



## **Nuala O'Loan resigns over Northern abortion law move**

Irish Catholic - Baroness Nuala O'Loan has unexpectedly resigned from a prestigious medical ethics committee over the watchdog's support for the extension of Britain's abortion law to the North.

Baroness O'Loan told *The Irish Catholic* that she could not, in conscience, remain a member of the [churchnewsireland@gmail.com](mailto:churchnewsireland@gmail.com)

Medical Ethics Committee of the British Medical Association (BMA) as a result of the stance.

“I believe in the sanctity and sacredness of human life so I could not commit to anything inconsistent with that position. I felt I had no option but to resign,” she told *The Irish Catholic*.

The highly-regarded human rights lawyer and former Police Ombudsman was appointed to the committee in July, but was forced to step down after her first meeting when the committee favoured extending Britain’s controversial 1967 Abortion Act to Northern Ireland.

Britain has one of the most liberal abortion regimes in the world and permits the termination of pregnancy up to 24 weeks.

Britain, with 200,000 abortions each year, sees about one in five pregnancies end in abortion.

**“I had to resign as I believe it is a flawed piece of legislation.**

“I felt there was no scope for change even if I was to debate the decision,” Baroness O’Loan said.

The committee is made up of BMA members from a wide range of specialties and experience and lay members who are experts in their field of theology, law and moral philosophy.

The committee debates ethical issues on the relationship between the medical profession, the public and the state. It also liaises with the General Medical Council (GMC) on all matters of ethics affecting medical practice.

Baroness O’Loan said she was “disappointed” to have had to resign from the committee.

“I would have hoped to make a positive contribution to discussions particularly around end of life care and care of vulnerable persons. I just could not allow my name to be associated with this particular stance,” she said.

Mrs O’Loan’s decision comes as the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) announced plans to take the devolved government in Belfast to the high court over its re-fusal to liberalise the abortion law.

## **Same–Sex Issues and the Bible’ Lent Course Available**

For those who are already planning for next year, 'Same–Sex Issues and the Bible' is the title of a five part series of Bible Studies for Lent 2015 put together by the Biblical Association for the Church of Ireland (BACI) with a view to bringing the Church's discussion and discernment process on these issues to everyday Christians in the Church of Ireland.

The series has been carefully designed to take note of recent biblical thinking in this area and to offer both traditionalist and more modern ways of considering the key texts. It demands no theological expertise of participants, but does invite groups to ponder the theological, biblical and sociological questions in a non–academic fashion. It is hoped that it will enable participants to think over the issues prayerfully with respect both for the biblical texts, for one another and for those whose lives are affected by the debate.

The sessions will be on the teaching of Jesus – extracts from Matthew's Gospel; the prohibitions of Leviticus; implications from the Creation Narratives; St Paul's teaching on unnatural or depraved sexuality (Romans 1); and sin lists, condemnation, exemption and redemption. (other Pauline texts with Acts 10–11.)

The BACI team – on this occasion Canon Ginnie Kennerley, the Revd Dr William Olhausen and David Compton, who is a second year student in the Church of Ireland Theological Institute – hope that this opportunity for people of differing views to study Scripture and meditate together on the issues will assist in the ongoing discernment process in the Church of Ireland. The 36 page booklet can be down-loaded from [www.bibliahibernica.wordpress.com](http://www.bibliahibernica.wordpress.com) and copies can also be purchased from The Bible Society.

### **Feature article in Irish Times on being Catholic and Gay in Ireland**

See -

<http://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/people/gay-catholics-pray-2015-will-be-the-year-of-the-welcome-1.2035620?page=1>

### **Church of Scotland Statement on formation of gay ordination protest group**

The Church of Scotland has issued a statement in response to the formation of Covenant Fellowship, a group launched last week in Glasgow opposed to the ordination of ministers in active homosexual relationships.

The Church of Scotland has issued a statement in response to the formation of a group launched today in Glasgow opposed to the ordination of ministers in active homosexual relationships. Rev Prof Andrew McGowan, minister of Inverness East Church, is one of those involved in Covenant Fellowship.

He said: "Today, members and adherents of the Church of Scotland are being asked to express support for a Covenant Fellowship. We invite everyone in the Church who feels the same way to stand with us.

"The hope is that the Covenant Fellowship, which begins today as a protest against recent events, will grow to become an effective campaign group within the Church on behalf of those who believe in Christian orthodoxy."

Acting Principal Clerk for the Church of Scotland, Rev Dr George Whyte, said: "The Church of Scotland welcomes Professor McGowan's continued commitment to remain a member and a minister but there are in his statement accusations which we believe are not accurate.

"The proposed legislation which is the focus of the group's criticism has been painstakingly considered by the Church across the nation. We know that for many people the discussion has been difficult and it has always been clear that we could never come to a common mind on the matter.

