

Church News Ireland



Image of the day – Belfast Sitout £56,784 for Ukraine

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Belfast Sitout £56,784 for Ukraine

Dean Stephen Forde has presented a cheque for £56,784 to Rosamond Bennett, Chief Executive of Christian Aid Ireland and Jenny Williams, Chief Executive of Habitat for Humanity Ireland, raised through Belfast Cathedral's special Black Santa Sit-out for Ukraine

News reports

Black Santa Ukraine Sit-out raises more than £56,000 to date

The Dean of Belfast, the Very Rev Stephen Forde, has thanked everyone who contributed to a special Black Santa Appeal for Ukraine, which has raised more than £56,000 to date.

Dean Forde was speaking on the sixth and final sit-out on the steps of Belfast Cathedral, which began on Wednesday March 9 and continued each Wednesday afternoon through the Lent period, finishing on April 13.

Black Santa has been a familiar sight in Donegall Street every December since the tradition began in 1976, but in March this year, Dean Forde opted to bring out the familiar collecting barrel in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This is not the first time Black Santa has responded to humanitarian crises in the world. In 1974, Dean Sammy Crooks collected funds following major

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flooding in Bangladesh, and Dean Houston McKelvey staged a special sit-out in the wake of the Boxing Day tsunami of 2004.

Dean Forde said: “A massive thank you to everyone who has contributed to the current total of £56,784 raised for the Black Santa Lent Appeal for Ukraine.

“Over the past six weeks of Lent, unimaginable horrors have been endured by the citizens of Ukraine. These traumas will take decades, if not generations to heal. At the same time, the equivalent of more than half the population of this island have fled as refugees – women and children who have left behind their husbands, sons and fathers to fight a brutal invading army. Some children have stopped speaking. Others draw pictures of planes bombing their towns.”

The Dean continued: “Through the generosity of so many from Belfast and beyond, humanitarian support is being provided to people whose lives have been torn apart by a needless war. This giving has provided the resources for Habitat for Humanity and Christian Aid Ireland to respond to immediate need, and establish longer term support.

“Food, battery packs for mobile phones, ruck sacks, heaters and tents have been provided at border crossings and railway stations. Medicines and emergency food is making its way to Ukraine. Accommodation is being fitted out for thousands of women and children in the countries neighbouring Ukraine.

“All this has been made possible through the generosity of those who have given.”

Dean Forde presented the proceeds of his Black Santa Appeal to date to Jenny Williams, Chief Executive of Habitat for Humanity Ireland, and Rosamond Bennett, Chief Executive of Christian Aid Ireland, at his final Lent Sit-out on Wednesday April 13.

The Appeal will remain open on the dedicated Black Santa website for anyone wishing to make a donation.

Archbishop pleads for help for suffering families at annual Mass for the Disappeared

THE head of the Catholic Church in Ireland has pleaded with those who have information on the still-missing victims of paramilitaries to help end the "agonising wait" faced by families, Paul Ainsworth writes in the Irish News. April 11.

Archbishop Eamon Martin spoke at the annual Mass for the Disappeared at St Patrick's Cathedral in Armagh yesterday, where he acknowledged the "unanswered questions and unresolved pain" of loved ones whose relatives were abducted and murdered by republicans and loyalists.

He praised the work of the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains for its role in helping recover the bodies of many abducted during the height of the Troubles, and called for help for those who remain missing.

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In his homily, he highlighted ongoing cases including Columba McVeigh, who was kidnapped by the IRA in 1975 at the age of 17, and Lisa Dorrian, who was last seen in 2005. It is believed the 25-year-old Co Down woman was abducted by loyalists.

"Their families have faced not only the trauma of sudden loss but also the added agony of not knowing where their loved ones are buried and why, and how they were taken," he said.

