

Riley Institute hosts Lord Mayor of Dublin

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Eibhlin Byrne, the newly elected Lord Mayor of Dublin, was on campus last week Wednesday, Sept. 17 to share her city with Furman students, staff and faculty. At a CLP in Younts Conference Center's Shaw Hall, the Lord Mayor presented the state of Dublin, Ireland, the city she is leading through an economic and cultural transformation.

The Riley Institute, the departments of English and Political Science and the J. Kelly Sisk Lectureship in Public Affairs sponsored the event. Her lecture, "Moving the Celtic Tiger: Civic Leadership in 21st Century Dublin," served as the capstone event of Byrne's weekend tenure as Fellow-in-Residence at the Riley Institute.

In 1988, The Economist pegged Ireland as the poorest of the rich nations in the world. In 1997, the same magazine called Dublin "Europe's Shining Light."

GDP growth is one of the areas that led to Dublin's rise to superpower status. Dublin has seen a 6.7 percent growth in GDP, making the metropolitan area one of the fastest growing economies in the developed world.

Byrne noted that low corporate tax rates, states-driven economy, participation by women and an English-speaking workforce have helped to catapult Dublin into the limelight. Dublin became the catalyst for Ireland to become the Celtic Tiger, a standout in the greater European economy.

Byrne was elected Lord Mayor of Dublin after holding positions in advocacy, serving as senior manager with the Daughters of Charity Child and Family Services immediately prior to beginning her time as Lord Mayor. Byrne, only the sixth woman to serve as Lord Mayor, a position which comes up for reelection each year, is a member of the Fianna Fail party.

The Lord Mayor discussed at length present-day Dublin. Describing a city of growing international diversity, she noted the declining number of faith-based interactions per capita.



Media Credit: Alex Pinson
The Lord Mayor of Dublin, Eibhlin Byrne, speaks to an audience Sept. 17 in the Younts Conference center about Dublin's economic rise.

The number of individuals going to mass daily has dropped, but the city's cultural productivity has increased. "We, as a city, depend upon the creative energy of our people," said Byrne. Civic leadership, the currency that creates social capital, must be high.

"People, not buildings, make communities and shape great cities," the Lord Mayor reminded her audience, noting the connection between the Irish and United States' economies. "When America sneezes, we get the flu."

"Mayor Byrne reaffirmed how things at the local level can affect things at a larger level," said sophomore DJ Harris.

Andrew Trull, a junior who also attended the event, said, "Byrne provided a first hand account of the economic overhaul that Ireland has experienced."

"The Lord Mayor raised issues that the people of Dublin now encounter as Ireland transforms," sophomore Corban Doran said. "Hearing a leader discuss the problems faced by her country gave me a look at the considerations of world governments from a fresh perspective."