

# Church News Ireland



**Image of the day – Carols support  
Community Rescue Service**

## Image of the day

### **Carols singers support Community Rescue Service**

**Ballintoy & Dunseverick Carol Singers were in great voice pre Christmas. This coastal parish raised a grand total of £1305 for Community Rescue Service.**

So a big thank you to the generous community on the Causeway Coast. The photograph shows the rector the Rev Patrick Barton handing over the cheque to volunteers Shirley and Marie.

Every blessing to Hazel and the Community Rescue Service team which does an extraordinary work throughout the province.

## News

### **Register for Christian Aid Ireland's upcoming Supporter Conference**

**CAI's annual supporter conference returns on Saturday 9 March from 10am – 1.30pm.**



St Macartin's cathedral in Enniskillen was host to the Clogher diocesan Mothers' Union service on Thursday. Bishop Ellis and Dean Hall. Photo 1 of 4.

CAI writes - You can register now by following this link: <https://caid.ie/>The venue is Carnmoney Presbyterian Church. The conference will celebrate Christian Aid's impact over the past year, preparing for Christian Aid Week 2024 and learning more about how we can make a difference as we fundraise, act and pray.

You will hear from special guest speakers, as well as our community team and CEO Rosamond Bennet. Together we'll learn more about Christian Aid's distinctive way of working in communities and countries around the world, and how our Christian faith informs and underpins everything we do.





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Photo 2 of 4.

As well as previewing Christian Aid Week 2024, there will also be informative and inspiring seminars to help you go deeper with Christian Aid's aim to end poverty and injustice worldwide.

Whether you're a life-long supporter, an organiser or church representative, or entirely new to Christian Aid, everyone is welcome to attend the Conference and to stay for a delicious lunch afterwards.

## **Story shaped lives**

**Hear how stories have shaped the lives of five public figures at the 4 Corners Festival on February 10th.**



St Macartin's cathedral in Enniskillen was host to the Clogher diocesan Mothers' Union service on Thursday. Photo 3 of 4.

Starting at 7:30pm at the Clayton Hotel, discover the five books that left an indelible impact on our 5 guests. Enjoy selected readings that provide windows into pivotal moments.

This evening reminds us how the tales we tell colour who we are individually and collectively.

An enchanting event supporting Linen Quarter BID that proves why renowned poet Ben Okri called stories "the secret reservoir of values."

Book now for an inspiring night where narratives change worldviews, or for any of the other events



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<https://www.4cornersfestival.com/festival-years/2024-festival/>

Livestream also available for this event

## **Weak Made Strong - Mission in Ireland evening at Richhill Presbyterian Church**

**Speakers: Rick Hill, Tom Dowling and Sharon Heron. 20 March 2024 @ 8pm**

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Each March, Mission in Ireland evenings are held in various Presbyteries to highlight the mission of the church across the island and share encouraging examples of God's work.

The Council for Mission in Ireland supports Presbyteries in running these evenings, through the identification of speakers, some media resources and an over-arching theme. 10 of these services or events will be held in March 2024, with a range of speakers.

This year's theme is 'Weak Made Strong,' drawing on the Apostle Paul's words to in 2 Corinthians 12 about God's power being made perfect in weakness. These evenings aim to emphasise that even though we may feel weak as individuals or no longer assume a position of strength as the church, weakness is no barrier for gospel growth.

It is hoped many people will engage with these events as we each seek to play our part in God's mission across Ireland today.

## **Lisburn violinist to perform at Belfast International Festival of Chamber Music**

**Jamie Howe, winner of the audience prize at Camerata Ireland Academy's Young Musicians Showcase in 2023, will perform as part of the Belfast Music Society International Festival of Chamber Music!**

Jamie will be joined by pianist Julian Chan, and their programme will include York Bowen's Phantasy in F major, Op 54 and Hindemith Viola Sonata No. 1.



The recital will take place on 24th February at 1pm in the Harty Room, Queen's University, Belfast, and tickets are available from <https://www.belfastmusicsociety.org/>

This collaboration with BMS offers Camerata Ireland Academy young musicians a high profile performance opportunity as part of a world-class festival.

