

**Image of the day -
Clonard Monastery**

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Northern Ireland's first-ever inter-Church arts festival goes on-line.

The Belfast 4 Corners Festival, now in its ninth year, co-founded by its Joint Chairs, Presbyterian minister, Rev Steve Stockman and Catholic priest, Fr Martin Magill, will live stream 30 events from January 31 to February 7.

The festival announced its lineup on its website 4cornersfestival.com

The festival said they had to abandon plans to invite a limited number of members of the public to attend some of the events owing to the current health emergency, Bernie O'Neill writes on SluggerO'Toole web site.

The festival's theme is Breathe and its organisers say they "are trying to breathe hope and creativity into our very difficult situation."

They added: "It is still our intention to invite people in Belfast and elsewhere to pause and take the deep breath we all need at this exceptionally trying moment in our history."

The programme includes a keynote speech by United States-based Professor John Paul Lederach, an internationally acclaimed author and expert in conflict resolution plus contributions from the Jamaica-born singer-songwriter and teacher Raquel McKee, and the poet and theologian, Pádraig Ó Tuama.



There is an evening in the company of Belfast songwriter and performer Duke Special.

Hot button issues coming under the spotlight include domestic violence which has soared during the pandemic and racism, underlined by the killing of George Floyd in America, says the festival programme.

A panel discussion on domestic violence – in the wake of the passing of new legislation in the Assembly last week – the will include Dr Olive Buckley, OBE, a family GP and forensic medical doctor; Detective Superintendent Lindsay Fisher from Public Protection Branch, PSNI, and Rev Alan Lorimer, a chartered psychologist and Methodist minister.

The ugly face of paramilitary-style “justice” in post-conflict Northern Ireland is depicted in the screening of the short film “Rough” followed by an on-line panel discussion including its writers Declan Lawn and Adam Patterson.



Belfast City Hall

The festival said: “We had planned a programme of online-only and blended in-person/online events (Covid-19 regulations permitting).

“However, given the deteriorating situation around the pandemic and the introduction of new tighter restrictions we have decided to proceed on the basis of a festival accessible only on-line. But one still true to 4 Corners’ original vision of inspiring people to cross traditional boundaries.”

The festival committee told supporters: “We think you’ll understand that because of the deteriorating Covid-19 situation we’ve had to change tack and go for a purely

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online festival. It's not what we'd have wished but health and safety must be our priority."

They added: "Due to the lack of social contact we cannot spread the word about our festival as we normally do, so we must rely heavily on social media and would greatly appreciate your help in letting others know about the events. Please follow us on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter and share our posts whenever you can."

The mission of the 4 Corners Festival is "to inspire people from across the city of Belfast to transform it for the peace and prosperity of all."

It promises "innovative events designed to entice people out of their own 'corners' of the city and into new places where they will encounter new perspectives, new ideas, and new



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friends” and to “celebrate our city through music, prayer, storytelling, discussion, and more.”

Morning and Night Prayer will be streamed throughout the festival and a special BBC Radio Ulster Morning Service will be aired.

To view all the events and book your free tickets visit 4cornersfestival.com

You can also follow the festival on Facebook and Twitter.

An tSeirbhís Idirchreidmheach

Interdenominational Service for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

This service to celebrate the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity will be with you from Friday 22 January at 7.30pm on this link <https://youtu.be/>

The following people contributed to this service: Clergy: Bishop Alan McGuickian giving a lovely sermon to commemorate the birth of St Columba 1500 years ago, and Canon David Oxley and Fr Pádraig Ó Baoill presiding. Music: Cór Cúil Aodha under the musical direction of Peadar Ó Riada Hymns: Lúireach Phádraig, Ag Críost an Síol, Tiomna Cholm Cille, An Phaidir and An Cosán Draíochta. Readers: Deputy Lord Mayor, Councillor Mícheál Mac Donncha representing the Lord Mayor of Dublin, Bláthnaid Ó Brádaigh & Giollamuire Ó Murchú (Pobal an

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Aifrinn) and Connor McCabe (Cumann Gaelach na hEaglaise).

The organisers state - “We are commemorating two events this year: 50 years since this service first began in 1971 as a response to the Troubles, and 1500 year since the birth of St. Columba.

“We welcome you to light a candle and enjoy 30 minutes of reflection. The Service Sheet is available”

[Ord-na-Seirbhise-an-tSeirbhis-Idirchreidmheach-2021-v.cDownload](#)

Spring Harvest ‘tough decision’ to cancel Minehead and Skegness events

Spring Harvest has made the “tough decision” to pull the plug on its in-person gatherings planned for Minehead and Skegness this April.

