



## **Catholic MP introduces bill to legalise same-sex marriage in Northern Ireland**

A Catholic Labour MP has introduced a bill that would legalise same-sex marriage in Northern Ireland, saying that he is “living the message of the gospel in this Holy Week”.

Conor McGinn, who was born in Northern Ireland but currently represents St Helens North in

northern England, described himself as a practicing Catholic and hinted that God would approve of the bill.

“I am a practicing Catholic, now my parish priest would undoubtedly say that I probably need to practice a little bit more,” he joked.

He added that he had no trouble reconciling the bill with his faith.

“I have been asked about whether or not, given the position of the Church hierarchy, this conflicts with my own person faith. Let me say this as gently and I hope as appropriately as possible: the God I know is one of love, compassion and understanding. In showing that to others, in standing up for the marginalised and those denied their rights, I believe I am living the message of the gospel in this Holy Week”.

Northern Ireland’s governing assembly is currently suspended after its two main parties – the unionist DUP and the nationalist Sinn Fein – failed to reach an agreement to form a government.

The suspension means that the UK government is now temporarily ruling the province directly, giving MPs from mainland Britain the chance to overturn some of its more conservative laws.

Northern Ireland has much stricter abortion laws than the rest of the UK, and is the only part of the British Isles not to allow same-sex marriage.

## **As Irish abortion vote nears, C of I archbishops reiterate its position**

The archbishops of the Church of Ireland have reminded church members of its stance on abortion as the country prepares to vote on the issue.

Ireland is due to hold a referendum on 25th May which could reverse the country's ban on abortion.

Citizens will be asked whether they want to repeal the Eighth Amendment of Ireland's Constitution, a provision that makes abortion illegal in all but exceptional circumstances.

They will be asked whether they want to replace the amendment, which gives the mother and unborn an equal right to life, with wording that hands responsibility for setting the country's abortion laws to politicians.

If the public votes to repeal the constitutional provision, the Irish Government intends to table legislation that would permit women to abort within 12 weeks of pregnancy.

Most Rev Dr Richard Clarke, Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland, and Most Rev Dr Michael Jackson, Archbishop of Dublin and Primate of Ireland have expressed their concerns on the issue.

They said in a joint statement: "We have previously expressed our concern that the forthcoming Constitutional referendum is being understood as something akin to an opinion poll on the complex issue of abortion.

"However, now that the Government has made known the general scheme of a Bill which it would introduce should the referendum on the repeal of Article 40.3.3 of the Constitution of Ireland be passed, voters face a stark decision."

They acknowledged the need for pastoral care for women, for improved support services and for greater investment in medical and mental health services.

However, they reiterated that abortion in any stage of pregnancy is not an ethical decision they can accept.

The C of I archbishops added: "There is, for Christians, a very clear witness in the Scriptures that all human life, including before physical birth, has a sacred dignity in the eyes of God.

"We therefore ask Church members to think through the issues involved carefully and with prayer over these coming weeks."

## **Proposed abortion law is in no way restrictive: Iona Institute**

The Iona Institute has warned that the Government's proposed abortion law will, to all intents and purposes, permit abortion-on-demand.

In a statement issued on Tuesday evening in response to Minister Simon Harris'

announcement that the Cabinet had approved the main points of the proposed legislation which will be tabled if the referendum on the Eighth Amendment is passed, the Iona Institute said the abortion law being proposed is in no real way restrictive and in practice would mean very few women being refused an abortion in Ireland.

Earlier on Tuesday, Minister for Health Simon Harris said the Government proposed unrestricted abortion where a medical practitioner has certified that the pregnancy has not exceeded 12 weeks.

A space of seventy-two hours must elapse between an application for an abortion and the abortion procedure being carried out.

Minister Harris said that abortion would only be available in exceptional circumstances beyond 12 weeks. This includes where there is a risk to the health or life of the mother, in emergency situations and in cases of fatal foetal abnormality.

He said in all other circumstances abortion would remain unlawful.

In cases where there was a risk to the life or health of a woman, abortion would not be lawful



“beyond viability” and the pregnancy would be ended through early delivery with a full medical team.

In their statement, the Iona Institute said the safeguards being proposed following 12 weeks would be no more effective than they are in Britain.

