



Image of the day

Choristers - missing them

Parishioner mourned in Portrush and Phuket



The restricted numbers of people able to attend the funeral of an 89-year-old Portrush woman in the town on Wednesday were not the only ones mourning her passing, Ivan Little writes in the Belfast Telegraph

More than 6,000 miles away in Thailand, a service was also held for Joan Gregg, whose son Willie has been supporting children in Phuket ever since the tsunami devastated the area in 2004, killing tens of thousands of people.

Staff and children at the Duang Prateep Foundation gathered to remember Mrs Gregg, who they affectionately called 'Wee Joan' and who was a passionate backer of her

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son's work for tsunami survivors at the Foundation's Baan Than Namchai orphanage.

Mr Gregg, who is the manager of the Harbour Bar in Portrush, has raised over £250,000 for the home through his Willie's Orphan Fund and his mother played a prominent role in its administration.

At the memorial service at the organisation's headquarters in Bangkok, speakers said the organisation and the children had been deeply saddened to learn of Mrs Gregg's death.

They said Mrs Gregg was a “wonderful woman who was able to affect the lives of many children in Thailand and would be missed by the Foundation”.

Back home at a funeral service at the Holy Trinity Church in Portrush, the Rev Canon Peter McDowell said: “Joan was a great support to Willie as he established his orphan fund.

“She was held in the highest esteem by the many people who travelled from Thailand to Portrush, and she was very fondly remembered by them for her innate kindness and hospitality and welcome.

“It is a testimony to how kindness and compassion break down barriers of distance, culture, faith to know that as we gather here to remember and give thanks for Joan, at the Duang Prateep Foundation in Bangkok they are adding their prayers to ours as they remember her and the impact she has had on their lives.”

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Mrs Gregg's son Kerry paid tribute to his mother and it was revealed that the tireless charity worker had helped the Second World War effort at the age of six.

Among the other good causes she aided were the Red Cross, Guide Dogs for the Blind and Deaf, the USPCA, the Northern Ireland Hospice, the Royal British Legion and the RNLI in Portrush.

The Lifeboat Station was among the places at which Mrs Gregg's funeral cortege halted on a 'tour' of the her favourite parts of the town before the funeral service.

It also stopped at a tourist amenity that Mrs Gregg and her late husband Billy ran at Lansdowne Crescent before the Troubles.

Mourners stood socially distanced outside the church and at the various stopping off points around the town.

More than 2,000 messages of condolence had been posted about Mrs Gregg's death on social media yesterday. One came from the country and western singer Brendan Quinn.

Although Mrs Gregg didn't die from coronavirus, her minister Canon McDowell referred in his address to the toll that Covid has had been having on everyone in society.

He talked of the “heavy burden” faced by residents, families and staff at nursing homes like the one that Mrs Gregg had been in before she was taken into hospital, where she died at the weekend.

Trócaire Lenten collection facing €6m shortfall hit

Trócaire has said the inability to distribute its Lenten collection boxes through schools and at church services threatens to leave the charity with a €6 million shortfall in its income this year, as it encouraged people to collect a box from a church or donate online this Lent.

Speaking on RTÉ's Morning Ireland, Trócaire Chief Executive Caoimhe de Barra said its boxes are being left in churches across the country for anyone who would like to pick one up in person when out for a daily walk, or they can request one be posted to them if that suits them better.

She said that the Lenten fundraising campaign provides one third of the organisation's public income - or €6m - and if the funds are lost it would have a "catastrophic effect" on its overseas work.

Ms de Barra said there is a fantastic partnership with the church network and it is a means of distribution that does not involve an extra cost for Trócaire and allows people to get access to boxes if it is safe for them to do so.

Latest coronavirus stories

Meanwhile, Ms de Barra said a fair global approach to the distribution of vaccines is in everyone's interest as allowing it to circulate in poorer countries may allow mutations to emerge that threaten the efficacy of vaccines.



She said that just 55 people in sub Saharan Africa have received the Covid-19 vaccine to date, compared to 120 million people in wealthier countries.

She said 84 of the world's poorest countries will not get enough vaccines until 2024 to provide herd immunity.

Ms de Barra said the World Health Organisation's Covax initiative is excellent but will only vaccinate a maximum of 25% of people in need in the countries that rely on it this year.

She said Covax is severely underfunded and that there is a need for pharmaceutical companies to waive intellectual property rights to allow vaccines be produced at lower costs and high volumes.

Booterstown and Mount Merrion parishioners pull together in Lenten Challenge

Parishioners of Booterstown and Mount Merrion are being urged to take up a new challenge for Lent this year.

Rather than giving something up for Lent, Canon Gillian Wharton is urging her parishioners to pull together and take up a challenge that will benefit their physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health while raising money for three causes.

