



Irish, GB and international News

Irish speaking carol service in Belfast

The top ten GB carols

Anglican religious leave Lambeth

The challenge of the US churches to gun violence



The stars of the Kilmood Nativity

Fantastic performance by the youngsters in this parish in the Diocese of Down

Seminar on Missional Discipleship

A seminar aimed at exploring the challenges and practicalities of creating a missional discipleship culture will take place in Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin, on January 8 and 9 2014.

Entitled 'Missional Discipleship in Ireland Today', the first session of the event is aimed at everyone – from church leaders to church planters and lay leaders. Topics covered will include empowering lay leaders, personal growth and development, creating a culture of discipleship and discipleship that leads to mission.

The session will also hear from PJ Booth, leader of Open Arms Christian Fellowship and national leader of the AGI; Andy Carroll, minister of Donabate Presbyterian Church; and Ross and Lucy Hill, leaders of Hope Community Church, Ringsend.

The second session will be more interactive and practical and is aimed more specifically at church planters – those who are currently or have recently planted a church or those who are planning something new in their community.

The main speaker at this event will be Paul Maconochie who runs a network of church based on St Thomas Crooke's in Sheffield. Paul also oversees the European network of churches that have an affiliation with St Thomas'. He will share his experience. This event will be run in Christ Church Cathedral but is overseen by an interdenominational group so there will be people from a variety of denominations there. It is hoped that the event might be a helpful way to continue the conversation started at the Diocesan Growth Forum last year and will stimulate further ideas to find new ways of engaging with local communities in an effective way.

Spaces for the event will be limited so to secure a place please email Andrew McNeile at amcneile@eircom.net by the end of November. More details are available at www.irishchurchplanting.org.



Nine Lessons with Carols in Irish in Belfast

The Lord Mayor Mairtin O Muilleoir, the Bishop of Connor Rt Rev Alan Abernethy, Rev Haydn Foster and one of the pupils from Gaelscoil na bh Fla following the Irish language carol service organised by the Irish Guild of the Church of Ireland. The entire service, readings carols and prayers and blessing was in Irish.

Cumann Gaelach na hEaglaise (The Irish Guild of the Church) supported the Annual Civil Carol Service

which took place in St George's Church, Belfast on December 15 2013.

The Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev Alan Abernethy, gave a blessing in Irish and the Lord Mayor, Máirtín Ó Muilleoir, read a lesson.

At the service Cumann Gaelach na hEaglaise launched its bilingual services book, Holy Communion and Other Services of the Church of Ireland.

Dáithí Ó Maolchoille, Chair of the Irish Guild of the Church, speaking at the launch said: "The parish of St George's should be rightly proud of their tremendous efforts to promote the greater use of Irish in their services. We also wish to commend Bishop Alan Abernethy on giving the blessing in Irish. He may not know how much this is appreciated."

The translation of the Services of the Nine Carols was carried out by Liam Andrews and representatives from the Irish language sector also read lessons at the service.



The 37th annual Christmas sitout by the Dean and Chapter of Belfast Cathedral got underway at on Monday December 16. Lord Mayor of Belfast Máirtín Ó Muilleoir launched the Black Santa charity sitout on the steps of St Anne's Cathedral along with the Dean of Belfast and the Bishop of Connor, The Rt Rev Alan Abernethy.

Almshouses and schools

***The Legacy of Hannah Villiers—Almshouses and Schools* has recently been published by Allan Callender in Limerick and is a history of Villiers Schools and the Almshouses through the years.**

The book can be ordered by email at aacallender@eircom.net or 087–1421525, price 25 euro plus p.p.

GB NEWS

'O Holy Night' is nation's favourite carol

The French-penned 'O Holy Night' remains a firm favourite nearly two centuries after it was written.

The Christmas carol, written by the mayor of a small French town near Avignon in 1847, has not lost any of its popularity after topping a poll of favourite Christmas carols.

