



Bishop of Down and Connor Noel Treanor met DUP MLA Paul Givan at Stormont to discuss plans for a conscience clause in Northern Ireland's equality legislation. The Catholic delegation included Fr Tim Bartlett from the Catholic Council on Social Affairs (left)

'Gay cake row': Catholic Church supports DUP conscience clause

The Catholic Church has said it supports the general objective of a DUP Private Member's Bill seeking to build a conscience clause into equality law.

BBC NewsNi - The bill was drawn up by DUP MLA Paul Givan, after a Christian-run bakery faced legal action for [refusing to bake a cake with a pro-gay marriage slogan](#).

The clause would allow businesses to refuse to provide some services if they clash with their religious convictions.

A delegation led by the Bishop of Down and Connor met the DUP for talks.

After meeting Mr Givan and the DUP leader Peter Robinson at Stormont, the Catholic delegation said that any change to the law would have to be carefully defined, to prevent it from leading to spurious claims of religious conscience.

However, Bishop of Down and Connor Noel Treanor said politicians must accept there was a real problem that needs to be addressed.

He said it would be wrong to swap one form of discrimination for another.

The Catholic Church has concerns about the impact of anti-discrimination law on its adoption agency and, potentially, its marriage guidance service.

The row over the pro-gay marriage cake began last year, when Northern Ireland's Equality Commission said it would take legal action against Ashers bakery for refusing to accept a customer's order.

More at -

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-31596699>

The NICCOSA delegation also included Dr Nicola Brady, research coordinator with the Council for Justice and Peace of the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference; Mrs Deidre O'Rawe, regional director of ACCORD Catholic Marriage Care Service NI; and, Father Timothy Bartlett, Secretary to the Catholic Bishops of Northern Ireland.

Immediately following the meeting with the DUP, the delegation from NICCOSA met with representatives of the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), including Party Leader, Dr Alasdair McDonnell MLA, MP.

NICCOSA intends to have meetings with the other Northern Ireland political parties over coming weeks to discuss the proposed *Freedom of Conscience Amendment Bill* and other issues.

Speaking after the meetings, Bishop Treanor said, “As part of the democratic process, we are glad to take the opportunity to discuss with our legislators, in a calm and respectful manner, how to find a more just and reasonable accommodation for religious belief when conflicts between goods and services legislation and freedom of conscience arise. It is important that our politicians accept there is a real problem here that needs to be addressed. Our laws as they stand are having an unjust and disproportionate impact on those of religious faith. It is important that they don’t just ignore the situation but seek ways of addressing it and of giving greater recognition to freedom of conscience and religion as a fundamental human right and a cornerstone of a diverse and pluralist society.”

Bishop Treanor continued, “Is it acceptable in a genuinely just, tolerant and pluralist society that one group are threatened with fines, imprisonment, losing their business or job, or in the case of the Catholic Church, losing public funding for long established adoption agencies and other charitable services that we provide, in the name of providing equality for another group? It is as if we have swapped one form of discrimination for another! Is it just to have a situation where one group of people are told

‘you are out’ of a particular business or ‘you need not apply’ for a particular job or that ‘you may not apply for public funds’, simply because they hold the perfectly rational belief that marriage is between a woman and a man, and that sexual relationships are reserved in their dignity and purpose for this form of married relationship? The truth is that such prejudice and discrimination against any other category of people in our society would not be tolerated and public representatives have a responsibility to ensure that discrimination against those with perfectly rational religious views will not be tolerated either.”

Mrs Deirdre O’Rawe said, “We do not want to see any change to the law that would lead to unfair discrimination against any individual or community. That would be contrary to our Christian beliefs. Any change to the law in this area has to be very carefully defined so that people cannot use transient, superficial or spurious claims of religious conscience as an excuse for discrimination. While we support the general objective behind the proposed *Freedom of Conscience Amendment Bill* we believe it needs to be very carefully assessed to ensure it does not create exceptions to goods and services legislation that are too wide.”

Cork soup kitchen offers free communion clothes



A soup kitchen charity in Cork believes its free first communion clothes initiative for families struggling to meet the costs of the big day should be replicated across the country.

Irish Examiner - Cork Penny Dinners said the response to its appeal earlier this month for just one second-hand communion dress to help one needy family has been overwhelming.

So many people and companies responded that the charity, best known for feeding the city's hungry, is staging a pop-up shop event on Sunday in the River Lee Hotel.

The charity showcased some of the almost 100 donated outfits at a fashion show in Ovens National School yesterday and it assured that all the clothes that will be on display this weekend will be free.

“They are not for hire. They are not being loaned. They are there to take home and keep. No strings attached, no questions asked,” said Cork Penny Dinners volunteer co-ordinator Catriona Twomey.