"This pain and disillusionment has been felt by those, like Professor McGowan, who think the Church is going in the wrong direction and those who desperately want a Church which would go further on their chosen route. Yet the issue has to be discussed and we are a Church which recognises "liberty of opinion." Our General Assembly has agreed that this proposal – to allow a congregation call a minister in a civil partnership - falls into that category. It is not, therefore, an attack on the fundamental doctrines of the Christian Faith. We share Professor McGowan's abhorrence of further disruption and we hope and pray that across Scotland Christians will find ways to continue to work together despite their varied opinions."

## **Country church building in Cushendun to become village hub**

News Letter - It has taken almost a decade of campaigning, and a high-profile appearance on

national television, to save a much-loved church building in Co Antrim.

The Cushendun Old Church is now deconsecrated and in disrepair but local residents have never given up hope that it can be restored as a community hub.



Their ambitious attempts to secure the necessary funding including entering the project as a contender in the BBC's Restoration Village series, hosted by Griff Rhys Jones.

That was back in 2006 and the plan almost succeeded - the quaint, red sandstone church named the Northern Ireland regional winner and



eventually reaching the UK final of the competition on which the popular BB2 programme was based.

Described as “one of the landmark buildings in the area,” it was built in 1842 for the new Church of Ireland parish of Cushendun.

By the end of the last century the dwindling congregation had become too small to be viable and, in 2003, the church was deconsecrated.

Despite the setback of the Restoration Village disappointment, the campaigners battled on and applied to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for a grant.

It was announced on Wednesday that the HLF has now earmarked more than £260,000 for the project.

Monica Morgan, chair of the Cushendun Building Preservation Trust, said: “We were heartbroken when we failed to win the money to repair the church and turn it into a community centre, but we were determined to keep on trying.

“Restoring the church will make a great difference to the village and create a great facility for all to share.”

Paul Mullan, head of HLF Northern Ireland, said: “I really admire the campaigners for their perseverance and hard work.

“This will become a wonderful space for residents and tourists alike. Thank you to all the lottery players who have made this possible.”

## **Pop-up Nativities, Stable Trails and Christingles in Wales**

From Pop Up Nativities to Stable Trails – the Christmas story is being told in ever more imaginative and interactive ways in – and out – of churches the length and breadth of the country.

Here Naomi Wood, who works with families and young people in Bangor Diocese, describes some of the events she is involved in. Naomi is one of the diocese’s four CYFME workers and works in the North Meirionydd synod. CYFME stands for Children, Youth and Family Ministry Enabler. They were appointed this year as part of the diocese’s mission to reach out to young people, which is also a key part of the Church in Wales’ 2020 Vision strategy for growth.



Naomi writes: “We know that relatively few families come to church regularly through the year – but many more do at Christmas. This time of year gives the Church a perfect opportunity to try something a little different. It’s also refreshing for those who do attend regularly! Finding new ways of telling a story that is so familiar to so many is a challenge, but we know that the Christmas story is becoming less and less well known. So what can we do?”

“Already this year I have been involved in Stable Trails, school assemblies, Carol Services, Christingle Services and Star at the Stable events – with Messy Churches, Pop-up Nativity Services and a Crib Service still to look forward to.



“Stable Trails are a great way of introducing each character from the Nativity Story. Different ‘zones’ are set up around the church or venue: Mary’s home, Joseph’s workshop, the inn, a stable and Herod’s Palace. The children follow the trail around, meeting the characters who tell their part of the story – they might even be led around by a star or an angel.

"Although volunteer-heavy, this event has received strong, positive feedback from the schools where it has been offered. It can also be done at a time convenient for whole families to attend. At the end of the trail, a quiz, song and simple message can be shared as well.

“Pop-up Nativity services are great fun and chaotic at times! Children and families are invited to come along dressed as their favourite character from the Nativity story. During the service the scene is ‘built’ at the front – sometimes with three Marys, four Gabriels and six Wise Men!

"In one of these services a year or so ago there was a truly beautiful moment when a six-year-old Wise Man walked up to the crib, took off his crown and placed it on the floor in front of the manger before kneeling down. Totally unrehearsed and totally un-prompted, but perfect. Given the opportunity, children can show an understanding and depth that we rarely get to see.

“Allowing people to engage in different ways is so important. For those who learn by seeing or listening the ideas above are great, but some people need to touch. Craft is an excellent way of helping people to interact with a message. Messy Church allows people to take part in a simple, informal, interactive format and gives time to explore more aspects of the story than a shorter ‘slot’ during a service.

“This list is by no means exhaustive of the ways we can help people to hear about, learn and

celebrate the birth of Jesus. There are many, many more ways in which we, as individuals and collectively as the family of the Church, can share the hope, joy and love of Jesus.”

## **Church under Pope Francis is building bridges with women, says senior nun**

Christian Today - Despite the inquiry originally sparking mistrust among women in religious communities in the US, its concluding report has been described as "relatively warm tone".

One of Britain's most senior Catholic Church women has welcomed the report of a Vatican inquiry into nuns in the United States as a "conscious attempt to build bridges and repair trust."

