



**Image of the day - Opening of General Assembly 2021**

## Reports

# Pope and Archbishop of Canterbury lead calls for climate action

**Pope Francis, the Archbishop of Canterbury and other religious leaders came together at the Vatican on Monday for a climate-focused meeting ahead of the UN's COP26 summit in Glasgow next month.**

The one-day meeting, titled 'Faith and Science: Towards COP26', was organised jointly by the Vatican and the Italian and British embassies to the Holy See.

A joint statement warning of "unprecedented challenges" was signed at the meeting and presented to Alok Kumar Sharma, president designate of COP26, and Luigi Di Maio, Italian foreign minister.

It calls on governments to recognise the "deeply interdependent" nature of the relationship between humans and nature, and speaks of "the necessity of an even deeper solidarity in the face of the global pandemic and of growing concern for our common home".

The religious leaders also link the environmental crisis to a "crisis of values" and what they call the "seeds of conflict: greed, indifference, ignorance, fear, injustice, insecurity and violence".

"Damage to the environment is a result, in part, of the predatory tendency to see the natural world as something to



Archbishop Justin Welby encounters the ecumenical prayer of Methodist, Catholic, Lutheran, and Anglican clergy who meet each week at the Anglican Centre in Rome

be exploited with disregard for the extent to which survival hinges on biodiversity and on maintaining the health of planetary and local ecosystems," they say.

"Multiple crises facing humanity are demonstrating the failures of such an approach; these are ultimately linked to a crisis of values, ethical and spiritual."

The statement condemns today's "pervasive throwaway culture" and the "wickedness of excess", and says this must be replaced by "a new kind of economics" centred on

October 5, 2021

human dignity and care for the environment rather than "endless growth and proliferating desires".

The statement concludes, "Future generations will never forgive us if we squander this precious opportunity. We have inherited a garden: we must not leave a desert to our children.

"Scientists have warned us that there might be only one decade left to restore the planet.

"We plead with the international community, gathered at COP26, to take speedy, responsible and shared action to safeguard, restore and heal our wounded humanity and the home entrusted to our stewardship."

In a speech to delegates, the Pope said the spiritual and material were "profoundly interrelated", and that action must be informed by a sense of "interdependence and co-responsibility".

"We cannot act alone, for each of us is fundamentally responsible to care for others and for the environment," he said.

"This commitment should lead to an urgently needed change of direction, nurtured also by our respective religious beliefs and spirituality."

While the Pope said there was a challenge ahead in creating a culture of care for the planet, he said this should inspire hope "for surely humanity has never possessed as many means for achieving this goal as it possesses today".

He concluded, "COP26 in Glasgow represents an urgent summons to provide effective responses to the unprecedented ecological crisis and the crisis of values that we are presently experiencing, and in this way to offer concrete hope to future generations. We want to accompany it with our commitment and our spiritual closeness."

## **General Assembly says 'thank you'**

**Members of staff from some of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland's (PCI) residential care homes, supported living schemes and community based programmes received a standing ovation from members of the Church's General Assembly yesterday (4 October), when those watching the livestream from PCI's various locations across the island of Ireland were shown on the large video screens in the Assembly Hall.**

Led by the Moderator, Rt Rev Dr David Bruce, the show of support and appreciation came on the opening day of PCI's three-day in person General Assembly in Belfast, where Presbyterian's from 500-plus congregations across Ireland thanked and paid tribute to those working on the frontline during the Covid-19 pandemic.

In the introduction of the Report of the General Council before the Assembly, entitled 'The Era of Covid-19', it described the lives of individuals, families and church families having been 'turned upside down', with the impact



The Moderator, Rt Rev Dr David Bruce is greeted by the PCI's longest serving Moderator, Very Rev Dr Godfrey Brown, who was Moderator in 1988.

on church life having been 'significant, [and] at times, almost overwhelming.'

In two resolutions the General Assembly expressed its 'thanks to front-line workers in all sectors throughout the island of Ireland, whose dedication and sacrificial self-giving during the worst of the Covid-19 pandemic enabled essential services to be maintained and the vulnerable to be cared for in often stressful and challenging circumstances and situations.'

