

No rush to the registry office by UK same-sex couples

Nancy Soderberg: NI politicians have shown 'abysmal abdication of leadership'

A senior aide to former US president Bill Clinton has accused Northern Ireland politicians of an "abysmal abdication of leadership".



Ms Soderberg made the comments in an article for the Irish Times newspaper

BBC - Nancy Soderberg said unionist and nationalists were "far too stuck in the past, making progress vulnerable and even reversible". She made the comments in [an article in Thursday's Irish Times newspaper](#). Ms Soderberg, a former deputy national security adviser, said many people take peace for granted.

She looked back at the Northern Ireland peace process in the article to mark the 20th anniversary of the IRA ceasefire in 1994.

She said in the years since the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, progress had been made on "governing on policing and holding the peace".

But she added: "The two communities remain far too focused on the injustices of the past."

Ms Soderberg, who was also an ambassador to the United Nations, wrote: "Good leaders would be able to recognise the righteousness of the other side and step forward to compromise and build a more prosperous future."

"Good leaders would get past the flags, parades and the legacy of the violence of the Troubles and work together to attract investment, technology, and build the best schools which are no longer segregated."

"It's time to get beyond the past and build a Northern Ireland that can compete and thrive in the 21st century."

Her remarks come [on the day that former US senator Gary Hart is due to meet Northern Ireland parties in Belfast.](#)

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-28964025>



Final prayer training takes place in Down & Dromore

St Ignatius, Carryduff, was the venue for Down & Dromore Diocesan's fifth and final 24–7 Prayer training event on 27 August.

A diocesan spokesperson said - Since our first training evening in Knocknagoney at the end of November, we've been keeping ahead of the prayer scroll, preparing parishes to set up their prayer rooms and take on the prayer vigil for between 2 and 5 days. All of the training evenings have been a great success and the last was no exception with over 50 people attending.

Tash Creaney, our 24–7 Prayer Coordinator, gave the group 90 minutes of background, ideas, practical tips and lots of encouragement. The prayer room is a multi-sensory space set up with creative stations, each with a different focus to guide and stimulate people in their praying. Tash shared some great prayer station ideas from parishes that have already held the prayer scroll and the group also split into smaller teams to do some brainstorming of their own.

[See some photos here.](#)

Year of 24–7 Prayer

The scroll began its journey on 1 January in the Titanic Quarter at the Dock Cafe and is currently on its way to Dromore. All of our parishes will hold the scroll at some point during the year and with it the responsibility for sustaining prayer as we lay the foundation for the Year of Mission.

It has been an overwhelmingly positive experience so far and we're confident that the group of parishes just trained will be blessed as they embark upon their 24–7 prayer slot before Christmas.

Our 24–7 Prayer vigil will end with a celebration in Belfast Cathedral on 31 December and we hope that you will join us as a year of prayer gives way to 2015 and our Year of Mission.

Vicar of Antrim arrested in front of hall full of children!

The Vicar of Antrim was arrested and handcuffed by officers from the PSNI on Wednesday night in front of a hall full of children!

Archdeacon Stephen McBride was led shamefaced through a sea of astounded young faces to the exit of Antrim Parish Halls by two community police officers.



His crime – impersonation of a police officer.

Fortunately for the Vicar, his impersonation was so poor – some likened him to Noddy's Mr Plod – that he was let off with a caution. A relief all round, especially for the police officers who were not looking forward to transporting the

Archdeacon of Connor to the station on the back of their bicycles.

And hence the Vicar was able to return to the fun and games of the Holiday Bible Club without making headlines of the wrong kind!

The visit by the community police officers was actually planned in advance (or so the Vicar of Antrim says) and provided an opportunity for young Bible Club participants to find out about the work of the officers, and to ask some interesting questions.

The Holiday Bible Club, which was co-ordinated by Connor Children's Project Development Officer Jill Hamilton, attracted around 35 children each evening over the course of a week.

