



**Image  
of the day**

**Round  
Tower,  
Antrim**

## **Churches and civic groups clash over who will control future sex education in schools**

**Churches and civic groups have set out sharply contrasting views on the future shape of sex education in NI, Philip Bradfield reports in the Belfast Newsletter.**

Yesterday a coalition of civic organisations under the banner 'Raise Your Voice' published an open letter to Education Minister Peter Weir calling for "compulsory, comprehensive and standardised relationships and sexuality education (RSE) in schools".

The group said: "It is time the minister listened to the needs of young people in NI and those who work in education, sexual health and support services, who are asking him to act promptly."

The alliance is made up of civil society groups such as the union Unison, the Children's Law Centre, Amnesty International NI, Rape Crisis NI and LGBT groups.

The Department for Communities recently made recommendations to reform sex education based on input from its panels on gender equality and sexual orientation.

And Secretary of State Brandon Lewis has laid regulations in Parliament which impose on him a duty to implement recommendations on abortion and sex education for NI made by a UN committee.



However, the four largest churches have all argued that the status quo – where schools decide their own approach to sex education – must be maintained.

A spokesperson for the Presbyterian Church in Ireland spoke of “the worrying prospect of major changes being made to how Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE), is taught in Northern Ireland’s schools through the imposition of a standardised curriculum”.

They added: “We would be highly concerned that changes imposed on schools, either through new powers acquired by the secretary of state that undercuts devolution, or through departmental advisory bodies that are not fully representative of the totality of RSE stakeholders, would seriously undermine the school’s ability to link RSE to its values and ethos, in line with Department of Education guidance.”

April 29, 2021

In their own statements, the Church of Ireland, Methodist Church of Ireland and Catholic Schools Trustee Service likewise all argued that, in line with current Department of Education policy and associated legislation, RSE should be delivered within the context of the ethos of each school.

The view of the churches has been echoed by the Iona Institute, Evangelical Alliance and CARE NI.

News Letter 28.04.2021

## **PCI: Secretary of State's new powers 'destructive'**

**The Presbyterian Church in Ireland has called Westminster's confirmation of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland's abortion powers 'deeply regrettable' and 'a sad day not only for devolution', which has been seriously undermined, 'but also for the protection of unborn children...' In light of Parliament's approval, the Church has also called on the Secretary of State not use these new powers and reflect on how destructive they could be.**

Speaking after today's debate on the Abortion (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2021 in the House of Lords, the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, Right Reverend Dr David Bruce said, "When the Secretary of State introduced regulations last month seeking powers to implement abortion legislation over and above the heads of MLAs, we described the move as 'unreasonable, unacceptable, ill-considered and irresponsible'.

“We deeply regret that Parliament has now given its approval for these radical and sweeping powers, which not only devalue Northern Ireland’s purposely unique system of negotiated government, but also give the Secretary of State the freedom to interfere directly, and at will, with every single department of devolved government.

“It is difficult to reconcile the fact that during the three years when Northern Ireland didn’t have a functioning Executive, his predecessors did not find it necessary to intervene in its governance, except on budgetary matters and other minor ways. Yet now, when Ministers are in office and seeking to govern together, this radical move is now deemed to be essential.”

Dr Bruce continued, “The Secretary of State, and those supportive of devolution, cannot claim to be upholding Northern Ireland’s fragile devolved settlement, while at the same time facilitating this ill-considered and irresponsible intervention which cherry-picks issues and undermines that very system. It should not be forgotten that nearly 80% of those who responded to the public consultation on the abortion regulations in 2019 were against the proposals.

“This is a sad day not only for devolution, but also for the protection of unborn children, leaving children with Down’s syndrome and other conditions unprotected and incredibly vulnerable, not to mention those perceived to be of the ‘wrong’ gender. We call on the Secretary of State not use these new powers and reflect on how destructive they could be.”



## India Covid crisis: 'People are in despair,' says Tearfund



Bodies are being burned around the clock at make-shift crematoriums amid India's devastating second wave. Photo courtesy Sky News

**Tearfund's Country Director for India has revealed the scale of the challenge facing the country as it spirals into a deeper Covid crisis.**

In the brutal second wave, hundreds of thousands of people are being diagnosed with Covid-19 and at least 2,000 are dying from the virus every day across India.