October 5, 2021

The General Assembly also paid tribute “to local ministers, elders and leaders for their dedicated and innovative service enabling congregational life and witness to continue in the ways that were possible during the long months of restrictions and shut-downs...’

It its report, which was debated in the afternoon, the Council for Social Witness had a significant focus on the pandemic. The Council is tasked with the delivery of an effective social care service for the denomination. As a Church, PCI is called to demonstrate God’s love for people. This means the putting of faith into practical action and simple Christian caring, which is a very special kind of witness, and a powerful social witness of the gospel. As a service provider with a budget of £10 million, the Council manages PCI’s provision of residential, nursing, supported housing, respite and day care, and community based programmes, employing around 400 people, some of whom were ‘zoomed’ into the Assembly and received this afternoon’s standing ovation.

The Council reported on each sector of its work, saying, ‘... the work of Social Witness has been disrupted by the assault of Covid-19 on our society and the restrictions that the various degrees of lockdown imposed on us. Where perhaps we differed was that the work of our homes and units became even more intense and vital. Just as emergency workers find themselves walking toward danger while all others run from it, so our staff became key workers in the fight against Covid-19...’

The report also describes as ‘humbling’ ‘...the professionalism, dedication and Christian compassion that

October 5, 2021

our staff have shown to residents and their families. The heroic interventions by staff are too numerous to mention, their care and dedication has been immense.

Speaking to the Assembly, the retiring Secretary to the Council for Social Witness, Lindsay Conway OBE said, “The Covid pandemic has redefined the essential role of Social Care and has permanently changed how that service will be delivered and that the Council for Social Witness would be at the sharp end of life saving service delivery for nearly two years.”

Mr Conway described how PCI’s dedicated staff “placed their own lives at risk to look after those in our care...” He also described how staff would become “...the only point of contact with the outside world for months on end for residents and tenants. We as a church, as a community owe an unpayable debt to all who work in the Health and Social Care Sector, their contribution needs to be acknowledged and rewarded.

With that in mind, the General Assembly expressed its gratitude ‘to all who have worked in PCI’s care facilities during the worst of the Covid-19 pandemic, recognising the sacrificial service of both locally based staff and senior management that always put the care of residents to the fore.’

A resolution from the Council for Mission in Ireland, recognised ‘with sincere gratitude...’ ‘...the dedicated work of chaplains serving in hospitals, prisons, the armed forces, and universities and colleges, during the restrictions and challenges of Covid-19’.



