

Church News Ireland



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Image of the day

Ecumenical guests warmly welcomed to C of I General Synod

Photo above - Archdeacon with the Methodist guests

The General Synod 2025 was in Lawlor's Hotel in Naas. The Archbishop of Armagh, the Most Revd John McDowell, welcomed members of Synod and Synod's ecumenical guests.

Guests this year included: the Revd Dr John Alderdice and Ms Elaine Barnett of the **Methodist Church in Ireland**, Dr Heather Payne of the **Church in Wales**, the Revd Dr Sam Mawhinny of the **Presbyterian Church in Ireland**, the Rt Revd Sarah Groves of the **Moravian Church**, the Revd Dr Karen Campbell of the **Irish Council of Churches**, and Bishop Denis Nulty and Dr Joan Back of the **Roman Catholic Church**.

Dr Alderdice brought greetings from the Methodist Church in Ireland. He said it was wonderful to address Synod and that he felt he was among friends. His own faith has been shaped by friends and colleagues from the Church of Ireland, he said adding that it has been fantastic over his time in ministry to share with Church of Ireland colleagues in local settings.

During his year in office he said it had been a privilege to share on many occasions with Archbishop John McDowell

and the breath of his address showed the gift that he is to the Church of Ireland.

“We find ourselves in interesting circumstances in Ireland,” he commented.

“This year I have seen the challenge of aging demographics and declining numbers but there have also been opportunities to share the Gospel and see the openness of young people to hear the Good News of Jesus. My theme for this year has been the transformation of the world. The movement of the Holy Spirit doesn’t restore things to the way we want them to be or how they were in the past but it moves us forward. My hope and prayer for us all is that we will understand these times and know what we should be doing in the service of the Kingdom of God.”

News

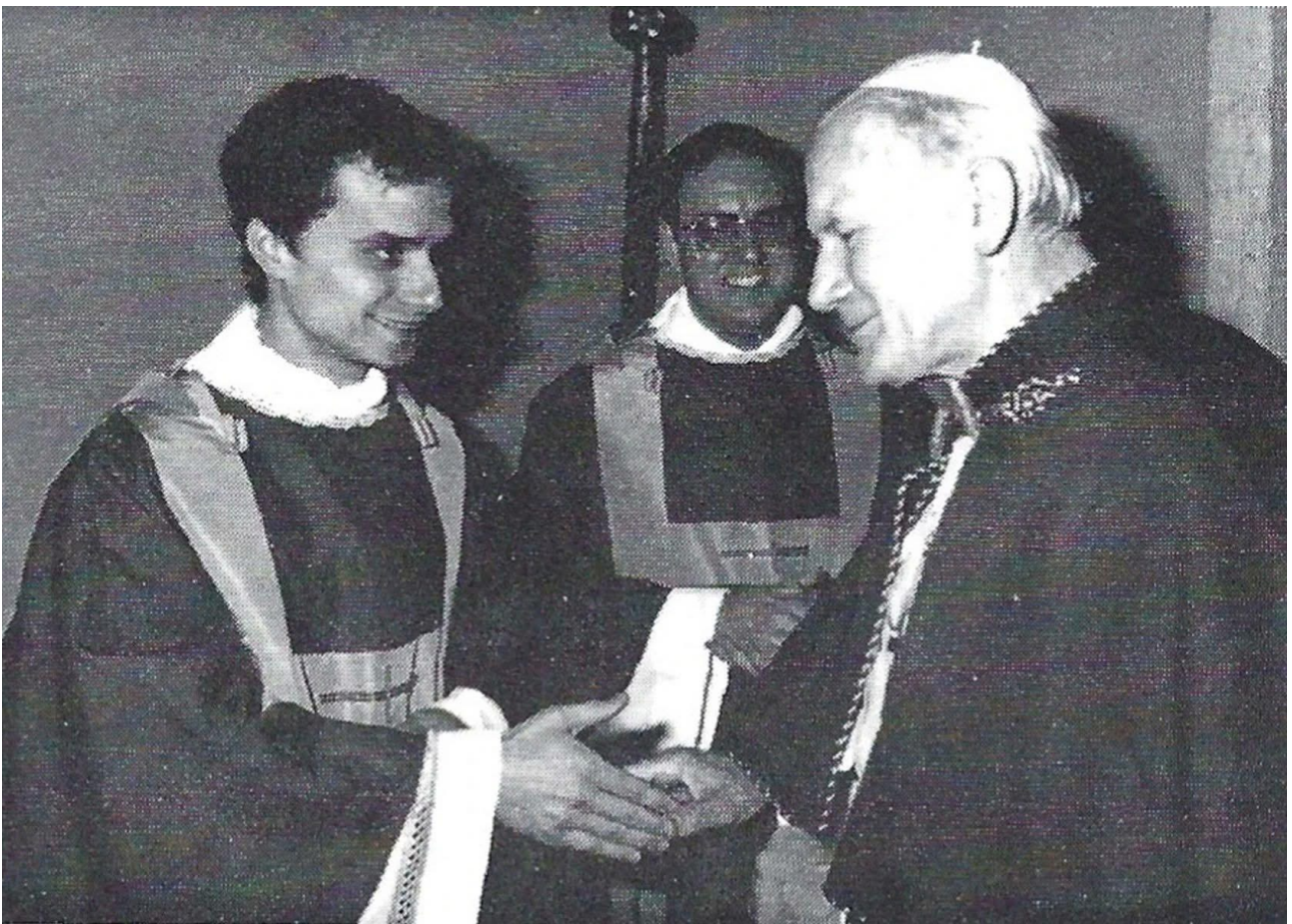
Irish bishops welcome the election of Pope Leo XIV



