



***Pope Francis and Archbishop Stanley Ntagali at the Anglican Shrine to the Ugandan Martyrs in Namugongo - see report this issue***

## **Ardoyne Altar boys of '69 reunited for film on how the Troubles shaped their lives**

What have a PSNI superintendent, an ex-Leeds United footballer and the former Director General

of RTÉ got in common?

BMG - Incredibly, they were all once part of the same group of altar boys serving at Holy Cross Church during the Troubles.

On Monday and Tuesday nights, True North's 'Boys of '69' documentary aired on BBC and told the fascinating story of a group of Ardoyne youngsters reunited for the first time in 50 years. It shared an insight as to how their experiences within the community helped shape their very different life paths.

The moving documentary was the brainchild of community worker Brian McKee, who can be found most nights interacting with young people close to Camp Twaddell on the Crumlin Road.

One of the seven former altar boys himself, Brompton boy Brian has kept a close relationship with the church and Ardoyne throughout his 57 years. Others, however, went different ways including to America, England and the south.

The documentary followed Brian as he tracked down his former friends before eventually filming their reunion at the Holy Cross altar, where their journey began.



***Former altar boys at Holy Cross reunited after 40 years are top row (l-r): Sean O'Neill, Brian McKee, Brendan O'Connor; bottom row: Sean Goan, Gerry Murray, Gerard McGuigan, Cathal Goan***

Each of the men viewed what happened that summer differently, but all admit that what they witnessed and experienced had a huge influence on their life choices.

The stark contrast of the impact and influence the summer of '69 had was most evidently shown in the comparison of Gerry Murray and Gerard McGuigan. Gerry became an RUC officer and is the longest serving Catholic police officer in the

force. As well as being a PSNI superintendent, he is also a founding member of the PSNI GAA team.

Gerard, meanwhile, was a long-serving Sinn Féin councillor and republican activist throughout the Troubles. A tense atmosphere was noticeable when the pair were placed together.

Others featured included Cathal Goan who went on to the top man at RTÉ. His brother Sean was the only one out of the group to remain in the church and was ordained as priest. Now a teacher and scripture writer, Sean said that he found safety in the church but that his eventual decision to leave the church was based on his need “to grow up”.

Sean O’Neill went on to play professional football for Leeds United, while Brendan O’Connor is now a highly respected oral surgeon based in New York.

The documentary was spliced with footage from the time, both nostalgic and harrowing.

Brian McKee explained the importance Holy Cross Church played in the lives of local people, then and now.

“No matter what you think about the church in Ardoyne you can never get away from it, even physically it is always in the background,” he said.

“It has always played a big role in the community here and in the late ‘60s and early ‘70s. When the Troubles were at their height we had about 50 altar boys serving at the same time.”

Brian, who served the 7.45am Mass with his two brothers every day, said that despite many differences most young people in the area at that time shared common experiences.

“I suppose what this documentary shows is how those common experiences can set people on different paths in life,” he added.

“For example Cathal who got out and made a successful life for himself in the south, and Gerard who was equally successful working within the Ardoyne community.

“When I see what this one group achieved there is a real sense of pride but also there is also a lesson there for the current generation in Ardoyne that you shape your success in life by

your own decisions and not by those that are made for you.

“We all shared a common background and even when on the other side of the earth, the experiences that we had as youngsters will always be the base from which we built our lives. Hopefully this is something other communities can identify with.”

## **RC bishops profoundly disquieted at Belfast High Court decision on abortion**

A statement has been issued by the Catholic bishops in Northern Ireland in response to the judgement of the High Court in Belfast in relation to the laws on abortion. It states:

“Our day to day pastoral experience teaches us that even in the hardest of hard cases society cannot forget that human life is sacred and always deserving of our utmost protection, compassion and care. The Catholic Church teaches that the duty to care for and protect human life extends equally to a mother and her unborn child in all circumstances.

“Having met with many parents whose unborn child with a life limiting condition has lived for hours, days, weeks and even years bringing immense happiness, we are profoundly shocked and disturbed at the Judges words that such children are ‘doomed’. The Judge compounds this by saying that ‘there is no human life to protect’. By any human and moral standard these children are persons and our duty to respect and protect their right to life does not change because of any Court judgement.

“It is profoundly disquieting that the decision of the High Court in Belfast has effectively weighed up one life against another and said to our society that the life of some children is more worthy of our protection, love and care than others. Vulnerable and innocent children who suffer from a life limiting condition, and children who have been conceived as a result of the trauma of a sexual crime for which they bear no responsibility, will no longer be afforded the protection of the law to vindicate their inherent right to life. To deliberately and intentionally take the life of an innocent person continues to be gravely morally wrong in all circumstances.