It is the second year in a row that the physical gathering has been cancelled because of the pandemic.

Organisers Essential Christian said it will proceed with an online event that had been planned to complement the physical gathering.

“We remain confident in Butlin’s ability to deliver safe and secure holidays,” said Essential Christian CEO Phil Loose.

“This decision hasn’t been made lightly and is due to the unique and complex nature of the live event with its massive

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volunteer team, huge children's programme and large additional infrastructure."

This year's online event will take place around the theme of the "Unrivalled" God, with more details to be released soon.

Warm tributes to Armagh priest

Warm tributes have been paid to a former Crossmaglen parish priest who has passed away from Covid-19.

Portadown native Fr Joe McKeever died at Craigavon Area Hospital on Saturday morning, Lauren Harte writes in the Belfast Telegraph.

The retired priest has been described as a "great character" who was well-known right across Co Armagh and beyond. Fr McKeever taught at Drumcree High School for a number of years before he entered the priesthood, when aged in his 40s.

Among those paying tribute following his passing was Fr Paddy McCafferty, parish priest at Corpus Christi in Ballymurphy.

The west Belfast priest said: "Joe, originally from Portadown, was a late vocation having taught in Drumcree High School for some time. He was in his early 40s when he came to Maynooth to study for the priesthood. He was my next door neighbour for a while back then."



Fr Joe McKeever, who was originally from Portadown, died at Craigavon Area Hospital on Saturday morning.

Fr McCafferty added: “He was absolutely hilarious. A very colourful character and great company. A very kind and wise pastor too. May God rest his good and dear soul.”

The Bishop of Killaloe Fintan Monahan said his former classmate would be remembered as “a man of great intellect and sharp but gentle wit”.

Newry and Armagh SDLP MLA Justin McNulty added: “So sorry to hear of the passing of Fr. Joe McKeever RIP. What craic we had with him down the years around the football. And I know how well got he was amongst all his parishioners.”

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Close friend, the Emmy award winning singer and TV producer, Eamonn McCrystal, said: “Fr McKeever and I worked on many projects together including ‘Rest For Your Soul’. My sincere condolences to his family. I’ll miss you Joe!”

Crossmaglen Rangers said its players, members, supporters and friends were also “deeply saddened” to learn of the passing of “a loyal, devoted and passionate supporter”.

They added: “We all have fond memories of Fr Joe enjoying many successes with us.”

McKeever’s Bar in Portadown — which is owned by Fr Joe’s family — posting on their Facebook page, said he will be “missed more than words can convey. We love you Joe”.

A private funeral will take place for Fr McKeever with Requiem Mass being celebrated at a later date.

News briefs

Church of England appoints first bishop for housing - A bishop for housing has been appointed by the Church of England as part of the church’s efforts to help tackle the UK housing crisis. Bishop of Loughborough Dr Guli Francis-Dehqani will take up the new role, which will see her lead the church’s efforts in tackling housing inequality, later in the year when she becomes Bishop of Chelmsford. Her appointment comes ahead of next month’s publication of the findings of a two-year commission, set up by the

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Archbishop of Canterbury, examining the role of the church in tackling housing inequality.

Coming Home: A Theology of Housing - Church House Publishing has launched “Coming Home: A Theology of Housing” addresses one of the most urgent issues of our day. You can join the book’s editors Malcolm Brown and Graham Tomlin with contributors Niamh Colbrook and Sharon Prentis to explore the theological and practical questions surrounding housing, why the church should be involved and what a Christian vision of housing and community would look like, ahead of the landmark report of the Archbishop’s Housing, Church and Community Commission in February. Tickets to this event are FREE. Date: Thursday 28th January Time: 7pm GMT. Sign up to receive details of how to access the event PLUS 10% off the RRP of Coming Home. See -
[<https://www.chpublishing.co.uk/events>]

Catholic Schools Week 2021 - is taking place in parishes and Catholic schools across the island of Ireland. This annual celebration of Catholic education runs from 24 – 31 January and this year’s theme is, ‘Catholic Schools: Communities of Resilience and Faith’. Resources for use by parishes, and by primary and post-primary schools, are available on www.catholicschools.ie

Belfast Cathedral on BBC nationwide - Next Sunday, 31st January, morning worship from Belfast Cathedral will be a UK wide radio broadcast of Sunday Morning Worship at 8.10am on BBC Radio 4, with the Dean as preacher. On the 68th anniversary, the broadcast will remember the loss of

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the Princess Victoria Stranraer to Larne ferry on 31st January 1953.