Archbishop Eamon Martin promotes Rosary Sunday prayer initiative

“I invite people to pray the Rosary for the intention of the ‘Family’ and thereby linking with those gathered in Rome for the Synod on the Family in October” – Archbishop Martin

Archbishop Eamon Martin, Coadjutor Archbishop of Armagh, spoke last Thursday 21 August at Knock Shrine about the Rosary Sunday initiative from the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference. The bishops announced it following their June 2014 General Meeting in Maynooth to encourage the practice of this special and much loved family prayer. This year marks the 135th anniversary of the Apparition at Knock.

Rosary Sunday will be celebrated in parishes across Ireland on Sunday 5 October next, the day on which the Church celebrates our 'Day for Life 2014'. It is the Sunday closest to the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary and it coincides with the 60th anniversary of the Rosary Rally of Father Peyton and the Marian Year of 1954 (see below). Archbishop Martin said, “this prayerful initiative has been scheduled to take place during October, the month in which the recitation of the Rosary is especially promoted”.

Archbishop Martin continued, “Rosary Sunday is an invitation to people in parishes, in homes, and in religious congregations to pray the Rosary for the intention of the ‘Family’. The once-common tradition of the family Rosary

links very well with the theme of the Synod on the Family in Rome which takes place from 5 – 19 October.

“I encourage all parishes and faith communities to join on this special occasion to pray for the intention of the Family. In praying the Rosary we meditate on the life and ministry of Jesus Christ and the life of the Holy Family. In a particular way on Sunday 5 October we pray that the Gospel of the Family will be proclaimed faithfully and joyfully by all who turn in prayer to the Mother of God.”

Archbishop Martin concluded, “Pope Francis has recommended the Rosary as a form of ‘spiritual medicine’, saying ‘it’s good for your soul, for your whole life.’”

Gaza conflict costs agriculture and fisheries sector more than \$100m

Christian Aid partner in Gaza, the Agricultural Development Association, estimates that the recent conflict has cost the agricultural and fisheries sectors more than US\$100 million, resulting in more than 8,700 families losing their means of income.

The association have managed to survey 4,700 Gazan farmers and small holders over the last few weeks, 65 per cent of the farming population, with findings revealing that 3,670 acres of land used for fruit and vegetable production have been damaged or destroyed.

In addition to the devastated land, farmers have lost more than 316,579 livestock including cows, sheep and chickens, as well as the farms and barns in which they lived, and 1,161 beehives.

Meanwhile the fisheries industry has been completely wiped out with more than 4,000 fishermen unable to take to the sea.

With Gaza’s only power station destroyed at the end of July, refrigeration of the little that can now be produced is almost impossible. With such scarce supplies, prices are spiralling, meaning most people cannot now afford to buy fresh produce.

Figures released by the United Nations Refugee and Works Agency (UNRWA) at the beginning of June this year, before the current conflict

began, reported that food insecurity levels in Gaza were already at 57 per cent, and 40 per cent of the population were unemployed. UNRWA had already predicted in December 2013 that one million Gazans would need food aid in 2014.

“We urgently need to help families to build back their livelihoods and earn money to feed their families,” said Madeleine McGivern, Programme Officer at Christian Aid.

“Due to the blockade imposed on Gaza by Israel, people can’t leave to earn a living elsewhere, they need their land and boats repaired as quickly as possible. A growing number of people were entirely dependent on food aid before this latest round of violence. Now that number will rise even higher.

“The Agricultural Development Association has been working with these communities for decades, supporting the agricultural and fisheries sectors, despite the severe limitations on the development of these sectors as a result of the Israeli imposed blockade. In a matter of weeks this conflict has once again fuelled the ‘de-development’ of the Gazan economy with huge destruction to these sectors and the lives of fishermen, farmers, and their families, which will take years to recover from.”

No rush to the registry office by UK same-sex couples

Carolyn Moynihan of Conjugality writes : The first official count of same-sex marriages in the UK since they were legalised last year has been published, and it is a “disappointing” figure, according to [British academic Mike Thomas](#):



According to figures released by the [Office for National Statistics](#), just 1,409 same-sex couples were married in England and Wales from the end of March to the end of June 2014. This is a relatively low number in comparison to the 7,000 or so couples across the UK who entered into civil partnerships in the same period of time after they were first made available in 2005.

