



***An elderly Sri Lankan prays at a roadside shrine of St Anthony in Colombo - See report that Pope's visit to Sri Lanka will go ahead***

## **Archbishop Martin of Armagh: Church must be free to air views on gay marriage**

Irish Independent - The leader of the Catholic Church in Ireland has said the Church must be

allowed to contribute to the public debate leading up to next May's referendum on gay marriage.

Speaking to the Irish Independent, Archbishop Eamon Martin called for a calm and respectful debate in which the church is free to participate.

"We believe we have something to say on the issue of marriage and we would like to be able to say it, and to say it freely in the public square," he said. "We would like to be able to explain and share what we believe is the good news about marriage."

Speaking personally, the 53-year-old Primate of All Ireland said he was calling for a debate "free from insult or injury or hurt to any person, whether they be people of a homosexual orientation or people of faith who would oppose change on the grounds that it is essentially re-defining marriage."

Stating that for the Church marriage is something "very special" and "very unique", he added that for Catholics, marriage is something reserved for the relationship between a male and a female, which is open to procreation of children and the rearing of families.



This was something the Church believes is written in nature, in the law of creation and the law of God, he said.

"It is a message which will not be wholly acceptable to a lot of people," he acknowledged, adding that it still needed to be heard for the common good and the good of children and society. He said it was also a prophetic message in today's "hyper-sexualised world".

Referring to the recent publication by the Church of a pastoral statement, 'The Meaning of Marriage', Dr Martin said it was aimed at explaining "in a straight-forward way" what the church's understanding of marriage is.

Separately, on a possible papal visit to Ireland in 2016, the Derry native said he would "dearly love to see Pope Francis in Ireland" and he would do everything he could "to persuade and encourage him".

However, he said it was important that as a country and a church, people ask themselves why they want the Pope to come.

"Would it simply be to have some big razzmatazz event or would it be to encourage Irish people to find their faith in Jesus again?" he asked. Dr Martin said he didn't think Pope Francis himself would be interested in going to a country to be a celebrity.

Sitting in his home, Ara Coeli, in the shadow of St Patrick's Cathedral in Armagh, Dr Martin said the Church in Ireland is in a period of change and the context in which the Church is living is a very different one to the past, notably when Pope John Paul II visited in 1979.

Nevertheless, he said as a "person of hope" he sees "green shoots of new life all around the church in Ireland which are growing quietly and need to be nurtured and cared for."

## **Centenary of first Irish Nine Lessons and Carols**

One hundred years ago on Christmas Eve 1914, the first Irish Service of Nine Lessons and Carols was held in North Strand Church in Dublin. The service was organised by the Revd David Wilson who later became Dean of St Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin.

He had seen a reference to such a service in Archbishop Benson's 'Prayers', which was published in 1899. In it there was an outline of a Service of Nine Lessons and Carols.

The service has taken place in North Strand Church for 100 years and to celebrate this, the parish will mark the occasion with a special carol service on Sunday December 28 at 11.00 am. All are most welcome to come along, to sing many favourite carols and hear the traditional language readings.

## **2015 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity**

At least once a year, Christians are reminded of Jesus' prayer for his disciples that "they may be one so that the world may believe" (see John 17.21).

Hearts are touched and Christians come together to pray for their unity. Congregations and parishes all over the world exchange preachers or arrange special ecumenical celebrations and prayer services. The event that touches off this special experience is the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

Traditionally the week of prayer is celebrated between 18-25 January, between the feasts of St Peter and St Paul. In the southern hemisphere,

where January is a vacation time, churches often find other days to celebrate it, for example around Pentecost, which is also a symbolic date for unity.

The theme for the week of prayer in 2015 comes from the gospel of John: "Jesus said to her: 'Give me to drink'". It was proposed by a group of Brazilian Christians called together by the National Council of Christian Churches of Brazil (CONIC).

The biblical gesture of offering water to whomever arrives, as a way of welcoming and sharing, is something that is repeated in all regions of Brazil.

The proposed study and meditation on the story of Jesus meeting a Samaritan woman at the well is to help people and communities to realize the dialogical dimension of the project of Jesus, which we call the Kingdom of God.

## **Ebola Medical Missionaries Named Time's Person of the Year**

For their “tireless acts of courage and mercy,” *Time* magazine has named the Ebola fighters—including missionary doctor Kent Brantly and

staffer Nancy Writebol—its 2014 person of the year.

