



***Given the scale & implications of the housing and homelessness crisis, it's disappointing the issue hasn't featured far more prominently in election debates: Fr McVerry.***

## **Housing is key social justice issue facing the country, Jesuit Centre**

The Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice has described the latest statistics on family

[churchnewsireland@gmail.com](mailto:churchnewsireland@gmail.com)

homelessness in Ireland as “a shocking indictment of current housing policy”.

In a statement the JCFJ said the current homelessness crisis represents “a terrible social injustice” and reflects the abject failure of housing policy over the last two decades.

Well known campaigner on homelessness, Fr Peter McVerry, noted that, “The fact that there are now 769 families, including 1,570 children, living in emergency accommodation means that family homelessness in Dublin has more than doubled since January 2015.”

“The figure of 125 ‘newly homeless’ families in January 2016 is significantly greater than the ‘newly homeless’ figure for any month during 2015 and indeed is nearly three times the equivalent figure for January 2015.”

The Jesuit priest highlighted how throughout last year, even in the face of considerable media and public concern about the homelessness and housing crisis, the situation continued to deteriorate.

“These latest figures raise the alarming prospect that 2016 will see the problem continue to deepen. It must be remembered that these are just the figures for the Dublin region; during

2015, family homelessness was increasing all around the country,” he warned.

According to the Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice the homelessness crisis is a reflection of a deeper housing crisis, one that is the outcome of inadequate and distorted housing policies over several decades.

In particular, the Centre said, the increase in family homelessness can be linked to the policy of relying on the private rented sector to meet social housing needs, rather than building adequate numbers of local authority houses, complemented by provision by voluntary housing bodies.

“This failure of policy has led not only to the alarming growth in homelessness but to the numbers on local authority waiting lists more than doubling since 2005, and indeed tripling since 1993,” the JCFJ said.

Given the scale and implications of the housing and homelessness crisis, Fr McVerry said, it is surprising and disappointing that the issue has not featured far more prominently in debates leading up to the General Election and in the commitments of candidates.

He added, “Housing is the key social justice issue facing our country right now. Homelessness is obviously the most extreme manifestation of the crisis but the housing situation of tens of thousands of people in Ireland today is overshadowed by issues of affordability and insecurity, whether because of rising rents or mortgage arrears.”

Fr McVerry added: “Even at this late stage of the campaign the issue of housing needs to be brought to the fore and certainly in the negotiating of the next programme of Government the outlining and resourcing of an ambitious housing programme should be a central feature.”

## **Methodist President encourages prayerful voting**

The President of the Methodist Church in Ireland, the Rev Brian Anderson has issued the following Statement in the light of the upcoming General Election in the Irish Republic:

*Citizens in a democracy, get the opportunity to comment on the work of their Government or on the record of that Government while in Office.*

*In a world in which many citizens do not have the luxury of expressing their views via the ballot box I would encourage, after prayerfully considering all the literature you have received from those offering for election to go and exercise your right to vote on election day.*

## **PCI's Transform: A fresh way to equip the next generation**

For many young people across the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI), transitioning into adulthood – getting that first job or becoming a full-time student, graduating, getting married, buying a home, the list goes on – can sometimes be challenging on so many different levels, and this is the same for the Church as well.

Rick Hill, PCI's Discipleship Development Officer, remembers that it was a time that seemed to flash by in an instant, yet the whirlwind contained some of the most life shaping of events.

“It is a critical stage when twenty somethings wonder whether to stick around in church or make a break for it, and all too often this age group is missing in many of our congregations.



“We need to rediscover and share with the young adult generation what a disciple of Jesus might look like at university today. We should be helping a young Christ-follower think what it means to be on mission in their workplace, for example. We need to connect, equip and inspire a generation of young adults and this is what we hope Transform will do,” Rick said.

In recognising the huge discipleship opportunities that lie within these transitional times, the Council for Congregational Life and Witness has reimaged The Word’ Bible Conference into Transform. The event is a fresh approach to discipling a fresh generation of young adults across this island that will take place over 36-hours in Belfast’s Cathedral and Titanic Quarters.

