



Marilynne Robinson author of Gilead

Pulitzer Prize winner to speak in Belfast church

The American author, who won the 2005 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction for her book *Gilead*, will be in Northern Ireland to give a lecture at Queen's University and has also agreed to give the

Harvey Memorial Lecture in McCracken Memorial Presbyterian Church two days later.

McCracken's Minister, Rev. Barry McCroskery, said that the lecture, which takes place every five years, is named after Rev. Kenneth D. Harvey, who died in 2005 having been McCracken's second minister from 1958-1990. "This year's lecture is a great opportunity to hear an inspiring author and essayist," he said.

"Many people will know Marilynne Robinson's work, especially Gilead and its companion Home, which we have read in our church book club. We are deeply indebted to Dame Professor Ingrid Allen, one of our elders and book club members, who has been instrumental in arranging her visit."

Described by a former Archbishop of Canterbury as 'one of the world's most compelling English speaking novelists,' President Obama is also an admirer of the Idaho born writer, who was brought up in a Presbyterian family, becoming a Congregationalist later. In 2012, the President awarded her the National Humanities Medal for "her grace and intelligence in writing."

Twice nominated for the Man Booker International Prize, Ms Robinson is the author of many fiction and non-fiction works since 1980. She won the Orange Prize for Fiction for *Home* in 2009 and last month The United States' Library of Congress named her as the recipient of its 2016 Prize for American Fiction.

Marilynne Robinson's talk is entitled 'Varieties of religious understanding' and will take place in McCracken Memorial Presbyterian Church, Malone Road, Belfast at 7.30pm on Friday, 22nd April. No tickets are required, but seats are limited, so guests are encouraged to arrive early.

Concerts by Singing Friar from Assisi in Athlone and Killarney

Celebrated Italian tenor, Friar Alessandro, best known as the Singing Friar from Assisi, has been confirmed for two Irish dates in April 2016 in Athlone and Killarney.

All profits from the Irish concerts will go directly to the Franciscan Mission in Zimbabwe.

Friar Alessandro shot to fame in 2012 on the release of his debut album *Voice of Assisi*.

The album went to number one in the UK Classical Charts and was nominated in the Best Album of the Year Award in the Classic Brit Award 2013.

His second album, *Joy to the World*, was released in 2013, followed by his third album *Voice of Peace* in 2015. He is also the first religious brother to land an exclusive record contract with a major record label Universal Music.

In his visits during 2014 and 2015, Friar Alessandro appeared on RTE's Saturday Night Show twice and performed to thousands of fans in sell-out concerts in Dublin, Cork and Galway. Those Irish concerts raised €13,000 for the Franciscan Mission in Zimbabwe.

The 34-year-old, a dedicated Franciscan Friar, is signed to Decca Records, part of the Universal Music Group.

In keeping with the vow of poverty made by Friar Alessandro, all proceeds from his singing career go straight back to the Franciscan Order's charitable works.

Friar Alessandro's first Irish performance takes place in Athlone on 15 April 2016 at 8pm in St Anthony Church, Friary Lane, Athlone, Co

Westmeath. Tickets are available on Eventbrite.ie, at the door or can be purchased in advance from the Friary Offices. Ticket Prices are €10.

Killarney welcomes Friar Alessandro to Killarney Cathedral on 17 April 2016 at 8pm. Tickets are available at the door, on Eventbrite.ie or can be purchased in advance from Killarney Cathedral. Ticket Prices are €10.

Franciscan Brother, Pat Lynch OFM, is the co-ordinator of Friar Alessandro's Irish dates. "We are really pleased to welcome Friar Alessandro back to Ireland. As well as being an extraordinarily talented and successful singer, Friar Alessandro is a dedicated member of the Franciscan Order. He is in charge of music in one of the main basilicas in Assisi, so he doesn't travel to do concerts very often," Bro Pat said.

The supporting musicians at Friar Alessandro's concert will be Marina Cassidy, harpist and singer, accompanied by organist Declan Walsh.

Derry lecture on Pope Francis and the Environment

Fr Sean McDonagh SSC, internationally renowned authority on the challenges facing the

global environment, will be speaking in Derry's City Hotel on Tuesday May 3rd 2016 at 8pm. As one of Pope Francis' chosen advisers he helped in the drafting of the pope's latest encyclical 'Laudato Si' about the environment.

Fr Sean's chosen title is: 'Laudato Si': A Prophetic Challenge for the 21st Century. The talk will be followed by discussion of how this challenge will affect all of us in decades to come. Admission free. A donation to defray costs will be welcome on the evening with any surplus to go to Trocaire.