Brantly, Writebol, and other medical staff—mainly volunteers—stepped up to manage the disease when federal governments and international health organizations were dragging their feet, fighting “a war that is waged with bleach and a prayer,” managing editor Nancy Gibbs wrote in her [explanation for the magazine’s choice](#).

Medical missions is currently [seeing record interest](#) from physicians and medical students. Brantly, a doctor with Samaritan’s Purse and affiliated with the Christian Medical and Dental Association (CMDA), was “one of our most dynamic student leaders,” David Stevens, president of the CMDA, told CT. Before Brantly headed to Liberia, Stevens interviewed him at last year’s medical missions conference in Louisville, where more than 1,000 people committed themselves to careers in medical missions, he said.

Brantly said God “blessed him with a special sense of his presence” while he battled the disease. “I remained strangely calm, never shedding a tear,” he said. “I wasn’t being brave. I was filled with peace. ... When I told my parents



about my impending fate, I told them that whether I live or die, I just want God to be glorified.”

As Brantly waited to be transferred from Liberia to Atlanta, he told *Time* he [listened to passages of scripture](#) on his laptop, and one verse in particular caught his attention:

“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God.”

The story of Ebola fighters has a [strong religion angle](#), which *Time* makes “abundantly clear” in highlighting the role of Samaritan’s Purse and other missionary doctors and even the Bible, Get Religion columnist Bobby Ross Jr. noted approvingly.

## **Love in a Box brings Christmas joy to Europe’s children in need**

For many orphans and disadvantaged children throughout Europe, being able to open a gift on Christmas Day is merely a dream.

[Love in a Box](#), a ministry of the [American Cathedral in Paris](#), is committed to changing that reality. For more than a decade, the ministry has helped to put a smile on the faces of children who often have very little to smile about.

In the weeks leading up to Christmas, several packing shifts are organized by coordinators Judy Nicault and Betsi Dwyer with Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and volunteers from local schools loading boxes and backpacks with practical gifts, a few fun items, and some candy. This year, the final count of 3,218 boxes and backpacks is a record.

Didier Chastagnier from The Salvation Army drives the 12-hour round trip from Strasbourg to Paris and parks his van outside the American Cathedral on the first Sunday in Advent.

At the end of the service the choir and congregation take the boxes and process out of the cathedral to Chastagnier's van where the gifts are loaded ready for distribution to European countries such as Bulgaria, Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

## **Papal visit to Sri Lanka 'will go ahead' despite election tensions**

Pope Francis will visit Sri Lanka as planned next month, local Church officials have said.

They said the trip would go ahead despite calls by Catholic clergy and Christian organisations to postpone the visit because it is being politicised as the country prepares for a presidential election on January 8, days before Francis's visit on January 13-15.

Fr Cyril Gamini Fernando, director of the National Catholic Centre for Social Communications in Sri Lanka and media coordinator for the visit, said: "We never said that we will change or cancel the visit. It is on schedule.

"Individuals and groups may have expressed their views and concerns. But [the schedule] stands as it is,"

Bishop Nibert Andradi of Anuradhapura, former secretary-general of the Sri Lankan Catholic bishops' conference, told the Catholic News Service (CNS): "Yes, everything is on track."

Earlier this month Bishop Andradi was quoted in the Divaina daily in Sinhala as saying that the timing of the visit was “not appropriate” because of the election.

“My sentiments were not properly reported in the article. I wrote a rejoinder to them, but it has not been published yet,” Bishop Andradi told CNS.

## **Symposium on the Role of Religion in International Affairs**

International affairs have very direct intersections with religion. Several Christian organizations that work with the United Nations have decided to address these intersections through an Annual Symposium on the Role of Religion and Faith-Based Organizations in International Affairs.

The inaugural symposium in 2015 will be on human dignity and human rights. It is organized by the General Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church, the General Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists, United Methodist Women and the World Council of Churches.

Co-sponsors include the African Methodist Episcopal Church Women's Missionary Society, The Episcopal Church, General Board of Global Ministries of The United Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and The Salvation Army.

The full-day programme of presentations and question-and-answer sessions involves high-ranking representatives of the United Nations and of faith-based organizations that are engaged in international affairs.

**HELP GROW CNI - Share CNI with your friends**

**Are you a Twitter user?**

**Please click on TWITTER on home page to receive daily headlines from CNI - share with your friends**

**Facebook user?**

**Click on FACEBOOK on home page to receive daily headlines - and please share with your friends**

December 26, 2014