



Image of the day
Salisbury Cathedral

January 7

Inter-church arts festival to stream 30 events online

Northern Ireland's first inter-church arts festival is defying Covid-19 by going online.

The Belfast 4 Corners Festival, co-founded by its joint chairs, Presbyterian minister Rev Steve Stockman and Catholic priest Fr Martin Magill, is in its ninth year, Adrian Rutherford reports in the Belfast Telegraph.

But this will be a very different experience, with all events done virtually. Organisers plan to live stream 30 events from January 30 to February 7.

They had to abandon plans to invite a limited number of people to some events due to the health emergency.





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

Rev Steve Stockman

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, Padraig O Tuama.

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

January 7

Big issues coming under the spotlight include domestic violence, which has soared during the pandemic, and racism, following the killing of George Floyd in America.

A panel discussion on domestic violence will include Nicole Jacobs, the UK's first Domestic Abuse Commissioner, and PSNI Detective Supt Lindsay Fisher.

The issue of paramilitary-style “justice” in modern Northern Ireland is depicted in the screening of the short film “Rough”, followed by an online panel discussion including its writers Declan Lawn and Adam Patterson.

In a letter to supporters the festival committee said: “We think you'll understand that because of the deteriorating Covid-19 situation we've had to change tack and go for a purely online festival. It's not what we'd have wished but health and safety must be our priority.”

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.”

More information is available via 4cornersfestival.com

RTE host breaks silence over 'blasphemous' God sketch on New Year's Eve special

Former RTE star Aengus Mac Grianna has apologised after taking part in a controversial sketch describing God as being arrested for "sexual harassment" offences.



Aengus Mac Grianna

The national broadcaster's New Year's Eve sketch about God was condemned by the Catholic Church.

The segment was broadcast on the New Year's Eve special and showed "God" being led away by Gardai for "sexual harassment" offences.

It emerged that the broadcaster had received 3,500 emails and 1,250 calls from people complaining about the skit.

And presenter Aengus Mac Grianna has now issued an apology, saying he is "deeply sorry" for the offence caused.

He wrote on Twitter: "I wish to apologise concerning my participation in the Waterford Whispers News item on the NYE show on RTE 1 on New Year's Eve. Truly I am deeply sorry for the offence, distress and hurt caused. It was wrong for me. It was wrong of me."

January 7

It comes after RTE themselves also apologised for broadcasting the sketch in a statement last week.

The station said: "RTÉ recognises that matters which can cause offence naturally differ from person to person, within comedy and satire in particular.

"Having reviewed the feedback and complaints received up to this point, RTÉ wishes to apologise to those who were offended by the segment.

"The formal complaints received by RTÉ are being entered into our complaints system and will be responded to in accordance with the relevant statutory process."

The New Year's Eve Countdown Show screened the clip from satirical site Waterford Whispers, where a man in a white robe is led to court.

Kingsmill anniversary 'a reminder of sectarianism'

First Minister Arlene Foster has said the anniversary of the IRA Kingsmill massacre serves as a reminder of the sectarian bloodshed that blighted Northern Ireland.

This week marked 45 years since the murders of 10 Protestant workmen.

They were shot dead when their minibus was ambushed by the IRA near the Co Armagh village on January 5 1976.

Just one survived — Alan Black, who was shot 18 times. He was awarded an MBE in the New Year Honours last week.

Speaking yesterday, Mrs Foster and local MLA William Irwin said the atrocity remained one of Northern Ireland's darkest

January 7

days. Mrs Foster said: “Despite the passing of so many years, the pain felt by those who lost loved ones at Kingsmill remains undiminished.

“The sectarian slaughter witnessed at Kingsmill was undoubtedly one of the darkest days of the Troubles in Northern Ireland and reminds us all of why we must never return to such times again.

“Unfortunately many of the relatives have passed away without ever seeing justice served for the murder of their loved one.”

Mrs Foster said that the murders were one of the many unanswered questions in relation to the Irish state and its relationship with the Provisional IRA.

