



*The joy of meeting the donkey at the outdoor nativity scene at Abbeystrewry Parish Church... Parishes in Cork, Cloyne and Ross have been sending their bishop photos of Christmas and festivals*

## **C of I discussion guide on same-sex relationships issued**

Yesterday in Dublin, the Church of Ireland launched a guide to enable discussion of same-sex relationships within the church.

A press release states, this is “a new resource designed to assist members of the Church in the ongoing process of listening, learning and dialogue on the issue. The *Guide* outlines the process to date along with contextual essays and contributions from different viewpoints.”

It was produced by a committee saddled with the cumbersome title of : “The Church of Ireland’s Select Committee on Human Sexuality in the Context of Christian Belief”.

The *Guide* was launched in Church of Ireland House, Dublin, by the Archbishop of Armagh, the Most Revd Dr Richard Clarke, and will be launched in the Northern Province today (Tuesday) in St Anne’s Cathedral, Belfast, also by the Archbishop of Armagh.

The Archbishop said ‘I commend the *Guide* warmly. It contains an absolute wealth of material on a huge variety of issues. We are encouraged to use the Scriptures reverently and humbly, and helped in finding ways in which we may do this. We are given practical guidance on how to approach dialogue with those who hold different viewpoints from ours.’

The Very Revd John Mann, Chairman of the Select Committee, stated that its members

initially considered taking a broad approach to human sexuality before deciding to concentrate on same–sex issues, in the light of current debates and recent legislation. In advance of yesterday’s launch, he said: ‘Following a number of meetings and residential sessions, the Select Committee sought theological and biblical guidance, as well as beginning a wide–ranging listening process whereby organisations and individuals were given the opportunity to express their views and experiences in a safe and confidential manner.’

Dean Mann continued: ‘The Select Committee has not sought to present the *Guide* as a solution to difficult issues arising from sexuality in the life of the Church. There are conflicting views voiced in the *Guide* but there is plenty of material to make the thinking person reflect, challenge preconceived notions, and give them a voice for their concerns or the confidence to search out further guidance.’

Study modules will also be available to encourage discussion and personal reflection. Dean Mann concluded: ‘These will help all who sincerely seek to engage with the issues and to understand all whose relationship with the Church is affected by their sexual orientation.’

Changing Attitude Ireland, the foremost group in presenting the needs of LGBT people with the church welcomed the publication. Scott Golden, Chairman of CAI, in a press statement said, Changing Attitude Ireland would like to commend the Select Committee for their carefully balanced “Guide to the Conversation on Human Sexuality in the context of Christian Belief” and understand their reasons for not attempting to come to any conclusion other than that “the conversation should continue”. It is essential, if this Guide is to be effective, that the Church facilitate further small group conversation on these issues throughout the Church, at parish level then diocesan level and finally at General Synod. These sessions should use experienced facilitators as suggested by Bishop Trevor Williams in his submission “Understanding the Other”.

“As to our regrets, we would have wished that the personal testimonies shared with committee members by LGBT individuals and those close to them at considerable emotional cost could have been quoted more fully. We also question the necessity of hypothesizing about what those who did **not** testify might have said if they had felt comfortable enough to come forward.”

Moving on to the outcomes of the Anglican Primates' Meeting last week, he continued, "On the wider scene, we are encouraged by the Archbishop of Armagh, Richard Clarke, saying yesterday (*Sunday on BBC Sunday Sequence*) that he believed in equality absolutely and completely, that he was open to changing his mind on the issue of same-sex marriage and hoped we might find some form of pastoral accommodation that would be true to the Scriptures and to our understanding that every human person is made in the image and likeness of God and is equally loved by God and must be equally loved by us."

The Select Committee on Human Sexuality in the Context of Christian Belief was established in May 2013 following a resolution of the 2012 General Synod. The Select Committee's remit is to enable a listening, dialogue and learning process within the Church of Ireland to continue on all issues concerning human sexuality in the context of Christian belief.

