



French police officer who swapped places with hostage was a practising Catholic

The police officer who died after taking the place of a hostage in France was a practising Catholic who had “experienced a genuine conversion” around 2008. **Lieutenant-Colonel Arnaud Beltrame** died on Saturday after volunteering to replace a female hostage during a terrorist attack

on the Super U supermarket in Trèbes, southern France, on Friday.

Beltrame left his phone on so that police could hear his conversations with the gunman.

He was shot in the neck by jihadist Radouane Lakdim before police entered the supermarket and killed the Moroccan-born French national. Beltrame served in Iraq in 2005 and received the Legion of Honour, France's highest award, in 2012. Last year he was named deputy commander of anti-terror police in the Aude region.

Fr Dominique Arz, national chaplain of the gendarmerie, **told** the French Catholic magazine Famille Chrétienne: "It turns out that the lieutenant-colonel was a practising Catholic. The fact is that he did not hide his faith, and that he radiated it, he bore witness to it. We can say that his act of self-offering is consistent with what he believed. He served his country to the very end, and bore witness to his faith to the very end."

The website Rorate Caeli **compared** Beltrame's sacrifice to that of St Maximilian Kolbe, who died in 1941 after volunteering to take the place of a

fellow prisoner condemned to death at Auschwitz.

Beltrame and his fiancée, Marielle, were preparing to receive the sacrament of marriage, according to Fr Jean-Baptiste, one of the Canons Regular of the Mother of God of Lagrasse Abbey.

Fr Jean-Baptiste **said** in a statement, **translated by Christopher Gillibrand**: “It was through a chance meeting during a visit to our abbey, which is a historical monument, that I met Lieutenant-Colonel Arnaud Beltrame and Marielle, who he had just married civilly on August 27, 2016. We got on together very quickly and they asked me to prepare them for the religious wedding that I was going to celebrate near Vannes on June 9. We spent many hours working on the basics of married life for almost two years. I had just blessed their home on December 16 and we were finalising their canonical marriage record. The very beautiful declaration of intention of Arnaud reached me four days before his heroic death.

“This young couple regularly came to the abbey to participate in Masses, services and teachings, especially to a group of ‘foyers’, Notre Dame de

Canal. They were part of the Narbonne team. They came again last Sunday.

“Intelligent, sporty, voluble and lively, Arnaud spoke readily of his conversion. Born into a family with little practice, he experienced a genuine conversion around 2008, at almost 33 years old. He received First Communion and Confirmation after two years of catechumenate, in 2010.

“After a pilgrimage to Sainte-Anne-d’Auray in 2015, where he asked the Virgin Mary to help him to meet the woman of his life, he became friends with Marielle, whose faith is deep and discreet. The engagement was celebrated at the Breton abbey of Timadeuc at Easter 2016.

“Passionate about the gendarmerie, he has always had a passion for France, her greatness, her history and her Christian roots which he rediscovered with his conversion. By substituting himself for the hostages, he was probably motivated by a commitment to gallantry as an officer, because for him being a policeman meant protecting. But he knew the incredible risk that he was taking.

“He also knew the promise of religious marriage he made to Marielle, who is already his wife and who he loved tenderly, as I witnessed. So? Was he right to take such a risk? It seems to me that only his faith can explain the madness of this sacrifice which is today the admiration of all. He knew, as Jesus told us, that ‘There is no greater love than to give one’s life for one’s friends’ (John 15.13). He knew that if his life began to belong to Marielle, it was also to God, to France, to his brothers in danger of death. I believe that only a Christian faith animated by charity could ask for this superhuman sacrifice.

“I was able to join him at the hospital in Carcassonne around 9pm last night. The gendarmes and the doctors or nurses opened the way with remarkable delicacy. He was alive but unconscious. I was able to give him the Sacrament of the Sick and the apostolic blessing at the moment of death. Marielle responded to these beautiful liturgical formulas.

