

Church News Ireland

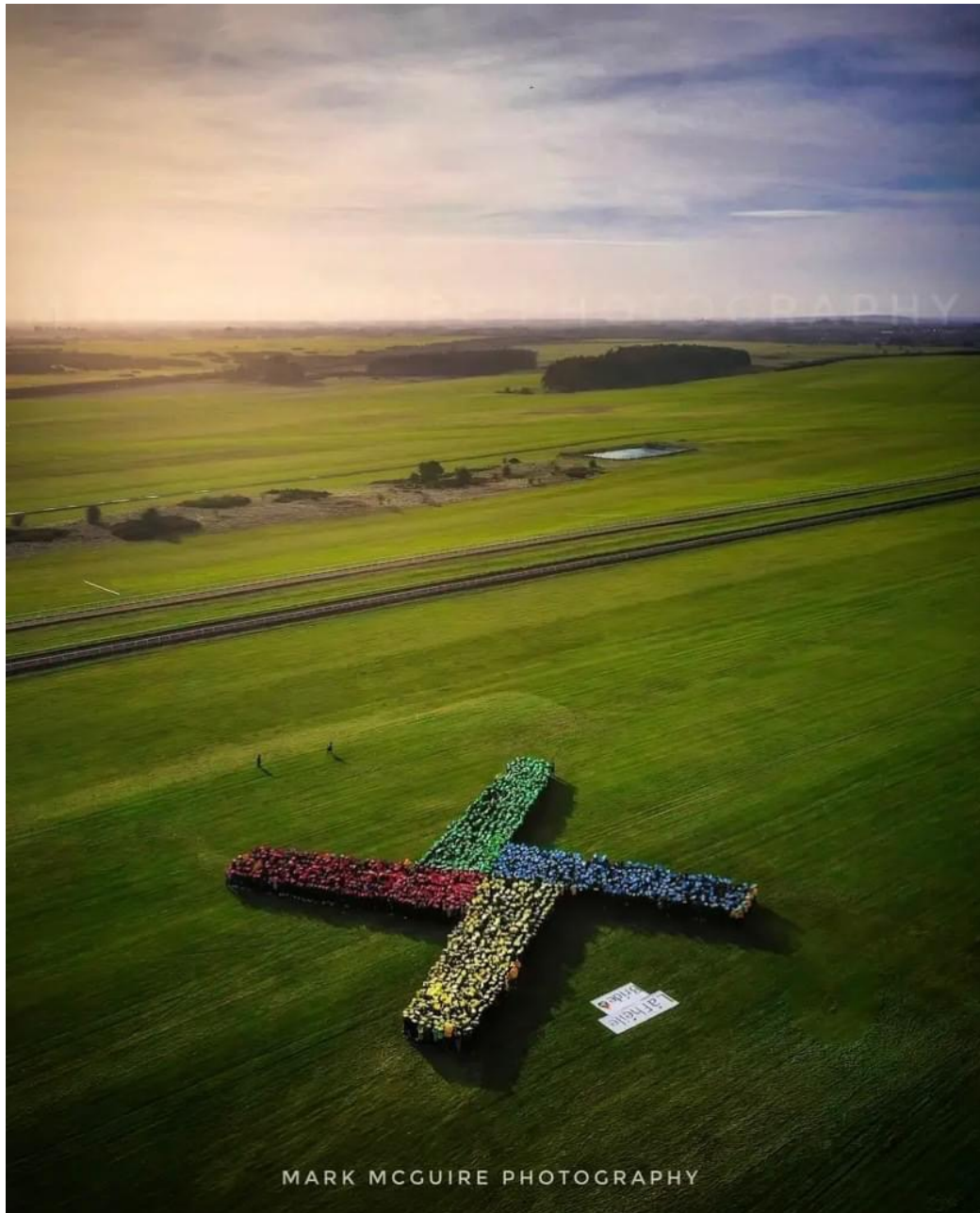


Image of the day – Schools witness to St Brigit

Image of the day

Schools witness to St Brigit

3000 students created a massive human Brigid's cross on the Curragh Plains yesterday afternoon for Lá Fhéile Bríde marking Brigid 1500. Photo: Mark McGuire Photography



Northern Lights audio-visual shows mark Brigid 1500 three times each evening

The Northern Lights to mark Brigid 1500 here in Dundalk is class. Three extraordinary audio-visual shows at 6pm, 6:30pm and 7pm each evening until Mon 5 Feb

People and places

Vocations retreat helps participants explore ministry opportunities



Pictured from left at the vocations retreat are Provost Lynda Peilow (Central Director of Ordinands), Judy Peters (Commission on Ministry), Dr Katie Heffelfinger (CITI), the Revd Julie Bell (Chaplain), Dr Sean Doherty (from Trinity College, Bristol) and the Revd Rob Jones (Pioneer Ministry National Director).