The getaway vehicle used at Kingsmill was dumped in the Republic and the suspects took refuge there afterwards.



Rathlin Island with the snow covered Paps of Jura in background taken from Ballycastle

January 7

The DUP leader added: “Just last month I raised the Kingsmill case amongst others with the Taoiseach. The Irish Government must play its role in getting to the truth in such cases.

“Ultimately these cases are also a test of commitment to the values which are so often raised in other cases.

“I look forward to discussions with the Taoiseach on these cases in the near future.”

Mr Irwin, a DUP MLA for Newry and Armagh, said that after 45 years, the families of the dead deserve justice.



“Forty five years on from the murders, the families continue their long and dignified battle for truth and justice. They deserve nothing less.”

The Kingsmill attack came the day after the Reavey brothers were shot dead at nearby Whitecross by the UVF's infamous Glenanne gang.

John Martin (24)

January 7

and Brian (22) were killed by loyalist gunmen who burst into their home. A third brother, Anthony (17), was also shot and died later in hospital.

Ten minutes after the attack on the Reaveys, other members of the Glenanne gang burst into the O'Dowd home, 15 miles up the road in Gilford, Co Down.

The gunmen killed Barry O'Dowd (24), his brother Declan (19) and their uncle Joe (61).

New Congress still overwhelmingly Christian, heavily Protestant

The 117th session of Congress got off to a testy start on Jan. 3, including an opening prayer from an ordained member whose pairing of “A-woman” with the traditional “Amen” raised both hackles and questions about the meaning of the word.

But what is rarely at question is the religious composition of Congress, as the House and Senate remained overwhelmingly Christian (88%), and heavily Protestant (55%), the Pew Research Center has found, David Paulsen of Episcopal News Service writes

A total of 294 House and Senate members are Protestant Christians, out of a possible 535 — nearly the same as the last Congress. Like the previous Congress, too, the 117th Congress is also unlike America as a whole when it comes to faith allegiances.

Whereas about a quarter (26%) of U.S. adults are religiously unaffiliated — describing themselves as atheist, agnostic or having no particular religion — Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, a



Congressional buildings, Washington

Democrat from Arizona, was the only member of Congress to identify as religiously unaffiliated. Rep. Jared Huffman, a California Democrat, describes himself as a humanist. Both Sinema and Huffman have said they do not consider themselves atheists.

Eighteen others declined to specify a religious affiliation.

“Is it disappointing that there’s this much underrepresentation of non-religious voices in Congress?” asked Hemant Mehta, an atheist writer and podcaster. “Yes. It’s deeply depressing.”

But he noted he was encouraged that four of the 18 who declined to specify a religious affiliation are part of the Congressional Freethought Caucus, a group established in April 2018 to foster science and reason.

Pew found a growing number of congressional members do not identify with a particular denomination, such as

January 7

Methodist, Lutheran or Presbyterian. There were 96 members of Congress who said they were simply Christian or Protestant. By contrast, in 2009, during the 111th Congress, only 39 members described themselves this way.

The Pew analysis relied on CQ Roll Call data on the religious affiliations of members of Congress.

It found that several religious groups were overrepresented in the new Congress. Jews make up 2% of the U.S. population but 6% of the new Congress (or 33 members).



January 7

Catholics, who make up about 20% of the U.S. population, comprise 30% of the new Congress (or 158 members). Likewise, Presbyterians, Episcopalians and Methodists were also overrepresented. (Pew found 26 identified as Anglican or Episcopalian.)

Pentecostals were underrepresented. They make up 0.4% of Congress vs. 5% of all U.S. adults.

Among other findings:

There are nine Mormons, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, in the 117th Congress. The new Congress, like the old, has three Muslim representatives. It also has two Buddhists. There are two Hindus in Congress. Nearly all the non-Christian representatives (with the exception of three: two Jews and one who declined to state his religious affiliation) were Democrats.

Covid-19: Pope will not celebrate Baptisms in Sistine Chapel

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Pope Francis will not celebrate the Sacrament of Baptism for babies in the Vatican's Sistine Chapel this year.

