

Church News Ireland



Image of the day – Pro Bono Choir at St George's



Image of the day

Pro Bono Choir at St George's

Belfast's Pro Bonno Choir comprises members of the legal profession who sing throughout the year and assist various charities and causes.

Sheelagh Greer writes - What a joy to conduct the Pro Bono Choir for the last 8 weeks. They have been wonderfully warm and welcoming and we had a magical sell out concert on Tuesday night in the beautiful St George's Parish, High Street Belfast. A treat to have the skills of Jack Wilson on organ and piano and always a huge delight to hear the



magical voice of Karl McGuckin . Lots of exciting things in store for this choir!

People and places

Belfast's annual Black Santa sit-out begins

Belfast's annual Black Santa sit-out for charity gets underway and still going strong 47 years on.

Last year Black Santa raised £130,000 which allowed the appeal to support 126 local charities

This year's Black Santa Sit-out for charities got underway on the steps of St Anne's Cathedral in Belfast on Thursday.

December 15, 2023

It's the sixth Christmas sit-out for the current Dean of Belfast, the Very Rev Stephen Forde and the 47th year of a tradition started in December 1976 by Dean Sammy Crooks and maintained by his successors Jack Shearer, Houston McKelvey and John Mann.

Dean Crooks was dubbed Black Santa by the media because he wore a black Anglican clerical cloak to protect him from the elements, and the name has stuck for more than four decades.



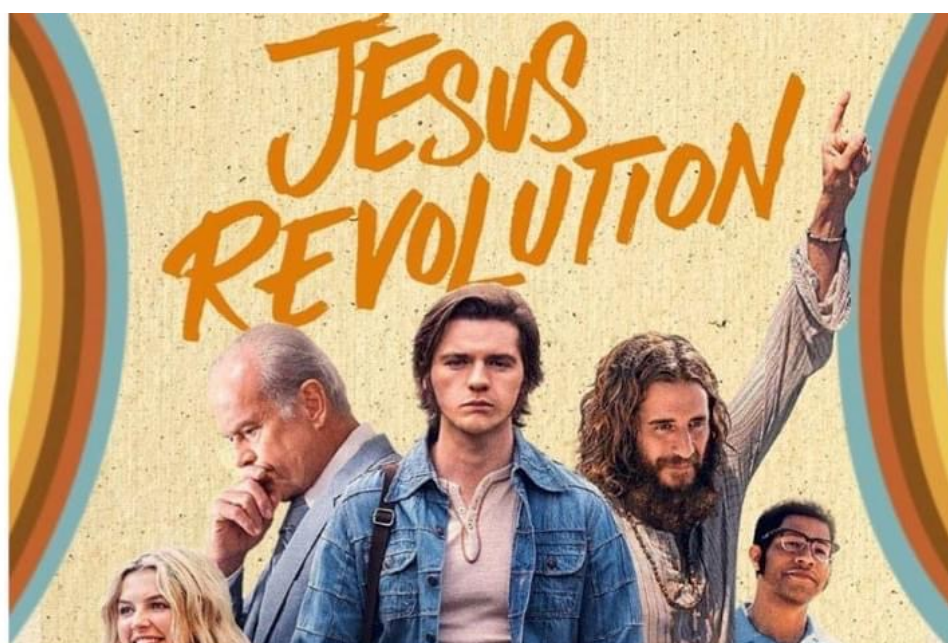
CIRCUIT FILM NIGHT

Strand Cinema

Sunday 7th January
2024
at 5.30pm

Please book your
seat through the
link at the bottom.

Cost £5
(plus a booking charge)



<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/circuit-cinema-night-the-jesus-revolution-tickets-776995112297?aff=ebdssbdestsearch>

Belfast East Methodists are going to the pictures

They are hosting a Circuit Film Night on Sunday 7th January.

December 15, 2023

There are limited seats in the Strand Cinema so please book your tickets on the link.