A vocations retreat was held from 26th to 28th January, in the Dromantine Conference Centre, near Newry, for those ‘exploring’ ordination in the Church of Ireland.

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The retreat was led by Provost Lynda Peilow (the Central Director of Ordinands), Judy Peters (from the Commission on Ministry), and Bishop David McClay. Dr Sean Doherty, Principal of Trinity College, Bristol, was the guest speaker, and he navigated the gathering through discernment, exploration and answering God's call.

The Very Rev Lynda Peilow said: "The retreat has successfully provided structure and space for individuals considering a call to ordained ministry. Through a balanced combination of spiritual, intellectual, and practical elements, the participants gained a deeper understanding of their vocation, and a strengthened sense of support and community.

"I hope and pray that their 'time out' at the retreat in Dromantine will support and encourage them on this journey as they continue to discern God's call. It was promising and encouraging to see people from across the country gather. For some, it will lead to a path towards ordination and for others it enabled a structured space and place to unravel their sense of vocation in a safe and informative environment."

Kells Presbyterian Church to celebrate 150 Years

Members of Kells Presbyterian Church in County Antrim will celebrate their 150th Anniversary with a special service on Sunday 11th February 2024 beginning at 12noon, Joe Boyd writes in The Church Page.



On 24th March 1874 Rev Thomas Eaton M.A. was ordained as the first minister of Kells congregation. This congregation grew out of the great Revival of 1859 when so many were converted, that Connor Meeting House could no longer hold them all.

God's word proclaimed had changed the nature of the area. Prior to this in 1853 the Irish Presbyterian had noted "many seem to put on religion with their Sunday clothes...from one Sabbath to another the Bible lies unopened on their shelves...They rise in the morning and they lie down at night without bending the knee in prayer...How many are there who are living in open disregard of the Divine Law.

On 8th August 1873, Kells was established by Ballymena Presbytery and until 1876, the congregation met in the Campbell School, (now the Pigeon Club.) After his installation, Rev. Eaton appealed to people to give to the construction of a meetinghouse and undertook two

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preaching tours to the USA in support of this. The current building was opened in 1873 at a cost of £3000.

The nearby congregation of Eskylane joined the Presbyterian Church in Ireland in 1903 following a split with Kellswater Reformed Presbyterian and continued with their own Minister, Rev. Moffett, until his retirement in 1917. Subsequently, Kells & Eskylane became a joint charge and they continue to have a great relationship to this day.

To date, a total of eight men have occupied the pulpit at Kells: Rev Thomas Eaton, Rev. James Cully, Rev. Hugh Charles Wilson, Rev. James Walter Houston, Rev. John Williamson (Jack) Mills, Rev. John Leslie Casement, Rev. John Stafford Carson and Rev. William Brian Boyd who arrived in June 1992.

Rev Brian Boyd told The Church Page “God has been very good to us throughout our history but we don’t want to live in the past. God continues to bless us today and we look forward with anticipation to what He is going to do in the future. He has brought us through COVID without the massive decline that has been seen in some other places. He has also brought new individuals and families into our existing warm fellowship. We know that He will continue to bless the Word as it is read and preached.”

Friends of the congregation at Kells & Eskylane are very welcome to come to the special service which will be attended by the three living former Ministers in addition to others who have been ‘sent out’ from Kells as PCI Ministers.

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For more information on the work and witness of Kells Presbyterian Church, log on to www.kellschurch.com

Book Well sale supports Scripture Union's Schools Project

The Book Well's second-hand sale last Saturday raised a whopping £1200 for SUNI's Schools Project - East Belfast.



The Book Well folk thank you for your generosity. Special thanks too to those who helped collect, drop off, set up and maintain.