Ireland's biggest gospel music festival coming to Ennis

The seventh annual Gospel Rising Music Festival - Ireland's biggest gospel music festival - returns to Ennis from 13th to 15th May 2016 with choirs from all over Ireland and beyond performing in venues throughout the Clare County Capital.

Leading Irish and international choral experts will facilitate workshops in gospel music, performance and singing for choir and non-choir members throughout the Festival. The festival also will feature a Sunday morning church

service that will be broadcast live on RTE Radio at 11am on Sunday 15th May.

This year's workshop facilitators are drawn from all over Ireland and abroad and include Ruth Waldron, an internationally renowned Gospel Vocal instructor and Choir Director; and Shelley Bukspan, an American/Israeli singer, songwriter and performer.

Irish contributors include Kathleen Turner (singer/songwriter and vocal tutor at the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance), Carmel Reilly (Musical Director of Virginia Gospel Choir), Eimear Crehan (music facilitator, singer and choral director) and Claire Crehan (music teacher, composer and musical director)

This year's Gospel Rising Music Festival is hosted by The Really Truly Joyful Ennis Gospel Choir, and is supported Failte Ireland and the Shannon Region Conference and Sports Bureau.

"We are expecting a large gathering of gospel choirs and music lovers who are interested in this growing genre of music in Ennis next month," said **Lindsay Rountree of the Gospel Rising Music Festival.**

"One of the most popular elements of our festival is the workshops for big and small groups, covering choir harmony singing in gospel styles, different solo singing styles and levels, choreography and big group singing. The gospel choirs in attendance also will be participating in impromptu performances and in organised gigs throughout the town," he added.

Fiona Walsh of The Really Truly Joyful Ennis Gospel Choir described the Gospel Rising Music Festival as a "social, educational and fun event which brings together lovers of gospel music from all over the country to learn from each other and form networks and friendships."

"With more than over 350 people attending every year, the Festival brings new workshop facilitators to the fore and offers choirs a wonderful opportunity to come together and share their music with each other and the wider public," said Ms. Walsh.

Karen Brosnahan, General Manager of the Shannon Region Conference and Sports Bureau called on gospel music enthusiasts to visit Ennis and to celebrate the continued "rising" of gospel music in Ireland.

She continued, "The increasing popularity of gospel music is reflected in the number of new choral groups being established throughout the country. Importantly, the festival also gives non-choir members the opportunity to get that inside look and feel of what happens when they are part of a choir."

The three-day festival will feature daily workshops including a series of master-class style workshops on Saturday focusing on a range of themes including Choral Choreography, Vocal Percussion, Being Your Best Soloist Self, Harmonising, Acapella, and Praise & Worship. Spaces are limited and advance booking is advisable.

Tickets and booking of workshops are available through the Gospel Rising Music Festival website, www.gospelrising.com.

Mary McAleese criticises Pope Francis's document

Pope Francis's Amoris Laetitia document published last week is "very traditional" and lacks "imagination and innovation", former president of [Ireland](http://www.gospelrising.com) Mary McAleese has said.

Irish Times - “Doctrinally it is as anticipated, very traditional. The openness to ongoing debate is welcome as is the encouragement of the initiative of local churches,” she said.

But she said that “pastorally it lacks the imagination and innovation that had been hoped for”.

She was “disappointed in the document’s overall failure to clearly address many of the challenges facing families within the church today”.

The We Are Church Ireland group also expressed disappointment at the document.

While welcoming “its pastoral outlook and its emphasis on the ‘logic of mercy’”, the group said “there are no positive changes for the many divorced and civilly remarried Catholics who are in a second relationship”.

However, it said Pope Francis’s praise for the women’s movement was “a positive development” and said “the most significant section of the document” was Chapter 8.

In it, [Pope Francis](#) “states very clearly”, the group noted, that “it can no longer be said that all those in any irregular union are living in a

state of mortal sin and are deprived of sanctifying grace”.

More at -

<http://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/religion-and-beliefs/mary-mcaleese-criticises-pope-francis-s-document-1.2606988>

Emigrant Information Pack 2016 now available

The Emigrant Information Pack 2016, produced by the Irish Episcopal Council for Emigrants and containing practical information which will assist emigrants in making informed decisions and support them while they are away, is now available to download.