Prince David, who heads up Tearfund's operations in India said he is afraid to answer his phone in case it is another call to tell him someone he knows has died.

April 29, 2021

He described an atmosphere of fear across India.

"Every time I pick up my phone, I am very fearful. Since nine o'clock this morning, I have answered my phone three times to hear that another of my friends has died," he said.

"People are in despair. It is tough. Even people who have been very courageous in other situations are saying 'I am scared this time and I don't know what's happening around me.'"

Horrific reports from the country tell of bodies being lined up on the streets ahead of mass cremations, and people being turned away from overwhelmed hospitals.

Medical oxygen, intensive care beds and medicine to treat Covid-19 are all reported to be in short supply.

David continued, "My friend told me earlier this week that the hospital his wife works in only had sufficient oxygen to last the next six hours."

Through local partners, Tearfund is providing food, water and counselling to migrant workers left destitute by the economic fallout of lockdown.

It is also trying to help people continue earning a living during the crisis.

"We are helping those who have walked in desperation back to their villages to increase their agricultural production and find places to sell," he said.

April 29, 2021

"We are also creating jobs in new infrastructure projects that will benefit the community. It's about restoring people's dignity and increasing their income long term."

The scale of the second wave is making that harder, and communities will need long-term support, he admitted.

"My concern is that our plans to hand over to communities the management of their own sustainable development will be delayed," he said.

"The progress they have made to increase their resilience since the first lockdown is being frustrated by the second wave.

"Farmers who grow and sell produce in the market are telling us that they are not earning enough because there are few buyers. The cash economy has been massively affected and it's not going to recover in the short term."

Despite the crisis that continues to grip the country, David said he drew "hope" from the "aspirational" character of Indians.

"After major disasters, we have seen communities build their resilience, go back to life and continue from there," he said.

"It is going to take time. It takes a lot of effort. It takes a lot of investment.

"Once the cases of coronavirus go down, people will spring back. They are going to go back to work. They are going to restart their businesses.



April 29, 2021

"Right now, it's a very difficult phase."

## **Rector reacts to vandalism of historic Derry rectory**

Police are appealing for information after thousands of pounds of damage was caused to a historic County Derry rectory following a spate of vandalism last week, Liam Tunney at Derry Now reports.

Several windows at the 19th century Georgian rectory which serves St Lurach's Church of Ireland Parish, Maghera and Killelagh were damaged in the incident.

The building is in the process of being refurbished, and the windows had recently been reinstalled at a cost of £70,000.

The PSNI confirmed they are investigating the incident and appealed for anyone with information to come forward.

"Sometime between 5.00pm on Thursday April 22 and 6:20am on Friday April 23, it was reported that entry was gained to a vacant premises in the area," said Inspector Knipe.

"It was reported that a number of windows were damaged during the incident in the Church Street area of Maghera.

"Enquiries are continuing and we would appeal to anyone with any information in relation to this incident to contact police on 101, quoting reference number 346 23/04/21.

April 29, 2021

“A report can also be made online via [ <http://www.psni.police.uk/makeareport/> ] or call Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555 111 or online at [ <http://crimestoppers-uk.org/> ].

Video at - [ [ <https://www.derrynow.com/video/multimedia/628497/watch-parish-rector-reacts-to-st-lurachs-vandalism.html> ] ]

## **Anglican Communion prays for the Catholic community of South Sudan after shooting of bishop**

**The Anglican Communion has responded to Sunday night’s attack at the Catholic diocesan offices in Rumbek, in which the Catholic Bishop-Elect of Rumbek, Christian Carlassare, was shot.**

The Primate of the Episcopal Church of South Sudan, Archbishop Justin Badi Arama, said that the Anglican Church in the country was saddened to learn of the shooting. He said: “As people of God, we are called to live in peace with each other and those around us – ‘if one member suffers, all suffer together’ (1 Corinthians 12:26).

