



Shamrocks on the Shankill tradition maintained

A St Patrick's Day service for the 1st Belfast Branch, Royal Irish Rangers Old Comrades Association was conducted by Rev Tracy McRoberts at St Matthew's Parish Church, Shankill. Following the service William Humphrey MLA presented sprigs of shamrock in the British military tradition.

Ancient St Patrick's stone gifted to Down Cathedral

An ancient religious stone closely linked with Saint Patrick has been presented to Down Cathedral by the army.

UTV News - The granite stone – known as a Bullaun – has a history going back over 1000 years as focus in early Christian pilgrimages to one of Saint Patrick's earliest landing sites in Ireland and through its chequered history has served as a font and a birdbath.

Bullauns are stones with a small hollow and in Celtic times were attributed power and mysticism with collected rainwater believed to hold healing powers. They continued into Christian times with some being used to hold Holy Water and others holding “prayer stones”.

This one is believed to have been housed in a small church which was constructed to mark one of St Patrick's “landing sites” near the mouth of Dundrum Bay and close to a spot known as St Patrick's Well.

Records going back through the 12th century reference a small church at Killyglinnie where it is now accepted widely as at the spot where Saint



Padre Andrew Totten (left) who chronicled the history of the Ballykinler Bullaun and the Dean of Down Cathedral The Very Reverent Henry Hull (right)

Patrick landed on subsequent missions to Ireland – Slaney River near Saul holding firm as the site of his first return after fleeing slavery on Slemish Mountain.

With the small church – noted even in the times of John de Courcy – falling into decline over the years and eventually much of the stonework being used for local building work the historic Ballaun which was central to pilgrimages disappeared.

After being “discovered” being used as a bird bath in a Downpatrick garden it was placed in

the safekeeping of St Martin of the Mournes – the garrison church at Ballykinler and used as a baptismal font.

Following the transfer of 2 Rifles from Abercorn Barracks at Ballykinler to Thiepval Barracks in Lisburn and the closure of St Martin of the Mournes the “Ballykinler Bullaun” now has a new home at Down Cathedral within yards of the accorded burial site of Saint Patrick.

Cathedral Dean, Very Reverent Henry Hull, said the gift from the army is not only welcome but poignant coming in time for the annual pilgrimage from Saul to the Cathedral. He said: “It is wonderful to link together all of these stones and pieces of history and I think for 21st Century pilgrims, they love to be able to come and see and touch the things that resonate with the past.”

CNI note - Another Bullaun is sited in the grounds of St Matthew’s Parish on Belfast’s Shankill Road.

Methodist Synod concern for vulnerable FASA clients

Members of Belfast Synod of the Methodist church have told of their concern “for the most



vulnerable individuals and families in our society who shall be affected by the impending closure of FASA”.

The Belfast Synod spoke out after news of the suspension of operations of FASA (Forum for Action on Substance Abuse).

The Belfast Synod of the Methodist church further called for “elected representatives and government bodies to work together with statutory agencies and other bodies to ensure that those affected are provided with appropriate and necessary help”.

Preparation weekend for Limerick Catholic Synod

Over 100 proposals have been submitted for discussion at the upcoming Limerick Diocesan Synod – the first Synod to take place in Ireland in half a century.

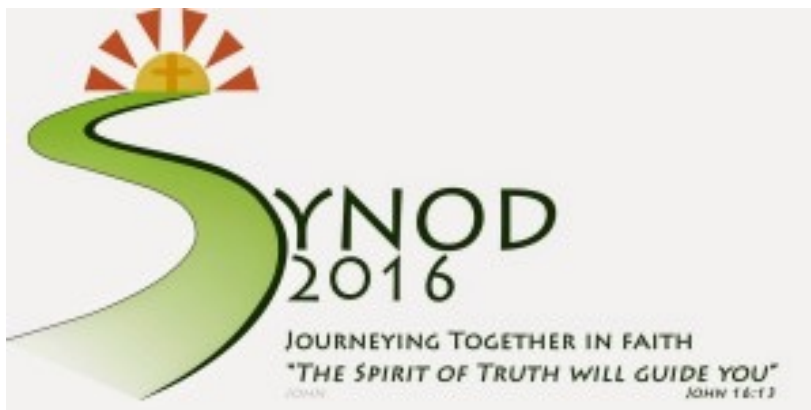
The final gathering of delegates ahead of the Synod itself on 8-10 April took place last weekend at Mary Immaculate College.

