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## World Meeting of Families watered down Christian vision of the family - priest



### Cardinal Kevin Farrell and Archbishop Diarmuid Martin at WMOF conference

A Co. Down-based priest and writer has criticised this summer's World Meeting of Families (WMOF) for watering

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down the Christian vision of the family to become more acceptable to current secular understandings of family life.

Writing in *The Furrow*, Fr Andrew McMahon observes that although there were “unquestionably edifying aspects” of WMOF2018, a desire for acceptance was also clearly present.

Fr McMahon noted that while Archbishop Diarmuid Martin was both sensitive and truthful in speaking at the gathering of the variety of family types today, it would also have been truthful and sensitive to recognise that “there remains a vision for family at the heart of Church teaching – a vision which, however imperfectly, continues to be reflected within very many Irish homes”.

Many of the topics covered at WMOF2018 were worthwhile but hardly distinctively Catholic, he continued, observing that the gathering avoided exploring the destructive implications for family life of recent changes in Irish law.

“Such exploration would, presumably, have left the gathering at variance with Mr Varadkar’s Ireland and its cheerleaders,” he wrote. “The ultimate consequences of such timidity, at a moment of real opportunity, will take some time to manifest themselves.”

Already, he noted, there is a growing sense that WMOF2018 is fading without a trace from popular memory.

## **Presentations**

Barrister Patrick Treacy, who runs the Integritas Centre of Christian Spirituality, agreed that while WMOF2018 brought together many people of goodwill who were generous with

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their time, convened interesting presentations and allowed many to encounter the Pope, it has indeed left no real impression.

“It has no lasting legacy, however, because its central organising dynamic was an inhibiting fear of controversy,” he told The Irish Catholic. “In this way, through a studied silence, it was effectively compliant with the prevailing ideological colonisation of our country which maintains that marriage has nothing to do with the distinction as to sex between a man and a woman and that a child does not uniquely benefit from having a mother and a father.”

The next WMOF should be free from societal pressures to conform, he said.

“Thankfully, Pope Francis has chosen Rome for the next World Meeting of Families in 2021 so that the full teaching of what is articulated by him in *Amoris Laetitia* will not be inhibited by the fear of secularist liberalism which is now so pervasive in every aspect of contemporary Irish society.”

## **Strategic review of Meath and Kildare dioceses**

During the first nine months of 2018 Church Army UK conducted a Strategic Review for the C of I dioceses.

This included meeting all clergy and groups of parishioners from every parish. In an article on the diocesan web site, Bishop Pat Storey said,

“Church Army UK has been helping us to assess our state of play at (this) present moment of our church history ... (it will help us) plan a future which will strengthen the things

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that bring us joy, and face up to the things which make us nervous.”

Dr Tim Ling and Mark Russell from Church Army UK were invited to present the findings of the diocesan review to the 2018 Diocesan Synod, for discussion. Members then had an opportunity to discuss and reflect on the findings, including:

- That the dioceses has shared the experience of falling church attendance over the past decade.
- That out of a total population of 669,000, in the diocesan area, 51,500 identify as having no religion - five times as many as the Church of Ireland population. Church-going, practically everywhere, is declining – and yet very often people still claim to be spiritually open to God, but simply not to the church as an institution.
- That a culture of ‘keeping our head down’ is now beginning to change.
- There is an awareness of being in an era of profound change.
- There is a willingness to respond to the need for change, and move outside of our comfort zone.
- That there is a need to take responsibility for discipleship.

## **At Christmas time the return of an adult child can be stressful as well as joyful - C of I bishop**

Bishop Michael Burrows writing in the Irish Times comments  
- Last year I penned a seasonal message for my diocese

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and beyond, entitled *The Empty Chair*. It seems to have struck a chord with many people; particularly on [YouTube](#).

I was reflecting on how in our house there would be an absentee from the family table, for the first time since our children were born. One member of our family was living and working, following her graduation, far away in [Chile](#).

It seemed rather poignantly like the end of an era.

This year our daughter will be coming home again, so there will be no empty chairs. But when our adult offspring return even briefly to the nest, especially after extended periods of travelling and working abroad, we have to accept that they may be somewhat different people.

They may have been changed by experiences the rest of us did not share, and they may have entered into relationships about which we scarcely know.

