



**Image of the day -  
York Minster mourns former head teacher  
and composer**

## **Canon Helene Steed commends international report on Reformed and Anglican churches dialogue**

**Canon Helene Steed, the rector of St Mark's Dundela, Belfast is a member of the International Reformed–Anglican Dialogue (IRAD) which recently concluded its work with the publication of the agreed statement, 'Koinonia: God's Gift and Calling'.**

The report was finalised at the commission's final meeting in Hiroshima, Japan.

IRAD brings together appointed theologians from around the Anglican Communion and around the World Communion of Reformed Churches. This is the first international ecumenical document agreed between the two communions since 1984.

The central concept in the report is *koinonia*, a Greek word meaning communion – the relationship that binds Christians together. The report challenges the communions to deepen the unity that they already share.

“I believe the report, its thoughts and content are important for the Church of Ireland and indeed our ecumenical conversations for several reasons,” said Helene:

“Firstly, it introduces a new way of thinking, which is also reflected in the language. It is poetic and Biblical. Both the Old and New Testaments concepts are used, and the report is deeply biblically rooted.



## Canon Helene Steed

“The new way of thinking means that the starting point for the commission was the experience of the ‘energy of lived *koinonia*’. Hence our discussions shifted ‘away from trying to resolve questions of ministry in order to affirm *koinonia*, to instead affirming that *koinonia* is a gift already experienced in many ways.’ (p. xxiii) That was the commission’s approach and this what the report offers to the Church of Ireland, and our ecumenical conversations with Presbyterians (Reformed) and other denominations. The starting point is bringing people/churches/denominations together with the energy of lived *koinonia*. Discussions about dogma, agreements and the desire to solve differences may follow. This lived *koinonia* draws on hospitality. Christ lived hospitality, which was radical. Hospitality continues to be radical – a Covid world challenges us even more so.

“The second reason why *koinonia* is important for our communions is that *koinonia* does not shy away from disagreement and obstacles. Both the Reformed and the Anglican Communions have grappled internally with discord

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and hard questions over the last number of years and as a commission we embraced that conversation, recognising hard questions and allowing them to be seen. In this context the commission was provoked by a Central African image of sharing a family meal – one shared pot, offered to all to eat from (p.xxiv). The Body of Christ – the Church – is wounded because of its impaired reception of *koinonia*. (p.xvii) The challenge remains to engage with difference as we as Church are called to receive God’s gift and calling: *koinonia*. “Which takes me to my third point. *Koinonia* by its very nature, keeps doors ajar, rather than shut. That is the Goodly Givenness of *koinonia* given to our communions. I pray we may receive it gratefully and continue the *koinonia* conversation.

“Finally, on a personal level, being a member of the commission and involved in the drafting of the report has



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given me insights and tools for parish ministry. The thoughts and concepts are translatable to local, everyday parish ministry, which I have found both challenging and helpful." The Report "Koinonia: God's Gift and Calling" is available to download as a pdf at this link -

[wcrch.wp-content/uploads/2020/11/IRAD-Koinonia-Gods-Gift-and-Calling.pdf](http://wcrch.wp-content/uploads/2020/11/IRAD-Koinonia-Gods-Gift-and-Calling.pdf)

## **Belfast Royal Academy changes admissions criteria**

**One of Northern Ireland's biggest grammar schools has changed its admissions criteria to give higher priority to pupils entitled to free school meals (FSM), writes Robbie Meredith, BBC News NI Education Correspondent.**

Belfast Royal Academy (BRA), which has more than 1,400 pupils, said the change followed "detailed" legal advice.

Children seeking admission still need to have entered the AQE transfer test, which has been cancelled this year.

But priority will then be given to a proportion of children entitled to FSM.

They will be selected from the group who put the school as their first choice in the admissions process.

Under the changed criteria, they will be given priority ahead of children who currently attend BRA's prep school or children with a sibling at the school.



