



## **Resourcing mission and restructuring at Irish Methodist Conference**

The first full day of the representative session of this year's Irish Methodist Conference might be described as 'meaty'. From the challenge of the opening Bible study – delivered by the Rev David Bruce, Secretary of the Council for Mission of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland – to the late afternoon presentation on charity regulation, members were given so much to chew on, it is hard to pick out a 'main course'.

This said, one significant item of business certainly looks set to have a clear impact on the shape of things to come. This was the green light given to the Working Party on Connexional Structures to proceed towards a major restructuring of the Church that would see the current eight districts becoming three, each with a full-time district superintendent. The new district superintendents would be part of a ten-person, connexional team, accountable through the General Committee to the Conference.

In introducing the proposals, Home Mission Secretary the Rev Dr Heather Morris emphasised that the changes were designed to release resources for mission and said that it was her prayer that 'the debate we have today about structural changes will not be the most impassioned debate we have this Conference'.

Nor was it. Having being reassured that nothing was being rushed through and there would be time to bring the paper to the districts, Conference voted, with a substantial majority, to direct the working party to prepare the legislation to implement the changes. So, the next twelve months will see district-wide consultation and discussion of the proposals, with legislation to be presented to Conference this time next year.

Two other substantial items on today's agenda helped Conference face up to the testing times ahead.

First the Secretary of Conference gave a sobering, statistical presentation outlining some 'known surprises' in terms of looming shortfalls in terms of ministers and finances. 'The challenge is not just to know it but to ask how are we going to respond to it,' Dr Stephens said. He highlighted the need for the Church to be strategic, align itself purposefully with a sense of what God is calling us to be and simplify our governance.

Complementing this was an inspirational presentation from the Rev Dr Martyn Atkins of the British Methodist Church, who posed a range of searching questions in relation to how Irish Methodism may rediscover and reproduce

its founding spiritual gifts in our 21st-century context.

## **5 churches host ‘Moira’s Big Weekend’ of family–friendly events**

Moira’s 5 churches recently came together to host ‘Moira’s Big Weekend’, a packed programme of family–friendly events that attracted hundreds of people of all ages.

The aim was outreach – to introduce people to Jesus – and over the weekend special guest, Bishop Ken Clarke, addressed *The Big Issue*, *The Big Question* and *The Big Decision*. All of this took place in a Big Tent! (1000 seater marquee)

The Big Weekend got off to a brilliant start on Friday 10 June with the Kids’ Morning. Moira’s 2 primary schools had been invited and over 500 children came along for a fun programme of songs, puppeteering, prayers and (of course) balloon modelling.

The fun continued with the Big Family Festival in a sunny Moira Demesne on Saturday afternoon and on both Friday and Saturday nights the marquee became an Acoustic Café. From 7–



11.00 pm, folk enjoyed live music, refreshments and a short message from Bishop Ken.

On Sunday morning the tent and overflow held an amazing 1200 people gathered for worship led by the 5 church leaders along with a combined praise band, local primary school choirs, puppets and Bishop Ken.

Afterwards, the marquee emptied into the Demesne for a 'Picnic in the Park' complete with face painting and those busy puppets!

This was the first time the churches had worked together on this scale and after the success of the weekend there is plenty of scope for the future.

Revd Joanne Megarrell, rector of St John's Moira said, "It was wonderful to have the churches working together for this mission event – all of us with different 'flavours' of what it means to be 'church', but all working for the extension of God's kingdom and His glory."

## **Little institutional support for intellectual debate in the Catholic Church claim**

Co-founder of the Association of Catholic Priests, Fr Brendan Hoban, has expressed frustration over the intimidation exerted by a Catholic 'stasi' that seeks to "psychologically bludgeon anyone who doesn't agree with them".

Writing in his weekly column for the *Western People*, the Co Mayo parish priest focused on recent comments made by Archbishop Diarmuid Martin of Dublin about the lack of 'people of intellect who can address the pressing issues of the day' in the Church in Ireland and the need for



***Fr. Brendan Hoban, PP., Ballina.***

‘competent lay men and women well educated in their faith’.

According to Fr Hoban, part of the problem is that there is little if any acceptance in the leadership of the Church for the free flow of ideas, “still less for those who might robustly challenge a given wisdom”.

He said the record so far suggests that only those who “unambiguously and uncritically

defend the status quo are entitled to be heard” and that “only those who dismiss the critical voices are regarded as being inside the fold”.

Real intellectuals tend not to see the Catholic Church as an institution encouraging open debate

Elsewhere he said part of the reason why the ‘lay’ Catholic intellectual is an endangered species in Irish life is that ‘clerical’ intellectuals are often the subject of undue pressure to bend their views.