Sometimes the return of an adult child can be somewhat stressful as well as joyful, for all parties involved. Many families know this because the scarcity and cost of housing,

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particularly in our cities, brings young adults back to live in the parental home at an age when in previous generations they would almost certainly have left.

It can be a test of our hospitality and our empathy when our adult children return to those empty chairs, sometime bringing with them strange ideas that challenge our comfortable assumptions. We have to accept and even rejoice that their travels and their encounters have changed them, that they may no longer share all our values and are certainly not our clones.

And we have to acknowledge that the return of the wanderers can, for them, involve a certain measure of trepidation and courage as they wonder what we are going to make of them.

### **Confused choreography**

There are many stories in Scripture about the awkwardness as well as the joy of going back home; the confused choreography of it all. Most obviously there is the parable describing the return of the so-called prodigal son (a designation I have never found particularly helpful), which has provided inspiration for many a great artist – including, of course, Rembrandt.

At this particular time of the year, however, I always find myself thinking imaginatively about what it might have been like for the wise men to go back to where they came from. Scripture only tells us that they had to choose a roundabout route to avoid the wrath of [King Herod](#). beyond that we can only speculate.

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Certainly they faced a long and tiring journey, back to a cultural context which, although once familiar, would have no shared sense of the transforming encounter that they had experienced. They must have felt considerable trepidation about how they would face their families, not least with their inherited religious assumptions now turned upside down.

TS Eliot, in *Journey of the Magi*, expresses perfectly the genuine fear and apprehension of the returning wise men. They came to feel no longer at ease in the old dispensation with an alien people clutching their gods.

Although the language is that of poetry, the feelings of the wise men may not be hugely different to those of today's returning travellers who come back to old haunts often greatly changed, apprehensive as well as joyful.

### **Not unaltered**

It is wonderful when that empty chair is no longer empty. But it is vital to welcome back the traveller as she now is, not to pretend that she is unaltered or still comfortably made in the parental image.

True and indeed divine hospitality is about welcoming people as they are, indeed rushing to greet them with outstretched arms as they approach . . . just like the father in Jesus's Parable of the Two Sons, as it is surely better to call that story.

The really profound truth is surely this: those who travel back into their own past to take again their old places at Christmas tables may actually come among us, like the risen Christ himself at the meal at Emmaus, as apparent strangers who are simultaneously our best beloved.

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*Right Rev [Michael Burrows](#) is Church of [Ireland](#) Bishop of [Cashel, Ferns & Ossory](#)*

*To watch the 'Welcome Home' Christmas message, see <http://cashel.anglican.org/>*

## **Union College is an "exclusively Presbyterian male teaching faculty" - staff member**

Queen's University Belfast has said it won't be accepting new students to the "highly problematic" Presbyterian-run Union Theological College (UTC) in 2019, the Belfast Telegraph reports

A review by a panel of senior academics at Queen's University has raised concerns about the diversity of teaching available.

The Belfast college admits around 150 theology students each year, with some training for ministry in the Presbyterian Church.

The BBC reported that the review found the current undergraduate theology course covered a diverse subject matter, but was taught "entirely from a particular theological and religious perspective" and that teaching staff were male and "predominantly from a Presbyterian background".

The report added that admission to undergraduate programmes would be suspended as a single denomination providing all undergraduate theology provision was "highly



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problematic and not sustainable in today's post-conflict Northern Ireland".

The College was also accused of having no plan to address the lack of full-time female teaching staff and diversity in staffing and curriculum.

The decision will affect new undergraduate students due to begin their studies in 2019, but current students will be permitted to continue.

Queen's University has said it will consider how this will affect Union College's future and that it will help those who have applied to study in 2019 find alternative courses.

A spokesperson for UTC called the review findings "very speculative and totally unsubstantiated".

"We very much regret and are disappointed by the decision taken," they said.

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They said suggesting that students had not been exposed to a breadth of theological perspectives contradicted reports from external examiners in theology for many years.

The spokesperson added it was not by choice that Union College had become the sole provider of undergraduate degree programmes after three other theological colleges - the Methodist Edgehill College, Irish Baptist College and Belfast Bible College - no longer offered courses.

"As to why Northern Ireland's three other theological colleges found themselves unable to work with Queen's University is, of course, an open question," they said.

"Is the real issue that there is no place for a Christian college linked to the Queen's University of today?"

DUP MLA Christopher Stalford voiced his support on Twitter. "Union is a fine college which has produced many great thinkers, preachers and lecturers. This is Queen's loss," he said.

