

Church News Ireland



Image of the day – Cork choral marathon

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Image of the day

Cork choral marathon

December was a Month of Carol Singing for the Cathedral Choir

During the month of December, the Choir of St Fin Barre's Cathedral was busy singing carols at the cathedral as well as across Cork.



On Saturday, 2nd December members of the choir travelled to St Peter's Church in Bandon to sing Handel's Messiah. The soloists were mostly the teenage Junior Lay Vicars Choral and St Peter's Church was well attended for the occasion.

On Saturday 9th and Saturday 16th December, the choir performed their annual Christmas Concerts. The concerts were sold out on both occasions and everyone enjoyed the hospitality provided by choir parents who baked biscuits and



served hot drinks during the interval. There was also a raffle at both concerts, prizes for which were also provided by choir parents, to raise funds for the annual choir trip in April.

On Tuesday, 19th December, the Junior Lay Vicars Choral and the Adult Lay Vicars Choral sang Carols at The Elysian. On Wednesday, the choir had their Christmas meal at the Flying Enterprise, in preparation for the Christmas weekend.

In the lead up to Christmas Day, there was the usual Choral Evensong on Friday, a Service of Nine Lesson and Carols on Saturday, Choral Eucharist and another Service of Nine Lessons and Carols on Sunday, and the Festive Choral Eucharist for Christmas Day on Monday.

Well done to everyone at the Cathedral for a busy but fabulous Christmas weekend, and special thanks to the

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Director of Music, Peter Stobart, Assistant Director of Music, Matthew Breen, choir parents, and all members of the choir.

People and places



Archdeacon appointed as Hugh Sheriff of City of Londonderry

The Archdeacon of Derry, Ven. Robert Miller, has been appointed as His Majesty King Charles III's High Sheriff for the County Borough (City) of Londonderry 2024.

Archdeacon Miller has stated that he hopes to use his year in the role to support two local charities which are close to his heart: St John Ambulance and Youth Initiatives. He also



BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

To The Venerable Robert Stephen Miller MSTJ
Of The Rectory, 1B Heathfield, Culmore Road, Londonderry

WHEREAS I have been pleased to nominate and appoint you for and to be Sheriff of the County Borough of Londonderry during His Majesty's pleasure: These are therefore to require you to take the Custody and Charge of the said County Borough, and duly to perform the duties of Sheriff thereof during His Majesty's pleasure, and whereof you are duly to answer according to Law.

DATED this First day of January
Two Thousand and Twenty Four

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'C. Hillier', written over a horizontal line.

ONE OF HIS MAJESTY'S PRINCIPAL
SECRETARIES OF STATE

intends to nurture the city's strong links with the City of London, working alongside The Honorable the Irish Society and The Merchant Taylors' Company, and building on the Lord Mayor of London, Prof Michael Mainelli's visit to Londonderry at the end of last year.

Derg Parishioner awarded the British Empire Medal

Derry & Raphoe has expressed warmest congratulations to Derg Parishioner, Dr Morris Brown, who has been awarded the British Empire Medal (BEM) for service to the community.

The retired GP has made an immense contribution to his community over decades. Dr Brown was involved for many

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years in Castlederg Surgery and established Silverdale Nursing Home in the town. He sits on the board of Castlederg Terminally Ill Fund, is a member of the local Rotary club and was a member of the Derg Valley Ambassadors Football Tour to Zambia in 2017.

“We thank him and applaud him for his public and community service, and offer heartfelt congratulations on being recognised in the Honours List”.

News

Irish government acts to hasten reparation payments to survivors of mother-and-baby homes

The Irish government is to carry out its own assessment of the assets held by church organisations, in a bid to speed up negotiations over reparation payments to survivors of mother-and-baby homes, Rebecca Paveley writes in the Church Times.

Discussions about who should contribute to compensation packages for the women and children who survived the homes, which operated from 1922 to 1998, have been under way for three years. So far, only one Roman Catholic order has said that it will contribute to payouts.

The €800-million redress scheme was announced by the Irish government in 2021; it is estimated that 34,000 former residents will be entitled to compensation. The scheme

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followed a five-year investigation into the homes, in which women who became pregnant outside marriage were sent, many under duress, to avoid what was then seen as scandal (News, 15 January 2021).

The Commission of Investigation report, dated October 2020, found that the harsh treatment of residents was “supported by, contributed to, and condoned by” the institutions of the State and Churches.