For more information about the Camerata Ireland Academy and to register your interest, visit <https://www.camerata-ireland.com/academy>



## **Les Misérables School Edition - Performed entirely by students**

Belvoir Theatre Academy are bringing a fully staged production of the show that has been seen by 130 million people worldwide.

Les Misérables is the story of Jean Valjean, a French peasant, and his desire for redemption. Released from prison after serving nineteen years in jail for stealing a loaf of bread for his sister's starving child. Valjean decides to start his life anew after a bishop inspires him with a tremendous act of mercy. But a police inspector named Javert refuses to let him escape justice and pursues him through revolutionary France to the story's dramatic conclusion.

Filled with showstopping songs such as 'I Dreamed a Dream', 'Master of the House', 'Do You Hear the People Sing?', 'One Day More' and 'Empty Chairs at Empty Tables' sung by some of the best young talent in Northern Ireland, this is a show not to be missed.

## **Presbyterian Church in Ireland's next Moderator**

**Rev Richard Murray was elected Moderator-Designate on Tuesday evening (6 February) in the Church's annual election for its principal public representative.**



The minister of Drumreagh Presbyterian Church was brought up in Belfast. The 58-year-old received the most votes from the Church's 19 presbyteries when they met in various locations across Ireland this evening.

Mr Murray, who has been minister of the County Antrim congregation since 2016, will be the denomination's 179th Moderator since 1840.

Mr Murray was one of five nominees for the Church to choose from this year, which traditionally elects the Moderator-Designate on the first Tuesday in February. He will be formally elected as Moderator by the Church's General Assembly in June.

Until then he will be known as the Moderator-Designate and continue to serve his congregation in Drumreagh.

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He studied at the Presbyterian Church's Union Theological College in Belfast, and later served at churches including Finaghy's Lowe Memorial, Terrace Row in Coleraine, and Connor Presbyterian in Ballymena.

He has been a minister at Drumreagh and Dromore Presbyterian Churches, which amalgamated last year and have a congregation of around 850 people, since 2016.

"I will feel keenly the loss of weekly fellowship in Drumreagh, as I step aside from June for the following 12 months," he said.

"However, I recognise this as a call of God and go forward in faith believing that the Lord Himself will be my rear guard."

Alongside Mr Murray (who got nine votes, from the Presbyteries of Armagh, Ballymena, Coleraine & Limavady, Down, Iveagh, Newry, Omagh, Route, and Tyrone), the other nominees were:

Rev Trevor Gribben, Clerk of the General Assembly and General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (five votes, from East Belfast, Carrickfergus, Derry & Donegal, Dromore, Dublin & Munster);

Rev Richard Kerr, minister of Templepatrick Presbyterian Church in Co Antrim (three votes, from North Belfast, Monaghan, Templepatrick);

Rev Gary McDowell, minister of Greystones Presbyterian Church in Co Wicklow (no votes);



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and Rev Mairisine Stanfield, minister of First Presbyterian Church, Bangor (two votes, from Ards and South Belfast).

## In the media

### **Sinn Fein gains more power: are Christian values in Ireland under threat? Catholic Herald**

**As devolved government returns to Northern Ireland for the first time in two years, a Sinn Fein leader takes the position of First Minister of Northern Ireland on the back of becoming the largest party in the Northern Irish Assembly in the 2022 elections, Dubhaltach O Reachtain writes.**

With a Nationalist party now holding the most seats in Northern Ireland's Stormont Parliament Buildings, and thus the First Minister position, the question may be asked what the future holds for Catholics north of the border under this new reality.

Since the Assembly was established under the Good Friday Agreement – sitting since 1998 – the position of First Minister has been held by a leader of a Unionist party. The shift to a Nationalist or Republican leader marks an important, if merely symbolic, change for governance of the six counties.