“The judgment itself draws attention to the contradiction and illogicality of laws that call for “no discrimination against those children who are born suffering from disabilities such as Down’s Syndrome or spina bifida” but then permit “selective abortion so as to prevent those children with such disabilities being born in the first place”. In this regard we draw attention to the words of Pope Francis: “How can we genuinely teach the importance of concern for other vulnerable beings, however troublesome or inconvenient they may be, if we fail to protect a human embryo, even when its presence is uncomfortable and creates difficulties? If personal and social sensitivity towards the acceptance of the new life is lost, then other forms of acceptance that are valuable for society also wither away” (Laudato Si, n. 120). We are committed to a culture of equal compassion and care for a mother and her unborn child. We share with others the belief that the direct and intentional killing of an unborn child can never be a humane, compassionate or appropriate response to the complex and sensitive circumstances of a difficult or crisis pregnancy. The Church will continue to consider the full implications of the judgement of the High



Court in Belfast and of any appeal which may follow.”

Archbishop Eamon Martin, Archbishop of Armagh; Bishop Noel Treanor, Bishop of Down & Connor; Bishop Anthony Farquhar, Auxiliary Bishop of Down & Connor; Bishop John McAreavey, Bishop of Dromore; Bishop Liam MacDaid, Bishop of Clogher; Bishop Donal McKeown, Bishop of Derry

## **PCI's Christmas Cracker Scheme**

Now in their seventh year, the [Christmas Cracker Scheme](#) provides a fun programme for adults with a learning disability over the age of 18 based around the Christmas story. The events are run by individual congregations and supported by the Presbyterian Church in Ireland's (PCI) Council for Social Witness with [Prospects](#), the UK's lead Christian organisation for people with a learning disability and their families.

Linda Wray, PCI's Residential and Supported Services Manager, explained that the events offered a fun-packed, Christmas-themed afternoon for those taking part and an opportunity for respite for their parents and carers. She also encouraged more congregations to get involved.



“People matter to God and as a Church we are called to live out the love of Christ as a caring church within our communities and the Christmas Cracker Scheme is just one example of this,” Linda Wray said.

“Around 1 in 50 people in Northern Ireland have a learning disability and we hope that these events will provide a fun afternoon for those who come and some respite time for their parents and carers.

“Our experienced staff and volunteers probably enjoy it as much as those taking part, as there are arts, crafts, cookery, music and games to take part in. There will also be a Christmas story and refreshments,” she said.

The events will be held in Belfast’s McQuiston Memorial Presbyterian Church on 5th December and Orangefield Presbyterian Church on 12th December. For the first time West Church in Bangor will also be holding a Christmas Cracker event on the 12th December. All events are from 2.00pm to 5.30pm.

To attend please register in advance by Friday, 4th December. [Registration forms](#) for each event and further details are available to [download here](#) or contact Linda Wray, email: [lwray@presbyterianireland.org](mailto:lwray@presbyterianireland.org) or tel: 028 9041 7234

5th December: [McQuiston Presbyterian Church, Belfast](#)

12th December: [Orangefield Presbyterian Church, Belfast](#)

12th December: [West Church, Bangor](#)

## **Columbanus anniversary celebrations in Bangor and Maynooth**

The Columbanus 1400th anniversary celebrations in Bangor reached their climax over the weekend 20 – 22 November in a full programme organised jointly between the Friends of Columbanus, Ards and North Down Council and the local churches.

St Columbanus, Ballyholme, was the natural venue for two lectures on the Saturday, both supported by a large number of pilgrims from all over Ireland. The first lecture was a consideration of Columbanus's run-ins with some of early Europe's temporal powers by Dr Immo Warntjes from Queen's University School of History and Anthropology. The second was the launch of a book charting a very personal journey made by Belfast Methodist Minister Dr Barry Sloane (right) who spent a number of months hitch-hiking, so far as was possible, in Columbanus' actual footsteps down through France, Germany and Italy.

Music also featured with the highlight event being held in the Abbey with a presentation of, 'To find a heathen place and sound a bell'. Telling the story of Fiachra and Columbanus in a haunting weave of voices and music it featured the work of Kerrie Hardy one of Ireland's leading poets who grew up in Bangor.

A festival service in the Abbey concluded the weekend. Led by the Rector, Canon Ronnie Nesbitt, and including local church leaders and the Bangor Ladies' Choir it celebrated Bangor, 'Light of the world'. Former Archbishop of Armagh, Lord Eames, was the preacher stressing the call of Columbanus to be lights in the dark places of the world today and linking his thoughts to recent events in France.

In the New Year a major art work will be unveiled in the grounds of the Abbey based on the Bangor Bell, a ninth century bronze bell housed in North Down Museum.