Join the Lambeth Conference prayer journey at -
[<https://lambethconference.org/prayerjourney>]

Focus - Seamus Heaney's poems are for Protestants too

The poet and Northern Ireland's great divide

by Jenny McCartney

The one and only time I met Seamus Heaney, in 2007, he was making tea in the kitchen of his Dublin home when he asked — more modestly regretful than coy — ‘Did you have to do the poems at school?’

I grew up in Belfast, and certainly we had to do the poems at school. Even in the early 1980s, in a disputatious city that was frequently contemptuous of life but rarely of poetry, it was Heaney whose reputation already seemed cast in bronze. His lines on Northern Ireland defined us internationally, like it or not: it was clear that we had somehow grown someone big, a poetic prize -marrow.

At that time, my flicker of vicarious pride was mixed with a sense of being informally exiled from the celebration.

Heaney was a Catholic, nationalist poet, raised on a farm in Mossbawn, County Derry. I was a teenager in a Protestant, unionist family outside Belfast. Our vision of politics softly jarred as often as it overlapped. And the complexity of the

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Troubles — a dark time at once suffocating, toxic and blazingly alive — was simplified the further it travelled away from us, boiled down to digestible stereotypes.

I was aware that in fashionable English metropolitan circles there were few groupings held to be more inherently ghastly than the Ulster Unionists, whose insistence on Britishness somehow disqualified us from membership of the club. We were broadly caricatured as bigots and bores, huddled under the bawling megaphone of Paisley (in those years a minority leader within unionism). When I met a certain type of Englishman or woman, it became clear that not only were they convinced of this view, but unwilling to change it. After the interested party ferreted out my religion, I would often be earnestly asked if I actually knew or talked to any Catholic people at all. The question filled me with an inexpressible sense of exhaustion, the sense of a mountain of misapprehension to be shifted. I would answer that of course we knew some Catholics, and loved them too, including my aunt from County Sligo, and some of my father's closest friends who came regularly to our house. My brother Kevin was named after one such friend, creating a Protestant called Kevin, a permanent curve ball thrown into the insidious Northern Irish game of deducing a religion from a first name (so memorably described in Heaney's 'Whatever You Say, Say Nothing' as 'the rule/ that Norman, Ken and Sidney signalled Prod/ and Seamus (call me Sean) was sure-fire Pape').

These things were all true, but beneath them were other truths, also complicated: the way that Protestants and Catholics, upon first meeting, said nothing about politics or

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touched only lightly on it, as if mutually afraid to inflame a wound.

It was no good: as soon as I started, the eyes of my English questioners began to slide away. They wanted simple tales of religious apartheid: mercurial, romantically aggrieved Catholics and tight-lipped, taciturn Prods. It got on my nerves. I started mentally collecting famous Protestant anti-stereotypes. Look at George Best, I thought, you don't get much more mercurial than him: in fact, his mercury seemed to be poisoning him.

And then I would read Heaney's early poem 'Docker' from his 1966 collection *Death of a Naturalist*, about a menacing, thick Prod bigot in a pub — 'The only Roman collar he tolerates/ Smiles all round his sleek pint of porter' — and it appeared we were back to square one.

His later poem 'The Other Side', about a Protestant neighbour quietly waiting outside to come in after the Heaney family's rosary ended, was a masterpiece of tender perception. Yet I suspected the cruder 'Docker' had travelled further, into receptive imaginations abroad. There were indeed thick Prod bigots, of course, and thick Catholic bigots too: just not as one-dimensional or numerous as outsiders liked to imagine.

As Heaney himself told me decades later, 'docker' was the wrong word: since most dockers were Catholic, it should have been 'shipyard worker'. He left it out of his *Selected Poems*.

At that time, my flicker of vicarious pride was mixed with a sense of being informally exiled from the celebration. This sort of thing only mattered, of course, because Heaney mattered, and the business of culture — who had one, who allegedly didn't — was used in Northern Ireland as a kind of feverish proxy war. In any case, his wider poetry could not be dismissed. People always grabbed for 'Digging', but I was most moved by 'Mid-Term Break' (reprinted on this page), about the sudden death of his younger brother when he was 14. Its final line, 'A four foot box, a foot for every year', could break a reader's heart in nine plain words.

Yet 'Punishment', from the 1975 volume *North*, left me unsettled too. The poem dealt with Heaney's feelings when looking at the corpse of a murdered adulteress hauled from a bog, comparing it to the Catholic girls tarred and feathered by the IRA for going out with British soldiers. 'I who have stood dumb/ when your betraying sisters/ cauled in tar/ wept by the railings/ who would connive/ in civilised outrage/ yet understand the exact/ and tribal, intimate revenge.' It felt as if the real emotion lay in the silent understanding, rather than the veneer of outrage. At such cruelties — I couldn't stop thinking of their poor damaged skin — wasn't it the job of the poet to roar in indignation?