Watch Rick, and some of the contributors, talk about Transform 2016, in [this video](#).

The overnight gathering on 1st to 2nd April is for all young adults across the denomination. With main sessions in The Mac, Transform will be packed full of trigger talks, seminars, Bible teaching, worship, discussion, activities and space to connect. It is designed to better connect them to Christ and the Church, equip them as disciples and inspire them to carry that into their every day lives.

“We have a whole host of great contributors, such as Michael Wylie and Peter Lynas who will be part of Transform 2016, as well as a late night gig by local musician Jamie Neish. We are really excited by what is beginning to emerge. We have some amazing young adults in our Church who we need to nurture, equip and support as they continue on their spiritual journey at a time when life begins to change radically,” Rick said.

Booking closes on Monday, 29th February. For more information and to register see [Transform 2016 here](#). You can also email [clw@presbyterianireland.org](mailto:clw@presbyterianireland.org) or call: +44 (0)28 9032 2284.

## **US Couple's 50th wedding anniversary marked at Catholic church rebuilt in Ulster Folk Museum**

A Northern Ireland couple have returned from the US to enjoy a special 50th anniversary at the church where they wed.

Belfast Telegraph - Laurence and Cecelia McCann were married in 1966 at Drumcree Church in Portadown. It has since been dismantled and rebuilt at the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum in Co Down.

Mr McCann is a retired businessman and his wife a former nurse. They settled in Albuquerque in New Mexico but have lived all over the world.

Mrs McCann said: "This is a very special day for us, made even more memorable by being here at the same church, now in a different county."

They were joined by family and friends - including the bridesmaid and best man.

Mrs McCann added: "Many of our guests have travelled thousands of miles to be here and it



***Laurence and Cecelia McCann enjoyed a special 50th anniversary at the church where they wed***

has been wonderful to have the blessing in the very unique setting of the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum."

Drumcree Catholic Church was originally located on the Birches Road in Portadown, County Armagh.

Built in 1783, it was dismantled and reconstructed at the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum in 1990.

The church is comparatively rare in that it was created before the repeal of the Penal Laws,

which attempted to force Catholics and Presbyterians to accept the Church of Ireland.

It includes a magnificent early-1800s pipe organ as well as 14 Stations of the Cross, identical to those hung in the original church.

The couple, aged in their seventies, first met through church and then developed their friendship as young people when they were both volunteers with the Legion of Mary - an organisation which helps and coordinates home visits for people in need.

They have two sons and four grandchildren.

## **Down and Dromore youth night buzzing**

Tim Burns writes - The place was buzzing when young people from around the diocese got together in Dollingstown for our second 'Saturday Night Live' event earlier this month.

The tables were set up; a photo booth with a variety of wigs and hats took over a corner; the hot dogs and traybakes were prepared; the prayer room sorted; sound was checked and then we cracked on with a great evening.

With over 80 young people there we competed to see who could build the highest tower (Holywood won with quite an impressive structure), followed by a rapid fire kazoo music quiz. We were then led in worship by our SNL band before Andrew Frame (CIYD) explored what it means to share your faith and gave us an opportunity to respond in discussion and in prayer.

It was a brilliant night and really encouraging to have so many groups from across the diocese there. Thank you so much to Dollingstown for hosting us, to all the volunteers that helped put on the event, and to all those that came along.

‘Saturday Night Live’ is running bi-monthly and is a great chance for our youth groups to mix. We want to see even more of you in April! The next SNL has the theme, “An indiscriminate act of kindness”. Don’t miss it! When: Saturday 9 April at 7.30 pm. Where: Holywood Parish Church

## **Strabane wedding festival**

View "Some old, some new, some borrowed..." at Camus-Justa-Mourne's three-day Wedding Dress Festival, which begins this Friday 26th.

