



Image of the day - Westminster Abbey

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Presbyterians postpone election of new Moderator for a month



The election of a new Presbyterian Moderator for 2021 has been postponed for a month due to the coronavirus pandemic, Alf McCreery writes in the Belfast Telegraph

The election for Rev David Bruce's (Photo above) successor was due to take place on February 2 and is hoped it will now take place in early March.

It is thought that this is the first time in the recent history of the Presbyterian Church that the election of a new Moderator has been postponed.

Dr Trevor Gribben, Clerk of the General Assembly and General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church, said: "Over the past 10 months, due to the unprecedented and uncertain times that we have been living through, all

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organisations including churches, have had to look again at how they do business.

“Given the current restrictions in both jurisdictions to ensure people's safety we have pushed back the election of the Moderator-designate to the first Tuesday in March. This, of course, will be dependent on any restrictions pertaining at the time.”

Traditionally a Moderator is elected on the first Tuesday in February when members from the 19 Presbyteries across Ireland north and south meet to discuss the candidates and send in their nominations to Church House in Belfast.

The names of the candidates are made public shortly before the election.

The votes are counted without delay and the name of the successful candidate is announced later that evening. This year members have been advised that they cannot meet together to discuss the claims of the various candidates and to take part in the selection process.

Salisbury Cathedral serves as Covid inoculation centre

On Saturday Salisbury Cathedral welcomed in the first members of the public to receive the Covid-19 vaccine in the stunning surroundings of the 800-year-old building.

The cathedral has even offered to play the organ as patients receive their jab.



Cathedral organist John Challenger said he would be playing Handel's "Largo" among other pieces.

The Very Rev Nicholas Papadopoulos, Dean of Salisbury, said: "We are proud to be playing our part in the life-saving vaccination programme, which offers real hope in these difficult times.

"Staff of our local NHS and their patients will receive a warm welcome to their cathedral, and we assure them of our constant prayer."

The cathedral is working with the Sarum South Primary Care Network to offer its space as a vaccination centre for the region.

The network's co-clinical director, Dr Dan Henderson, said it was great to be expanding the vaccination programme in Wiltshire.

“This marks another step towards getting our lives back to normal,” he said.

“I understand that people are keen to get their jabs but please don’t call your doctor or the hospital asking about when you will get an appointment, we are following the priority order set out by the independent Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation and the NHS will be in touch when it is your turn to be vaccinated.

“The huge vaccine programme is a marathon, not a sprint, but we will get to everyone.”

Pope Francis and Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI are vaccinated against Covid-19

Pope Francis and his predecessor Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI have taken the Covid-19 vaccination.

The Vatican commenced its rollout of the vaccination on Wednesday, with Pope Francis and Benedict receiving the jab.

“I can confirm that as part of the vaccination program of the Vatican City State, as of today, the first dose of the Covid-19 vaccine has been administered to Pope Francis and to the Pope Emeritus,” said Matteo Bruni, director of the Holy See Press Office.



Francis said earlier this week that having the vaccine was “ethical” and suggested that by not taking it, “you are gambling with your health, you are gambling with your life, but you are also gambling with the lives of others.”

Some pro-life people have raised concerns about Covid-19 vaccines because of the link to abortion.

Both Moderna and Pfizer tested their vaccines on fetal cells descended from a 1973 abortion in the Netherlands.

The AstraZeneca vaccine was developed in part by growing a modified virus in cells derived from an abortion in the 1970s but the final product does not contain aborted cells.

The Vatican has already clarified its position on taking such vaccines.

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In a statement issued late December, it argued that they were justified by the “grave danger” posed by Covid-19 and the lack of more ethical alternatives.

“In this sense, when ethically irreproachable Covid-19 vaccines are not available ... it is morally acceptable to receive Covid-19 vaccines that have used cell lines from aborted fetuses in their research and production process,” it said.

“The moral duty to avoid such passive material cooperation [in evil] is not obligatory if there is a grave danger, such as the otherwise uncontrollable spread of a serious pathological agent - in this case, the pandemic spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes Covid-19.



“It must therefore be considered that, in such a case, all vaccinations recognized as clinically safe and effective can be used in good conscience with the certain knowledge that the use of such vaccines does not constitute formal cooperation with the abortion from which the cells used in production of the vaccines derive.”