The latest decision follows a previous review in 2016 which raised similar issues. It's believed a key factor in the latest review was a decision to suspend a theology professor for comments in the media.

Laurence Kirkpatrick had described Union College as an "exclusively Presbyterian male teaching faculty," and that: "I'd be broken-hearted if anyone said I'd been bigoted against a Catholic or gay student."

His comments followed a controversial decision by the Presbyterian General Assembly to deny anyone in a same-sex relationship to be a full communicant member of the Church or have their children baptised.

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A spokesman for Queen's said, that following the review, the university had concerns regarding "the breadth and diversity" of the teaching and curriculum being delivered.

"The University has taken the decision to suspend entry to all undergraduate programmes for the forthcoming 2019-20 academic year," he said.

"The University is now considering the implications of the review for the longer term future of Theology provision through the University's Institute and the associated programmes. This requires comprehensive engagement with relevant stakeholders, including Union Theological College, which is now underway.

"The University is committed to ensuring that issues raised by the review will be addressed and its priority is to continue to support students who have already begun their course.

"Prospective students that have already applied for 2019-20 entry to affected programmes are being contacted and will be supported to find suitable alternatives," said the spokesman.

## **News links**

### **Confusion Over Holy Communion for Protestant Spouses**

<http://www.ncregister.com/blog/edward-pentin/confusion-in-germany-over-holy-communion-for-protestant-spouses>

### **Former 'singing' priest jailed for 3½ years for indecent assault**

Tony Walsh is currently serving a seven and a half year sentence for raping another boy three times in the 1980s.

<http://www.thejournal.ie/former-singing-priest-jailed-for-3%c2%bd-years-for-indecent-assault-4406006-Dec2018/>

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

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## **Almost 700 clergymen accused of child sex abuse in US state - far more than was disclosed by Church**

The state's attorney general said it was clear from its investigation that the "Catholic Church cannot police itself".

<http://www.thejournal.ie/illinois-clerical-sex-abuse-4406653-Dec2018/>

## **No contingencies, no plans, no secret plans: Leo says the Irish government has no preparations for a hard border**

Questions have been raised about the level at which the Irish government is prepared for a no-deal Brexit.

<http://www.thejournal.ie/brexit-hard-border-leo-varadkar-4407720-Dec2018/>

## **'It doesn't take very long for your balaclava to slip': Ructions in Dáil as Taoiseach and Doherty discuss Roscommon eviction**

Leo Varadkar claimed that "when it comes to law and order" and the Sinn Féin party, "It doesn't take very long for your balaclava to slip."

<http://www.thejournal.ie/sinn-fein-leo-varadkar-mask-slipped-balaclava-4402664-Dec2018/>

## **Garda reform: Policing Authority and Garda Síochána Inspectorate to be replaced**

Work has been underway over the past three months to implement the recommendations.

<http://www.thejournal.ie/garda-siochana-reform-4402794-Dec2018/>

## **Bishops Christmas messages**

### **Ecumenical Christmas letter from Archbishop of Canterbury**

<http://www.anglicannews.org/news/2018/12/the-ecumenical-christmas-letter-from-the-archbishop-of-canterbury-justin-welby-.aspx>

### **Presiding Bishop Michael Curry**

<http://www.anglicannews.org/news/2018/12/a-christmas-message-from-presiding-bishop-michael-curry.aspx>

### **Archbishop John Davies of Wales**

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<http://www.anglicannews.org/news/2018/12/a-christmas-message-from-archbishop-john-davies.aspx>

## **Archbishop Michael Jackson of Dublin**

<https://dublin.anglican.org/news/2018/12/17/christmas-message-2018-from-archbishop>

## **Bishop of Connor**

<https://connor.anglican.org/2018/12/19/christmas-message-from-the-bishop-of-connor/>

## **Bishops of Cork: Bishop John Buckley and Bishop Paul Colton**

<https://churchofirelandcork.com/2018/12/18/joint-christmas-message-from-the-bishops-of-cork-bishop-john-buckley-and-bishop-paul-colton/...>

## **Bishop John McDowell, Church of Ireland Bishop of Clogher, and Monsignor Joseph McGuinness, Diocesan Administrator of Clogher**

<https://www.ireland.anglican.org/news/8518/joint-christmas-message-from-bishop>

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