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/circuit-cinema-night-the-jesus-revolution-tickets-776995112297?aff=ebdssbdestsearch>



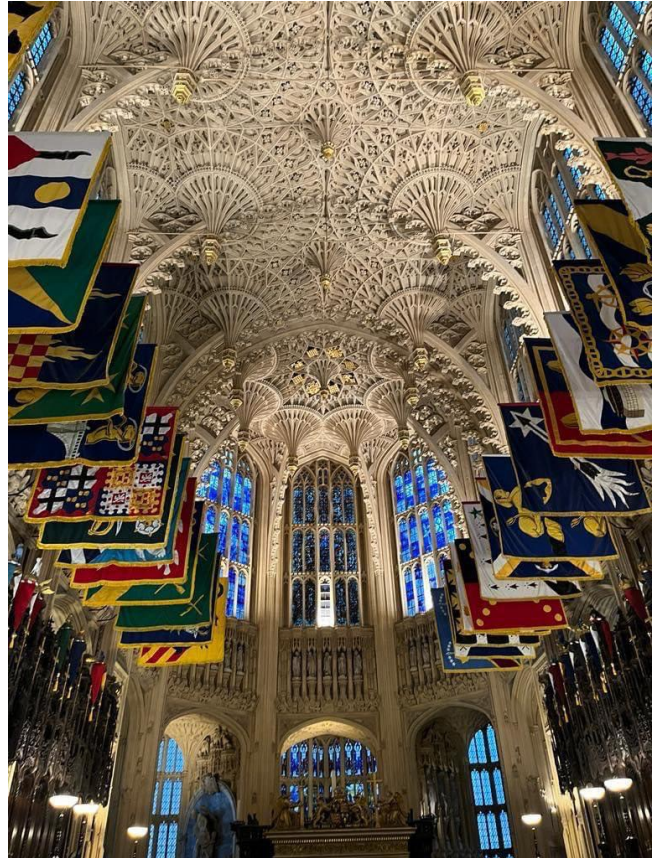
St. Catherine's Killead massive effort for Mission to Seafarers in Belfast

Rev Mark Reid, Chaplain to the Mission to Seafarers in Belfast has passed on his thanks to everyone in St. Catherine's Killead for their huge effort.

All in all, 104 Christmas Parcels are on their way to the Mission to Seafarers along with 12 blankets knit by Pins and Needles.

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An absolutely amazing contribution from the wee church at Killead! Well done to all who made up parcels in support of this important initiative.



Dalriada student wins prize in UK-wide Bible Project competition

Fergus Glenn (10T) travelled to London from Ballymoney this week, along with his parents, to attend a prizegiving for the School's Bible Project Competition.

Fergus was awarded 4th prize in the UK-wide competition. Prizewinners were given a tour of Westminster Abbey before the prizes were presented at Mary Sumner House, the world wide Mothers Union centre.

Bust of 'great Ulsterman and peacemaker' Lord Trimble unveiled at Leinster House in Dublin

A commemorative bust of Lord David Trimble has been unveiled at the seat of the Irish parliament in dedication to his work towards the Good Friday Agreement.

Present at the ceremony were the Church of Ireland Primate of All Ireland, the Most Reverend Archbishop John McDowell and the President of the Methodist Church in Ireland, Rev David Turtle.

The former UUP leader was the recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize 25 years ago in 1998, when it was also jointly awarded to former SDLP leader John Hume for their work negotiating the historic peace deal.

The commemoration for Lord Trimble is displayed at Leinster House beside a bust of Mr Hume which was unveiled in March, to coincide with the 25th anniversary of the agreement.

Speaker of the Irish parliament, Ceann Comhairle Sean Ó Fearghail, previously said their peace-building work was supported and admired at Leinster House and the people of Ireland “owe them a debt of gratitude”.

Mr Ó Fearghail unveiled the bronze bust of Lord Trimble, which was created by sculptor John Sherlock, at an event on Wednesday.