Bishop Alan McGuckian of Down and Connor said
“With joy and gratitude, I welcome the news of the

election of Pope Leo XIV as the Bishop of Rome and successor to Saint Peter.

“On behalf of the Diocese of Down and Connor, I pledge our prayer and heartfelt support for this ‘Son of Saint Augustine’ entrusted with the apostolic mission to shepherd and serve the Church.



Pope Leo XIV with Pope John Paul

“Addressing the crowds gathered in Rome, Pope Leo XIV reminded everyone of the universality of the Church and that “God loves us, all of us”. In a world torn apart by conflict, war and confusion, he encourages us to be heralds of peace and unity.

"I invite all the clergy, religious and laity across the Diocese of Down and Connor to offer prayers of thanksgiving. May God's blessing be upon Pope Leo XIV that he may bring the light of faith to those who are searching and be an instrument of God's peace in the world."

Bishop of Derry Donal McKeown said he had met the then Cardinal Robert Prevost in Rome last October.

He told BBC News NI that he found the new Pope to be a "most amenable person".

"He came on his own to meet me in the office, he sat and listened, asked intelligent questions, he knew his brief," Bishop McKeown said.

"I was very impressed by the courtesy with which I was met on that occasion.

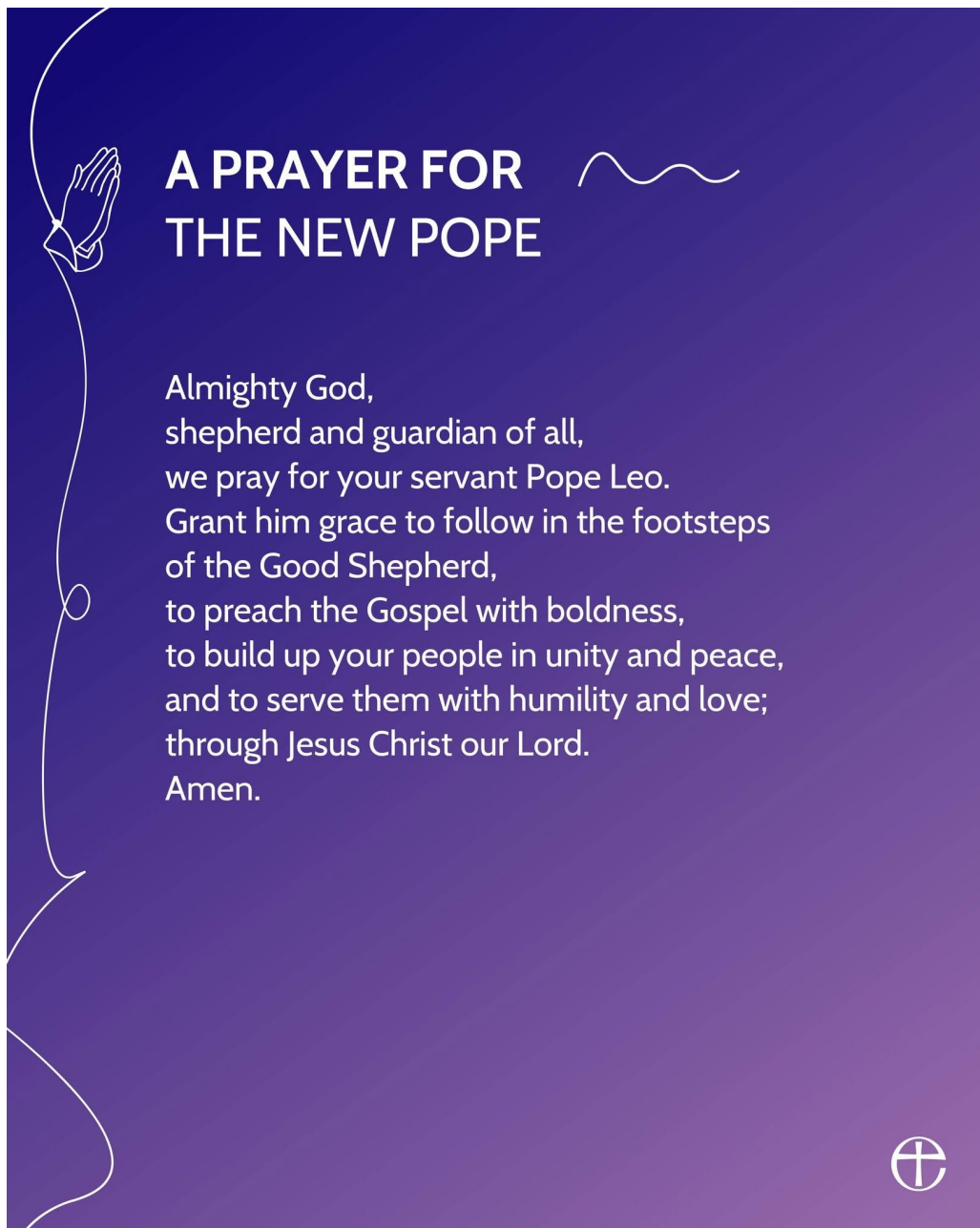
"In the congregation for bishops I'm very small fry. He treated me with enormous respect and courtesy and I'm very impressed."

Archbishop Eamon Martin on pilgrimage welcomed appointment of Pope Leo XIV

Primate of All Ireland Archbishop Eamon Martin was leading a pilgrimage from the Archdiocese of Armagh to the Marian grotto in Lourdes when the news of the appointment was made

Archbishop Eamon said - With great joy, I welcome our new PopeLeoXIV. At the end of February I and the other Irish

archbishops – Dermot Farrell, Kieran O'Reilly, Francis Duffy – met with him, and he came across as a humble and respectful listener, wanting to learn as much as possible about the Church in Ireland. He is a calm, affable and approachable person. **He is a friend of Ireland** and no doubt the Augustinian communities at home will be delighted with the news.



A Prayer for the new Pope
by the Church of England

Pope Leo is a missionary at heart with a breadth of international experience and background – having ministered in three continents. His opening words about peace and ‘building bridges’ indicate that he wishes to work for reconciliation and unity in the Church and in the world.

Pope Leo’s choice of name suggests that a commitment to Catholic social teaching will be a hallmark of his papacy. Please pray for him. Saint Peter intercede for him. Our Lady of Grace watch over him.

