

# Church News Ireland



**Image of the day – One Lord, One faith, One baptism**

## Image of the day

### One Lord, One faith, One baptism

The baptistery and font at St Peter's Cathedral, Belfast. This was installed during a most major renovation of the cathedral. At a service of re-dedication of the building the Administrator of St Peter's invited the Dean of Belfast to join him and together they poured the first water into this new font as a witness to the Cathedrals' Partnership and their shared belief of the font inscription Unus Dominus, Uni Fides, Unum Baptisma - One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism.

## People and places

### Corrymeela Service of Lament in Belfast Cathedral

**The 21st of June has been set in Northern Ireland as a Day of Reflection. As the sun reaches its highest point, we are given time to pause and acknowledge the grief that countless individuals have experienced through sectarian violence – and to commit ourselves to a more hope-filled future for everyone.**

Corrymeela invites you to 'A Service of Lament', an ecumenical service at St. Anne's Cathedral, on Wednesday

June 20, 2023

21st June 11.30am-12.30pm. Using the biblical practice of lament, this service will offers a space to reflect on the conflict in and about Northern Ireland – and to commit to a more peaceful future for everyone.

At the service last year, the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland remarked on how rare it is for us in this society to come together to acknowledge our collective pain. The Archbishop of Armagh (RC) noted that we have separated ourselves from each other – even in our grief. A shared service of lament provides an opportunity for us to be together as we find the courage to remember the past and seek hope for a better future.

You can learn more by watching video from last years' service:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yGwKOny2Yyc&t=4s>

More information about the Day of Reflection is found at <https://www.healingthroughremembering.org>

A link to the livestream of the event will be available on the day through our YouTube channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/@CorryCentre>

You are warmly invited to be there. No prior booking is required.







## Union TC Graduation Ceremony

**Union Theological College hosted its annual graduation service, recognising graduands across a number of our PTFI Postgraduate Programmes, and ministerial students who received their certificates of completion of studies from the General Assembly's Council for Training in Ministry.**

The Faculty and graduands made the brief journey on Friday 9th June, from UTC to Fitzroy Presbyterian Church, Belfast, where the ceremony took place.

During the service, PTFI awarded the Moderator Designate, Rev Dr Sam Mawhinney, an honorary Doctor of Divinity.



June 20, 2023



Dr Olwyn Mark (Lecturer in Practical Theology) delivered this year's citation.

June 20, 2023

By the authority of its Royal Charter (granted in 1881), the PTFI awarded degrees to graduands across a number of postgraduate programmes: PG Certificate in Biblical Greek, Master of Divinity (MDiv), Master of Theology in New Testament (MTh NT), Master of Theology in Reformed Theology (MTh Ref), Master of Arts in Theology (MA Th) and for the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD). The certificates of completion from the Council for Training in Ministry were then presented.

Rev Dr Martyn Cowan (Acting Vice-Principal and Lecturer in Historical Theology) delivered a charge to those receiving their awards, before the procession made its way back to the college, where graduands and their families - along with college Faculty, staff and supporters - celebrated with refreshments and the opportunity for photos.

## **Mothers Union Dungannon adventure**

**Last Saturday the ladies from Muckamore Mothers' Union and Killead and Gartree Mothers' Union enjoyed their joint summer outing to Drumglass Parish Flower Festival.**

It is safe to say a good time was had by all as the following account relates -

“When we arrived at Drumglass Parish we were warmly greeted by the Rev. Bryan Martin who escorted us to our table in their newly renovated hall where a beautiful lunch was provided and served to us by a team of ladies who worked very hard attending to a very busy crowd.





“We then enjoyed browsing around the church and their halls at all the wonderful Flower displays, which were so





carefully crafted to illustrate a story about specific aspects of our Lord's ministry.

“Of course, a day out is also not complete without a spot of retail therapy. The ladies enjoyed stopping off at Linen Green to treat themselves to something nice and a cuppa.

“Thanks goes to Killead and Gartree Mothers' Union for organising this year's joint outing. And to Drumglass Parish Dungannon for all their efforts in greeting us, feeding us and making us feel very welcome to their Flower festival.

“A great day had by all”.



June 20, 2023



## Larne's ladlers do it for Christian Aid

**Congratulations to the lovely ladlers from Larne who raised almost £450 for Christian Aid's work with a soup**

June 20, 2023

## **lunch held on Monday at First Larne Presbyterian Church.**

And what better way to raise funds to help your 'broth'-ers and sisters living in poverty and crisis than with a soup lunch?

Christian Aid is “especially grateful to Jackie Tennant (stirring the soup) and her band of helpers, Sandy Lindsay and his wife Margaret, also Janet and Robin Tweed and June Bryson for preparing a delicious lunch.

“We're grateful to everyone who came along to support the lunch with their donations. We are bowled over by your kindness”.

