

Church News Ireland



Image of the day – King's Award for Muckamore parish



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King's Award for Muckamore parish

MPDA - Muckamore Parish Development Association became the first voluntary group in the Borough of Antrim and Newtownabbey to receive the King's Award for Voluntary Service.

The group received “the MBE for Volunteer Groups” from the Lord-Lieutenant of County Antrim, Mr David McCorkell KStJ (photo above) at a special event held today in The Old Courthouse, Antrim.

MPDA has been in existence for 16 years and during this time has carried out a range of projects which have positively impacted their local community, particularly in the Ballycraigie area which is situated between the main roads

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from Antrim to Ballyclare and Antrim to Belfast. It contains areas of public housing and of private developments.

For many years all the wonderful work of MPDA

was carried out by a small group of dedicated volunteers and in recent years the employment of part-time staff, the establishment of the new community hub and the recruitment of more volunteers has increased the scope of this work.

The group has been instrumental in providing essential community services, ranging from sensory play for children with additional needs to one-to-one support services. They work to improve the wellbeing of both families and individuals by collaborating with and signposting to local services, providing a foodbank, hosting an after-school club and establishing the Muckamore Friendship Group for older people. MPDA also offer skills and training to improve employability and youth activities to build resilience and improve life and health outcomes.

Mayor of Antrim and Newtownabbey, Councillor Mark Cooper BEM said, "I would like to congratulate the Chairperson, Trustees and Volunteers of Muckamore Parish Development Association for the contribution they have





Andrew Stewart (left above) has served on the Development Association's board since its inception. A graduate of TCD he came to the parish about 50 years ago when appointed to the senior post at Greenmount Agricultural College of farm manager. The College is situate within the parish and close to the parish church of St Jude's. Mercifully the saint did not deploy his talent as the patron saint of lost causes!

made, and continue to make in Ballycraigy and the surrounding areas.

“Their detailed knowledge of the needs of the community and passion to see these needs met has allowed the volunteers to develop strong trusting and supportive relationships with those in the local community.

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“The volunteers are the foundation of the organisation and the driving force behind every activity, event and service delivered. Their compassion and generous devotion is inspirational.”

Created in 2002 to celebrate Queen Elizabeth II’s Golden Jubilee and previously known as The Queen’s Award for Voluntary Service (QAVS), the Award has been shining a light on the fantastic work of voluntary groups from all across the UK for many years. For more details on the Award visit www.kavs.dcms.gov.uk

Muckamore Parish Development Association Face Book - [\[https://www.facebook.com/OfficialMPDA/\]](https://www.facebook.com/OfficialMPDA/)

News

Widespread support for 2024 World Wide Day of Prayer.

World Day of Prayer, formally known as Women’s Day of Prayer, is celebrated in over 170 countries across the world on the first Friday in March.

Every year, an order of worship is developed focusing on a different country and a specific theme. It aims to bring together people of various cultures and traditions in a yearly common Day of Prayer, as well as closer fellowship, understanding and action throughout the year.



Hillsborough Churches gathered in Eglantine parish church

This year the programme was prepared by Christian Palestinian women based on Ephesians 4:1-3 'I beg you... bear with one another in love.'

Despite living in a region where there is ongoing conflict and the future is uncertain, the Christian women of Palestine are sharing with love a reminder that they are there, and they want to give hope to everyone. The theme of the 2024 service – 'bear with one another in love' – seems very appropriate for these women who won't give up witnessing the love of Jesus Christ.

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There was an island wide response. CNI presents what can only be a mere token of the quantity and quality of worship and fellowship which is evident in social media posts.



Eglantine host of Hillsborough Churches

Eglantine parish members said they were honoured to host the 2024 World Wide Day of Prayer. Over 100 attended the service with 10 churches from the Hillsborough area attending.

Lady Eames gave those present an inspiring and thought provoking address. Supper was provided in the hall afterwards.



A presentation to the speaker at Eglantine

Dunmurry Churches Together

Dunmurry Churches Together had a wonderful evening, in the McCleery Hall (photo left) for Dunmurry Churches Together annual World Day of Prayer Service.



Dunmurry Churches Together is made up of congregations from

Dunmurry Presbyterian, Kilmakee Presbyterian Church, St.Colman's

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Parish Church, Dunmurry, St Anne's Parish and Our Lady Queen of Peace.



The service in the **Foyle area of Londonderry** was held in St Peter's Church, Belmont (part of the CCCMSP Group).