Canon Wharton has committed to walking 5km each day in Lent. Others in the parish are challenging themselves to a shorter or greater distance, some walking, some cycling and some running. Some people are evening challenging themselves to learn and dance 'Jerusalem' each day. Another parishioner is learning sign language online. "We are doing this together even though we are apart,"

Canon Wharton comments. "In addition to doing this for our wellbeing, we are also hoping to raise money for the Irish Cancer Society, Protestant Aid and our parishes. All charities have struggled to fundraise over the last 11 months." Each year, the parishes hold a Daffodil Service on the fourth Sunday of March for all those who are affected by cancer, either themselves or through a loved one, and after the service they have a Coffee Morning in aid of the Irish Cancer Society. This year, like last year, the service will be

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online at 10.30am on Sunday 28 March 2021 but they can't hold the Coffee Morning.

Canon Gillian Wharton embarking on her 5km a day challenge on Ash Wednesday.



Protestant Aid helps families and individuals, financially, regardless of religious, social or ethnic background, to alleviate poverty and distress.

All donations will be divided equally, with a third given to the Irish Cancer Society, a third to Protestant Aid and a third to the Parishes of Booterstown and Mount Merrion

During lockdown the parishes are not asking people to take sponsorship cards or to handle money. Donations may be churchnewsireland@gmail.org

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made via the GoFundMe page – <https://gofund.me/996d06a6> or to

Boosterstown and Mount Merrion Rector's Account IBAN:
IE92ULSB 985330 00606072

Thousands killed by euthanasia and assisted suicide across Belgium and Netherlands

Thousands of people have died by euthanasia and assisted suicide since being legalized in the Netherlands and Belgium.

Both countries introduced euthanasia and assisted suicide laws in 2002, although Belgium's go further in allowing children and people with psychiatric conditions to be eligible.

Data from the Institute for Medical Anthropology and Bioethics in Vienna shows that since then, there has been a surge in people dying this way in Belgium, from just 24 in 2002 to 2,656 in 2019.

The figures are even higher in the Netherlands, rising from 1,882 to 6,361 in the same period.

Antonia Tully, of the Lives Worth Living Campaign by the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children (SPUC), said that "each death is a tragedy".

"It is sad that people see death as the solution to their problems. But this is how people start to think once euthanasia has been legalised," she said.



Belgium permits children and people with psychiatric conditions to die by assisted suicide.

She raised concerns that some people may be choosing to end their lives to avoid being a burden on their families. She cited 2018 data from Washington State in the US - where assisted suicide is legal - which found that over half (51%) of people who were killed in this way did so because they felt they were a burden on family, friends and caregivers.

"There is a creeping culture of death spreading around the globe as euthanasia laws are passed in one country after another," she said.

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"During 2020, New Zealand, Spain and Portugal all passed bills to allow assisted suicide. Here in Britain, we must resist all attempts to normalise this dangerous practice and instead promote a society where each human life is valued and respected."

Bishops of England and Wales condemned for losing women in translation

A co-founder of the Association of Catholic Priests in Ireland has criticised the bishops of England and Wales for their lack of consultation in opting for the Catholic Edition of the gender-exclusive English Standard Version (ESV) translation of the Bible for use in a new version of the lectionary, Sara McDonnell writes in The Tablet.

Fr Brendan Hoban, a retired parish priest in Co. Mayo, noted that the ESV refers to men and women as “men” and translates humanity as “man”. Other translations, such as the Revised New Jerusalem Bible, prefer inclusive language.

Accusing the 22 bishops of England and Wales of “a conspicuously bad decision”, he alleged there had been no consultation with priests, Religious or laity, biblical scholars or liturgical experts.

In a statement on 22 January, the bishops of England and Wales said the ESV was chosen because it is seen as fulfilling the qualities the Church seeks for “accuracy of

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translation which conveys the meaning of the biblical authors” as well as for the “dignity and accessibility of language needed for a worthy proclamation of the Word of God”.

The Bishops of Scotland announced in July 2020 that they had also chosen the English Standard Version – Catholic Edition for the lectionary.

Writing in his column in the Western People, Fr Hoban noted that traditionally the Catholic Churches of England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland cooperate over the publication of liturgical books and their revised editions for financial and other reasons.

He asked if the Irish bishops would now accept the “unilateral England (and Wales) decision”, or would they “follow again the dismal, dangerous example of their colleagues on the other side of the Irish sea?”

Fr Hoban wrote: “Will they compound a problem being visited on the Catholics of England and Wales by regularly and ritually insulting women as they listen to the Word of God being read at Mass – giving them another reason to cut their links with an institution that insists on patronising and disrespecting them to the point of misogyny?”

He added that if the Irish bishops do this, the recent words of the newly installed Archbishop of Dublin on leadership would be meaningless.

Fr Hoban was referring to Archbishop Dermot Farrell’s homily at his installation earlier this month, where he said:

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“Leadership in the Church is not about telling people what to do; rather it is about promoting co- responsibility and overcoming the mindset which runs the risk of relegating the baptised to a subordinate role, effectively keeping them on the edges of church life.”

According to Fr Hoban, the decision to adopt the ESV translation for the lectionary is “a watershed moment when women may eventually decide that no matter what the Catholic Church says, disrespect for women is sewn into its institutional seams”.

Courtesy The Tablet 17.02.2021

Churches and politics blamed for ‘splintered’ education system in NI

Academics have called for a complete reform of the education system in Northern Ireland after a report concluded the current system is “unsustainable”.