I pray: God bless Popem Leo XIV. Pour out your Holy Spirit upon him with all the graces he needs to be a courageous and gentle shepherd. Fill him with faith, hope and love. May he govern with wisdom and fidelity to Christ and the Gospel. May he be an inspiring missionary of peace, healing and reconciliation in the world. Give him health and strength to do all that you ask of him. Amen.

Tomorrow morning, (Friday, 9 May), at the grotto in Lourdes France, I will use the name of Pope Leo XIV for the first time at Mass and pray for our new pope. I’m here on the Archdiocese pilgrimage and Mass is at 7.30am Irish time available on the Lourdes website: lourdes-france.org live at the grotto.

Methodist Church in Ireland welcomes election of Pope Leo XIV

"The Methodist Church in Ireland welcomes the election of Pope Leo XIV and prays for God's blessing upon him

as he takes up this ministry, that he might know the wisdom and guidance of God in his leadership.

We continue to pray for our sisters and brothers in the Roman Catholic Church at this time of transition. We are thankful to God for partnership in the gospel."

Rev Dr John Alderdice (President). Mrs Elaine M Barnett (Lay Leader)

Moderator: 'Give thanks for VE Day 80 years on'

The Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, Right Reverend Dr Richard Murray, joined the King and Queen, members of the Royal Family, politicians from across the UK, and church leaders, on Thursday 8 May for a special service at Westminster Abbey to mark, celebrate and give thanks to God for the 80th anniversary of VE Day - Victory in Europe.

Speaking ahead of the service, in which he took part in the procession of the clergy, Dr Murray said, "It is an honour to be our Church's Moderator on this 80th anniversary of VE Day and to represent Irish Presbyterians at this service. Many in our church family volunteered from Northern Ireland, and what was then the Irish Free State, which was officially neutral, paying the ultimate price for our freedoms in these islands - and I believe that should not be forgotten.

"As the time between the ending of the Second World War grows more distant, and those who fought, or remember it

become fewer, it is important that we continue to honour, and give thanks to God, for all who made victory possible, and the deliverance from the evil that had ensnared Europe.”

Dr Murray continued, “As we remember the defeat of Nazism and the sacrifices made by so many to achieve victory, we also remember those on the home front who also made victory possible.”

The Moderator concluded by saying, “In his VE DAY broadcast, the King’s grandfather, King George VI, said ‘Today we give thanks to Almighty God for a great deliverance.’ It was a great deliverance, and a liberation from the evil the that had descended across Europe, and it is right and proper that 80 years on, we give thanks to God for such a victory, and celebrate as it preserved the civil and religious liberties that we enjoy today, and returned freedom to many elsewhere.”

“In one of his VE Day speeches, Winston Church also said, ‘This is your victory, victory of the cause of freedom in every land.’ To have religious freedom and freedom of conscience are invaluable, and we ought not to allow them to be undermined at home or abroad.”

Education

'Schols' Award from Trinity College Dublin for Wallace High alumnus

Congratulations to Wallace High, Lisburn alumnus Alexander Robertson (Class of 2024) on receiving the prestigious 'Schols' Award from Trinity College Dublin.

Alexander, who achieved an outstanding 5 A* grades at Wallace High School, is currently studying Computer Science at Trinity.



The Foundation Scholarship ("Schols") has been a hallmark of academic excellence at Trinity College since its founding in 1592. The award is granted to students who attain a first-class honours average in a series of rigorous, voluntary examinations held in January, just before the start of Hilary term. These exams are designed to test a student's ability to "consistently demonstrate exceptional knowledge and understanding of their subjects".

Scholars receive a number of benefits, including free tuition, a stipend, accommodation in college, dining rights at Commons, voting privileges in the Seanad, and the post-

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nominal title "Sch.". Fewer than 1% of undergraduate students are awarded this distinguished scholarship.

Well done, Alexander — an exceptional achievement!