Seven RC bodies and one Protestant organisation that ran homes or were linked to them have been asked to contribute financially to the redress scheme. The Church of Ireland has been asked for a contribution on behalf of the Protestant-run Bethany Home, although the Church said that it “neither owned nor operated any of the homes”.

The order to examine financial assets was requested by the special government negotiator, Sheila Nunan, who has been in charge of talks with religious bodies since the commission released its report.

The Office of the Department for Children confirmed that Ms Nunan had asked for a financial assessment. “The Minister and his department is committed to the process of assisting the independent negotiator in her work and as part of this process, the requirement for financial assistance was identified,” a statement said.

Only one RC organisation, the Bon Secours order, has so far said that it will contribute financially to the redress scheme, but has not disclosed how much.

More than 1% of Palestinians in Gaza killed in violence

At least 22,185 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza since October 7, 2023, according to the Ministry of Health (MoH) in Gaza, which is the equivalent of more than 1% of the population of Gaza.

About 1 in 7 of those killed are said to be women and children. During the same period, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) notes 57,035 Palestinians were reportedly injured and up to 7,000 people are estimated to be missing.

Christian Aid's partners in Gaza are responding with medical relief and community-led initiatives. This includes building mobile bathrooms in four shelters and working alongside local farmers to get fresh vegetables for families who have left their homes to escape airstrikes.

William Bell, Head of Middle East Policy and Advocacy at Christian Aid, said:

“This is a devastating and heartbreaking milestone. It is beyond sickening to even contemplate. How many more lives will be lost, homes destroyed, and childhoods shattered before leaders see sense and focus on finding peace?”

“The UK Government and its international partners must urgently use all diplomatic channels to end the violence, protect civilians and agree a permanent ceasefire so

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humanitarian aid can safely be delivered at the scale needed.”

In the media

Small rural schools under attack and facing fight to survive, warns principal - News Letter

Ex-UTU President says they ‘says they provide hub and focal point for communities’ writes Mark Bain, Education Correspondent.

The principal of a Co Antrim primary school has said she fears rural schools across Northern Ireland remain under attack and face a fight for survival.

Louise Creelman, principal at Lislagan Primary in Ballymoney, said while she was delighted to hear a battle to keep St Mary's Primary in Fivemiletown open was successful, the long-running campaign showed just how difficult keeping schools open has become.

“That St Mary's Primary in Fivemiletown is to continue is indeed important for education here in Northern Ireland. However, too many others remain under threat,” said Ms Creelman, a former president of the Ulster Teachers' Union.

“I am currently principal of a school with 110 pupils and I can't over-emphasise how important schools like ours are in

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small rural communities where they often provide a hub and focal point for those communities. Take away the school and you could be threatening the very future of those communities.”

Published in December, the Independent Review of Education noted there are too many small, unsustainable schools in Northern Ireland.

The report suggested a new approach to area planning was needed to create a school network that meets the needs of all learners and promotes social cohesion in a cost-effective manner.

The panel argued a new process has the potential to create new “jointly managed community schools” by merging schools from different sectors rather than simply closing a school entirely.

“We are concerned regarding the number of small schools in Northern Ireland,” the panel said.

“In 2020/21, there were 21 primary schools with fewer than 30 pupils — well below the minimum thresholds set by the Sustainable Schools Policy. There were 25 urban primary schools (20%) and 220 rural primary schools (33%) below the minimum thresholds.”

Ms Creelman said that the benefits of smaller class sizes must be considered in decisions going forward.

“With a smaller school like our own we're in the privileged position of being able to get to know our parents and pupils

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very well and our children receive a well-rounded education with excellent after-schools and pastoral care provision, comparable to any other primary school,” she said.

“Indeed the fact that St Mary's is to be saved is recognition of the fine work being carried out in the school — and which is being carried out in other small schools across Northern Ireland. However, more than that, when a school is facing closure, provision must be found for its pupils elsewhere in the area, placing further pressure on schools there in terms of increasing class sizes.

“Some children are more suited to smaller class sizes. As a family we have actually recently moved two of our children to a school with under 100 pupils and they are thriving there, because of the smaller class sizes which suits them so much better.

“Similarly, such smaller schools are often very well placed to help and support children with special educational needs. We appreciate that difficult decisions may have to be made but we fear the Department of Education's current funding policies through its Area Planning system leave little latitude for decisions on the future of schools to be made on a case by case basis.”