More seismic statistics might have been expected, given the political storm that surrounded the 2013 act that sanctioned same-sex marriage and the impact it was predicted to have on society – apocalyptic or utopian, depending on your point of view.

Thomas, a sociology lecturer who does research with same-sex couples, goes on to suggest a few reasons.

“**First**, civil partnerships got there first and offer pretty much all of the rights and entitlements that go with marriage.”

This is an interesting admission, indicating that in the UK, at least, there was no practical need for same-sex marriage. It was all about social recognition and acceptance, as he points out later in his piece.

Then, in view of the 60,000 [civil partnerships](#) that same-sex couples have entered into since 2005 (when that step became available) many may be content with that status. However, from December this year they will have the option of converting their civil partnerships to marriages. The civil partnerships option will continue to be available.

Heterosexual couples do not have that option in the UK – it’s either marriage or cohabitation for them, the latter offering “relatively few legal protections,” according to Thomas. (In New Zealand, by contrast, civil unions are open to both heterosexual and homosexual couples who, together with cohabiting partners, enjoy the same rights as married couples.)

Further, UK law excludes same-sex weddings in churches, which Thomas thinks might deter some religiously minded same-sex couples from marrying at this point. He adds:

Mother and baby homes were symptoms of a traumatised society after Civil War

Opinion: Conflict became particularly ruthless after Michael Collins was shot in an ambush, 92 years ago this month

The 1916 Proclamation is our charter of liberty. Yet there was a disconnection between its noble aspirations and the realities of life in the new State, as the latest sordid chapter to emerge from our past, regarding mother and baby homes, reminds us. Fratricidal strife severed the link.

Instead of using the Treaty as a stepping-stone to the republic, as Michael Collins argued, we descended into civil war. With the poet's capacity to distil truth from fact, Yeats wrote in *Meditations in Time of Civil War*: "We had fed the heart on fantasies,/ The heart's grown brutal from the fare;/ More substance in our enmities/ Than in our love . . ."



'Instead of using the Treaty as a stepping-stone to the republic, as Michael Collins (above) argued, we descended into civil war.'

The conflict became particularly ruthless after Collins was shot. Atrocities were committed on both sides. Society was stained with violence and remained bitterly divided long after hostilities ended in 1923. We achieved statehood but failed to create a new society. It was not the state envisaged by those leaders – now dead – who had vowed to “cherish all the children of the nation equally”. The carnival of reaction predicted by Connolly irrupted, with institutionalised discrimination in the North and unbridled clerical power in the South.

Revolution

Pearse's literary executor, Desmond Ryan, wrote: Beneath the debris of the Civil War “the spirit of the Irish revolution was buried. It was the hour of reaction, of the place-hunter, the intriguer, the hopeless, the mediocre, the superstitious Never had the pride and self-respect of a nation been so deeply wounded.” The historian Alice Stopford Green said after Collins's death: “Our progress can be no longer along the hills of high adventure, but on the level ground where men less gifted must needs travel.”

The vacuum created by the eclipse of civic republicanism was filled by an authoritarian church. Although a relatively modernised society, Ireland was predominantly agrarian and poor. A destructive civil war left us poorer still. Limited resources were spent on restoring basic infrastructure; the

institutional church was left in charge of schools, hospitals and a rudimentary welfare system.

Women were for the most part sidelined in the Free State. It was a religious but unspiritual society, which made a mockery of Christ's compassion for the marginalised and outcast. Many young people became dedicated missionaries, however, leaving a country that was scared of beauty and truth and had a crippled notion of goodness.

Regarding the revival of Irish, the scholar patriot Edward MacLysaght said the Treaty split "resulted in our throwing away what may prove to have been the last chance" of saving Irish as a vernacular language. "The split blew that spirit to atoms as surely as the explosion at the Four Courts made dust of the archives in the Public Record Office."