"I appeal again to the conscience of anyone who can help with the cases of Lisa Dorrian, Joe Lynskey – who still hasn't been found after 50 years – Seamus Maguire, Columba McVeigh and Robert Nairac to bring forward even the slightest clues, so that the agonising wait of you, their families and support persons, can be shortened, and those who remain hidden can at last have a Christian burial."



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Messy Easter Church Armagh



On Saturday last St Patrick's Cathedral hosted a diocesan Messy Easter Church event.



East Belfast Mission head claims Council practicing religious discrimination in Queen's Platinum Jubilee grants process

Belfast City Council and Community Foundation for Northern Ireland face claims of 'religious discrimination' in barring faith based groups from grants process for Queen's Platinum Jubilee celebration

The leader of an east Belfast charity says that 'religious discrimination' is stopping him applying for funds from Belfast City Council to host a street party in celebration of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, Philipo Bradfield writes in the News Letter, April 11.

Rev Brian Anderson head up the East Belfast Mission, which has a particular focus on supporting homeless people and the unemployed.

He was hoping to apply for a grant from Belfast City Council to run a street party to mark the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. But when he found out the council had appointed the Community Foundation for NI (CFNI) to distribute the funds he realised he could not apply.

"We have found before that the CFNI will not grant any funds to faith based groups," he said. The EBM previously applied for funds from CFNI to distribute women's sanitary products.

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“But they simply said it was written into their constitution that they don’t grant funds to faith based groups and after checking with a lawyer they were satisfied it was legal.”

However Rev Anderson notes that despite being faith based, his organisation receives 90% of its funding from

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NIHE and Belfast City Council. And he notes that many faith based groups across NI have been given state funding for projects for decades, including faith-based schools and youth projects. So he does not understand why CFNI sticks so rigidly to the principle of refusing to work with faith-based groups, or how it can be in the wider public interest to do so.

“I would understand funds being withheld if I was using them to distribute religious literature. But that is not what we are doing.”

He has written to the Queen - whom he notes is a professing Christian believer - to ask if she is aware that funding is being withheld from groups like his for the celebrations.

Rev Anderson said that the Departments of Health and Communities both also persist in using CFNI to distribute funds despite what he describes as “the religious discrimination” in its constitution.

The News Letter put it to Belfast City Council that the decision to use CFNI meant that it knowingly ruled out funding any platinum jubilee grants for churches, faith based community groups or the loyal orders.

The News Letter asked the council to explain its rationale for using CFNI and to explain how the choice was compatible with its equality policies. The council did not offer any clear answers to the questions.