Pope Francis will not hold this year's traditional Baptism of infants in the Vatican's famed Sistine Chapel on Sunday, 10 January, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Holy See's Press Office announced on Tuesday.

“Due to the health situation, as a precautionary measure, the traditional baptism of children presided over by the Holy Father in the Sistine Chapel on the Sunday of the Baptism



Pope Francis celebrating Mass in the Sistine Chapel at baptism of 32 babies on 12 January 2020.

of the Lord will not be celebrated this year,” the Holy See’s Press Office said in a brief note on Tuesday.

Instead, the baptisms will take place in the parishes to which they belong.

Long-running tradition

The tradition of baptizing children amidst the splendour of Michelangelo frescos in the Vatican’s Sistine Chapel, where Popes are elected, was started by Pope St. John Paul II.

The Vatican’s website says that on 11 January 1981, the feast of the Baptism of the Lord, the Polish Pope administered Baptism to 9 infants in the Vatican’s Pauline Chapel, which is separated from the Sistine Chapel by the Sala Regia. The following year he baptised 13 new-born babies and, in 1983, 20 infants.

January 7

Last year, Pope Francis baptized 32 infants (17 boys and 15 girls), all children of Vatican employees.

In the Church's liturgical calendar, the feast of the Baptism of Jesus marks the conclusion of the Christmas Season, which begins with the Christmas Eve Mass.

Pandemic's second wave

Numerous countries around the globe, including in Europe, are grappling with a second wave of the coronavirus infection, with governments trying to check its spread by severely restricting movements and gathering of people, especially during the current holiday season.

Over 75,000 people have died in Italy, the highest among European countries. With over 2.1 million total infections since the start of the pandemic, Italy ranks 4th after Russia, the UK and France.

Second phase of Covid funding opens to NI charities

The second phase of the COVID 19 Charities Fund in Northern Ireland, administered by the Department for Communities opened yesterday, 6th January.

Communities Minister Carál Ní Chuilín announced the second phase of the COVID-19 Charities Fund which will provide £11.7m support for charitable groups including faith-based organisations.

The Fund will provide financial support to charities that have lost income due to the impact of COVID -19 and are unable to cover unavoidable costs between 1 October 2020 and 31 March 2021.

January 7

It is important to note that previous applicants and those who were successful in being awarded grant aid previously, will be able to apply in recognition that the support applied to a different six month period.

It will also allow charities to apply which were previously ineligible due to having received other COVID funding.

The second phase of the COVID 19 Charities Fund will be delivered on behalf of the Executive and the Department for Communities by Community Finance Ireland.

More information from the following link;

<https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/news/ni-chuilin-announces-ps117million-support-ch>

Treasure Ireland reminder of deadline for grant applications in January

The deadline for applications for the National Churches Trust's new Treasure Ireland Community Grants Programme is 25th January 2021.

The grants programme offers church buildings funding of between £500 and £10,000 for church maintenance or urgent repair work.

Following the receipt of applications at midnight on 25th January, the decisions on outcomes will be made in March.

Grants of between £500 and £10,000 will be made to successful projects on works projects of up to £100,000 including VAT and fees.

The eligibility criteria consists of;

- * We will consider applications from listed and unlisted Christian places of worship, of any denomination located in Northern Ireland. To be eligible to apply you must satisfy the following criteria:
- * You must have 50% of the funds required at the point of application
- * Work must not have started
- * Any necessary permissions must be in place
- * The work must have been out to tender or you must have at least two quotes in place
- * Work must be to the main church building or an attached hall
- * The church building must have been constructed as a place of worship at least 30 years ago
- * Places of worship must be open beyond worship at least 100 days

Further grants will be offered later in 2021 with the deadlines as follows;

1 June 2021 (for a decision in July 2021)

27 September 2021 (for a decision on November 2021)

The National Churches Trust has asked those interested to read the guidance notes containing the scoring criteria, advice on completing the application form, a list of supporting documents required and details of the terms and conditions of any grant award made.

January 7

All applications must be made online.

