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Protestant and Catholic church leaders plan Northern Ireland's first multi-faith school

Protestant church leaders have revealed plans for Northern Ireland's first inter-denominational school.

Belfast Telegraph - Stormont's Education Committee was told yesterday that the Department of Education is currently drawing up guidance for what will be a brand new category of school here.

The plan was revealed as clerics from the Church of Ireland, Presbyterian and Methodist denominations gave evidence to the committee's inquiry into shared and integrated education.

They said the initiative for what they termed a 'multi-faith school' was inspired by requests from the grassroots. The Protestant clerics said they have been in talks with Catholic bishops over the matter and almost all elements have been agreed.

The inspiration for a multi-denominational school came from [Hope Academy in Liverpool](#).

Rev Trevor Gribben, Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, emphasised the school is not a "one size fits all" solution, but said he believes it has "the potential for so much good".

While guidelines are currently being drawn up by the Department of Education, decisions over religious education at these multi-

denominational schools would be made at local level.

Rev Donald Kerr, Secretary of the Conference of the Methodist Church in Ireland, said the schools would be jointly managed.

"It would be a new type of school but founded on a common Christian principle," he explained to the committee.

"We have been working together with the Catholic bishops in an agreed way to found the school. Work is at a fairly advanced stage.

"We see it as one option for sharing in the future. If it did come about, in our view it would be effectively an integrated school, with both faiths represented."

Mr Gribben said the Transferors' Representative Council, which comprises clergy from the three main Protestant churches, has received expressions of interest from a number of schools about becoming mixed denominational. He did not wish to name any schools but gave the example of a village where both a controlled and a maintained primary school had become not viable in terms of numbers.

"There are schools that want to pilot this," he said. "Structural issues have been dealt with, we are almost there with ownership, and decisions on religious education will be left to governors at a local level.

"These requests are coming from the grassroots. Schools have asked for this. There is a great willingness in some areas to explore this."

Rev Ian Ellis, Secretary to the Church of Ireland Board of Education, said the clergy behind the proposal had been inspired by a school in Liverpool, Hope Academy, which was formed in 2011 by merging Catholic and Anglican schools.

Alliance MLA Trevor Lunn asked for clarity whether the proposed schools would have joint management.

Mr Ellis responded: "The jointly managed church schools in our vision would have joint trustees, a common curriculum. Effectively they would be a single school under the one roof. No physical separation."

Mr Gribben added that they have not got into the detail of the proposals yet.

The Protestant churches originally owned and ran schools in Northern Ireland until they

transferred them to the state, creating the controlled sector. Churchmen remain to this day on the boards of controlled schools.

A spokeswoman for the Department of Education confirmed it is "drawing up guidance on the establishment of jointly managed schools where both the main Protestant churches and the Catholic church working together will have a joint role in the management of the school".

<http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/education/protestant-and-catholic-church-leaders-plan-northern-irelands-first-multifaith-school-31004386.html>

Could Liverpool's Hope Academy be the model for mixed faith schools of Northern Ireland's future?

Success story inspires radical inter-denominational plan. Move over integrated education - Protestants and Catholics are set to be educated together in a new faith-based model.

Belfast Telegraph - That was the surprise revelation from Wednesday's education

committee at Stormont as it heard evidence at its inquiry into shared and integrated education.

But unlike integrated education, this new model apparently has the backing of both main church traditions. So if they are in agreement, it is a safe assumption that the new model will not fall under the remit of the controlled sector traditionally attended by Protestant pupils, the Catholic maintained sector or integrated.



Hope Academy pupils

That leaves a voluntary school as the most likely option - or the Department of Education could create a new sector.

The idea is that it would be a Christian school jointly run by both the Catholic Church and the Protestant churches with both having representation on the board of governors.

However, both sides are in agreement that this is shared education - not integrated.

According to sources, in areas where the long-term viability of both a controlled and Catholic maintained school is under threat, the new model would ensure a school remains without pupils having to be bussed out of the locality.

Rural areas including Fermanagh, where population is less dense, could be likely candidates for the model.

