



Image of the day

**Motor cycle racing suspended in NI...
...and so is in person worship**



Church services to remain suspended - Church of Ireland Bishops in NI

The bishops write - As you will be aware, yesterday afternoon the Northern Ireland Executive took the unanimous decision to extend the current Covid–19 restrictions until Friday 5th March 2021.

This decision was based on the strong recommendation of the Chief Medical Officer and the Chief Scientific Advisor, as a result of the continued extremely high level of transmission of the Covid–19 virus throughout the community (which over these last four weeks had not reduced to the level that had been hoped for), along with the increasing numbers in hospital and intensive care.

In the light of this decision, and on the basis of the clear and unequivocal public health advice that people should

continue to stay at home, we have decided that all in person Sunday gatherings for worship, along with all other in person church gatherings, should remain suspended in all Church of Ireland parishes in Northern Ireland until Friday 5th March 2021 – with the exception of weddings, funerals, arrangements for recording and/or live-streaming, drive-in services and private prayer (as permitted by regulations). This same step is also being taken today by the Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church, and the Roman Catholic Church.

While we acknowledge that there is both cost and disappointment in this for many, we see this decision as part of our response to the command of Jesus to love our neighbours. We continue to encourage as many people as possible to stay at home for the sake of health, life and the Common Good.

Ultimately, as followers of Jesus, we are people of hope. As we journey through these dark and difficult days, we live in that hope, looking to the light that we find in Jesus.

+John Armagh, +Andrew Derry and Raphoe, +David Down and Dromore, +George Connor

PCI church services to remain suspended Decision taken ‘for the sake of health, life and the Common Good’

A statement from the Presbyterian Church - Due to the continued extremely high level of transmission of the Covid-19 virus throughout the community, which over these

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last four weeks has not reduced yet to the level hoped for, alongside the increasing numbers in hospital and intensive care, yesterday afternoon (21 January) the Northern



Ireland Executive took the unanimous decision to extend the current Covid-19 restrictions until Friday, 5 March 2021.

The Executive's decision was based on the strong recommendation of Dr Michael McBride, the Chief Medical Officer, and Professor Ian Young, Chief Scientific Advisor. As a result of their advice, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI) has decided that all of its in person Sunday gatherings for worship, along with all other in person church gatherings, should continue to remain suspended until 5 March.

Responding to the news that the current restrictions had been extended for an additional four weeks, Rev Trevor Gribben, the Clerk of the General Assembly and General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, said, "In the light of this decision, and on the basis of the unequivocal public health advice that people should continue to stay at home, the General Council Standing Committee of our Church, has directed that all in person Sunday gatherings for worship, along with all other in person church gatherings

across our congregations in Northern Ireland, should remain suspended until Friday, 5 March.”

Mr Gribben said that he and the Moderator had written to all PCI congregations with this decision, the only exceptions being weddings and funerals along with arrangements for recording, or live-streaming, drive-in services and private prayer (as permitted by regulations). This same step is also being taken today by the Methodist Church in Ireland, the Church of Ireland and the Roman Catholic Church.

The Clerk of the General Assembly continued, “While we acknowledge that there is both cost and disappointment in this for many, we see this decision as part of our response to the command of Jesus to love our neighbours. We continue to encourage as many people as possible to stay at home for the sake of health, life and the Common Good.

“Ultimately, as followers of Jesus, we are people of hope. As we journey through these dark and difficult days, we live in that hope, looking to the light that we find in Jesus,” he said.

Getting the Word out in Lurgan

A team of volunteers from St John’s Lurgan has been ‘getting the Word out’ and through the letterboxes of the local community. Yesterday they delivered 300 copies of John’s Gospel plus invitations to an online Alpha Course.

The initiative is part of the diocese’s Gospel Giveaway project. Over 60,000 pocket-sized copies, personalised for



each parish, have been distributed in Down and Dromore in the past two months.

“We pray that God would speak and reach people through His Word as they read of the good news of Jesus Christ,” said the rector of St John’s, Revd Raymond Kettle.

Contact Tim Burns if you’d like to find out more about the Gospel Giveaway: tim@downanddromore.org

Rectory Reflections

Rectory Reflections is a new book, written in lockdown, by the Rev Ian Magowan, rector of St Saviour’s in Connor and St Patrick’s, Antrim.

The volume comprises 24 sermons on subjects such as ‘the Resurrection,’ ‘Taming the Tongue,’ ‘Going the Extra Mile’ and many more.