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## High profile changes in clergy appointments in Down & Connor

There is to be a major number of new appointments in the Catholic diocese of Down and Connor. Amongst them are the administrator of St Peter's Cathedral, Rev Dr Hugh P Kennedy and a member of "The Priests", the well-known singing group.

Rev Dr Hugh P Kennedy stated on Facebook that "On February 1st after almost ten years I will be leaving St Peter's Cathedral to take up my new post as Chaplain to More House, Archdiocese of Westminster, London to minister with other university chaplains".

He continued, "I give thanks for so many happy memories of my priesthood at the Cathedral, the most profound and that which has given me greatest inspiration and joy was the founding of the Schola Cantorum, and the beauty that the Schola's music brought to the celebration of the liturgy at the Cathedral"

A Belfast organist congratulating Dr Kennedy commented, "The Schola Cantorum of St Peter's

Cathedral Belfast, conducted by Nigel McClintock is a splendid testament to what Nigel has achieved musically and what the Schola's founder, Fr Hugh Kennedy, has accomplished”

Fr Eugene O’Hagan of “The Priests” is to be Diocesan Chancellor.

View the new appointments at -

<http://www.downandconnor.org/blog/2016/01/15/connor-clerical-appointments-15th-january-2016/>

## **The Art of Listening theme of Belfast’s Four Corners Festival**

The 4 Corners Festival seeks to inspire people from across the city to transform it for the peace and prosperity of all. It consists of innovative events designed to entice people out of their own ‘corners’ of the city and into new places where they will encounter new perspectives, new ideas, and new friends.

This year’s festival takes on the theme of ‘The Art of Listening’. A full programme is available on the [4 Corners Festival website](#).

St George’s Parish Church is involved on January 30 when it is the starting point on a [churchnewsireland@gmail.com](mailto:churchnewsireland@gmail.com)



Festival Churches' Walk. Meeting at St George's in High Street at 2.30pm, the walk includes First Belfast Presbyterian Church in Rosemary Street (Non-Subscribing Presbyterian), St Mary's, Chapel Lane (Roman Catholic) and Sandy Row Methodist Church.

Walkers will be welcomed at each church by the Minister or a parishioner who will speak about the life and ministry of that congregation for around 20 minutes, and so including walking time, the event should last about two and a half hours.

St Nicholas Parish Church in Lisburn Road is the location for an event to end the festival on Sunday February 7 at 7pm. Here, festival visionaries will share their dreams about how the festival moves into the future. Expect poetry and songs and the winner of the School's Art Competition.



<http://4cornersfestival.com/news/>

## **Archbishop's tribute to Pieta House on 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary**

Pieta House was and still is a pioneer in eliminating the taboos around suicide, Archbishop Diarmuid Martin said on Sunday as he marked the suicide support group's tenth anniversary.

In his homily at a Mass in the Church of St Mary in Lucan, the Archbishop of Dublin said the taboos around suicide had damaged many troubled lives and a debt of gratitude was owed to Pieta House for breaking them down.

“From the first moment in which the idea emerged, Pieta House was truly innovative,” he told the congregation and said the group was the “fruit of sensitivity to a problem which in so many was – and to an extent still is – kept buried within Irish society”.

He said that those who established Pieta House were not content in simply providing a service, they realised that in opening a door of compassion and care and support they should also open up a door of awareness.



“The more the door opened, the more society would become aware of how significant the problems linked with suicide were in Ireland and how the worst thing that could be done in the face of this reality was to try to hide it and bury it,” he said.

The Archbishop described the suffering of those who have been helped by Pieta House as “suffering in the deepest corners of their hearts”.

He paid tribute to the generosity and care and assistance that Pieta House offers and said the voluntary nature of this care was “a sign of deep respect and personal embrace for those who suffer, without seeking any rewards or publicity”.

Emphasising that it is the truth which sets people free, Dr Martin said that facing the truth of an individual’s struggle opens the possibility

of gaining help that will free them from the burdens and the entrapment that weigh down on them.

