

Church News Ireland



Image of the day – Assembly Buildings

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Image of the day

Assembly Buildings, Belfast

The buildings include the administrative headquarters of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and the hall which is the customary venue for the meetings of the church's General Assembly.

The 2023 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland meets in Assembly Buildings in Belfast from Wednesday evening, 21 June and closes on Saturday afternoon, 24 June.

Here is the link to the General Assembly Business 2023. In this section you will find details of each day's business before the General Assembly.

You can download the reports and resolutions mentioned below in The Blue Book here.

This page also includes new digital and e-reader versions of the Blue Book. Supplementary Reports can also be found here when published.

<https://www.presbyterianireland.org/Resources/General-Assembly/2023-General-Assembly/General-Assembly-2023-Business.aspx>

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People and places



Turning Tide mission teams welcomed to Down and Dromore

Down and Dromore Diocese says “We were thrilled to welcome 50 SOMA team members who have travelled to Northern Ireland to take part in two weeks of parish missions across the diocese.”

Before joining their parishes, everyone gathered in Banbridge for a Team Training and Orientation Day. It was also an opportunity for people to meet each other, and pray in their teams for the first time.

The international visitors have come all the way from Australia, Brazil, England, Nigeria, Portugal, Scotland, USA, South Africa, Uganda, Ukraine and Kenya. They are joining up with 29 parish teams and will share in a wide variety of

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ministry and outreach activities from prayer walks to pizza nights.

Richard Moyes who leads SOMA UK and Henry Blair, leader of SOMA Ireland, have also joined the initiative and will be leading teams.

You can't leave Northern Ireland without understanding the meaning of craic, so it was a relaxed day with refreshments, lunch, worship, prayer and lots of encouragement.

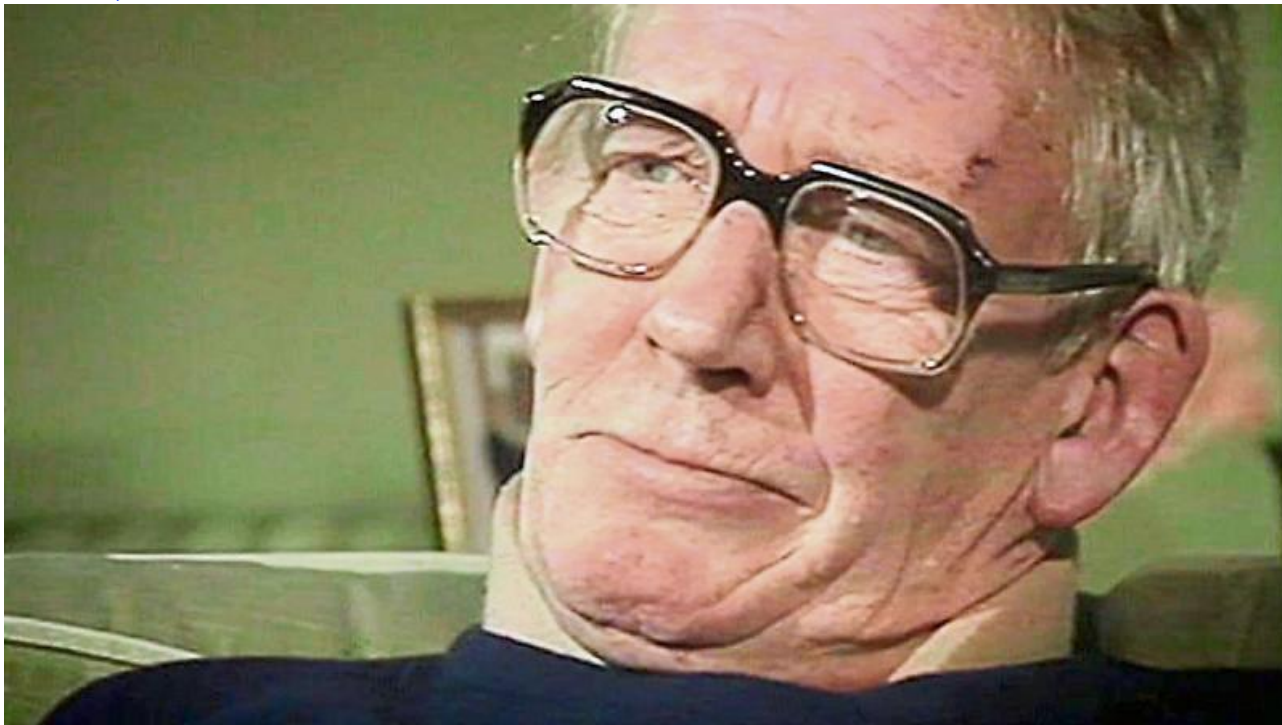
Bishop David McClay gave some background to the diocese and set the vision for the mission which is called Turning Tide.