Speaking about how the book came to fruition, Ian said: “After a 31-year career as a teacher, I answered God’s call to the ministry of the Church of Ireland. On graduating from churchnewsireland@gmail.com



The Rev Ian Magowan

Trinity College Dublin, I served as rector of Killowen Parish, Coleraine, before becoming rector of St Saviour's, Connor, and St Patrick's Antrim.

“Since March 2020, we have all been facing the threat of the Covid-19 pandemic. At times we have been unable to go to church due to government regulations. In order to provide spiritual guidance, I have been putting my sermons and prayers on our church's Facebook site as well as my own personal social media. I have been keeping in touch with members of our congregations through phone and the church magazines.”

Ian said that living in the rectory during lockdown has given him the opportunity to enjoy his hobby of photography. “I

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have been taking many pictures of the extensive grounds and surrounding area, some of which are included in this book. I believe that we can see the Glory of God in His creation which is all around us,” Ian said.

“This book includes 24 sermons which I trust will encourage and help us in our faith and walk with God. It is important that we realise that no matter what happens, God is still in control and he is always there for us.”

Copies of Rectory Reflections are available at £8 plus £2 p&p, directly from Ian who can be contacted by private messaging the parish Facebook page.

Trappist beer production could fall silent in Belgium over shortage of new monks

Belgium’s Trappist beers are under threat from a crippling shortage of new monks to replace their ageing brewing brothers.

The recruitment crisis has already led to one brewery, Achel, losing its Authentic Trappist Product label after the last two monks at the St Benedict’s Abbey in the province of Limburg, close to the Dutch border, retired.

There are about 100 Cistercian monks brewing in Belgium, which is the spiritual home of the Trappist beers and, until recently, boasted almost half of the world’s 14 Trappist breweries.

The vast majority of the monks have already reached retirement age but fewer and fewer Belgians are replacing them, leading to fears the monastic order could die out.

“Achel is the first of the six monasteries that no longer has a living community. For the past four years there have only been two brothers,” Abbot Nathanaël Koninkx, of the Westmalle Abbey, told De Tijd newspaper.

“In Westmalle, there are still 27. I do not dare to say how many will still be there in 20 years’ time. If you can provide more vocations, please do.

“If there are no vocations, the monastic order disappears and so does the name. The beer can continue to exist, but no longer under the Trappist label.”

The Authentic Trappist Product label is only awarded to beers made in the immediate surroundings of an abbey, produced under the supervision of monks or nuns and sold to fund the monastery and for charitable works.

Production of the six Achel beers, a mix of blonde and dark beers which can be as strong as 8 per cent, will continue but without the international quality mark because no monks are supervising the brewing. Eoghan Walsh, the author of Brussels Beer City: Stories from Brussels’ Brewing Past, said: “The number of new vocations for new monks have dropped off a cliff in Belgium, and they have never exactly been very high to begin with.

“The existential reality of what this means for one of Belgium’s most cherished brewing traditions is becoming clear.”

There are six Trappist breweries in Belgium and 14 Trappist breweries worldwide, including Mount Saint Bernard Abbey, near Coalville, Leicestershire, which makes Tynt Meadow, as well as breweries in the US.

Tribute to the late Dean Brian Moller

The late Dean Brian Moller's life was one 'packed full of interest and energy, activity and achievement over the course of 85 years,' Canon Ronnie Nesbitt told the small congregation permitted to gather at the funeral service of the former Dean held in Bangor Abbey on January 19.

The Diocese of Down and Dromore, into which Dean Moller retired, was represented by Bishop David McClay.

Describing Dean Moller as 'one of God's most faithful and devoted servants,' Canon Nesbitt said he would have celebrated the 60th anniversary of his ordination this year.

"But there is a lovely sense of completion as we meet in that a parochial ministry that began 60 years ago in St Peter's on the Antrim Road where Brian was appointed curate assistant should also have ended there as Brian gave his final address from its familiar pulpit on the first Sunday of this new year," Canon Nesbitt said.

He spoke of Dean Moller's contribution to the wider church at Diocesan and General Synods, as Dean of Connor, in filling for a time the roles of Director of Ordinands and Examining Chaplain in Connor Diocese. As chaplain to

Stranmillis, Brian also had significant influence on a generation of teachers and ordinands,” Canon Nesbitt said.

He added that the Dean’s many other skills and interests made for a ‘well–rounded, interesting and above all entertaining personality.’

“Above all, Brian was a man of sincere and convinced faith in Christ, steeped in liturgy of the Church of Ireland of course! He was kind and generous, warm hearted and loving. Someone who invested himself in the lives of others. Like Barnabas, a ‘son of encouragement’, and as a friend or colleague, utterly dependable. Someone who laughed often.

“It is no surprise that his death has evoked such a deep sense of loss not just in this parish but in so many other places as well.”

