



Image of the day

Care for the earth, Hull Minster

People and places



PCI to hold major event to mark significant college role in NI

To mark the role played by the PCI and its Union Theological College in hosting the first Northern Ireland Parliament 100 years ago, and to mark the centenary of the creation of Northern Ireland, and the partition of Ireland, the Church announced that it would be holding a special commemorative event later this month at the College – the first home of the Parliament of Northern Ireland.

Entitled ‘On these steps’ the event will include historical analysis, music and drama, along with a reflective address

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from the Church's Moderator, before an audience of invited political and civic guests from across the UK and Ireland.

Scheduled for 17 September it takes place nearly 100 years to the day, when MPs and Senators ascended the College steps for the first time to meet as the Parliament of Northern Ireland, before moving to Stormont, its permanent home, 11 years later.

Looking forward to playing his part in this historic occasion, PCI's Moderator, Right Reverend Dr David Bruce will address the live streamed event, which will focus on the Christian principles for imagining a better future across the island for the next 100 years.

Find out more, and how you can tune in to watch, here: bit.ly/3Bx2Cvm

Tributes to Mrs Pat Hume

Church leaders have paid tribute to Mrs Pat Hume, who died on the evening of 2nd September.

Archbishop of Armagh, Eamon Martin

“God rest Pat Hume, who gently guided the hand of peace over many years - Derry's “First Lady” and a friend to all who suffered during troubled times. We owe you and John a great debt of gratitude.” In a tweet.



“When the history of Ireland is written, if Pat Hume’s name is not beside John’s, it will be an incomplete history.” Father Paul Farren, speaking at John’s funeral 13 months ago.

The Archbishop of Armagh, the Most Revd John McDowell

Anyone who has been involved in public life in Ireland over the past 50 years will be saddened by the news of the death of Mrs Pat Hume who not only cared for her husband in his long and distressing final illness but was a source of

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inspiration and stability to him and to all who work for peace in these islands.

Our thoughts and prayers are especially with John and Pat's children and with all of those who are grieving most deeply for her today.

Archbishop of Dublin, the Most Revd Dr Michael Jackson

We express our heartfelt sympathy to her family, together with our assurance of prayers in their sorrow and bereavement in these days.

We pay tribute to her for her commitment, courage and compassion in the service of peace and the cause of reconciliation in Ireland.

Local people mattered deeply to Mrs Hume, children and adults alike, as did local flourishing and she worked tirelessly for both.

We give thanks to God for her many decades of tireless service, lovingly shared with her husband John.

The President of the Methodist Church in Ireland, The Rev. Dr. Sahr Yambasu

Like many others we recognise the invaluable contribution which Pat played in the merging peace process associated with her husband John and others. She was courageous, wise and untiring in her support and encouragement for John.

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May Pat's family experience the lasting peace which the Lord promises for such a time as this.

The Moderator of the Presbyterian Church

I join with many others in expressing my condolences to the Hume family on the passing of Pat. Be assured of my prayers in your loss. We are thankful to God for such advocates of peace in our community.

General Assembly to meet next month

The governing body of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI), its General Assembly, will meet next month.

The meeting will be held from Monday morning, 4 October, to Wednesday afternoon, 6 October, at Assembly Buildings in Belfast, the all-Ireland denomination has confirmed.

Welcoming the news, Rev Trevor Gribben, Clerk of the General Assembly, described the autumn coming together of Presbyterians from across Ireland as 'an exceptional meeting that reflects the exceptional times we are living through.'

Meeting for only three days, with the necessary Covid mitigations in place, will mean that only 'full voting members' of the General Assembly will be able to be present in person, thereby ensuring the necessary social distancing required at the city centre venue.

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“There can be absolutely no doubt that the life and rhythm of our church, since the first lockdowns of March last year, along with other organisations, businesses and society a whole, has witnessed extraordinary change that has required unprecedented adjustment as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. As a result, one of the casualties was our June 2020 General Assembly, which had to be cancelled,” Mr Gribben said.

The cancellation, the first time in PCI’s 180 year history, was agreed by ministers and elders meeting in a unique virtual Special Meeting of the General Assembly during April 2020. They also agreed that all necessary business of that year’s General Assembly be conducted through a special ‘2020 Standing Commission of the General Assembly’. Mr Gribben explained that the Standing Commission met via video conference last June to enable the Church’s work to continue.

This included the formal election and installation of Dr David Bruce as Moderator in a special livestreamed service of worship from the Assembly Hall in Belfast. With many hundreds watching online, there were just four people physically present. Over the following two days, and two further meetings, the Commission dealt with normal routine business, with only non-controversial, necessary, or time sensitive decisions being taken. All other business was remitted to a full General Assembly when it could meet.

