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Three senior leaders of the Church of Scotland abseil off the Firth of Forth bridge to raise funds for church's social service

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C of I responds to Education Equality's claims on schools admissions

In a letter to the Irish Times, Rev. Brian O' Rourke, Chairman of the C of I Primary School Management Association responded to claims made by Education

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Equality about the proposed changes in schools admissions. He writes -

In response to the consultation process on proposed changes to school admissions, the Minister for Education and Skills invited all stakeholders to express their views on what was being proposed. Out of the 198 Church of Ireland and Protestant primary schools in the State, over 100 took the opportunity to respond to the Minister's invitation.

Each school expressed the view that the ability to prioritise entry on the basis of religious denomination, where oversubscribed, is of fundamental importance to their ability to serve families of a Protestant and other minority faith traditions.

This information has been in the public domain for some weeks now and our public representatives were obviously aware of these strongly held views from their contributions to the debate on this topic in the Dáil last week. The "shock" is that Education Equality, a group that seems to be holding itself out as speaking for faith

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minorities in education (but yet also seems to be advocating for the secularisation of Irish education at primary and post-primary level), was apparently unaware of the widely articulated views of Church of Ireland and Protestant minority schools, at both primary and post-primary level, on this issue.

“Cherishing all the children of the nation equally” does not mean that every child must have the same educational experience nor attend the same type of school” - Minister

The rights of parents from a Church of Ireland or Protestant faith tradition are not in competition with those of other minority religious traditions. Neither is a “one size fits all” relativist approach to the provision of schools representative of either parental choice or a pluralist republic. The challenge is to make provision for various and varied educational patronage.

At our annual conference last Saturday, the Minister for Education and Skills outlined how Government has already made advances in that regard.

“Cherishing all the children of the nation equally” does not mean that every child must have the same educational experience nor attend the same type of

school. Such a view would result in a diminution of rights and schooling experience. Rather, the quality of that education and the resourcing of it must be uniformly and equally delivered, but the type of school should vary and indeed does vary. No school is the same and neither does it remain the same.

At its annual conference last Saturday, the members of the Church of Ireland Primary Management Association articulated this view directly to Minister Richard Bruton and reiterated that the retention of section 7, 3, (c) is essential for oversubscribed Church of Ireland and other Protestant minority schools as a meaningful outworking of the constitutional rights of parents of a minority denomination in regards to accessing existing schools of their own faith tradition.

We reject the construed notion that the removal of this existing right could justifiably be for the benefit of religious minorities. Increased provision for diversity of school type and increased school capacity are the obvious long-term solutions. I trust this clarifies our position for Education Equality.

It is a Christian duty to vote on 8 June, Northern Irish Catholic bishops

Northern Ireland’s Catholic bishops have urged all those eligible to vote in the forthcoming Westminster elections to do so, saying it is a Christian duty to use churchnewsireland@gmail.com

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their democratic franchise. The churchmen have identified key issues that voters should ponder before deciding how to cast their vote, including: endemic child poverty, which affects more than 100,000 Northern Irish children; the ongoing reductions in funding for education and health care; the potentially destabilising impact of Brexit; the right to life of all human beings from conception to natural death; and the impact of climate change and global warming.

“The Christian vocation to transform the world in the light of the Gospel commandment to love includes the duty to participate as informed and co-responsible citizens in the democratic process,” says the statement issued jointly by Archbishop Eamon Martin of Armagh, Bishop John McAreavey of Dromore, Bishop Noel Treanor of Down & Connor, Bishop Donal McKeown of Derry and Monsignor Joseph McGuinness, diocesan administrator of Clogher.

York Minster 'will learn lessons' after losing £600k on Mystery Plays

Staging the traditional Mystery Plays last summer lost York Minster nearly £600,000, the landmark's annual accounts reveal.



Leaders say demand for 40,000 tickets to watch 41 performances of the £1.3 million production was weaker than expected. Approximately 65 per cent were sold.

Communications director Sharon Atkinson was quoted by The Times as saying: "There are lots of lessons that we will learn for the future."

The Mystery Plays lost nearly York Minster £590,000 last year however funds still rose by £2 million, owing in part to returns on investments and properties.

Sharon Atkinson went on to say: "We always knew that taking on the plays would come at a cost, but we took the decision to go ahead because of their importance to the city of York."



"We are not a commercial organisation. There is a Christian mission. One of those things is to get involved in lots of community initiatives."

