopes to forge a stronger relationship between Trinity's US alumni estimated at over 5,000 graduates and their Irish alma mater. Worldwide there are over 100,000 graduates of Trinity.

He reminded the alumni and reiterated this later in his keynote address that Trinity is Ireland's leading university with certain high-tech fields like immunology and nanotechnology pushing this ranking into the top one percent of worldwide universities.

Prendergast, the 44th provost of Trinity, has stellar credentials all of which were earned at this ancient center of learning. The degrees awarded to him: a BA, BAI, PhD and ScD. His academic appointments at Trinity have shown his rise to the top position starting as a lecturer in 1995, then professor of bioengineering and biomechanics, dean of

graduate studies, vice-provost and chief academic officer. This culminated in 2011 with his appointment as provost/professor.

Prendergast thinks that for many years the Irish state has underfunded higher education and he has worked hard to change this. He has secured necessary funds to modernize the infrastructure of the university so that it can compete in the lucrative scientific and medical fields. With the assistance of the entire faculty, he has initiated a blueprint for future growth which he believes will promote a multidisciplinary excellence

across the board in the sciences as well as the humanities. The Provost's visionary plan called A Strategic Plan 2014-2019 Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland has three new vital capital development projects:

1. A new Trinity Business School which will include an entrepreneurial hub.
2. A new Engineering, Energy and Environment Institute called E3 to ensure that Ireland can be at the forefront of energy sustainability and wise use of Ireland's natural capital.
3. A new Translational Cancer Institute for advanced biomedical research, clinical care, and medical education

The provost hopes to partner with Philadelphia universities and high-tech corporations so that solid academic and business links can be forged extending Trinity's reach across the Atlantic. This will revitalize and reenergize the great partnership that has existed between America and Ireland. In his concluding remarks at the gala, the provost said:

"In Trinity we are building a global community - of staff, students, and alumni, including international students who study with us on a semester exchanges. We want membership of our community to benefit the individual, Trinity, and Ireland. We want a community bound - as your American poet Robert Frost put it - 'by countless silken ties of love and thought'.

"I look forward to strengthening the silken ties between my university and your society, between Dublin and Philadelphia - and I look forward to what this will mean for the citizens of my country, and of yours."