Commenting on the draft law, Maria Steen of the Iona Institute said, “It is misleading on the part of our Health Minister, and the Government, to imply this law would be restrictive. They know perfectly well that the proposed law is even more radical in almost every respect than the British law, which permits abortion, effectively on demand.”

Ms Steen added that it was “doubly misleading” to describe what is being proposed as ‘healthcare’.

“In the first 12 weeks of pregnancy no medical reason for abortion whatsoever need be offered. Perfectly healthy women will be aborting perfectly healthy babies. How is this ‘healthcare’? It is the opposite, and a total inversion of medicine.”

“We are confident the Irish people will see through the Government’s spin and see that what is being proposed is, in fact, a very radical abortion law that offers the unborn child no real legal protection. Without the Eighth Amendment, there will be nothing to prevent this or any future Oireachtas from enacting even more extreme abortion laws. For this reason, we trust that the electorate will, in the end, vote to keep the pro-life amendment,” Maria Steen said.

Meanwhile, the Pro Life Campaign has said the Government’s proposals on abortion are “way more extreme than Britain’s, where 1 in 5 pregnancies now end in abortion.”

Dr Ruth Cullen of the Pro Life Campaign said, “Every day between now and the referendum the Government will try to convince voters that its



proposal is reasonable and even restrictive. But the truth is what's being proposed is one of the most extreme abortion laws anywhere in the world, including the proposal for unrestricted access to abortion up to three months in pregnancy, a provision that goes much further than what the English law currently permits.”

Dr Cullen continued, “The Government’s abortion proposal effectively sets the rights of unborn babies at zero. Government ministers know full well too that if the Eighth Amendment were repealed there is no guarantee that even the proposed restrictions on late-term abortions would last any length of time. The Taoiseach, the Minister for Health and others in government have totally abandoned the rights of unborn babies. They should stop pretending otherwise with insertions here and there to the Bill that are utterly meaningless and would do nothing whatsoever to safeguard the right to life.”

## **‘Godly Play’ workshop for children’s workers in Cork, Cloyne and Ross**

The Children’s Ministry Group in the United Dioceses of Cork , Cloyne and Ross is hosting a

[www.churchnewsireland.org](http://www.churchnewsireland.org)

**NEWS March 29**



'Godly Play' workshop for children's workers in the Diocese on Saturday, 14th April from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. in Northridge House

Education and Research Centre, Mahon, Cork.

'Godly Play' is a creative approach to spiritual education.

The trainer on the day will be Cora O'Farrell who is a Godly Play trainer with Godly Play Ireland. She uses Godly Play in her work with student teachers at the Institute of Education, DCU.

Have you ever wondered how to tell Bible stories to children? Have you ever longed to really make the stories meaningful and memorable? Those of us in children's ministry in churches and schools may be the only people telling this treasure trove

of stories to children. Do you want fresh inspiration, some new ideas and a creative way of telling stories? Not alone, you will also get fresh insights into some of the great stories for yourself.

Godly Play provides a unique way of working with children and adults. It is rooted in Montessori principles and is practised in various contexts and in several countries throughout the world. This workshop will offer participants an experience of Godly Play thorough presentations from its four genres of sacred story, parable, liturgy and silence. There will also be input on the underpinnings of Godly Play and how to get started in the method. Date : Saturday 14th April 2018. Time : 10am till 1pm. Venue : Northridge House Education and Research Centre, Mahon, Cork. Cost : €7 per person (*over 18s only*). To book a place, please contact the Rev'd Elaine Murray at [emit@eircom.net](mailto:emit@eircom.net) or 087-2363100

## **Friends thank God for Sir Ken Dodd at his funeral**

Hundreds of mourners gathered on Wednesday at Liverpool Cathedral to pay their last respect to Sir Ken Dodd.



Tickle sticks appeared across Liverpool as the city said a final farewell him.

The props were made famous by the much-loved Christian comedian, who died earlier this month aged 90, and were placed on landmarks across the area.

Applause rang out as Sir Ken Dodd's funeral cortege arrived at the Anglican Cathedral for the start of the service.

A horse-drawn carriage bore his wooden casket, with a bouquet of yellow sunflowers atop and a tribute to one of his trademark Diddymen alongside.