“We share in the pain of our brother, Bishop-elect Christian Carlassare, and we pray for his quick recovery and healing and that all involved find forgiveness and reconciliation to move forward and shine as an example of God in Rumbek Diocese and throughout South Sudan.”



## Bishop-elect Christian Carlassare

The Secretary General of the Anglican Communion, Archbishop Josiah Idowu-Fearon, said: “In my visits to South Sudan I have seen how close Catholic, Anglican, and other Christians are. The shooting of Bishop-Elect Christian Carlassare will have sent shockwaves through all the churches of South Sudan; as it has amongst Christian communities outside the country.

“I join with Archbishop Justin Badi Arama in praying for Bishop Christian and urge Anglicans and other Christians around the world to do the same.”

A Lambeth Palace spokesperson added: “we pray with our brothers and sisters in South Sudan for the recovery of the Catholic Bishop-Elect of Rumbek Diocese. We support

April 29, 2021

Archbishop Justin Badi's call for us to remember that 'as people of God we are called to live in peace with each other and those around us'.

"We share the pain of this violence against the Bishop-Elect and the pain of all who suffer in South Sudan. May South Sudanese leaders re-double efforts to implement R-ARCSS and bring peace to the nation."

## **Opinion - Without pragmatism, the protocol will poison Northern Irish politics - Peter Shirlow**

**While loud voices demand unyielding political conviction, the majority's hopes for jobs and investment in the wake of Brexit are ignored, Peter Shirley writes in The Guardian.**

The historian Alexandre Koyré once said: "The mob believes everything it is told." Too often in Northern Ireland, it is the politicians that believe everything the mob tells them. Propagandised loyalist bloggers and social media activists have unmerited impact. As do those who state Irish unity is just around the corner despite surveys, conducted since 1998, showing support far below what is required to actually make it happen.

When I speak to people offering these perspectives, I am depressingly informed evidence "doesn't matter". The reactive party politics we are again witnessing in Northern Ireland is conditioned by the mood of those who demand unyielding political party convictions at the cost of acting

April 29, 2021

reasonably. It's a case of the angry wheel that squeaks the loudest receiving the oil. Such political short-termism is out of kilter with the majority who have moved on from sectarian divides, and who await an equally impassioned response to their desire for jobs and investment. Reactive demand, in Northern Ireland, still trumps rational hopes.

In Contagion of Uncertainty, a research paper I published with Michael D'Arcy last June, we highlighted how the protocol as a result of the Brexit trade deal could affect trade and inter-community dynamics in Northern Ireland. We warned that while protecting the north-south dimension, it lacked equivalent protection going east-west. We highlighted that the majority of the electorate in Northern Ireland were opposed to checks on goods in either direction. Virtually no one listened.

Brexit began with a threat of deep unrest from one direction and ended in violence from another, as we saw in Belfast in recent weeks. Public anxiety over empty shelves and businesses in Great Britain no longer trading with Northern Ireland has grown as the provisions of the protocol kicked in at the start of the year – and anxiety and uncertainty has led to worse reactions. For some unionists the protocol has the hallmarks of a treacherous act, which unfolds as unionist belligerence and hostility to government and authority.

Despite the riots in Belfast, we have been fortunate that some loyalist groups refused to bring violence on to the streets when pressured to do so. Figures in the community promoted social media campaigns warning against violence. However, I sense there are elements that lack such tolerance, who will challenge broadminded loyalism and



April 29, 2021

organise future protests. London and Brussels must understand that social divisions on the ground are deepening.

The only solution to growing tension is pragmatic and flexible leadership – that needs to come from Belfast, Dublin, London and Brussels. The choices made now are crucial. Everyone knows the protocol is law, but more importantly there must be an appreciation that how it is implemented is pivotal to whether we can have better future outcomes, or things get even worse.

The EU must understand several things. First, protecting the single market must be proportionate given Northern Ireland's location and economic size. Europe simply has to be more trusting regarding goods at risk. Second, in seeking protection of the single market it must be aware of potentially disastrous societal consequences. Finally, avoiding escalation in tensions in Northern Ireland will depend on trade between Great Britain and Northern Ireland being as frictionless as possible.