“This is quite an operation each year, and without help, we just couldn't do it. Thanks too to Book Aid who will receive the books that weren't snapped up, and to St Mark's, Dundela for being such hospitable hosts.”



Hollywood parish renewing links with South Sudan

Hollywood parish's links with South Sudan go back decades- the parish contributed to the building of Chaima Christian Institute and has an ongoing partnership with the Diocese of Maridi.

Andrew and Joanne Quill (pictured) will soon travel to work alongside the neighbouring diocese of Ibba. Hollywood parish will be hosting them at our parish prayer meeting on Monday 5th February at 7.00pm. This will be a great opportunity to hear about their work and to pray for them as they prepare to depart.

News

Its time to 'walk together, pray together, and seek justice together' - Anglican and Catholic Bishops



It's time to 'walk together, pray together, and seek justice together', say Anglican and Catholic Bishops as they share their commitment and call for Christian Unity.

The commitment has been shared after the conclusion of the ecumenical summit 'Growing Together', which met in Rome and Canterbury during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

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Anglican and Catholic bishops participating in the ecumenical summit Growing Together have shared their post-conference 'Call'. Entitled Our Common Witness, Calling and Commitment, it comes after a weeklong gathering (22-29 January) that saw the bishops meeting in Rome and Canterbury, for pilgrimage and discussion on joint mission and witness.

Meeting during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, the summit was attended by Catholic and Anglican bishop pairs, representing 27 countries from all over the world. During the summit, each pairing was commissioned by Pope Francis and the Archbishop of Canterbury, during Vespers, at the basilica of Saint Paul outside the Walls in Rome.

The summit was organised by IARCCUM, an ongoing International Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission. It is supported by the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity in Rome and the Anglican Communion Office, Secretariat to the Anglican Communion.

Our Common Witness, Calling and Commitment covers important themes relevant to Church and world affairs. It is written not only as a summary of the bishops' commitment, and also as a united call to the wider Church. In its opening it says:

After four centuries of conflict and separation, the Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion have now been on a walk towards reconciliation for almost six decades. At times, the path has been bumpy, but the Holy Spirit has been at work and our churches have persevered in a dialogue which has been extraordinarily fruitful.

We willingly proclaim that our communion in Christ is a source of joy and life. While that communion is not yet full, decades of rich theological dialogue, nourished by prayer for and with each other, have brought us to a place where the bonds which unite us are deep and profound. Yet in our churches we have barely begun to do all that is possible to do together.

It is the task and mission of the International Anglican Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission (IARCCUM) to build on the results of that dialogue and to bridge the gap between the elements of faith we hold in common and the tangible expression of that shared belief in our ecclesial lives.

Mindful of God's sending us forth to engage in common witness, to build relationship of friendship in Christ, to walk a synodal path together and to share wherever possible in the Church's mission, IARCCUM brings together bishops from across the world where Anglicans and Catholics live together side by side in significant number.

The statement goes on to make calls and invitations to the Church in the areas of Witness, Friendship, Mission and Synodality. It says: 'Synodality is not merely about the Church's governance; it is about putting relationships at the centre of the Church's life.' It references the words of Pope Francis to the bishops during their commissioning at St Paul's outside the Walls in Rome: 'First our brothers and sisters, then the structures.'

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In its commitments on mission, the statement calls for working for the ‘flourishing of human life in every aspect.... We cannot live in isolation from each other as churches.’ The commitment also references the challenges and hopes of ‘Indigenous Peoples, descendants of enslaved persons and others that live with the legacy of colonisation and assimilation.’ Appeals are also made to be able to ‘hear and heed the voices of women and of minority ethnic groups wherever they experience marginalisation or the denial of their human dignity’.

During the Summit, bishops participating shared about the realities of the climate crisis, including Bishops Marinez Bassotto and Teodoro Mendes Tavares from Amazonia. The statement is clear in the call for to ‘care for our common home’, Pope Francis’s Encyclical on the Environment (Laudato Si’) and the recent Lambeth Call on the Environment and Sustainable Development issued by Anglican bishops during the 2022 Lambeth Conference.

The statement also makes a promise to proclaim the ‘Good News of peace to those in places scourged by ongoing wars’.

The Growing Together statement is an important comment from the IARCCUM bishops, not only on their sentiments during the meeting, but as an ongoing commitment to working for unity as they go home. It concludes:

As we return to our own local churches after our pilgrimage in Rome and Canterbury, we pray that our ministry alongside one another as Catholics and Anglicans will be for

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the world a foretaste of the reconciling of all Christians in the unity of the one and only Church of Christ.

