

Church News Ireland



Image of the day – Diamond Remembrance

News reports

Service of Remembrance in the Diamond



The words ‘God save our gracious King!’ rang out around the war memorial in the centre of Londonderry, Oz Sunday for the first time in over 70 years, as local people gathered to remember servicemen and women who had died in past conflicts.

The Rev Canon John Merrick, from St Columb’s Cathedral, Derry, led the Service of Remembrance in the Diamond, where he was joined by leaders of the four main Churches.



Among those who laid wreaths at the cenotaph were the King's Vice Lord -Lieutenant for the County Borough of Londonderry, Ian Crowe; the High Sheriff for the County Borough of Londonderry, Paul Howie; East Londonderry MP Gregory Campbell; Foyle MLA Gary Middleton; and members of Derry City and Strabane District Council.

After the ceremony, the Dean of Derry, Very Rev Raymond Stewart, led a Service of Remembrance and Thanksgiving at St Columb's Cathedral, which was attended by the Vice Lord -Lieutenant; the Deputy Mayor of Derry City and Strabane District, Cllr Angela Dobbins; and the High Sheriff for the Borough.

During the Service, wreaths were laid at the Cathedral's war memorial, followed by the playing of The Last Post.

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The sermon was delivered by the Bishop of Derry and Raphoe, Rt Rev Andrew Forster, who described Remembrance Sunday as the “most solemn day of our annual calendar”. Bishop Forster said he, personally, was remembering three people in particular: one grandfather, who served in the First World War with the King’s Westminster Rifles; another grandfather, who served in the Home Guard during the Second World War; and a late uncle who served with distinction in the Royal Ulster Constabulary.

The Bishop said the congregation’s remembrance was more than some annual, formal duty. “Rather,” he said, “it is a heartfelt obligation borne of admiration and borne of love, as in our remembrance – in some very small way – we pay the debt we owe to those who served us and those who paid the ultimate sacrifice that ensured that we can do what we do today, and live our everyday lives in peace and freedom.”

Irish Inter–Church Meeting considers church life after pandemic

The thirty–second meeting of the Irish Inter–Church Meeting (IICM) took place on Thursday, 10th November, and Friday, 11th November, in Dromantine Conference Centre, Newry.

The theme for the meeting was ‘Creatively reconfiguring our post–pandemic understanding of church’.



IICM Co-Chair, Bishop Brendan Leahy, with Joe McKeown and a panel from Youthlink NI discussing the effect of the pandemic on their lives.

Representatives from across the island gathered to reflect together on how churches can connect with a changed post-pandemic world.

Prof. John Fitzgerald (TCD) began by tracing the story from Jan 2020 to Nov 2022, giving an analysis of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on society on the island of Ireland.

Participants then reflected on a changing local church, led by Breige O'Hare (from the First Step Well counselling and support service), who provided opportunities to prayerfully reflect on the impact of these changing and challenging times on those working in ministry at local level. She focussed in particular on the importance of churches

creating space for people to deepen robust, honest relationships with Christ and with each other in these anxious times.

While the Covid–19 pandemic has affected us greatly on this island, its impact for our brothers and sisters in the global church has been significantly different – it was often another amongst many crises. Speakers Bob Kikuyu of Christian Aid (Kenya) and Dr Conchita Reyes of Trócaire (Guatemala) shared about the situation in their countries.

With Orthodox and Migrant–Led churches represented in the Irish Council of Churches membership, a panel discussion between Fr Anish John (Indian Orthodox) and Pastor Dare Adetuberu (Redeemed Christian Church of God), joined by Ruth Garvey–Williams (editor of Vox magazine) highlighted what the distinctive impact of the pandemic has been for them, and at grassroots across the country.

Finally Joe McKeown, Youthlink’s Research and Curriculum Development Officer, facilitated a panel of young people from YouthLink who shared their perspective on the Covid–19 pandemic, and its effects on their day–to–day and social lives.

Caring Carnalea responds to cost-of-living crisis

From September 2020 until September 2022 the Carnalea Methodist Church (CMC) family in Bangor has given £8,635 in monetary donations and 451 bags of

groceries to the Storehouse North Down Foodbank which is supported by over 40 other churches of various denominations within the North Down area.

It was remarkable that during the height of the COVID pandemic, regulations permitting, church members turned up at the church carpark to deposit their gifts into the boot of a car to be brought to Storehouse.

