

## A choir in tune with its sexuality

**Founded 18 years ago, the Glória lesbian and gay choir has helped many people find their voice. As they prepare for their Christmas concert, its singers have plenty to celebrate**

Irish Times - The Glória choir are wearing black tonight, accented with a rainbow of ties in solid colours for the men and big red-silk flowers for the women. When word goes out that someone isn't happy with his tie, a flamboyant fashion director opens up his own suitcase of colourful ties. "What would you like? Silk? Silk mix? Red, blue, pink?" The ensuing laughter is one of the



Church of [Ireland](#) school, where the choir practises in Rathmines, and can certainly command a group.

"When I met the school parents for the first time I warned them that music would go up-up-up and sports would go down-down-down," he jokes. "My husband, Niall, is a choir widow: I eat, sleep and make music."

The joy of experiencing a performance by Glória, apart from the glorious music, is watching its members' faces, each telling a story.

Over the past 18 years the gay, lesbian and transgender members of Glória have seen each other through celebrations and mourning, civil partnerships and the births of children.

When the choir began, in 1995, same-sex relationships had only recently been made



**Seasonal celebration at Rathcoole parish, Newtownabbey**

reasons people join Glória.

But when the choir's musical director, [Ian Packham](#), takes charge, it's down to business. He is a lecturer in music education at the [Church of Ireland](#) College of Education and principal of Kildare Place

legal, so it was an act of courage for them to sing publicly.

The choir's longest-serving member, 73-year-old [Jim Rafter](#), is a barman in Rathmines and a part-time extra in the BBC drama *Ripper Street*. He was at Glória's first meeting, 18 years ago, after he answered a newspaper ad that asked, "Fancy hitting some high notes?" The choir's nervous first performance was in the safety of a gay-friendly bar, Mother Redcaps. "Nowadays the young people think it's trendy to be gay," he says.



*The Vatican Christmas tree arrives*

The chance to socialise outside of pubs and clubs was a draw for Lorna Rouse, a 33-year-old who joined last year after returning from several years in London. A primary teacher originally from [Ballina](#), Co [Mayo](#), she didn't know many people in Dublin. "It's the enjoyment of singing, but it's also a social outlet, like a family, where you get to meet like-minded people."

Glória has performed all over Ireland and internationally, singing with the Garda Band and Male Voice Choir at the National Concert Hall, at both Church of Ireland and [Catholic Church](#) events, civil partnerships and birthdays, and at Aids memorials. Next year it will host Various Voices, one of the largest choral festivals to be held in Ireland, with 2,500 singers coming to Dublin City University from all over the world. It is expected to bring €2 million in business to Dublin over four days.

<http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/a-choir-in-tune-with-its-sexuality-1.1619701>

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## Ballynahinch church protester receives 'burn in hell' text message

**An unholy row at a church has taken a sinister turn after a protester was told to "burn in hell."**

Belfast Telegraph - Churchgoers who stage weekly protests at Ballynahinch Congregational Church have been told "action" would be "taken against them" if they continued to talk to the media about the dispute.

The congregation is split between those who support the minister, Rev George Speers, and those who want him to go.

It is understood the anonymous text messages were sent to church trustee member, Sammy Graham who said the



warnings would not intimidate him or stop protests.

"Yes being told someone hopes you burn in hell isn't pleasant. But we at the church will not be put off by these disgusting threats," he said.

In a separate incident, police received a report of a man making comments which were felt to be intimidatory at yesterday morning's church service.

For more than 14 weeks, peaceful protests have continued outside the Sunday morning services against Rev Speers.

Yesterday afternoon, some 125 protesters set foot inside the church for the first time in months. The trustees and other supporters took a seat in the pews as they held their own Christmas Carol Service featuring readings, carols and participation by children in the Sunday School.

The trustees say they held the service at 2pm in a bid to avoid confrontation. Rev Speers and his supporters were not present.