Although there are provisions via the UK-EU joint committee to examine problems with the protocol, there is no obvious framework through which the Northern Ireland executive has direct influence. But the executive must work with existing mechanisms to have its voice heard. For that to happen, the political mood has to change. Nationalists and republicans need to recognise that the UK government amended the Northern Ireland Act to protect rights, as well as signposting north-south development. Unionism and loyalists need to accept that the Channel Islands, Gibraltar and other places

April 29, 2021

have a different relationship with the EU than the UK, without undermining constitutional integrity.

The Northern Ireland executive can, as permitted under the Good Friday agreement, speak directly to the European commission. It can also set up monitoring systems to allow the business community to outline impacts and opportunities of the current arrangements: doing so will help bolster reasoned civic leadership. The executive could promote Northern Ireland as a site that responsibly offers access to the EU customs code and the UK customs territory. These are vitally important choices.

It is time for policies based on evidence that link the centrality of the economy to continued peace-building. If the protocol is damaging to the economy of Northern Ireland, I sincerely hope London and Brussels have a plan B. Furthermore, all executive members should be engaging with the north-south ministerial council (as set up under the GFA), and the various governments of these islands need to convene the British-Irish intergovernmental council.

If people are concerned by the impact of Brexit, they need to be assured that the executive and all other actors have the ability to find new solutions. Maybe it is time to revisit how Northern Ireland addresses its long-term economic challenges in dynamic and innovative ways supported by the protocol and the GFA – and with additional backing from the US, UK and EU.

None of those involved in Brexit have emerged with their reputation intact, but there is still time to think creatively. Conflict is not the real problem here. Determining blame is

April 29, 2021

not a solution. The critical issue is whether inflexibility is now so deeply rooted that new actions or pragmatic answers cannot be found.

Prof Peter Shirlow FAcSS is director of the Institute of Irish Studies at the University of Liverpool. He is author of *The End of Ulster Loyalism?*

The Guardian 26.04.2021

## **Books, Broadcasts, Resources and Webinars**

### **Florence Nightingale Commemoration Service at Westminster Abbey**

The annual Florence Nightingale Commemoration Service this year will be one of remembrance and thanks to nurses and midwives

Please join in paying tribute by streaming this socially distanced event at Westminster Abbey, May 12:

<http://ow.ly/Zoba50ExwHu>

If you would like to receive a reminder of the event nearer the time, please register your interest here for free:

<http://ow.ly/7iWL50ExwHt>

Westminster Abbey Commemoration Service: Live Stream Tickets, Wed 12 May 2021 at 17:00 | Eventbrite

April 29, 2021

[<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/westminster-abbey-commemoration-service-live-stream-tickets-152098935009?>]

## **Media review**

### **Why India's Covid crisis matters to the whole world**

BBC News

[[] <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-56907007> ]

### **Northern Ireland minister sends oxygen units to India**

Belfast Telegraph

[[] <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/ni-sends-three-oxygen-units-to-help-indias-covid-19-battle-40366733.html> ]

### **Minister of church with DUP ties: A party leader must halt moral decline**

Belfast Newsletter

Rev Ian Brown took over as minister of Martyrs' Memorial Free Presbyterian Church from DUP founder Ian Paisley in 2013.

[[] <https://www.newsletter.co.uk/news/politics/minister-of-church-with-dup-ties-a-party-leader-must-halt-moral-decline-3217494> ]

### **Arlene Foster: From trailblazing leader to party civil war**

BBC News

[[] <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-38320780> ]

### **Arlene Foster and the DUP**

April 29, 2021

Belfast Newsletter

Sammy Wilson and Gregory Campbell 'refused' to sign letter demanding ousting of Arlene Foster

**Entire Derry Sinn Féin leadership asked to stand aside.**

Irish Examiner

[[] <https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/politics/arid-40275416.html> ]

**The final hurdle: Post-Brexit trade deal given 'big green light' by MEPs**

Journal.ie

Members of the European Parliament had threatened to reject the agreement over the UK's actions on the NI Protocol.