When Fianna Fáil gained power in 1932, Maud Gonne MacBride asked the education minister, Thomas Derrig, to have a copy of the Proclamation hung in every school. He replied that he could not do so as (clerical) "managers might object and it would cost money".

In 1941 Harry Gleeson was hanged for a crime he did not commit. His counsel, Seán MacBride, said a conspiracy of silence in Tipperary protected the killers of Mary McCarthy, who had given birth to seven children by different fathers. MacBride suggested she was the "victim of a perverted sense of morality bred by a civilisation which, nominally based on Christianity", lacked most of its essentials.

On the night of June 17th, 1922, as the country lurched towards civil war, five armed and masked men entered the home of a herdsman in north Clare. The moonlighters' purpose was intimidation but in the melee they shot dead Margaret Kilmartin, a mother of nine children. Her husband, Stephen, was a member of Sinn Féin and most likely involved in the Carron Herdsmen's Union, which challenged the authority of landowners. Four years later four "respectable men of the farming class" were charged with her murder. A search in the National Archives and among the files of the local press proved inconclusive. Apparently the case was dropped. Eventually, the last member of Mrs Kilmartin's family provided the missing information (when I interviewed her shortly before her death). "It was the priests got them off," she revealed. This scandalous abuse of clerical power is a paradigm on post-Civil War Ireland.

The mother and baby homes were symptoms of a traumatised society.

Dr Brendan Ó Cathaoir is a historian and journalist

<http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/heritage/mother-and-baby-homes-were-symptoms-of-a-traumatised-society-after-civil-war-1.1908597>

Press Review

Tel

Report that the Archbishop of York has called for David Cameron to 'take a lead' on persecuted Iraqis. It states Dr John Sentamu, said he wrote to the Prime Minister three weeks ago calling for Britain to offer asylum to those fleeing the country, but had yet to receive a reply. Church officials said that a separate letter sent by the Bishop of Leeds, and parliamentary questions tabled by the Bishop of Coventry a month ago, all remained unanswered. On Tuesday evening the Rt Rev David Walker, the Bishop of Manchester, said the Government's "silence" on the issue of asylum for Iraqis was "deafening".

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/11057015/Archbishop-of-York-calls-for-David-Cameron-to-take-a-lead-on-persecuted-Iraqis.html>

BBC

Report that a Merseyside priest has been named as the first ever Bishop of Huddersfield. The town became an episcopal area when the new diocese of West Yorkshire and the Dales was created in April. Reverend Dr Jonathan Gibbs, 53, will be consecrated at York Minster on 17 October, along with the new Bishop of Bradford, Reverend Dr Toby Howarth.

<http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-leeds-28935742>

Times

Report that a former University of Oxford cricketer who is now a vicar has been chosen to lead a Church of England XI in the first ecumenical Twenty20 match against the Vatican City. The Rev Jez Barnes, vicar of St Stephen's, Twickenham, has been given the honour of representing the Archbishop of Canterbury against the best that the Pope can muster in a match on September 19 at Kent's county ground in Canterbury. With the Bishop of Shrewsbury, Mark Rylands, Mr Barnes has picked a squad of 12, eight of whom are trainee priests. It states they have been practising at - where else? - Lord's.

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/faith/article4187782.ece>

Guard

Report that a proposed [BBC drama](#) about Shannon Matthews, the nine-year old girl from Dewsbury in West Yorkshire who endured a hoax kidnapping organised by her own mother, has met with concern among her former neighbours and been questioned by two local clergy. It states dredging up the ordeal would be painful for the community, according to Rev Canon Kevin Partington of Dewsbury Minster. Kathy Robertson, the vicar at St John the Evangelist in Dewsbury, is quoted saying she worried for Shannon herself, who was given a new identity and family after her mother's convictions for kidnapping, false imprisonment and perverting the course of justice. <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/aug/26/shannon-matthews-tv-drama-dewsbury>

Mail

Report that two English schoolgirls thought to have been abducted by their Thai mother while on holiday, have been found safe after a three-month search. Annie and Alina Day, aged 11 and six, from Sevenoaks who are pupils at Sundridge and Brasted Church of England Primary School, in Sundridge, Kent, disappeared after flying out to see their mother Onwarat Gamlem, 36, for a half-term holiday in Thailand.