It worked out a format for the event, including grouping the 100 plus proposals that have been submitted under the six already agreed themes for the Synod.

The submission of proposals was the third and final preparatory stage in the build up to next month's gathering.

It was preceded by the selection in the autumn last year of the six Synod themes, which were chosen following a three-month listening process to determine the key issues facing the Church today.

It effectively amounted to the largest body of research done in Ireland by any entity in 2015,



with questionnaires responded to by over 4,000 people across the diocese.

The period since Christmas has concentrated on canvassing delegates' for a range of proposals to be discussed under the six themes and this has now resulted in over 100 recommendations that will be discussed at the summit.

Speaking about the forthcoming Synod, Director Fr Eamonn Fitzgibbon said, "Each of the three preparatory phases have been equally important for us and the Synod is now in sight."

The delegates – 70% of whom are lay people – are representative of the faithful across the diocese, with delegates drawn from all socio-economic backgrounds and ethnicities and including all ages, from older citizens to even primary school students.

So far over 1,500 people have attended meetings in the preparatory phase for the Synod, with all 60 parishes engaged in the process, as well as 25 other groups, including primary, secondary and third level education, healthcare workers, members of the travelling community, the migrant community and people with disabilities.

The six themes were selected by vote at a Delegate Day last October and are: Community & Sense of Belonging; Faith Formation; Pastoral Care of the Family; New Models of Leadership; Liturgy & Life; Young People

The themes were selected after 4,000 plus questionnaires were submitted.

Dad's gambling robbed us of our family home and I fought depression, reveals Church of Ireland bishop

A Church of Ireland bishop has revealed how his father's gambling led to his family being kicked out of their home when the cleric was a child.



Belfast Telegraph - The Rt Rev Alan Abernethy, who is originally from east Belfast, also told how he had struggled with depression shortly after being appointed Bishop of Connor.

During a sermon on the theme of living with uncertainty, the 58-year-old cleric confessed that the Church can find it difficult to deal with "messy" personal situations.

His revelations were made during a moving sermon at St Peter's Church of Ireland in north

Belfast and broadcast live on Radio Ulster yesterday morning.

Bishop Abernethy's parents separated after the family lost their home, and said at that difficult time the Church had not found it easy to "dispense with grace".

"The details of that day are very sketchy in my memory, although I do remember it was cloudy and dry," he said.

"My brother and I set out for school as normal assuming we would return to our home that evening. I was never to see inside of that house again.

"We were collected from school and brought to our grandparents' house next door to our school. We could walk out of the back door of our grandparents' house and be at one of the school gates."

When he was older the bishop learned more about what had actually happened that day, including his mother being confronted by bailiffs.

"Others tell me some of the details of this part of my life. My father had been gambling heavily for some time, and he had managed to work his way

through the family inheritance he had received," he said.

"That particular morning the bailiffs arrived to inform my mum that we had lost our home because of my father's debts.

"She took the two of us to her parents and they were incredibly supportive and gave us a secure and loving environment.

"From a very young age I observed unwittingly that my mum, with strong, personal and gentle faith, remained humble and thankful for what she had. For her faith helped her at what must have been at times a lonely road.

"I also learned from an early age that having faith did not protect us from difficulties and that life could be painful and hard. However, it was also a strange realisation that the Church found it hard to cope with our situation - she and my father were separated through no fault of hers.

"As bishop, I do recognise the Church can find it difficult to deal with situations which are messy and untidy. The Church does not find it easy to dispense with grace. I know that from first-hand experience."

Bishop Abernethy also spoke about his recent struggle with depression.

"A few years after I was ordained bishop I found myself quite unwell, at first with gallstones, but then as I physically recovered I had to recognise I was struggling with a heavy heart and what I would describe as a bruised spirit," he said. "I was suffering from depression.

"I was given great help from my doctor, which included antidepressants and cognitive therapy.

"Recovery was slow and frustrating, but with the love of my family and the professional help I received and the countless prayers offered for me, I was able to return to work, but only after I had learnt some very important lessons."

St Peter's rector, Rev Brian Lacey, said because the service was being broadcast live on Radio Ulster there was not the usual congregation in the church during the sermon, simply the choir, himself, the bishop and the broadcasting team.

He paid tribute to the bishop's style of preaching, saying he often revealed sections of his life, and it was a style that very much worked for him.

Methodist mission nurse on way to work in Ghana



On Sunday March 13 a farewell service was held at Newtownabbey Methodist Mission for Pat Jamison before she leaves Newtownabbey to travel to Ghana where she will work as a nurse for the next three years.

