

Church News Ireland



Image of the day – New light in Newtownards

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A new window has been completed this week in St Mark's Parish Church, Newtownards.

The window has been donated in memory of Rebecca Cairnduff by her father Russell Houston. Rebecca died on 30th December 2020.

Designed by artist Ann Smyth and by Thomas of CWS who crafted each piece of glass with support from Stuart, Pat, Steve and all the staff of CWS glass.



The window is based on the theme of the new creation from the Book of Revelations (7:17 & 22 1 - 5) and also on the hymn “There is a higher throne” by Keith and Kristen Getty.

The artwork has the Lord Jesus as the Shepherd King and the source of light for the

new creation. Jesus is standing before the emerald throne with the sapphire clouds above. The River of the Water of Life is flowing along at his feet and on either side of the Tree of Life. On either side of the Tree of Life Cherubim are looking on in worship.

There is cherry blossom which reflects the flower used when Rebecca and Mark married in June 2018. The blue heart and wings at the top of the window is based on a necklace which Mark had given to Rebecca and which she wore at

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their wedding. There are also roses which were Rebecca's favourite flowers.

The overall aim of the window is to direct the minds of observers to the Shepherd King and the New Creation.

The service of dedication is tomorrow Friday 19th January at 2 30 pm in St Marks Parish Church Newtownards . Everyone is welcome to attend . The service will be live streamed and available on the St Marks Newtownards YouTube channel. There will be an afternoon tea in the Parish hall after the service.



People and places

Summer mission trip to Albania

The Rev Jeremy Mould, rector of the United Parish of Templepatrick and Donegore, is organising a summer mission trip to Albania and is encouraging people to join the team.

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The project will support a local charity, A2BAlbania, and will be involved in running a holiday bible club for underprivileged children in Elbasan from July 15-26.

This is a parish initiative but Jeremy, who has taken several teams to India in the past, including a ministry trip to the Indian Christian Mission Centre near Salem last July (as reported in the autumn issue of Connor Connections), says the team also welcomes people from outside the parish.

It is open to young people aged over 14 and adults. “I have taken mixed teams to India several times and they work really well, as the older folk model the possibility of being a follower of Jesus for the long haul and the older folk catch the enthusiasm of the youth!” Jeremy said.

He has a female adult co-leader and a number of members of the parish youth fellowship are hoping to join.

Jeremy explains why he chose to support this organisation. “My older brother Chris Mould is the CEO of a charity called House of Opportunity (HOP) and he has long term contact with Alketa Hassani who heads up the A2BAlbania charitable work in Albania through whom the HOP works to deliver some of its programme.

“Chris learnt that the church that used to send a team to run Bible holiday clubs had ceased to do so due to a change of leadership, and so there was a gap that needs filled.”

Jeremy added: “Albania is a very poor country and the churches there need as much help as possible. Alketa is the leader of A2B in Albania and she is very keen for us to send

