



CNI

A helping hand from Irish midwives at Christ's birthplace

Catholic Herald - A group of Irish midwives is helping to change lives in Bethlehem, writes Louise McCarthy.

At Christmas, hearts and minds turn to Bethlehem, the town of Christ's birth. Just a short distance from the site of his birth, the Holy Family Hospital, funded by the Order of Malta, ensures that local women can have the best possible care during and after their pregnancy, giving their children the best start in life.

Irish midwives are among those behind the state-of-the-art maternity unit which shines as a beacon of hope in a region blighted by conflict and mistrust.

Former matrons of Dublin's National Maternity Hospital and St James' maternity unit, Maeve Dwyer and Peta Taaffe, are some of the Irish

midwives raising standards at the Holy Family Hospital.

Peta and Maeve have been helping to transform services for pregnant women in Bethlehem and across the entire West Bank. When Ms Dwyer visited Bethlehem 10 years ago, there was just one midwife available, leaving many women in labour unaccompanied. Perinatal mortality was extremely high.



A group of Irish midwives is helping to change lives in Bethlehem

“It was so inferior to Ireland. There was a simple baby unit. Babies had better chance in Holy

Family than elsewhere but not the same chance as in Dublin,” Ms Dwyer told *The Irish Catholic*.

“I would now be happy to have my sister attend the Holy Family Hospital,” she said.

Bethlehem’s maternity hospital is located just 800 metres from the birthplace of Christ. Many of the Palestinian women who have their babies there have had as many as 12 children, and often have their first baby as young as 15.

The Order of Malta has been working hard in recent years to improve outcomes for pregnant women in the region. In the past, Ms Dwyer recalls, “the expected outcomes were much poorer”.

In November, a woman presented with twins at 24 weeks pregnant. There was little chance of a live birth 20 years ago but now “there is a superb neo-natal unit,” said Ms Dwyer.

Women in Bethlehem also have access to antenatal care in contrast to a time when the only time they presented for care was when they were about to give birth.

Because Palestinian women generally marry young and midwifery training took up to six

years, there was a lack of qualified midwives available. The Order of Malta funded a direct-entry midwifery course, enabling nurses' aides to take part in a four-year training course.

Now Bethlehem is funding the courses itself. Many Palestinian midwives came to Ireland to experience best practice in the National Maternity Hospital. More at - <http://irishcatholic.ie/article/helping-hand-christs-birthplace>

God's soldiers: The Salvation Army in Northern Ireland

News Letter - The Salvation Army has 18 churches throughout Northern Ireland. Established in 1865 by William Booth in London the organisation which celebrates its 150th anniversary next year continues to remain true to its Christian mission. In particular Christmas is an important time.

For many Christian churches and organisations worship is the main reason for their existence with other missionary work and activities secondary to the celebration of their faith in God.

However, speak to anyone on the street and ask them what The Salvation Army do and in most

cases the organisation's aid work will be central to their brand.

And this is not by accident. The Salvation Army has stayed true to its founder William Booth's ethos to "serve God and to serve suffering humanity by fighting against social injustice". The organisation truly is an army of sorts, one in which the Christian faith is its absolute backbone and one which works tirelessly to achieve its goal.



Lieutenant Colonel Ray Irving, Salvation Army

Major Elwyn Harries, leader of The Salvation Army in Northern Ireland explained: “The Salvation Army is dedicated to caring for people who are vulnerable or in need in every community.

“We are there when you need us, offering compassionate support and practical help.

“We have centres across Northern Ireland that offer care and support to people who are homeless, unemployed, elderly or facing hardship.

“We are also committed to supporting victims of modern slavery - both men and women. Our specialist support programme is designed to preserve the dignity of victims, protect and care for them in safe accommodation, and provide access to confidential client-based support services to give victims the space to reflect, recover and rebuild their lives.

“We have members of staff of all faiths and none. Salvation Army churches are led by officers (ministers) and all officers are soldiers who feel they have been called by God into ministry through The Salvation Army.

“While you do not have to be a member of The Salvation Army to attend worship meetings, or to receive practical help and support, there are two ways of making a commitment through the church.