Pat is from Rathcoole and has been a member of the Newtownabbey Methodist Mission for over 20 years. She has previously spent time working in a number of countries including Bangladesh, India, Ethiopia, Uganda and Sierra Leone.

While in Ghana, Pat will be working with the Methodist Church Ghana which will be providing her with accommodation. She will be based in a place called Ankaase, which is a rural region and will be connected to the local hospital there and visiting and caring for its patients in the rural area.

Pat would like people to pray for her as she embarks on the journey, to help her get used to the new culture and new situation, as well as praying for her own health as she needs to stay healthy in order to help the people in Ghana.

The Methodist Church in Ghana is one of the core partners of the Methodist Church in Ireland's World Development and Relief Project. (see [Methodist Relief and Development Services, Ghana](#)).

For more information on Pat's journey in Ghana and the work that she will be doing, check out the [Newtownabbey Methodist Mission Facebook page](#).

Presbyterian mission outreach from Kilkenny

The Presbyterian Church is currently presenting its annual Home Mission evenings

CMI has the role of considering new church development, church planting and the oversight of three special PCI projects: The International Meeting Point, Nightlight and Friendship House – providing support and strategic direction. PCI’s 23 Deaconesses, 6 Irish Mission Workers and 6 Community Outreach Workers are also an important part of its responsibilities.

“PCI supports Home and Urban Mission congregations because we are Presbyterian. This means we draw alongside congregations which may be smaller, new or emerging to bring the encouragement, nurture and strength of our denomination”, spokesperson said.

Tom Dowling, who spoke at the second Mission in Ireland evening in Muckamore Presbyterian on Sunday, 13th March, has served as an Irish Mission Worker since 2006. He is attached to Kilkenny Presbyterian Church, where he assists Rev. Daniel Reyes Martin. Tom’s work involves sharing the gospel about Jesus Christ in many different contexts; door-to-door visitation; Christianity Explored courses; home Bible studies; one-to-one Bible studies; children’s Bible club; and street outreach, largely among young people.

“An Irish mission worker is someone who has been called by God to share the good news of Jesus Christ. We work alongside ministers and congregations to reach out to those in our communities”, Tom said.

Rev. Daniel Reyes Martin reiterates the key role that Tom plays in the life of Kilkenny Presbyterian Church.

“With our church members being from six different counties, pastoral work and visitation becomes demanding, particularly with the amount of travelling required. But with Tom in charge of the evangelistic areas of our ministry, this allows me more time to devote to pastoral care”, Daniel said.

Moira parish team share South Sudan experiences

The CMSI META team from St John’s Moira who visited Ibba Diocese, South Sudan. in January gave a presentation in the parish last week. Bishop Harold Miller also attended.

Whilst in Juba, the team were able to see Bishop Wilson’s new community vehicle which by now



L–R: David and Joan Johnston, Revd Joanne Megarrell, Olwen Laird, Bishop Harold Miller, Linda Abwa, Jenny Smyth and in front, Diane Graham.

should be in lbba. This will make a massive difference to the bishop's ministry, thanks to the generosity and fundraising efforts efforts of St John's.

Many folk at home also gathered together materials for the *Days for Girls* programme. It's hard to grasp just what practical and cultural difficulties surround menstruation for young women and the project is a vital and very practical response to the problem.

“In Iggy, we were able to visit one of the boreholes that was installed as a result of the fundraising undertaken in our parish. The impact that this has had on this place cannot be underestimated – before there was a borehole people had to draw water from the local river. As you know we are here in the dry season. The nearby river is little more than a muddy stream and the people here have no choice but to use this water to cook, clean and also drink. I cannot find the words to explain the impact that the borehole has had on their lives.”

“The way the kits and teaching have been received is far beyond the expectation of the team. The conversations that *Days for Girls* has provoked have been particularly relevant and meaningful to the girls and women in Ibba. Everyone involved in these kits at home, in Moira and beyond, should be encouraged by the impact that your work is having in a very real way here in Ibba. The practical skill learning offers the opportunity to discuss many difficult issues faced by women here, issues where faith and culture collide.”

“Joanne and Olwen were leading pastor training, focussing on the key challenges faced by pastors and talking through opportunities to make real

practical steps to work through these challenges.”

“David and Nigel continued to work with the local farmers co-operative – they have walked many miles now and have seen many of the local farms.”

