



## Media Review

### Pope urged to give backing to mixed marriages on visit

Belfast Telegraph - report by Jim McDowell  
The Pope is to be asked to give his blessing to mixed marriages during his prospective visit to Ireland.

The request is being formulated by the Northern Ireland Mixed Marriage Association (NIMMA) in advance of the pontiff's visit here in 2018.

Association chairman Ken Dunn has revealed that he will be writing to the Vatican soon.

It is expected that Pope Francis will cross the border during the trip to visit Ireland's ecclesiastical capital of Armagh.

The NIMMA chairman says he hopes that "his Holiness will allow (the association) to share in the joy of the Irish visit granting us some role in its content".

Mr Dunn says he is making the written request even though mixed marriage "within fairly recent memory (has been) the bugbear of Roman Catholicism".

However, he says his letter to the Pope will explain "who we are, what we do and how we feel that mixed marriage... has much to offer in the long journey to a truly ecumenical future".

Writing in the association's monthly bulletin, he states: "NIMMA has been to the fore in the field of reconciliation for more than 40 years and a

champion of Christian marriage in an increasingly secular society for just as long.

"I feel that a NIMMA contribution to the visit should be welcomed and encouraged."

More at -

<http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/pope-urged-to-give-backing-to-mixed-marriages-on-visit-35321614.html>

## **'Papal visit to Ireland will inspire us and turn around negativity towards Church'**

Irish Independent report by Sarah MacDonald

The highest-ranking Irishman in the Vatican, Cardinal Kevin Farrell, believes Pope Francis's visit to Ireland in 2018 will turn around some of the negativity across the country towards the Catholic Church.

The 69-year-old former bishop of Dallas, who was elevated to the cardinalate in November, said: "I think Pope Francis will change things; I think people will see his authenticity.

"He is clearly a man of God and he will attract people to think in those terms again. He is a person who inspires all of us to do something good for the church and for people," added the Dublin-born prelate, who was speaking exclusively to the Irish Independent from Rome.

Pope Francis has chosen Ireland for the hosting of the World Meeting of Families in 2018, having just passed a referendum on marriage equality and amid calls for change to the country's abortion laws.

More at -

<http://www.independent.ie/irish-news/papal-visit-to-ireland-will-inspire-us-and-turn-around-negativity-towards-church-35320394.html>

## **How community worship can play a vital role in strengthening family life**

Irish Independent - Article by Rev. Tim Bartlett. Being with our loved ones is a treasured part of Christmas for many of us, but the church is also important.

The number of ads on television and social media over recent weeks evoking emotional scenes of a Christmas homecoming suggests that, here in Ireland, we continue to place a very high value on the family.

As a priest, I have often noticed how the strength and support of a family has made all the difference to how someone coped, recovered or survived through some of the most challenging and tragic crises of their life. Whether it was coping with shattered dreams, disappointed love, financial set-backs, addiction, ill-health, grief or the trauma of losing a home, I have noticed that someone who is part of a close, loving family, strong in its commitment to one another, has an invaluable resource when it comes to coping with life and all its problems.

<http://www.independent.ie/opinion/comment/how-community-worship-can-play-a-vital-role-in-strengthening-family-life-35318006.html>

## **Education in Northern Ireland undergoes year of change**

Review of the year by Robbie Meredith BBC News NI Education Correspondent

2016 was a year of change at the top in education with new ministers for schools and universities

But familiar problems over money remained.



***Peter Weir became the first DUP education minister since the establishment of the assembly in 1998***

Peter Weir became the first DUP education minister since the establishment of the assembly in 1998.

His party colleague and economic minister Simon Hamilton became universities minister as part of an expanded portfolio.



***Noelle Buick, chief inspector of schools, said that too many pupils were still not getting a good enough education despite Northern Ireland having the highest-achieving primary school pupils in Europe in major international tests in maths.***

Mr Weir changed his predecessor John O'Dowd's policies in important areas like preparation for the transfer tests and GCSE grading.