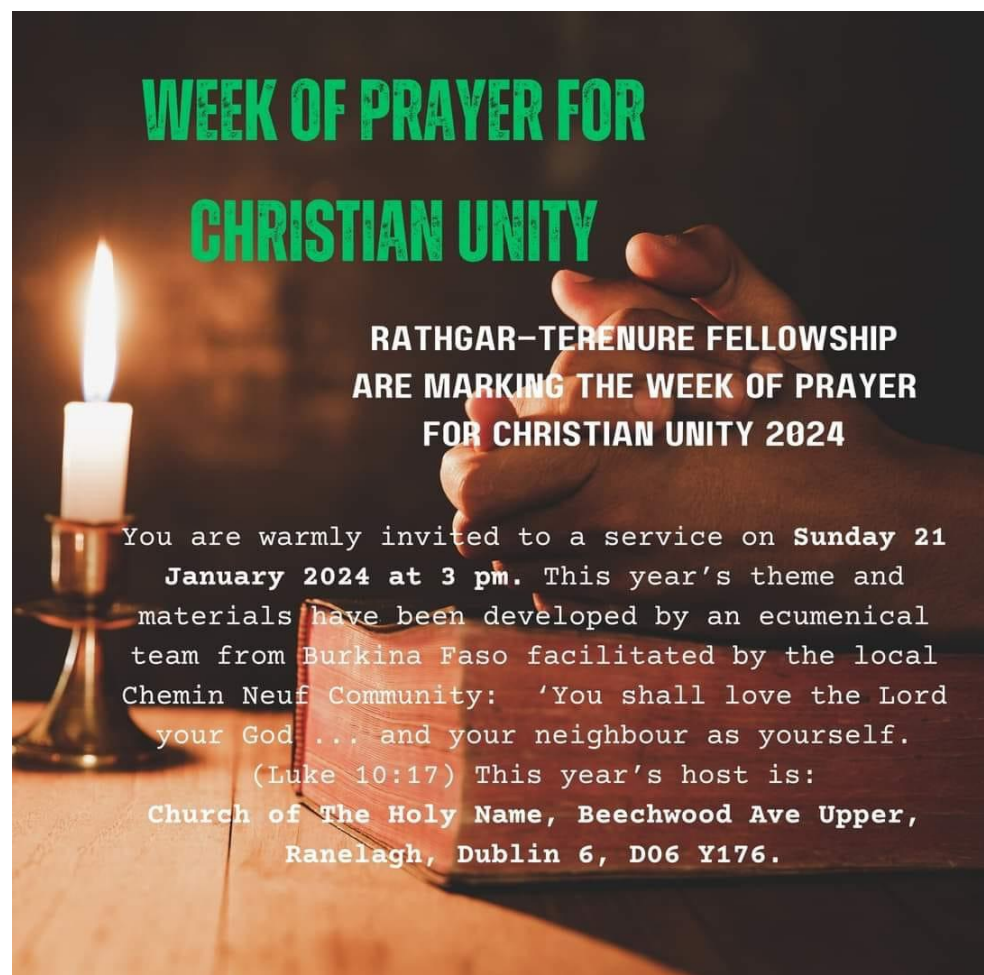
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a group to help them run this summer club for the underprivileged kids of Elbasan.”

No previous experience is required. The cost of the trip will be approximately £600. To learn more, please contact Jeremy at jermould@gmail.com or call him on 07896 839488.

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity begins today

Beginning Thursday 18 January, churches around the world will mark the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity over a period of eight days between the feasts of St Peter and St Paul.



The annual event, which first began in 1908, is designed to strengthen the ecumenical ties between denominations and encourage a sense of mutual support.

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As part of Christian Unity Week there is a service for Christian Unity in Kilmore Parish Church on Tuesday, January 23 at 7.30pm. The speaker is retired Church of Ireland bishop, Bishop Ken Clarke.

Church of Ireland transferor member to the Education Authority Board sought

Expressions of interest are sought from persons wishing to be considered for nomination as a Church of Ireland transferor member to the EA Board.

An information pack including an application form to express interest is available from:

Secretary to the Board of Education (Northern Ireland),
Church of Ireland, Floor 2, 18–22 Hill Street, Belfast. BT1
2LA.

Tel: 028 9082 8860 / Email: edunorth@rcbcoi.org

This post is for initially one year and possibly up to four years, requires a time commitment of at least five days per month, and is remunerated.

Completed expressions of interest to be received by Friday, 2nd February 2024.

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Joint statement by Bishops Fintan Monahan and Michael Burrows on protests in Roscrea

The week of prayer for Christian Unity begins on Thursday. The theme chosen for this year is drawn from the parable of the Good Samaritan, with the emphasis on the instruction “Go and do Likewise”!

Over the past number of days and weeks it has been disturbing and sad to see some of the strong protests against the arrival of people seeking emergency accommodation in Roscrea, which is in the diocese of Killaloe and also other venues and locations of the country.