“Firstly by becoming a soldier - a member of a Salvation Army church which is a voluntary personal commitment arising from a personal spiritual conviction.

“Secondly as an adherent member, who does not wear the uniform but are committed to The Salvation Army as their church and, as such, can identify themselves as members of The Salvation Army. It is the opportunity to explore your faith and how you best express is.”

Major Harries believes there are many things that make The Salvation Army different from other Christian organisations.

And for him it's more than just their social mission.

“We conduct church services on the street and in other public places because we believe worship should not be confined to certain buildings. Not everyone has the time or the confidence to enter

a church hall; therefore, we strive to make worship accessible to all” he said, adding: “Unique to The Salvation Army also is the Mercy Seat, a consecrated place of prayer located at the front of the hall. The Mercy Seat is open to anyone at any time, though an invitation is often given for the congregation to use this space during worship.

“Prayer is simply a conversation with God, and so the Mercy Seat can be used for a variety of reasons, including personal or communal thanksgiving and reflection.

“Another feature of Salvation Army worship is testimony time. Often, the congregation is given the opportunity to share their spiritual experiences, maybe something which has challenged or encouraged them during the week.

“We believe sharing faith is important because it demonstrates how church congregations are families which are interested the personal lives of its members. In sharing testimony we reflect on our own spiritual journeys and offer a challenge, word of encouragement or prayer request with our friends who journey with us.

“As well as that music forms an integral part of Salvation Army worship and evangelism. Bands, songster brigades, youth choirs and worship groups are an important part of church life and public events. More at -

<http://www.newsletter.co.uk/news/regional/god-s-soldiers-the-salvation-army-1-6478634>

Quaker DUP man backs Fry in gay rights row

News Letter - A Quaker member of the DUP has challenged his party over an approach to gay rights which has provoked the intervention of television personality Stephen Fry.

Raymond Mitchell from Lurgan last night welcomed the involvement of Mr Fry as a challenge to “the dangers of majority rule”.

DUP MLA Paul Givan has proposed a conscience clause to allow service providers to opt out of providing goods which they feel would compromise their faith. The move comes after the Equality Commission launched litigation against Belfast bakery Ashers for refusing to supply a cake with a gay marriage slogan.

On Wednesday Mr Fry, a high-profile member of the gay community, described the DUP conscience clause as being “sick”.

His comments sparked criticism from the DUP, to which Mr Fry added: “To be slammed by the bigots of the DUP is to be bathed in light and kissed by angels.”



Raymond Mitchell

Lurgan DUP member and Quaker Mr Mitchell warmly welcomed Mr Fry’s intervention.

“I am glad that he has got involved,” he said. “He lives in a tolerant and civilised society. The

danger in this country is of majority rule persecuting niche interests, so I am glad that somebody like him got involved.”

He was “utterly ashamed” of how Mr Givan and his colleague Jim Wells quizzed sex worker Laura Lee and Queen’s University Belfast academic Dr Graham Ellison at Justice Committee hearings at the start of the year regarding DUP human trafficking and prostitution legislation.

“The DUP had complained of the amount of abuse it had taken via social media because of Mr Givan’s bill.

“But that is precisely what Mr Givan and Mr Wells were doing to Dr Ellison and Laura Lee at the justice committee,

“This is a hornet’s nest and it needs to be addressed with the utmost respect for people’s feelings,” he said of the conscience clause.

He cited a recent legal challenge in Scotland where two nurses unsuccessfully attempted to distance themselves from even indirect involvement with abortion provision.

More at -

churchnewsireland@gmail.com

<http://www.newsletter.co.uk/quaker-dup-man-backs-fry-in-row-1-6484382>

Irish Girl Guides gives 600 techy Christmas gifts

- Irish Girl Guides gives women in every county of Ireland a new online management system – Christmas has come early for Irish Girl Guides leaders in the form of a brand new online unit management system, which allows leaders to keep track of their girls' attendance, progress & achievements in Guiding at the click of a button on their smartphone or tablet.