George Newell led a session on sharing your faith in Northern Ireland which included cultural orientation and some evangelism basics while Andrew Brannigan delivered training on the safeguarding of children and adults.

The afternoon ended with Holy Communion and an act of commissioning.

It's exciting to know that there are about 500 people in other parts of the world praying for the teams. The diocese stated, "We are full of expectation for what God will do among us".

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Tribute to peace campaigner Gordon Wilson

A local group representing the main Christian Churches, gathered in North Leitrim on Saturday, May 20 to hold an ecumenical prayer service and tree planting ceremony in memory of the late Senator and peace campaigner, Gordon Wilson who was born in the rural community just outside Manorhamilton in 1927.

The prayer service, which included members of the Wilson family and members of the local community, was led by Rev David Nixon, President of the Methodist Church in Ireland.

Rev Nixon, drew on the themes of forgiveness and reconciliation, recognising that these were the hallmarks of Gordon Wilson's response to the killing of his daughter, Marie, in the 1987 Enniskillen bombing.

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Revd. Gerry Comiskey, Marian Harkin TD, Cathaoirleach of Leitrim County Council, Cllr Ita Reynolds Flynn, Revd Noel Regan, John Hassard, son-in-law, and Judith Grey, granddaughter of Senator Gordon Wilson, Revd. David Nixon, President of the Methodists in Ireland, Julie Ann Hassard, the late Senator Gordon Wilson's daughter who unveiled the plaque, Rev. Lurna Dreading, Minister of Enniskillen Methodist Church along with Gordon Wilson's great grandchildren Katie Hassard and Wilson Grey.
Pictures: James Molloy

The gathering was also addressed by Gordon Wilson's daughter Julie Anne Hassard, Rev Gerard Comiskey PP, Rev Noel Regan, Church of Ireland and Cathaoirleach of Leitrim County Council, Cllr Ita Reynolds.

Report courtesy Donal O'Grady, Leitrim Live

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Drumcree Family Fun Day draws bumper crowds

The organisers of Drumcree Family Fun Day and Vintage Rally couldn't have hoped for better weather on Saturday.

They were rewarded for their many weeks of preparation by the turnout on the day as large crowds – said to be quite possibly a record-breaking number – came along to join the fun.



Sing & Tonic Choir

When: Sunday 18th June
Time: 3pm
At: Drumbeg Parish Halls, beside Coop Coffee
How: bring your deckchairs and picnic and chill!

First performance!

More Information :
kirstyormusic@gmail.com

With a host of activities ranging from children's fun, a novelty dog show, vintage and classic tractors and cars, customised vehicles, live music and entertainment and a variety of stalls, there really was something for everyone.

The proceeds

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of the day are going to the Drumcree Parish Church Building Fund.

Photographer Tony Hendron was there to capture some of the highlights of the event.

[\[https://www.northernirelandworld.com/news/people/21-sun-soaked-pictures-as-drumcree-family-fun-day-draws-bumper-crowds-4168669\]](https://www.northernirelandworld.com/news/people/21-sun-soaked-pictures-as-drumcree-family-fun-day-draws-bumper-crowds-4168669)

Report courtesy Valerie Martin, Northern Ireland World

Arklow Christian Church donate to community resource centre

The Arklow Christian Community Church supported the Arklow Community Action Resource Centre at their monthly Super Sunday event for May.

Praising the volunteers for their generosity, selflessness and their dedicated service to the Wicklow community, Patricia Aroboto was delighted to present the cheque in-person to Arklow Community Action Resource Centre committee members PJ Busher, Anne Carroll and Julie Martin.

Speaking after the presentation, PJ, Anne and Julie said they were “delighted” with the church’s generous contribution and felt supremely honoured to be chosen as recipients.

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The Arklow Christian Community Church organises a Super Sunday fundraising event at their highly popular Sunday service every month.