The first day of the festival lasts from 10.30 a.m. till 7 p.m. and will be followed by an Opening Service. Light refreshments will be available in the parish hall. For group catering, please contact Rev Mark Lennox on 028 7188 2314. Programme at - <http://derryandraphoe.org/events-view/wedding-dress-festival>

## **Remembering 1916, Martyrdom and Sacrifices Seminar**

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland is holding the second in a series of events to continue the public conversation around 1916 tomorrow Thursday evening.

John Wolffe, Professor of Religious History at the Open University in Milton Keynes is a specialist in the area of religion and martyrdom. Professor Wolffe has written on the interfaces between religion, nationalism and national identity. His talk 'Remembering 1916 – Martyrdom and Sacrifice' will focus on this aspect of the events of 1916 in relation to the Easter Rising and the Battle of the Somme.

The Seminar is hosted by PCI's Council for Church in Society.

Over 300 people attended the Presbyterian Church in Ireland's (PCI) Church in the Public Square Conference on 21<sup>st</sup> January – [\*The Future of our Past: Remembering and Reassessing 1916\*](#). The Conference explored the events of 100 years ago and discussed how the Easter Rising and the Battle of the Somme have come to exert such a central place in how Ireland views its past and present. It also looked at wider questions around current relationships in Ireland that have been shaped by the events of 1916 and addressed ways in which conversations about the future could be reformed. Video of the event can be seen [here](#).

## **News links to reports on faith, politics and education**

### **Nine figure NI peace grants threatened by Brexit**

News Letter

European grants worth almost 425 million euro to support peace in Northern Ireland could be threatened by a Brexit, EU sources said.

<http://www.newsletter.co.uk/nine-figure-sum-of-peace-funding-threatened-by-eu-exit-1-7226246>

### **NI nationalist parties stop reform of discriminatory teaching appointments**

News Letter

The UUP's attempt to repeal the law which allows discrimination in teacher recruitment on the grounds of religion has been blocked by the nationalist parties at Stormont.

<http://www.newsletter.co.uk/discrimination-bill-blocked-by-nationalist-parties-1-7226491>

## **Rory Best's tribute to Rev David Somerville**

News Letter

A Church of Ireland clergyman arrived in Richhill several years ago as a stranger and died last week as "best friend" to the parish, it was said yesterday.

<http://www.newsletter.co.uk/cleric-was-best-friend-of-parish-1-7226572>

## **Christian Today**

Steve Chalke, theologian and founder of the Oasis charity says he believes parts of Islamic theology better reflect God's character than some Christian teaching. Speaking about the publication of his new book *Radical*, Mr Chalke explains he has come to the conclusion "Muslims and Christians worship the same God".

## **Exp**

Further reports that a group of 200 MPs and Council leaders are calling for a relaxation of Sunday Trading laws. The group says that increasing spending on Sundays would boost job prospects and help shops compete with online firms. They back the government plans to devolve Sunday trading laws to local councils. The Bishop of St Albans, Alan Smith, is quoted amongst those opposed to the plans.

<http://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/646112/End-Sunday-trading-laws-Nearly-200-politicians-demand-retail-reform>

## **Mail**

Further coverage of a new book produced by the Bible Society, HM The Queen writes of her enduring Christian faith. In the forward to the book *The Servant Queen And The King She Serves* published to celebrate the Queen's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday later this year, the supreme governor of the Church of England, writes "I have been - and remain - very grateful to you for your prayers and to God for His steadfast love. I have indeed seen His faithfulness."

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/pa/article-3457017/Queen-reflects-enduring-Christian-faith.html>

## **Exp**

Further reports of a speech given by the Bishop of London, Richard Chartres, at a Mansion House dinner hosted by the Lord Mayor of London for Anglican bishops. He is quoted as saying the church has a role to articulate an inclusive version of the English story.