“Facing the truth about the phenomenon of suicide also frees a society to address the challenge and not to deny it or bury it. The truth frees; taboos imprison.”

He acknowledged that the Church in Ireland and farther afield contributed greatly to the level of taboo which surrounded suicide.

“A Church which loses the sense of the priority of mercy gets trapped in a priority of rules and loses the meaning of those rules. The preaching of Jesus was constantly directed against those who imposed burdens on others and never lifted a hand to help,” he underlined.

## **Bishop restates gay marriage is an endorsement of the institution of marriage and “a matter of justice”**

The Bishop of Salisbury has written last weekend that “The possibility of ‘gay marriage’ does not detract from heterosexual marriage unless we think that homosexuality is a choice rather than the given identity of a minority of people. Indeed

the development of marriage for same sex couples is a very strong endorsement of the institution of marriage.”

In a letter delivered to Lord Alli at the House of Lords, Bishop Holtam states his belief that civil partnerships have been a natural precursor of gay marriage being recognised in law: “Open recognition and public support have increased in civil partnerships those very qualities of life for which marriage itself is so highly celebrated. It is not surprising this now needs recognition in law.”

Replying to a letter from Lord Alli of Norbury who requested that Bishop Holtam clarify his position on the issue as a member of the House of Bishops for members of the Upper House, Bishop Holtam stresses that this issue is about justice: “In the current debates it is striking that within the Anglican Communion one of the strongest supporters of same sex marriage is Archbishop Desmond Tutu. From his experience of the racism of Apartheid he sees same sex marriage as primarily a matter of justice.”

Bishop Holtam states: “there are a variety of views within the Church of England where we are experiencing rapid change similar to that in the



wider society. This is complex to express, partly because there are those who see this issue as fundamental to the structure of Christian faith.”

In his letter the Bishop of Salisbury also observes that the church has adapted its approach to marriage in light of social change including the widespread availability of contraceptives so that couples may choose to have children; the acceptance of divorce and possibility of marriage in church after divorce so that not all marriages are lifelong, and the acceptance of couples living together before marriage by a Church that still teaches sexual relationships are properly confined to marriage.

The Bishop then explains to Lord Alli that biblical texts never change but sometimes the interpretation of them develops: “ Christian morality comes from the mix of Bible, Christian tradition and our reasoned experience. Sometimes Christians have had to rethink the priorities of the Gospel in the light of experience. For example, before Wilberforce, Christians saw slavery as Biblical and part of the God-given ordering of creation. Similarly in South Africa the Dutch Reformed Church supported Apartheid because it was Biblical and part of the God-given order of creation. No one now supports either slavery or Apartheid.”

Bishop Holtam is the only serving diocesan bishop among a number of retired and suffragan bishops in the Church of England who have given their support to gay marriage.

## **Equal marriage is the next stage in the church's continual reformation**

It matters little what the primates of the Anglican communion decide. The movement towards marriage equality is inexorable, Canon Giles Fraser writes in The Guardian...



...Earlier today, two members of the Church of England, John and John – one of them an Egyptologist, one a care home manager – got married in a church in the heart of the City of [London](#).

They entered a civil partnership some years ago but, in accordance with the state's silly rules, weren't allowed to mention God on that occasion. Instead of religious music (which is banned) they opted for Cole Porter. But this time it was different. "Praise, my soul, the King of heaven" we sang. And the service itself was couched in the familiar language of classic Anglicanism: "It is very meet, right and our bounden duty" etc. It was a privilege to be invited to take communion with them both.