O Holy Night came out on top in the poll carried out by Premier Christian Radio, with 15% of the vote.

Hark The Herald Angels Sing came a close second with 12% of the vote.

The Top Ten Christmas Carols favourites in the Premier chart were:

- 1] O Holy Night 15% vote
- 2] Hark The Herald Angels Sing 14%
- 3] In The Bleak Mid Winter 11%
- 4] Silent Night 9%
- 5] Joy To The World 7%
- 6] O Come All Ye Faithful 6%
- 7] O Little Town of Bethlehem 5%
- 8] O come O Come Emmanuel 4%



- 9] It Came Upon A Midnight Clear 3%+
10] Away in a Manger 3%

Pam Rhodes, who was to announce the Top Ten during her 'Hearts & Hymns' programme on Premier, said today that it was interesting that the winning carol was rarely sung by a congregation and is usually an inspirational performance piece.

"O Holy Night fits the mould of a traditional carol perfectly because it was first performed at Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve in 1847," she explained.

"The words had been written by Placide Clappeau, the Mayor of Roquemaure in France, who took his poem to Paris to ask his friend, the Jewish composer Charles Adam, to write the melody. The carol has been a favourite down the years ever since."

After 25 years, Lambeth Palace bids fond farewell to Sisters



Archbishop Justin with three Sisters from the Orders that have resided at Lambeth Palace over the last 25 years, Wednesday 11 December 2013. (Picture: Lambeth Palace)

Present and former staff joined a special Eucharist service at Lambeth Palace last week to celebrate 25 years of residence of nuns at the palace.

Guests were joined by some of the Sisters who have served, including the final one, Sister Catherine. Over the years the Sisters at Lambeth Palace have been drawn from the Anglican communities of the Order of the Holy Paraclete, the Community of the Holy Name, and the Sisters of the Love of God. Also present were two members of the Chemin Neuf community who will be moving into Lambeth Palace next month to continue the religious life of prayer that supports the Archbishop's ministry.

In a homily, Archbishop Justin said there are 'so many myths' about living in religious communities. 'One is that it's comfortable. The second is that it's an escape. It's anything but an escape; it's the opposite of an escape.

'Anyone who thinks this is a nice quiet place to go where you'll have a sort of regular pattern of worship and you can pray nicely... they've got to be kidding.'

You're living in community, you're with people, praying together, you see very aspect; it's not an escape. And all the spiritual trials and temptations that people face are concentrated in a community, and it's really demanding.

It's also not safe. It's incredibly risky, because of all the things we do, to say we're going to rely entirely on God, and that the worth of our life is set not by our own standards but by God, is hugely risky. . .

The first emphasis in my own ministry is around a renewal of prayer and the religious life within our church. Because where that happens it is an underlying sign of people taking risks with the existence of God. Saying we're going to throw ourselves into the void and see what happens, and see if God shows up. . . '

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Scotland: Marriage group targets marginal seats

A group opposing gay marriage legislation in Scotland has released a list revealing that many MSPs who plan to back the proposed bill are vulnerable to being voted out of their seats by those in support of traditional marriage.



The Scottish Assembly

Scotland For Marriage (SFM), which supports marriage as a union between a man and a woman and has almost 55,000 supporters throughout Scotland, has

published a Top Ten list that indicates just how significant votes will be in certain constituencies.

Sufficient numbers of supporters have been signed up to topple seven SNP figures including Gil Paterson, Sandra White and Marco Biagi, in addition to three Labour leaders.

"Our supporters are against same sex marriage. MSPs have already indicated that they are inclined to back the legislation," a spokesperson for SFM has said.

The group, which includes the Catholic Church, Church of Scotland and representatives of Muslim communities, hopes that voters will oust MSPs who refuse to protect the rights of those who disagree with the legislation.

"This is not a threat. It is merely democracy in action," the spokesman asserted.