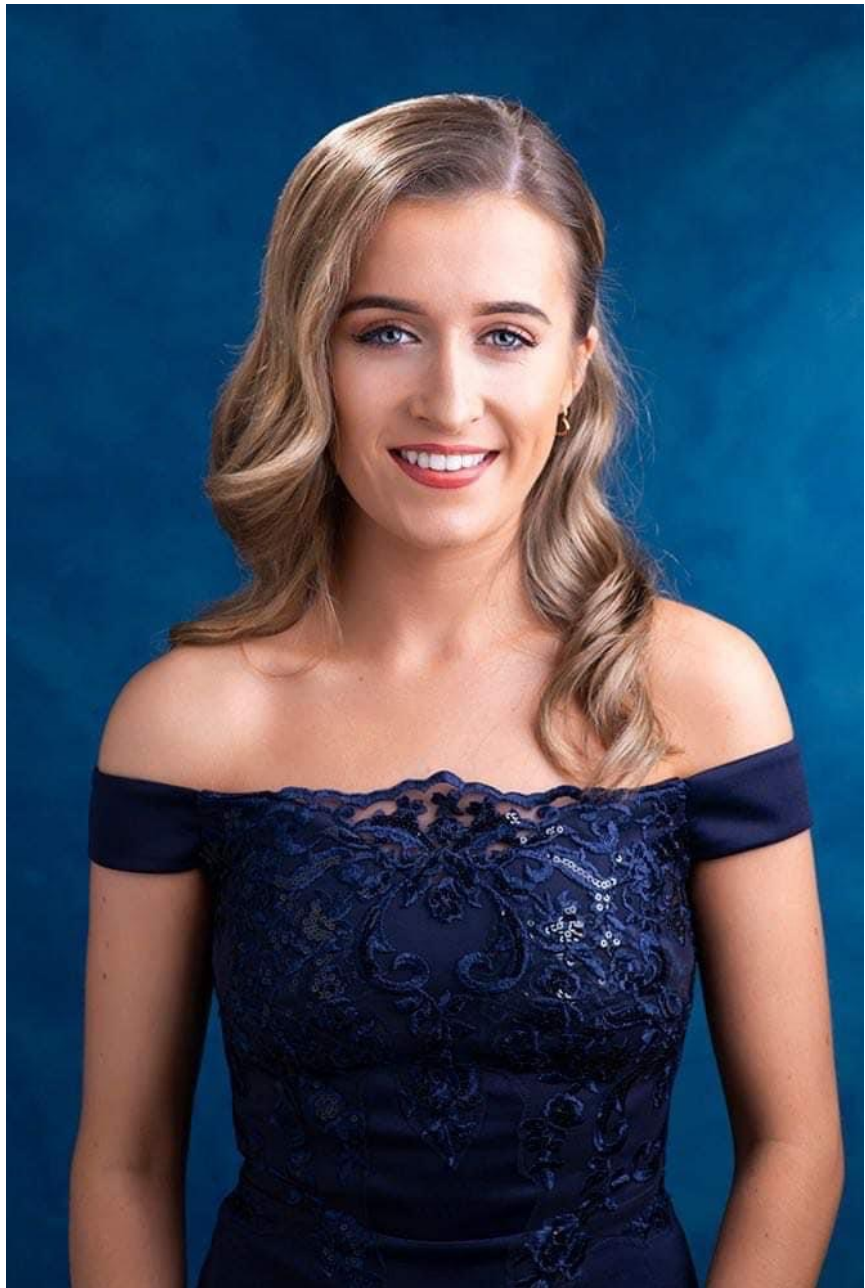
Changes at Canticle choir at QUB Catholic chaplaincy

Canticle, is a major contributor to Chaplaincy life and owes much of its success to the hard work, dedication and vision of its co-founder, celebrated soprano, Marcella Walsh, the Chaplaincy writes.

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For three years, she has served as our Director of Sacred Music, inspiring our student choristers and musicians to animate liturgies and perform at key moments in the life of Chaplaincy and our University with their wonderful music and song.

Marcella Walsh leaves us in these days to pursue international opportunities in the opera world.



We record our immense gratitude to her for the inestimable contribution she has made to the music and prayer life of Chaplaincy and hold her in our love and prayers as she begins another chapter in her career.

Eilís Fox new Director of Sacred Music

As sad as we are to say goodbye to Marcella, we are thrilled to announce that soprano and classical cross-over singer, Eilís Fox, has been appointed our new Director of Sacred

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Music at the Queen's Chaplaincy. Eílís, from County Armagh, is eminently qualified and well-placed to take Canticle in new and exciting directions.

She is a graduate of the Royal Irish Academy of Music, having obtained a Bachelors in Music Performance with First Class Honours before progressing to a Masters in Music Performance in Vocal Studies where she placed top of her year. In March 2022, Eílís received the inaugural Irish Prize as part of the Charles Wood International Song Competition.