Referring to the Irish priests censured by the Vatican, he said the fact that some of them were effectively explaining in ordinary words the insights of theologians and biblical scholars and were ‘silenced’ because of that was “an embarrassment beyond words”.

“They ended up as the equivalent of sacrificial lambs hunted down by the Catholic ‘stasi’ ... who wouldn’t know their theological arm from their elbow,” he hit out.

## **C of E synod closed doors discussion on sexuality**



The radical student doctrine of ‘safe spaces’ – often used to shut down free speech on university campuses – has been adopted by the Church of England.

A major debate on gay rights is to be held behind closed doors with the aim of making all its speakers feel welcome and ‘encouraging diversity’.

Church leaders have ruled that the 483 members of the General Synod will discuss the C of E’s deep divisions on sexuality under ‘safe space’ rules over three days in York next month.

The rules say Synod members must promise that ‘whatever information they hear is not used to disadvantage any participant in situations outside the conversation’.

But the debate is thought to be the first time in its near 100-year history that the Church’s parliament, which has law-making powers, will have gone into secret session to consider its thinking on a moral question of great public interest. The move has angered Synod members on the Church’s conservative evangelical wing, who called the secret sessions an affront to democracy.



The Agenda for the July meeting of the General Synod is published today. Members will gather in York on Friday 8 July until Saturday 9 July. A key focus during these two days will be how the Church's vision for a growing, confident and hopeful church can be put into action through the Renewal and Reform Programme.

Following a service on 10 July at York Minster, members of the Synod will take part in Shared Conversations on Scripture, Mission and Human Sexuality - following the regional sessions that concluded earlier this year - until Tuesday.

<https://churchofengland.org/media-centre/news/2016/06/agenda-published-for-the-july-2016-general-synod-york-meeting.aspx>

## **Cathedral, choral and musical**

**St Patrick's Church of Ireland Cathedral, Armagh** will be the venue for three musical events taking place at the end of this month.

**On Thursday 30 June, the Chesapeake Youth Symphony Orchestra will give a concert at 7.30pm.**

The orchestra is based in Annapolis, Maryland, USA, and provides young musicians, aged eight to eighteen years, with comprehensive musical and orchestral training. Under the leadership of professional conductors, the orchestra develops excellent performers through weekly rehearsals, coaching, workshops, competitions, and national and international tours. Thousands of young people have participated in its programmes, and many have gone on to have successful careers as musicians, while others have cultivated a life-long love of music. Their programme will include works by Schubert, Dvorak, and a world premiere by Irish composer Finola Merivale.

**On Friday 1 July, a lunch time concert of sacred music will be given at 1.00pm, by the Schola Cantorum of Santa Fe, from the American Southwest.**

The programme, lasting sixty minutes, will include the music of the American Midwest, the rural American Rocky Mountains and of Mexico, interspersed with medieval chants. As part of Schola's twenty-fifth anniversary celebrations, concerts will be held in Dublin, Armagh and Galway. Schola's Director, Dr Billy Turney, is particularly pleased to direct the concert in Armagh, as his family originally came from the County. Donations from this concert will support the 2016 Charles Wood Festival of Music and Summer School.

**On Sunday 3 July, at 4.15pm an organ recital will be given by two organists from America, Ms Nicole Keller and Professor Timothy Olsen.**

Nicole Keller is a solo and chamber music recitalist, performing regularly on the organ, piano and harpsichord. She is a faculty member of the Baldwin Wallace University Conservatory of Music in Berea, and serves as the Director of Music at the Community of Saint John in Hudson, both in Ohio.

Having competed in several national and international competitions, Nicole won first prize in 2011 in the North American round of the Michael Tariverdiev International Organ

Competition, and earned a place in the second round in Kaliningrad, Russia. She was also awarded the Special Shabyt Prize from the Kazakh National University of Arts in Astana, Kazakhstan for 'the most promising organist for inspiration and luck'.

Professor Olsen teaches high school, undergraduate and graduate organ courses as the Kenan Professor of Organ at the University of North Carolina School of the Arts and Associate Professor of Organ at Salem College in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, where he also serves as Cantor in Augsburg Lutheran Church. He enjoys an accomplished career in organ tuition, performance, and sacred music. He is an enthusiast for twentieth and twenty-first century music, having premiered compositions for organ and for organ/trumpet duo. He also enjoys performing baroque music on period instruments – both as a solo organist and as a continuo player.

The recital programme, given individually and jointly by Nicole and Timothy, will include pieces by Buxtehude, Mozart, Cesar Franck, Frank Ferko and Kenneth Leighton. As with all the recitals in this series, admission is free, with a retiring collection towards the further

endowment of the Cathedral choir through the Archbishop's Choir Fund.

The Very Revd Gregory Dunstan, Dean of Armagh, said, "In the run up to the Fourth of July, circumstances have combined to bring American musicians to the Cathedral on three occasions. From different backgrounds, from across the continent, they will give very different programmes, with something for everyone. As summer holidays begin, we look forward to a festival of music from America."