<http://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/646227/Bishop-London-English-pride>

## **UK News**

The Bishop of Wakefield, Tony Robinson, has become the first elderly care ambassador at Pinderfields Hospital. His new ambassador role will see him promoting the message that health care for elderly matters. The article highlights that the Leeds diocese organises dementia friendly acts of worship and parish travel rotas, enabling residents to attend church. Read [the full story](#)

<http://www.newsrt.co.uk/news/bishop-is-first-elderly-care-ambassador-3934672.html>

## **Tel**

An article extolling the beauty of Salisbury Cathedral and its Close is sparked by news that a 15 foot high sculpture of clasped hands, called the Kiss, is being moved at Salisbury Cathedral because people on mobile phones keep walking into it.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/12166488/Put-away-your-phone-and-enjoy-the-world-around-you.html>

## **BBC**

A peel of bells have been returned to a church near Swindon, where they will go on show. A blessing of the five 17th Century bells took place at All Saints Church at Liddington this weekend. A new set of six bells is due to be installed in the church in July, which will allow bells to be rung for the first time since 1979.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-wiltshire-35621834>

## **Care Industry news**

Reports that an East Riding housing development known for its commitment to the health and well-being of older-people was visited by the Archbishop of York, Dr John Sentamu. The visit to Hanover Court in North Cave was part of the Archbishop's Pilgrimage of Prayer Witness and Blessing which ends at York Minster in May.

<http://careindustrynews.co.uk/2016/02/north-cave-residents-welcome-the-archbishop-of-york-for-afternoon-tea/>

## **Guard/Mail Online**

The Children's Society has urged ministers to reconsider plans for a four-year freeze on a range of benefits and agree a moratorium on future welfare cuts for low-income families. The charity made the call after its research suggested that the plans risk pushing more children into poverty. More than 7.5 million children live in four million low-income families who will by 2020 lose up to 12% of the real value of benefits including Child Tax Credits, Working Tax Credits and Jobseeker's Allowance. The Children's Society chief executive Matthew Reed is quoted.

<http://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/feb/23/plans-to-freeze-benefits-for-four-years-will-hit-7-million-children>

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/pa/article-3459355/Childrens-Society-urges-benefits-freeze-plans-reconsidered.html>

### **Christian Today**

Reports analysis done by the Manchester Evening News on the latest CofE attendance figures. According to the MEN, Durham is the diocese where Christians are least likely to go to a CofE service, with one in 81 Christians attended an Anglican church in 2014, a fall of nearly 10 per cent since 2009. The highest was Gloucester diocese, where 3.7 per cent of the Christian population attended church, or one in 27 Christians.

### **Mail**

Reports that the Head of BBC Ethics and Religion has said that an edition of *Songs of Praise* broadcast from the refugee camp in Calais, known as the Jungle, had been criticised by viewers and MPs because it was making "a political statement". Last summer's broadcast came from a make-shift Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Writing in a blog

on the [Open Democracy](#) website, Aaqil Ahmed, said viewers who criticised the programme failed to understand that 'compassion' is a core Christian value. [http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3459453/Critics-attacked-Songs-Praise-broadcast-Jungle-camp-Calais-lacked-religious-literacy-says-BBC-s-head-religion.html?ITO=1490&ns\\_mchannel=rss&ns\\_campaign=1490](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3459453/Critics-attacked-Songs-Praise-broadcast-Jungle-camp-Calais-lacked-religious-literacy-says-BBC-s-head-religion.html?ITO=1490&ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490)

## **BBC**

Report that Islamic State militants have released the last of more than 200 Assyrian Christians they kidnapped in NE Syria a year ago. Some 42 captives were freed on Monday morning, following mediation by the Assyrian Church. One Assyrian group said IS had demanded an £13m ransom.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-35630196>

## **Tel/Exp**

Reports that the *Sun* newspaper has said that the BBC is reportedly planning to build a mosque on the set of *EastEnders*. A new set design costing £15m will include the religious building on a street that leads to Albert Square. The new mosque will be the set's first religious institution. There is currently no church. Instead, the soap's most Christian character, Dot Cotton, has religious meetings at the Walford Community Centre.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/12169525/>

[Mosque-to-be-built-on-the-set-of-EastEnders.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/12169525/Mosque-to-be-built-on-the-set-of-EastEnders.html)

<http://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/646577/Eastenders-Mosque-Religious-Building-Muslim-Islam-BBC-New-Set-Call-to-prayer-Albert-Square>

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