

Pope Francis blessed Co Down man "buried alive" by severe disability

A young man so severely disabled he will live the rest of his life as if "tied up in a box and blind-folded" has been

given a personal blessing by Pope Francis.

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Photo above - Declan McMullan with his parents

Declan McMullan, 25, from Crossga, Co. Down, suffers from Locked-In Syndrome, a rare neurological condition that means he cannot move, talk, or see despite being fully aware.

He has been disabled by the condition since he suffered a sudden heart attack in bed when he was 19.

Declan's dad John said the family was given a great boost when he was selected from an audience of 82,000 to receive an unexpected Papal blessing at Croke Park on Saturday.

He said: "Declan's heart turned off like an instant switch when he was 19. He no longer has the ability to make his brain communicate with his muscles, he can't move or talk but he has full feeling.

"We did not know at the time that he suffered from Wolffe Parkinson White syndrome.

"It's as if you are tied up in a box and blind-folded for the rest of your life. He has been buried alive.

"My wife found him and we knew he was gone. I did CPR for 10 minutes and the family was screaming before paramedics arrived and brought him back to life with 13 electric shocks.

"Because he was dead for so long he is blind and he cannot move or talk but can communicate with us by

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blinking. He is still the same Declan and he deals with it very well. He keeps us going."

John said he had requested a pass for the World Meeting of Families six months ago and was shocked when he received a call on Friday morning to say they were invited.

He said: "We are a faithful family, it is important to have a little faith in something, but for a while we questioned everything.

"I recognise there has been controversy around the Pope's visit, but my relationship is not with the Pope, it is with God.

"My wife and I take turns going to church, it keeps us sane. I think your faith is to do with the unknown, Declan experienced death and he is now alive again.

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"His illness and disability has made our family stronger. You take everything for granted, but no more."

Although Declan was initially nervous about travelling to Dublin for the visit, John said he talked him around.

He said: "Declan has had a rough time and questioned his faith. He wondered what is this going to do for me, but I told him it can't do any harm and you will never meet him again so he agreed to go.

"When the Pope turned back to bless him, he felt very emotional and cried but he is glad he went.

"For one of the most powerful people in the world to bless your son is very touching.

"I did not go down expecting a miracle. The miracle for us is that Declan is alive again." Report courtesy Belfast Live

World Suicide Prevention Day to be marked with special concert in St Peter's Cathedral, Belfast

A concert celebrating "love, life and happiness" is being held in Saint Peter's Cathedral on September 14 to mark World Suicide Prevention Day.

Organised by All Lives Are Precious (ALPs), the cross-community event will be headlined by singing sensations Peter Corry, The Priests, and joined by a number of



Peter Corry

community choirs. The concert is part of the ALPs charity's 'Voice of Hope' concert series in Northern Ireland.

Ronan Gilchrist, from ALPs, said: "Proceeds of this event will go towards Saint Peter's Immaculata Youth Club and provide support and services to young people in West Belfast on Mental Health Awareness, Suicide Prevention and Wellbeing.

"As well as the spectacular Peter Corry and his house band, with a very special guest appearance from the internationally acclaimed The Priests, we are pleased to announce on Saint Peter's Schola Cantorum, Saint Peter's Community Choir, Down and Connor Folk Choir and an ensemble choir of children and young people from local primary schools and youth clubs will be also be there on the night."

The ALPs organisation was set up in 2014 by Co. Down man Ronan Gilchrist. He believes that a community-based initiative funded and run by the people, for the people, is the best way of offering support around mental health education and suicide prevention.

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The Priests

Since February alone, they have worked on spreading their message to 10,000 young people in schools and community groups.

Ronan said this year's concert series would also feature a single written by Vincent Donnelly and produced and sung by Peter Corry.