York Minster acknowledged "a shorter run might have helped" and that concerns were raised over the length of each performance - four hours.

The Mystery Plays, which cover Creation right through to the Last Judgement, can be traced back to 14th century performances given at a time when most

people could not read the Bible because it was written in Latin.

Tearfund 'disappointed' as Trump stalls on climate change deal

The international Christian organisation Tearfund says it is "disappointed" at Donald Trump delaying a final decision on a major climate change pledge. In contrast to the leaders of six other world leaders at a G7 summit in Italy, the US President said he would decide next week on whether to support the Paris Agreement.

USPG stands with Philippines' church following 'illegal arrest' of bishop

Anglican Mission Agency, the USPG is standing in solidarity alongside the Philippines Independent Church following the arrest of a bishop on what it describes as 'the spurious charge of illegal possession of firearms and ammunitions'. The Rt Revd Carlo Morales, Bishop of Ozamis – together with his wife, aide and driver – were arrested by police earlier this month.

Bishop Carlo and his companions were in a vehicle with Romel Salinas, a consultant of the National Democratic Front (NDFP), a group which promotes 'national freedom and the democratic rights of the



people'. The police had a warrant for the arrest of Mr Salinas, but no warrant for Bishop Carlo and his companions. According to human rights lawyers - the Union of People's Lawyers in Mindanao (UPLM) - the arrest of Bishop Carlo was therefore illegal.

The Rt Revd Rhee Timbang, Bishop of Surigao, told USPG: 'We are deeply saddened and furious about the way Ozamis City [police] treated the arrest and detention of Bishop Carlo Morales and his company. They were treated as common criminals; in fact they are in detention cells together with common criminals. The bishop's lawyer was barred from being present



The Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) has expressed serious concerns about the declaration of martial law last week in Mindanao in southern Philippines by President Rodrigo Duterte. The CCA, a fellowship of churches and ecumenical councils in Asia, issued a statement calling on President Duterte to lift the martial law which subjects the people of southern Philippines to curfews, checkpoints and other restraints on their human rights.

during the inventory of materials allegedly confiscated from them, and likewise from talking to him initially.'

Local church-goers are bringing food and clean clothes to the bishop and his party, and holding a vigil at the police station in the hope of ensuring their safety.

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Bishop Rhee added: 'We hope to mobilise human rights lawyers to assist their legal needs. We also seek moral support from our partner churches and ecumenical network on this incident which is clearly a case of harassment against church people. We ask the bishops, clergy and faithful of the Philippines Independent Church in other parts of the country and abroad to keep praying for Bishop Carlo and company, and to seek ways to help in their immediate release.'

USPG Programmes Co-ordinator Rebecca Boardman said: 'We stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters in the Philippines. They are in our prayers.'

Church of Scotland senior leaders abseil from the Forth Rail Bridge

Three former or outgoing senior leaders from the Church of Scotland have tackled a fear of heights to abseil from the Forth Rail Bridge above the Firth of Forth.

Outgoing Principal Clerk, Very Rev Dr John Chalmers, former Moderator of the General Assembly Dr Russell Barr and former chief executive officer of CrossReach descended 165ft from the UNESCO World Heritage Site.



Dr John said: As we were crossing, going out to the pillar, a couple of trains passed overhead and you realised you were a long way up. But, what a fantastic view? So, we just kept our head."

The three men raised nearly £12,000 for the social service division of the Church of Scotland, known as CrossReach, from the stunt on Sunday.

Dr John went on to say: "[It was] a spectacular day. I suppose you could say we were all just a little bit apprehensive but once we realised the rope was going to hold us, we took our time."

It is hoped the funds raised will help vulnerable people including those struggling with addiction or mental health issues, and families affected by dementia.

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Speaking about the decision to tackle his fear of heights for the stunt, Dr John added: "Isn't it a fairly irrational fear in a way because you know that everything that is around about you is going to hold you.

"You just have to put it to the back of your mind and when you're doing something for a good cause, it's easier to do that."

Catholic missionary praised by George Clooney



A Catholic missionary, the only doctor serving half a million people in a war-ravaged area of Sudan, has been honoured by George Clooney.

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Dr Tom Catena, who treats up to 400 inpatients everyday in the Nuba Mountains, has been awarded a prize in recognition of his humanitarian work.

Clooney said Dr Catena, and all the Aurora Prize for Awakening Humanity finalists, are "modern day heroes" who have put themselves at risk.