On a positive note, it will safeguard schooling, jobs and spin-off employment in rural areas.

It is also proof that the controversial practice of area- based planning can work when there is agreement - religion does not need to be a barrier to education.

But cynics might wonder if this just another ploy to stop the advance of the integrated sector.

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Initial C of I response to Minister on smaller rural schools

The Church of Ireland Primary Schools patrons made the following statement yesterday:

‘We note with great interest the confirmation by the Minister for Education and Skills of the publication of the Value for Money (VFM) Report on Small Schools (Primary) and will give it our close consideration.

‘We welcome the invitation by the Minister for Education to enter into a dialogue regarding the future sustainability of smaller rural schools. As Church of Ireland patrons we look forward to engaging with the Minister in further discussions on this matter in due course and in particular on the detail of a proposed voluntary amalgamation protocol for small primary schools within a certain radial proximity.

‘In particular, we are encouraged by the indication of alleviations in teacher appointment

and retention thresholds for one teacher schools in isolated locations.'

Prison, printers and praise: The Moderator's Dromore Presbytery Tour

By tradition Moderators tour three presbyteries during their year in office visiting congregations in the presbytery, preaching in numerous churches, meeting with civic officials in the area and visiting some of the many local projects that are supported by congregations in the community.

In October Dr. Barry visited Carrickfergus Presbytery and this month he completed a weeklong tour of the Dromore Presbytery, which includes 22 congregations in and around Lisburn, Hillsborough, Annahilt, Ballinderry, Dromara, Dromore, Drumbo, Ballymacash, Lambeg and Moira.

“As I visited congregations I saw the work of both the Presbytery, congregations and the community. I was very much encouraged that our church is actively engaged in the local community and producing people of service and outreach,” Dr. Barry said.

During the week the Moderator spoke in five congregations. On the first Sunday of the tour Dr. Barry preached in the congregation of Rev. David Knox at Harmony Hill Presbyterian Church and in the evening he spoke at Second Dromara Presbyterian Church, who were joined by First Dromara.

In a busy schedule Dr. Barry visited Lagan Valley Hospital with hospital chaplain Rev. Jack Richardson and saw the community development work of First Lisburn Presbyterian Church. He met students and teachers at Dromore High School and on a visit to a local Women's Aid Hostel he saw first hand how local congregations were supporting the valuable work being done there.

Dr. Barry also visited Thiepval Barracks in Lisburn and Maghaberry Prison. At the County Antrim prison he met the prison chaplains, including the Presbyterian Chaplain Rev. Rodney Cameron, and had a meeting with the Governor. There were also opportunities to meet prison officers and pray with some of the prisoners.

Speaking after his visit the Moderator said, "I want to pay tribute to the Governor's team, the prison officers and chaplains for the very difficult

work that they do, I also want to encourage the Church to pray for them and the prisoners.”



In a week that also saw him visit a social enterprise run by Habitat for Humanity, Dr. Barry was shown around the Revival Movement Association’s premises in Dromara, a gospel literature printing facility better known as ‘Every Home Crusade’. The organisation uses on average five tonnes of paper per working day to print tracts and booklets for distribution the world over.

While meeting with members of the Dromore Presbytery, he also attended the Presbytery

Dinner and paid a courtesy call on the Mayor of Lisburn, Councillor Andrew Ewing. Sunday morning saw him speak in Loughaghery and Cargycreevy and then at St. Columba's Presbyterian Church in Lisburn for the traditional end of tour Moderator's Rally.

Rev. Paul Jamieson of Hillhall Presbyterian Church, the Presbytery Moderator, welcomed Dromore Presbytery ministers and members of the different congregations. Dr. Barry then gave a challenging address entitled, 'Come and see - then go'.

Scottish bishops band together to boost full-time ordination training

The **Scottish Episcopal Church's** bishops have this year banded together to appeal to its members to invest in the Church's future.

For this year's Bishops' Lent Appeals, all seven diocesan bishops have agreed to support the training and formation of those entering ministerial training in the Scottish Episcopal Church.

