



Christians harangued for beliefs

Loyalty to Christian beliefs on the subjects of marriage and abortion can leave people open to

"ridicule, condemnation or even persecution", according to the Roman Catholic Primate of All Ireland.

Archbishop Eamon Martin said that it was difficult for people's Christian convictions and understandings of marriage, family and human life to remain unswayed as the "pressure on us to conform, to become just like everyone else, is often immense and overpowering".

He made the outspoken comments during his homily at the annual Holy Thursday Chrism Mass at St Patrick's Cathedral in Armagh.

"To be like Christ in an increasingly secularised world often means being different, counter-cultural, and not easily swayed by the prevailing attitudes and opinions around us. This is not easy," he said.

"Sometimes daring to witness openly to our sincerely held Christian convictions can bring upon us ridicule, condemnation or even persecution.

"I am thinking, for example, about our strong beliefs in the sacredness of human life from the first moment of conception until the moment of our natural death; our Church's understanding of marriage and the family; our Catholic social

teaching about the fair distribution of goods, care for creation and concern for the weakest and most vulnerable."

Vicar of Baghdad to visit Enniskillen

Thursday 16th April – Evening Service in St Macartin's Cathedral, Enniskillen at 7.30pm.
Special speaker: The Revd Canon Andrew White, Vicar of Baghdad.

The Reverend Dr. Canon Andrew White, is vicar of St George's Church, Baghdad, the only Anglican church in Iraq. He has thus been dubbed the "Vicar of Baghdad". He is also President of the Foundation for Relief and Reconciliation in the Middle East. He was previously Director of International Ministry at the International Centre for Reconciliation at Coventry Cathedral, England.

At the age of 33 years he was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, a condition which for many years affected his mobility and his speech. He has been undergoing a new stem cell treatment for MS at a clinic in Baghdad that utilises his body's own stem

cells and he has said, "It had completely transformed my life." He is married to Caroline and they have two sons.

A MISSIONAL CONVERSATION



Methodists in Missional Conversation

in the Methodist Church there is some thinking and conversation going on around missional communities/church.

The organisers state - "This is exciting as we work out, with God's leading, how to be the church he asks us to be today.

"There are people already experimenting with this and there are attempts to get others thinking and experimenting using the 'Dwell' process."

Heather Morris, Kathryn Harte and Gillian Gilmore are keen to try and involve young adults(18+) in this thinking and experimenting and to that end they are hosting a meal and conversation on Friday 17 April at 7pm in Edgehill Theological College, Lennoxvale,

April 7

Belfast. Please note the RSVP date is the 10th of April. See -

<http://form.jotformpro.com/form/50814485649970>



C of I Youth leaders retreat

The Church of Ireland Youth Department is organising a retreat for youth leaders in the Killeshin Hotel, Portlaoise, from Saturday 18th to Sunday 19th April. Further information and a booking form can be found at this link: <https://coiyouth.wufoo.com/forms/qltj9p806ox32d/>

Women's Link Annual Fellowship Day

Women's Link will hold their Annual Fellowship Day on Saturday 18th April in Newtownbreda Presbyterian Church at 10am.

The theme of this year's event is 'Loving Life' and two speakers, Leanne Hill from 'Love for Life' and Sandra Matthews from Faith Mission.

The Fellowship Day will also see the installation of Joyce Bond as Women's Link President and Eilis O'Malley as Secretary.

A light lunch will be provided and the registration cost for delegates is £10/€10.

To request a booking form please contact the Irish Council of Churches by telephone on 028 (048 from RoI) 9066 3145 or via email info@irishchurches.org.

St George's Belfast Bicentenary Recital

On Sunday April 19 2015. **Conor Breen (tenor) & Emma Gibbins (piano)**. This is part of

St George's Parsh, Belfast, Bicentenary Recital Series. Recital begins at 6pm after Choral Evensong at 5pm and will conclude by 7.00 pm. Free admission. Refreshments served after recital

Christian Aid 70th Anniversary services

Supporters of Christian Aid are invited to St Anne's Cathedral, Belfast on 19 April 2015 for a service of thanksgiving for 70 years of the inter-church world development agency. Dean John Mann will lead the service and the main address will be given by Mr David Ford, Minister for Justice.

Everyone is welcome to attend but please RSVP by calling the Christian Aid Belfast office on 028 9064 8133 or email belfast@christian-aid.org.