Theology books donated to St Dominic's Grammar School



We are honoured to share that the children of the late Patricia Bridget Hill have generously donated her extensive collection of theology books to St. Dominic's, her beloved Alma Mater. ✨

Pat Hill (nee Mc Cormick) was a pupil at St Dominic's in the 1940's, during her time at the school she excelled academically and was on the school hockey team. Pat later went on to teach in St Catherine's Primary School. In 1990 Pat met Queen Elizabeth II when she received a Member of the British Empire (MBE) in Buckingham Palace for services to education. Working at St Catherine's Primary School on the Falls Road in Belfast, Pat got the young people in the school to interview their parents and grandparents to build up an archive of memories from the Falls Road.

Her work after she retired in 1994 was also significant. She began a degree in theology at Queen's University, Belfast, while lobbying tirelessly that pastoral councils should be set up to give the laity a say in the running of the Catholic church in Ireland. Along with a delegation from Belfast she met and shook hands with Pope John Paul II.

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Pat Hill's passion for theology and education was evident throughout her life, and this donation ensures that her legacy will continue to inspire and educate future generations.

St. Dominic's was a place close to her heart, and we are grateful that her children have chosen to honour her memory in such a meaningful way. These books will be a valuable resource for students and faculty alike, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of theological studies.

Thank you to the Hill family for this wonderful contribution. Pat Bridget Hill's spirit will live on through the knowledge and wisdom shared within these pages.

Cathedral Calls

St Anne's to come alive with the Sound of Music

The Belfast Operatic Company is celebrating its 65th anniversary by performing The Sound of Music at the city's St Anne's Cathedral.

The follow-up show to its sell-out run of Les Miserables: Let the People Sing will also mark the 60th anniversary of The Sound of Music.

The cast of 50 includes 12 young performers who will share the roles of the Von Trapp children, alongside a stellar adult

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cast led by Anna-Maria Boyle, who took to the stage as Cosette in Les Miserables, and Hannah Russell, alternating in the role of Maria.

They will be joined by Samuel Moore, who also appeared in Les Miserables as Val Jean, playing the stern and distant Captain Von Trapp, who is learning to love again.

It will be directed by the Belfast Operatic Company's Gary Redpath, who has been involved with the company for 15 years and who previously directed A Night at Gatsby's and The Greatest Show.

He said: "It's a real privilege to be directing The Sound of Music, especially in such a breathtaking and iconic venue.

"This show holds a special place in so many hearts, and bringing it to life with such a talented cast, including these incredible young performers, makes it even more exciting.

"As we celebrate 65 years of the Belfast Operatic Company, I can't think of a more fitting or magical way to mark this milestone.

"St Anne's Cathedral is unlike any venue we've performed in before. Its architecture, acoustics and sheer scale create an atmosphere that's nothing short of awe-inspiring.

"It brings a grandeur and reverence that perfectly complements the heart and soul of The Sound of Music.

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“Of course, staging a full-scale musical in a cathedral comes with its own set of logistical and creative challenges, but that's all part of the thrill.

“It pushes us to think differently, and I truly believe audiences are in for a once-in-a-lifetime theatrical experience.”

Tickets available now at www.belfastoperatic.org

Clergy and ministry

Deacon ordained at Newry Cathedral

**Ordination to
the Diaconate
on Sunday, 11th
May at 3.00pm**

Archbishop



Eamon Martin ordained Rev. Anthony Moffett to the Order of diaconate for the Diocese of Dromore. Anthony is a familiar face to those who attend Mass in the cathedral. Please keep him in your prayers in these days following his ordination. Please God, Anthony will be ordained to the priesthood in the not too distant future.

General Synod focus on ministry

The speakers during the discussion of the Commission on Ministry's report contributed a wide and in-depth perspective

Bishop Andrew Forster has urged parishes to create a culture in which each member was a "vocation scout", seeking to find the call to vocation in others. Responding to the Commission on Ministry's Report to General Synod, Bishop Andrew said these were challenging but exciting times, that God was at work, using "you and me to identify vocations".