“When April 2020’s Special Meeting voted to cancel that year’s General Assembly, I said at the time that, ‘unprecedented times often call for unprecedented responses to provide for a measure of certainty and

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continuity'. While somethings had to be done differently by necessity, decisions were taken collectively, prayerfully and democratically in the best sense of Presbyterianism," Mr Gribben said.

"In considering different options for the 2021 General Assembly, we have kept a constant eye on the changing situation across the island. The rollout of the vaccination programmes, the easing of restrictions and the general reopening up of society, has meant that we will be able to hold an in-person meeting, though shifting our normal June week to the first week in October."

Mr Gribben continued, "I very much welcome the fact that we can meet again in General Assembly this autumn. It will be an exceptional meeting that reflects the exceptional times that we are living through. The safety and wellbeing of those attending will be paramount, so we will ensure that all the necessary Covid mitigations are in place and public health guidance is followed. For these reasons, our General Council has agreed significant and necessary changes to this year's Assembly."

Mr Gribben explained that the first significant change is that the General Council, with delegated authority from the General Assembly itself, after consulting widely, agreed that only full voting members would be able to be present in person. In the main, these will be PCI's ministers in congregations, active retired ministers and a commissioned representative elder from each of the Church's 532 congregations. To ensure appropriate social distancing, the floor of the Assembly Hall, its large gallery, along with a few suitable overflow halls in Assembly Buildings, will be used.

Unfortunately this will mean that civic dignitaries and senior representatives from overseas and partner churches won't be in attendance this year, neither will those other PCI members who usually are invited to 'sit and deliberate'. While all sessions will be livestreamed, there will be no public access. The attendance of the media, however, will still be facilitated.

The second significant departure from normal practice is that the Assembly will open on Monday morning, instead of the traditional Monday evening, with a service of worship where Dr David Bruce will be formally confirmed as Moderator for an historic second term. Having given his address to the General Assembly, Dr Bruce will then chair it, with business scheduled across three days in ten sessions, closing on Wednesday afternoon.

Mr Gribben concluded by saying, "We will be announcing the key elements of the business nearer the General Assembly, but as October approaches we will continue to seek God's guidance in preparing for this year's Assembly, especially in the context of the easing of restrictions north and south, committing all to Him, who can do more than we can possibly imagine."

News briefs

Service to Cashel diocese honoured

A new bench in the grounds of the Cashel Diocesan Office has been dedicated to Mrs Denise Hughes for her long and

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dedicated service as Diocesan Secretary. She held this role from 1966 to 2020, retiring last December.

On a joyful day at the Diocesan Office to mark the launch of the all-colour Diocesan Magazine (Denise's idea) Bishop Michael Burrows invited her to sit on her wooden bench for the first time.

The brass plate inscription reads: Presented with gratitude and admiration for the immense and devoted work of Denise Hughes, Diocesan Secretary 1966-2020

Mothers Union Camino fundraiser

Mothers Union Chief Executive Bev Julien and her husband have arrived in Santiago and received their pilgrims' certificates for 115km. "Thank you to all who have supported our adventure! You can still help us raise funds for Mothers Union"



Death of the Rev Gordon Freeman

The death has taken place of the Rev Gordon Freeman, a former Rector of the Ardara group of parishes. Mr Freeman, who had been living in Ballycastle, passed away on Thursday at the Causeway Hospital in Coleraine. He was ordained in the mid-90s, after a career in business, and was the incumbent in Ardara from 1998 until his retirement in 2007.

Gordon is survived by his wife Sheila, their sons Vincent and Duncan, and daughters-in-law Colleen and Gwena.

Bishop Andrew Forster has paid tribute to Mr Freeman. "Gordon had a real love for his parish in west Donegal," the Bishop said. "He served with grace and faithfulness, and is remembered fondly by former parishioners. Sheila and their children are in our thoughts and prayers at this time. May Gordon rest in peace and rise in glory."

Quotes

20 years ago today changed my life as I walked with 225 children and their parents to Holy Cross School. For three months they allowed me share in their taking their young daughters to school. Thanks for your trust in me. Today I pray that lasting peace be the road ahead for all.

[Fr. Aidan Troy](#)

Anyone who thinks the issues with the Chief Constable are simply about Unionists jumping up and down has missed the many missteps he's made and the impact he's had on

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morale. The report was unnecessary; operational changes should just have been implemented. [Jim Gamble](#)

59 members of the RUC were murdered by terrorists defending Northern Ireland in Newry Sub Division. For this Chief Constable and his senior team to attempt to hide this sacrifice and sully the good name of those who served this country during its darkest days is abhorrent.