Sunday 26th April – Christian Aid Service at 11.30am in Derryvullen North Parish Church, Irvinestown to mark 70 years of Christian Aid. Special visiting speaker. Proceeds to Christian Aid.

New Diocesan Youth Officer

Emma Rothwell has been appointed Diocesan Youth Officer. For Meath and Kildare. Emma has been a teacher in Alex and will share this new role with being Chaplain of Wilson's School. She begins in September.



£81k for roof repairs on historic Carrick church

St Nicholas' Church of Ireland in Carrickfergus has secured £81,000 towards urgent roof repairs.

A total of 25 churches across Northern Ireland, from a variety of denominations, will now be made weathertight, safe and open for use through the Listed Places of Worship: Roof Repair Fund.

Grants of £10,000 to £100,000 will meet the costs of urgent repairs to roofs and rainwater disposal systems. Money is also being provided for structural investigations, specialist reports and bat surveys.

This funding is part of a wider funding package of £30million to 502 historic places of worship across the UK announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne.

The fund will reopen to new applications later this year and successful applicants will be announced in 2016. It is administered by the National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF) on behalf of the Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS).

Causeway Christians Against Poverty appoints extra staff

As many still feel the financial squeeze, the Causeway Coast branch of a debt counselling charity is taking on extra staff to bring more free help to those in need.

From this week, the centre based at Causeway Coast Vineyard church (Coleraine) will be welcoming a new debt coach to their team resulting in more appointment slots for people suffering from out-of-control debts.

The centre, which opened in 2010, has seen a steady growth in the number of people getting in touch as word has spread of CAP's uniquely in-depth, caring and face-to-face help.

Typically most clients get in touch after personal recommendation while others are referred by family centres, housing associations and council offices. Clients' creditors are contacted by CAP, a workable budget is set for the household and the charity continues to give support and encouragement until the client is debt free.

Centre Manager for the Causeway Coast branch David Kelly said: "We're delighted to be welcoming debt coach Dorothy McKernan onto the team at such a crucial time.

“We have been booked up months in advance as we continue to cope with the fall-out from the economic downturn. This will mean we have many more appointments available each week and be able to see and help more people, more quickly.”

The most common cause of debt is a change in circumstance, for example job loss, relationship breakdown, accident or illness in the family.

- For more about CAP see www.capuk.org or call 0800 328 0006

Irish pupils packed into biggest classes in the eurozone

More than 125,000 primary pupils are squeezed into "supersize" classes of 30 or more

The number is growing year-on-year, with the most crowded classrooms in the extended Dublin commuter belt and other pockets of population growth. Schools in Carlow, Meath, Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown and Wicklow are feeling the biggest pinch.

Independent - Overall, almost one in four (24pc) of 532,933 pupils is in a class of 30-plus, despite

a Government promise more than a decade ago to have all under-nines in classes of below 20.

Today, only one in 10 (10pc) primary pupils is in a class with fewer than 20, although the under-nines account for more than half of all enrolments.

The average class size is 25, which, although unchanged from 2013/14, remains the highest in the eurozone and compares with an average of 21 across the developed world

More at -

<http://www.independent.ie/irish-news/education/pupils-packed-into-biggest-classes-in-the-eurozone-31120330.html>

Increase In 'Mixed' Housing in NI Due To Financial Reasons Study Claims

Catholics and Protestants are living side by side in growing numbers for financial reasons rather than genuine attempts at integration, according to new research.

Irish News - Shared housing initiatives have long been seen as the key to breaking down

sectarianism in Northern Ireland and have been introduced by successive governments.

And, since the 1990s ceasefires - and more so since the Good Friday agreement - areas designated as 'single identity' have declined and those that are 'mixed' increased.

However, the main findings of the research show that the reasons for people's moves were "financial concerns, practical motivations and family considerations", with "mixing" of secondary concern.

The report, commissioned by the Community Relations Council and produced by Queen's University, was launched yesterday at Crumlin Road Gaol.

Clifford Stevenson, senior QUB psychology lecturer, who led the research team, said the increased movement of people across Belfast from 'single identity' to 'mixed' areas "is a sign of progress as we become a more peaceful society".

But he warned it would be wrong to assume it was accompanied by "more contact between neighbours of different religious backgrounds

leading to positive feelings and attitudes between these groups".

"Our research suggests that new residents may actually be predisposed to experience mixing negatively, unless they have good communication with their neighbours," he said.