Saint Patrick's College Maynooth marked the commemoration yesterday by conferring the award of Doctor of Philosophy, *honoris causa* on:

- Bishop Gianni Ambrosio, Bishop of Piacenza-Bobbio, Italy

- Mr Mauro Steffenini, San Colombano al Lambro, Italy
- Reverend Kevin O'Neill, SSC, Superior General of the Missionary Society of Saint Columban

Each of the honourees are being recognised for the extraordinary contribution that they each have made in separate ways to continue the great work and mission of Saint Columban in the twenty-first century. In the case of Father O'Neill the honour is also intended as recognition of the outstanding work done by the entire Missionary Society of Saint Columban – formerly the Maynooth Mission to China from its foundation until the present day.

As a Pontifical University, the College specializes in the study of theology and philosophy and related areas. It is now completely distinct from Maynooth University although both institutions share a history and campus and co-operate on many academic programmes. Pontifical Universities are “academic institutes established or approved directly by the Holy See, composed of three main ecclesiastical faculties (Theology, Philosophy and Canon Law) and at least one other faculty.

## **Witness to Christ's love Pope Francis stresses in visit to Anglican Ugandan martyrs shrine**

The Pope has made a visit to the Anglican shrine to the Ugandan Martyrs in Namugongo, and spoke of the “ecumenism of blood”. Pope Francis looked visibly pained and shocked as Archbishop Stanley Ntagali, Primate of the Anglican Church of Uganda, explained how the martyrs were put to death on the orders of the King of Buganda in the late 19th Century for refusing to renounce their faith.

Later, in a sermon during a Papal Mass outside the Catholic shrine, Pope Francis spoke of the sacrifice of the 45 men – 23 Anglicans and 22 Roman Catholics – saying that their “witness of love for Christ and his Church has truly gone ‘to the end of the earth.’”

“We remember also the Anglican martyrs whose deaths for Christ testify to the ecumenism of



***Pope Francis prays at the torture tree at the Anglican Shrine to the Ugandan Martyrs in Namugongo.***

blood. All these witnesses nurtured the gift of the Holy Spirit in their lives and freely gave testimony of their faith in Jesus Christ, even at the cost of their lives, many at such a young age.

“The gift of the Holy Spirit is a gift which is meant to be shared. It unites us to one another as believers and living members of Christ’s mystical Body. We do not receive the gift of the Spirit for ourselves alone, but to build up one another in faith, hope and love.”



He said that the Ugandan Martyrs “had tended to their faith and deepened their love of God, they were fearless in bringing Christ to others, even at the cost of their lives. Their faith became witness; today, venerated as martyrs, their example continues to inspire people throughout the world. They continue to proclaim Jesus Christ and the power of his Cross.

“Like the Apostles and the Uganda martyrs before us, we have received the gift of the Holy Spirit to become missionary disciples called to go forth and bring the Gospel to all. At times this may take us to the end of the earth, as missionaries to faraway lands.

This is essential to the spread of God’s Kingdom, and I ask always for your generous response to this need. But we do not need to travel to be missionary disciples. In fact, we need only to open our eyes and see the needs in our homes and our local communities to realize how many opportunities await us.

“Here too the Uganda martyrs show us the way. Their faith sought the good of all people, including the very King who condemned them for their Christian beliefs. Their response was to meet hatred with love, and thus to radiate the

splendour of the Gospel. They did not simply tell the King what the Gospel does not allow, but showed through their lives what saying 'yes' to Jesus really means. It means mercy and purity of heart, being meek and poor in spirit, and thirsting for righteousness in the hope of an eternal reward."

## Media digest

### Methodist **Church** condemns loyalist anti-refugee rally

the Irish News

Methodist **Church** condemns loyalist anti-refugee rally ... THE head of the Methodist **Church** has become the latest **church** leader to condemn a ... the influx of refugees/terrorists coming to the shores of Northern **Ireland/Ireland**".

<http://www.irishnews.com/paywall/tsa/irishnews/irishnews/irishnews//news/northernirelandnews/2015/11/30/news/methodist-church-condemns-loyalist-anti-refugee-rally-339208/content.html>

### Number of Irish held in prison abroad and seeking help steadily increasing

Irish Times

As we approach the Year of Mercy, Pope Francis reminds us all, "We are a **church** of sinners. And we sinners are called to let ourselves be ...

<http://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/number-of-irish-held-in-prison-abroad-and-seeking-help-steadily-increasing-1.2449195>

## Churches and anti-abortion campaigners speak of their shock

the Irish News

"The Catholic **Church** teaches that the duty to care for and protect human life ... The winter general meeting of the **Irish** Catholic Bishops' Conference is ...

<http://www.irishnews.com/paywall/tsa/irishnews/irishnews/irishnews//news/2015/12/01/news/anti-abortion-campaigners-brand-ruling-undemocratic--338992/content.html>

## Priest hailed for key role in the Northern Ireland peace process dies

Premier

A priest who has been credited with a key role in the Northern **Ireland** ... "Fr Reynolds was part of the Clonard **Church** Ministry, a special peace-making ...