*Belfast Royal Academy is one of Northern Ireland's largest schools*

The transfer tests run by the [AQE and the Post-Primary Transfer Consortium \(PPTC\)](#) were cancelled in early 2021.

As a result, grammar schools - which are attended by about 45% of post-primary pupils in Northern Ireland - have had to draw up new criteria for how they will select pupils in 2021.

The vast majority of grammars are not [using any academic data to admit pupils for 2021](#).

[The Irish News had previously reported that BRA was facing a legal challenge](#) to its admissions criteria due to the initial priority it had given to children attending its prep school.

In a letter to parents on Monday, BRA's governors said that "in light of detailed advice received recently from senior counsel" they had amended the school's admissions criteria.



*The vast majority of grammar schools are not using academic data to select pupils this year*

They said BRA was "integrated and inclusive and the envy of almost every other local post-primary school".

"For more than 235 years, Belfast Royal Academy has served as a beacon of hope, tolerance, and mutual understanding," their letter said.

"We are one of the most diverse school communities in Northern Ireland in terms of religion, gender, race, ethnicity and socio-economic background.

"For every 10 pupils, four come from the Protestant tradition, three come from the Catholic tradition, and three come from other religious traditions and none.

"One in six of our pupils is entitled to free school meals; and one in 10 of our pupils has special educational needs.

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"The record of Belfast Royal Academy in relation to diversity and inclusion is second to none and it would be much better for Northern Ireland as a whole if more schools followed our example."

BRA was one of the first grammar schools to decide [not to use the AQE test to admit pupils this year](#).

However, the governors also told parents that "the school remains of the view that academic selection is the fairest way of allocating places to children who apply to the school".

BRA normally admits 200 pupils into year eight every year but in previous years has had about 300 applications for those places.

Parents can begin applying to post-primary schools which they want their children to attend on 1 March.

Courtesy BBC NI News, 23.02.2021

## **Fort Worth Diocese loses fight for church properties as US Supreme Court declines to hear diocese's case**

**The U.S. Supreme Court on Feb. 22 declined to hear the Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth's appeal of a state court ruling, leaving more than \$100 million of diocesan property in the hands of a breakaway group and potentially forcing five of the diocese's congregations to vacate their buildings, David Paulsen of Episcopal Church News writes.**





*The congregation of All Saints' Episcopal Church in Fort Worth, Texas, is one of five that could be forced out of their buildings after the Diocese of Fort Worth lost a legal fight with a breakaway group. Photo: All Saints' Episcopal Church*

Fort Worth Provisional Bishop Scott Mayer acknowledged “disappointment” that the nation’s highest court let stand the Supreme Court of Texas’ May 2020 ruling against his diocese. Mayer met with clergy and lay leaders of the diocese by Zoom to discuss next steps now that the legal case is drawing to a close.

“I ask for your prayers and urge us all to stay focused on the saving gospel of Jesus Christ and on our mission and ministries in the days ahead,” Mayer said in a Feb. 22 written statement. He encouraged Episcopalians to focus on “the important goal of continuing our worship of God and our

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ministries in this diocese of the Church in as uninterrupted a manner as possible.”

The Episcopal Church partnered with the Diocese of Fort Worth throughout the litigation process. Presiding Bishop Michael Curry issued a statement on Feb. 22 expressing support for Episcopalians the in Fort Worth diocese.



*Episcopalians who worship at St. Stephen's in Wichita Falls, Texas, are among those who may be forced to look for new worshipping spaces after the resolution of the court case over diocesan property. Photo: Episcopal Church of Wichita Falls*

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“On behalf of your family who is The Episcopal Church, I want you to know that while we cannot know your pain and hardship, we stand with you in sorrow and disappointment,” Curry said. “You have been so constant and faithful in your witness to our Lord Jesus Christ and his way of love.”

In 2008, a majority of clergy and lay leaders in the Diocese of Fort Worth voted to leave The Episcopal Church and join the Anglican Province of the Southern Cone over doctrinal differences on topics like same-sex marriage and the ordination of women. The breakaway group now is part of the Anglican Church in North America, or ACNA. The split resulted in two Fort Worth-based dioceses claiming the same name and pursuing dueling claims for church properties.

