

Irish Church leaders appeal from Messines for political progress and understanding in Northern Ireland

Irish Church leaders who have attended centenary commemorations for the Battle of Messines today, June 7, appeal for political progress, a spirit of hope and continued peace-building in Northern Ireland after the General Election.

Archbishop Richard Clarke (Church of Ireland); Archbishop Eamon Martin (Catholic Church); the Revd Bill Mullally (President of the Methodist Church in Ireland) and the Very Revd Dr Frank Sellar (former Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland) state -

‘First World War commemorations took place in Belgium today when representatives from the Irish Churches were among those present who marked the tragedy and futility of war and the searing pain and loss which Irish people from all walks of life encountered one hundred years ago

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at the Battle of Messines. The battle was the first time that soldiers from both traditions in Ireland, unionist and nationalist, fought side-by-side during the conflict.

‘At this time, in 2017, when talks among the political parties in Northern Ireland have been postponed until after the UK General Election tomorrow, it seems like an appropriate moment to draw on the words of the Peace Pledge at the Island of Ireland Peace Park at Messines. It states: “...We appeal to all people in Ireland to help build a peaceful and tolerant society. Let us remember the solidarity and trust that developed between Protestant and Catholic soldiers when they served together in these trenches ... we affirm that a fitting tribute to the principles for which men and women from the Island of Ireland died in both World Wars would be permanent peace.”

‘It is our hope and prayer that the elected representatives of the people of Northern Ireland will all do their utmost to build bridges, overcome differences and find constructive ways forward to build on the peace which has been established at home and to continue through the devolved Assembly to provide leadership for the good of all the people of Northern Ireland,

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irrespective of political or religious background, in the days, months and years ahead.'

Spirit of Cork Award for Bishop Colton+

Cork Civic Trust as organisers of *The Spirit of Cork Award* has announced that it will bestow the 2017 award on Dr Paul Colton, the Bishop of Cork, Cloyne and Ross.

The Chairman of Cork Civic Trust, Michael Mulcahy, said:

“Cork Civic Trust, as hosts of *The Spirit of Cork Award 2017*, is very pleased to confirm that Dr Paul Colton is to be its recipient for the 2017 award. Through *Spirit of Cork*, our city and county has the opportunity to honour and recognise people who have made a real difference to Cork and her people. *Spirit of Cork* is an honour and recognition for people that we are proud to be part of our Cork family.

We need young people with strong ideals to help fix broken world – Bishop Leahy

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Bishop Leahy's hope for students to get more from studies than just exam points

Bishop Brendan Leahy, Bishop of Limerick, has today extended his best wishes and prayers to the Leaving and Junior Certificate students who commence their exams today, commenting that the need for young people with strong ideals to help fix this broken world has never been greater.

Calling for prayers to be said across the entire diocese for students sitting their exams, Bishop Leahy said: "My immediate thought and hope is that those sitting Leaving and Junior Cert examinations would approach tomorrow relaxed and focussed, aware that there's no point in overdoing things at this stage, and that it is now better to focus on expressing themselves and their knowledge across their respective subjects.

Marriage may be good for your health, according to a new study

Researchers from Aston Medical School in Birmingham looked at more than 900,000 patients with high blood pressure, high cholesterol and type 2 diabetes and found marriage led to higher survival rates.

Experts suspect this is because those who have the encouragement of a partner are more likely

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to take their medication, eat healthily and get enough exercise.

Jan Erswell, Director of Reality Counselling told Premier that while some people are happy not being married, it was better to be.

She explained during News Hour: "It is better to be married than cohabiting - it's better for your health - it's better for your relationship.

"I think the important thing in Churches as well is to not make people feel isolated if they're not married and actually help them through that."

The study, which is to be presented to the British Cardiovascular Society conference in Manchester, examined data obtained from hospitals in northern England between January 2000 and March 2013.

Bellringers around the world sought for special day+

Bellringers at cathedrals and churches around the world are being invited to join a worldwide day of music organised by the BBC. Already 20 locations outside the UK, including Kenya, Australia, Zimbabwe and the United States have signed up to take part in BBC Music Day at 7pm, local time, on Thursday 15 June. The sound of bells proved to be a popular feature of the event last year with peals ringing from around

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200 towers. Organisers are hoping to build on that success by encouraging many more people to participate this year.

Membership of the Anglican Communion Safe Church Commission announced+

The membership of the newly-established Safe Church Commission has been announced. The Commission has been established to promote the safety of people within the churches of the Anglican Communion. Garth Blake SC of the Anglican Church of Australia will chair the Commission. Mr Blake is a member of the Anglican Consultative Council and has served as the chair of the Anglican Church of Australia's Child Protection Committee. He is currently the Convener of the Anglican Communion Safe Church Network.

Reflecting on Thy Kingdom Come+

It's emerged that churches in eighty five countries participated in Thy Kingdom Come, a prayer initiative between Ascension Day and Pentecost (25th May – 4th June). Prayer events of all shapes and sizes took place, including

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round-the-clock prayer rooms, prayer days, prayer walks and half-nights of prayer. People gathered across cities and towns to worship and to pray for the empowering of the Holy Spirit for effective witness. In England 35 cathedrals were involved in running a prayer event. St Paul's Cathedral in Melbourne, Australia, hosted a beacon event last Saturday. On Facebook the organisers wrote: "A river of light extends from the High Altar at St Paul's Cathedral Melbourne for #thykingdom #melbeacon17. They represent the people for whom we have prayed this week. We pray for God's Kingdom to come and our world to be transformed. Come, Holy Spirit."

Report estimates up to 80% of Christians have left Syria and Iraq

A new report estimates that between half and 80 per cent of Christians have left Syria and Iraq since the Syrian civil war started in 2011. The arrival of Islamic State provided only the "tipping point" in a wider trend of believers leaving the countries, according to the document, which also warned that providing precise figures was difficult. The report comes as United States-backed Kurdish-led forces began an operation to seize control of the Syrian city of Raqqa.

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It also estimates that the Christian community in Iraq has shrunk from more than 300,000 in 2014 to 200,000-250,000 today - "many" of whom are internally displaced.

Concerning Syria, the 'Understanding the recent movements of Christians leaving Syria and Iraq' report estimates that the Christian population of around two million six years ago has "roughly halved".

Dublin's Ecumenical Bible Week in full swing

Ecumenical Bible Week 2017 got underway on Sunday evening (June 4). The week long programme of events runs each year from Pentecost to Trinity Sunday and this year there are 23 events with 25 presenters in venues across Dublin and Glendalough. The theme is 'Faith comes from hearing the word of Christ' which honours the 500th anniversary of the Reformation.

The week was launched in St Finian's Lutheran Church in Adelaide Road with a service of Sung Lutheran Vespers. The closing event will take place there also on Sunday next, June 11.

Pastor Stephan Arras said it was a great honour for their tiny church to host the events and mark the 500 years of Reformation. He added that the

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theme of Ecumenical Bible Week 2017 got right to the centre of Martin Luther's theology.

Pastor Arras also led prayers for the people of London and for all people who fear attacks as well as refugees and those who host them.

+ Indicates longer report in tomorrow's CNI News bulletin