Pope Francis allows blessings of couples in same-sex relationships - America

In a significant new development, Pope Francis has given permission to priests to offer blessings to couples in same-sex relationships and other irregular

situations “without officially validating their status or changing in any way the Church’s perennial teaching on marriage.”

The Vatican’s Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith announced this in a declaration issued Dec. 18 by distinguishing clearly between “ritual and liturgical blessings” that are given in the reception of a sacrament and “blessings,” spontaneous ones, that are given outside this situation in a wider pastoral perspective that have long been part of popular piety.

In an introduction to the text, Cardinal Victor Manuel Fernández, prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, explains that the declaration “offers a specific and innovative contribution to the pastoral meaning of blessings, permitting a broadening and enrichment of the classical understanding of blessings, which is closely linked to a liturgical perspective.” In other words, the new document, approved by the pope with his signature, distinguishes between different types of blessings and opens the way for blessings to be given to couples in irregular situations but insists that they are not formulated as rites and do not lead to confusion.

Today’s declaration goes beyond the document issued on Feb. 22, 2021, which prohibited blessings of same-sex couples because it looked at such blessings only as “ritual and liturgical blessings,” and not in the broader pastoral context of other types of blessing.

“One must also avoid the risk of reducing the meaning of blessings to this point of view alone,” the document states,

“for it would lead us to expect the same moral conditions for a simple blessing that are called for in the reception of the sacraments. Such a risk requires that we broaden this perspective further.” Indeed, it said, “there is the danger that a pastoral gesture that is so beloved and widespread will be subjected to too many moral prerequisites, which, under the claim of control, could overshadow the unconditional power of God’s love that forms the basis for the gesture of blessing.” Precisely in this regard, it said, “Pope Francis urged us not to ‘lose pastoral charity, which should permeate all our decisions and attitudes’ and to avoid being ‘judges who only deny, reject, and exclude.’”

“Such theological reflection,” Cardinal Fernández said, “based on the pastoral vision of Pope Francis, implies a real development from what has been said about blessings in the Magisterium and the official texts of the Church” previously. He said, “It is precisely in this context that one can understand the possibility of blessing couples in irregular situations and same-sex couples without officially validating their status or changing in any way the Church’s perennial teaching on marriage.”

While opening to such wider blessings, the declaration, which examines the different forms of blessings in Scripture, emphasizes, as Pope Francis made clear in his response to the dubia of some cardinals, that “when it comes to blessings, the Church has the right and the duty to avoid any rite that might contradict this conviction or lead to confusion” regarding the church’s understanding of marriage.

It recalled that Pope Francis emphasized that the church must avoid the implication that “something that is not marriage is being recognized as marriage.” Therefore, rites and prayers that could create confusion between what constitutes marriage—which is the “exclusive, stable, and indissoluble union between a man and a woman, naturally open to the generation of children”—and what contradicts it are inadmissible. This conviction is grounded in the perennial Catholic doctrine of marriage.

The Vatican document explains that to “help us understand the value of a more pastoral approach to blessings, Pope Francis urges us to contemplate, with an attitude of faith and fatherly mercy, the fact that ‘when one asks for a blessing, one is expressing a petition for God’s assistance, a plea to live better, and confidence in a Father who can help us live better.’”

The Vatican document added that “this request should, in every way, be valued, accompanied, and received with gratitude. People who come spontaneously to ask for a blessing show by this request their sincere openness to transcendence, the confidence of their hearts that they do not trust in their own strength alone, their need for God, and their desire to break out of the narrow confines of this world, enclosed in its limitations.”

The declaration says that “it is essential to grasp the Holy Father’s concern that these non-ritualized blessings never cease being simple gestures that provide an effective means of increasing trust in God on the part of the people who ask for them, careful that they should not become a liturgical or semi-liturgical act, similar to a sacrament.”

Indeed, it said, “such a ritualization would constitute a serious impoverishment because it would subject a gesture of great value in popular piety to excessive control, depriving ministers of freedom and spontaneity in their pastoral accompaniment of people’s lives.”

For this reason, the declaration states that “one should neither provide for nor promote a ritual for the blessings of couples in an irregular situation. At the same time, one should not prevent or prohibit the Church’s closeness to people in every situation in which they might seek God’s help through a simple blessing.”

