

18/03/2018

### **Manneken Pis Speaking Points**

Monsieur Le President, Mesdames at Messieurs, Dames en Heren, Ladies and Gentlemen, A Dhaoine Uaisle,

As the new Ambassador of Ireland to the Kingdom of Belgium, it is a great pleasure for me to participate in this very special ceremony, for the first time.

I am honoured to have been invited by the l'Ordre des Amis du Manneken Pis to dress this iconic Brussels figure in his special Irish costume, on the occasion of our National Day, the feast of St Patrick.

We have been participating in this ceremony since 2011, so this is the 8<sup>th</sup> time that an Irish Ambassador has been able to dress the Manneken Pis, thanks to the kind support of the Town of Brussels and the Friends of the Manneken Pis, the Brussels City Council and our colleagues in Tourism Ireland.

The Manneken Pis is the most famous resident of Brussels and we know that he now has about 1,000 costumes, which are on display in a special museum. We are delighted to be able to share in this long tradition of dressing him. The Manneken Pis is 399 years old this year, so he will have a very important birthday next year when he turns 400.

There are many different legends about this little boy, but they all seem to involve bravery or happiness or both, so it is surely no wonder that he has become such a popular and iconic figure and a symbol of this lovely city.

When I first visited Brussels almost 30 years ago, the first place I came to was here and to the Grand Place and the first souvenir I bought was a little replica of this little boy. Since then, we have always had one in our house. I never thought

then that one day I would be standing before you as the Ambassador of Ireland and with the opportunity to see the Mannekin Pis in his Irish clothes.

The costume he is wearing is based on a traditional Aran hand-knitted sweater, originally made and worn by fishermen on the Aran Islands off the west coast of Ireland but now a high fashion item. He is also wearing tweed trousers and a tweed cap; tweed is also a high quality Irish product. This year, I have decided to wear the same costume myself as the Mannekin Pis.

I would like to wish you all a Happy St Patricks Day, which is the day when we share all that is good about Ireland with the world. Many Irish people have made their home here in Belgium and my family and I have also received a warm welcome since we arrived here last summer.

Today's event is all about friendship and connection, celebrating not just Ireland's National Day but also our warm relationship with the people of Belgium and with the wider European Union, which has its heart and home here in beautiful Brussels.

As well as dressing the Manneken Pis, we are delighted that a number of iconic sites in Belgium are turning green again for St Patrick's Day this year, highlighting this strong connection between Ireland and Belgium. This included the Grand Place yesterday and also turning green are the Lille Gate in Ieper, for the first time this year, the Celtic Cross at Fontenoy, the Belfy at Mons and the Burge in Bruges. And yesterday the town of Dinant hosted a wonderful St Patrick's Festival which I was delighted to attend.

So, can I say to you all - Bon Fete agus La Fheile Padraig, a Happy St Patrick's Day

Merci beaucoup, danke well, thank you, go raibh mile maith agaibh go leir!