2014 saw the creation of the new **Scottish Episcopal Institute** (SEI), which replaced the

former Theological Institute of the Scottish Episcopal Church (TISEC).



The province's statement issued yesterday said that the ethos of the Scottish Episcopal Institute has "a very intentional emphasis on formation – the shaping of a person for ministerial functions and ensuring that the person has sufficient maturity in Christ to carry those functions."

The Rt Revd Kevin Pearson, Bishop of Argyll & The Isles and Convener of the transitional Institute Council was quoted as saying, "We recognise the importance of investing substantially in a candidate's training and formation, and to equip them as best we can for the wide and varied tasks that they will encounter as they develop their ministry."

“We are already very encouraged by the numbers of potential younger candidates exploring vocation, and funds permitting, we hope to be able to offer full-time training as a possible pathway for some in the future.

“Please give what you can to the Bishops’ Lent Appeal so that we can equip the Church for its future ministry.”

The Scottish Episcopal Church is one of the four Member Churches ministering to the British Isles - the others being England, Ireland and Wales. It has a crucial role in the history of the Anglican Communion as the Church that ordained Samuel Seabury as the first American Episcopal bishop in 1784.

Religious violence "a defining issue of our generation" - David Porter to WCC

Violence perpetrated in the name of religion was highlighted as “a defining issue of our generation” by Canon David Porter when he spoke to members of the Commission of the

Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) of the World Council of Churches (WCC).

Canon Porter who is from Belfast was appointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury as director for reconciliation at Lambeth Palace in London. He joined the WCC meeting via Skype on 17 February. The meeting has brought together CCIA members who will set directions for the work of the Commission in coming years.

At the meeting, Porter said that religiously sanctified violence is a global challenge, and not just an issue of the Arab world. "The reality is that those promoting such violence are looking deep into their own religious traditions and are attempting to find justifications for their actions," he said.

"It isn't just a façade; for many it comes with a deep ideological commitment from their tradition, as they understand it. Therefore the challenge for us is to look again into all religious traditions and see how traditions and texts are used to justify violence," Porter added.

Porter stressed the need to delve deeper into what instigates young people to be attracted to the views articulated by extremists. He said for many young people this is an ideological issue

with several economic and socio-political reasons behind much of their anger and violence.

Porter stressed the need for a safe space for religious leaders, where they can openly and honestly address the question of why people are seduced by extremist narratives.

Germany's richest diocese has greater assets than the Vatican

A diocese in Germany has more money than the Vatican, it has been revealed.

Cologne diocese published its 2013 accounts yesterday, the fourth of Germany's 27 bishoprics to present an annual financial balance.

Cologne general-vicar Stefan Hesse presented the figures, showing that it has assets of €3.35 billion (£2.45 billion), which compares with Vatican assets of £2 billion.

More than two-thirds of Cologne's assets are held in investments, including two housing companies owning 24,000 flats, some for low earners. Fr Hesse also said the income, mostly

from the country's church tax, was also used to help refugees and the homeless. The diocese also has real estate, including schools, seminaries and conference centres, worth £500m, in an area covering two million Catholics.

The German Church is hugely wealthy because registered Catholics must pay a share of their income tax towards the Church under a long-standing agreement dating back to the 19th century. In 2013, the Catholic Church in Germany received almost €5.5 billion (£4.6 billion) via the church tax.

Media digest

Tel/Mail/Ind/Times/Sun

Further reports and comment on the [Bishop's pastoral letter](#) (*also see blogs*). *Telegraph* says that Iain Duncan Smith has mocked the CofE's "dwindling relevance" after bishops attacked the Conservative Party's economic and welfare policies. While Jemima Thackray argues the 'brilliant' letter attempting to inspire people to vote has been cheaply criticised by disgruntled Tories. *Mail* comment is very critical of the letter and the Archbishop. *Independent* says the letter is political good sense and they have called for a

"new direction" in the public realm. *Times* states Conservative party support for gay marriage "turbocharged" Anglican disillusionment with politics, as figures showed that tens of thousands of Christians were preparing to ditch their support for the Tories. Comment also from columnists on politics in the light of the letter saying Conservatives need to construct a new vision.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/11419923/lain-Duncan-Smith-mocks-Church-of-Englands-dwindling-relevance.html>