“In a brief prayer preceding this spontaneous blessing,” the document suggests, “the ordained minister could ask that the individuals have peace, health, a spirit of patience, dialogue, and mutual assistance—but also God’s light and strength to be able to fulfill his will completely.”

It insists, however, that “precisely to avoid any form of confusion or scandal, when the prayer of blessing is requested by a couple in an irregular situation, even though it is expressed outside the rites prescribed by the liturgical books, this blessing should never be imparted in concurrence with the ceremonies of a civil union, and not even in connection with them. Nor can it be performed with any clothing, gestures, or words that are proper to a wedding. The same applies when the blessing is requested by a same-sex couple.”

It suggests that such a blessing “may instead find its place in other contexts, such as a visit to a shrine, a meeting with a priest, a prayer recited in a group, or during a pilgrimage.”

The declaration emphasizes that with these blessings “there is no intention to legitimize anything, but rather to open one’s life to God, to ask for his help to live better, and also to invoke the Holy Spirit so that the values of the Gospel may be lived with greater faithfulness.”

It concludes that what has been said in the declaration regarding the blessings of same-sex couples should be sufficient “to guide the prudent and fatherly discernment of ordained ministers in this regard.”

First published December 18, 2023 in “America - The Jesuit Review”

Gerard O’Connell is America’s Vatican correspondent and author of *The Election of Pope Francis: An Inside Story of the Conclave That Changed*

Webinars, music, resources, broadcasts, and books

MCI Ministry of Healing Sunday

On Sunday 4th February 2024, MCI will hold its annual Ministry of Healing Sunday. The theme for this year is Healing: Sign, Gift & Ministry.

A resource booklet to assist in your preparations is available now.

Visit: irishmethodist.org/resources-ministry-of-healing

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The Long and the Short of it returns

The Long and the Short of it returns on BBC Radio Ulster this Saturday January 6th for a brand new series! Tune in at 1.30pm as we discuss whether there was ever an ancient Irish race. We had a race to the dolmen in the background but you will notice Tim gave himself a head start...

We're back (in time...). Join us for a discussion about whether there was ever an ancient Irish race, including an interview with an ancient at Emain Macha (Navan Fort) and

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some thoughts on DNA findings. BBC Radio Ulster,
Saturday 6th at 1.30pm.

Children and Families Ministry planner

CFM advises - Take control of your Children and Families Ministry planning for the year with our planner. Free to download and print – either add into your BCFM ring binder if you have one or any binder will do! The planner helps you to keep track of your... <https://facebook.com/churchofirelan>

Ireland beyond 2024 - a new vision of republicanism

IRELAND BEYOND 2024 is the focus of the spring public seminars sponsored by Belfast South and Dun Laoghaire Methodist Churches with Declan Kearney presenting the topic: A new vision of Republicanism on Wednesday, 24 January 2024 at 7:30pm, by Zoom.

Open opportunity to discuss Declan's presentation and offer/ share your own thoughts.