Eílís is a chorister with St Patrick's Cathedral Choir, Armagh, and her solo performances were the highlight of the Cathedral's 150th Anniversary celebrations last year. Eílís is in much-demand for both church and concert performances, and so we are delighted to have secured her as our new Director.

Meanwhile our accompanist and founding Canticle member, Fiona Donnelly, becomes Assistant Director, and alumna and student of the University's Institute of Professional Legal Studies, Sarah Leonard, takes on the role of Chair of our Sacred Music Society. Sarah will be ably assisted by recent teaching graduate from St Mary's University College, Mary Lyons, who will serve as Vice Chair and Secretary.

The future is bright for Canticle as we continue to invest heavily in the strategic development of music ministry at Chaplaincy and look forward to our Italian tour in June with performances scheduled for Rome, Florence and Assisi.

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Music world delight at appointment of Deputy Lieutenant (DL) of Belfast



The boards of various music organisations and groups have been congratulating

Richard Yarr MBE, on being appointed a Deputy Lieutenant (DL) of Belfast. As one body stated, “We know that Richard will be a tremendous asset and ambassador for all”.

WCC extends greetings and appreciation to Bishop Brian Farrell

World Council of Churches (WCC) general secretary Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay extended birthday greetings to Bishop Brian Farrell, secretary of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity, commending Farrell for more than two decades of service with the dicastery and congratulating him on his retirement.

I speak for all of us in the WCC fellowship and staff in expressing our deep gratitude for your dedication and our

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work together,” wrote Pillay. “In those 21 years, you have witnessed several seasons of ecumenical relations.”

Pillay highlighted accomplishments and collaborative work areas with the dicastery, particularly the annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity and the Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the WCC.

“We are so grateful for your contributions to this enhanced ecumenical relationship,” wrote Pillay. “Beyond these substantial contributions, Bishop Farrell, we are most appreciative for the genial and generous friendship and fellowship in Christ that you have shown all of us WCC members, staff, and students through the years.”

Bessbrook parish installs community defibrillator

Christ Church (Church of Ireland) in Bessbrook has installed a defibrillator thanks to funding from the British Heart Foundation. The defibrillator which is now available to all in the local community 24 hours a day 7 days a week.

This is a vital piece of life saving equipment which is now available to the entire Bessbrook community. The defibrillator is also available to the emergency services. The parishioners of Christ Church wish to place on record their thanks to BHF for their support of our community. If you use the app 'what 3 words' the location reference is [valuables.cubed.plotter](https://www.valuables.cubed.plotter).

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Over the next few months the church will be holding training sessions on how to use a defibrillator. This information will be posted on their parish website

The defibrillator is situated at the entrance to the Parish Hall which is in the grounds of the church.

Check out the Christ Church site at www.christchurchbessbrook.co.uk

If you wish to learn more about defibrillators please visit www.revivr.bhf.org.uk

Cathedral call

Donkey crisis over at Peterborough Cathedral



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“A big thank you to everybody who responded to our appeal for donkeys for our Palm Sunday service, our donkey alert is now officially over! We have a plethora of donkeys to choose from and do not require any more donkeys at this time! Thank you again”

St Canices family tree engineers qualify

Pictured here with their certificates for the St Canice's, Kilkenny, "Introduction to Genealogy" course are

Mary Butler,
Breda Murphy,
Monica Fleming
(Tutor), Bridget
Kelly and
Emmet Huston.



Missing from the photo is Alan Buckley.

You can sign up to the St Canice's cathedral newsletter to keep up to date with any further courses in the future here - <http://eepurl.com/iHPQQI>

Webinars, music, resources, broadcasts, and books

2024 North/South Postgraduate Scholarships

The Centre for Cross Border Studies says that Universities Ireland has opened its 2024 North/South Postgraduate Scholarships.

There are four awards of €25,000 available to students who have been accepted on a Master's Degree or are entering the first year of a PhD programme at a university on the island of Ireland.

The scheme aims to encourage outstanding students from the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland to cross the border to undertake postgraduate study and experience life in the other jurisdiction.

For the guidance notes, details on the application process, and information on past winners...

► <https://universitiesireland.ie/northsouth-postgraduate-scholarships/>

London Theatre Week

It's London Theatre Week, so snap up your chance to save on some of the best London shows and fly directly from Belfast City Airport for a spectacular trip!