However as the year ended he faced strike action from some of the [teaching unions unhappy at a pay award of 0% for 2015/16 and 1% in 2016/17](#), although he disputed their figures and called their action "futile".

The Education Authority (EA) also faced pressures and will be [forced to look for around](#)

[£50m of savings](#) in 2017, which will affect some front-line services to schools.

Moves by the EA to cut hours for pupils in [special school nurseries](#) were condemned by Mr O'Dowd in March, forcing them to apologise and to review their plans.

After taking over following the assembly election, Mr Weir reversed a long-standing departmental policy by allowing primary schools to prepare pupils for the AQE and GL Assessment tests.

He also initiated talks between the two test providers towards finding a common transfer test, but admitted he could not "impose" a single test.

More at -

<http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-38406009>

## **Spending plans for 1,112 schools thrown out by Education Authority**

Irish News report - Every school in the north has had its spending plans rejected by government, throwing budgets into disarray, the Irish News has learned.



Education chiefs were forced to take the unprecedented move to throw out all plans due to a "serious deterioration" in schools' finances.

Schools are struggling to tighten their belts because millions of pounds have been taken out of the system.

The amount of money given to schools in 2016/17 was about £1.2bn - about £10m less than the previous 12 months.

In addition, major changes to funding are taking their toll.

Schools must now pick up the tab for increases in employers' contributions to national insurance and superannuation. Many warn this will cost them tens of thousands of pounds, with the cash coming straight out of their budget.

For some, this means making teaching and non-teaching staff redundant.

After being informed of their budget share, all schools were asked to provide three-year spending plans to the Education Authority (EA).

It has emerged that the EA has rejected every single one - 1,112 schools. This effectively

means that schools have no approval to spend all the money they need to spend.

The majority goes towards salaries for teachers and non-teaching staff. Financial plans also factor in sick leave cover costs, assessments and maintenance.

The EA advised that "none of the schools for which it is the funding authority have had their three-year financial plans approved" due to "the increasing number projecting a deteriorating financial position".

More at -

<http://www.irishnews.com/news/2016/12/23/news/spending-plans-for-1-112-schools-thrown-out-by-education-authority-849084/?utm>

## **Christianity in peril as followers driven from their homelands**

Daily Telegraph report by Raf Sanchez and Josie Ensor

On the last Sunday of October, the church bells in the Iraqi Christian town of Qaraqosh rang out for the first time in two years.



***Christians attend a Christmas mass in Aleppo's Old City***

The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (Isil) had been driven out, leaving behind only the dead bodies of their fighters and the churches that lay desecrated but not totally destroyed.

Christians have lived and worshipped in the region since the first century AD, and in the heady days after Qaraqosh and neighbouring villages were liberated, people spoke excitedly about a new dawn.

But in a nearby refugee camp, Thamer Ghayath, a 35-year-old father of two, had quiet doubts. Mr Ghayath had been a security guard at his church in Qaraqosh but fled as Isil swept in.

He said he was frightened not only of the jihadists but also of his neighbours from Sunni Muslim villages, some of whom had helped Isil identify Christian homes, then moved into them, forcing out their occupants.

“I believe they wish to cleanse the area of all Christians,” he said. “Christians are no longer safe in the Middle East. While Daesh may be expelled for now, there will be another Isil tomorrow.” His fears are echoed in Christian communities across the Middle East. While 2016 may have been the year that the Islamic State was pushed back and towards defeat, its two years of violence have left Christians with wounds created by fear and distrust that may never heal.

In interviews throughout the Middle East, Christians of many backgrounds wondered aloud whether Isil’s savagery was the symptom, not the cause, of a wider hatred against them. They said their minority faith made them targets for specific brutality.

And they questioned whether there was any future for Christians in the lands where Jesus and his earliest followers once walked.

More at -

[https://digitaledition.telegraph.co.uk/editions/  
edition\\_DHFr\\_2016-12-26/data/257716/  
index.html](https://digitaledition.telegraph.co.uk/editions/edition_DHFr_2016-12-26/data/257716/index.html)