The diocese that is still affiliated with The Episcopal Church fought in court to retain possession of the disputed property. It lost in the trial court in 2015, but in 2018, a state Court of Appeals reversed the earlier decision and ruled in the diocese’s favor. That appellate ruling, however, was overturned by the Supreme Court of Texas two years later.

“When we began this litigation in 2009, we did so as heir and steward of the legacy of generations of faithful Episcopalians,” Mayer said on Feb. 22 after the U.S. Supreme Court declined to intervene. “In the wake of this decision we remain committed to preaching the Gospel as we celebrate the sacraments, care for those in need, and strive for justice and peace. Let us move forward together with grace and love, guided by the Holy Spirit.”

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The Fort Worth diocese now has 14 congregations, including eight that chose to find new worshipping locations after the breakaway group claimed ownership of church buildings. One of those congregations began meeting in a theater. Another built a new church. The diocese also has developed one brand new congregation since the split.

“They have found places to thrive, but they had to start over with nothing,” Katie Sherrod, the Diocese of Fort Worth’s communications director, told Episcopal News Service.

The other five congregations, however, fought to remain in their former church buildings and now could face eviction by the ACNA group. They are four congregations in Fort Worth – St. Christopher’s, St. Luke’s in the Meadow, St. Elisabeth’s & Christ the King, and All Saints’ – and one congregation, St. Stephen’s, in Wichita Falls.

Sherrod said the legal case now goes back to the trial court judge to determine how his order will be carried out. Church leaders don’t expect the five congregations will need to relocate for at least 30 days, but regarding the court case, “this is effectively the end of the road.”

The diocese had been planning for this possibility, that some of its congregations would need to find new locations, though after the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision, the immediate focus is on providing pastoral care and showing support for the affected congregations, Sherrod said.

“Right now, I think our folks are just trying to deal with the shock of this decision not to hear our case,” she said.

Episcopal Church News - 22.02/2021

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## **Composer and ex-York Minster School head Richard Shephard MBE mourned**

**Prayers were said at York Minster for composer, former Minster School head master and Lay Canon Richard Shephard, after he died on Saturday, aged 71.**

Dr Shephard, who was made an MBE in 2012 for services to music and education, was a distinguished and internationally renowned composer of Church Music, said Canon Pastor, The Revd Michael Smith, during a Zoom service.

"He worked for the York Minster Fund and helped to raise well over £10,000,000 for the Great East Window amongst much else," he said.

He has sung in the choir and was Chamberlain for many years, helping to lead Choral Evensong each day. In recent years he has been a member of Chapter.

"We will miss him. We surround him with our love and prayers today and give thanks for his creativity, loyalty, friendship, humour and humanity."

He said Dr Shephard had been 'very ill for some time,' News of Dr Shephard's death was originally announced on Twitter by York Minster Choir, which tweeted: "RIP Dr Richard Shephard MBE. Variousy composer, headmaster, fundraiser, member of chapter, trustee, educationalist. And friend of @YorkMinChoir."

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Tributes to Dr Shephard have since poured in. York councillor Ashley Mason tweeted: "Such sad news. Richard was someone who worked to always help others. An Honorary Freeman of the City of York and past Governor of York Adventurers. Especially passionate about young people. I will never forget the support he offered me. He will be missed by so many. RIP & God bless."

Robert Sharpe, Director of Music at York Minster, tweeted: "A great support, adviser, and wise counsel. RIP Richard Shephard."

Former council leader Steve Galloway tweeted: "A former school head, Richard dedicated his later years to the York Minster Fund, raising literally millions to secure the fabric of York's most iconic building. One of the nicest people that I ever met. RIP."