The situation in Roscrea and in other places have many local complexities, with some genuine concerns both regarding resources for the new residents and for the amenities and services in the areas in question. However, we would appeal for calm, for a peaceful approach to the issues involved. Many have expressed concerns at the long-term effect the protests and unrest might have on the young children and families now resident in the facility.

Our joint appeal is for us all to keep on mind the bigger picture and the emergency situation that presents itself. Many of the people coming to our shores are coming from very distressful situations and are in dire need of refuge and shelter. They deserve whatever level of help can possibly be offered and provided, even if it involves some sacrifice or inconvenience, going the extra mile, so to speak.



Bishops Fintan Monahan and Michael Burrows

Bishop Fintan Monahan is Catholic Bishop of Killaloe and Bishop Michael Burrows is Church of Ireland Bishop of Killaloe, Limerick and Tuam

One of the key issues is provision of resources and we welcome the announcement today of the government promise of extra provision for local areas in relation to health, education and policing. It was also positive and encouraging to hear today the conciliatory approach being explored in relation to a community hotel facility. It is our strong hope also that these developments will be accompanied with an increased level of communication and consultation of local communities involved or affected should any new projects arise.

Looking at the broader situation from a Christian perspective, coming out of the Christmas season as we are – we look back to the time when Mary and Joseph were desperately seeking shelter where there was “no room at the inn” and they were later refugees in a foreign land with the new-born infant Jesus. They were reliant on the charity and hospitality for survival. One of the core messages of Christianity is love of neighbour, care for the stranger and reaching out to those in need.

Many of our ancestors were at one time economic migrants, and our children today continue to travel to gain work and life experience. We Irish, more than most, know what it is like to be a stranger in a foreign land.

We asked for people to be as open as possible to make sacrifices, despite some inconveniences that might arise in this extraordinary situation we find ourselves in during these troubled times.

The people of Roscrea have a great tradition of hospitality, welcome and friendship. Local people there, political representatives and local authorities have done outstanding work in recent months already and I am confident that despite the great efforts already done this might be expanded to meet the challenges ahead.

As we enter this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity from 18 January to 25 January we pray that all who follow the way of Jesus Christ would pray for peace and an end to war and conflict in the many troubled spots of the world.

Govt agree in principle to examine Roscrea community hotel funding

RTE News. -It is understood that the Government has agreed in principle to examine funding mechanisms to support a community hotel in Roscrea, Co Tipperary.

The proposal was put forward by Fianna Fáil TD Jackie Cahill at a meeting between local representatives and Minister for Integration Roderic O'Gorman. More at -

<https://www.rte.ie/news/munster/2024/0116/1426744-roscrea-protest/>

Canon Alastair Graham to retire

Canon Alastair Graham has announced that he will be retiring on 10th March 2024. Alastair has been part of the Meath and Kildare diocesan family since June, 2009 when he became Rector of Mullingar Union.

“We are grateful to him for his passion and enthusiasm for ministry in the Mulling Union of parishes. This was seen in such things as the recent youth initiative on climate change, ‘Lighten Our Darkness By Numbers’.

“As well as having had a wide experience of parish ministry he took some years to serve in a strategic role with the HSE.”

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Bishop Pat Storey said, “We will be sorry to lose Alastair from the dioceses of Meath and Kildare. He, along with his wife Olive, has contributed much to the dioceses. We are particularly grateful for his work in encouraging and nurturing vocational life across the dioceses, most recently in his role as Joint Diocesan Director of Ordinands. We wish him and Olive every blessing in the years ahead.”



News

Pope Francis responds on questions about blessings for same-sex couples

Pope Francis responded publicly to questions about the Vatican’s declaration on blessings for same-sex couples for the first time in a television interview on Sunday night.