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It added that taking the vaccine did not amount to a moral endorsement of abortion or using the cell lines from aborted fetuses.

“Both pharmaceutical companies and governmental health agencies are therefore encouraged to produce, approve, distribute and offer ethically acceptable vaccines that do not create problems of conscience for either health care providers or the people to be vaccinated,” it said.

The majority of American megachurches are now multiracial

American megachurches are more racially and ethnically diverse than ever, according to a new study from sociologists Warren Bird and Scott Thumma.

The majority of the country’s roughly 1,750 megachurches are now multiracial (defined as 20 percent or more of a congregation belonging to a minority group).

In the pulpit, 94 percent of senior pastors are white. But in the pews, the percentages of white people, black people, Asians, and Native Americans closely correspond with their percentages in the American population. Latinos are underrepresented by about 8 points, and biracial people are slightly overrepresented.

Smaller churches are growing more diverse as well, though at a slower rate. The total number of all multiracial congregations, across Christian denominations, has grown from 7 percent in 2000 to 16 percent in 2020.

Death of former Dean of Connor

The death has been announced of the Very Rev Brian Moller, a former Dean of Connor.

Born in 1935, he graduated from Trinity College, Dublin in 1960, and was made deacon in 1961 to serve as Curate-assistant at St Peter's Belfast. Ordained priest in 1962 he also served as curate-assistant in Larne and Inver from 1964-1968.

From 1968 - 69 he served as priest in charge of St Comgall's in Rathcoole. He became the first incumbent of the parish, serving there until 1986, when he was appointed incumbent of St Bartholomew's in Stranmillis, Belfast.

He served as Diocesan Director of Ordinands from 1982 - 92, and as Chaplain to Stranmillis University College.

He was made a Canon of Lisburn Cathedral in 1990, and served in turn as Treasurer and Precentor before being appointed Dean of Connor in 1998.

Dean Moller retired from full time ordained ministry in 2001. After his retirement he founded the Retired Clergy Association, becoming its first president. He continued to be active in the association until his death

His friend and colleague Canon Walter Laverty paid tribute to him: "He was a very kind, generous, helpful and warm-hearted person, who had a very wide range of interests.

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“A wise and learned person, he will be very badly missed.”

Due to the current restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 emergency the late Dean’s funeral will be strictly private.

The former Dean is survived by his sons Jeremy and Julian and daughter-in-law Elaine. His wife Kay predeceased him. His family have requested no floral tributes, rather, donations in memory, if desired, are to Cancer Research NI c/o Gilmore Funeral Directors Ltd, 13 The Square, Comber.

Funeral of late Bishop told of ‘a kind and good and courageous man’

The late Bishop Roy Warke was “a sensitive and committed pastor, an efficient administrator, and someone with an excellent understanding of people. In short, he was a faithful shepherd to the flock,” his funeral service was told on Friday morning, Patsy McGarry writes in The Irish Times.

Former Church of Ireland Bishop of Cork, Cloyne and Ross, Bishop Warke (90) died in Dublin last Tuesday. His funeral service took place at Zion parish church in Dublin’s Rathgar where Bishop Warke had once been rector.

Current rector at Zion Rev Stephen Farrell said few had expected to be back there so soon after the funeral of Bishop Warke’s wife Eileen, who died on Christmas Eve.

“On that day Roy himself began the prayers. He read a prayer from the Book of Common Prayer that was deeply

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meaningful to both of them. You could have been left in no doubt after that moment that their's was a marriage built on the foundation of love and sustained by a shared faith," Rev Farrell said.

Passing on the sympathises of the people of Zion parish, he said "there is an immense gratitude here for Roy's 17 years of dedicated service."

Rev Farrell also read a message from Bishop Warke's successor in Cork, Cloyne and Ross, Bishop Paul Colton, who expressed his "immense personal disappointment in these grim times of the coronavirus pandemic" at being prevented by Level 5 restrictions from attending the funeral. 'Courageous episcopate'

Retired Archdeacon of Cork, Cloyne and Ross Robin Bantry White spoke of "a grateful church giving thanks for a kind and good and courageous man. Someone who fulfilled all that was best in ministry and especially episcopal ministry ." He recalled how Bishop Warke had been born in Belfast "but moved as a baby to Mountmellick Co Laois where his father was an accountant in the many faceted business firm of James Pim". Educated at Kings Hospital and Trinity College in Dublin where "he excelled in sports, especially in hockey" he was ordained for Newtownards parish in Co Down.