Proposing the commission's report, **Captain George Newall** (Dromore) said that in recent years the commission had become increasingly concerned about clergy wellbeing. He said that bishops had been trying to find solutions for clergy who were suffering from stress. He said that there were various sources of stress but that the stress had to be managed in such a way that it didn't undermine the effectiveness of the church.

Captain Newall announced that Dr Scott Brown would run a **pilot scheme for clergy to understand sources of stress**, early signs of stress, and how to deal with it. He hoped this would lead to an ongoing programme for clergy in future years.

The commission also wanted to focus on church growth. For many years the church had looked at decline and had become accustomed to it, he stated. But now many parishes were experiencing growth and the commission was planning a conference to focus on church growth in 2026, he said. It would focus on what growth had happened and share

resources. “Our church is one not of decline but one of growth for Christ,” he said.

Judy Peters (Cork, Cloyne and Ross) seconded the report and looked at the **retreats and conferences run by the commission**. The first was the Advent Retreat which was an opportunity for people to set aside time before the beginning of Advent – for both clergy and lay people. It takes place in Mount St Ann’s and for the last two years it has been assisted by the Church’s Ministry of Healing, she said, asking members to look out for the advertisement for the retreat.

The Vocations Retreat has been an exciting development, Ms Peters said. In 2019 the commission began examining vocations and as part of the project it was decided to hold a retreat. The commission has been delighted with the number of people coming to that retreat, she reported. The retreat is for anyone considering the ordained ministry at whatever stage they are at and enables people to understand what that journey is about. It is a confidential event and she expressed gratitude to the DDOs for encouraging people to attend.

The Retirement Retreat is an opportunity for people coming up to retirement to hear about pensions, finances and spiritual wellbeing as well as having an opportunity to chat to people, she said.

Speaking to the report **Gillian Purser** (Cashel, Ferns and Ossory) said that ministry involved all people. She expressed disappointment to discover 9when she got her book of reports) that Synod next year would return to three

days. She recalled speaking at General Synod in Belfast and saying that people were being denied the opportunity to speak at General Synod because of the cost. She said that three days in Slieve Donard, if it was not booked out, would cost over £500. She said she had to resign from Bishops' Appeal because meetings take place on weekdays in working hours. "Do we want a church that is run by people who can afford to take time off work, people who are retired or by clergy. I don't. I want to be in a church that is run by clergy and laity together and open to everyone regardless of status. I feel that by going back to three days we are disenfranchising a huge number of people in our church. I said this three years ago and I thought we would be listened to but we weren't," she said.

Archdeacon Peter Thompson (Armagh) stated that **nurturing vocations** was important. There had been a drop in vocations, he said, noting that the current training system takes eight years to nurture a vocation through to incumbency but within the next eight years there will be 150 retirements. "Where are we going to find the clergy to fill the gaps?" he asked. "As a church we are standing on the edge of a precipice and the church is crumbling before us. We spend more time discussing pensions than vocations. What do we do? Close the doors, lock up churches and sell them?" He said the church must seek a new approach to team ministry. "We need bold vision and joined up thinking," he stated. "We have a one size fits all model to training and vocations. CITI are doing a tremendous job but can only operate within the confines handed to them. Do we engage in 'outside the box' thinking? By the time I retire, what will be left in the Church of Ireland if we fail to act today. There is a deep and abiding joy in ministry and I thank God for that

call. For others they have that call but we need to identify what is stopping people from responding to that call.”

Bishop Adrian Wilkinson (Cashel Ferns and Ossory) spoke about the **Church Growth Conference** planned for next year. He highlighted the ‘quiet revival’ in England and Wales – the growth of young people coming back to church, reading the Bible and seeking community, purpose and something authentic in a world that often feels isolating. They are looking for authenticity and causes they can embrace through social activism, he said. “The church is seen as a positive place by young people. Many young people are working from home. Must be isolating. They are looking for a community they can be part of and a place they can discover that God loves them no matter what. They are looking for authenticity in church community,” he said. He added that he is often asked how we can get young people back to church. “I think young people are looking for depth of engagement – something of deep spiritual significance in a world which is bemusing. People are looking for the sense of the sacred and a genuine engagement between them and the work of God. If this conference can begin with that then there is hope,” he concluded.