“It was the Friday before the Passion, just before the opening of Holy Week. I had just prayed the office of none and the Stations of the Cross for him. I asked the caregiver if he could have near

him a Marian medal, that of the rue du Bac in Paris.

“Comprehensive and professional, a nurse, attached it to his shoulder. I could not marry him, as an article awkwardly said, because he was unconscious. Arnaud will never now have children in life. But his astonishing heroism will, I believe, inspire many imitators, ready to give of themselves to France and her Christian joy.”

Pope could still visit NI, says bishop

Bishop Donal McKeown says he hopes the Vatican will reconsider facilitating a visit to Northern Ireland by the Pope this summer.

Pope Francis will visit Dublin for the World Meeting of Families in August however there was widespread disappointment among Northern Ireland Catholics that a visit to Northern Ireland was not on his agenda when it was released last week.

It will be the first papal visit to the Republic of Ireland for almost 40 years, with Pope John Paul



He drawing crowds of over 2.5m when he visited the south in 1979.

Speaking on BBC Radio Ulster's Sunday Sequence, Bishop McKeown said there are still five months for the Vatican to change the plans.

There are a number of large catholic congregations in Northern Ireland, he said, and he hoped that their voices would be heard by the Vatican. Report courtesy Belfast News Letter

Dublin & Glendalough raise €115,000 for refugee housing

Donations to the Dublin & Glendalough Refugee Housing Appeal have now reached €115,000. Parishes and individuals throughout the United Dioceses have been supporting the project enthusiastically and are working hard to raise funds to make a difference for people who are emerging from Direct Provision. Already €80,000 has been shared with the Irish Refugee Council (IRC) for their housing project. The appeal and its finances are under the governance of the dioceses.

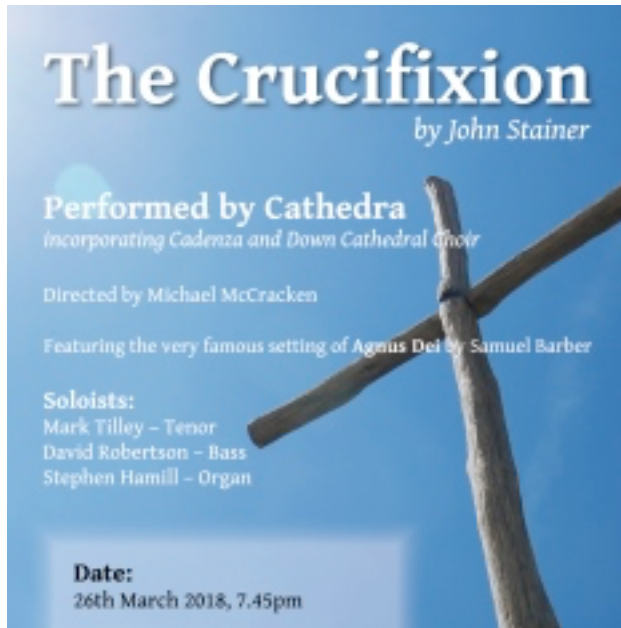
The IRC's holistic programme provides transitional accommodation for people who have been given refugee status in Ireland. This takes pressure off the individuals who find it almost impossible to access private rented accommodation in today's market and in turn takes pressure off organisations who work with homeless people. The IRC programme also provides individually tailored supports to help people access education, employment, support services and health services, and build social connections.

The fundraising target for the dioceses is €300,000 in three years and Archbishop Michael Jackson has thanked everyone who has played a part in reaching the current total, while Nick Henderson, CEO of the Irish Refugee Council, said that the funds raised provide vital support for the project.