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Lord Trimble's wife Lady Daphne, their daughter Vicky, son Nicholas and his wife Sarah were present alongside members of the Hume and Sherlock families, representatives of the unionist community in Northern Ireland, and serving and former members of the Irish Dail and Seanad.

Also present were former Ulster Unionist Party leader Mike Nesbitt MLA and former UUP MP Lady Sylvia Hermon; and former Irish premier Bertie Ahern, who played a key role in negotiating the Good Friday Agreement.

Mr O Fearghail said: "This bust will be an important part of David Trimble's legacy and it will be here in Leinster House as a constant reminder of his commitment to peace.

"We are honouring a great Ulsterman, a courageous politician, and a dedicated peacemaker."

He said Lord Trimble stood "head and shoulders above those who resisted change" and did not want the Good Friday Agreement to succeed.

"In the end, we crossed the Rubicon. David and John, through dogged and gritty determination, gave us the political breakthrough that ended the violence, and gave Northern Ireland self-government on a cross-party, cross-community basis.

"In the heat of political battle, David was reluctant to use the word 'vision'.

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“Yet that very thing was his constant companion, which saw him through to delivering his cherished objective – peace. It may be imperfect but it is immeasurably better than what we witnessed before that point.”

Mr O Fearghail also paid tribute to former taoiseach Bertie Ahern for his role in the peace process and the relationship he built with Lord Trimble.

“All of us here know of the role Bertie Ahern played but few will know of the deep respect and abiding friendship that was developed during long hours of problem solving.

“Bertie and David relied upon one another and they, in turn, relied upon others including their advisers and committed supporters.

“We must also recognise the efforts of all those who contributed to reaching for, and delivering, peace on our island: courageous political leaders, activists and community groups, and the many different partners in Ireland, the UK, Europe and the United States.”

Lord Trimble died in July last year and Mr Hume died in August 2020.

Mr Hume’s bust was created by sculptor Elizabeth O’Kane.

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In the media

Ulster-Scots' key role in American Revolution recognised with Tea Party invite - News Letter

The key roles played by Ulster-Scots in the revolutionary fervour gripping North America in the late 18th century has been recognised with a transatlantic invite to a special gathering writes Mark Rainey.

To mark the 250th anniversary of the Boston Tea Party, a delegation from Northern Ireland has been invited to join in the celebrations – and take part in a rerun of an act of defiance in 1773 that would ultimately lead to the American Revolution.

Thousands of people will converge on Boston Harbour on Friday (December 16) for a series of dramatic performances, historical lectures and virtual presentations – culminating in a grand-scale reenactment of hundreds of tea chests being dumped from two East India Company vessels into the sea.

The protest was a response to London passing laws that imposed new trade barriers, and subjected them to laws over which they had no say.

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The colonists behind the Boston protest were angered that London's refusal to afford them equal British rights effectively made them second-class citizens.

Ulster-Scots Agency chief executive Ian Crozier said: "The Boston Tea Party is an iconic event on the road to American independence and like many such events, it has a significant Ulster-Scots dimension."



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“In celebration of the part played by the Ulster-Scots diaspora, we are bringing tea from Belfast-based SD Bell & Co (founded 1887), Ireland’s oldest independent tea blenders and coffee roasters, which will be presented at the Boston Tea Party and Historic Ships Museum and later used alongside tea from around the world to recreate the historic event.”

The official website of the anniversary events states: “On that fateful night, 5,000 men gathered for a final meeting about the controversial tea tax, resulting in Samuel Adams giving the signal that would start the Boston Tea Party. Colonists then marched from the meeting house to Griffin’s Wharf and dumped 340 chests of tea into the Boston Harbor!”

Several leading Boston ‘Sons of Liberty’ – the group that organised the protest, had Ulster-Scots roots, including Thomas Young who led the operation, brothers Robert and Charles Jameson, who helped throw the tea into the sea, and Hugh Williamson, who brought news of the events to London and warned the government that the cost of any retribution would be revolution.