Canon Nesbitt said Dean Moller was also one of the most determined people he had ever met, and someone who had known him throughout the length of his own ministry as one of those ordinands who found direction and encouragement from him.

Extending sympathy to Brian’s family, his sons Jeremy and Julian, Jeremy’s wife Elaine, and the wider family circle, Canon Nesbitt remembered the Dean’s beloved wife Kay. He said they were a clergy family, of the old school, in that holidays comprised of house for duty locums the length and breadth of Scotland and England.

“To say you will miss him is a huge understatement. But there is also relief that his passing into the nearer presence



Dean Moller at a Down and Dromore Clergy Quiet Day

of God was peaceful and swift, and if it didn't afford time for farewells – we know that Brian would have found any prolonged incapacity so very hard to bear.”

Canon Nesbitt said music and singing was Dean Moller's 'joy and delight' adding that 'his very fine tenor voice graced so many occasions both secular and sacred.'

He remembered that Dean Moller was brought up in Belfast, the son of Edward, a Danish-born marine draughtsman with Harland and Wolff, and Emily. On the Easter Tuesday of 1941, the family was caught up on the air raid on Belfast and as a six-year-old, Brian could remember being dug out of the rubble of his home by soldiers.

He grew up in Lisburn, studied at Friends' School and his choral singing at Lisburn Cathedral was, Dean Nesbitt said, to foster a growing sense of vocation. “But not before noting Brian had a spell in stockbroking and, as a student, a conductor on the Blackpool trams, which was news to me, I must say!” Canon Nesbitt revealed.

He outlined how, aware of God's call to the ordained ministry, Dean Moller commenced studies at Trinity College Dublin, followed by his Divinity Testimonium at the Divinity Hostel. After ordination, he served curacies at St Peter's and in Larne, with particular responsibility for Craigy Hill. In 1968, he was appointed as curate-in-charge of St Comgall's, Rathcoole, later rector, staying there until his appointment to St Bartholomew's in 1986.

"It is the date of his appointment to Rathcoole that is significant, just before the beginning of the Troubles," Canon Nesbitt said.

"Brian took on as his first incumbency a parish of 600 families, as part of the largest housing estate in Europe. And there he set the tone of his ministry which was characterised by careful preparation of worship allied with an assiduous programme of house-to-house visiting, where he got to know his people by name. He fostered leadership and took meticulous care of church property, often himself.

"During his time, the congregation grew, organisations flourished, the church was enhanced by the addition of stained glass from a disused church – Brian ever the recycler – a minor hall was built. But more importantly, Brian and by extension the church, was the salt and light in a community under huge stress. It was a costly ministry."

Canon Nesbitt said that if St Bartholomew's had been a complete change, Dean Moller's priorities remained the same. "He maintained the highest standard of worship, valuing the parish's choral and liturgical heritage, and here

too he commissioned stain glass and undertook refurbishment projects,” Canon Nesbitt said.

“Alongside all that an increasing commitment to the wider church as Dean of Connor and through groups such as the Organ Scholarship Scheme and the Choral Union. The fact that we are able to hold our General Vestry before Easter is done to a bill introduced by Brian at Synod.”

He said that once the Dean eventually retired, he didn't slow down, founding the Retired Clergy Association, being president of Friends' Old Scholars' Association, an enthusiastic member of Probus and, in latter years, an inveterate traveller.

He was always available for cover, something he loved, because he enjoyed people and the conducting of worship, Canon Nesbitt said.

“But above all he was a fixer and mender. We need look no further than the Bishop's Crozier, mended by Brian when a former bishop, who shall remain nameless, got it stuck in a grating in Down Cathedral. In fact Brian mended four croziers in all, in Connor and Down and Dromore Diocese.

“Brian also had the knack of mending people as well. It's as a mender and fixer we will remember him here. Mender of so many things, lots of clocks, including the clock in the tower which was restored and upgraded in 2014 in memory of Kay.”

Concluding, Canon Nesbitt said: “We meet today in our recently refurbished church. Even if the scheme didn't

entirely please him, as he told me, he got fully behind it. He launched Inspire, based on the parable of the talents, handing out £10 notes and urging people to use it as able, no one could refuse him and he promoted it at every opportunity.

“It raised over £10,000 in the end, testimony to his enthusiasm, drive and the profound belief that God could be trusted and would bless that which was offered in faith. The God whom he had made the foundation of his life, the Saviour in whose steps he followed in the power of the Holy Spirit. Brian certainly didn’t bury his talent and Christ whom he knew as his saviour and Lord will, I have no doubt, greeted him with the words, ‘Well done good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your master.’”

