



CATHOLIC COURIER

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Christmas card

Next week we continue the tradition of our annual gift to readers with the *Catholic Courier's* Christmas Keepsake Edition, featuring stories on special holiday celebrations we hope will help bring home this season's true meaning.

Rev. Paisley has blasted the British government for its talks with the IRA.



Rev. Ian Paisley
Democratic Unionist
Party Leader

Gerry Adams
Leader of
Sinn Fein



Nationalist leaders Adams and Hume have submitted their own peace proposal to both governments.

NORTHERN IRELAND



Britain's Prime Minister John Major (left) and Irish Prime Minister Albert Reynolds meet at Dublin Castle, Friday Dec. 3, 1993.



John Hume
Leader of Social
Democratic Labour Party

Talks inspire hopefulness for Northern Ireland peace

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

As Christmas approaches, the people of Northern Ireland are hoping for something their region has not seen in 25 years.
Peace.

"There is a burning desire on each side of the community for peace," British Prime Minister John Major said in November, according to a statement sent by fax to the *Catholic Courier* from the British Embassy.

"This strength of feeling is far more intense than we have seen before," he added. "No one wants to continue living with death and terror and fear for another 25 years. This desire for peace gives an opportunity we must try to take."

A province of the United Kingdom since it was split from the rest of Ireland in 1920,

Northern Ireland saw years of discrimination against Catholics by its Protestant majority bear bitter fruit in 1969. That was the year a Catholic civil rights movement foundered on the rocks of violent Protestant reaction.

This led to the introduction of British troops into the region. First seen as protectors and then as persecutors of the Catholic community, the British troops became one of several players on the stage of low-scale war between armed supporters of British rule and of Irish unity.

Initiative after initiative to end the conflict has failed to bridge the gap between those favoring the region's provincial union with the United Kingdom — referred to as "loyalists" or "unionists" — and those favoring a united Ireland — many of them "nationalists."

For a number of historical reasons, most loyalists are Protestants and most nationalists are Catholics. However, members of both

Christian camps can be found on each side. When religion is mentioned, it is often used to define a citizen's political allegiance as much or more than his spiritual conviction.

Power-sharing efforts and other attempts at peace, including a 1985 agreement between Dublin and London, have paralleled the ebb and flow of bloodshed in which 3,000 people have died and more than 40,000 have been injured.

Both sides can recite a litany of torture, murder, atrocity and falsehood to justify continuing their mistrust of one another — and the British government, which is even mistrusted by many supposedly loyal to it.

But according to reports from Ireland and the United Kingdom, attitudes regarding the war-torn region's future seem to be shifting on all sides.

A poll in the Dec. 3 *Irish Times* revealed that

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