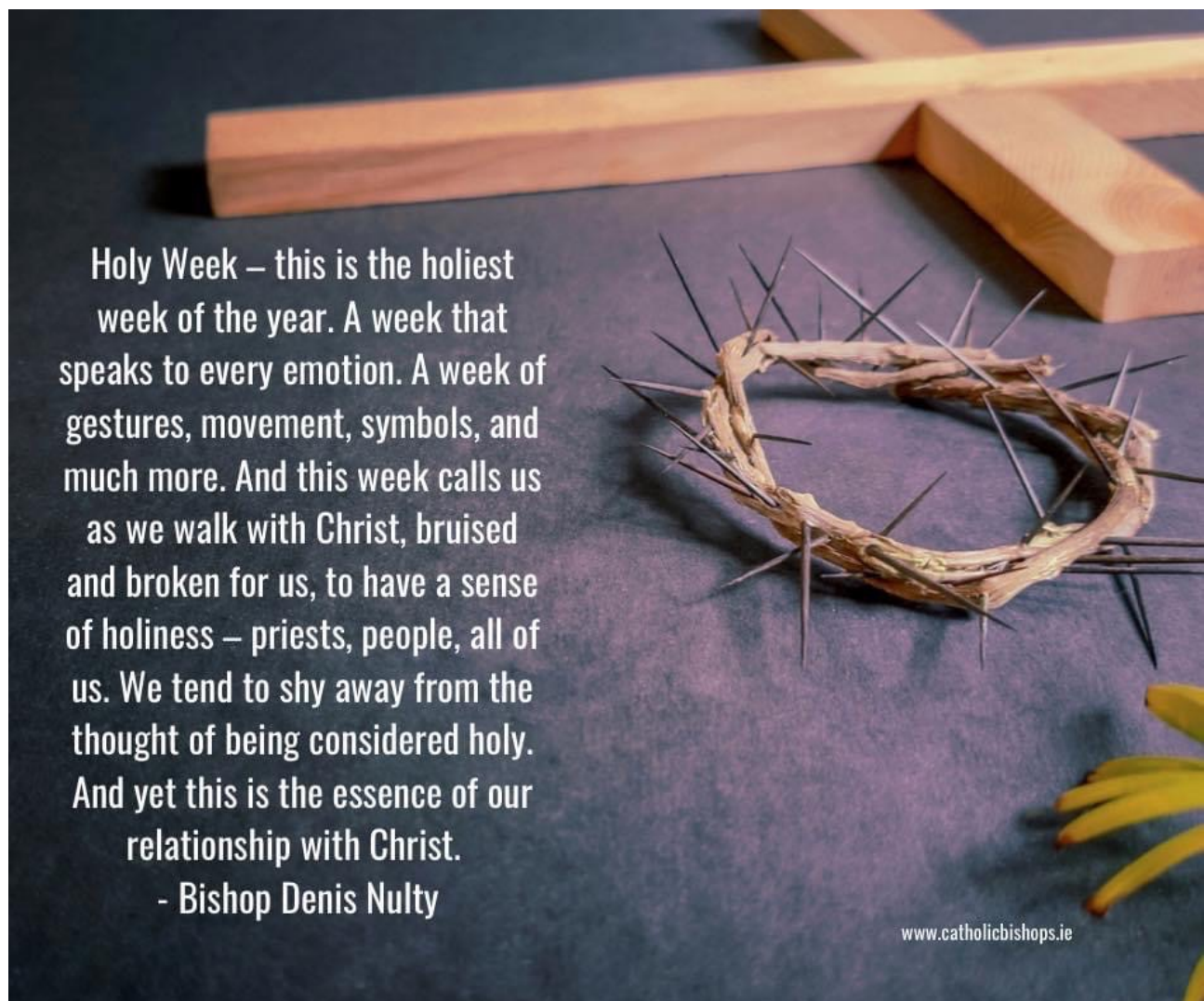
A council spokeswoman said: “At February’s meeting of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, elected

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members agreed that Community Foundation NI (CFNI) would administer a funding programme, on behalf of Belfast City Council, to support groups organising community events over the Queen's Platinum Jubilee weekend.

“Officers are working closely with CFNI to provide support to those organisations who do not currently meet CFNI's funding guidelines, but whose proposed event meets the criteria of the fund.

“This will enable as many groups as possible to submit an application for funding before the deadline of 1pm on Monday 11 April, and no groups meeting the application



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criteria will be excluded, subject to the fund not being over-subscribed.”

The News Letter asked CFNI if its policy to exclude faith based groups from grants was not religious discrimination and whether this was approved by the charity Commission? The charity did not directly answer the questions.

“The founding documents of the Community Foundation have limitations in our ability to directly fund certain groups, affirmed legally,” it replied. “Organisations with purposes to advance religion can seek an eligible umbrella organisation to work with and are welcome to submit an application to the Foundation for an eligible project on their behalf.”

The News Letter also invited the Departments of Health and Communities to explain how using CFNI is compatible with equality guidelines. Neither had offered any comment at the time of going to press.

The Charity Commission said it will consider the information in full before deciding any next steps which may be required.