## **News reports**

### **UK evangelicals distance themselves from Ugandan support for anti-homosexuality law**

**The Church of England Evangelical Council has issued a statement rejecting the criminalisation of homosexual behaviour.**

The CEEC's statement was published this week in response to the Anglican Church of Uganda's support for strict new laws making some homosexual activity punishable by death.



June 20, 2023

The Anglican Primate of Uganda, Archbishop Stephen Kaziimba, said he was "grateful" for the Anti-Homosexuality Act 2023, which received presidential assent last month.

The CEEC said that while it was "fully committed to Lambeth I.10 in its entirety" and upholding biblical teaching on marriage and sexuality, it could not condone the criminalisation of homosexuality.

The evangelical group said that such laws would "encourage victimisation" of LGBT people and hamper pastoral care and discipleship.

"We oppose the criminalisation of consensual homosexual behaviour, especially when combined with severe penalties and requirements to report people for their behaviour," the CEEC said.

"We believe such laws encourage victimisation of those who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or same-sex attracted and make the church's commitment to listen to, care for, and disciple all people, regardless of sexual orientation, much more difficult to live out.

"On the basis of these convictions, we are committed to further reflection on these matters and are engaging privately, through EFAC, with GAFCON and GSFA.

"We continue to pray for Christians and non-Christians whose lives such laws impact so severely and for all of us that, in our diverse cultures, we will learn from each other and bear faithful witness to Christ in word and deed."

June 20, 2023

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, has asked the Ugandan Primate to reconsider his support for the new law.

In a letter to Archbishop Kaziimba, he expressed "grief and dismay" at the Ugandan Church's endorsement and said there was "no justification" for any province in the Anglican Communion to adopt such a stance.

Archbishop Kaziimba dismissed Welby's concerns in a tweet, saying, "Archbishop Justin Welby, Primate of All England, has every right to form his opinions about matters around the world that he knows little about firsthand, which he has done in his recent statement about Church of Uganda's widely held support for the Anti-Homosexuality Act 2023."

## In the media

### **Bishops accuse Westminster of 'ideological colonisation' over abortion propaganda in Irish schools**

**The bishops of Northern Ireland, speaking at the annual Irish Catholic Bishops Conference in Maynoth, just outside Dublin, issued a very strong and frank rebuke to the ideological imposition of a liberal secularist agenda in Northern Ireland, Dubhaltach O Reachtain writes in the Catholic Herald**

The Bishops were speaking in response to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Chris Heaton Harris, laying regulations in the Westminster Parliament making it



compulsory on all second level schools in Northern Ireland to teach children about access to abortion.

The attempt at further imposition in Northern Ireland of Westminster imposed laws that exceed even those that are in place across the water in the UK, takes place in the continued absence of a government structure in Northern Ireland with the Northern Ireland Assembly currently suspended.

The Northern Ireland Assembly has the power to make laws in a wide range of areas, including housing, employment, education, health, agriculture and the environment but has failed sit for a number of years as electoral changes and other issues have resulted in an impasse between the major Nationalist and Unionist parties.

The UK government has previously taken advantage of the suspension to impose an abortion regime exceedingly more permissive than is available in the UK itself.

Instigated in 2019 under a proposal from Labour MP Stella Creasy, taking effect from 31 March 2020, the law permitted abortions in all circumstances in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy, and beyond that in other cases including no term limit in cases of life limiting conditions, where there is a substantial risk that the baby would die or, if born, would suffer a severe mental or physical impairment.

When limited progress was made in operationalising the instruction from London, a High Court judge in February 2022 ruled that then Northern Ireland Secretary Brandon

Lewis had the legal authority to direct the establishment of abortion services.

Mr Justice Colton held that Mr Lewis was compelled to take the step citing non-binding recommendations from UN reports as justification for the intrusive actions.

Citizens on both sides of the Nationalist/Unionist divide were incensed at the overreach of the UK Government in dismissing the devolved authority in Northern Ireland, effectively imposing a new form of sectarianism from outside the country.

Speaking from Maynooth, the bishops said: “Having already imposed some of the most radical abortion laws in the world on the people of Northern Ireland, without their consent, the Secretary of State now seems determined to impose an ideologically biased view of abortion on all schools, irrespective of parental rights or school ethos.

“This is radical legislation the British Government doesn’t even impose on schools in Britain, where the right of parents to be involved in decisions about such ethical and pastoral issues is fully respected.”

Reminding the government of the principle of subsidiarity and the rights of parents to educate their children in moral formation, the bishops note that it is not even the right of the Northern Assembly to impose such ideologically driven views on children and schools, let alone the administration based in London.



June 20, 2023

“It is not for a Government to impose one ideological approach on children, parents or on our schools, over others.

“This is why the right of parents to an education for their children that is an accordance with their ethical, religious and philosophical convictions, is an internationally recognised human right.

“It prevents Governments from the kind of over-reach in relation to the rights and freedom of parents that this legislation represents.

“We call on the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to respect the internationally recognised rights of parents, and the principles.”