The church has made sizeable donations to a variety of worthy local causes over the years, including Men's Sheds, Arklow Tidy Towns, Arklow's schools, The East Wicklow Youth Service, the Vault Youth Café, The Arklow Community Action Resource Centre and Arklow First Responders – to name but a few.

Report courtesy Eoin Mac raghnaill, Wicklow People

Wicklow has highest percentage of Church of Ireland residents in the country according to Census

Co Wicklow has the highest proportion of people identifying as Church of Ireland, England, Anglican or Episcopalian in the country according to figures from the 2022 Census.

Published this week the figures show that, as of April last year, there were 8,895 people in the county who chose one of the above as their religion of choice.

This accounts for 5.7 per cent of the county's population, the highest percentage nationwide followed by Cavan (4.9 per cent) and Dún Laoghaire (4.1 per cent). Wicklow residents also ranked highly when it came to selecting 'no religion' in the Census form.

A massive 30,649 (19.7 per cent) of respondents chose this option, placing Wicklow fourth in the country behind Dún Laoghaire (23.9 per cent), Dublin City (22.6 per cent), and Co Galway (20.9 per cent). The figure for people with no religion increased by 284,269 and stood at 736,210.

Despite these developments, Roman Catholic remains the predominant religion of choice for residents of Wicklow with 99,324 people (63.7 per cent) selecting it in the Census form. Mayo had the highest proportion of Roman Catholics at 80 per cent of the county's population, closely followed by Tipperary, Offaly, Roscommon and Galway County, all reporting 79 per cent.

Dublin City recorded the lowest percentage of Roman Catholics at 53 per cent. Nationally the percentage of the



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population who identified as Roman Catholic fell from 3,696,644 (79 per cent) in 2016 to 3,515,861 (69 per cent) in 2022. The total number of Roman Catholics fell by 180,783.

With regards to other faiths in Wicklow the Census recorded 2,592 Orthodox (Greek, Coptic, Russian) in the county, 1,449 Christian (unspecified), 1,131 Islam, 624 Presbyterians, 448 Hindus, 419 Evangelicals, 331 Methodists, 311 Buddhists, 173 Jehovah's Witness, 150 Protestants, 150 Pagan/Pantheists, 138 lapsed Roman Catholics, 129 Born again Christians, 127 Spiritualist, 123 Lutherans, 122 Apostolic or Pentecostal, 114 Baptists, 97 Agnostics, 39 Atheists, 805 who chose 'other', and 7,511 who opted not to select any of the available options.



Asking God to guide us in our efforts to care for our common home and leave a better world for future generations [cafod.org.uk](https://www.cafod.org.uk)

Cafod invites you [Write a Prayer for Tomorrow](#)

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Nationally the number of Hindus more than doubled from 13,729 to 33,043.

Report courtesy Simon Bourke, Wicklow People Simon Bourke

News reports

Archbishop of Dublin appointed Anglican Co–Chair of dialogue with Oriental Orthodox Churches

The Church of Ireland’s Archbishop of Dublin, the Most Revd Dr Michael Jackson, has been appointed as the co–Chair of the official international group responsible for ecumenical dialogue between the Anglican Communion and the Oriental Orthodox Churches.

The Anglican–Oriental Orthodox International Commission (AOOIC) was formed in 2001 to build unity between the Churches of the two families of Churches.

The Anglican Communion comprises 42 autonomous and independent–yet–interdependent regional, national and pan–national churches. Six Oriental Orthodox Churches are represented in the Dialogue. There are an estimated 140 million Christians in the two Communion.

AOOIC brings together church leaders and theologians from both to further the work of Christian unity.

AOOIC has two Co–Chairs. The Coptic Orthodox Archbishop of London, His Eminence Archbishop Angaelos, is the Oriental Orthodox Co–Chair. The Most Revd Dr Michael Jackson now succeeds the Bishop of St Asaph from the Church in Wales, the Rt Revd Gregory Cameron, as the Anglican Co–Chair.

“I feel honoured to be invited by the Archbishop of Canterbury to serve as Anglican Co–Chair of The Anglican Oriental Orthodox International Commission,” Archbishop Michael said. “The Dialogue is something of which I have been privileged to be part since 2002. Throughout that period, we have addressed a wide range of issues of importance to the various traditions involved in the Dialogue.

“One of the major changes to have happened is that the movements of people worldwide have brought us all closer together both personally and theologically. This constantly enriches and enhances our range of engagement and makes our Dialogue both ancient and modern at the same time.