He returned to Dublin four years later as his father was ill, but with many Northern connections the late Bishop was "more au fait and comfortable with the Northern ethos of the Church of Ireland than many of us in the south," the Archdeacon said.

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Elected Bishop of Cork, Cloyne and Ross in 1988 “for what was fruitful and courageous episcopate” he brought “ a quiet firmness, an absolute sincerity and utter diligence and a disarming humility to the task.”

The Archdeacon concluded “I always think that a good person’s life is the real sermon at a funeral. So it is today.” Also among the Covid-restricted attendance were Archbishop of Dublin Michael Jackson and Bishop of Meath and Kildare Pat Storey.

Chief mourners were Bishop Warke’s daughters Jane and Ruth.

Episcopal Church’s ‘From Many, One’ aims to heal America’s deep divisions one conversation at a time

The Episcopal Church is launching a campaign, “From Many, One,” to promote a new spiritual framework for Episcopalians to engage in tough conversations with family, friends and neighbours, bridging the intense divisions that threaten to tear apart communities in the United States and beyond, writes David Paulsen editor of Episcopal News Service.

Starting today Jan. 18, Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Episcopalians will be encouraged to invite others to join them in “conversations across difference” guided by four questions: Who do you love? What have you lost? Where does it hurt? And what do you dream?

The campaign, which rejects retribution, punishment and “othering,” is inspired by the Latin phrase on the U.S. seal: E Pluribus Unum. Although it was developed before the mob of Trump supporters took over the Capitol for several hours on Jan. 6, the church campaign is launching at a time when many Americans are reeling from recent events. The goal is to celebrate difference and promote healing by emphasizing listening and curiosity.

“I have never been more profoundly aware of the need for passionate and practical commitment to the way of unselfish, sacrificial love that Jesus taught,” Presiding Bishop Michael Curry said Jan. 11 in a news release announcing the church’s “From Many, One” campaign. “Conversations with others across difference is not just a nice thing to do. It is a spiritual practice of love in action.”

So how will “From Many, One” help Episcopalians respond faithfully to today’s divisions? The campaign offers steps for facilitating one-on-one conversations that allow open expression of differences without judgment. Before setting up those conversations, participants can review the guide developed by the church. Engaging in “the spiritual practice of conversation across difference can help to knit us all into a diverse, more perfect union,” the guide says.

The guide encourages participants to reflect on the framework’s four questions. Participants also may watch videos of Curry and other leaders modeling these types of conversations. The guide provides practical tips and suggestions for approaching these conversations with openness and curiosity in search of “God in the presence of the other person.”



Presiding Bishop Curry

“Watching the tragic upheaval in our nation’s Capitol, I was struck again by the urgency – and difficulty – of cutting through the vitriol, listening deeply, and growing authentic relationships across difference,” the Rev. Stephanie Spellers, the presiding bishop’s canon for evangelism, reconciliation and stewardship of creation, told Episcopal News Service. “‘From Many, One’ won’t solve the problems in our broken common life, but it’s one concrete way for each of us to practice the ministry of reconciliation that Jesus gave us all. I know I want help making that commitment right now.”

Conversation partners can be anyone in a person’s social circle, from relatives to co-workers – “many of them are eager for respectful, mutual conversation,” the guide says. Although the conversations are intended for individuals, congregations may choose to host events that encourage



the practice, such as Zoom meetings with breakout rooms for the one-on-one talks.

“We all are wonderfully and diversely made in God’s image,” the Rev. Shannon Kelly, the church’s director of faith formation, told ENS. “Engaging in conversation with someone who differs from us on any topic, hearing their experiences and sharing your own understanding is one way to start to build relationships and break down the walls between us.”

After completing these conversations, participants then are asked to pray for their conversation partners and, if they wish, to share the story of their experiences online through the “From Many, One” campaign.

“We hope people understand this is only scratching the surface of the practice and learning we’re called toward,” the Rev. Melanie Mullen, the church’s director of Reconciliation, Justice and Creation Care, said in the news release. “Our

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goal is to point people toward partner efforts that meet you where you are: for more simple conversation, further learning, deeper reckoning and/or action. More than that, we hope people see this as part of a life-long commitment to creating beloved community.”