The 1,800 Irish Girl Guides (IGG) volunteer leaders throughout the country were delighted to begin using the Online Guide Manager (OGM) last week. Some leaders have described it as being akin to having an extra volunteer as it has so many advantages, including quicker and easier record-keeping and communication. Leaders can access the system on their computer, laptop, tablet or smartphone – in their meeting place, at home, camping or even on a mountaintop!

“IGG is delighted to be at the forefront of developing new technologies to improve the lives of our volunteers. This system will revolutionise the way we operate the administration of our units and will free up leaders’ time to be active with the girls rather than being overloaded with paperwork. Our leaders work very hard throughout the year and they thoroughly deserve this early Christmas present!” said IGG Chief Commissioner Helen Concannon.

The first of its kind to be used by a Guiding or Scouting association in Ireland, OGM is based on the system that Online Youth Manager, a UK-based company, provides to youth organisations in the UK at both a grass-roots leader level and national office level. Over 95% of Scout groups in the UK use their software.

Data protection is a top priority for IGG and parents will be reassured to know that OGM is safe and secure and is regularly tested by one of the UK’s most respected online security organisations. Each unit leader will only be able to access data about the girls in her own unit and aggregated data will be available nationally. There will also be an option in the future for parents to access their daughters’ records e.g. to

sign up to events, see which badges have been completed and update their contact details.

“We believe it is a great system and, as a modern and progressive youth organisation that moves with the times, we’re delighted to be the first Guide or Scout organisation in Ireland to adopt OGM. Heavy folders filled with papers have been replaced by a mobile site where all the information required is at their fingertips. The girls love it too and they all want to be the one on the iPad taking the roll call!” said Amanda O’Sullivan, the Assistant Chief Commissioner who has led the team working on this new system.

Irish Girl Guides welcomes members from age 5+, young leaders from age 15 and adult leaders from age 18. For further information see www.irishgirlguides.ie or telephone 01 6683898.

Church of Ireland hit by theft spree

Four parishes in County Down and Antrim have been targeted by thieves in the run-up to Christmas, the Church of Ireland has said. Money was stolen from St Malachy's Church in Hillsborough, Aghaderg Church, Loughbrickland and St John's Church, Dromara.

St Andrew's Church in Lisburn, County Antrim, was targeted as well.

A Church of Ireland spokesperson said the robbers used specialist equipment to break into the parish safes.

In a statement, a spokesperson for the Church of Ireland Diocese of Down and Dromore said:

"Following a recent spate of robberies on church premises we have urged our clergy to be extra vigilant over the Christmas period.

"We are saddened to have been targeted in this way and hope that no further such incidents occur for us or for anyone else in this Christmas season and beyond."

Read more:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-30569539>

Church of Scotland launches New Gaelic hymn book on Skye

The rich tradition of Gaelic hymns has been preserved for future generations with the creation of a new hymn book in this beautiful language. On the Isle of Skye 'Seinneamaid Còmhla' (Let's sing praise together) was launched at a Praise

Evening at Columba 1400, a centre dedicated to enhancing the lives of young people.

Very Rev Lorna Hood, who visited a Gaelic service in the parish on her visit to the island last year, said: "We all know the Gaelic love of the Psalms and the wonderful haunting sounds evocative of Gaelic life and culture.

"I am delighted that this new book of Gaelic hymns will speak to a younger generation in the Gaelic medium schools all across the country, in their assemblies and worship. It will also hopefully stir the hearts of an older generation as they too strive to relate their faith to modern day living.

"Even those of us who are non-Gaelic speakers can look forward to new inspiring words and music from the culture which derives from the heart of our nation."

Three members of the Church of Scotland parish of Kilmuir and Stenscholl at the north end of the Trotternish peninsula, have been working at producing the book which contains 100 hymns, many being translations of old and modern

hymns originally composed in English, but also featuring a number of original Gaelic hymns. Encased in an attractive cover and interspersed by lovely colour and black and white photos of local scenes, the book is aimed at ensuring that Gaelic continues its strong and distinctive association with contemporary worship.

Kilmuir and Staffin is one of the few areas in the Highlands and Islands where Gaelic is still used in regular worship, and both the parish's primary schools contain a high percentage of children who receive their education in Gaelic. With the steady growth of Gaelic medium education throughout Scotland, and a general resurgence of interest in the language, this new resource will be a great asset for use in schools and all worship settings.