My own indignation had been delayed: by the time I was reading these poems they were already old. Heaney had long left Northern Ireland — in 1972, he and his family departed for Wicklow, and later Dublin — and the brutal lunacy had stayed in Northern Ireland. I think Heaney went away primarily to stay sane, to prevent his keen poetic instinct from being buffeted and corrupted by rage and

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malice. He valued harmony and courtesy, and Northern Irish politics offered neither. Away, his generous spirit expanded.

A staunch nationalist, he was no friend to the Provisional IRA: its strident fanaticism ran counter to his instinct for sympathy. His eye couldn't miss the IRA's horrors, and his 1995 Nobel lecture dealt profoundly with the stultifying effect of political violence. A snapshot of the early times: in 1974, the IRA one morning murdered at breakfast a QC friend of Heaney's called Martin McBirney, a Protestant magistrate and left-leaning Belfast literary figure. Five minutes later, it also murdered a senior Catholic judge called Rory Conaghan, in front of his young daughter.

Heaney's dear friend Michael Longley wrote a shocked, short poem about McBirney called 'The Civil Servant', describing how his clever, talented friend had been cooking an Ulster fry when 'a bullet entered his mouth and pierced his skull/ The books he had read, the music he could play'. The Ulster poets did what they could in the midst of carnage: reeling, they wrapped words around the dead, and bore them into memory.

An awareness of threat quietly resonated with me: my father was a lawyer and involved in unionist politics, both areas in which the IRA retained an active interest. In the midst of a happy childhood, one could never be entirely free of the small stomach-knot of unease: nausea at the sectarian murders of the loyalist paramilitaries, and apprehension over what the IRA might be planning next.

Yet what impressed me, when I met Heaney six years ago, was that he had never stopped considering and

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investigating both himself and the country he was born into, never grown rigid. His element was earth, both literally and metaphorically, and he loved to dredge things from the mud to the light, inhaling their secret scent. I read ‘Punishment’ differently now with that understanding: he was tugging the unspeakable truth out of himself, and squinting at it. It didn’t much matter that I didn’t like what I saw. Indeed, disliking it was possibly the point.

On ‘Docker’, he said that he had been ‘writing from within a nationalist collective sense of things. So yes, I became far, far more alert to that.’ Yet at the time he had needed ‘to draw the boil and get it out’. Poems are fixed in a feeling and a moment; poets move on. Age and eminence had freed him to forage where he wished: in 2007, he was busy translating the 15th-century Scottish poet Robert Henryson.

He was interested in my name, McCartney, and whereabouts ‘my people’ came from. I ascribed it to his natural feeling for roots, but names, too, float back like ghosts: it was only later that I remembered his poem ‘The Strand At Lough Beg’, written for his cousin Colum McCartney, murdered by loyalist paramilitaries in a sectarian ambush in 1975, aged just 22. In it, Heaney imagines washing the dead man clean with dew.

The Czech author Milan Kundera once wrote of the ‘poetic memory’, an area of the brain which records ‘everything that charms and touches us.’ He spoke of its power in the context of romantic love, but I think it also applies to places. Northern Ireland — its customs, people and pain — was imprinted on Heaney’s poetic memory; in a much less productive sense, it has lodged in mine. He acted as a safe-

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house for our words — the lively dialect one locks away when one comes to England — and a careful trapper of detail: bread, sweets, place names.

You see as friends get older how they draw together, keenly aware that only their dwindling group holds these memories in common. I came to feel that about Heaney, who was three decades older and whom I knew mainly through his published writing. There was an inexplicable loneliness when he died, the sense of an end to a long conversation, of remembered passions fading. It is good still to have the poems. It all mattered so much, you see, and he understood its weight.