As the COVID restrictions eased regarding meeting outdoors, this once-a-week event became the focal point for church members to exchange greetings, catch up with and support each other.

While now back in church as the pandemic has receded, the need in the community is growing due to the cost of living. CMC members continue wholeheartedly to support others less fortunate than themselves both in prayer and practical actions like giving to Storehouse North Down.

Enniskillen Church cafe helping people to connect

“We laugh with the people who laugh and cry with the people who cry. We just hang out,” says Barbara Hayward who runs the Tea4U café at Enniskillen Presbyterian Church.

The former Devenish College teacher runs the café to help people of all ages and all walks of life to connect with others and break the chains of isolation that many find themselves in, Matthew Leslie writes in the Fermanagh Herald.



Back in 2014 the Church did a community audit to find out what was going on in Enniskillen and if there was anything they could do as a group of people to help with anything.

When the results came in, they found that loneliness came back as a big factor within the community and Barbara, with the help of a number of volunteers, set up the café the following year which opens its doors every Friday for people to have a cuppa, a bite to eat and to make new friends.

She said: “The interesting thing was that loneliness was spread across the age-ranges. There were young single mums and there was some level of poverty that meant that they couldn’t go out and say, buy a coffee and a muffin for a fiver.

“If they did go out, they would wonder about the town and maybe stop by in the library for a bit of heat. Beyond that, there were not a lot of facilities for them.

“We decided to see what we could do. So back in July 2015, we set up the café which would be run by volunteers. The café would be open to all where we would provide a warm space, a basic lunch of soup and wheaten bread, cup of tea, a scone and some company to have a chat with if those coming in wished to do so.

“We also have a price suggestion – not a price list regarding our menu. We say to people, if you can’t afford to put 5p in, that’s fine. Of course most people don’t abuse it to that degree and we’re really happy to take what we get.

“On days where we get any extra money once we’ve paid for the tea, coffee and other supplies, we give that to the Christians Against Poverty group which usually comes to a couple of thousand on an annual basis.”

Given the audit’s highlighting of loneliness within Enniskillen, Barbara states that the café has served as a solid starting point for isolated people to build a network of new friends.

She added: “A lot of people do want company and then, we they come back, there is someone there they can connect with, do some catching-up with and connect with others as well.

“Say we have a chat with ‘Mary’ – as an example. We find out from ‘Mary’ that she’s really arty and we say well maybe you’d like to meet ‘Theresa’ who’s also arty as well.

“So ‘Mary’ and ‘Theresa’ connect and they meet other people via each other.

“We do little trips as a lot of people who come through our doors don’t drive.

One example, which nearly broke me one day, was a 78-year-old man I took out to Castle Archdale one time. He said to me, ‘I really enjoyed that Barbara – I’ve never been here before’. He is Fermanagh born and bred but because he is on a low income, he has never had a car and I suppose the bus route to Castle Archdale isn’t good.

“Because he had never married or didn’t have anyone who could take him out there, he never went until we took him. It was awful to hear but at least through the networking that the café has, we were able to do so.

“We’ve had older people and people out of work have come here as well and have met and made good friends via this place – as have I.

“We more or less jump to the door whenever we see people coming in. We introduce ourselves and ask if they want their

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own space so you can be on your own or if you want someone to have a chat with, I'm very happy to come and join you."

Courtesy The Fermanagh Herald 13/11/2022.

New Children and Families Ministry Representative for the Diocese of Cork

The Rev. Isobel Jackson, Rector of Templebreedy Group of Parishes, has been appointed by Bishop Paul Colton as the new Children and Families Ministry Representative for the Diocese of Cork, Cloyne and Ross.

Upon her appointment, the Rev. Isobel Jackson said:

"It has been a privilege to have been part of the Children's Ministry Group in the diocese for the last eight years and I am excited about my appointment to this new responsibility. Working with children in schools and in parish ministry is one of the most rewarding ministries you could be involved in and also the most vital to the future of our parishes.

"Our role as the children's ministry group is to support and equip those in this ministry, linking in with the wider church network supporting children and families, where there is a larger resource.

"The past two years have been a challenge. All ministries have experienced strain on many levels, and parishes are 'beginning again' in some respects, especially in children's

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ministry. As a team, we want to know how best we can support the wonderfully gifted people who have been doing this work and have always been so committed in their time and energy, and we also would like to encourage others to join us.