Episcopal clergy respond to Scots bishops guidance on marriage

The Scottish Episcopal Church recently issued Guidance on Marriage and Civil Partnership. Last week, a response from quite a number of clergy was published, see [Dear Bishops of the Scottish](#)

Episcopal Church. Amongst the signatories are some of the SEC's most prominent figures, including current and former deans of three dioceses, essentially bishops' deputies and the equivalent of an archdeacon in the Church of England, and two provosts, the senior priests in Episcopalian cathedrals. As Kelvin Holdsworth, provost of Glasgow, explains:

Last weekend I signed the following letter which was sent to the Bishops of the Scottish Episcopal Church. It was organised by a group of clergy in the diocese of Edinburgh. The fifty or so signatories were those who happened to learn of this over a couple of days last weekend. There will no doubt be others who would have wanted to sign it who simply didn't hear about it...

The Scottish newspaper *The Herald* has picked up this story, and run two articles about it. First on Wednesday they wrote [Church faces backlash after banning gay clergy from marrying](#).

Clergy in the Scottish Episcopal Church have been threatened with disciplinary action if they enter a same-sex marriage, sparking a fierce backlash amongst its ministry and membership.

An edict by Episcopalian bishops warns clerics already in a civil partnership that converting their relationships into marriage would put them “outwith doctrinal understanding”, a move sources say could effectively make them homeless or strip them of their livelihood.

People training to enter the clergy and in civil partnerships, accepted within the Scottish Episcopal Church (SEC), are also warned that if they marry they cannot be ordained. The ban also extends to ‘lay readers’, non-clergy trained to preach, teach and lead worship...

Then on Saturday, the same newspaper published this: [Traditional weddings threat as church faces unprecedented insurrection over gay marriage ban.](#)

Church leaders are facing an unprecedented insurrection amongst their own ministry over their gay marriage ban, with signals some clergy will not carry out any weddings until the matter is resolved.

In what has been described as the biggest crisis to engulf it in living memory, over 50 Scottish Episcopalian Church (SEC) clergy - around one

in six - have signed a letter condemning the stance of their bishops over same-sex marriage.

Amongst the signatories are some of the SEC's most prominent figures, including current and former deans of three dioceses, essentially bishops' deputies and the equivalent of an archdeacon in the Church of England, and two provosts, the senior priests in Episcopalian cathedrals.

While unhappy over the general stance of the SEC on gay marriage, the ire is focused primarily on the ban on the clergy and trainees turning their civil partnerships into marriage.

The letter also contains a veiled warning some members of the SEC clergy could refuse to conduct any weddings while the row rumbles on...

Dear Bishops of the Scottish Episcopal Church,

We read with dismay the Guidance for Clergy and Lay Readers in the light of the Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Act 2014.

We appreciate that we are bound by the law, and that until our canons are changed, we cannot legally perform same-sex marriages. However,

we are disappointed by both the timing and the tone of the document. We have been urged by you to enter into 'cascade conversations' in a spirit of open and sensitive listening with people of all views on this matter. This document only makes this process much harder for us, even impossible for some. Far from acknowledging the reality of differing experience and views in the church, it gives the impression of a definitive answer to the question we have yet to discuss or debate. The document ought to make it clear that the restrictions it describes may be temporary, if the church decides to change its canons. Because of the confusion created by this document, we now believe that such canonical change should be decided in Synod as soon as possible.

But we were especially dismayed by the section of the document which refers to clergy, lay readers, and ordinands, should they be in a same-sex relationship and wish to be married. In particular, we find the warnings to ordinands, both currently training and those who might be training in the future, to be unrepresentative of the generous and communal characteristics of the Scottish Episcopal Church. Even though our church has not yet agreed to solemnise same-

sex marriages, they will nevertheless become a civil institution which we will recognise like everyone else under the law. It is our firm belief therefore that any prohibition on obtaining a civil marriage is outwith the moral and canonical authority of a bishop.