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2734712/English-girls-abducted-Thai-mother-home-country-safe-three-month-search.html#ixzz3BZG4NDuM>

BBC

Report that a thief who stole more than £37,000 from three church collection boxes was caught after police found full details of his crimes in his diary. Stefan Bodnarczuk, 55, from Coventry, was [jailed for 20 months](#) at Northampton Crown Court earlier this month. He admitted stealing from churches in Fotheringhay in Northamptonshire, Lincoln and the Yorkshire Dales. The diary detailed whether the church was worth revisiting and what the weather had been like on each visit.

<http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-28937857>

Ind

Report on a bus route that operates for one day each year, ending in Imber, an isolated ghost village that has been under military occupation for more than 70 years and has a 13th-century church. It states St Giles Church is the only building in the village to have survived intact and is a church with no congregation in a village without villagers. The church has been restored and alongside Easter and a popular Christmas carols concert, the Imber Bus service is now a key entry in the church's very limited calendar.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/motoring/features/on-the-road-to-nowhere-a-routemaster-trip-to-remember-9692436.html>

Mail

Report that a couple campaigning for a change to the rules governing the conversion of civil partnerships into full marriages are presenting a petition to the minister responsible for equal marriage today. Jakki and Sheila Livesey-van Dorst will present the 38,000-strong petition to Nick Boles today in the hope it will help influence changes to the regulations that apply to those wishing to convert their civil partnerships into marriages. Couples applying have hit out at regulations which do not allow for a formal ceremony and say they will also be presented with a "certificate of conversion" rather than a marriage certificate.

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/pa/article-2735297/Civil-partnership-conversion-plea.html#ixzz3BZ7H3HQ3>

Mail

Report that Chinese officials have warned Pope Francis not to 'interfere' with their country's religion, following a series of overtures from the pontiff to the officially atheist nation. It states China is one of few countries that has had no diplomatic relations with the Vatican and little contact since shortly after the country's 1949 communist revolution. As he returned from Korea at the end of last month Francis said he wanted to visit the Communist state 'as soon as tomorrow'.

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2735217/Leave-China-tells-Pope-Officials-warn-Francis-not-interfere-atheist-country-s-religion-said-wanted-visit.html#ixzz3BZ8FspPG>

Obituary -

Times

Obituary report on John Austin Baker, former Bishop of Salisbury, described as a highly accomplished academic theologian and author who was judged by his peers in the Church of England to "write like an angel". It states he was also a complex character prone to unpredictable acts and opinions: his 11-year tenure as Bishop of Salisbury began amid controversy in 1982 with the publication of *The Church and the Bomb*, which urged the

Thatcher government to adopt a policy of unilateral nuclear disarmament "in the hope of getting multilateral reductions moving". Baker was also the main author of *Issues in Human Sexuality*, a report by the House of Bishops in 1991 that called for homosexual clergy to abstain from sex but allowed it for the laity,

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/opinion/obituaries/article4187657.ece>

Letters

Guard

Rev Paul Nicolson saying Christianity needs bishops who speak up for the poor and against oppression, like, Archbishop Oscar Romero who was assassinated in El Salvador.

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/26/christianity-needs-bishops-speak-out-against-oppression>

Blogs

Nick Baines: Two new bishops

<http://nickbaines.wordpress.com/2014/08/26/two-new-bishops/>

Brother Ivo: What is the uniquely British contribution towards jihad?

<http://brotherivo.com/blog/2014/08/23/what-is-the-uniquely-british-contribution-towards-jihad/>

Archbishop Cranmer: The difficulties of dialoguing with Islam

<http://archbishop-cranmer.blogspot.co.uk/2014/08/the-difficulties-of-dialoguing-with.html/>

Huff Post

Zaid al-Rawni: Despair in the Desert - In One of Iraq's Deadliest Places

http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/zaid-alrawni/iraq-despair-in-the-desert_b_5710207.html

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