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2959399/lain-Duncan-Smith-blasts-bishops-meddling-politics-Minister-hits-Church-England-claiming-non-partisan-attacking-Coalition-policies.html>

<http://www.mailonsunday.co.uk/debate/article-2959446/DAILY-MAIL-COMMENT-don-t-Tories-blow-trumpet.html>

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-2957986/DAILY-MAIL-COMMENT-Preaching-politics-pews-empty.html>

<http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/at-last-we-found-a-political-agenda-i-can-get-behind-10054084.html>

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-life/11420855/Dont-use-women-bishops-as-a-stick-to-bash-the-Church.html>

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/faith/article4358573.ece>

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/opinion/columnists/article4358438.ece>

http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/news/sun_says/6338245/The-Sun-Says.html

Spectator

Article asking about the viability of overworked clergy responsible for many rural churches of tiny congregations and few people under 70. Includes comments from various rural clergy and a suggestion from the Canon Chancellor of Exeter Cathedral, Anna Norman Walker, about struggling churches becoming 'Festival Churches', with the village paying for the upkeep of the church in exchange for having it as a usable community building; but at church festivals (Christmas, Harvest, Mothering Sunday, Easter) it would be open for services.

<http://www.spectator.co.uk/features/9446782/it-takes-a-village-or-six-the-battle-for-rural-churches/>

Ind & Guard

Reports on marble life size sculpture entitled 'For Pete's sake' part of the 'Stations Of The Cross' exhibition being held at St. Marylebone Parish Church. They state, the sculpture, for which Pete Doherty submitted to a full body cast in plaster, was a collaboration with his friend the artist Nick Reynolds. The Revd Stephen Evans, said he hoped that, the sculpture might help visitors stop and reflect not only Christ's Passion and Resurrection, but also what in their own lives leads to death or to life.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/news/for-petes-sake-libertines-frontman-doherty->

[crucified-for-exhibition-at-st-marylebone-parish-church-10054501.html](http://www.theguardian.com/music/2015/feb/18/lifesize-pete-doherty-crucifixion-sculpture-unveiled-in-church-missing-tom-fund)

<http://www.theguardian.com/music/2015/feb/18/lifesize-pete-doherty-crucifixion-sculpture-unveiled-in-church-missing-tom-fund>

BBC & Mail

Reports on the funeral yesterday of five-year-old Andrea Gada, who died after she was hit by a car. Her funeral was postponed in the hope her grandparents and aunt from Zimbabwe could attend. Her relatives were finally granted temporary visas "on compassionate grounds" earlier this month, after they were refused entry twice. The Archbishop of York and Bishop of Chichester had publicly supported the visa application.

<http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-sussex-31514986>

http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/pa/article-2958062/Funeral-family-granted-visas.html?ITO=1490&ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490

Mail

Report that 200 Palestinian Christians staged a candlelit march in Jerusalem Wednesday to mourn Egyptian Copts killed by the Islamic State group in Libya, calling for stronger international action against the jihadists. The demonstrators called on the international community to respond to the killing of innocents.

[http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/afp/article-2959002/
Palestinian-Christians-urge-stronger-fight-against-
IS.html?
ITO=1490&ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/afp/article-2959002/Palestinian-Christians-urge-stronger-fight-against-IS.html?ITO=1490&ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490)

Mail

Report on how people too busy to stop for an Ash Wednesday service benefitted from a church plan to offer 'drive-by ashes'. Clergy at Advent Evangelical Lutheran Church in Upper Arlington, Ohio, planned to apply ash to the foreheads of anyone who stopped in the parking lot of the church from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Wednesday.

[http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/ap/article-2958858/
Churches-offer-drive-ashes-Ash-
Wednesday.html#ixzz3SAhEdkb0](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/ap/article-2958858/Churches-offer-drive-ashes-Ash-Wednesday.html#ixzz3SAhEdkb0)