“I want to thank my predecessor, the Rt Revd Dr Gregory Cameron, Bishop of St Asaph, and before him the Rt Revd Dr Geoffrey Rowell, now sadly deceased, and also my fellow Co–Chair, Archbishop Angaelos, for all their work and sustained contributions.”

Archbishop Angaelos said: “We give thanks for the contribution of the Rt Revd Gregory Cameron over the past nine years, who has not only contributed richly to the life of the Commission, but also exhibited exemplary leadership as

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the Anglican Co–Chair. I am thankful for the fellowship I have shared with him over these past years.

“As Oriental Orthodox members of the Commission, we extend our sincere thanks and appreciation to Bishop Gregory, and look forward to continuing our work with His Grace Archbishop Michael Jackson as Anglican Co–Chair, who has been a valued member of the Commission since its establishment.”

The Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Revd and Rt Hon Justin Welby, said: “Archbishop Michael has vast ecumenical and Anglican Communion experience and has been a member of AOOIC since its beginning. He now brings this knowledge, and his many other gifts, to the role of Co–Chair of AOOIC.

“The deepening friendship between Anglicans and Oriental Orthodox brings me great joy, and I pray that this may continue to grow with God’s help, and that the work of AOOIC may be a blessing to us all as we seek to achieve the unity which Christ wills.”

The Secretary General of the Anglican Communion, Bishop Anthony Poggio, said: “Since 2002, AOOIC has made a significant contribution in bringing Christians from the Oriental Orthodox and Anglican Churches closer together, and in their valuable theological work for both families.

“I welcome Archbishop Michael Jackson’s acceptance of the Archbishop of Canterbury’s invitation to serve as the Anglican Co–Chair of this dialogue; and look forward to seeing the results of ongoing and future work on Authority.”

In 2014, AOOIC signed an agreed statement on Christology. This was followed in 2017 by an agreed statement on 'The Procession and Work of the Holy Spirit', and a statement on 'The Inheritance of Ecumenical Councils' in 2022. AOOIC is currently exploring further questions of Authority in the Church.

In the media

Archbishop John McDowell: 'Unionists need to engage with a changing world'

Church of Ireland Archbishop of Armagh John McDowell talks to Paul McFadden about the mood in the Protestant-unionist-loyalist community

"One of the problems with being a bishop or, indeed, being an archbishop, is that you're not in and out of people's homes the way you used to be."

The Church of Ireland Archbishop of Armagh, the Most Reverend John McDowell, is discussing the challenges of reconciliation, as well as the mood in the Protestant-unionist-loyalist (PUL) community, among whom he has grown up, lived, worked and served for over 60 years – a lifetime during which unionism's once apparently unassailable majority at Stormont has dissipated.

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"When I was in parish ministry and visiting maybe three or four people a day, every day, different types of people, you were getting a very, very clear view of what was on their mind at the time," he says when we meet in Armagh.

"It's much less so now. But there's no doubt – well, there's always a doubt, in a sense – that there is a nervousness and defensiveness again within that broad PUL community."

He might not be in and out of people's homes so much nowadays but the Primate still gets around. His diary last month included a prominent role in the coronation service at Westminster Abbey; chairing the General Synod in Wexford; and attending the GAA's Ulster football final at Clones.

Archbishop McDowell was at pains, in our conversation, not to come across as a political spokesperson, though he accepts that a majority of Church of Ireland people in Northern Ireland "would be unionist".

"I don't speak in that context – there are plenty of people out there who get paid good money to do that," he stresses.

In any case, the political allegiances of Church of Ireland members are none of his business, he adds: "If I'm a leader in any sense, it's as a disciple of Jesus Christ with other disciples of Jesus Christ."

Still, his political antennae have detected within that broad PUL community a sense of being let down and even, in some cases, of betrayal.

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"You know, on that famous occasion when Boris Johnson said, 'If anybody sends you a customs declaration, tear it up,' that was just misleading people. So, I think they have a right to feel aggrieved at that," says the Archbishop.

"But anybody who thought that you could be part of a trading bloc which had become a kind of a political bloc as well, for 40 odd years, and for there to be no difficult consequences after that – especially in a place with a land border – I mean, that was just silly, really, and people should never have believed it."

Nonetheless, there was a sense of being 'let down', and of a "crisis of relationship with the government of the United Kingdom".