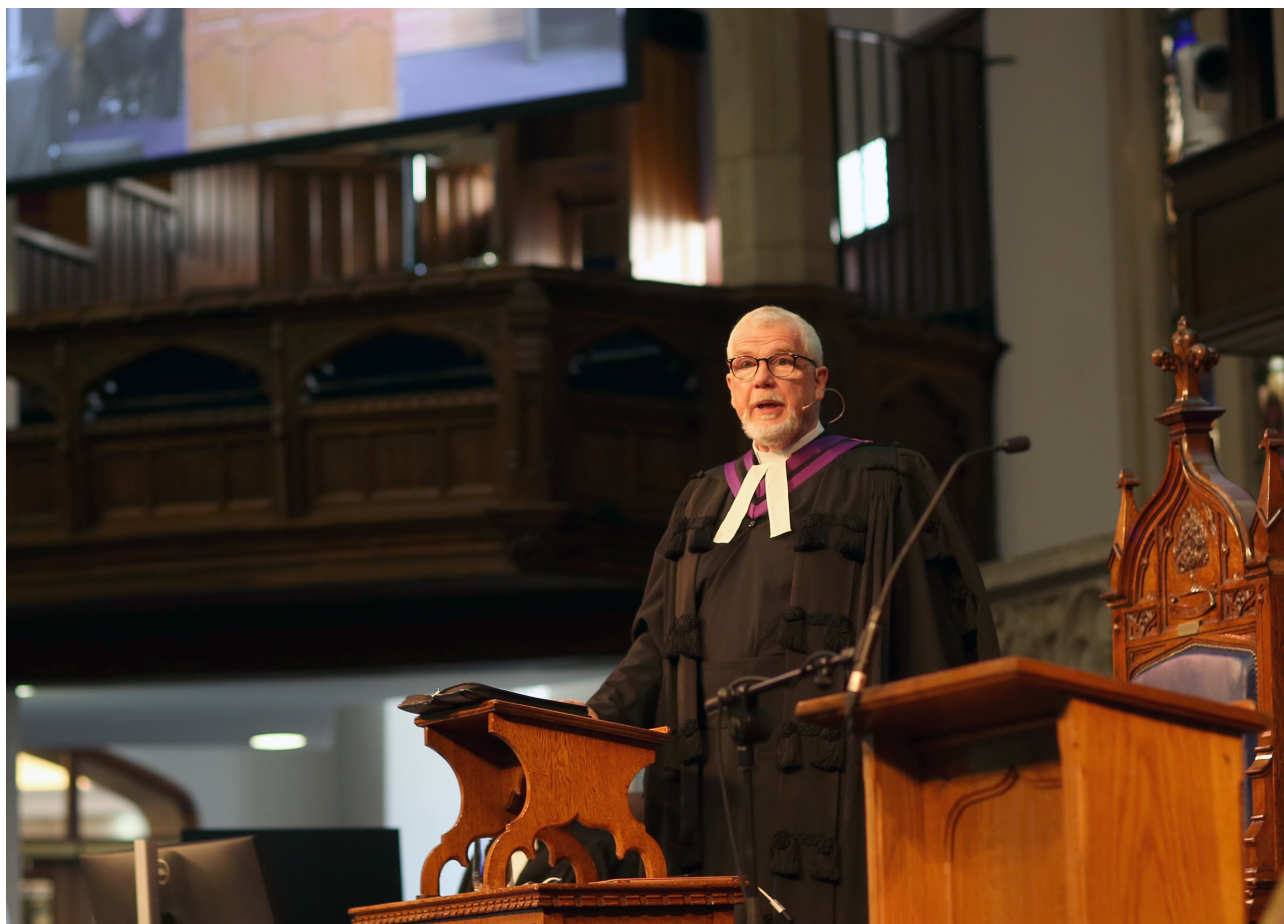
## Presbyterian Moderator begins second term

**The Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, Right Rev Dr David Bruce, began his second term of office yesterday morning (4 October) at the Opening Service of Worship at the denomination's General Assembly in Belfast. Cancelled last year, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Dr Bruce is only the seventh Moderator to serve two terms in office since 1840, and the first to do so in the last 127 years.**

In his address to the in person, socially distanced gathering at Assembly Buildings, Dr Bruce thanked the General Assembly for his fresh opportunity to serve, adding, "I sincerely hope the extension of Moderatorial terms of service does not become habit forming." Dr Bruce was referring to the fact that two-term Moderator's were not in the recent tradition of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

Opening on a Monday morning, and not the traditional Monday evening, with no procession of former Moderator's, or civic guests in attendance, only voting members of the General Assembly were present to hear Dr Bruce's address. In another break with tradition, PCI's longest serving Moderator, Very Rev Dr Godfrey Brown, who was Moderator in 1988, took the chair briefly for Dr Bruce's election and appointment as Moderator. He then prayed for him.

During worship, members of the New Irish Choir and Orchestra, including a string quartet, provided the music to



accompany the three hymns sung at the service. Led by Creative Director Jonathan Rea, Sylvia Burnside performed the song 'There is hope'. The organist was the Rev Mark Spratt, Minister of Kilmore Presbyterian Church. Following the Opening Service and address by the Moderator, three days of debate and decision making began that will focus upon the life and mission of the Church and also touch upon some of the challenging issues facing society across the island.

Reflecting on the year that has passed, Dr Bruce told ministers and elders from PCI's 500-plus congregations from across Ireland that he could simply list "all the struggles we have faced, and speak of Covid, furlough, vaccinations, social distancing, face-coverings, Brexit, the Northern Ireland Protocol...Lockdowns, container ships

October 5, 2021

grounded in the Suez Canal, interrupted supply chains [and] shortages...and Zoom. Small wonder perhaps that Time magazine labelled 2020 as 'one of the worst years to be alive in modern history.'