Fabulous painting on display in Leinster House to celebrate St. Brigid's Day. Thanks to Kildare based artist Lia Laimböch for lending her fine work to the Houses of the Oireachtas. Photo courtesy of Niall Collins TD

The new First Minister, Michelle O'Neill – and leader of Sinn Fein in Northern Ireland – holds the same powers and responsibilities as the Deputy First Minister, Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) politician Emma Little-Pengelly. However, the First Minister is the first to greet official visitors

to Northern Ireland and shares the same title as their counterparts in Scotland and Wales.

Sinn Fein, with 27 seats, followed by the DUP with 24, the Alliance Party on 17, along with the Ulster Unionists and SDLP with 9 and 7, respectively, make up the bulk of the Assembly. The balance of power is effectively held by the centrist Alliance with traditionally loyalist and national parties being essentially evenly matched.

Historically, Nationalism and Catholicism could have been used interchangeably, as could Protestantism and Loyalism/ Unionism. But as secularised politics has taken hold, thereby diminishing sectarianism from a policy perspective, new fractures have emerged, with many questioning the binary nature of their politics in the respective jurisdiction.

The emergence of the Alliance party is testament to a gradual move away from loyalty based on traditional sectarian divides, offering an alternative for supporters of either side who no longer identify with parties to which they previously may have been religiously tied.

Nationalism is no longer so easily interchanged with Catholicism, and both of the major nationalist parties, while holding fast to their commitment to re-unification with the Republic of Ireland, no longer offer a warm home for traditional and conservative Catholics.

With both Sinn Fein and the SDLP openly supporting and advocating for “progressive” social policies, some Catholics have pondered the historically imponderable – supporting the DUP, the party of Ian Paisley, who in 1998 interrupted



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proceedings of the European Parliament to denounce Pope John Paul II as “the antichrist”.

Upon taking up her role as First Minister, Michelle O’Neill announced: “We must make power sharing work because collectively, we are charged with leading and delivering for all our people, for every community.”

She added: “I wish to lead an executive which has the freedom to make our own policy and spending choices.”

This will raise the eyebrows of many Catholics in Northern Ireland who were shocked to see O’Neill joining Sinn Fein’s leader in the south of the island, Mary Lou McDonald, celebrating the repeal of the constitutional ban on abortion in the Republic in May 2018, with the rallying cry “The North is Next”.

They were true to their promise. Sinn Fein remained silent as Westminster in London imposed legislation on Northern Ireland that permits abortions in all circumstances in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy, and beyond that in other cases including no term limit in cases of life-limiting conditions, where there is a substantial risk that the baby would die or, if born, would suffer a severe mental or physical impairment.

In that instance, Sinn Fein made no claim to sovereignty or of undue interference in policy choices for Northern Ireland as the UK’s Conservative Party stood aside in facilitating a Labour-led proposition driven by Stella Creasy – that circumvented the democratic process – denying any representation or popular vote on the issue of abortion for the inhabitants of Northern Ireland.

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Preference preceded principle in that instance and suspicion remains that Sinn Fein is wedded to its principles only as far as they prove instrumental and advantageous to its political agenda. While citizens on both sides of the Nationalist/ Unionist divide were incensed at the overreach of the UK Government in dismissing the devolved authority in Northern Ireland – effectively imposing a new form of sectarianism from outside the country – the feeling emerged that the “community” that voiced concerns for the unborn child was not one that Sinn Fein wished to argue on behalf of.

The perception outside Ireland is that Sinn Fein is the Catholic party of Northern Ireland, but the fracture between Nationalism and Catholicism is deep and widening in present-day Irish politics.

In the south of the country, Mary Lou McDonald arguably gave the strongest performance in the public debates leading up to the introduction of abortion in Ireland, as public opinion swung from a 50:50 opinion poll position, a week from the referendum, to a 66 per cent to 34 per cent result in favour of abortion.

With a populist, socialist identity in the South, Sinn Fein is likely to be in a position to form the next government in Ireland with elections due in 2024. Opinion polls over the past three years have Sinn Fein as consistently the most popular party, with support from at least 30 per cent of the electorate.