More at - <http://www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/video-cork-soup-kitchen-offers-free-communion-clothes-314201.html>

DUP's William McCrea spent 30 hours a week as clergyman

South Antrim MP William McCrea dedicated around 30 hours a week last year to his second job as a Free Presbyterian minister.

Belfast Telegraph - Mr McCrea picked up £25,000 in 2014 for his role as minister of Calvary Free Presbyterian Church in Magherafelt - on top of his £67,060 a year pay packet as an Member of Parliament.

A Daily Telegraph investigation placed Mr McCrea third on the league table of MPs who spend a significant amount of time doing second jobs.

In total, it was revealed that MPs declared earnings from outside work and second jobs of more than £7.4million in the past year, with some making more than £1,600 per hour.

Official data confirmed that 30 Members earned at least the equivalent of an MP's £67,000 salary in extra work.

More at -

<http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/dups-william-mccrea-spent-30-hours-a-week-as-clergyman-rather-than-31016473.html>

U2's 'travelling pastor' passes away at home

A clergyman who played the role of "travelling pastor" for U2's world tours has died. The Rev Jack Heaslip, who had been battling motor neurone disease, passed away at his home in Howth at the weekend.

His links with the world's most famous rock band go back as far as the 1970s, when he was

a guidance counsellor at Mount Temple
Comprehensive school.



The Rev. Jack Heaslip spent the first twenty years of his working life in education - teaching English, ministering as a guidance counselor and chaplain in Mount Temple Comprehensive School in Dublin, Ireland. He later moved into full time parish ministry in the Church of Ireland as an ordained Anglican priest.

When the band was on tour he helped the hundreds of staff and crew members - who were away from homes and families - cope with the challenges of isolation and long distance travel.

Rev Val Rogers - the rector at the Aughavale group of parishes - where Rev Heaslip was also

based, paid tribute to him for "his intelligence, courage and love".

"Our parishioners who knew him are distressed at his passing," she added. Rev Heaslip, who was in his 70s, is survived by his wife, Patricia, and family.

Pope Francis to be represented at Anniversary Celebrations for Historic Belfast Church

On Thursday, 5 March, Papal Nuncio, Archbishop Charles Brown, will celebrate Mass with the priests, people and friends of Saint Patrick's Parish, Belfast. The Mass will mark the 200th anniversary of the Parish.

For 200 years, Saint Patrick's has faithfully provided for the spiritual and pastoral needs of the people of inner-city Belfast, as well as workers and visitors to one of Ireland's principal cities. It has also played a significant role in the Diocese of Down and Connor, hosting the episcopal consecration of a number its bishops.

Saint Patrick's follows in a long and noble Christian tradition within the City, tracing its roots to the most ancient foundations of the

Faith in this part of Ireland. Its origins are first recorded in the 1306 Taxation of Pope Nicholas. It has also served as a beacon of light for the people of Belfast during some of the City's darkest and most troubled years.

The present Church is an imposing edifice, rendered in sandstone and in the Romanesque style. Its treasury boasts artifacts of international significance, chief among them a relic of St Patrick's arm, enshrined in a medieval silver reliquary. It also has a triptych altarpiece entitled 'Madonna of the Lakes' painted by Sir John Lavery, himself a native of the Parish.

A number of events are planned to mark the Parish's bicentenary. On 9 March, noted historian, Professor Eamon Pheonix, will deliver a lecture on the Parish's place in the history of Belfast in City Hall. On the eve of Saint Patrick's Day, the Parish will host a Gala Ball in Titanic Belfast. It is hoped the event will raise much needed funds to restore the Church's stonework. A Mission will be given by one of the Church's newest orders, the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal, in early March. Throughout Lent, global Catholic television network, EWTN, is broadcasting Scripture reflections given by priests associated with the Parish. On 20 April, the Parish will host an exhibition and lecture on

the life and works of one of its celebrated sons, artist Sir John Lavery. The year of celebration will conclude with a Parish Pilgrimage to Rome in October, and an audience with Pope Francis.

The highlight of the bicentenary celebrations is undoubtedly the Jubilee Mass on 5 March. Parish Administrator, Father Michael Sheehan remarked: 'we are deeply honoured that Pope Francis' representative in Ireland should join us for this very special milestone in the life of our Parish.'

Commenting on the Church's anniversary, Father Michael said: 'whilst this year provides us with an opportunity to reflect on and celebrate our past achievements, we also look forward to building on these to ensure that St. Patrick's continues to be a place where future generations encounter Christ.'

Puppet Training Day

A practical hands on day suitable for both adults and children, where there will be plenty of opportunities to develop your skills and be inspired with new ideas!

This exciting puppet training day is designed to give you hands on experience within the following areas: basic and advanced puppet manipulation skills, solo and theatre style puppetry, how to start a puppet ministry (including finances, equipment, recruiting etc), props and scenery, choreography, putting a song together and much more!