Sister Jane Livesey, who is based in Rome and heads influential women's religious order the Congregation of Jesus, told Christian Today that she and other nuns were now looking forward to a Church under Pope Francis where she hoped the role of women would be enhanced.

However she also said there was "some truth" in the fears that some "edges" in some congregations in the US might have become a bit "blurred".

The final report on the Apostolic Visitation of Institutes of Women Religious in the US brought to an end a saga that began six years ago when the Holy See announced its investigation under Pope Benedict XVI.

Americans Catholic nuns are among the most selfless and giving members of contemporary society, as are nuns throughout the world. But their counter-cultural lifestyle of poverty, chastity, obedience and service is also out of step in a nation renowned for its advocacy of consumer ideals, and this is reflected in a decline in vocations. Most nuns are also now elderly, with many in their 70s and older.

There were fears when it was set up that the enquiry would seek to establish that there had been a movement away from traditional Catholic theology and towards a form of secular feminism. This would have devastated the thousands of nuns who have given their lives to God and signalled a male Church hierarchy that was

merciless and judgmental in its assessment of these sacrificial women.

Although not uncritical, the final report could not have been further from these fears.

The New York Times reported: "The relatively warm tone in the report, and at the Vatican news conference that released it, were a far cry from six years ago when the investigation was announced, creating fear, anger and mistrust among women in religious communities and convents across the United States."

Headed by Mother Mary Clare Millea, the unprecedented inquiry looked at 341 religious institutions with a total of 50,000 women religious in the US.

Cardinal Franc Rodé, head of the Vatican office for religious orders, said at the time it was announced that the aim was to examine the "quality of life" of female religious in the US.

He added that he was concerned about "a certain secular mentality that has spread in these religious families and, perhaps, also a certain feminist spirit."



Sister Jane was appointed in 2011 as the first British woman since the 18th century to hold her office. She leads nearly 2,000 nuns in 24 countries in a congregation founded by Mary Ward in 1609, and told Christian Today: "I think there is some truth that in some congregations in North America, the edges might have got a bit blurred. But it has been clear all along that the majority of members of congregations continue to do what they have always done, which is serve the Church and the people of God."

Some of the theological thinking in a minority of communities might have gone "beyond the bounds" of what is considered "safe" by the Church, she added. But for the main part, the report was warm, positive and affirming and had appropriately been published towards the end of the Church's "Year of Consecrated Life".

She said the report was in effect asking women religious to do what they were already doing. It was also "interesting" that all the "players" who were responsible for instigating it had changed under Pope Francis.

"Everybody on both sides wants to build bridges," she said. "For the majority, it was a far more

positive experience than they could possibly have dreamed of when it was announced."

Her order has a province in Argentina, where the current provincial was nurtured in her vocation by a spiritual director called - Jorge Bergoglio.

## Media digest

### Tel

Report saying the tradition of attending Christmas Eve midnight mass is dying out in some areas because of invasions by raucous drinkers and even streakers, as well as the need to cater for ageing parishioners anxious to get home to bed. It states a survey by [The Tablet](#), found 50 deaneries where the festive celebration has been scaled back with services either moved earlier on Christmas Eve or cancelled altogether.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/11302445/Christmas-midnight-mass-being-killed-off-by-streakers-and-dosing-parishioners.html>

### Ind

Report on Jesus being used as a marketing phenomenon by creative agencies and as the subject of sexy calendars. It also says the Christian faith is becoming popular again, too. According to a recent FT report, church

attendance in the capital rose 16 per cent between 2006 and 2012.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/media/advertising/jesus-christ-has-become-an-unlikely-pinup-for-hipster-marketing-companies-9934582.html>

## **City AM & Third Sector**

The City AM's World Charity Index 2014 has named the Church Commissioners as the world's eight highest charitable giver from the private sector and the second highest in the UK. The Commissioners are reported as donating £207 million to charities including the Church Urban Fund.

<http://www.cityam.com/205869/city-ams-world-charity-index-2014-whos-made-list-top-givers>

<http://www.thirdsector.co.uk/bill-melinda-gates-foundation-tops-list-charitable-grant-givers-2014/fundraising/article/1327127>

## **Tel**

Article on new research, commissioned by the [Bible Society](#), which found that 99 per cent of the British public confuses elements of tradition or details from Christmas carols and elsewhere with the original Biblical accounts. It says when the society drew up what it believes is a "fiendishly difficult" quiz on the subject and commissioned ComRes to put a sample of the public to the test, only one per cent got all the

answers right. Invites readers to take the quiz on line.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/11301446/How-well-do-you-actually-know-the-Christmas-story.html>

## **BBC**

Report on growth in Christingle services says the money raised for the Children's Society went up from £1m to £1.2m last year. It states the newest variation involves changing the candle in the orange to a glowstick prompted by the concern that children should not be carrying lit candles. The [Daily Telegraph reported back in 2006](#) that Chelmsford Cathedral had gone the way of the glowstick after a particularly crammed service made them worry that children's hair could catch fire.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/blogs-magazine-monitor-30186196>

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