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Other tributes posted include: "Farewell to Richard, one of York's great characters and a world-famous composer" and: "As frequent visitors to York since 1982, we greatly appreciated the comfort and continuity of his presence in Evensong. He will be sorely missed."

Another person tweeted: "A charming man, with a delicious sense of humour," and a fourth said:"Sad news but so grateful for his music. May he rest in peace."

Dr Shephard was made an MBE in 2012 for services to music and education.

He had an international reputation as a composer of church music, with his choral works sung extensively around the world, but he also wrote operas, musicals and music for television, and his compositions were broadcast frequently.

He was commissioned to write for the York Millennium Mystery Plays and was musical director for the York Minster Mystery Plays production of 2016.

He served on the Archbishops' Commission on Cathedrals and on the Church Music Commission on Cathedrals and was a Fellow of the Royal School of Church Music.

The Press reported in 2015 how the Minster was paying tribute to him in his retirement as Chamberlain and as director of development of the York Minster Fund by immortalising him as a grotesque on the cathedral's East End.

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The grotesque was holding a doctorate hat, and holding its hand as if conducting music, whilst the face was a familiar caricature of Dr Shephard.

Rebecca Thompson, superintendent of works at the Minster, said that when she discovered one of the decayed grotesques overlooking the Minster school needed replacement, incorporating a permanent tribute to Dr Shephard seemed like too good an opportunity to miss.

Dr Shephard said then: "Having oneself immortalised on the Minster as a grotesque may not be to everyone's taste, but I am flattered and honoured that this piece of sculpture has been incorporated into the cathedral that has played such a large part of my life for many years."

## **Opinion - Living standards 20 per cent higher in Northern Ireland than Republic - Dr Graham Gudgin**

**Living standards are 20 per cent higher in Northern Ireland than the Republic, according to a Cambridge University academic.**

Dr Graham Gudgin said the gap may explain why polls show a huge margin in favour of maintaining the union.

An honorary research associate at the University of Cambridge and visiting professor at Ulster University, Dr Gudgin compared living standards in an article for Queen's Policy Engagement.



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He said the comparison would likely prompt "the next wave of united Ireland excitement".

Dr Gudgin, who served as a special adviser to David Trimble, claimed if the Republic were to "rejoin the UK", it would be as its poorest region.

He wrote that the view of the Northern Ireland economy from southern economists had been "jaundiced and self-serving".

John Fitzgerald and Edgar Morgenroth of Trinity College and ESRI in Dublin, described it as "lacklustre, lacking dynamism and low productivity", he noted.

In their view, Brexit left Northern Ireland facing a serious negative impact.

The necessary context, he wrote, was that the UK had become the world's leading exporter of services. Even if Northern Ireland had not fully shared in this transition, most of its inward investment was in services, including legal services and cyber-security, he said.

The north's economy had grown at exactly the UK average growth rate, he added.

"If we use a well-accepted measure of living standards, spending by households and by government on behalf of households, then the data in the Republic is much more accurate. Fitzgerald and Morgenroth used this measure to calculate that living standards were 20 per cent higher in Northern Ireland in 2012," Dr Gudgin wrote.



*Dr Graham Gudgin said the gap may help explain why polls show a huge margin in favour of maintaining the union*

"When they updated this using data for 2016 their figure was 4 per cent. They did not however allow for lower prices in Northern Ireland, especially house prices, which mean that households in Northern Ireland get more goods and services for any given amount of spending. When this correction is made, living standards again emerge as closer to 20 per cent higher in Northern Ireland.

"This result is staggering. It means that after 60 years as a tax haven and 48 years inside the EU, the Republic of Ireland has not managed to raise the living standards of its people to that in Northern Ireland."

While tax haven status and EU membership had worked for the Irish elite, he added, the majority of citizens had gained little.

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"There is little reason to doubt that, even after all that has happened over recent decades, living standards are higher in the north than in the south. This may help to explain why the rigorous polls show a huge margin in favour of maintaining the union," he said.