In an appearance on an Italian talk show on Jan. 14, the 87-year-old pope was asked if he “felt alone” after the

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publication of *Fiducia Supplicans* was met with some resistance.

“Sometimes decisions are not accepted,” Pope Francis replied. “But in most cases, when you don’t accept a decision, it’s because you don’t understand.”

The pope underlined that “the Lord blesses everyone” and that a blessing is an invitation to enter into a conversation “to see what the road is that the Lord proposes to them.”

“The Lord blesses everyone who is capable of being baptized, that is, every person,” Francis repeated.

“But we are to take them by the hand and help them go down that road, not condemn them from the beginning,” he added. “And this is the pastoral work of the Church. This is very important work for confessors.”

The Vatican Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith’s Dec. 18 declaration made it permissible for priests to offer nonliturgical blessings for couples in “irregular” situations, including same-sex couples, noting “that it offers a specific and innovative contribution to the pastoral meaning of blessings, permitting a broadening and enrichment of the classical understanding of blessings.”

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In the media

No matter what the situation, abdication is never acceptable - Belfast Telegraph

Since the resignation of First Minister Paul Givan in February 2022, Northern Ireland has not had a functioning government, writes Andrew McCormick former Permanent Secretary §§

It should be deeply shocking that in a part of a long-established democratic country, the United Kingdom, no-one has the legal authority to take decisions that are vital for the protection and promotion of the interests of nearly two million people.

Whatever may be the rights or wrongs of the resignations of the ministers of the Northern Ireland Executive, the worst feature (now, and as also was the case in 2017-2019) is the abdication by the UK Government of its inherent responsibility to govern.

The present situation is an affront to democracy and an unprecedented departure from constitutional principles.

Devolution means the delegation of power. But it does not mean that the supreme governmental authority can or should abrogate its ultimate responsibility for any part of the UK.

Under the devolution settlements, the UK Parliament explicitly retained the power to legislate, even in devolved matters, and during the periods when there has been no functioning Executive, essential and ad hoc legislation has proceeded.

But NIO ministers have refused to take responsibility for the day-to-day process of decision-making, other than on a very selective basis, driven by political expediency or opportunism rather than by the public interest.

In the summer of 2018, in the “Buick” judgment, the Northern Ireland Court of Appeal concluded that there were significant limits on the legality of decision-making by departments in the absence of ministers, and in his supplementary judgment, Justice Treacy, said that the argument that executive authority may be exercised by departments in the absence of a minister would be “profoundly undemocratic” and “in breach of fundamental constitutional principle”.

The Government's response was to secure new powers from Parliament that extended and defined the scope for decision-making by civil servants in the absence of ministers, and these powers have been developed further during the present hiatus.

It appears that the Secretary of State Chris Heaton Harris is now considering further extension of this deeply flawed approach.

The sovereignty of the Crown in Parliament is the very centre of the UK constitution, but it is deeply concerning that

parliament has legislated to provide for arbitrary and unaccountable executive power, ignoring fundamental principles of how parliament exercises its sovereignty.

The Bill of Rights (1689) required the Crown to seek the consent of the people as represented in Parliament in relation to its exercise of authority. Accountability to Parliament is the central protection of the interests of citizens from arbitrary government.

The fact today is that in Northern Ireland, some decisions are being taken by benevolent (but reluctant) dictators who have no such accountability and who are not under any defined authority.

NIO ministers have chosen to seek and to apply only very limited powers of direction, and have no authority to “hire or fire”. And there are some vital and urgent decisions that no-one can lawfully take.

The European Convention on Human Rights (Protocol 1, Article 3) requires “free elections... under conditions which will ensure the free expression of the opinion of the people in the choice of the legislature”. By choosing the continuation of a situation where there is no means of representation by the people in relation to the decisions that affect their day-to-day lives, the UK is in clear breach of this obligation. The removal of that right is also a diminution of the rights that applied in Northern Ireland before Brexit, and hence breaches Article 2 of the Protocol/ Windsor Framework, which has the status of an international treaty as it is part of the Withdrawal Agreement.