More at -

<http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/local-national/northern-ireland/ballynahinch-church-protester-receives-burn-in-hell-text-message-29821234.html>

## Magheralin Church Hall wins major award

**Magheralin Parish Church Hall was recently named the winner in the Repair and Adaptive Re-use category of a major national architectural design competition.**

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***Raymond Neill (Hon Treasurer, Magheralin Parish), Angus and Nicola Waddington– Waddington McClure Architects, Kenneth Forbes, Magheralin Parish Select Vestry***

Known as the Wood Awards, the competition is designed to recognise innovation in the use of wood and to inform people that wood is a beautiful and economical material which can be used to great advantage in any building.

The presentation was made in the magnificent surroundings of Carpenters Hall, the home of the Society of Carpenters. The hall was also named runner-up to the Gold Medal award winner across all the categories.

The church hall was extensively renovated in 2012 with the assistance of funding from the Northern Ireland Development Council and the International Fund for Ireland. The work included the removal of an old stage and the incorporation of new meeting rooms and storage space within the existing building. More efficient insulation measures were also built in.

The design and project management work was carried out by Nicola Waddington of local company Waddington–McClure

Architects. "What we were trying to do was to refurbish the hall in a manner which would make it more energy efficient whilst, at the same time, ensuring that it met the needs of an expanding church and community. Aesthetically, it was important that the Hall became a bright new meeting place for all", she commented.

The Rector of Magheralin Parish, Canon Gareth Harron, said how delighted he was that the hall had won such a prestigious award.

"The inspirational ideas of Waddington-McClure, together with the excellent workmanship of the builders – Viewpoint Developments – and all who worked on the project combined to give the Parish a hall which we can take great pleasure in dedicating to the Glory of God. I am particularly keen to see it being used by all in our community and many events have already been held where this is evident."

The chairman of the judging panel, who had visited the hall in September, said: "This is intelligent and commendable work. It is an unassuming project which has completely transformed the space and is exactly the sort of work that should be encouraged. The use of American white oak has lifted the whole process."

## **Attack on nuns' car in Belfast was sectarian, says UPRG**

**A "disgusting" attack on a car used by nuns living in a unionist area of [Belfast](#) was sectarian, a community worker has said.**

Belfast Telegraph - It's believed the vehicle was targeted by those coming through the interface gate from the nationalist Springfield Road to Workman Avenue in the Woodvale area at around 9pm yesterday.

The windscreens and side windows were smashed on the car used by the two nuns who live at the property.

A similar attack at the same home in July was blamed on republican youths.

West [Belfast](#) UPRG representative Gerald Solinas slammed the sectarian attack.

"I would call on all nationalist and republican community workers to condemn this despicable, unprovoked and intimidating attack," he said.

"Those responsible came through the gate at the interface deliberately. The nuns told me they couldn't understand why they were continuously being picked on, especially now in the run up to Christmas.

"They were very shaken and understandably upset."

"This is the fourth or fifth time they've been targeted in the past eight or so years.

"It's disgusting, it's sectarian and it's wrong."

The West Belfast UPRG stated "this was the second attack on this Catholic nuns' property in three days. The irony is this lady has been welcomed to Ainsworth with open arms."

Mr Solinas said the PSNI removed the car to a local station for safekeeping.

"The ladies are safe but badly shaken."

## **Tuam, Killala & Achonry National Schools Service**

**Pupils and teachers of National Schools from all over the United Diocese gathered at St Mary's Cathedral, Tuam for their annual service and get-together on 29th November 2013.**

The Theme of the Service this year was 'Living Stones' which fed into reflection about the ongoing project of the schools



***Bishop Rooke and his Assessor, Paul Ryan, enter into the spirit of things.***

and the diocese to support the construction and equipping of a dorm in Oloosuyian Maasi Girls School, diocese of Kajiado, Kenya. The children fabricated papier maché 'bricks' which they painted and decorated and brought to St Mary's where they were made into a wall.