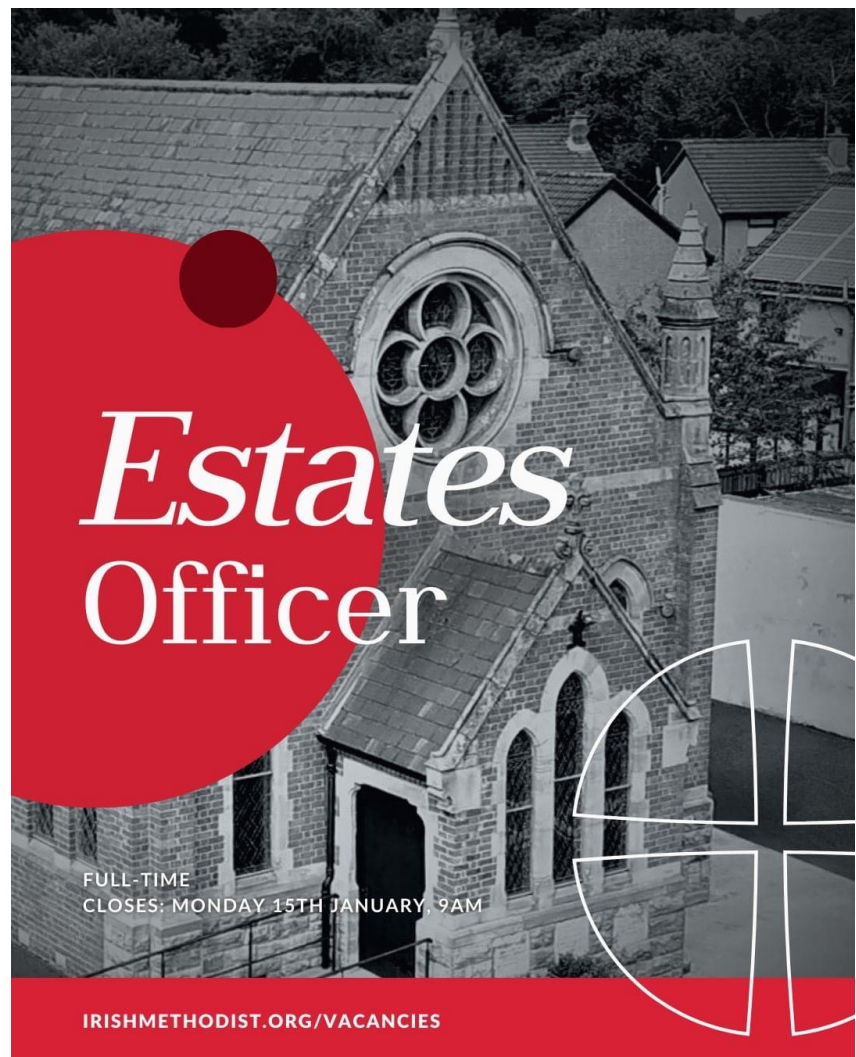
The future is inevitable, if what it will be is not - and that is why we are talking about it!

All welcome, public and church minded, left and right - all who bring themselves to a focus on a fair future.

For login information, contact
thinkingaloudseminar@icloud.com

MCI seeks Estates Officer

The Methodist Church in Ireland wishes to appoint an Estates Officer to assist with co-ordinating the management of its property estate which is located on approximately 200 sites across Ireland.



Full Time (Hybrid)
£33,824 - £36,924 depending on experience
Closing date: Monday 15th January, 9am

→ For full job description and application form visit:
irishmethodist.org/vacancies

Here is an excellent opportunity for a suitably qualified person to work with young people in the Eglinton-Faughanvale area. It's a full time permanent job. The work is rewarding and very valuable and it's a chance to work with some wonderful people. Please note the closing date is 12th January 2024 (a 12noon deadline).

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‘Curator of Futures’ vacancy with Belvoir Parish

Belvoir Parish are looking for someone to help grow their Youth Ministry through the creation and development of youth programmes and to lead their youth work into the next chapter.

This will be a 12 month post initially with hours, duties and salary negotiable according to availability and experience.

For more information please contact paul@belvoirparish.co.uk before Friday January 26, 2024

Perspective

Go and search diligently - Bishop Adrian Wilkinson

Bishop Wilkinson’s diocesan letter at Epiphany

‘Prove all things; hold fast that which is good’ (1 Thessalonians 5:21)

Words, whether written, spoken or signed, are at the centre of everything we do. Many people enjoy doing the crossword or engage in other word puzzles for relaxation. Every year Merriam-Webster, the oldest dictionary publisher in the United States, publishes their word of the year which is the word that is most searched for in the online version of their dictionary. For 2023 it was the word ‘authentic’.

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unfolds, the magi arrive at Bethlehem, and they pay Jesus homage by offering their gifts. Then the message they had been given by Herod is shown to be inauthentic or fake, and they are warned in a dream to go home via another route so that they can avoid encountering Herod again. Jesus is safe for now, although he becomes a refugee along with his parents as they have to travel to Egypt.

While Herod is being duplicitous, there is one part of his request which we all can take to heart – ‘go and search diligently for the child’. It is a wonderful description of the Christian pilgrimage. To set out and search diligently is something we are all called to do, time and time again throughout our life. God leads us to explore new paths and there is always some new perspective or new insight to uncover.

In 1st Thessalonians 5: 21 we read ‘prove all things; hold fast that which is good.’ It is a principle we can all adopt and so it makes a good new year’s resolution.

As we journey through 2024, I pray that you will be diligent in your searching, that you will be discerning and so discover what is truly authentic in the year ahead.

Speaking to the soul

Short reading and a prayer - daily on this site

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Church News Ireland

The publication of Church News Ireland is overseen by Very Rev Dr Houston McKelvey OBE, QVRM, TD. He may be contacted at houstonmckelvey@mac.com