SFM is expected to encourage members to make direct approaches to their MSPs in the coming few weeks in an effort to persuade them to support amendments to the proposed legislation, which is currently before Holyrood.

It has warned that safeguards are needed to protect those who support traditional marriage if the bill is passed and has repeatedly called for a series of changes to be made.

However, this is proving more difficult than otherwise hoped. SNP MSP Fiona McLeod, who represents Strathkelvin and Bearsden, recently refused to meet a constituent who supports Scotland For Marriage to discuss the legislation.

McLeod has a majority of 1892 in her constituency, but SFM has signed up 3,207 supporters in her seat, which marks her as one of the most vulnerable sitting MSPs.

"Our members are exercising their democratic rights and MSPs should have the decency to meet and listen to those who don't share their views," the SFM spokesman said.

"They are in office to represent all their constituents - not just those who might agree with them.

"While 76 per cent of MSPs voted to support the Bill at Stage One a recent poll showed that 43 per cent of Scots do not support gay marriage. So the politicians are out of step with public opinion."

SFM hopes to ensure that those who believe that marriage is between one man and one woman do not suffer discrimination in their career or workplace, do not have their freedom of speech restricted, are not denied access to public services and are not disallowed from fostering or adopting children.

"No one who supports the law as it stands should be discriminated against at home in the workplace and in schools, but that is likely to happen without safeguards being put in place to protect the rights and civil liberties of the majority of Scots who don't support this Bill," the SFM spokesperson said.

"The politicians claim there are sufficient safeguards but legal advice from leading human rights lawyers says otherwise.

"MSPs need to pay heed to what we are saying and our supporters will not be frightened to demonstrate their feelings at the next election. And for some, their votes could be decisive."



Girlguiding

Girl Guides may be expelled over promise change

Girl Guides from the North [of England] have been warned they risk being expelled from the

movement after refusing to drop 'God' from their traditional promise.

The leader of a church-based troop has been told she risks being axed from the organisation after defying a bid to to replace its traditional pledge.

Glynis Mackie, 55, who has been leading the 37th Newcastle Guide Unit at Jesmond Parish Church for more than 25 years, received a letter on Friday after the unit refused to adopt a new oath.

The Guiding Promise was altered so that members now swear "to be true to myself and develop my beliefs" rather than the original "to love my God". Mrs Mackie and the other leaders of the group resisted the change, which she calls a "fridge magnet promise that doesn't really mean anything".

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

A year after Sandy Hook, the USA churches witness against Gun Violence



A heart that bears 26 crosses for each victim is surrounded by lights in the Sandy Hook portion of Newtown, Connecticut, Dec. 14, 2013.

One year after the shooting at a Connecticut elementary school where 20 children and six adults were killed, Episcopalians across the nation participated in memorial services and spoke to the need for tighter gun control.

At [Trinity Episcopal Church](#) in Newtown, Connecticut, about two miles from Sandy Hook Elementary School, the site of the Dec. 14, 2012 shooting, the community was joined by Connecticut bishops suffragan Laura J. Ahrens and James E. Curry for a two-hour memorial service commemorating the victims.

At St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Fayetteville, Arkansas, the [grandfather of one of the child victims rang](#) the bells 20 times, once for each child victim.

Adam Lanza, 20, who had a history of mental and emotional problems, killed his mother at their Newtown home one year ago before driving to the elementary school, where he opened fire on the other victims and then committed suicide. The shooting, which devastated the nation, sparked a conversation on stricter gun control.

President Barack Obama and first lady Michelle Obama on Dec. 14 lit a candle for each of the 26 victims at the school, and the president [called](#) for stricter gun control and support for mental health treatment.

"As a nation, we can't stop every act of violence. We can't heal every troubled mind. But if we want to live in a country where we can go to work, send our kids to school, and walk our streets free from fear, we have to keep trying. We have to keep caring. We have to treat every child like they're our child. Like those in Sandy Hook, we must choose love. And together, we must make a change," said Obama in his [weekly address](#).