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It is possible that within the next 12 months, Sinn Fein will hold the top position both north and south of the border and become the largest party in both jurisdictions.

This may be good news for those still holding out hope for a united Ireland but it does not bode well for Catholics across the country, particularly those who advocate socially conservative positions.

Sinn Fein have already indicated they will support the government's position in the upcoming referenda in Ireland to remove constitutional protection for mothers who choose to stay home to raise their children, and to expand the definition of family from that of "founded on marriage" to "durable relationships" – the meaning of which no one has yet been able to entirely discern – nor to refute the assertion that it may constitutionally protect polygamy or polyamory.

There are concerns that an authoritarian and uncompromising approach to governing exists within Sinn Fein that when coupled with an unwavering commitment to liberal progressive values will see conservative Christian values further marginalised – and punished – in both jurisdictions in the island of Ireland.

## **Tractor protesters are holding Brussels hostage and winning - Daily Telegraph**

**Brussels's climbdown on net zero rules for farmers will not stuff the Eurosceptic genie back into the bottle. Polls predict anti-EU parties will win June's European Parliament elections in nine member states – Austria,**



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## **Belgium, the Czech Republic, France, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland and Slovakia, James Crisp, Europe Editor writes**

Now fully emerged from their defensive crouch after Britain's painful Brexit negotiations, they are set to come second or third in another nine EU countries. The EU fears that those results could be boosted by the farmers' populist revolt.

Tractor protests against climate rules handed a Dutch farmer's party a landslide victory in regional elections last year after the vote became a referendum on establishment politics.

After the ruling coalition collapsed, voters turned to Geert Wilders, an anti-migrant, Nexit-backing, farmer-supporting firebrand in November's snap general election.

Copycat tractor protests have since been held in France, Italy, Germany, Belgium, Poland and Romania, are expected soon in Slovakia and erupted in Spain yesterday.

Eurosceptic parties have adopted the farmer's fight, robbing pro-EU forces of a constituency it has long regarded as its own thanks to the bloc's huge agricultural subsidies. A key battleground is the pushback against the EU's 2050 net zero target, given impetus by the cost of living crisis.

Europe's farmers are also anxious about competition with cheap agricultural imports from Ukraine after the EU waived trade restrictions. They have thrown a spanner into the works of the bloc's free trade negotiations with the Mercosur bloc of South American countries.

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This is a problem for Ursula von der Leyen, the European Commission president who spearheaded the net zero push. Five years ago, her appointment was approved by just nine votes after she relied on Green support to secure the job.

Now her own centre-Right European People's Party, long the parliament's biggest group, is courting the farmers by getting tough on environmental legislation. The Eurosceptic surge, like those before it, could be contained by an alliance of pro-EU parties, which will still be in the majority after the elections. The European People's Party simply has to forgo the temptation to form a coalition with Eurosceptic parties to limit the influence of the likes of Marine Le Pen, Viktor Orban and Mr Wilders.

But Mrs von der Leyen has wilted under the pressure of her political family and shelved or weakened new EU green laws. Agriculture is responsible for 11 per cent of EU greenhouse gas emissions and 54 per cent of its polluting methane emissions. Removing farming from a plan to cut emissions by 90 percent by 2040 is a huge concession to the sector, which represents just 1.5 per cent of EU GDP. Services represent 64.7 per cent of EU GDP, while manufacturing is 23.8 per cent.

Allowing agriculture, which benefits from a third of the EU's budget – €386 billion over seven years – to force a more protectionist trade policy is equally astounding.

Mrs von der Leyen's about-turn is a sign of weakness and will not stop the tractor protests.

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The farmers are holding the EU hostage and they are winning.

## Poem for today

### The Road Not Taken

By Robert Frost

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I could not travel both  
And be one traveler, long I stood  
And looked down one as far as I could  
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,  
And having perhaps the better claim,  
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;  
Though as for that the passing there  
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay  
In leaves no step had trodden black.  
Oh, I kept the first for another day!  
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,  
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.

# Speaking to the soul

Short reading and a prayer - daily on this site

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## Church News Ireland

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