[[] <https://www.newsletter.co.uk/heritage-and-retro/heritage/belfast-city-council-and-community-foundation-for-northern-ireland-face-claims-of-religious-discrimination-in-barring-faith-based-groups-from-grants-process-for-queens-platinum-jubilee-celebration-3648665>]

Catholic activist group petition against QFT's Good Friday 'fraud' film Benedetta

A Catholic activist group has hit out at the Queen's Film Theatre cinema in Belfast for screening a 'blasphemous' movie about a lesbian nun on Good Friday, Maureen Coleman writes in the Belfast Telegraph, April 11

The Irish Society for Christian Civilisation branded Dutch director Paul Verhoeven's film *Benedetta* "a fraud" and "a blatant attack on the Catholic faith".

The film is due to be shown at the QFT this Friday and, ahead of its screening, the ISCC has gathered around 13,000 signatures for a petition which it plans to send to MUBI, the London-based distributor, and to the QFT.

The synopsis for *Benedetta*, which stars Virginie Efira, says: "A 17th-century nun in Italy suffers from disturbing and erotic visions. She is assisted by a companion and the relationship between the two women develops into a romantic love affair."

According to the ISCC, the film contains a number of controversial scenes, including the use of a statuette of the Virgin Mary as a sex toy by lesbian nuns.

Loosely based on the 1986 non-fiction book *Immodest Acts: The Life Of A Lesbian Nun In Renaissance Italy* by Judith C Brown, the film sparked protests outside cinemas in the US when it was released last December.



“This movie is a fraud and nothing more than a blatant attack on the Catholic faith,” said Damien Murphy, a spokesman for the Irish Society for Christian Civilisation.

“To launch this film on Good Friday is a calculated insult to Christians everywhere. And shame on the Queen’s Film Theatre in Belfast for permitting this showing at any time, but especially on this highly significant religious occasion.”

Mr Murphy said the film claimed to tell the story of Sister Benedetta Carlini, an early 17th-century abbess of the Theatine convent in Pescia.

The nun was the subject of an inquest by Church authorities between 1619 and 1623.

Among the accusations laid against her by other nuns were that she was a fake stigmatist and under demonic possession.

She was ultimately removed from her position and died repentant and reconciled with the church in 1661.

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“Catholics have been silent for too long in the face of these attacks against our faith,” said Mr Murphy.

“From now on we will be making our voices heard through peaceful protest and public prayer.”

The QFT has been contacted for a response.

The cinema’s website describes the movie as a “subversive erotic drama based on the true story of a 17th-century nun entangled in a forbidden lesbian affair”.

It adds: “Verhoeven’s intoxicating latest is a transgressive and alluring look at faith, power and religion and is every bit as scandalous as you would expect from the controversial filmmaker.”

Millions spent on cross-border cultural peace programmes since Good Friday Agreement

Museums reflect a society’s history, but sometimes they are part of it.

In 1993, the IRA exploded a 1000lb bomb on the tree-lined Georgian mall at the heart of Armagh City, targeting the local courthouse, and damaging other buildings including the Armagh County Museum.

“All the windows were blown out at the front, a few at the side. The windows at the front were 16 feet high and

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covered two floors,” says Catherine McCullough, a museum expert who worked there at the time.

“And we were very lucky that the glass blew out, and not in, because if it was blown in it would have damaged one of the most important collections of George Russell's paintings in the world,” she told The Detail.

[[] https://www.thedetail.tv/?utm_campaign=2415-millions-spent-on-cross-border-cultural-&utm]

Priest says it's 'sad' Catholic Church will bless tractors but not same-sex couples when they marry

A well-known priest has congratulated Olympic medallist Kellie Harrington and her wife Mandy Loughlin on their wedding and criticised the Catholic Church's stance on same-sex blessings as “out of date”, Sarah Mac Donald writes in the Independent.ie, April 10.

Fr Paddy Byrne, parish priest of Abbeyleix, Ballinakill, Raheen in Co Laois, lamented the “sad” fact that he can bless tractors and cars but not a loving same-sex couple.

Speaking to the Irish Independent he said the boxer and healthcare worker “encompasses and personifies all that Christianity is about”.