In Salt Lake City, Episcopal Diocese of Utah Bishop Scott Hayashi said the nation's wounds remained open and that Americans would not be lulled into thinking that such a tragedy won't happen again.

"You and I, for the sake of all people, must continue to be outraged," Hayashi told an audience at Salt Lake City's First Unitarian Church, [according to the Salt Lake Tribune](#). "If we lose that, we will lose the energy to move forward to make the changes that need to be made."

One day earlier, on Dec. 13, in Littleton, Colorado, an 18-year-old gunman shot and critically wounded a 17-year-old high-school classmate before killing himself. The gunman went to the high school searching for the head of speech and debate team, who'd recently kicked him off the team, according to news reports.

On Dec. 14, the bishops of the Diocese of Virginia [sent](#) the [following message](#) to the diocese, "Today, we remember the children, men and women

who lost their lives at the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting one year ago. We join in prayer with others from across the country and across the globe, for the victims and families of Sandy Hook and of so many other gun-related tragedies. We pray, too, for our country, as we continue to grapple with issues surrounding gun violence and safety – issues raised again by yesterday's shootings in a suburban Denver school.”

Also on Dec. 14, gun control advocates [gathered](#) at the Cathedral of the Incarnation in Baltimore, Maryland, to commemorate the Sandy Hook victims and “to express their displeasure” with the federal government and individual states for failing to pass stricter gun control laws.

Washington National Cathedral on Dec. 12 held a national vigil for all victims of gun violence honoring all those who have been affected by the rampant gun violence in the United States and exploring the role that people of faith can have in healing victimized communities and push for justice and changes in law that can protect against further gun deaths.

More than 800 people, including Connecticut Bishop Ian T. Douglas, interfaith gun control activists, survivors and victim's families, [attended](#) the service. The Very Rev. Gary Hall, dean of the cathedral, has been an outspoken advocate for stricter gun control in the wake of the Connecticut and other shootings.

On Dec. 15, Hall used his sermon to reaffirm his stance.

“A year ago, I stood in the pulpit and declared my own and this cathedral's resolve to stand with and for the victims of gun violence and to use our energies to mobilize the faith community to pressure our legislators for action to curb the epidemic of deaths brought about by guns in America,” he said. “In the phrase that will no doubt be the opening line of my obituary, I said, ‘The gun lobby is no match for the cross lobby.’”

Hall noted that one year later “pretty close to nothing has happened,” pointing out that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has reported that an additional 32,000 people have died from gun violence in the United States since the Sandy Hook shootings, including 12 people who died in the Washington Navy Yard shootings in September 2013.

“There has been almost no legislative action in response to these deaths,” he said.

“What else did we think we had a right to expect? Nothing has happened in a year partially because we have not cared enough to make something happen. The passion is all on one side in the gun violence debate. Oh, sure, we care every time there is a tragedy. But we quickly lose interest and turn our attention to other things. We need, my friends, to do better. We need, as the community that lives out the life and promise of Jesus in the world, to be the people bringing good news to a nation and world in the grips of a death-dealing addiction to violence and guns,” Hall continued.

A Facebook page, [Episcopalians Against Gun Violence](#), has been created to share the work of bishops, clergy and lay Episcopalians working to curb gun violence.

Meanwhile, the [Episcopal Peace Fellowship](#) staged a memorial vigil — “Protect Children, Not Guns!” — at the National Rifle Association headquarters in Fairfax, Virginia, on the morning of Dec. 14,” said the Rev. Allison Liles, EPF executive director.

“Twenty young children and six educators were slaughtered by 154 bullets — fired in just five minutes. This obscenity has to stop,” said the Liles, who took part in the national vigil for all victims of gun violence at Washington National Cathedral on Dec. 12. “I felt a strong sense of commitment during the cathedral vigil to work even harder to persuade the U.S. Congress to finally adopt meaningful and sensible gun control legislation when they return to Washington in January.”