“Throughout the pandemic we saw people get creative and innovative in finding new ways to minister. To have seen this resilience fills me

with hope and excitement for the future, and through prayer and practical help we look forward to empowering parishes to take the next steps in their children’s ministry. I am looking forward to seeing what we can do together to grow the Kingdom, through this vital ministry.”



The Church of Ireland Board for Ministry with Children and Families (CFM) exists to equip, resource and advocate for the increased welcome, enhanced inclusion, and full participation of children and their families in the whole life of the Church. Their vision is that every Church of Ireland parish, no matter how big or small, is equipped to provide vibrant and engaging ministry with children and families.

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The CFM representatives from each Diocese work together to promote, support and develop Children and Families ministry across the island of Ireland.

Family engagement with churches has fallen post-Covid, study finds

Many families are less engaged with their church since the pandemic, according to new research.

The study by Liverpool Hope University and the National Institute for Christian Education Research (NICER) found that Sunday morning church attendance has become "less of a priority" for families, while faith nurturing at home has improved.

The research found that engagement with church had fallen in 40% of families surveyed.

"Considering that the willingness of these families to respond to the survey indicates that they are likely to be more engaged than average, it is concerning to see that a significant proportion of the participants have decreased church engagement over pandemic times," the report said.

This finding was confirmed by responses from church leaders, around half (48%) of whom reported families in their congregation now engaging less than they did before the pandemic.

When it came to resources to nurture family faith during the pandemic, the study uncovered "striking" differences in perceptions between church leaders and families.

Many families felt unsupported and under-resourced by their churches during the pandemic.

Two thirds of church leaders felt they had supported families in their faith at home during the pandemic, but this fell to half (49%) of parents who agreed.

A quarter (24%) of church leaders did not know if families in their church felt supported in nurturing faith at home.

Some 40% of parents surveyed said that the local church does not provide resources to support their child's faith.

Only 2% of parents said that worksheets and activities provided by their local church during the pandemic had been beneficial.

Despite this, most parents (88%) want the church to provide or signpost them to specific activities and resources to equip their family for their own spiritual growth.

According to the report, parents said that connections with the church fell away more quickly than with other community groups during the pandemic. Some said they had fallen out of the habit of going to church and others admitted it was a struggle to reintegrate into church life as a family.

"All of the parents interviewed explained that it had been difficult returning to church after the lockdowns," the report said.

"Many felt that their congregation had become less tolerant of children."

The report added, "Having engaged with faith at home resources during the pandemic parents became more aware and critical of provision for children at church."

Researchers recommended that churches listen to the needs of young families and reflect on how to provide "a welcoming and meaningful experience of church for all".

"This research has shown that families' faith at home has tended to improve during the pandemic, whilst their engagement with church has reduced," the report said.

"However, there is a significant disconnect between the perceptions of church leaders and parents about what is needed going forward.

"It is clear that churches must now consider how to respond to this change in family's ethos and practices.

"It is key to meet families where they are and support those spiritual connections which occur at home rather than simply seeking to coax them back into church attendance."

Responding to the findings, Andy Frost, Director of Share Jesus International, one of the organisations that sponsored

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the study, said the research would help church leaders "take stock" and give clear insights into how they can work with families and not just children.

"As I meet with church leaders, it's clear that the pandemic has thrown up lots of questions around what church life could and should look like," he said.

"My prayer is that this research helps us have robust conversations about how we best support parents in nurturing faith."

Rachel Turner, Parenting for Faith Pioneer, said, "This new research enables us to finally put statistics to the experiences that we shared over the pandemic.

"Some of its conclusions are confirmation of what we already 'knew', but it also provides some eyebrow raising surprises.

"It makes for a thoughtful and provoking read that demands action."

Perspective

The eradication of the victims of Enniskillen Ian Acheson writes

In Northern Ireland, the dead are being eradicated.

This week marks the 35th anniversary of the IRA bombing of a remembrance service in my hometown Enniskillen. In an

attack so barbarous it was condemned at the time by the Kremlin, a bomb planted the night before slaughtered 12 of my neighbours standing around the town's cenotaph. No warning had been given. The chemist, the teacher, the nurses, the retired police officer, the housewives, the house painter, all standing around a war memorial with the names of Catholic and Protestant locals on it who fought and died in the trenches, were cut to pieces. My father, one of the first responders, discovered his colleague and wife dead in the rubble. It was an image that haunted him to his death.