Read the full story and see the joint commitment here:

<https://bit.ly/3uniEKK>

In the media

Mass migration is dashing Sinn Fein's dreams - Ruth Dudley Edwards

While it brags about Irish unity, the party is facing trouble with voters given its pro-immigration stance, Ruth Dudley Edwards writes in the Daily Telegraph

On the one hand, Mary Lou McDonald, Sinn Fein president and leader of the opposition in the Republic of Ireland, is triumphant. This week, predicting the imminent elevation of her vice president, Michelle O'Neill, to be first minister of Northern Ireland, she declared that it would mean Irish unity was "within touching distance".

On the other, she is staying very quiet about some serious, unexpected challenges facing her party.

With the next Irish general election due by March 2025, McDonald has been confidently predicting that Sinn Fein will soon be in government north and south of the border, prompting a border poll in which people of both jurisdictions will vote yes to end partition, and everyone will live happily ever after.

Never mind that, to the clear-minded, it is obvious that an awful lot of people in the South are not interested in Northerners of any politics, are happy with their country as it is, don't want to import new tensions or make concessions to Unionists, and, when the chips were down, would vote against unity.

Sinn Fein now faces a wider problem. As the electorate of the Republic has become increasingly exercised about mass immigration, the party is splitting over what line to take.

Until now, strategic decisions in Sinn Fein have been taken smoothly. The party is intensely secretive in its practices. Leaders and policies are imposed and dissenters generally find themselves capitulating or leaving.

The desire for power had produced a coherent political strategy: all sacred cows other than a united 32 counties and support for Palestinians could be slaughtered if it was deemed necessary to maintain Sinn Fein's progressive image, which included its traditional enthusiasm for immigrants and asylum seekers.

And the general view was that, unlike their oppressors, the racist Brits, the Irish knew what it was to have to leave your country and so embraced immigrants with a spirit not unlike that of Angela Merkel. Their generosity was such that even Ukrainian refugees (100,000 at one stage) in other European countries flocked to Ireland.

That the mainstream media in Ireland is dominated by Guardianista types who avoid airing views of which they

disapprove had certainly helped Sinn Fein. There was almost no national coverage until very recently of protests about hotels being requisitioned to house asylum seekers in little towns all over the country. And like the riots that broke out in Dublin, when they were covered, they were blamed on the far-Right, who at that point hardly existed.

But anyone who cared to look could see that this was absurd: as a local in the small town of Roscrea, which had attracted obloquy for trying to stop its only hotel being filled with asylum seekers, explained: “We’re putting up with people coming into this town for years and we never had a bother. And now they’re calling us Nazis. The truth is being twisted.” Some Sinn Fein politicians are defying HQ to join these protests.

Until recently, Sinn Fein had been soaring in the polls and the votes of the young – who know little of the bloody history of the IRA – had seemed securely in the bag. But in spite of the party’s irresponsible promises of a housing bonanza, that support has begun to slip.

Last Sunday, the reliable Red C poll showed Sinn Fein suffering a drop of another 4 per cent, which took its rating to the lowest point since the last general election. At its height, it had been 35 per cent; now it is down to 25 per cent. This has not been to the benefit of the governing parties: Leo Varadkar’s Fine Gael and Micheál Martin’s Fianna Fail are steady at 20 per cent and 17 per cent respectively. Red C found that 66 per cent think Ireland has taken in too many refugees, anti-immigrant independents are gaining, and interest is being shown in tiny Right-wing parties like Ireland First.

How will Sinn Fein attempt to reverse this trend? It upped its rhetorical attacks on Israel, only to be outflanked by rivals on the far-Left. McDonald even came under attack for not boycotting the St Patrick's Day reception in the White House, but she needs to keep Joe Biden sweet, given Irish-America provided the party with close to a million dollars last year.

Poor Mary Lou. So little time: so many circles to square.

The Daily Telegraph February 1, 2024

Perspective

Homily for the celebration of Mass for the Feast of Saint Brigid - Bishop Michael Router

Pope Francis has brought many women into the highest governance roles in the Vatican. The synodal process, that is at the heart of the Church's life, is presently reflecting on how to establish a more equitable and realistic role for women in the future.