[Carla Lockhart MP](#)

Reports

Hypocritical' religions are failing children over sex abuse, inquiry concludes

Most major religions are guilty of “blatant hypocrisy” for covering up sex abuse while preaching “right from wrong”, a government-ordered inquiry has concluded.

The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse examined child protection in 38 religious organisations and settings in England and Wales, including Jehovah’s Witnesses, Baptists, Methodists, Islam, Judaism, Sikhism, Hinduism, Buddhism and nonconformist Christian denominations.

The organisations had a “significant or even dominant influence on the lives of millions of children”, the inquiry’s report said, while also highlighting “the blatant hypocrisy and moral failing of religions purporting to teach right from wrong and yet failing to prevent or respond to child sexual abuse.

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“What marks religious organisations out ... is the explicit purpose they have in teaching right from wrong; the moral turpitude of any failing by them in the prevention of, or response to, child sexual abuse is therefore heightened.

“Freedom of religion and belief can never justify or excuse the ill-treatment of a child, or a failure to take adequate steps to protect them from harm.”

The inquiry found that between 2015 and 2020, of all known institutions where abuse had taken place, 11 per cent (443 instances) were committed within a religious organisation or setting.

Ten per cent of suspects (726 people) were employed by, or somehow linked to, a religious organisation or setting.

Prof Alexis Jay, chairman of the inquiry said: “When we heard about shocking failures to prevent and respond to child sexual abuse across almost all major religions it became clear many are operating in direct conflict with [their moral] mission.”

Richard Scorer, specialist abuse lawyer at Slater and Gordon who acts for seven victim and survivor groups in the inquiry, said: “Too many religious organisations continue to prioritise the protection . . . and authority of religious leaders above the rights of children.”



New Dean for St Andrews, Dunkeld and Dunblane

The new Dean takes office following the retirement of the Very Rev Kenny Rathband on 31 August.

The Dean continues to serve as Rector of St John the Baptist, Princes Street, Perth, where he has been since 2014, becoming a Canon of St Ninian's Cathedral in 2019. Previously, he served in several charges in the Diocese of Aberdeen and Orkney, where he was ordained in 2001.

The Rt Rev Ian Paton, Bishop of St Andrews, Dunkeld and Dunblane, said: "I am very glad that Graham accepted my invitation to become Dean, and I am looking forward very much to welcoming him as a colleague and adviser, and to helping him as he settles into this new ministry.

"The role of Dean is one of the most important in the life of any diocese. It includes support for the Bishop's ministry; sharing in leadership of the Diocese with the Bishop and others; encouraging the clergy, lay ministers and vestries of the Diocese; and fulfilling the other duties specified in the Code of Canons. Graham brings to this ministry his love of the Scottish Episcopal Church, his long experience of congregational ministry, his priority of pastoral care, and his warm sense of humour!"

The new Dean was licensed at a short and simple service at St John the Baptist, Perth, with members of St John's Vestry present. He will also be installed and welcomed, in the

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presence of many more people, at a full Diocesan service at the Cathedral at a yet to be confirmed date before Advent. At that service other Canons, appointed during lockdown, will also be installed, and there will be thanks given to the Very Rev Kenny Rathband as retiring Dean.

“Please welcome Graham, and pray for him as he becomes Dean of St Andrews, Dunkeld and Dunblane,” said Bishop Ian.

Books, Broadcasts, Resources and Webinars

Looking for a course for your small groups this Autumn? Free resource from Church Army

Faith Pictures is a free resource from Church Army to help Christians of all traditions talk about their own story of faith with confidence. Here you will find all you need to begin the conversation and run Faith Pictures for your group either digitally or in person.

Faith Shared is a free resource from Church Army helping churches of all traditions think about how they connect with the communities around them, why they think others should join them, and how to do so in a way that doesn't exhaust their church.

These sessions will provide you with all the resources you need to run Faith Shared for your group.

OVERVIEW

Faith Shared is six sessions long, designed around ideas that are easily applicable to the everyday lives of Christians and churches. It explores what evangelism is; how we and our churches can engage in evangelism and outreach well, and how we can make sure Jesus is at the center of what we do. The sessions are:

What is Evangelism?

What is your story?

Where and how can you share your story?

Jesus's Story?

How does your church invite people to be part of its story?

Ideas for outreach.

SESSION STRUCTURE

Each session is made up of four parts:

Introducing: Helping the group to think about what they already know about the subject.

Expanding: A 3-4 minute video covering key information and ideas for the session.

Exploring: Digging deeper into the ideas covered in the video.

Praying: Audio led prayers leading the group to reflect on what has been covered and how they have responded to it.