The research project, funded by the Community Relations Council, examined three increasingly mixed areas across Belfast city - Ravenhill, Fortwilliam and Cliftondene/Deer-park.

More at -

<http://www.irishnews.com/news/increase-in-mixed-housing-due-to-financial-reasons-study-claims-1424229>

'Promote gay relationships as positive in school,' teachers say

The government should be forced to portray gay relationships in a positive light, teachers say, causing outrage amongst influential Christian charities.

Telegraph - The call on schools including a "positive portrayal" on same-sex relationships emerged as part of a motion on a debate for a "manifesto for a new government on LGBT

rights in schools, which was being debated at the NUT union's in Harrogate.

The motion, which was passed, calls on teachers to put pressure on the government to "make it compulsory that all schools' [sex education](#) policies include a positive portrayal of same sex relationships" . .

...But the call from the unions outraged Christian campaigners. Simon Calvert, deputy director of the Christian Institute, church schools already do a proper job when it comes to promoting "tolerance towards all people by teaching pupils that every person is made in the image of God and has inherent dignity".

Mr Calvert said the motion was "an act of intolerance towards mainstream Christians and their beliefs".

He said the motion "would force Christian teachers to have to choose between their faith and their job. I wonder whether Christian members of the NUT who have paid their dues can expect any help from the NUT when their jobs are on the line".

Andrea Williams of Christian Concern said the motion was a "very concerning development".

She said: "This kind of policy is dangerous for our children who are being oversexualised at a very young age. They are being introduced to concepts and having normalised sex relationships which robs them of their innocence and is not good for their emotional and moral wellbeing.

More at -

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/educationnews/11517177/Promote-gay-relationships-as-positive-in-school-teachers-say.html>

Dwyer trial cast a light into darkest corners of Irish society

<http://www.irishtimes.com/news/crime-and-law/dwyer-trial-cast-a-light-into-darkest-corners-of-irish-society-1.2157459>

Ireland recognises famine gift from Choctaw Nation

Oklahoma City - The nine eagle feathers tower 20 feet into the Irish sky.

Washington Times - Aligned in a circle, the look is imperfect, bends and creases in one feather distinguishing it from its next metallic counterpart. The feathers stand strong, made

from steel and bound together with more than 20,000 welds. But they also give off a sense of fragility, a feeling that a strong breeze could topple them at any moment.

“This monument represents this time of great instability,” sculptor Alex Pentek explained. “But it also represents this great moment of compassion, strength and unity.”

Built to honor a donation by the Choctaw Nation to the people of Ireland during the Great Potato Famine, Pentek has spent more than a year sculpting a work he’s named “Kindred Spirits.”

Scheduled to be unveiled in May in Bailic Park in Middleton, a small town of 12,000 not far from Ireland’s southern coast in County Cork, a plaque in the middle of the structure will detail how in 1847, the impoverished Choctaw Nation was able to scrape together \$170 to send to Ireland to help feed starving people. The sum would be close to \$5,000 in today’s money.

.....Joe McCarthy, who today serves as East Cork’s municipal district officer, said that’s why the Choctaw donation meant so much to people back then. Just when they thought nobody cared, a group from across the world reached out to lend a helping hand. The county is paying

for the sculpture, which a local Irish newspaper reported will cost more than \$100,000.

“These people were still recovering from their own injustice, and they put their hands in their pockets and they helped strangers,” McCarthy said. “It’s rare to see such generosity. It had to be acknowledged.”

In 1831, the Choctaw Nation, along with members of the Cherokee, Muscogee (Creek), Seminole and Chickasaw nations, had been forced to walk hundreds of miles to Oklahoma from their ancestral lands after President Andrew Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act in 1830, which ended American Indian claims to land in the southeast U.S.

Read more: <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/apr/6/ireland-recognizes-gift-from-choctaw-nation/#ixzz3WX02R3Sx>

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Archbishop of York gives a stirring, political, Christian message for Easter



Christians are not excused suffering. In many parts of the world right now, they are actually at greater risk because they follow Jesus Christ.

Archbishop John Sentamu - As I tell God's tremendous story of Easter this year, I will also be asking myself how I would console the relatives of passengers and crew who died in that murderous plane crash in the French Alps.

What of others, who have witnessed unspeakable atrocities in Syria, and in Iraq where Christians have been expelled from villages that were home to their forebears for thousands of years? Or on the continent of Africa, where whole communities have been decimated by the

ebola plague and thousands more have died from HIV/Aids. Where is the solace for them?