Bishop Router said -

Jesus encourages us in the gospel of Saint Luke today to "Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate". In the first reading Job reflects on his life and recalls that he has tried to do God's will by being generous and



compassionate to the poor and afflicted. These qualities were reflected in the life and ministry of Saint Brigid, our national and diocesan patron saint, whose feast we celebrate today. As we gather at the Shrine of Saint Brigid in Faughart Co Louth, we are honoured to be in her birthplace to celebrate the beginning of the 1500th anniversary of her remarkable life. Saint Brigid's example of selfless giving and love for others especially the poor, the sick and the vulnerable did much to firmly establish the Christian faith in this land.

As Saint Brigid grew to maturity here in Faughart as this island was going through a period of rapid religious and cultural transition. The Christian faith so recently established by Saint Patrick was taking hold and freeing the Irish people from the dark and deadening influence of paganism. The pagan beliefs that had existed in Ireland before Saint Patrick consisted of a mix of superstition and magic which included the sacrifice of children, human

trafficking, the neglect of the poor and vulnerable and the widespread ill-treatment of women. Saint Patrick was faced with real and tangible evil that he had to overcome. The snakes he drove from Ireland are simply a symbolic representation of the demonic forces that he did much to repel.

Saint Brigid was motivated at a young age by this radical message of Jesus and the life-giving and progressive power of the Christian faith. From her very earliest days here in Faughart, Brigid displayed the Christian qualities that were very much at odds with the greed and self-centeredness in the society around her. That inner desire to be compassionate and charitable was something Brigid carried with her all her life. Indeed, her father Dubhthach, a pagan, was going to sell her into slavery because he feared she would make him destitute so great was her generosity.

There is no doubt that Brigid was a woman of strength, courage and deep faith who was so impressive and strong that she acquired the authority and breath of influence that was almost unheard of for a woman at that time. She gained that authority and influence because of her fearlessness and her willingness to champion the cause of those who had no voice and to tackle the injustices that existed in the society in which she lived. The example of Saint Brigid highlights the need for the resurgence today of a spirituality and faith based on love and compassion in a world that is so self-centered and materialistic.

The qualities that made Saint Brigid great have been found in so many women down through the centuries. Some of these women entered religious life and were extremely

dedicated to their vocation and mission. The vast majority, however, have been women who in their homes, workplaces and communities helped to nurture and to spread the faith. Without them the Church would have found it hard to survive and flourish. Their contribution is incalculable and the gratitude we owe them immense.

Time and again in the gospel we see that Jesus needed the cooperation of women, to carry out his mission. They supported him at every moment of his public ministry. They stood by him as he died on the cross, they received his lifeless body into their arms, and they were the first to witness and herald his resurrection from the dead.

Today at this celebration of the Eucharist many of the liturgical tasks such as serving, music ministry, reading, presenting symbols and gifts, are carried out by women, especially the twenty young women who join us from secondary schools in Dundalk. Many of them are the same age that Brigid was when she answered her call to serve the Lord and spread the light of his gospel message through prayer and charity. The vibrancy of our faith and Church in the future depends on the continued involvement of women such as these and in order for that to happen we must fully acknowledge the gifts and graces that women bring to the life of the Church.

I know from my own experience of thirty-five years in ministry that little could be achieved in a parish or diocese without the support and help of women. Women have the essential ability to see a need and to respond, as Saint Brigid did, with concern, compassion, and care.

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Pope Francis has recognized this ability and, rather than just praising women in a generic way, he has brought many women into the highest governance roles in the Vatican. The synodal process, that is at the heart of the Church's life, is presently reflecting on how to establish a more equitable and realistic role for women in the future.

Saint Brigid's example and patronage gives us hope that the renewed Church that we are building to meet the challenges of the 21st century will be open to engaging with all and bringing people into a truly transformative encounter with Christ. Saint Brigid touched the hearts of so many people through the depth of her faith, a faith that was evident in her care and concern for others. May we as a Church be that beacon of light again for the world through our example of compassion and love.

Bishop Michael Router is Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Armagh. This Mass was celebrated at 11.00am at the Shrine of Saint Brigid in Faughart Co Louth, Archdiocese of Armagh

Speaking to the soul

Short reading and a prayer - daily on this site

Church News Ireland

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