Thirty five years later Mary Lou McDonald, the leader of Sinn Fein, declared at her party's annual conference that there was 'no comparison' between the IRA, inextricably linked to her party, and the gangland violence currently plaguing the Republic of Ireland. A Sinn Fein activist on the podium before her said of the IRA, 'we have the right to remember, commemorate, recount the deeds of and yes, sing about our heroes.' In the same week, a republican supporter and one time Sinn Fein candidate, Chris Donnelly opined on Twitter,

'The further we move away from all our pasts, the less opinions on it matter to an increasing number in our society. Time will do that. Some are more at ease with that than others. Many will let resentment at an inability to control contested narratives consume them.'

It is difficult to reconcile the two statements. On the one hand, Sinn Fein reserves the right to glorify perpetrators who in any other context would be waiting their turn for a war crimes tribunal. On the other hand there seems to be an implication that inconvenient victims who refuse to forget are

yesterday's people whose unresolved grief and anger is illegitimate.

There wasn't much of a contested narrative at Enniskillen on that day of infamy in November 1987 and certainly little to sing about. Here is one grievously wounded victim, Jim Dixon recounting his injuries:

'My mouth was blown out. My jaw was missing on the right hand side. I was split open nine inches from my chin to my ear. My face and tongue were paralysed. I had nine broken ribs. My pelvis, two hips and one leg were smashed.'

Another largely forgotten and hideous postscript to the Enniskillen attack was that a further bomb was planted by the same IRA team in the tiny border village of Tullyhommon. It was timed to explode at a remembrance parade that almost entirely consisted of children in the Boys' and Girls' brigade. If that bomb, four times the size of the device in Enniskillen, had gone off as intended it would have created a massacre to rival anything in Bucha, Mariupol or Srebrenica.

This is the visceral reality of violent extremism that Sinn Fein would perhaps prefer us all to forget about and move on. But the thousands of families bereaved by the IRA are the ghosts at Sinn Fein's 'new Ireland' banquet. They are also largely ignored by Northern Ireland's extraordinary coalition of publicly funded human rights defenders, who attack the state for its conduct during the Troubles but remain mute on the terrorists who put so many more into the ground before their time.

There is a brutal logic in turning atrocities like Enniskillen into a squalid ‘regrettable but necessary’ event. Moving the public debate further away from the grotesque consequences of paramilitary violence means that the IRA’s living witnesses to their inhumanity will die off, after many suffer from years of physical and psychological torment without ever having anyone held to account for their suffering.

I often wonder about the terrorists who carried out the Enniskillen bombing. I wonder whether they are still alive, and if or how they reconcile the horror they caused with any sane image of a united Ireland. The bombers alive will surely be in late middle age or older by now, with the shadow of mortality growing shorter in front of them. I’ve met repentant terrorists across the ideological spectrum who were haunted to an early grave by the futility of their crimes.

But then the political descendants of one of western Europe’s most ruthless terrorist organisations are nothing if not resilient.

Imagine the mental toughness required from Sinn Fein’s leader, Mary Lou McDonald, to insist as she did that the IRA’s violent campaign was ‘justified.’ Imagine the psychological integrity required for Michelle O’Neill, Sinn Fein’s First Minister designate, to say there was ‘no alternative’ to their armed campaign, which resulted in attacks like the mass murder of men, women and children gathered around a war memorial. Now imagine any reconciled future in a unified Ireland between Unionists and Republicans with either of these people in charge.

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No matter how much ‘justification’ is used, both Sinn Fein and the victims they wish to erase are chained by the same history. For Sinn Fein it is a reflexive, sullen defiance of morality that sees some compelled to lionise terrorists, many of whom would in other circumstances merely be ordinary psychopaths or serial killers. For the victims still alive, like the 63 people maimed in the rubble of Enniskillen, it is that refusal to condemn the IRA’s campaign as a futile, sectarian fantasy or even to give up the names of the perpetrators that holds them in their pain. Killing their dead over again.

For all the talk of a united Ireland, one that is worth living in cannot be built on forgetting. The organisations involved in this endeavour, the human rights academics and journalists busily making its case, are far more interested in building a utopia. The dead and bereaved of Enniskillen and countless other IRA atrocities know the truth though – those who forget the past are condemned to repeat it.”

Courtesy The Spectator 10 November 2022

Speaking to the soul

Short reading and a prayer - daily on this site

Church News Ireland

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