The bishops added: “The Secretary of State, and the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, need to move away from their tendency to ideological colonisation in this area, and trust parents, teachers, young people and local politicians in Northern Ireland to balance the rights and responsibilities involved.”

The issue of relationship and sexuality education (RSE) is a sensitive topic across the island of Ireland with the Republic of Ireland department of education recently releasing guidelines for Social, Personal and Health Education that requires teachers to cover contested issues such as gender identity and other sensitive issues that ought to remain the responsibility of parents, with critics questioning the claim that the RSE is factual, evidence-based and value neutral.

June 20, 2023

The Catholic Education Partnership in Ireland has recently developed a course outline that attempts to navigate the requirements of the national curriculum while remaining true to Catholic teaching.

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## **King's Honours 2023: Rev Steve Stockman reflects - 'They said I would get nowhere with long hair and Beatles T-Shirts'**

**Unorthodox Presbyterian Minister Steve Stockman says he has proved relatives wrong who said he would get nowhere as a minister by sporting long hair and Beatles T-Shirts, Philip Bradfield writes in The Newsletter**

Instead, the minister at Fitzroy Presbyterian Church in Belfast he has been recognised in the Kings Honours list with an MBE for services to peace and reconciliation. He is perhaps best known for the annual 4 Corners Festival in Belfast, which he founded in 2012 together with Fr Martin Magill from St John's parish church on the Falls Road.

They describe it as a hybrid sacred-secular festival which aims to build bridges across the city.

He also made headlines last year when he shook hands with Pope Francis – together with Fr Magill – when the Pontiff visited Dublin.





“I’m not good at taking praise so I’m trying to work my way into this,” he told the News Letter about his MBE.

“But it’s nice to be affirmed for the stuff you do on a daily basis for the past 10-15 years. That is a wonderful thing to feel.”

He has no idea who put him forward for the award.

The cleric previously hosted a weekly radio programme on Radio Ulster where he played his favourite rock music – especially U2, a band about which he published a successful book.

And he has long had a reputation of challenging religious institutions and status quo.

Asked if it was not therefore inevitable that – like so many in the world of rock and roll – he would eventually be embraced by the establishment, he laughed.

“The first time I would ever have thought of MBEs was when the Beatles were awarded them, so yeah.”

“My biggest fear was, what if there’s been an administrative error, and I’ve already told my cousin I’ve been awarded an MBE?”

But the news also caused him to think about his father and an uncle – both of whom he he lost last year. They would have been very proud of him, he says.

“I imagine I would have said to them: ‘You told me to cut my hair and that I would get nowhere with my Beatles T shirts – and here we are – an MBE!’” he chuckled.

Responding to suggestions that he has often been outspoken in critiquing religion, he replies: “I’ve just tried to be as true to the Jesus that find in the Gospels as possible. Sometimes the church seems a little bit like it has domesticated Jesus, and I’ve gone my own way.”

He also paid tribute to his mentor at Fitzroy Presbyterian Church. “I stand on the shoulders of Ken Newell – that was a big lead into what I am doing.”

While he has faced accusations that he has compromised the doctrinal position of the Presbyterian Church in some of his work, he disagrees.

June 20, 2023

Last year he was invited into Clonard Monastery on the Falls Road to give a talk on the Protestant theology of Mary. In his view he maintains his principles while keeping his arms open to others.

“And I think that’s a great thing. We have a great respect for each other’s differences and I’ve never had to compromise my faith.”

His friend Fr Magill said he was “delighted” by the news.

“Steve has contributed so much over the years,” he said. “I first got to know him through his radio programme on BBC Radio Ulster – I still miss it up on a Sunday evening. But just in terms of his commitment to peace and reconciliation over the years, I think this is a very fitting tribute to him.”

## Webinars, music, resources, broadcasts, and books

### Reimagine - a call to action for evangelical Christians in Northern Ireland

This week Evangelical Alliance in Northern Ireland launched a new inspirational resource, called “Reimagine”, a call to action for evangelical Christians in Northern Ireland to reimagine a gospel vision for our people and our place and to speak with a prophetic voice to see transformation. As Proverbs 29:18 reminds us, “Where there is no vision, the people perish.”



June 20, 2023

EA is urging faith organisations to look beyond broken politics and envision a future for Northern Ireland that is centred on the gospel. We are talking about transformation at every level: society, government, communities, families, and individual lives. Reimagine provides a space for collaborative and innovative thinking.

Reimagine is a catalyst, reminding us of our responsibility as change agents who can make a real difference. It challenges us to bring lasting, positive change to Northern Ireland through the power of a renewed understanding of a gospel vision.

For more info, contact Danielle Mcelhinney EA (NI) Public Policy Officer. Email: [d.mcelhinney@eauk.org](mailto:d.mcelhinney@eauk.org) or go to the website and request a copy at <https://www.eauk.org/about-us/nations/northern-ireland>

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## Church News Ireland

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