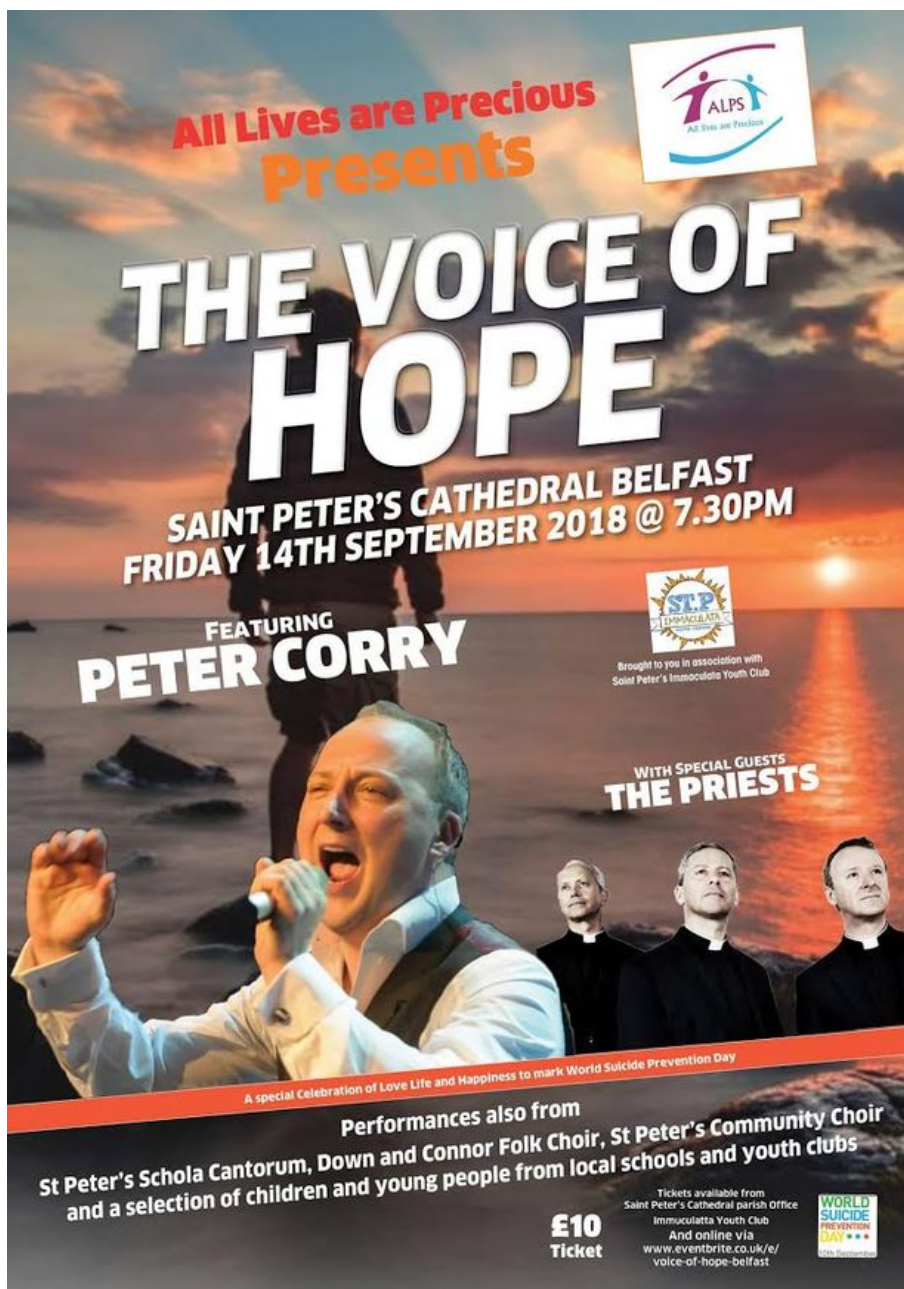
"Everyone at ALPs would like to thank the generosity and help which Peter Corry has shown to us over the past two years," he said.

"Many lives throughout the island of Ireland have been touched by tragic loss of a loved one.

"The forthcoming concert is a celebration of love, life and happiness event for the whole community. The event is to celebrate our own life and to remember the lives of all our loved ones who are no longer with us whilst, at the same time, allowing the community to mark World Suicide Prevention Day."

The concert in Belfast is in addition to dates in Downpatrick and Derry.

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"The concert series has become a vital part of our work and allows the organisation to engage the whole community in a conversation around suicide prevention and mental health awareness," added Ronan.

"All of the songs included in this event are carefully selected to fit the theme of the night."

The concert on Friday, September 14 at Saint Peter's Cathedral, Belfast starts at 7.30pm.

Tickets are priced at £10 and are available from Saint Peter's Cathedral Office, Immaculata Youth Club and online via [eventbrite](https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/voice-of-hope-belfast) .

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CS Lewis theme at Dundela flower festival

It is 140 years since the consecration of St Mark's Church, Dundela and the parish will celebrate with a Flower Festival.

The anniversary event at will celebrate how seeds of faith are being nurtured and produce fruit leading to a harvest and eternal life. Each floral arrangement on display in the church will have a theme, and each theme will be accompanied with a quotation from C. S. Lewis, a biblical reference and a prayer.

The themes for the floral arrangements are inspired by the textile wall hanging specially made by St Mark's Stitching Group which is on display in the entrance porch. It is hoped that the floral art together with its words of wisdom will take you on a journey of faith, a pilgrimage, sowing new seeds that will yield an abundant harvest.

The team of flower arrangers is led by Mrs Barbara Megarry, artistic designer; and members from Northern Ireland Group of Flower Arrangement Societies (NIGFAS), together with St Mark's Flower Guild.

During the weekend, Mr Sandy Smith will give several lectures about C. S. Lewis and his connection with the parish. C. S. Lewis' grandfather, Revd Thomas Hamilton was the first Rector of St Mark's. Mr Smith will speak on C. S. Lewis and the First World War; his poetry; and his connection with East Belfast. In addition, a documentary will be shown about C. S. Lewis and Ireland.

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Throughout the weekend, the parish drama group, St Mark's Players, will read passages from some of C.S. Lewis' books. These readings will take place in the side chapel where the Sunday School has provided a piece of floral art depicting Aslan the Lion.

[Find out more about the event here.](#)

Pope's Skoda donated to charity

The humble hatchback used by Pope Francis during his **recent visit to Ireland** is going to help homeless people find more appropriate places to live.

