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Saturday, August 16, 2008

## Many families to attend 'unofficial' memorial event

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DAN KEENAN

**TOMORROW'S SERVICE:** MANY FAMILIES who decided not to attend yesterday's council-organised ceremony will remember their dead tomorrow at their own service.

The Omagh Support and Self Help Group chaired by Michael Gallagher, who lost his son in the bombing, will continue its tradition of staging a memorial service on the Sunday closest to the date of the bombing.

Many families were unhappy with aspects of the arrangements for the "official" ceremony yesterday.

Some relatives of the dead said they were troubled by the presence of certain unnamed political representatives from Northern Ireland and at the wording of the inscription in the new memorial garden, which was opened to the public yesterday.

The families were also upset by an early decision by members of the clergy from the four main denominations in Omagh to attend the council event and not to turn up at tomorrow's ceremony.

However, this decision was later reversed, with clergy promising to attend the self-help group's ceremony as well.

The council and the families have stressed repeatedly during the week leading to yesterday's anniversary that each victim's family was free to commemorate their loved ones as they saw fit.

The families insisted there was no competition between the two ceremonies, despite their public misgivings.

A council spokeswoman said yesterday's event was designed to provide an opportunity for all those affected by the bomb to come together with the wider community to remember.

"Furthermore, the event will recognise the tremendous steps which have been made by individuals and by the community as a whole in rebuilding lives in our town, and a key element of the ceremony will be a communal dedication to peace," the spokeswoman said.

"All members of the public are welcome to attend."

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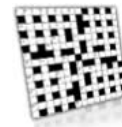
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