Dr Bruce continued, "Yet 2020 was the year our grandson was born – and his smile lights up the room. It was the year I was privileged to celebrate 100th birthdays with 17 centenarians around the church, and was deeply moved by their stories. During this year, I heard stories of congregations growing while in lockdown – of the curious and afraid, finding hope and forgiveness in Christ online while watching our ministers explain the gospel.

"This was the year when moulds were broken and new ways of doing and being church were conceived. Yes it's been hard, but as I often quote from Frederick Faber's great old hymn, 'Thrice blessed is he to who is given, the instinct that can tell, that God is on the field when he is most invisible.'"

Dr Bruce continued by observing, "This has not been an easy time to discern the mind of Christ, and having done so to the best of our abilities and insights, then to absorb the angst and pain of others in this unhinged climate. And yet, if this is not the calling of the minister and the church we serve, then what is?"

When churches across Ireland could not meet, carrying on from where his predecessor, Dr William Henry left off, the Moderator recorded a full service - and a further 19 - for each Sunday from June to October. During this time Dr Bruce took the Church through the Apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

October 5, 2021

“Ultimately the message of Ephesians is that the impossible needs to be the first item on the agenda for the church. The impossibility of ancient enemies becoming not only friends, but family – adopted as sons and daughters of God in Christ – such an impossibility is an inevitable outcome of the gospel when it is properly explained and daringly lived out.

“What a message for Ireland today. What a message for Europe today. What a message for a world...Paul was a man of the deepest theological convictions, but married this with a servant heart and a pastor’s passion for his people. As a church we need to carefully avoid perpetuating models of control which play to the loudest gallery, while seeking to live faithfully and well to the standards Christ demands of us.

“Jesus’ self-description as gentle and lowly in heart, is neither spineless nor soft, but a robust challenge to those of us called to lead, that we do so to win the people, not to lose them, to restore the sinful, not alienate them, to bind up the broken, not worsen their hurt, and to act as ambassadors of Christ in such a way that he will say to us at the end, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant.’”

Looking forward to his second year in office, Dr Bruce said that he also wanted to “take a few moments to wonder with God about what he might have us do and be, as we look to the future...” Recounting what he said at PCI’s event, ‘On these Steps’ at Union Theological College two weeks ago, to mark the centenary of Northern Ireland and the partition of Ireland, Dr Bruce said that when he spoke, he “...sought to reflect on the future of Ireland and its people... [and] did

October 5, 2021

so on the basis that we ought to be a people of hope rather than despair – the gospel surely demands this of us.”

He talked about how “north, south east and west on these islands present us with a web of opportunities to grow – economically, culturally and spiritually...” adding, “if we have the vision for it.” He spoke of how a “post-Brexit protocol environment” made this more complicated, adding, “...but if anything it has made more urgent”, he added. “We must work tirelessly to sort out the new configurations of our cultural, commercial and spiritual connections. No shortcuts. No quick fixes. No buck-passing. Just gritty determination to get it done. Whatever a new Ireland resembles, it will not be because someone was victorious, while another was defeated. If it looks like that, it won’t be a new Ireland. It will just be the same old, same old...”

Dr Bruce continued, “In making these and other remarks I did not want to minimize the challenges of speaking grace into some of the most contentious issues facing us in the public sphere for generations. Ethical issues surrounding our pastoral responses to human identity, sexuality and gender will be debated by us this week, and rightly so. The question of legacy and the need for justice for victims of the troubles is by their own admission the most complex matter facing legislators in the current round.”

He also talked about how the Church was a ‘pro-life church’ and how it was “a great disappointment to us that the Northern Ireland Secretary of State invoked a set of powers effectively bypassing the devolved institutions to impose upon Northern Ireland a deeply permissive abortion regime, far beyond any existing elsewhere on these islands. We

October 5, 2021

remain committed to vocalising our opposition to this, campaigning for changes to the law to protect the lives of unborn children who have no voice regarding their future,” he said.

Dr Bruce spoke of the Church’s ‘genuine concern ’at the introduction of legislation which would have permitted assisted suicide in Ireland. “As a result of many submissions made, including our own, the passage of the Bill has been halted, which is a victory of sorts. But we are aware that another Bill will come, and presumably also a parallel campaign will be launched in Northern Ireland to further challenge what we consider to be the specialness of human life.”