The film star chairs the selection committee for the award, which is presented in Armenia to recognise an exceptional humanitarian worker.

Dr Catena said: "I draw my inspiration from the Nuba people. "And with my faith as my guide, I am honoured

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to continue to serve the world and make it a better place."

The Aurora Prize for Awakening Humanity marks the World War I era eight-year slaughter and alleged ethnic cleansing suffered by Armenians during the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.

Armenia believes approximately 1.5 million residents died in the pogroms however Turkey estimates deaths number in the thousands and it does not recognise the events as genocide.

Born in New York state, Dr Catena works with the Sudan Relief Fund and is on call 24 hours a day, seven day per week.

Hundreds of thousands of people have been affected by conflict between rebels and government forces in the Nuba Mountains.

Message of reconciliation, truth and justice highlighted at German protestant gathering

Reconciliation was once primarily seen as a message of the church but is now used by secular leaders trying to establish peace in communities torn by conflict and



war, the World Council of Churches' (WCC) president for Africa, the Rev. Mary Anne Plaatjies van Huffel, has said at a major Protestant gathering in Germany.

"To pursue punitive justice exclusively will not result in reconciliation," said South African theologian Plaatjies van Huffel in a bible study during the 24-28 May German Protestant Kirchentag, or "church festival," in Berlin. "Reconciliation has also to do with the uncovering of the truth and forgiveness."

Former United States president Barack Obama joined German Chancellor Angela Merkel at the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin in front of tens of thousands of people on 25 May, the first full day of Germany's biggest

Protestant gathering, the Kirchentag, or “church festival”.

During a 90-minute podium discussion on democracy and global responsibility, Obama spoke of the need for the renewal of the international order against the background of xenophobia, nationalism, intolerance and anti-democratic trends.

“We have to push back against those trends that would violate human rights, or that would suppress democracy, or would restrict individual freedoms of conscience and religion,” said the former US president. “We can’t isolate ourselves. We can’t hide behind a wall,” Obama said, speaking at the place where the city was once divided between East and West by the Berlin Wall.

Organised every two years in a different German city, the Kirchentag this year has gathered more than 100,000 participants of all ages in Berlin. “We hope the Kirchentag will promote a holistic vision of justice and peace that addresses the dynamics of conflict in different regions, the impact of foreign powers and changing global realities such as economic globalization, migration and climate change,” said Dr Agnes Abuom, moderator of the World Council of Churches’ (WCC) Central Committee.

Down Cathedral piano recital this Sunday

Down Cathedral is presenting a Piano Recital by Gustavo Romero this Sunday (June 4). The starting time is 4pm, with all proceeds going to the Down Cathedral Organ Restoration Fund. Tickets (£15) can be purchased from: Down Cathedral Office, Down County Museum and Saint Patrick Centre, Matchett’s Music (Belfast) and Michael McCracken (phone 077 7384 6028). Alternatively, recital-goers can pay the £15 admission fee at the door

Today in Christian History, May 30

May 30, 339: Eusebius dies at age 74. Author of the 10-volume Ecclesiastical History, he is called the father of church history. In his Day, though, he was as much a maker of history as a recorder. At the Council of Nicea, he argued for peace between the heretical Arians and Orthodox leaders like Athanasius. When Arianism became hugely popular after the Council, Eusebius was one of the people to depose Athanasius. Though he wasn't an Arian himself, he strongly opposed anti-Arianism.

May 30, 1416: Jerome of Prague burns at the stake for heresy. When the Council of Constance arrested and

tried his fellow Bohemian reformer Jan Hus, Jerome went to defend him, sealing his own fate.

May 30, 1431: French mystic and revolutionary Joan of Arc burns at the stake for heresy. Her last words were, "Jesus, Jesus".

May 30, 1672: The governor of Rhode Island cordially entertains Quaker founder George Fox. "Most of the pupils had never heard of Friends before," Fox said, "but they were mightily affected with the meeting, and there is a great desire amongst them after the Truth.

May 30, 1822: A slave betrays the plans of African Methodist (and former slave) Denmark Vesey to stage a massive slave uprising on July 14. Of the 131 African Americans arrested in the plot, 35 were executed (including Vesey) and 43 were deported. Vesey's Charleston, South Carolina, church was closed until 1865.

May 30, 1934: The first synod of the Confessing Church at Barmen ends. Influenced by Karl Barth, the synod resisted the teachings of the Nazi German Christians.

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