The day is for adults and young people, schools workers, church leaders, Sunday school teachers, youth/children's workers, those already involved in puppet ministry and wanting to improve their skills or even if you are just curious as to how puppetry can enhance your outreach!

There will also be a large range of resources available for you to try out and purchase, including the latest puppets from the [One Way UK Creative Productions](#) workshop! Please contact us if there is anything specific you would like us to bring.

There will be performances and demonstrations throughout the day to give you plenty of starting ideas.

Cost: £15 per person if booked 10 days prior to event, or £20 thereafter. The day will commence at 10am and finish at 4pm. Registration starts at 9.30am.

Refreshments will be available but please bring a packed lunch and a puppet if you have one. There will be a selection of practice puppets available for you to use if needed. Please note the training day is not suitable for children under the age of 9, unless they are an active member of a puppet team.

More info and to book online <http://www.onewayuk.com/event.php?id=87654442>

Event Date:
Saturday, 14 March, 2015 - 09:30
Venue:

Craigmore Methodist Church, 20 Orken Lane,
Aghalee, BT67 0ED
Church or Organisation:
Craigmore Methodist Church and One Way UK
Email:
robertloney@btinternet.com
Website with Further Details:
[http://www.onewayuk.com/event.php?
id=87654442](http://www.onewayuk.com/event.php?id=87654442)

Moderator's Time for Reflection at Holyrood

The Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland yesterday gave the weekly Time for Reflection to MSPs at the Scottish Parliament.

Rt Rev John Chalmers is on a three day visit of the Scottish Parliament which has become an annual fixture in the Moderator's Diary. It is a chance to see, and be seen; an opportunity to learn about the political institutions and engage in conversations about the issues of the day. It is also a chance to demonstrate the Church's commitment to the political life of the nation in order that it might better serve the highest interests of the people.

Mr Chalmer's Time for Reflection:

"The Space" is a drop-in centre in Govanhill run by the Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul. One day a mother of nine children, who had been traded in for a younger model found her way, in desperation, to "The Space." She had been left to care for her children alone, but her biggest challenge was her young son who had severe learning difficulties and was also incontinent.

The boy could hardly walk; his shoes were two sizes too small and they hadn't been off of his feet in months. All I'm going to tell you is this – socks and new pair of shoes were bought for that young boy and the worker at "The Space" peeled off the old shoes, took that boy's feet on her lap and washed them clean. While she did that the boy's mother wept. She wept because; where she stands on the pecking order of life, no one had ever done that for her or for her boy.

She was experiencing love and grace being poured out. There were no words, but two things were true of that scene: real practical help was being given to someone on the margins of society and the God that I believe in was present - present in a pair of shoes and socks from Asda.

The God I believe in is not some puppet master presiding over good and evil in the universe – the God I believe in walks with the poor.

But the real reason for telling you that story is because I believe that there is a direct link in the chain of consequences that connects this place of government, to that woman and her children and the worker dedicated to her work at "The Space".

You see, I do not subscribe to the idea that people enter public life for self-aggrandisement. The people I know who give themselves to public life do so in order to make a difference and in order to leave the world a better place than they found it.

Well, today, I want you to know that when you make the right decisions here about how priorities are set and how money is spent and how the right resources find their way into the right places – then a needy child gets a new pair of shoes and a mother starved of affection gets the chance to weep."

Archbishop of Canterbury on gays: 'Who am I to judge them for their sins, if they have sins?'



The Archbishop of Canterbury The Most Revd and Rt Hon Justin Welby pays a visit to St Alban's Academy in Highgate

The leader of the Church of England told [Birmingham pupils](#) how he has “a lot of gay friends” when they quizzed him during a trip to their school.

Birmingham Mail - Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby was asked about his views on gay marriage and homosexuals working in the

church by sixth form students at St Alban's Academy in [Highgate](#).

“Marriage is between one man and one woman for life and sexual activity should be confined to marriage, that’s in the Church of England’s laws” he said. “I’m equally aware I have a lot of gay friends and I know gay clergy and they are doing incredible work.”

The married father-of-five admitted that he “struggled” with his views on homosexuality, adding: “I’m listening very, very closely to try to discern what the spirit of God is trying to tell us.”

He added: “I see my own selfishness and weakness and think who am I judge them for their sins, if they have sins.

“We shouldn’t demonise and dismiss and hate each other as that is so dangerous.”

Two years ago the Church of England agreed that gay clergy in civil partnerships can become bishops as long as they remain sexually abstinent. It has, however, remained opposed to same-sex marriages, which are now legal in England.

[The Archbishop faced a number of “challenging” questions from pupils at the Church of England](#)

[school](#), where 80 per cent of its pupils are Muslim.

Answering a pupil who asked whether he would encourage him to convert from Islam to Christianity, the Archbishop said: “I am not going to put pressure on you, and I wouldn’t expect you to put pressure on me.”

<http://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/archbishop-canterbury-gays-who-am-8703889>