Press Focus

Archbishop Kieran O'Reilly says abuses disclosed in mother and baby homes report 'total antithesis of the faith we claim to profess'

Patsy McGarry writes in the Irish Times

One of Ireland’s four Catholic Archbishops has said “we must create a Church in our diocese which truly listens to, and respects, womanhood; a church which promotes a full and deep engagement with the voices of women.”

Kieran O'Reilly, the Archbishop of Cashel and Emly, said the church must also be one “which listens, and acts upon, equally, to the cares, concerns, hopes and joys of both women and men in our diocese”.

“I pledge to do all that I can to ensure this happens through clear leadership in this regard,” he said in a letter to his archdiocese on Thursday.

The archbishop said the report of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes “has saddened me greatly”.

“The abuse and lifelong suffering inflicted on innocent mothers and children by many of those in authority at that time, including Church leadership, was the total antithesis of the faith we claim to profess,” he wrote.

Railed against

The archbishop said it must be acknowledged “that there were quite a large number of families and individual members of the clergy and religious who railed against the status-quo of the time, thereby ensuring that families remained together.

“I readily acknowledge that the practices outlined in this welcome report supporting the status-quo of the time, have blighted the lives of many fragile and innocent people in our communities,” he said.

The response in Cashel and Emly “must be to listen to, and really hear, the stories of the women and children in our diocese who suffered, and are still suffering the effects of their childhood and young lives”.

“I wish to offer a personal listening ear to any person who wishes to tell me their story,” he added.

“We will offer supportive services if they are required. I would ask that all Catholics throughout the diocese would also listen compassionately to any person who wishes to tell you their story.”

‘Death, pain and suffering’

Regarding the Covid-19 pandemic, he said it had “brought death, pain and suffering to many families in our diocese and country.

“I wish to express my deep sadness and solidarity with all those affected by the pandemic. We have also seen the courage, dedication and superhuman efforts of the frontline staff in nursing homes, hospitals, the public services, and, indeed, in every parish throughout our diocese.”

Archbishop O'Reilly asked church members to join him in praying for those “affected by the virus” and for those working in frontline healthcare roles.

Pointers for prayer

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.

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In this week of prayer for Christian Unity with its theme of “abiding in Christ” we’re more aware than ever of the importance of working together to serve the world. We pray for God to unite us together in his love.

Let’s remember and thank God today for friends and connections with different church traditions, and pray that we’ll fully embrace and enjoy the richness of diversity that we all bring to worship and service.

In this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, we pray all Christians may come together in prayer and action against all injustice and oppression so we may bring hope and healing to our world

We pray today for God’s help as we unite across denominations to bring hope and practical care to those in need, and ask that any differences and misunderstandings will be overcome through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Today we pray for Uganda. Last week, elections were held after dozens of people were killed in the run up to voting day, and violence has been at an unprecedented level. We pray for stability in Uganda and safety for those taking part in democratic processes

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.

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.

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 week.

Speaking to the Soul

"I am changing your name. It will no longer be Abram. Instead, you will be called Abraham, for you will be the father of many nations. I will make you extremely fruitful. Your descendants will become many nations, and kings will be among them! I will confirm my covenant with you and your descendants after you, from generation to generation. This is the everlasting covenant: I will always be your God and the God of your descendants after you."

Genesis 17:5-8 NLT

It's a big moment when you enter into a binding agreement with someone. Whether you are thinking of marriage, buying a house or starting a new job it's a moment to stand back from life and take a deep breath. This was just such a moment for Abram as he entered into a covenant with God that was going to change everything – including his name!

The word "covenant" is important throughout the whole of the Bible and it's an amazing word. The idea that the God of Creation wants to enter into a relationship with human beings is enough to blow your mind. The first covenant was with Noah and God set the rainbow in the sky as an eternal

reminder of it, and then in the New Testament we see the way in which Jesus' death on the cross ushers in a new covenant as he throws the door open to the world.

A covenant has two sides to it. On one side there is God who has freely chosen to enter into a relationship with us. The only explanation for this is love. He doesn't have to form a relationship with us and doesn't need us. He's God! But he decided from the beginning of time that his desire was to offer to humankind the possibility of relationship.

And then there's the other side of the covenant – us. If a covenant was one sided it wouldn't be a covenant. God will never impose himself on us. Through Jesus' death on the cross he offers a new life to us, and we need to decide whether we want to follow in his way and be obedient to him.

QUESTION

In what way will obeying God shape your life today?

PRAYER

Faithful and Loving Heavenly father, thank you that you invite us into an eternal covenant with you. Help me to be faithful to that covenant today. Amen.