And the project continues to be supported. Next Wednesday evening in Sandford parish church, at 8pm, Sandford and St Philip's Choral Scholars & Choral Union, with Warwick Harte (Tenor), Michael Lee (Bass) and David Leigh (Organ), will sing Stainer's *The Crucifixion*, in aid of the Dublin & Glendalough Refugee Housing Appeal. C of I notes in Irish Times

Stainer's The Crucifixion in Downpatrick tonight

Tonight, the Monday Evening of Holy Week, 26 March, Down Cathedral will be the venue for a performance of John Stainer's famous piece, *The Crucifixion*. Over 130 years, old, Stainer's *Crucifixion* is still sung regularly by choirs, and includes hymns sung by the whole congregation as well as haunting bass and tenor solos. The

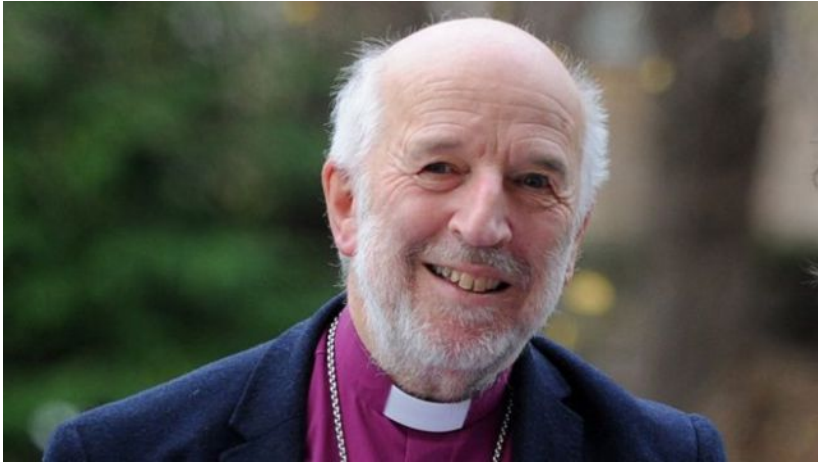


other piece sung on the evening will be Samuel Barber's *Agnus Dei*.
[Find out more here.](#)

Holy Week and Easter Services at Down Cathedral

- 25 March, Palm Sunday: Morning Prayer at 11.30 am
- 29 March, Maunday Thursday: Holy Communion at 10.00 am
- 1 April, Easter Day: Baptism and Holy Communion at 11.30 am

Former Primus returns to Cork roots for Holy Week



The Right Reverend David Chillingworth, who was Bishop of Saint Andrew's, Dunkeld and Dunblane in the Scottish Episcopal Church, and who was Primus (Presiding Bishop) of that Church from 2009 until 2016 is spending Holy Week 2018 in Cork, Cloyne and Ross visiting his Cork roots.

He will preach at the Holy Week Services in the parishes of Douglas Union with Frankfield.

Bishop Chillingworth's links with Cork and with Douglas go back through his father's family. His

grandfather was Rector of Carrigtwohill and of Corkbeg and Inch. The family graves of previous generations are in the churchyard in Douglas.

The Rector of Douglas Union with Frankfield, Archdeacon Wilkinson says:

I was delighted when Bishop Chillingworth accepted my invitation to be our Holy Week preacher in Douglas Union with Frankfield this year. I was aware of his family roots in Cork and when I heard he was retiring, I thought it an ideal opportunity to have him revisit the parish and diocese. He is someone who has served the Church with great distinction, vision and courage both in Northern Ireland and in Scotland. We look forward to a stimulating and thoughtful Holy Week in Douglas, as each evening in St Luke's Church, he leads us through the events and drama of the Passion.

The full schedule of Services in Douglas Union of Parishes with Frankfield may be found [HERE](#). All are welcome.

Bishop Chillingworth will also be the preacher at the annual Diocesan Chrism Eucharist in the Cathedral Church of Saint Fachtna, Rosscarbery

on Maundy Thursday at 12 noon. All are welcome.

Lanarkshire town to stage the Easter story on an epic scale



An ambitious staging of the Easter story featuring a cast of 50 will bring the Gospel accounts vividly to life in Hamilton over the bank holiday weekend.