We acknowledge that this process is one which creates anxiety for all church leaders, and bishops in particular. We empathise with the difficult situation that you as bishops are in, and reaffirm our desire to support you in your leadership of our church, and as fellow members of it.

Nevertheless, some of us are now uncomfortable about solemnising marriages at all until such time as all can be treated equally, and all of us will continue to feel morally compromised in our ministries, and wish to make clear our continuing commitment to affirm and support all people in our church, and to recognise and rejoice in all marriages, of whatever sexual orientation, as true signs of the love of God in Christ.

<http://www.heraldsotland.com/news/home-news/traditional-weddings-threat-as-church-faces-unprecedented-insurrection-over-gay-marri.114938659>

<http://www.thinkinganglicans.org.uk/archives/006818.html>
churchnewsireland@gmail.com

Christmas celebrations canceled in Peshawar after school attack

The bishop of Peshawar has said that, following what he called “another unimaginable horror,” the Church of Pakistan has decided to cancel its Christmas celebrations.

Peshawar Bishop Humphrey Peters spoke solemnly about the aftermath of the recent attack by the Taliban on a school that left 132 children and nine adults dead.

“It is another unimaginable horror that has been unleashed upon this beautiful city,” he said. “The church has already taken the decision to cancel Christmas as a celebration. Instead we will be using the time to come alongside those in the wider community who are grieving and injured.

“How can we celebrate and host parties when our city has been so devastated? We will still gather to worship but in a simple, stripped back and prayerful way.”

The attack on the Army School in Peshawar, just a few blocks from St. John’s Anglican Cathedral,

came just 15 months after twin suicide bombers from a group affiliated to the Taliban murdered more than 100 worshipers of All Saints Church in Peshawar.

The bishop said that the church is looking to support communities in practical ways – visiting the injured in hospital, being with their families and supporting the bereaved – whichever faith group they belong to. He stressed that the church would continue to minister to those affected long after the world’s focus has moved elsewhere.

“Many of those injured [in 2013] are still receiving treatment,” said Peters. “We need to insure that we stay with families for the long term.” He went on to emphasize that, while there was much anger and despair within the population of Peshawar, the church should remain true to its calling. “We must go on striving to be a source of comfort, of hope and reconciliation – that is the role of church – in good times and bad.”

Media digest

Financial Times - Profile of the Archbishop of Canterbury nearly two years after his

appointment. Describes him as an "increasingly respected moral voice" and an "energetic and plain-speaking" person who has had a powerful impact on urgent social and economic issues.

http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/f30ac094-8776-11e4-bc7c-00144feabdc0.html?FTCamp=engage/CAP/webapp/Channel_Moreover//B2B#axzz3Mblt4dSI

Times

Further report on the BBC Radio 4 *Desert Island Discs* with the Archbishop of Canterbury broadcast yesterday focusing on comments about how he is trying bridge a split in the Anglican Church over same sex marriage. It also quotes his description of a "grim" Christmas during his childhood when his alcoholic father stayed in bed all day.

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/faith/article4304325.ece>

Sun

Bishop of Leicester, Tim Stevens, writes about hope in the face of extremism

<http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/suncolumnists/6201912/Festive-message-from-Bishop-of-Leicester-lends-hope-in-face-of-extremism.html>

Express

Looks at the history of films made by Hollywood based on the scriptures in advance of the new

Biblical epic *Exodus: Gods and Kings* due to open on Boxing Day.

<http://www.express.co.uk/entertainment/films/548190/Word-God-according-Hollywood-look-back-films-based-scripture-Exodus>

Mail

The Rev George Pitcher, Anglican priest gives a Christmas view point with the headline: "Leaders have to shine a light on the shady side of business."

http://www.dailymail.co.uk/money/comment/article-2882844/MONDAY-VIEW-REV-GEORGE-PITCHER-Leaders-shine-light-shady-business.html?ITO=1490&ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490

Independent

Letter from the Rev Paul Nicolson (Taxpayers Against Poverty), on poverty in Britain. It refers to the launch of the food poverty report earlier this month by the Archbishop of Canterbury

<http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/letters/letters-christmas-spirit-of-gross-indulgence-9939043.html>

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