The Easter message must apply to humanity in its deepest distress. I was told of a recently bereaved widower who looked out on his garden ablaze with daffodils, his eyes full of tears.

‘How she loved this view each spring,’ he said. Grief at the death of his wife had eclipsed the beauty of the moment.

What for others would have been a glorious scene was a painful reminder to him of his loss.

For sufferers and bereaved people, the jollity of Easter egg hunts may seem like a cruel irrelevance. No one would deny children their fun, though one day they, too, will know that eggs and bunnies have little bearing on reality.

Christians are not excused suffering. In many parts of the world right now, they are actually at greater risk because they follow Jesus Christ.

In the midst of all this is the virtue of Christian hope, which comes from the contagious conviction that death, grim as it may be, is actually the prelude to something else. A comma, not a full stop, a pause, not the end.



*Durham
Cathedral
bathed in light
in Tom Denny's
Transfiguration
Window.*

If you take a glance at the New Testament, you will see that it all stems from encountering Jesus of Nazareth alive again from the dead.

His followers would have all abandoned His mission if He was not risen from the dead. They were demoralised, broken-hearted, frightened and confused when He was crucified. Within days, the same people were totally reinvigorated by the physicality of His resurrection. It gave them a new and dynamic confidence.

The prospect of eternity with God gives us a new angle on life here and now. Instead of trying to cram in every possible experience before the Grim Reaper catches up with us, we can afford to be magnanimous, putting other people's needs on a par with our own. This contradicts everything held out to us by a consumerist society and it is liberating.

It has powerful political overtones. Loving your neighbour as yourself has to include people we may not like. Imagine how this revolutionary ethical principle would transform relationships. But practising it might get you into hot water, too.

That is what the late Archbishop Robert Runcie experienced after the Falklands War when he said we should pray for Argentinian as well as British mothers who had lost sons. Runcie had won the Military Cross in the Second World War. What he said was utterly Christian, but he was savagely criticised for it.

My colleague, the Archbishop of Canterbury, faced similar hostility recently for expressing his sadness about the loss of life during the bombing of Dresden during the Second World War. He is part Jewish and might have let the

memory of the Holocaust nurture hatred. Instead, he preached reconciliation.

In Uganda, where I was a High Court judge, I tried one of President Idi Amin's relatives for rape and grievous bodily harm – he broke his victim's legs and arms. The President's Office rang to command me that I should not find his cousin guilty.

Having heard all the evidence, I convicted him, sent him to prison and forwarded the file to the Chief Justice to enhance the sentence. Soon afterwards, I was arrested and severely beaten. I could have carried resentment against Amin for the rest of my life. Instead, the example of Christ who prayed that his tormentors might be forgiven gave me the strength to forgive.

My sadness is that I was never given the chance to be reconciled to those who nearly killed me.

Faith centred on Jesus Christ insists that concern for others' wellbeing means political involvement (that is the deliberation and participation in how we are to be governed). That annoys some politicians and their supporters who want a monopoly over public affairs.

When they pillory bishops and others for daring to invade the territory hitherto regarded as their

private preserve, they are suggesting there are some areas of God's world that are out of bounds to him. That is as absurd as it sounds.

God is creator of the Cosmos and that includes the Palace of Westminster and the White House. There are followers of Jesus Christ in all the main political parties in the UK. It is not for me to tell their fellow church members how to vote next month, but I will encourage them to use their vote.

The turnout at recent elections has been pathetic. Only 65.1 per cent voted at the last General Election. I know that some potential voters feel exasperated because they cannot see much difference between the parties, or live in a constituency that has a safe seat. I still urge them to turn out on May 7 and vote. A response of 'None of the above' will not do. Engage and vote.

As a last possible resort, they could spoil their ballot papers and still show they had registered an opinion. I don't recommend it; be more positive. But it would be better than staying at home and doing nothing.

A 100 per cent turnout would produce a result this great nation deserves. Please turn out and vote.

Christians have no facile answer to life's heartbreaking questions but in their distress turn to Jesus because He suffered with and for us. It is He who motivated his followers to found hospitals, hospices and schools.

Look at the bigger picture. Christ is risen. May God grant you confidence in believing and joy this Eastertide.

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-3026046/In-world-terrible-atrocities-Easter-eggs-cruel-irrelevance-stirring-unashamedly-political-Christian-Church-England-s-outspoken-Archbishop.html>