The initial phase of the campaign will build to an Easter celebration, with a special online worship service and additional opportunities for participants to discuss their experiences.

News briefs

A Service of Institution - of the Rev Christopher St John as rector of the Parish of St Nicholas, Carrickfergus will be shared online on January 21.

This is in line with current Covid-19 restrictions, and the decision by Church of Ireland Bishops to temporarily suspend in-person public worship in church buildings.

The service will be broadcast live at 7.30pm on January 21 on the St Nicholas' Church of Ireland Facebook page.

While it is not possible for parishioners to attend this service in person, members of St Nicholas' Parish, and other friends of the new incumbent, who comes to Carrickfergus from St Mark's, Dundela, Diocese of Down and Dromore, are encouraged all to join online.

Christopher, 54, is a native of Londonderry. He moved at a young age to Newtownabbey where he was a member of the Church of the Holy Spirit, Mossley.

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He has PhD in Adult Education, and a number of Masters' degrees, and worked for several years in adult education and child protection training, before embarking on training at the Church of Ireland Theological Institute seven years ago.

Christopher served his deacon intern year in Holy Trinity, Woodburn, Connor Diocese, before ordination as curate assistant in St Mark's, Dundela, in August 2017.

Pointers for prayer

Today we pray for those facing food insecurity globally. Coronavirus, conflict and cuts to UN funding are increasing the risks of food insecurity and malnutrition in 2021, in particular in South Sudan.

An increase in domestic abuse has been an unwanted consequence of the global pandemic. We pray for all who have suffered that they will have help to rebuild their confidence in their self-worth and practical ways to move forward in life.

Prolonged restrictions and times of isolation can lead to a loss of confidence in venturing out and interacting with others. We pray for all who are experiencing this and ask God to help us gently reach out with encouragement and understanding.

We pray for those who have lost jobs in the last months and are now seeking new employment. May their confidence in their abilities stay strong and may unexpected doors open for them to new opportunities for work.



The COVID19 pandemic has wreaked havoc in the lives and livelihoods of so many. We pray today for God to give us the means to help rebuild hope and confidence in people, through practical help as well as emotional and spiritual support.

Today we pray for the USA. We pray for stable democracy and an end to divisions in the USA as a new president is inaugurated this month.

Today we pray for teachers and students. As the new term starts, schools have faced a lack of clarity over reopening which has made it more difficult to plan appropriate education for students and has left teachers and support staff without clear guidance.

Speaking to the Soul

The Lord had said to Abram, “Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father’s family, and go to the land that I will show you.”

Genesis 12:1 NLT

I wonder what your life looks like at the moment. I would guess that for many of us there are plenty of aspects of our lives that suit us really well. Life isn’t perfect, and we can easily come up with some suggested improvements, but the thought of it all changing completely would come as quite a shock. Well, if that’s true for us, imagine how much greater the challenge would have been for Abram. We would be able to reach for our computers and find out information about the wider world, but not Abram! God was taking him away from the security of his home and leading him on the most incredible adventure into a land of which he knew nothing.

And there’s another interesting detail. Abram is 75. There’s nothing wrong with being 75 but most people would consider that it is hardly the time of life when you are expecting to go on a daring adventure! One would assume that that would be left to much younger people. But that’s not how God works. Living the life of faith is one long adventure and, whatever your age, you need to be ready for change because that’s how God works.

The writer to the Hebrews uses the example of Abram as an illustration of faith. He reflects that Abram went out “not knowing where he was going”. By any normal standard that

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sounds extremely foolish. Leaving home without having a clue about the destination sounds ridiculous. But Abram was a man of faith and he knew that following God's will was the wisest possible course of action. Abram was willing to head out into the unknown together with his family and cattle for the simple reason that he trusted God. And the truth is that thousands of years later God works in exactly the same way today. He may ask you to do something which appears completely crazy by human standards, but if he is truly calling you then it will always be the best way.

QUESTION

Are you willing to go on an adventure with God?

PRAYER

Loving Father, thank you that you still call people to live by faith today. Help me to be willing to go on an adventure with you. Amen.