In July 2019, while he was still Bishop of Clogher, the Primate wrote an open letter to the then-new prime minister, Boris Johnson, warning of the "incalculable consequences" of a no-deal Brexit.

Four years and two prime ministers later, Archbishop McDowell sounds rueful. "My own view about the whole process, from the [Northern Ireland] Protocol and Brexit through, was if the [Withdrawal Agreement] Joint Committee had been allowed to do its work and had been taken seriously from the start by everybody – particularly by the UK government – that a great many of these matters could have been sorted out simply, almost as technical matters."

It is 'unfortunate' that neither the Joint Committee nor the Joint Working Group were "allowed to function properly", he says.

These weren't the only things stopped in their tracks. The DUP has been blocking the formation of an Executive and the functioning of the Assembly for over a year, in protest against post-Brexit trading arrangements for Northern Ireland. Critical spending decisions are being made by civil servants rather than locally elected politicians.

"It obviously undermines the idea of a democratically run place," the Archbishop says. "I think there are really very relatively small numbers of people who don't want to see Stormont working.

"I think that's on all sides. I mean, the DUP are a devolutionist party and they have been for a very, very long time, but the danger is that the longer you stay out, and the more frequently that the breakdowns happen, then the credibility of the institutions becomes undermined."

Archbishop McDowell endorses Senator George Mitchell's warning, made during the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement in April, about "the one hundred percenters".

"A lot of people have said, to the DUP particularly... there has to be some kind of acceptance that other people have interests, and they have to be taken into account," he says.

Despite Stormont's dysfunctionality, the dissident republican murder attempt on Detective Chief Inspector John Caldwell and rumblings from loyalist paramilitaries, Archbishop McDowell does not foresee a return to large-scale violence.

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"Obviously, there's an increased threat and the threat which the loyalist paramilitaries pose is to their own communities," he says.

"As I have repeatedly said, they wreck their own front room and they are not political players in any sense; they are criminals and extortionists and drug dealers, by and large.

"That's what characterises them. If they were in the Republic, they'd be called the Hutch and Kinahan gangs.

"Obviously, there's a slightly more sinister threat in some ways – politically sinister – from the extreme end of dissident republicanism, but I really don't believe that the republican-nationalist community have very much sympathy for that at all.

"[I believe] that the republican-nationalist community are more or less entirely bought into the peace process and to purely peaceful means of attaining an end."

Traditionally, Archbishop McDowell suggests, unionism has had a predisposition towards the status quo and not actually moving towards something.

"But now, even the status quo looks a bit uncertain or unstable, if the status quo, for instance, is the Windsor Framework," he says.

"As long as I can remember, unionist leaders have talked about 'selling the Union' – that is selling the Union to people who you wouldn't necessarily think are natural unionists –

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but that has never, ever been done in any significant or positive way.

"That's partly because northern Irish ideas of Britishness and Great Britain's ideas on Britishness are quite different and have a different emphasis."

These are difficult days for unionism. "I have no doubt that there are many people who think that the whole PUL nervousness is a kind of fabricated grievance, or exaggerated," Archbishop McDowell says.

"That's probably because they haven't had an opportunity to engage or because the PUL community hasn't engaged with them. It's difficult because some of the people who are now saying, 'We want to engage with you and accommodate you', are those who were trying to drive you into the sea 20 years ago.

"Now, it is 20 years ago, but nevertheless that's a long memory and it'll take a long time for that [to go] but it can't be done without engagement – and you can only engage when you're confident that you have something distinctive to say and something distinctive to contribute.

"I suppose the person who really did that best was [the late former Progressive Unionist Party leader and fellow east Belfast man] David Ervine, who engaged and felt that the culture which he represented was as rich as any other culture – that Belfast working class loyalist culture wasn't just to do with a certain range of slogans."

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Archbishop McDowell does have one piece of advice for the PUL community: "Engagement is the only way to achieve anything, so it's to engage with the world around you and how it's changing, but also to recognise that history isn't something just to be studied and endured, as though there is an inevitability about it.

"History is something that you make by little decisions, but if the little decisions you make are only made in your own bubble, they'll not affect anybody else."

This interview was conducted as part of the Journey in Self Belief project, 'A space for the Protestant community to embrace and create the future'.

By Paul McFadden . Published in The Irish News.
04/06/2023

Speaking to the soul

Short reading and a prayer - daily on this site

Church News Ireland

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