Click here [Emigrant Information Pack 2016](#)

The Council for Emigrants (formerly Irish Episcopal Commission for Emigrants IECE) is the response of the Episcopal Conference to the needs of Irish emigrants prior to and following departure. It shows the caring face of the Church and is particularly committed to the needs of the vulnerable involuntary emigrant. It is a significant voice on behalf of emigrants – condemning involuntary emigration and seeking rights and



adequate services for them. It provides services for potential emigrants and, in conjunction with the host church responds to the needs of the Irish as an immigrant community.

The plight of Irish emigrants in Britain was brought to the attention of Archbishop John Charles McQuaid in the mid 1950's by a group of Columban priests working in Manchester. Following their appeal and the obvious need the Irish Bishops' Conference asked that priests be released to minister to this wave of Irish Emigrants. Initially the work involved celebrating the Sacraments, however more and more attention was paid to the living and working

conditions of these emigrants, many of whom were on the verge of destitution. The response was formalised by the Irish Bishops' Conference in 1957 when it set up the Irish Chaplaincy Scheme in Britain. This response was replicated in the United States in the mid eighties when large numbers of young Irish left Ireland in the hope of a better and brighter future there.

News briefs

There are just ten days left to submit applications to be a member of the **Charles Wood Singers** for this year's Festival! The closing date is 16th April 2016. This is a not to be missed opportunity for young singers to develop and improve their musical abilities under the direction of David Hill. Application forms and further information is available on our website: <http://www.charleswoodsummerschool.org/charles-wood-singers/>

William Humphries MLA, West Belfast Scout District Commissioner, Jason Watson, and District Chairman, Thomas Scott OBE were invited to the **45th Scout Group (Immanuel C of I, Ardoyne)**, as the Group presented a cheque

for £450 to the RNLI. Jason and William were asked to dress in the emergency equipment - to demonstrate to the young people the different types of gear required to save lives at sea.



Lord Alderdice with Sean Barrett, [Julian Hamilton](#) and the Trinity College choir of 2016, at the door of the chapel after he had preached before the University. Commenting, Lord Alderdice said, “A great [TrinityMonday](#) with announcements of scholarships and honours for excellent students and distinguished staff and alumni, a magnificent service in the College

Chapel and stimulating conversations with academic colleagues at this wonderful Irish University”.

Archbishop Michael Jackson will institute the Revd Rob Clements as the new Incumbent of **Kilternan** tonight, Wednesday April 13 at 8.00 pm in Kilternan Parish Church.

St Columba's, Knock, is the venue for a **Health and Safety Forum** involving a wide range of exhibitors and open to all on Saturday 23 April from 10.30 am–12.30 pm - St Columba's Parish Church, 29 King's Road, Belfast, BT5 6JG

New Bishop of Oxford is announced - The new Bishop of Oxford is to be the Rt Revd Dr Steven Croft, Downing Street announced today. Bishop Steven succeeds the Rt Revd John Pritchard, who retired in October 2014 after seven years in post. Bishop Steven, who is 58, is currently Bishop of Sheffield, a role he has held since 2009. He serves on the Archbishop's Council and Chairs the Ministry Council of the Church of England. He has been a member of the House of Lords since 2013.

The Bishop of Oxford leads the Church of England in Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Berkshire, supported by the Area Bishops of Dorchester, Buckingham and Reading. The Diocese is one of the largest and most complex in the Church of England, stretching from Milton Keynes in the north to Newbury in the south; from the Cotswolds in the west to Slough in the east. The Diocese has a population of 2.3 million people, more than 800 churches and almost 600 parochial clergy. It also includes 12 secondary and 270 primary church schools. As the senior bishop in the Diocese, Bishop Steven will lead a large team and is expected to have a wide ranging role across the Thames Valley alongside his national responsibilities.

Lutheran Church of Norway votes in favour of gay marriage

Norway's Lutheran Church today voted in favour of same-sex unions.

At the Church's annual conference, 88 delegates out of 115 in total backed same-sex marriage. Under the new rules, priests who do not want to marry gay couples will still have the right to object.



88 delegates out of 115 in total backed same-sex marriage in a vote on Monday.

"Finally we can celebrate love independently of whom one falls in love with," said Gard Sandaker-Nilsen, leader of the Open Public Church, a religious movement within the Church that had campaigned for a change in its laws.

The vote reflects increasingly liberal attitudes in wider Norwegian society to issues including homosexuality.

Norway became the second country in the world after Denmark to allow same-sex registered partnerships in 1993, and has allowed civil same-sex marriage since 2009.