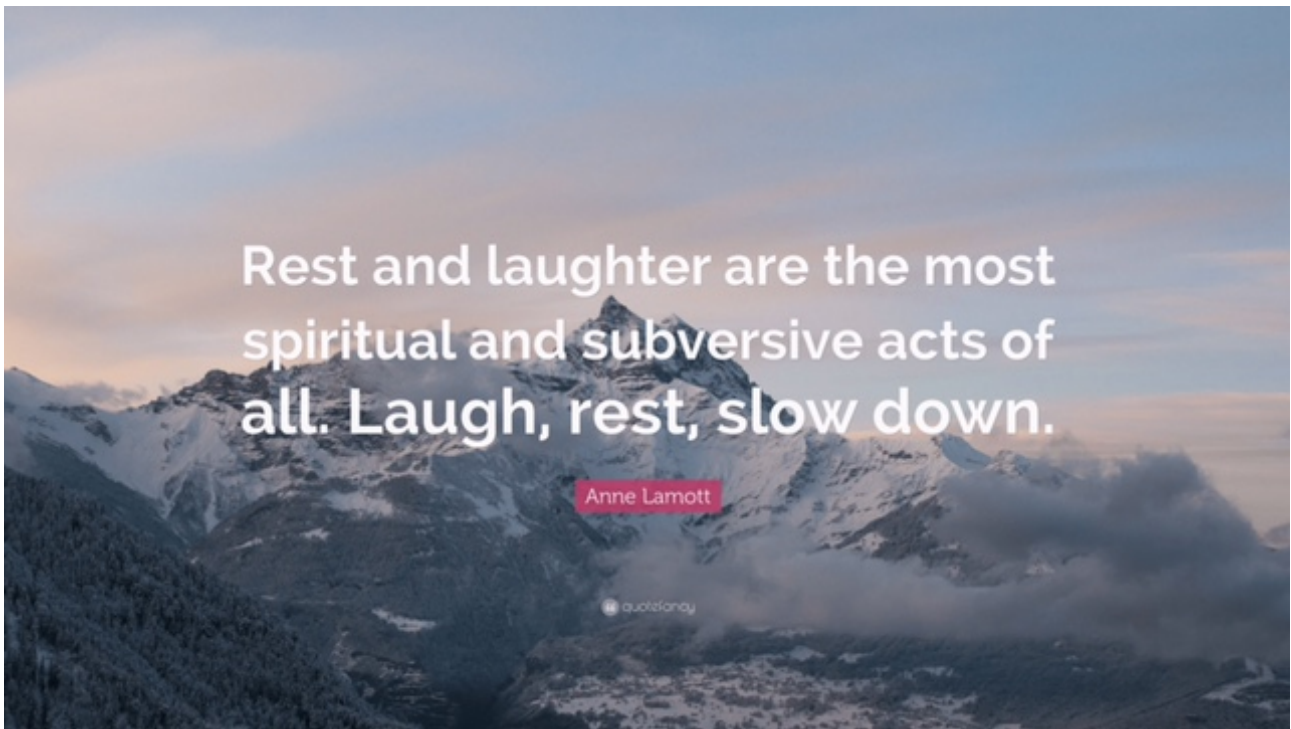
Jenny McCartney is a columnist and film critic. This article was first published in The Spectator, September 2013

Pointers for prayer

Urgent Prayer Request from the Province of Alexandria: The Anglican Church of Ethiopia have asked for our prayers as they see the results of the Tigray crisis unfold. One church leader has described “thousands of people internally displaced just living in empty fields.”

[[] <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/01/1082492>]

Today we give thanks for those raising awareness of leprosy around the world. It's World Leprosy Day next week, when advocates challenge myths and spread awareness about leprosy, which is totally curable, globally.



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.

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.

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.

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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.

Speaking to the Soul

My guilt overwhelms me—it is a burden too heavy to bear. My wounds fester and stink because of my foolish sins. I am bent over and racked with pain. All day long I walk around filled with grief. A raging fever burns within me, and my health is broken. I am exhausted and completely crushed. My groans come from an anguished heart. You know what I long for, Lord; you hear my every sigh.
Psalm 38:4-9 NLT

It's an incredible privilege when someone is completely honest with you. David tells us exactly how things are in his life, and it's not going well! He feels guilty, he's in pain and he is emotionally crushed. You can hardly imagine anything worse. But the crucial fact is that, amidst it all, he knows that God hears him.

I love the expression that David uses when he writes “you hear my every sigh”. God doesn't merely know when we are going through a hard time, but he picks up every detail of

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our distress. He is our Creator and knows us better than we know ourselves, so when we pray he is well ahead of us in understanding what is wrong and why we are struggling. In prayer we are informing God of nothing that he doesn't already know, but it is still vital for us to open our hearts to God with complete honesty because in that way we are welcoming him into our situation and inviting his comfort, healing and restoration.

Every single human being has times of difficulty and distress in their lives. There is nothing remarkable about that. But what is essential is that we don't hug our problems to ourselves. We need to come to God and be completely honest. It's also important for us to be open with other Christians. That's one reason why we need to belong to a church and know people with whom we can be completely honest. It wouldn't be helpful to share our inner struggles with many people, but we do need at least one person with whom we can share the whole story – however awful and tangled our story might be.

QUESTION

With whom are you able to be completely honest?

PRAYER

Thank you Lord that you love me so much that it is possible for me to be completely honest with you. Amen.