Report by Simon Doyle in The Irish News. 20.02.2021

## Pointers for prayer

Almighty Father,  
whose Son was revealed in majesty  
before he suffered death upon the cross:  
give us grace to perceive his glory,  
that we may be strengthened to suffer with him  
and be changed into his likeness, from glory to glory;  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

Pray for the launches of new Church Army centres of mission in Rochdale, Gwent Valley, North Sutton and Ipswich; that these will launch as planned and new staff will find ways to engage with their communities when they are appointed.

Pray for all teachers and parents involved with students or their children. We ask for stamina and creativity as they seek to educate in less than ideal circumstances.

It has been announced that on Ascension Day - 13 May 2021, Bishop Hosam Naoum will be installed as Bishop of



○ God, you have prepared for those who love you such good things as surpass our understanding: Pour into our hearts such love towards you, that we, loving you in all things and above all things, may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.



the Diocese of Jerusalem, bearing the title Archbishop. Please pray for Bishop Naoum, his family and the Diocese.

We think today of families who are struggling to cope with the ongoing restrictions to normal life, especially those who live in small homes with no outside space. We pray for an abundance of tolerance to help ease their less than ideal circumstances.

Today we give thanks for young climate activists. A UN survey shows that demand for green business and jobs is particularly high among young people, who have been a driving force behind getting the issue onto the political agenda.

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We remember with thanks the numerous Mothers' Union members who, over the years, have used their God-given gifts to change the world. We pray that, in our day, we'll also be willing to use our gifts to help transform lives and communities

We pray today for the church across the world, especially in places where they are experiencing hardship and persecution. We stand together with our sisters and brothers and pray for God to bring relief from their circumstances.

Lord Jesus, you prayed that we would all be united together so the world would believe and experience your love. Help us to put aside that which keeps us apart and work together to share your love through our actions and our lives.

Holy God,  
you know the disorder of our sinful lives:  
set straight our crooked hearts,  
and bend our wills to love your goodness  
and your glory  
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Almighty God,  
you have created the heavens and the earth  
and made us in your own image:  
teach us to discern your hand in all your works  
and your likeness in all your children;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who with you and the Holy Spirit reigns supreme over all  
things,  
now and for ever.

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Almighty and everlasting God,  
you hate nothing that you have made  
and forgive the sins of all those who are penitent:  
create and make in us new and contrite hearts  
that we, worthily lamenting our sins  
and acknowledging our wretchedness,  
may receive from you, the God of all mercy,  
perfect remission and forgiveness;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

## Speaking to the Soul

For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!"

2 Corinthians 5:19-20 NLT

If you have ever visited an embassy you will know what a strange experience it is. Suddenly you find yourself in another country: it's weird! In an instant everything changes and you find yourself looking at pictures of Royalty or the Head of State and listening to a different language from the street outside. That is of course the whole point of an embassy which intentionally represents a different country.

Paul tells us that's our job. We are ambassadors of a different country because we represent the Kingdom of God. And, in common with all ambassadors, we have messages

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to share. Ambassadors are carefully trained so that they can faithfully represent the views of their government and forge strong relationships with the country to which they have been posted. And that precisely describes our role. This world is not our home. We are just passing through and so in all that we say and do we need to ensure that we are being faithful representatives of God and his kingdom.

Our key role as God's ambassadors is to pass on a message of reconciliation. God sent Jesus into the world to give us the opportunity to have our sins forgiven and to enter into a relationship with him. We now need to pass on that message in our ambassadorial role. It's a simple and clear message. "Come back to God!" To be trusted to be an ambassador of any sort is awesome, but to be called to be an ambassador for God is as good as it gets. Wherever you go today and whatever you do, remember that before anything else you are God's ambassador.

## QUESTION

In what ways will you be able to represent the Kingdom of God today?

## PRAYER

Lord God I thank you that you sent Jesus into this world in order to forgive our sins and bring us into a relationship with you. Help me to be a good ambassador today and to help people to see that you are eager to enter into a relationship with them as well. Amen.



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