As the two Johns were quietly pledging their love for each other in London, 50 miles away in Canterbury the appointed leaders of world [Anglicanism](#) were locked in an undignified death match about homosexuality. Some of them would have the Johns thrown into prison for even whispering about the love that dare not speak its name. Church commentators have been carefully monitoring the proceedings, looking for the faintest of signs of who will emerge triumphant from the global culture wars. But the truth is, it doesn't really matter. The Anglican church is only nominally a top-down organisation. What matters most is what happens on the ground. And on the ground, in pews across England, Scotland, Wales, Canada, Brazil, Korea, Japan and the US, the movement towards marriage equality is inexorable. Whatever piece of paper Justin Welby emerges with, it won't hold back the tide of history. The best the conservatives can hope for is a few speed bumps.

Interestingly, the London ceremony wasn't a blessing or a carefully cobbled together service after a civil ceremony. It was a proper marriage, something the current C of E hierarchy has banned priests like me from undertaking. But the Rev Joost Röselaers, minister of the Dutch church in Austin Friars, is able to conduct the



ceremony because of a little-known historical loophole. In 1550, Edward VI granted a charter to Protestant refugees living in London, giving them the same privileges as the C of E. He permitted the Dutch “freely and quietly to practise, enjoy, use and exercise their own rites and ceremonies, and their own ecclesiastical discipline, notwithstanding that they do not conform with the rites and ceremonies used in our Kingdom, without impeachment, disturbance or vexation”.

More at -

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2016/jan/14/equal-marriage-is-the-next-stage-in-the-churchs-continual-reformation>

## **Pope makes ‘private’ Year of Mercy visit to care homes**

Pope Francis has made an unannounced, “private” visit to a retirement home and a home for people in a persistent vegetative state as part of his personal observance of the Year of Mercy.

The visits to the 33 residents of the Bruno Buozzi Retirement Home and the six residents of Casa Iride in Rome were announced with the hashtag [churchnewsireland@gmail.com](mailto:churchnewsireland@gmail.com)



***Pope Francis visits the residence for the elderly in Rome***

#MercyFriday by the pontifical commission organising the Year of Mercy.

The Vatican previously announced that on one Friday each month during the Holy Year, Pope Francis would personally and privately perform a work of mercy.

The series ended up beginning very publicly on December 18 when he visited and celebrated Mass at a shelter run by the Rome diocesan Caritas.

For the January visit, journalists were not invited or even informed. Even the residents of the two facilities were not told in advance, said a statement issued by the Vatican press office once the pope had returned to the Vatican.

Pope Francis was accompanied by Archbishop Rino Fisichella, who is in charge of the jubilee organising committee. The archbishop's office tweeted several photos of the Pope's visit.

The Vatican described the atmosphere at the retirement home as one of "great surprise and joy" as the Pope greeted each resident and stopped to speak to them, one by one.

Both the retirement home and the Casa Iride are located in one of the poorer neighbourhoods on the outskirts of Rome.

The Vatican said Casa Iride is not a hospital or clinic, but is a family-style structure where residents can be cared for by their own family members with the support of the staff.

In choosing the two homes, the Vatican statement said, "Pope Francis wanted to highlight – in opposition to the 'throwaway culture' – the

great importance and preciousness of the elderly and grandparents as well as the value and dignity of life in every situation.”

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

### We have not humiliated US counterparts - C of I Primate

Belfast Newsletter

The leader of the **Church of Ireland** has said that their US counterparts have not been “humiliated” by a decision to bar them from having any ...

<http://www.newsletter.co.uk/we-have-not-humiliated-us-counterparts-church-of-ireland-archbishop-1-7165197>

### C of I Primate defends Primates’ decision

BBC News

The **Church of Ireland** Primate has defended a decision by senior bishops in the Anglican church to restrict the US Episcopal branch for allowing .... Report on Dr Richard Clarke, the Church of Ireland primate who defended the decision on the US Episcopal Church at the Primates meeting last week. He encourages people to read the official primates statement carefully which states the first decision the primates made was we wanted to stay together, we wanted to walk together, while leaving enough breathing space, or faith space, so that hopefully we can grow together.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-35337511>

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

## **Clerics back barring of US church**

Belfast Telegraph

A leading **Church of Ireland** cleric has defended a move by Anglican leaders to bar a liberal US branch from decision-making for allowing same-sex ...