In a tweet, Fr Byrne described Kelly Harrington as “a national treasure” and said he wished her and her partner health and happiness.

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“I find it sad that as church we can bless cars, tractors...I’m not assuming this couple may want such ritual, but for many likewise who do we should,” he wrote.

He was congratulated by Labour TD, Aodhán Ó Ríordáin, for his comments.

Fr Byrne told the Irish Independent the Church’s ban on same-sex blessings is “one of the reasons why the level of practice among under 60s at the moment is in freefall”.

He added: “It is not about diluting the truth of Christianity – it is about embracing the consequences of the radical love of Jesus Christ.”

Referring to the sense of exclusion many gay couples feel within Catholicism, he asked: “How can we continue to alienate these couples at such a happy moment in their lives and not offer at least some form of recognition – spiritual nourishment – and ritual?”

He said he did not know Kellie personally or anything about her religious background or tradition, but he felt it was a “paradox” that cars and tractors can be blessed when a committed couple could not.

“I wanted to acknowledge a happy moment in her life particularly in the context of Holy Week, which is a narrative about inclusion, love and welcome.

“These couples aren’t from the moon, they are from loving families, they are our siblings, they are our people, they are us – they are humanity.”

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Stressing that he was “not a maverick in any way”, he said people on the ground in the Church buy into the need to offer gay couples a ritual to mark their commitment.

“I speak on behalf of the vast majority of the members of the parishes that I serve and particularly the younger members of those parishes. I speak on behalf of clergy as well. The majority of us find it not just disappointing but almost embarrassing that we cannot celebrate these occasions in our churches,” he said.

Christian group to sue if conversion therapy is banned

A Christian group is preparing to sue the government over its ban on conversion therapy, claiming that “religious and human rights will be breached”.

The move follows the Government’s about-turn on plans to scrap a conversion therapy ban.

Ministers now say that a ban on conversion therapy for lesbian, gay and bisexual people will go ahead, but that conducting the treatment on transgender people will still be permitted.

Christian Concern’s legal challenge would involve an application for a declaration of incompatibility under Section 4 of the Human Rights Act, as a ban would infringe freedom of the individual to exercise personal autonomy.

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However, Stonewall, the LGBT charity, has highlighted religious leaders, including the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Williams of Oystermouth, who have supported the ban on conversion therapy.

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Andrea Williams, chief executive of Christian Concern, said: “Whatever is announced by the Government in May, the problems remain: the definitions are inadequate, human rights will be breached and there is no evidence that a ban will help anyone. In such a scenario, we will face no alternative but to pursue legal action against any proposed legislation in this area.”

Ms Williams added: “The Government is being strong-armed by manipulative campaigns rather than following its own research that further legislation is not needed.”

Christian Concern has threatened the Government with legal proceedings on the grounds of infringement upon rights of “religious freedom”, enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights, if the plans go ahead and are announced as part of the Queen’s Speech on May 10.

A spokesman for Stonewall said: “With half of conversion practices happening in religious settings, LGBTQ+ people of faith make up one of the largest groups of victims.

“That’s why we’re heartened that numerous religious leaders recently wrote to the Prime Minister in support of a ban.

“We must continue to look to religious leaders who, rather than turn a blind eye to abuse, wish to address the harms done to other people who deeply hold and value their religious beliefs and community.”

2022 Easter Message from The Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, the Right Reverend Dr David Bruce

I have spent half of the last month away from my office, touring churches and projects in Counties Down, Antrim and Derry. In many ways, the things people have told me, as we have met in their homes, or places of work, have not been a great surprise.

Local councillors lament what they see as lack of support from central government. Small business owners lament what they see as lack of support from local councils. Some farmers lament what they see as a set of perpetually moving goalposts, rendering many of their commercial activities uneconomic. Healthcare workers in hospitals are exhausted, and in need of some love. They are genuine heroes – as are teachers and classroom assistants in our schools.