David Whyte (Dublin) spoke about **caring for the carers**. He said he was brought up in a rectory and a child in a rectory is usually the last person in a parish to know that something is bothering the rector. He appealed to everyone to bring back to the dioceses and parishes that rectors are humans. “They all like us and while we try to do our best it is not always possible to achieve what other people expect of us,” he commented.

Bishop Andrew Forster (Derry and Raphoe) said we were living in **really exciting times in the Church of Ireland**.

“Gen Z are identifying the emptiness of rampant secularism and are seeking the authenticity that Bishop Wilkinson talked about. I want the Church of Ireland to be part of this wave,” he said. He suggested that part of this had to be worked through vocations. He urged each parish to create a culture in which each person was a vocation scout. “We spot in people their vocation, the talents and gifts of God they are given. I think many people are involved in ministry today because someone said to them ‘Have you ever thought of....?’ Don’t leave that to other people, spot the vocations in others. These are challenging but exciting times. God is at work. He will use you and me to identify vocations. Whatever discernment God has given us let’s use it in identifying vocations in others,” he said.

Andrew Brannigan (Down) said we should be **praying for vocations** and looking out for those people and doing what we can to support these people. He agreed that there was the worry of demographics but he was thankful for the work of the Commission for their work in vocations, and the RB which is supporting new students and the funding of curacies. He recalled his motion in 2019 which called on the Church of Ireland to recognise people’s theological qualifications to shorten their journey to ministry. People who have a degree in theology are still being asked to do a masters in theology, he said.

The **Revd Catherine Simpson** (Down) had just returned from the **Alpha** conference in London and there was a sense of hope. She highlighted a programme operated by St Mellitus College in London – as a pathway to training in the

context of a year long programme for people who may experience disadvantage. This prepares people for the national discernment process. She suggested that the Church of Ireland move towards exploring that approach.

The Ven Paul Dundas (Connor) said there was an issue with vocations but **sometimes the Church was not brilliant at using some of the talent it has**. He said curacies could be better matched and people who did part time training over many years often took so long that they no longer considered full time ministry and their talents were lost to the church. He suggested that there may also be a problem with concentrating too much on political correctness and which wing of the church people belonged to.

Events

‘Not the end of the world event’- Belfast Jesuit centre

Join us for a half-day of reflection and inspiration at Ulster University, Belfast, on Saturday, 31st May, from 9.30am to 1.30pm, hosted by the Belfast Jesuit Centre.

Inspired by our late Pope Francis' vision for a Jubilee Year of Hope, we'll explore how our Catholic faith calls us to embody hope in these challenging times. Speakers include Bishop Alan McGuckian SJ, Dr Austen Ivereigh, and Julieann Moran. The event will be chaired by Pat Coyle of Jesuit Communications. Engage in Spirit-led conversations

to foster hope in our families, faith communities and world. All are welcome. Registration is required and a registration link can be found by visiting belfastjesuitcentre.org or the BJC Facebook page.

Poem for today

Ode

by Arthur O'Shaughnessy

We are the music-makers,
And we are the dreamers of dreams,
Wandering by lone sea-breakers
And sitting by desolate streams;
World losers and world forsakers,
On whom the pale moon gleams:
Yet we are the movers and shakers
Of the world for ever, it seems.

With wonderful deathless ditties
We build up the world's great cities.
And out of a fabulous story
We fashion an empire's glory:
One man with a dream, at pleasure,
Shall go forth and conquer a crown;
And three with a new song's measure
Can trample an empire down.

We, in the ages lying
In the buried past of the earth,
Built Nineveh with our sighing,
And Babel itself with our mirth;

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And o'erthrew them with prophesying
To the old of the new world's worth;
For each age is a dream that is dying,
Or one that is coming to birth.

Speaking to the soul

Short reading and a prayer - daily on this site

Church News Ireland

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Link in Monday through Saturday from
early morning

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