Around 74 per cent of Norwegians were members of the Lutheran Church last year, according to the national statistics agency, but that number has been declining.

Last year, France's main Protestant Church voted to allow gay marriage blessings, while the US Presbyterian Church approved a change in the wording of its constitution to include same-sex marriage.

News links to reports on faith, politics and education

Canon Ernie Long, 'legendary' Orange Order chaplain, dies aged 102

Belfast Newsletter

The man believed to be the **Church of Ireland's** oldest cleric has been praised for his keen mind and “legendary” drive, following his death at the ...
<http://www.newsletter.co.uk/news/canon-ernie-long-legendary-orange-order-chaplain-dies-aged-102-1-7323348>

BBC

Video interview with the Archbishop of Canterbury in which he says he is not embarrassed over the revelation at the weekend that his father is not Gavin Welby, as he had always thought, but the late Sir Anthony Montague Browne. Archbishop Justin says, "Nothing has

changed. ... I am who I am in Jesus Christ, and nothing more or less than that."

www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-36015162

Comment *(on the above)*

Times: Cameron's real problem is favouring the rich. The comment column by Rachel Sylvester draws a comparison between David Cameron's handling of the Panama papers revelations and that of the Archbishop of Canterbury's family news.

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/edition/comment/camersons-real-problem-is-favouring-the-rich-c5tv9qhr7>

Times: Justin Webb writes "Who are we to judge our real fathers?"

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/who-are-we-to-judge-our-real-fathers-87kkgh7jc>

Guardian: Michael White writes, "Welby shows grace under pressure while Cameron loses his poise".

<http://www.theguardian.com/politics/blog/2016/apr/11/justin-welby-grace-under-pressure-david-cameron-loses-his-poise>

Guardian: Justin Welby is reinventing how to be a church leader in a sceptical world.

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/apr/11/justin-welby-church-leader-parentage-archbishop-canterbury>

BBC/Mail

Reports that a memorial service is to be held today to commemorate the British tourists killed in terror attacks in Tunisia last year. Thirty Britons were among 38 tourists

killed by a gunman at Port El Kantaoui in June. A UK tourist was one of 22 killed in a separate attack at a museum in Tunis in March. Islamic State said it was behind both attacks. The service for survivors of the attacks and victims' families will be held at Westminster Abbey. Prince Harry will lay a wreath on behalf of the Queen during the service, which is being conducted by the Dean of Westminster.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-36016547>

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/pa/article-3535010/Prince-Harry-attending-service-Tunisia-terror-victims.html>

Ind

Reports that Exxon, Royal Dutch Shell and three trade organisations together were said to spend close to an estimated \$115 million (£81m), to "obstruct" policies that would address climate change around the world, according to a research published by Influence Map, a London-based non-profit organisation. The article notes that the New York State Comptroller and the Church Commissioners have signed a motion calling on ExxonMobil to disclose the resilience of its business model in the wake of the Paris agreement on climate change.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/news/royal-dutch-shell-exxon-american-petroleum-institute-western-states-petroleum-association-lobbying-a6978336.html>

Your Money

Further coverage that the Church Commissioners could receive a payout of more than £60m once Williams & Glyn separates from The Royal Bank of Scotland. The Commissioners hold a 10% stake in a £600m bond,

issued in 2013 to raise funds to help in the separation process of the two firms.

<http://www.yourmoney.com/saving-banking/church-could-receive-60m-payout-from-williams-glyn-separation/>

Times/Mail/Guard

Further profiles of the English golfer, Danny Willett, who won the Masters earlier this week. His father, the Revd Stephen Willett is a retired CofE vicar.

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/the-real-story-of-englands-new-golfing-sensation-t0zt393w3>

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3535049/Danny-Inspirational-story-unknown-Yorkshire-vicar-s-son-s-global-golf-superstar-overnight-thanks-baby-son-arriving-12-days-early.html>

<http://www.theguardian.com/sport/2016/apr/11/danny-willett-us-masters-golf-sheffield-rotherham>

Ind

Reports that Ofcom has rejected complaints against TV personality Piers Morgan. Mr Morgan received dozens of complaints for his interview on ITVs breakfast show with Christian magistrate Richard Page over same-sex marriage last month.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/piers-morgan-ofcom-christian-homophobe-comment-a6979136.html>

Mail online: Peter Hitchens blog reviews a new biography of Bishop George Bell.

<http://hitchensblog.mailonsunday.co.uk/2016/04/why-all-the-fuss-about-george-bell-a-new-biography-explains.html>