The service was led by Revd. John Godfrey of Galway who had the children eating out of his hands.

The address was given by Jennifer and Stephen McWhirter who came to us under the auspices of CMS Ireland

Both Jennifer and Stephen have visited Kajiado and they brought with them news of the project and several artefacts from Kenya ( including a couple of fierce-look native spears! ) which the children could touch and handle.

The children sang songs, read readings and prayed prayers. And the whole occasion was led into chaos at the very end as Revd John paraded the youngster and teachers and clergy alike on a 'Brick Walk' around the precincts of the cathedral.

Lunch was consumed in the Synod Hall after the service and the verdict on the day's events was 'Result!'

## **Tribute to Mandela at Service for International Community**

**Nelson Mandela's contribution to his own nation and to the rest of the world was honoured at a Carol Service for the international community in Dublin this week.**

The Archbishop of Dublin, the Most Revd Dr Michael Jackson paid tribute to "a man who lived his life for others" at the Discovery International Christmas Carol Service which took place in the Church of St George and St Thomas, Cathal Brugha Street. In a brief tribute to Nelson Mandela the Archbishop stated:

"The International Community in Dublin gathers joyously and lovingly in this church of St George and St Thomas in the heart



***Archbishop Michael Jackson in the Church of St George and St Thomas***

of a truly international city. It would be remiss of me not to speak appreciatively and with sadness of the passing of Nelson





*The Revd Obinna Ulogwara, who is also chaplain to the international community, Archbishop Jackson and lay reader, Gillian Dean*

Mandela. His name will ever be chiselled on the Memorial Wall of history and for special reasons.

“A long life lived with passion and commitment brought about many changes in him and in the nation to which he belonged and which, in the fulness of time, he led into a future of which so many had not even dared to dream. His stamina and idealism gave birth to patience and politics which secured dignity for the human person in South Africa such as had never been in place before and would not have happened had it not been for him – who he was and how he did it.

“The impact of his personality has been such that everyone across the world knows him as ‘one of their own.’ He has espoused values of principle, of human worth and of change and inclusion which have made it virtually impossible for unreflective conservatism to hold sway

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with any credibility or integrity. This is a legacy of thanksgiving.

“We in Ireland remember his gracious commitment and contribution to The Special Olympics and to all that he shared of himself internationally from within Ireland at that time. The disabled, the poor, the needy were among those who initiated change for the better through the hand and the heart of Nelson Mandela.

“We take a moment to reflect on a life which has changed the human face of the world. We use this moment to remember the challenge and responsibility of a rainbow people of God at home and abroad. We

celebrate a life lived for others by the father-figure of a nation whom many have come to regard as the father-figure of the world – Nelson Mandela.” The lessons were read in nine different languages including Irish, German, Yoruba, Igbo, French, Malawian, Italian and the Philippines. The Gospel was read in English by Archbishop Michael Jackson. The service was led by the rector, the Revd Obinna Ulogwara, who is also chaplain to the international community while lay reader, Gillian Dean, also contributed.

Meanwhile, books of condolences remain open in St Patrick’s Cathedral, Dublin, from 9.00 am to 5.30 pm until the end of the week. All will be very welcome to come in and mark the passing of Nelson Mandela and light a candle in his memory. In Christ Church Cathedral books of condolences will also be available for the week between the hours of 9.00 am to 5.00 pm.

## Autumn Soul Band auditions

### **The Methodist Church Autumn Soul Band is looking for a few new members.**

Could you be one of them? Check out the info in the download below, and if you're interested fill in the application form and send it in to them. Application forms need to be with them no later than Friday 17th January, and auditions will be held on Saturday 25th January.