Ministers say time and time again that they are unable to intervene to address issues such as public sector pay or the crisis in public services because they do not have the necessary powers. That is nonsense — they do not have statutory powers because they have abdicated from the inherent responsibility that any national government has to act to ensure that there is a basis for executive decision-making in all parts of the realm.

The obvious alternative that is available to the government is re-assume direct responsibility for executive decision-making in Northern Ireland.

It was accepted that direct rule was necessary in 1971 and in 2002. In 2007, part of the agreement between the UK and Irish governments and the main political parties in Northern Ireland was that there would be no return to direct rule, and the legislation providing for that approach was repealed. It is well understood that, once introduced, direct rule is very difficult to replace.

The Belfast/Good Friday Agreement does not make any provision for direct rule, though the reality (before 2017) was that it was always clear that a breakdown in the operation of the institutions created in 1998 would make it a necessity.

The role of the British Irish Governmental Conference is part of Strand 3 of the Agreement, which means that that council is explicitly excluded from engagement in the internal administration of Northern Ireland, as part of the point of Strand 1 of the Agreement was (and is) to assure unionists that the Irish government has no decision-making role in that context.

That does not exclude the possibility of the UK Government consulting the Irish government on any issue, as long it retains sole responsibility for any and all decisions taken.

The strong reasons against introducing direct rule do not remove the fundamental fact that executive decision-making by civil servants has no democratic basis. The current vacuum is having profound effects as public services deteriorate in the absence of decisions.

The budgetary crisis is spiralling out of control because under the current arrangements neither civil servants in NI departments nor NIO ministers have a legal basis for the strategic decisions that are needed. The government can and should change course as a matter of urgency. Abdication is not acceptable.

§§ Andrew McCormick is a former Permanent Secretary and from 2018 was Director General for International Relations in the Executive Office. In that role, he was the lead official in the NI Civil Service on Brexit until his retirement in 2021

Webinars, music, resources, broadcasts, and books

Watch And Pray C of E webinar

Join the C of E's upcoming webinar on 24 January to learn more about the Lent theme, Watch and Pray, and everything

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that is available to support you and your church during the season.

Find out more and register at cofe.io/WatchAndPray.

Being Anglican - Exploring the Lambeth Call on Anglican Identity

What does Being Anglican mean in today's world? From engaging online discussions to free resources, discover how Anglicans around the world are interpreting scripture, engaging in mission, and staying connected through communion. Find out how you can get involved and add your voice to the call.

A webinar – February 7 and 8, 2024:

Being Anglican - Exploring the Lambeth Call on Anglican Identity

The next series of Lambeth Call discussions is called 'Being Anglican - Exploring the Lambeth Call on Anglican Identity'.

Register now to explore:

What does it mean to be Anglican?

How do Anglicans use scripture?

How are we in communion through mission?

This webinar is open to all. It's for bishops and spouses that attended the Lambeth Conference in 2022 and wider church groups that want to take the Lambeth Call forward in their setting.

[<https://www.lambethconference.org/phase-3/register-for-phase-3/>]

Grandparenting for Faith

Sharing God with the children you love the most

Helping grandparents share their faith with their grandchildren.

In this book, Becky Sedgwick explores how grandparents can proactively encourage and equip their grandchildren to meet and know God. Grandparenting brings new life and joy, and also the opportunity to walk spiritually alongside our grandchildren, offering tools and skills for the journey. Whatever your circumstances, God has positioned you to be a unique voice speaking into your grandchildren's lives, helping to nurture them into the reality of a relationship with the God who loves them. This product will be available as soon as it's published on 19 January 2024. 9.99 BRF Online [<https://www.brfonline.org.uk/products/grandparenting-for-faith-sharing-god-with-the-children-you-love-the-most?utm>]

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