There is genuine frustration that the Northern Ireland Executive has stopped functioning. A few folk have told me that they are fed up with politics and politicians. They see lies and deceit in high places, especially London, and wonder at the gullibility of an electorate which tolerates it. When trust in leaders erodes, the whole of society gets sick.

I heard differing views on Brexit and the Protocol, some more passionately expressed than others. The same was true if the topic of a 'New Ireland' came up. With such a diverse set of opinions in the pews before me, as I led worship over the weekends of these tours, I wanted to step

away from the expectation that I reinforce one stance over another.

That is not what the Church is for. And here is the really great thing about the Christian gospel, fully expressed in the Easter story of hope. No matter what your politics, tradition or background, or indeed your experience of trauma, stress and concern, God's extraordinary love trumps them all.

So, as my wife and I walked with Street Pastors in the late evening chill in one of our larger towns, the talk wasn't "whose church is best" or "what do you believe about this or that?" It was offering a drink of water to a lad who needed it, or some reassurance to a girl who was trying too hard to be accepted by her peers.

These small acts of kindness offered every week without fail, authenticate grace in the minds of a generation who don't see it demonstrated often enough by the rich and powerful. It was watching the meticulous work of a volunteer stacking shelves with tins of peaches at the back of a church building, because their foodbank was about to open.

The fact that we need foodbanks at all is of course scandalous and a major social and political issue, which needs to be addressed head on. But the fact that we are able to run foodbanks all over the place, stocked by voluntary donations and staffed by ordinary people giving up their time without fanfare or publicity, is a miracle of practical Christian care. I was so proud and humbled to watch them at work.

Easter explains that God pushes back the frontiers of evil and death. Good Friday's story of death gave way to Easter Sunday's story of new life. We live, and then die – but Christ died, and then lived.

This reversal of the natural order which Christians celebrate with their call and response: "Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed!" describes much more than a remarkable moment in history. We see a glimpse of the world working in a wholly different way. In such hope, we offer a cup of cold water in his Name, and lend a hand to stack the shelves of a foodbank.

In the media

Archbishop of York's appearance on Good Morning Britain and follow up coverage.

<https://www.express.co.uk/showbiz/tv-radio/1594167/Ukraine-invasion-update-Vladimir-Putin-latest-Archbishop-of-York>

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2022/04/11/ukraine-russia-war-latest-news-zelensky-putin-talks/#update-20220411-1351>

Report from Kyiv's Anglican congregation who are still praying together despite the war in Ukraine.

[<https://www.episcopalnewsservice.org/2022/04/11/kyivs-anglicans-spread-across-europe-continue-to-meet/>]

Further coverage of the debate around a ban on conversion therapy.

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<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2021/04/10/conversion-therapy-ban-would-criminalise-christian-parents-stopping/>

Feature on Revd Simon Butler, vicar of St Mary's Upton Grey in Basingstone, who is set to race at Le Mans next year.

<https://www.thesun.co.uk/motors/18236103/vicar-races-le-mans/>

Poem for today

Sunday Morning by Louis MacNeice

Down the road someone is practising scales,
The notes like little fishes vanish with a wink of tails,
Man's heart expands to tinker with his car
For this is Sunday morning, Fate's great bazaar;
Regard these means as ends, concentrate on this Now,

And you may grow to music or drive beyond Hindhead
anyhow,
Take corners on two wheels until you go so fast
That you can clutch a fringe or two of the windy past,
That you can abstract this day and make it to the week of
time
A small eternity, a sonnet self-contained in rhyme.

But listen, up the road, something gulps, the church spire
Open its eight bells out, skulls' mouths which will not tire
To tell how there is no music or movement which secures
Escape from the weekday time. Which deadens and
endures.

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Speaking to the soul

Short reading and a prayer - daily on this site

Church News Ireland

The publication of Church News Ireland is overseen by Very Rev Dr Houston McKelvey OBE, QVRM, TD. He may be contacted at houstonmckelvey@mac.com