He also spoke about relations on the Ireland of island, north and south, and between Ireland and the United Kingdom, which Dr Bruce described as having been strained, “for reasons which include Brexit, the Northern Ireland Protocol, and our various attempts to mark or note the centenaries, including the formation of a border on this island, thus shaping the United Kingdom in its current form, and the creation of a new state in the Irish Republic.”

Referencing the Church Leaders Service of Reflection and Hope in Armagh later this month, the Moderator said, “We understand the sensitivities surrounding these anniversaries, and had hoped that the gathering of senior national representatives and local political leaders might have offered a significant public demonstration of a common commitment to peace, reconciliation and hope for the future. We remain resolute that these values will be to the fore in our engagement with governments.”

October 5, 2021

Towards the end of his address, Dr Bruce unveiled his theme for his remaining year in office. By simply substituting one letter from 'Home', his theme for 2020-2021, its successor will be 'Hope'. He said that "the puritans who shaped the theology of the reformation were above all else, a people of hope. They believed in the power of the Gospel to transform society – and so they pushed the church out in mission. For them, the world was not a wreck from which people must be plucked, but was the property of Christ to be reclaimed for him.

"For them, the call to mission was a call to engage, not withdraw. They understood themselves not as separatists but as servants of a world in need. Today, we find ourselves in a different kind of place than 17th century England. But the same gospel hopefulness inhabits and shapes our reformed vision of the world, and our belief that the task before us is unfinished, until Christ comes again, as he surely will."

## News briefs

### **Mothers Union knitting needles highlight Modern Day Slavery**

Mothers Union members in Manchester are taking out their knitting needles to raise awareness of Modern Day Slavery. A chain of 1129 links will be made to represent those trapped in Modern Day Slavery in Manchester. The chain will be completed and displayed for Anti-Slavery Day 18th Oct.

October 5, 2021

## **Former Belfast Chorister completes London marathon**

Stephen Bell was a chorister at Belfast Cathedral and a member of the Inst school choir, now conducts the Northampton Male Voice Choir. He completed the London Marathon raising funds for the Choir's support for the prostate cancer charity. Stephen's late father was Rev Canon John Bell of Drumbo Parish in Down diocese.

Commenting after the event Stephen said on Facebook "Running the Virgin London Marathon today was an experience like no other. It's exhilarating and frankly one of the hardest things I've ever done (and that includes the two other London's and Belfast in my younger body).

"It was awesome to see my lovely family at mile 17 and to see Christopher Bell who had flown from Edinburgh to join in the finish-line festivities. Ace stuff that! Great to see Hannah Bell and Joshua Borin, Rebecca Bell with baby Rosalie and Rhys Lovell, whilst Rhys Mum was an Epic finisher today: well done Sandy Lovell.

"Amazing to get a mention on the TV. Thanks to Jonny Newcombe and Abi Newcombe for that. Also lots of shout outs today from the guys at Northampton Male Voice Choir - United in friendship and in harmony and my friends at The GUS Band."

Commenting on the charity fundraising, Stephen said "It looks like the donations will have catapulted the contributions to well over £6000 and I've had a tip-off that there's a big donation in the offing so I'll tell you about that anon".



## **Books, Broadcasts, Resources and Webinars**

### **Book - A Different World – An English Vicar in West Cork**

#### **Hilary Wakeman's year as a West Cork vicar**

**If you visit your parishioners they'll forgive you everything, and if you don't they'll forgive you nothing, Emma Connolly writes in The Southern Star**

That's the advice that Hilary Wakeman got from her bishop when she became the rector in Schull back in 1996, and it's something that served her well.

'It meant I ate lots of cake and drank lots of tea – and also sherry and whiskey!' said Hilary, adding that it also helped her make life-long friends.

Now retired in her native Norwich, her book *A Different World – An English Vicar in West Cork*, has just been published and captures the first memorable year of her five years working in the parish.

Hilary was actually one of the first women priests in the Church of England and was ordained in 1994.

'My mother was Catholic and my father was a non-conformist but we were raised Catholic. When I hit my teens

October 5, 2021

I actually left the church and remember thinking what a lot of nonsense it all was and I was nothing at all for around 11 or 12 years.