Christians no longer a majority in New Zealand

The Church of the Good Shepherd, near Mount Cook, New Zealand

For the first time in over a century, less than half of New Zealanders call themselves Christians.

According to details of the 2013 census released recently, Christians now only make up approximately 47% of the four million-strong population who gave details of their religion (1.93 million people), dropping from 56% in 2006 (2.03 million).

Within the statistics, the most troubling data set is that of the Anglicans. The numbers show them as having lost almost 100,000 members in the space of six years, down from 0.55 million in 2006 to 0.46 million in 2013.

Anglicans have attributed this in large part to age, but have admitted that does not tell the full story.

"Last census there were 41,000 Anglicans over the age of 80, only slightly less than those under 10," said Peter Lineham, Professor of History at Massey University, according to AnglicanLink.com.

"But this still means that many Anglicans in 2006 have changed their affiliation since then – probably to 'none'."

This substantial decrease for Anglicans means that Catholics have become the single largest Christian denomination in New Zealand for the first time, but their numbers are down too (0.51 million in 2006 to 0.49 million in 2013).

The news wasn't all bad for Christian denominations though, with smaller denominations reporting limited but significant growth. Evangelicals have grown from approximately 13,800 followers in 2006 to 15,400 in 2013. Adventists were numbering approximately 16,200, and are now 17,100.

Crucially, those who described themselves simply as 'Christian' rather than any specific denomination, have increased from 0.18 million in 2006 to 0.22 million in 2013. This group may explain some percentage of the drop in other Christian groups, with Kiwi Anglican clergyman Geoff Robson blogging to the effect that he and his family label themselves as "Christian" without any further definition.

Those of an atheist or 'no religion' persuasion have increased substantially, now making up close to 40% of the population (1.63 million in 2013, compared to 1.29 million in 2006). This makes New Zealand one of the most secular nations in the world.

The results have prompted questions as to the aptness of national celebrations of Christmas and the place of Church in the national school system. Professor Paul Morris of Victoria University, a specialist in religious studies, said in the Sunday Star Times that New Zealand found itself in "new

territory", with Christianity losing its central position. "For the first time since 1901, Christians are not the clear majority."

However, the accuracy of the census as a means of gauging religiosity across the country has been in question for some time. A survey conducted in 1985 by the Ministry for Culture and Heritage found that around one-quarter of those answering 'no religion' may in fact believe in a God. The International Social Survey Programme conducted in New Zealand in 2008, received responses from around 1000 adults across the country. They found that 72% believed in a god, a substantial jump from the approximately 58% that described themselves as religious in the 2006 census. Anglican Bishop of Wellington Justin Duckworth suggests many people say they are spiritual, but become more hesitant when asked about organised religion.

Other religions in New Zealand have been growing steadily. Hindus have jumped from 64,300 people in 2006 to 90,000 in 2013. Muslims counted 36,000 among their number in 2006, but that has now increased to 40,000 in 2013. Although this growth is substantial, it is mostly linked to immigration which has slowed in recent years.

The most stable group seems to be Jews, who have reported an increase of only nine members between 2006 and 2013.

The size of these numbers does belie a longer-term situation in the New Zealand Christian community. Data gathered by the Christian theologian and academic blogger Mike Crudge suggests that New Zealand has been in decline in terms of Church attendance since 1890.

Many have predicted the current situation. According to one report by the American Physical Society, if current trends continue, not only will those of no religion outnumber Christians by the next census, but it could go extinct entirely.

Carl Walrond, writing in the Encyclopaedia of New Zealand, states that with current trends, non-religious people will outnumber all religious people regardless of affiliation by 2026.

Prayer for Today

**Empowering God,
you gave the church
the abiding presence of your Holy Spirit.
Look upon your church today and hear our petitions.**