Local people aged from 4 to 81 will play key parts in the performance of the Lanarkshire Passion Play. The lead role of Jesus will be

played by Glasgow-born professional actor Nicholas Elliott.

The production, an ecumenical initiative led by Hamilton Old Parish Church, will turn the town centre into Jerusalem for the day.

Director Liz Blackman, who also comes from a background in theatre, explained why she felt this was an effective way to teach people about Easter.

"People will pick up a computer now before anything else," she said.

"We want to see things in action.

"This provides an opportunity to get the Gospel Message out in a vibrant and creative way."

She cites the example of the famous Passion Play of Oberammergau in Bavaria, which has been performed for 400 years, as an inspiration. "We would like it to become a tradition of the town," she said.

"Local businesses have got involved: a balcony at the back of Asda will be Pilate's house;



Frankie & Benny's Temple Court; Jesus's tomb entrance is in a local lounge bar," she added.

The Hamilton branch of Subway also plans to contribute to the production.

Mrs Blackman's husband, Rev Ross Blackman, minister at Hamilton Old Parish Church, is equally enthusiastic about working with the community.

"The community have really responded well and we hope to bring people into the town," he said.

The Lanarkshire Passion Play will take place at the Bottom Cross, near Asda in Hamilton, on Saturday 31st March at 2pm.



UK has among the fewest Christian young adults in Europe, study finds

The proportion of young adults professing a Christian faith in the UK is among the lowest in Europe, a new study has found.

Twenty-two per cent of those aged between 16 and 29-years-old said they identified as Christian, while 70 per cent described themselves as non-religious.

Only four countries - Czech Republic (nine-per-cent), Sweden (18-per-cent), Estonia (19-per-cent) and the Netherlands (19-per-cent) - were found to have fewer Christians, as a proportion of the wider young adult population.

Graham Nicholls, leader of the Affinity network of evangelical churches in the UK and Ireland told Premier News the figures represent the knock-on effect of a spiritual decline among preceding generations.

He said: "If there's a decline in belief in Christianity and preaching of the Gospel, you get the next generation who don't really believe it anymore but are practising.

"And, then you get the next generation who neither belief or practise it and are willing to say that."

In contrast, 83-per-cent and 74-per-cent of young adults in Poland and Lithuania respectively identified as Christian, as did 59-per cent of those in Ireland and Slovenia.

Author of the 'Europe's Young Adults and Religion' report, Prof Stephen Bullivant from St Mary's University in Twickenham described the differences in religiosity "genuinely remarkable".

Prof Bullivant said: "The differences in the religiousness - or, as dominates in many countries, non-religiousness - of 16-29 year-olds

in our sample of European countries is genuinely remarkable.

"There are, moreover, some genuine surprises in the data.

"For example, Ireland's young adults are - contrary to recent reports - still remarkably religious, at least by the standards of other highly developed European nations.

"Meanwhile, countries that had, until quite recently, traditionally strong religious cultures - Lithuania, Belgium, Netherlands, Austria - look to be in serious trouble, in terms of the coming generations."

Conducted by St Mary's University and the Institut Catholique de Paris (ICP), the research analysed data recently gathered from 22 European nations via the European Social Survey.

Academics concluded then ten-per-cent and seven-per-cent of young adults in the UK consider themselves Catholic and Anglican respectively, while six-per-cent identify as Muslim.

European countries ranked by proportion of young adults who say they are Christians

Czech Republic 9%

Sweden 18%

Estonia 19%

The Netherlands 19%

United Kingdom 22%

Belgium 25%

France 25%

Hungary 33%

Denmark 34%

Norway 36%

Finland 37%

Spain 40%

Russia 41%

Switzerland 44%

Germany 47%

Austria 52%

Portugal 57%

Ireland 59%

Slovenia 59%

Lithuania 74%

Poland 83%

Source: The 'Europe's Young Adults and Religion' report



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