<http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/clerics-back-barring-of-us-wing-over-samesex-marriage-move-34372002.html>

## **MPs' expenses: Sinn Fein claimed £500,000 for second homes**

Telegraph

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstoppers/mps-expenses/5301510/MPs-expenses-Sinn-Fein-claimed-500000-for-second-homes.html>

## **Vice Chancellor QUB: Serious decisions need to be taken over the future funding of higher education in Northern Ireland**

News Letter

<http://www.newsletter.co.uk/qub-chief-we-need-decisions-on-higher-education-funding-1-7165142>

## **Schools in Northern Ireland could be transferred into common state ownership to cut costs**

News Letter

<http://www.newsletter.co.uk/state-ownership-of-schools-could-cut-education-costs-1-7165122>

## **Top legal expert joins Asher's team**

News Letter

A bakery found guilty of discrimination for refusing to supply a cake with a gay marriage slogan is to appeal the finding on the basis of its right to freedom of expression.

<http://www.newsletter.co.uk/freedom-of-expression-basis-for-ashers-appeal-1-7165348>

## **Islamic organisations report site to Gardaí that encourages Muslims to settle in Ireland**

Irish Examiner

<http://www.irishexaminer.com/breakingnews/ireland/islamic-organisations-report-site-to-gardai-that-encourages-muslims-to-settle-in-ireland-716049.html>

## **Times**

The Archbishop of Canterbury is to attend Davos, the World Economic Forum event in Switzerland. Other notable participants include, George Osborne, Mark Carney, the Governor of the Bank of England, John Kerry, the US Secretary of State and Leonardo DiCaprio.

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/business/industries/banking/article4667627.ece>

## **Mail Online/The Times**

Report on the plight of four children living in the refugee camps of Calais hoping to be reunited with family members in the UK. The case is due to be heard in court today. The Bishop of Barking Peter Hill, said while giving aid is worthwhile, many young people need to be allowed to come to Britain and be reunited with their family members.

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/law/article4667801.ece>

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/pa/article-3404226/Calais-refugees-set-make-UK-asylum-case.html#ixzz3xZoxjoM2>

## **BBC**

Report on St Peter and St John Church in Moorland in Somerset which has reopened following the flood damage in 2013-14. The Reverend Jane Haslam, who co-ordinated the repairs, said it had been a "long journey".

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-somerset-35297250>

## **Christian Today**

Report on calls for the Ofsted Chief, Sir Michael Wilshaw to resign over proposed Sunday school inspections. Sir Michael has raised his concern about radicalisation of children in unregistered schools and wants Sunday schools, madrassas and after school clubs to be registered.

## **Daily Star/Mail Online**

A poll has found 46% of the population have no religion – up by 4% on last year and 9% from 2013. It rises to more than 50% among white Brits. Among the under-40s of all races, 56% do not follow a religion. In the YouGov survey just 31% say they are Christian.

<http://www.dailystar.co.uk/news/latest-news/488286/Britain-is-losing-its-religion-says-poll>

[http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3403472/Is-end-Christian-Britain-Majority-white-adults-say-no-religion-number-set-rise.html?](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3403472/Is-end-Christian-Britain-Majority-white-adults-say-no-religion-number-set-rise.html?ITO=1490&ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490)

[ITO=1490&ns\\_mchannel=rss&ns\\_campaign=1490](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3403472/Is-end-Christian-Britain-Majority-white-adults-say-no-religion-number-set-rise.html?ITO=1490&ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490)

ITV.com

Report on a new app launched by Ely cathedral allowing visitors to navigate their way around the 900 year old cathedral. The app available to download showcases the history of the cathedral.

<http://www.itv.com/news/anglia/2016-01-17/ely-cathedral-launches-app/>

**BBC**

Report on the tribute paid to David Bowie held in a London Union's chapel which is also used as a working Church and comedy venue. Hundreds of fans attended the service to celebrate the musician in Islington.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-35340025>

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