SOCIAL MEDIA TOOLKIT

In order to spread the word about your Faith Shared course as effectively as possible, we've put together a Social Media Toolkit. This includes a list of helpful tips to make it as easy as possible to share about your Faith Shared course across your social media platforms and some images you can use. Get the Faith Shared Social Media Toolkit.

Free Download at Church Army site.

Poem for today

Begin by Brendan Kennelly

Begin again to the summoning birds
to the sight of the light at the window,
begin to the roar of morning traffic
all along Pembroke Road.
Every beginning is a promise
born in light and dying in dark
determination and exaltation of springtime
flowering the way to work.
Begin to the pageant of queuing girls
the arrogant loneliness of swans in the canal
bridges linking the past and future
old friends passing though with us still.
Begin to the loneliness that cannot end
since it perhaps is what makes us begin,
begin to wonder at unknown faces
at crying birds in the sudden rain
at branches stark in the willing sunlight
at seagulls foraging for bread

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at couples sharing a sunny secret
alone together while making good.
Though we live in a world that dreams of ending
that always seems about to give in
something that will not acknowledge conclusion
insists that we forever begin.

Pointers for prayer

Heavenly Father Mindful of the words of the prophet Isaiah
to be strong and fearless, we gather our thoughts and
prayers with hope and humbly call on You to help us in our
needs.

Give your wisdom and heavenly grace to all those who
serve our parish/congregation and to all others who hold
office in your church, that, by their service, faith may abound
and your kingdom increase.

(Short Silence)

Lord, in your Mercy: Hear our Prayer

Creator God we pray for our world leaders; for Heads of
State in Europe, The Commonwealth and for the United
Nations. We also pray for our community leaders and those
in public office dealing with difficult situations, especially all
that surrounds the ongoing Pandemic.

(Short Silence)

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Lord, in your Mercy: Hear our Prayer

Creator God, we worship You as the one who has given us this life, and ask that You will help us to live it to the full. At home may we be the friends and neighbours that we really want to be. Help us to spread the warmth of Your love to everyone we meet.

(Short Silence)

Lord, in your Mercy: Hear our Prayer

Loving God Isaiah also foretells the time when Jesus came to open the eyes of the blind and unstop deaf ears and cast out evil spirits. We especially pray for any we know who are blind or deaf and for the specialist care which they receive to help them live a normal life. Thank you too for Guide dogs for the Blind and for Hearing dogs for the Deaf and for those who train them to be so helpful.

(Short Silence)

Lord, in your Mercy: Hear our Prayer

Merciful God we pray for all who are coming to the end of their journey here on earth and pray that they may come into your presence and kingdom. We pray for all those who have come before your face and now rejoice in the fullness of life eternal.

(add names of the recently departed or an Anniversary list)

May God anoint you with His eternal blessing.
May Christ meet you in daily bread and wine.
May the Spirit's baptism fill you with love.



(Short Silence)

Lord, in your Mercy: Hear our Prayer
Faithful God we thank you that your wisdom not only enlightens us but transforms us and guides us in our daily walk through life with you. Help us, as James advises, to always accompany our words of faith with deeds of action.

Merciful Father: accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen

Speaking to the Soul

“This is a sacred day before our Lord. Don’t be dejected and sad, for the joy of the Lord is your strength!”

Nehemiah 8:10 NLT

When the people heard Ezra reading the Law of Moses they burst out crying. Presumably they did so because they were reflecting on how far they had fallen as a nation. There was a huge gulf between what God had intended and the present reality. Nehemiah and Ezra were as aware as anyone of these things but they saw this day as one for celebration and rejoicing, not for sorrow. They encouraged the people to bring together the best food and drink and to have an enormous party to celebrate what God had done. The celebrations were a recognition of the fact that the joy of the Lord was their strength.

Everybody knows what joy is and it always enhances life. The joy of birth, seeing a toddler take their first step, watching children playing happily, smelling a flower or seeing a majestic landscape, success in sport or work or the joy of finishing a jigsaw puzzle. We all know what joy feels like. But joy tends to be a brief response to a pleasant experience. It passes. Such joys enrich life but they don’t give us much strength. However, the joy of the Lord is different. When our lives are founded upon God there is a constant joyfulness which gives us strength. That was clearly the experience of Nehemiah and his remarkable effectiveness had its roots in his confidence in God. It is that relationship that is absolutely crucial. C.S. Lewis wrote, ”

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God cannot give us happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing.” The New Testament speaks of joy as being one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit. That is to say, joy is one of the results of allowing the Holy Spirit to direct our lives, and can be present whatever the circumstances we face.

QUESTION

Is the joy of the Lord your strength?

PRAYER

Loving God, help me to open my whole life to your joy.
Amen