[[] <https://www.thejournal.ie/post-brexit-trade-deal-passed-european-parliament-5422100-Apr2021/> ]

**Maternity hospital will not be impacted by religious ethos, Donnelly says**

The Irish Times

There is no way that reproductive health services which the Government or Health Service Executive wants to provide at the planned new national maternity hospital could be stopped or watered down due to any religious ethos, the Minister for Health has said. Stephen Donnelly said no religious ethos could be imposed at the planned new hospital that would impact on services under any circumstances. "That is an absolute red line," he said.

[[] <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/maternity-hospital-will-not-be-impacted-by-religious-ethos-donnelly-says-1.4549468> ]





## Pointers for prayer

Mighty God,  
in whom we know the power of redemption,  
you stand among us in the shadows of our time.  
As we move through every sorrow and trial of this life,  
uphold us with knowledge of the final morning  
when, in the glorious presence of your risen Son,  
we will share in his resurrection,  
redeemed and restored to the fullness of life  
and forever freed to be your people. Amen.

Living God,  
long ago, faithful women  
proclaimed the good news  
of Jesus' resurrection,  
and the world was changed forever.  
Teach us to keep faith with them,  
that our witness may be as bold,  
our love as deep,  
and our faith as true. Amen.

April 29, 2021

Creator of the universe,  
you made the world in beauty,  
and restore all things in glory  
through the victory of Jesus Christ.

We pray that, wherever your image is still disfigured  
by poverty, sickness, selfishness, war and greed,  
the new creation in Jesus Christ may appear in justice, love,  
and peace, to the glory of your name. Amen.

O God, your Son remained with his disciples after his  
resurrection, teaching them to love all people as neighbours.  
As his disciples in this age,  
we offer our prayers on behalf of the universe  
in which we are privileged to live  
and our neighbours with whom we share it...

...Your intercessions ....

Open our hearts to your power moving  
around us and between us and within us,  
until your glory is revealed in our love of both friend and  
enemy,  
in communities transformed by justice and compassion,  
and in the healing of all that is broken. Amen.

Holy God,  
you have called us to follow in the way of your risen Son,  
and to care for those who are our companions,  
not only with words of comfort, but with acts of love.

Seeking to be true friends of all,  
we offer our prayers on behalf of the church and the  
world....

...Your intercessions ....

Guide us in the path of discipleship,  
so that, as you have blessed us,

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April 29, 2021

we may be a blessing for others,  
bringing the promise of the kingdom near  
by our words and deeds. Amen.

## Speaking to the Soul

**I always thank my God for you and for the gracious gifts he has given you, now that you belong to Christ Jesus. Through him, God has enriched your church in every way.**

1 Corinthians 1:4-5 NLT

If you know anything at all about the church in Corinth you will know that it was a disaster area. Everything seemed to be going wrong. They were divided. They had a case of incest in the church and nothing had been done to sort it out. Their times of worship were an embarrassment. They totally misunderstood what the gifts of the Spirit were for, and viewed them competitively. It's hard to find anything to celebrate but look how Paul starts this letter. He gives thanks for them and for the way in which God had blessed them and rejoices in the way that through Jesus God has enriched them in every way. I love this! He could have kicked off the letter with a long list of moans, but he doesn't. He begins with encouragement.

My junior school was very small and so I found my huge secondary school a very bewildering place. I had never been a part of anything like it before. I struggled with the work and didn't do very well at first. And I will never forget the piece of work that I did for a Geography teacher when I was 12 which he marked as "excellent". Nobody had ever

April 29, 2021

told me that I had ever done anything excellent before, and his words changed everything. I saw myself in a new light. It's so important to use words of encouragement and particularly when we need to say something that is critical. Before we dare to say a single negative word we need to think of all the genuinely encouraging things that we can say.

Words of encouragement don't normally need to be long. They may be communicated in a quick text or on a card or in a brief email. But they can be of amazing importance. They can turn people's lives around. I wonder what you might be able to say today which will give solid encouragement to someone else.

## QUESTION

What was the most significant encouragement that you have ever received and what did you learn from the experience?

## PRAYER

Thank you, loving Lord, that you are the supreme encourager. Help me to become more encouraging day by day. Amen



April 29, 2021