The blue Skoda Rapid will take families from emergency housing in the Dublin area to longer-term accommodation arranged for them by Crosscare, a social care agency in the Irish capital run by the Catholic Church.

A decision of the future of the now famous five-door car was taken by Diarmuid Martin, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Dublin.

Bosses say the vehicle will be in daily use but the registration plate 'SCV 1' must be changed as it currently stands for Stato della Citta del Vaticano - or Vatican City.

The pope spent two days in Ireland at the weekend as part of the World Meeting of Families Congress which is held every three years.

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Speaking at the event, director of Crosscare services, Conor Hickey, said homelessness has become increasingly prevalent in Dublin during recent years.

He said it was affecting "people very much like you or I who, because of economic factors beyond their control, have found themselves in a housing market where there are no available houses".

Fifty families at any one time use The Hub - an over-subscribed temporary accommodation site operated by Crosscare as it tries to move families on to longer-term housing.

Liam Neeson joins calls for Tuam babies to be identified

Liam Neeson has joined calls for the Catholic Church in Ireland to identify the remains of hundreds of babies and children found buried under a former mother and baby home in Co Galway.

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The actor is currently developing a movie to tell the story of the remains of children found in an unmarked grave at the home for unmarried

women and their children that was run by Bon Secours nuns until it closed in 1961. According to the [New York Times](#), 796 children died at the home between 1925 and 1961. The newspaper says the remains were found in septic tanks and DNA analysis showed the children to be between the ages of 35 weeks and 3 years.

Neeson is among those calling for the bodies of the babies to be identified.

'DNA technology is now available to identify all these bones, belonging to possibly over 790 babies and children, still lying in the ground in Tuam,' he told [The Daily Mail](#).

'The Irish government, aided by the Catholic Church and especially the nuns' order, the Congregation of the Sisters of Bon Secours, must not shirk the responsibility of giving these souls the dignity and respect of identification.

'They had a right to exist. They were not "the devil's issue", as some people and establishments referred to them. A

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wrong is still a wrong and a crime is still a crime no matter how many years have passed. A proposed bronze plaque isn't going to absolve those responsible for this horror.'

As Pope Francis held Mass in Dublin on Sunday, a vigil was taking place 130 miles away in the town of Tuam for the babies.

Among those making the solemn procession from Tuam town hall to the site of the former home was Annette McKay, Councillor for Moorside ward in Bury, Lancashire, who is demanding a full forensic investigation of the site.

According to the Daily Mail, her sister Mary Margaret O'Connor died from whooping cough and heart failure while staying in the home with her mother Maggie O'Connor.

During the vigil, the names of those buried were read aloud. Ms McKay said it was a 'beautiful' moment.

'Something that was inhumane became human,' she said, [according to the Belfast Telegraph](#). 'It was very moving.'

US National Cathedral tribute to Sen. John McCain

The Very Rev. Randolph Marshall Hollerith, dean of [Washington National Cathedral](#), released the following statement on the death of Senator John McCain (R-AZ):

“Today, our hearts are with the family of Sen. John McCain, the people of Arizona and all those who mourn the loss of

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this American hero and patriot. We pray that his family may find comfort that Sen. McCain's soul is at peace in the arms of his loving Creator.

“In a town brimming with ambition and ego, Sen. McCain stood apart for his selfless devotion to his country, the men and women of our Armed Forces, and his family. Time and again, he pointed us toward the higher ideals of our national life, and we are grateful for his example. He modeled for all Americans what it means to live with honor and integrity.

“In the tumult of Vietnam, he endured the most horrific torture, yet refused to condone the same for the enemies of freedom. Sen. McCain worked tirelessly to reclaim our politics from the monied interests and restore the levers of democracy to the people. Above all, his public service to the nation he loved so much was animated by the virtues of decency, civility and bipartisanship.

“Together, with all the saints in glory, we give thanks for the life and legacy of Sen. John Sidney McCain III. In his service may we find courage; in his sacrifice, honor; and in his example, a renewed commitment to the common good.

News briefs

+++Deacons for Down & Dromore - This year's Service of Ordination of Deacons took place in Shankill Parish Church, Lurgan, on Sunday 26 August. The ordination retreat leader and preacher was Bishop Grant LeMarquand who is also the diocesan Bible Week speaker.

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650 people came along to support the candidates and take part in what was a truly inspirational service. Bishop Harold Miller ordained 4



deacons who will serve internships in the diocese. You may click on the links below to find out more about each of them:

- [Jonathan Brown](#) for Dromore Cathedral
- [Emma Carson](#) for Magheralin
- [Peter Hilton](#) for Hillsborough
- [Karen Salmon](#) for Shankill



+++Newtownards Wellbeing Cafe - The first Wellbeing Cafe! This Thursday from 6pm the Salvation Army Community Hub, 19 Regent Street Newtownards (photo left)

+++RSCM children's workshop - 28 children aged 9+ attended our Summer Roman Catholic workshop. RSCM Ireland

Committee and Blanaid Murphy co-taught. There was time

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for musicianship-training, exploring the liturgy, plainsong notation-reading, and pizza as well...