<http://www.irishmethodist.org/sites/default/files/youtheventattachments/AS%20Band%20Auditions%20info.pdf>

## Public funding private schools at €115m cost

### **Government cuts and falling enrolments have seen taxpayer funding of fee-paying schools' teacher salaries drop 11% in five years to below €97m.**

Irish Examiner - But total public funding of around €115m still helps in the running of 56 schools outside the free education scheme, despite continued opposition to the payments from Education Minister Ruairi Quinn's Labour Party.

A number of fee-paying schools are in talks with the Department of Education about following Kilkenny College into the fully state-funded scheme.

They are feeling the pressures of pupil-teacher ratio increases over and above those imposed by the Government, combined with the impact of fewer families being able to afford their fees.

But the falling cost to the Exchequer is not enough to satisfy some opponents of taxpayer support for the 50-plus schools, more than 30 of which are in Dublin.

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The Labour Party wants the subsidies stopped after unanimously backing a motion on the issue just over a week ago.

"These payments amount to education apartheid and promotes privilege among those students whose family can afford to send them to fee-paying schools," said the motion from the Tipperary North branch.

It came after Mr Quinn made no further cuts to their public funding for Sept 2014 in the budget, beyond those which took effect this term in Budget 2013. His party had voted at last year's conference to phase out subsidies for fee-paying schools.

A spokeswoman for Mr Quinn said he supports the Labour Party policy in relation to fee-paying schools and has increased their pupil-teacher ratios by three points since taking office.

"However, the minister is part of a coalition government and budgetary decisions are taken by the entire Cabinet, not just by Labour ministers," she said.

The €96.98m cost for the last school year does not include employers' PRSI of around 10.5% or the additional cost of clerical staff, special needs supports and other current payments to fee-paying schools by the Department of Education, factors which would bring the full cost to almost €115m.

Sinn Féin education spokesman Jonathan O'Brien, who got the latest figures from Mr Quinn in reply to a Dáil question, said the public funding should be phased out over four or five years except for small Protestant schools that depend on it to offer children places in a school of their own ethos.

"I don't buy the argument that all these schools would be forced to close. The department's report earlier this year showed some of the larger schools have huge cash reserves.

"If someone wants to educate their child in a private school, the best of luck to them, but I don't see why the parent of a child at a school in a disadvantaged area or in poor condition should subsidise a private fee-paying school with their taxes," he said.



## Welcome to Tralee

**The Rev'd. Jane Galbraith was welcomed in to her new ministry in the parish of Tralee in a service which was both joyful and thoughtful.**

She was presented by Canon Marie Rowley Brook, welcomed by the parishioners and commissioned to her ministry by Bishop Trevor. The liturgy not only commissioned and welcomed Jane to her new ministry, but also reminded the whole congregation that ministry was a

shared task and all were called to fulfil their calling as God's people. This was emphasised in the "after party" where

Bishop Trevor welcomed the Roman Catholic Priests and Methodist Minister from the Tralee. Ministry, he said, was a shared enterprise for the whole people of God, Roman Catholic, Anglican and Methodist.

The former Dean of St. Mary's the Most Rev'd Maurice Sirr, and Jane's former Rector, preached. Rev'd Sirr spoke of Jane's experience in ministry both as a lay reader and a non-stipendiary priest before her arrival in Limerick City. He also spoke of her time in the city parish, and the many skills she acquired and the important ministries she undertook. Her former parishioners will miss her, but the parish of Tralee has gained a priest with skill and experience to help in the task of looking to the future.

After the service there was, of course, cake. Then Rev'd Jim Stephens was presented with gifts as a token of appreciation of all his work during the vacancy. A book called "Thoughts and Inspirations" was also on sale for €5, the profits going towards the work of [living links Kerry](#), which supports families affected by suicide. If you would like a copy please contact Archdeacon Sue.

## Prayer for Today

Gracious God,  
through a vision you sent forth Paul to preach the gospel  
and called the women to the place of prayer on the Sabbath.  
Grant that we may be like Paul  
and be found like Lydia,  
our hearts responsive to your word  
and open to go where you lead us. Amen.