As well as attending the anniversary commemorations, the Ulster-Scots delegation will meet with key cultural, economic and social organisations – including several involved in the Belfast-Boston Sister Cities Network.

Mr Crozier added: “This visit isn’t just about commemorating the past, it’s also about planning for the future, making connections that are good for Ulster-Scots and good for Northern Ireland.

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“The 250th anniversary of American independence is coming in July 2026 and there are a whole series of big anniversaries between now and then. We’ve got a great opportunity, but in order to make the most of it we need to get organised and that starts now.”

The visit builds on the success of an Ulster-Scots Agency initiative over the summer which saw more than 3,000 people visiting the Public Record Office in Belfast to view an original Declaration of Independence and accompanying exhibition explaining the role of the Ulster-Scots and their Scotch-Irish diaspora in events leading up to 4th July 1776.

Decline of faith in Netherlands leaves priests ‘burnt out’ and demoralised - Catholic Herald

Growing work pressure, parish mergers and church closings are causing stress for parish priests in the Netherlands, sometimes even leading to clergy feeling overwhelmed.

Spokespeople for several Dutch dioceses acknowledge the problem, according to the Dutch Catholic weekly Katholiek Nieuwsblad, but they deny that there has been an increase in burnout among their priests.

The Netherlands is one of the most secularised countries in Europe, and for years the number of practising Catholics has been in steep decline.



Although about 3.5 million nominal Catholics still live in the 17.5 million-strong Western European country, the number of active churchgoers has fallen from nearly 400,000 to less than 100,000 over the past two decades, according to figures from Nijmegen University's KASKI Institute.

Therefore, in the seven dioceses in the Netherlands, a radical process of parish mergers and church closures has been underway. This is causing unrest among parishioners, but the process is also taking a heavy toll on priests.

Katholiek Nieuwsblad published interviews with several priests who have experienced burnout. Common denominators in their stories are a high workload due to parish mergers and the feeling of being made the bogeyman in church closings.

“There is so much negativity,” said Fr Eugène Jongerden, parish priest in Amstelveen, a town near Amsterdam.

“People are telling me: ‘You are going to close our church!’ No, it’s a thing we’re doing together. But in their perception I am the angry manager who has to close things down by order of the bishop,” he said.

“When a church has to close you think: ‘I’m letting all these people down now’,” said Fr David van Dijk, a priest in Reusel, a village in the south of the Netherlands.

“I had sleepless nights for months because of it. The average priest here has such a full agenda. I was restless. At one point I was so busy that my mother said, ‘Since you’re a priest, we hardly see you anymore.’ My mother was right. The parish took up all my life,” said van Dijk.

A priest must also be careful not to get caught up in negativity, he added.

“I’m a human being and if I can’t recharge my human battery; I can’t do anything for other people either. Sure, priests should be available, but in a normal way. I know now: I am not a human laundry machine,” van Dijk said.

The Covid pandemic put additional pressure on the clergy. On the one hand, because of increased pastoral concerns, and on the other, because the pandemic has further accelerated decline in church attendance and financial problems.

“In retrospect, I was running on my last legs,” Father Jan-Jaap van Peperstraten, a parish priest in Alkmaar, said.

When all of the Netherlands went into lockdown around Christmas 2021, something had to give for van Peperstraten. “I had to stay strong, but I had no strength left in me. That was my breaking point, that’s when my burnout started.”

“I blamed it all on Covid,” the priest continued. “That was the easiest explanation for people. But the true problem lies much deeper. The pandemic merely brought it all to the surface.”

Dutch dioceses cannot confirm that this increase is also seen among church personnel.

Stress among priests and other workers in the pastorate “is real”, acknowledged Marc de Koning, spokesperson of the Diocese of Breda, “but that was also the case 30 years ago”.