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London 2024 shows include:

 Hamilton

 The Lion King

 Mamma Mia

 Cabaret

✈️ Fly with British Airways to London City Airport and Heathrow Airport - bit.ly/BritishAirwaysBCA

✈️ Fly with easyJet to London Gatwick and London Luton - bit.ly/visiteasyJet

In the media

News Letter - Alf McCreary: Yes, fewer of us may be going to church, but faith is still all around

The recent survey published by the Evangelical Alliance on the state of church-going in Northern Ireland is timely and interesting but in the broad sense it confirms what we already know – namely that attendance is generally dropping compared to what it was 10 or 20 years ago.

Even the term “evangelical” is problematic. Nowadays it is taken to mean those churches whose main aim is outreach,

evangelisation and the attraction of new members, and these are generally more conservative in their theology.

However, many people in the mainstream churches would claim also to be “evangelical” in that their mission too is to spread the Gospel. By the same token, however, those who claim to be “liberal” are often regarded by the conservatives as “soft” on social issues such as same-sex relationships.

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI), for example, has been becoming much more conservative in recent years, and this is seen in its election of moderators.

The current Moderator the Very Reverend Dr Sam Mawhinney announced shortly after his election last year that he did not approve of the ordination of female ministers.

This year’s Moderator-elect the Reverend Richard Murray stated in one of his first interviews that it is “the Lord who decides, and if the Lord wants a woman minister to be moderator next year, then that will happen”.

This has to be one of the least persuasive excuses in the long history of the Presbyterian Church which has never elected a woman moderator, and this is particularly depressing because the PCI was the first major church to ordain a woman minister – the Reverend Ruth Patterson in 1976.

Sadly when she stood twice for the moderatorship she failed to get elected. Sadly and significantly on the second occasion she did not get a single vote from any of the 19 Presbyteries.

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Such a total rejection by the church which had ordained her as its first female minister was hurtful to many Presbyterians, and extremely regrettable.

In recent years the PCI has taken to promising its membership that there will be a female moderator some time, but people are entitled to ask “when?”. So far, not so good.

This poor record of failing to elect women to the moderatorship in an age of the widespread appointments of women to top posts in politics, industry, banking and other major aspects of modern life has not helped recruitment and evangelisation in the PCI, and members are leaving to join other denominations which give women the respect and authorisation to take top posts which they deserve.

On a broader canvas the Evangelical Alliance report reveals, for example, that only 23% of those surveyed claim to go to church once a week, while 35% of people in Northern Ireland pray only once a week and only 12% read the Bible once a week.

Equally fascinating is the statistic that 46% of practising Protestants say they are evangelical, while the figure for Catholics is 38%. Given the secularisation of society it is no surprise that only 31% of Northern people claim that they never pray, and that 25% never go to church.

Such figures are no doubt accurate, but I wonder if those who say that they never pray or go to church, or those who say they never read the Bible, may turn to faith in times of crisis? It is worth noting that when something terrible

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happens, like a random shooting or a terrible car crash, many people go to church to try to seek consolation or to try to make sense of the senseless. And how do we know where or when a person prays? That is a secret between him or her and God.

Having covered religious affairs as a writer for decades, I have met many people who sit loosely to organised religion, but who are searching for spiritual comfort and meaning for their lives.

There are others who live lives which would put many Christians to shame but who never darken the door of a church. Many years ago on a working trip to Vietnam on behalf of Christian Aid, I was helped greatly by a local woman whom I thought was an exemplary Christian, whereas in fact she was a Confucian.

Since then I never judge people on what they believe, or say they believe, but on what they do. Also I never try to make people believe what I believe, nor do I tell someone “you are wrong in your faith”. That is for a higher judge than me to determine.

Sometimes you get a major example of faith in action which is ennobling and inspiring. I read in last Saturday's Times that the Russian opposition leader and hero Alexei Navalny, who was murdered by the Kremlin and whose funeral took place in Moscow yesterday, was a practising Christian although at one time he had been a militant atheist.

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In his show trial in Moscow in 2021 he told the court: “I am now a believer and that helps me a lot in my activities because everything becomes much, much easier.”

Apparently he was particularly challenged by the Sermon on the Mount, and the words of Jesus “blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied”.

Such an example of total courage, sacrifice and Christian commitment by Alexei Navalny crosses the centuries and the barriers of man-made religion, and it ought to inspire us all.

The Times ended its report on Navalny with an extremely timely quote from the Danish theologian and philosopher Soren Kierkegaard – “The tyrant dies and his rule is over, the martyr dies and his rule begins.”

We should never forget that.

Alf McCreary is an author and award-winning Northern Ireland journalist who has written extensively from home and abroad on religion and current affairs.

His new book ‘Keeping the Faith’ is published by Messenger and will be available from early April.

Speaking to the soul

Short reading and a prayer - daily on this site

Church News Ireland

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