‘I found God again by visiting empty parish churches, but as I lived in a small English village our local church was Church of England, which is really how it all came about,’ she remembers.

Initially the Church of England weren’t accepting women priests, and Hilary was a deacon for seven years, before being ordained with around 800 other women in 1994 after which she became vicar of a city centre church in Norwich.

It was on the way back to the ferry after a less than successful family holiday in Doolin in Clare that a chance sighting changed her pathway in life.

‘We diverted into one of the many peninsulas of the south-west coast and found the fishing village of Castletownbere. Then I saw the Church of Ireland church there.

‘It was clearly not in use but what distressed me was that there was a great lashing of chains and a padlock on the high iron gates. “Keep out,” it seemed to say.

‘When we got home to Norwich I couldn’t get that church out of my mind. Was there a vacancy? What would it be like to work there?’

Straightaway Hilary contacted the diocesan secretary of Cork, Cloyne and Ross to see if there was a vacancy, but she was out of luck.

However six months later, in March 1996, there was a vacancy in Schull and Hilary applied and was accepted.

She moved with her husband John (a freelance writer and editor who could work from anywhere) and her daughter Rosie.

She has lots of good memories but some things she singles out for praise in her book include the patience of people (especially the drivers), the dedication of her post man (who when faced with a locked door, stood on a downstairs windowsill and pushed a package into the open top half of an upstairs window) and the quality of the local bread ('real food').

Among the challenges was having to 'relearn how to drive because everyone salutes each other.'

'It requires enormous alertness to identify the car and the driver in time to do it, especially on windey lanes and I fail again and again being frequently saluted by people I have not recognised.

'Perhaps the safest thing is to salute everyone with a registration plate of this county. If they don't know me it won't matter and if they do I won't have snubbed them,' she wrote.

During Hilary's eventful year there were challenges and setbacks, and even tragedies: drownings, a suicide, the fatal road accident of a young boy, and the murder of Sophie Toscan du Plantier.

Her diary entry of December 27th read: 'It's almost as if everyone is stunned frozen. In our Christmas Day services in the two churches the congregations seemed just to whisper the responses. And could hardly sing the carols at all.'

But there was also great happiness and the book ends with a Catholic–Protestant, homemade wedding of her late daughter Rosie, an esteemed Southern Star columnist, to Richie Shelley. The marriage service was conducted by Hilary in the Famine Church by the sea, and she captures the joy of the occasion perfectly.

It's now 25 years since Hilary became rector in Schull, and 20 years since she retired early on health grounds in 2001.

John passed away in 2018 and Hilary is now a parishioner (with permission to officiate) in the parish where she was a vicar. 'I still miss West Cork and am very homesick for it,' she said.

• A Different World – An English Vicar in West Cork is published by Liffey Press (€16.95). Courtesy The Southern Star, October 2, 2021

## Poem for today

### Blackberry-Picking by Seamus Heaney

Late August, given heavy rain and sun  
For a full week, the blackberries would ripen.

October 5, 2021

At first, just one, a glossy purple clot  
Among others, red, green, hard as a knot.  
You ate that first one and its flesh was sweet  
Like thickened wine: summer's blood was in it  
Leaving stains upon the tongue and lust for  
Picking. Then red ones inked up and that hunger  
Sent us out with milk cans, pea tins, jam-pots  
Where briars scratched and wet grass bleached our boots.  
Round hayfields, cornfields and potato-drills  
We trekked and picked until the cans were full,  
Until the tinkling bottom had been covered  
With green ones, and on top big dark blobs burned  
Like a plate of eyes. Our hands were peppered  
With thorn pricks, our palms sticky as Bluebeard's.

We hoarded the fresh berries in the byre.  
But when the bath was filled we found a fur,  
A rat-grey fungus, glutting on our cache.  
The juice was stinking too. Once off the bush  
The fruit fermented, the sweet flesh would turn sour.  
I always felt like crying. It wasn't fair  
That all the lovely canfuls smelt of rot.  
Each year I hoped they'd keep, knew they would not.

Source: Death of a Naturalist (1966)

## Speaking to the Soul

Bible verse, thought for the day and prayers - on site daily

October 5, 2021