A band played melancholy ragtime jazz music before six pall bearers carried the coffin inside



the cathedral with hundreds inside preparing to pay a final farewell.

As Sir Ken's casket was carried inside the cathedral hundreds of mourners gathered under a big screen outside to watch as the service

began, with opening prayers led by Canon Myles Davies, acting Dean of Liverpool.

Along with the comedian's fans a Who's Who of Liverpool comedians and celebrities have come to pay their last respects including, Jimmy Tarbuck, Les Dennis, Tom O'Connor and Stan Boardman.

Jimmy Tarbuck, who spoke before reading a passage based on Psalm 139, said: "What a perfect venue for our city's hero, perhaps our city's greatest hero and I'm pleased for Ken there's yet another full house."

He said he had met Sir Ken 57 years ago and "just fell in love with him".

He added: "He sang Happiness because he gave happiness."

He told the congregation it was an "honour" and a "joy" to watch Sir Ken.

He said: "He set a standard, ladies and gentlemen, which no one has remotely approached since."

Jimmy Cricket paid tribute to Sir Ken before he gave a reading from St John's gospel.

He described him as "one of the most different, original, innovative and gifted comedians".

He said: "We enjoyed him on the radio and the television but the live shows were special.

"From the moment he went on with his tickling sticks he created magic."

He added: "Ken always said his gift, his talents, were from God and comedians like

Ken, they only come once in a lifetime.

"We thank God today that he came during our lifetime."

In an address, acting dean of Liverpool Canon Myles Davies said: "Ken would be so pleased, and probably humbled too, by the way his home city and people from all over poured out their tributes to him in these last weeks."

He said the cathedral was "crowded out", with many more watching the service outside.

Canon Davies said: "What a wonderful tribute to someone who has spent his life persuading us all to exercise our chuckle muscles."

Prayers were led by the Rev Julia Jesson, the vicar of St John the Evangelist Church in Knotty Ash, where Sir Ken was a member of the congregation.

A recording of the comedian singing Absent Friends was played.

Diddymen followed Sir Ken's coffin as it was carried out of the cathedral to applause at the end of the service, which lasted one hour and 45 minutes.

## **Steve Chalke calls for full church inclusion for trans people**

Rev Steve Chalke has called for all churches to offer "radical inclusion" to transgender people, as not doing so will cause mental health risks to those who feel shunned.

The leader of the Oasis network has published a new eBook encouraging churches to include, welcome, support and accept transgender people.

The Gender Agenda: Towards a Biblical Theology on Gender Identity, Reassignment and Confirmation attempts to "heal the hurts" inflicted on people who are transgender. Its purpose is to also help Christians form an "inclusive theology",





which Rev Chalke argues is consistent throughout the Bible.

He said:"The subtle shift from viewing transgender people as 'depraved sinners' to 'unfortunate victims of psychological pressures and mental illness' camouflages the fact that, in the end, as numbers of trans people have learned to their cost, the environment it creates is just as toxic for them."

The book also asserts that the world's first Gentile convert to Christianity had gender and sexual minority status. It uses the example of Philip baptising an Ethiopian eunuch even though Jewish theology at the time would not have deemed him worthy of it due to his status as a foreigner and a eunuch.

Rev Chalke added: "For the record, I am not suggesting that a 1st century eunuch is the exact equivalent of a 21st century trans or intersex person. It is, however, an extraordinary example of the early Church's understanding of the principle of radical inclusion as central to their mission and purpose."

However, Jeanette Howard, a Christian who experienced gender dysphoria in her youth, told Premier News that churches should be careful about this topic and clearly define how they welcome trans people.

"Does it mean I walk with you shoulder to shoulder, I encourage you on your walk in discipleship, obedience and submission to the Lord? Absolutely.... I know three [people] who have de-transitioned in response to the Lord.

"If it means come in, and I not only accept you but I actually endorse and encourage you in your transgender, then to me that is not a Biblical representation of what has been said and taught."

Rev Chalke also teamed up with LGBT rights charity Stonewall to produce a new guide

designed to help churches begin the conversation of including transgender people.

The guide includes testimonies of transgender people and explores what the Bible has to say about trans people.

**Get the news headlines from CNI daily on Twitter or Facebook- Click symbol on CNI Home page**