## News briefs

The folk in **St Clements, Templemore Avenue, joined in the Queen's 90th Birthday celebrations** last Saturday with a Family Fun Day and a special service and BBQ on Sunday.

Around 300 people milled around the church and grounds enjoying balloon modelling, face painting, a bouncy castle and retro games like hopscotch! There was even a chance to get your photo taken 'in' the Royal Coach.

Inside they were dressed to impress at the 'garden party' where a mountain of buns and strawberries was eaten before Whilma Dempsey

cut a beautiful birthday cake on behalf of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

The normal congregation doubled for Sunday's service which used a specially written liturgy and included Her Majesty's favourite Bible story, The Good Samaritan. Former RUC Chief Superintendent Alf Entwistle, who has met the Queen, paid tribute to her long reign and many marvellous qualities.

Finally the Queen's deep Christian faith was celebrated as each family was given a copy of 'The Servant Queen and the King She Serves'.

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An 'overwhelming' number of children and families attended a **Community Fun Day at St Katharine's Parish Church, Belfast**, on June 11.

The free event was part of a new initiative by the parish to promote the church's ministry within the local community in this working class part of north Belfast.

The afternoon was aimed at local children and families and included bouncy castles, face painting, fire engines, tuck shop and afternoon

teas. In the region of 260 attended, many more than initial estimates.

Speaking after the event the rector, the Rev Canon William Taggart, said: “This was a very encouraging fun day for the whole community and it was overwhelming to see just how many people attended.

“We were delighted to receive so much appreciation from local people afterwards for running the Fun Day and we hope it provides a welcome boost to our ongoing ministry in this area.

“I’m also very grateful to the other organisations that partnered with us on the day including, local schools, the PSNI, St. John’s Ambulance, The NI Fire Service and the Children’s and Orphans Society for their financial assistance.”

## **[News links to reports on faith, politics and education](#)**

### **Plans revealed to merge County Derry Catholic School with Church of Ireland School**

Derry Now



If the proposed plans to merge Knocknagin Primary School with Desertmartin Primary School (pictured) go ahead, it would be Northern **Ireland's** first ...

<http://www.derrynow.com/news/plans-revealed-to-merge-county-derry-catholic-school-with-church-of-ireland-school/98639>

### **Prayers and vigil for murdered MP Jo Cox**

<http://www.westyorkshiredales.anglican.org/content/prayers-said-and-vigil-held-murdered-yorkshire-mp-jo-cox>

### **Church of England responds to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child's recommendations for collective worship reform**

<https://churchofengland.org/media-centre/news/2016/06/church-of-england-responds-to-the-united-nations-committee-on-the-rights-of-the-child-s-recommendations-for-collective-worship-reform.aspx>

### **BBC/Guard/Ind/Exp/Star/Mirror/Metro/York Post/ Herald Scotland/Premier/ITV**

Reports that vigils have been held for Labour MP Jo Cox, who died after being shot and stabbed in the street. Hundreds of people packed into a church in Birstall, West Yorkshire, yesterday evening. The Bishop of Huddersfield, Jonathan Gibbs, told the service, "She grew up in this community, she lived for this community, she served this community and, in the end, she gave her life for this community." A number of outlets quote the Archbishop of Canterbury. "The death of Jo Cox is terrible, most for her family and friends, but also for what

the whole country has lost. We pray for those who mourn."

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-36555996>

<http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jun/16/jo-cox-killing-shooting-mp-birstall-west-yorkshire>

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/jo-cox-in-pictures-remembering-the-bright-star-of-westminster-a7086551.html>

<http://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/680735/Mourners-tribute-vigil-Jo-Cox-MP-shot-stabbed-Britain-First-murder-Yorkshire-politics-Lab>

<http://www.dailystar.co.uk/news/latest-news/523538/jo-cox-attack-vigil-church-service-labour-mp-killed-mourners-church-pictures>

<http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/mourners-pack-local-church-attend-8212836#ICID=nsm>

<http://metro.co.uk/2016/06/16/vigils-held-in-memory-of-mp-jo-cox-5949988/>

<http://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/news/shellshocked-community-in-birstall-attends-moving-vigil-in-memory-of-mp-jo-cox-1-7968733>

<http://www.premier.org.uk/News/UK/Vicar-joins-tributes-after-MP-dies-in-attack>

<http://www.itv.com/news/update/2016-06-16/archbishop-of-canterbury-deeply-shocked-by-mp-shooting/>