<http://www.premier.org.uk/News/UK/Priest-hailed-for-key-role-in-the-Northern-Ireland-peace-process-dies>

## Labour promises to end 'baptism barrier' to school entry if re-elected - [Independent.ie](http://www.independent.ie)

<http://www.independent.ie/irish-news/education/labour-promises-to-end-baptism-barrier-to-school-entry-if-reelected-34248073.html>

## **Same-sex marriage in Northern Ireland is for Stormont to decide on,' Attorney General tells court - [BelfastTelegraph.co.uk](http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk)**

<http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/samesex-marriage-in-northern-ireland-is-for-stormont-to-decide-on-attorney-general-tells-court-34249892.html>

### **Christianity Today/Premier**

Young people are not just a "category" but should be treated as individuals, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, told the congregation at the commissioning of the new headquarters of youth charity Youthscape on Sunday. He challenged youth workers to "stop just entertaining young people and help them hear the call of Jesus", before saying that "every time we see evidence of a young person being transformed, we see Jesus."

<http://www.premier.org.uk/News/UK/Justin-Welby-commissions-new-youth-centre>

### **BBC/Times/Tel/Guard/Mail/Ind**

The Prime Minister is to ask the cabinet to endorse a one-day Commons debate and vote on Wednesday over UK air strikes against ISIS in Syria. David Cameron said there was "growing" parliamentary support for attacks, saying it was "the right thing to do" and in the national interest. Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn is granting his Labour MPs a free vote on the matter.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-34970516>

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/uk/defence/article4628676.ece>

[http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/Jeremy\\_Corbyn/12024093/Jeremy-Corbyn-on-verge-of-denying-MPs-free-vote-on-Syrian-air-strikes-live.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/Jeremy_Corbyn/12024093/Jeremy-Corbyn-on-verge-of-denying-MPs-free-vote-on-Syrian-air-strikes-live.html)

<http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/nov/30/commons-vote-syria-airstrikes-labour-jeremy-corbyn-isis>  
<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3339389/Corbyn-accused-bullying-intimidating-Labour-MPs-airstrikes-bitter-battle-control-party.html>  
<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/jeremy-corbyn-to-clash-with-hilary-benn-on-front-bench-over-decision-to-launch-air-strikes-on-isis-a6755151.html>

### **ITV/Newcastle Chronicle**

Christine Hardman was consecrated as the first female bishop of Newcastle in a ceremony conducted by the Archbishop of York, Dr John Sentamu yesterday. She becomes the twelfth person to take on the role since it was created in 1882. Mrs Hardman said, "I feel extraordinarily blessed to be coming to an exciting, vibrant, beautiful Diocese where there is such warmth, hospitality and friendliness."

<http://www.itv.com/news/tyne-tees/2015-11-30/christine-hardman-consecrated-as-bishop-of-newcastle/>  
<http://www.chroniclelive.co.uk/news/north-east-news/newcastles-first-female-bishop-consecrated-10528379>

### **Mail**

Report that Rehana Siraj-Allan, described by the paper as the CofE's first Muslim Headteacher, has been banned from the classroom for life after tampering with Key Stage 2 SATs results. A panel found that Rehana Siraj-Allan, headteacher of the Easton CofE Primary School in Bristol had changed the results of tests in reading and maths, after her school came under threat of being turned into an academy. The head, who had been at the school for 12 years, had achieved good results after taking over the failing inner-city school.

[http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3339833/First-Muslim-headteacher-Church-England-school-banned-classroom-changing-pupils-SATS-papers-better-marks.html?ITO=1490&ns\\_mchannel=rss&ns\\_campaign=1490](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3339833/First-Muslim-headteacher-Church-England-school-banned-classroom-changing-pupils-SATS-papers-better-marks.html?ITO=1490&ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490)

## **BBC**

Ofsted is warning of a north-south divide in England's secondary schools. In its annual report on education standards the watchdog says about a third of secondary schools in the North and Midlands are not good enough. Ofsted chief Sir Michael Wilshaw says more attention must be focused on regions where too many schools are "languishing in mediocrity". Education Secretary Nicky Morgan said more needed to be done to "tackle pockets of underperformance".

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-34964522>

## **Exp**

Report that 89% of Britons will open a non-Christian-themed advent calendar today, according to a survey. The advent calendar study, by online home handyman provider Fantastic Services, found that 86 per cent of Britons will be starting an advent calendar and only 11 per cent them will be completely religious-themed, with many of the rest being linked to High Street brands, pop groups or films.

<http://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/623008/Advent-Calendar-Alarming-89-per-cent-of-Britons-open-non-Christian-advent-calendar>