“Joanne and I continued with training – this time with evangelists and youth leaders in the diocese. The evangelists (above) provided an outline of their work here and the challenges that they face. They fast, then pray, then go out to where God has called them to go. In their evangelistic outreach, they reported being chased, meeting armed men, having abuse hurled at them and witchcraft used against them – but put simply, they see their work as ‘the work that Jesus left for us to do’.”

“Saturday evening saw the final of the ‘peace, forgiveness and reconciliation football tournament’ organised though the bishop. Some years ago, the Logic Cafe in Moira held a football tournament, aimed at raising funds for a trophy for the bishop to take back to South Sudan. This has been the start of something very special here and we were invited to be guests of honour at the final of the tournament on Saturday afternoon.”

News links to reports on faith, politics and education

Saved from ruin - Belfast's Methodist 'cathedral' - News Letter

A video clip of the stunning interior of what was once the grandest Methodist church in Ireland:

<http://www.newsletter.co.uk/video-saved-from-ruin-the-methodist-cathedral-1-7274132>

NI Parents given more check powers against sex offender - BBC News

A new scheme enabling people to check on someone they suspect might pose a risk to children comes into force in Northern Ireland.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-35800560>

EU body fudges on Newry council grant to fight sectarianism - News Letter

An EU body has declined to say whether it took account of a council's decision to name a park in honour of an IRA man before handing the same authority a seven-figure grant to combat sectarianism.

<http://www.newsletter.co.uk/mccreesh-council-got-eu-peace-cash-to-tackle-sectarianism-1-7273446>

BBC

Report that Canon Jeremy Pemberton, who last year lost an employment tribunal against the CofE, has said he has won the right to appeal the decision. Last year it was ruled he was not discriminated against when he was

stopped from taking up a new post as a hospital chaplain after marrying his partner, Laurence Cunnington. But he said that he has heard from the Employment Appeal Tribunal that they had accepted his application for an appeal and there would be a two day hearing later in the year.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-nottinghamshire-35795151>

Jewish Chronicle

Further coverage of the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, who has urged the government to intervene to halt the rise of “poisonous” anti-semitism on British campuses. In a letter to a student victim of anti-semitic comments, Lord Williams, now master of Magdalene College, Cambridge, disclosed that he had written to Jo Johnson, the universities minister, because of the “muted” official response so far to rising anti-semitic behaviour.

<http://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/154517/former-archbishop-canterbury-rowan-williams-urges-government-combat-campus-antis>

Exp/Mirror/Premier

Report the church services in Dunblane yesterday marking the 20th anniversary of the school shooting that left 16 children and their teacher dead. The Revd Colin Renwick, minister at Dunblane Cathedral, which contains a memorial to the victims is quoted as are other ecumenical leaders. The *Mirror* notes Andy Murray’s tribute, posted on Facebook. The tennis player and his brother Jamie were pupils at Dunblane Primary School, Stirling, when gunman Thoams Hamilton opened fire on a gym class on March 13, 1996.

<http://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/652321/Dunblane-thanks-world-on-shooting-anniversary>

<http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/andy-murray-pays-tribute-hometown-7552012#ICID=nsm>

<http://www.premier.org.uk/News/UK/Prayers-as-Dunblane-marks-20-years-since-school-shooting>

BBC

Reports that a Herefordshire parish is facing a race against time to restore the bells of its Norman church tower in time for St George's Day. The bells, which date back to the 14th Century, were removed from St George's in Woolhope in January after cracks were discovered in them. The aim was to get them restored by 23 April - St George's Day. So far, £30,000 has been raised but the cost is likely to be much more, the church said.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-hereford-worcester-35794751>

BBC

Further report on Lord Carey's letter to neice of Bishop George Bell, following the Church settling a civil claim with a woman 'Carol' over sexual abuse allegations against Bishop Bell. Article clarifies who 'Carol' complained to originally in 1995.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-35797388>

Comment

Independent: Is the Archbishop of Canterbury right to say it is not racist to oppose immigration?

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/immigration-archbishop-of-canterbury-justin-welby-is-it-not-racist-a6928701.html>

Telegraph: Following the comments made by the Archbishop of Canterbury on migration, the paper's comment column says, "The voters deserve to know the full facts about immigration".

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/telegraph-view/12192213/The-voters-deserve-to-know-the-full-facts-about-immigration.html>

Guardian: With the rise in the number of atheist funerals the paper poses the question, "Are we ready to face death without religion?"

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/mar/13/are-we-ready-to-confront-death-without-religion>

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