In a comprehensive paper looking at how education is run, the report, by Ulster University’s Unesco Education Centre, said the influence of the church and politics had created a confused, bloated and ultimately costly system that is no longer fit for purpose without ambitious and radical reform. The paper found that “vested interests of the churches and the traditional political blocs” had been major contributing factors to failures in the system.

It said the system has been left “divided, splintered and overly expensive”, and as a result has become “confusing

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and socially divisive”. And it said a fundamental review, as promised in the new Decade New Approach deal agreed in January 2020, must now be a priority.

That review is not expected to begin before May, but it warned that the Department of Education (DE) needs to move away from the current system which is, in effect, bankrolling separation in education.

While the research has been conducted independently, its publication was partly funded by the Integrated Fund for Education.

It said previous attempts at reform, including the setting up of the Education Authority (EA) in 2014, had largely fallen short.

The Department of Education is responsible for at least eight other arms-length bodies as well as the EA.

These include the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI), the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS).

There are also sectoral organisations for voluntary grammars, integrated, Irish-medium and controlled schools, as well as a Catholic Schools Trustee Service.

“It is not inconceivable that the proposal in the New Decade New Approach document to place a duty on the Department to ‘encourage and facilitate’ education through Ulster-Scots could lead to demands for the creation of Ulster-Scots

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schools and, ultimately, on the grounds of ensuring parity of investment with the Irish language, a further support body,” the university paper said. “This proliferation of arm’s length bodies and sectoral bodies creates additional expenditure.” Grants to these bodies cost the taxpayer almost £6m in 2018/19 alone — a figure expected to rise by 10% annually.

“It could be argued that the current configuration means that DE is, in effect, bankrolling the structural, ethnic separation of education,” the report said.

“It is, however, undeniable that the existing system for the administration of education in Northern Ireland presents a bewildering alphabetical word-storm of acronyms and initials.”

A spokesperson for the department of Education said officials will consider the report.

She added: “The forthcoming Independent Review of Education is expected to consider a range of issues with a focus on improving the effectiveness, efficiency and quality of our education system. The Terms of Reference for the Review explains that it will include consideration of system level design, delivery and administration.”

Pointers for prayer

A Lent intention

Most Holy One,
envelop us in your love and grace today.

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Abba, may we bend the knee
of our hearts, minds, souls, and bodies,
to live in joyful obedience to your will.

Make us bold to step out, Lord Christ,
upon the path of love that you have set before us,
for the way of hope is the way of blessing.

Guide us, O Holy Spirit,
into wisdom and holiness,
filled with your reconciling power.

Give us the courage, O God, to dare to work for justice and
peace for all,
and work for the common good.

Give us empathy, O God, to reimagine our lives with each
other,
grounded in mercy and lovingkindness.

Give us the faithfulness, O God, to see that your ways are
sure and beautiful,
and work to open the closed fists of our hearts.

Give us the strength, O God, to reach out to those in need,
loving our brothers and sisters as ourselves.

Give your light to those who are lost, O Holy One,
and give your peace to those who are troubled.
For You are the God of Compassion,
and we want to be your people, your beacons, and your
witnesses.

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Holy Trinity, unite us by your love,
and gather within your embrace those we now name.

Speaking to the Soul

The Rt Rev George Davison, Bishop of Connor

Faith in the tough times - honest communication

There are times in all our lives when it is relatively easy to be a person of faith.

When life is good, when things are going well, we look to our Creator and offer genuine thanks for the blessings that we experience.

We rejoice in those blessings as signs of God's love and favour, we immerse ourselves in them and our hearts are glad.

But what about the tough times? For many people, that's our current experience of life - days of uncertainty, of frustration, of pressure at work (or because of the lack of it), of not knowing when, or if, some sort of normality will return to our lives.

What does it mean to be a person of faith now? Where is God's blessing today?

Why does he allow us to endure such trials, be they sickness or suffering, insecurity or loss? How do we face these challenging times with our faith in a loving God intact?



Bishop George Davison

Perhaps we even feel guilty for entertaining such thoughts?

Habakkuk, a Jewish prophet of the 7th century BC, may be a surprising source of help to us.

Life was getting him down. The familiar things that held his community together were disappearing and it felt to him as if God was nowhere to be seen.

In the opening verses of the Old Testament book that bears his name, Habakkuk asks the Lord a few straight questions.

"How long are you going to ignore my cries for help?" "Why have you allowed this mess to happen?" "Why won't you do something to sort things out?"

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These are not the measured, respectful words that we might think of when we think about prayer.

They are not beautifully written prayers such as we might use together in church.

They are the heartfelt cries of a person of faith who trusts God, but who doesn't understand and probably even feels as if God might be letting him down right now.

For Habakkuk, this is no time for respectful politeness, it is a time for an honest talk with God.

He will speak truthfully about what is on his heart to one he trusts, even if that is a difficult conversation. And he will listen.

That is the kind of communication on which lasting relationships are built. It allows issues to be dealt with and trust to be restored.

It's the honest open prayer on which faith can find a foundation in the most difficult of days. It's a good place to start.