### **Tel/Guard/Christian Today**

Reports that two bishops are urging a rethink of traditional "interpretations" of the Bible which condemn homosexuality as a sin. Paul Bayes, the Bishop of Liverpool, said it was time for a "reconsideration" of the centuries-old view of marriage and insisted his mind was "open not closed" on how passages in the Bible talking

about homosexuality should be read in the 21st century. Colin Fetcher, the Bishop of Dorchester, said the Church's teaching on sexuality should not be treated as a core doctrine like the trinity, from which anyone who disagrees is a "heretic". The pair are among a number of church leaders from an evangelical background who have contributed to a new book of essays, edited by General Synod member Jayne Ozanne, calling for the Church to move to a stance of "affirming" people in same-sex relationships.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/06/16/two-bishops-urge-clerics-to-rethink-interpretations-of-the-bible/>

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jun/16/senior-bishop-change-church-of-england-attitudes-gay-people>

### **Eve Stand**

In a comment article Melaine McDonagh says the EU referendum's a time when our votes really count. She cites comments made by the Archbishop of Canterbury at Lambeth Palace reception for the media: "People feel really engaged about this (an election); and it's good". She reminds her readers that Archbishop Justin is, "a Remainer".

<http://www.standard.co.uk/comment/comment/melanie-mcdonagh-the-referendum-s-a-time-when-our-votes-really-count-a3273626.html>

### **Times**

Diary item on the tribute the Archbishop of Canterbury paid to Caroline Wyatt, who has retired as the BBC's Religious Affairs Correspondent. He recalled travelling with her to ebola-struck Sierra Leone in 2014. "We arrived at the airport and Caroline got out this huge bag

full of medical equipment that could have equipped a field hospital." He then asked his aide what first aid they had got for him and was handed a packet of paracetamol.

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/a-bitter-pill-for-welby-0qchnj0pz>

### **Co-Star (Thurs)**

Report that the Church Commissioners have withdrawn plans to sell its freehold interest in the Intu Metrocentre in Gateshead after putting it on the market last summer for around £125m. The Commissioners appointed JLL to sell the freehold to the shopping centre in July 2015 with the right to 10% of the rental income. Intu owns a 90% interest in the leasehold, which it bought from the Church Commissioners in 1995 when it was then Capital Shopping Centres. A spokesperson for the Church Commissioners said, "We had marketed the centre with a view to a sale as we were rebalancing our property portfolio. We did not achieve the price it is worth to us so we are happy to continue to hold it, and we are pleased to be working with Intu on a number of asset management initiatives."

<http://www.costar.co.uk/en/assets/news/2016/June/Church-Commissioners-shelves-plans-to-sell-Intu-MetroCentre-stake/>

### **Mail/Sun**

Reports that a C of E priest has been suspended for two years for 'dishonouring God' after he had an extra marital affair. The Revd Mark Bailey stepped down from his role at Trinity Church in Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, in January. Imposing the suspension under the Clergy Discipline Measure, the Bishop of Gloucester, Rachel

Treweek said clergy are "expected to aspire to the highest possible standards of conduct within their ministry".

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3644606/Church-England-pastor-suspended-clergy-two-years-dishonouring-God-having-affair-wife-s-back.html>  
<https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/1295662/andy-reverend-banned-from-clergy-for-dishonouring-god-but-forgiving-wife-takes-love-rat-back/>

### **Premier/Metro**

Reports that the C of E has been accused of discriminating against a lesbian couple by refusing to conduct their wedding. Janie and Lisa Davey-Collins had invited Revd Heather Aston from St Mawgan in Meneage church in Helston, Cornwall to officiate a wedding at their home in Manaccan in March. Articles note that the C of E is legally unable to perform same-sex weddings but that Heather Aston had offered prayers and pastoral support to the couple.

<http://www.premier.org.uk/News/UK/Church-of-England-accused-of-discrimination-over-lesbian-wedding-refusal>  
<http://metro.co.uk/2016/06/16/lesbian-couple-accuse-church-of-discrimination-after-it-refuses-to-bless-wedding-5948199/>

### **Leyland Guardian**

Reports that the Bishop of Lancaster has warned against leaving the EU in next week's referendum, saying it could turn out to be a backward step for Britain. Geoff Pearson, says he will be voting to stay in Europe even though he admits the "Brussels machine" is far from perfect. "Yes, there are faults. But in my view we can only change them by being at the table and not running

away," he said. "Are you going to change things more if you are on the outside than on the inside?"

<http://www.leylandguardian.co.uk/news/local/bishop-urges-voters-to-reject-brexit-campaign-1-7966701>

### [Christian Today](#)

Reports that in a statement issued by the Church of Wales, all the county's Bishops are all voting Remain in the European referendum. The bishops say that immigrants are being "demonised" in the debate over the referendum.

### **Schools Week**

Report that James Townsend has been appointed director of the Church of England foundation for educational leadership.

<http://schoolsweek.co.uk/james-townsend-tessa-mason-and-jenny-williams/>

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