However, church officials do acknowledge that the process of parish mergers and church closings place new demands on priests, for which they are not always well equipped.

“Priests are by nature used to dealing with people in a pastoral way,” said Matheu Bemelmans, spokesman of the Roermond diocese.

“But sometimes as ‘managers’ they also have to make some tough decisions.”

Webinars, music, resources, broadcasts, and books



Christmas
at
Belfast Cathedral
2023

Sunday 17th December
3.30pm
Carols in the City

Christmas Eve
8pm
Festival of Nine Lessons and
Carols

11pm
The First Eucharist of
Christmas

Christmas Day
11am
Festival Eucharist

www.belfastcathedral.org

Belfast Cathedral December music

December 15, 2023

“As we progress further through this festive season, please do join us for one of our festive services here at Belfast Cathedral, as we, together, celebrate the true meaning of Christmas through scripture, poetry, prayer, and music”

Full details of our December Services and Music list can be found on our website: <https://www.belfastcathedral.org/music/music-list>

Charles Wood Song Comp2024

Applications are now open for the Charles Wood Song Comp2024. ✨

The Competition features Junior and Senior categories and is open to singers aged 18-28.

Entry deadline: 2 February 2024.
Live finals: 9 March 2024 Armagh.

The BRF Book of 365 Bible Reflections

The BRF Book of 365 Bible Reflections: with contributions from BRF authors, supporters and well-wishers

Author : Karen Laister and Olivia Warburton. £14.99

The Bible is at the heart of BRF's work, and this special anniversary collection is a celebration of the Bible for BRF's

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centenary year. Bringing together a fantastically wide-ranging writing team of authors, supporters and well-wishers from all areas of BRF's work, this resource is designed to help us go deeper into the story of the Bible and reflect on how we can share it in our everyday lives.

Including sections which lead us through the Bible narrative as well as thematic and seasonal sections, it is the perfect daily companion to resource your spiritual journey.

Contributors include: Ian Adams, John Bell, Inderjit Bhogal, Amy Boucher Pye, Stephen Cottrell, Steven Croft, Mark Greene, Isabelle Hamley, Bob Hartman, Bev Jullien, Krish Kandiah, Paul Kerensa, Ann Lewin, Bex Lewis, Chine McDonald, Lucy Moore, Rob Parsons, John Pritchard, Jennifer Rees Larcombe, Pam Rhodes, Margaret Silf, Jo Swinney, Stephen Timms, Graham Tomlin and Justin Welby.

Further short reviews and link to BRF -

<https://www.brfoonline.org.uk/products/the-brf-book-of-365-bible-reflections-with-contributions-from-brf-authors-supporters-and-well-wishers>

Poem for today

Father and Son

by Frederick Robert Higgins

Only last week, walking the hushed fields...

...Of our most lovely Meath, now thinned by November,
I came to where the road from Laracor leads
To the Boyne river-that seems more lake than river,
Stretched in uneasy light and stript of reeds.

And walking longside an old weir
Of my people's, where nothing stirs-only the shadowed
Leaden flight of a heron up the lean air-
I went unmanly with grief, knowing how my father,
Happy though captive in years, walked last with me there.

Yes, happy in Meath with me for a day
He walked, taking stock of herds hid in their own breathing;
And naming colts, gusty as wind, once steered by his hand,
Lightnings winked in the eyes that were half shy in greeting
Old friends-the wild blades, when he gallivanted the land.

For that proud, wayward man now my heart breaks-
Breaks for that man whose mind was a secret eyrie,
Whose kind hand was sole signet of his race,
Who curbed me, scorned my green ways, yet increasingly
loved me
Till Death drew its grey blind down his face.

And yet I am pleased that even my reckless ways
Are living shades of his rich calms and passions-
Witnesses for him and for those faint namesakes
With whom now he is one, under yew branches,
Yes, one in a graven silence no bird breaks.

Speaking to the soul

Short reading and a prayer - daily on this site

Church News Ireland

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