Decisions on all grant applications are made by the Charity's Northern Ireland Grants Committee comprised of experts from the church and heritage sectors. The Committee meets three times a year.

Decisions will be notified following the Grants Committee meeting.

From 2021 applications for projects under £12,000 will be considered on a rolling basis and you will know the outcome of your application within 6 weeks of submission.

Applications for projects over £12,000 will still be considered by the Grants Committee in the normal way.

Further information can be obtained from the following link;

https://www.nationalchurchestrust.org/our-grants/grants-northern-ireland?fbclid=IwAR1iR0Jk9XbRa5BST-h7G3ENYvTTMPa_Oi0JvCd-cnU4ADlhjIWuptmsmRQ

News briefs

Light during the darkness – online event Remembering the Holocaust The Linen Hall Library in partnership with Conflict Textiles* will mark Holocaust Memorial Day on 27 January with an online event featuring inputs from a transnational panel of contributors on Holocaust-related family memorabilia. The event will take place over ZOOM from 2.00pm – 3.30pm (GMT).

There will also be a small exhibition from Tuesday 12 January, Light During the Darkness: Remembering the

January 7

Holocaust, in the Library and online displaying items of a personal nature that survived World War II and have their own fascinating, historic stories to tell.

For more information on Holocaust Memorial Day 2021 visit:
[<https://www.hmd.org.uk/>]

Conflict Textiles is an 'Associated Site' of CAIN (Conflict Archive on the INternet) at Ulster University, Northern Ireland. The collection is mainly comprised of arpilleras, quilts and wall hangings. Making visible the struggle for the disappeared remains at the very core of the collection. For more information visit: <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/conflicttextiles/>

Please ensure that you include an accurate email address when booking. A link to join the event will be emailed to you on the morning of the 27th January.

Divine Healing Ministries - Tonight, Thursday 7th January 7.30pm Livestream with Rev Nigel Mumford.

DHM write - We are thrilled to welcome Rev Nigel Mumford to our livestream this Thursday evening. Nigel is an international speaker, author and founder of By His Wounds, focusing on Christian Healing. Nigel is also Priest Associate for Healing, at Galilee Church in Virginia Beach, VA.

Nigel was born and educated in England. He served for six and a half years in Her Majesty's Royal Marine Commandos and continued his education while in the armed forces.

Nigel has been involved in the Healing Ministry for over 28 years. His conviction to pray for healing came in 1989 when his sister, Julie Sheldon, a ballet dancer with the Royal Ballet in London, was healed by God through the late Canon

January 7

Jim Glennon. This was a very dramatic healing from a disease called Dystonia. Being a witness to her healing has had a profound effect on his life.

In October 2009, Nigel was near death, due to contracting H1N1/Swine Flu. Hospitalized and in a chemical induced coma, for 19 days. Prognoses was not good. Through prayer and wonderful doctors & nurses, Nigel survived. Doctors were eventually able to perform a tracheotomy and wean him off the ventilator. The pulmonologist told him; “you were as close to death without dying that he has ever seen”. Nigel continues to give thanks and praise to all the intercessors who lifted him up in prayer. He is alive because of prayer. Thank you Jesus!

Nigel will lead us in praying for healing and for the touch of Jesus at our point of need. Expect the miracles of Jesus.

The Charles Wood Song Competition - will be held on 12 & 13 March, and the Charles Wood Festival 2021 will take place from 22 to 29 August. Further details to be announced in due course

The Long Read

Ruth Dudley Edwards: Truth is the weapon to use against republicans | Belfast News Letter

“As the southern commentator Eoghan Harris put it in the Sunday Independent in a stark article filleting hard-nationalist fantasies: “Banging on about a united Ireland just to upset unionists is part of the Sinn Féin agenda.

January 7

“If we go on indulging them, it will end badly for all on our island.”

<https://www.newsletter.co.uk/news/opinion/columnists/ruth-dudley-edwards-truth-weapon-use-against-republicans-3085784>

Pointers for prayer

Today we pray for disarmament and non-proliferation treaties. As Iran have accelerated their nuclear programme and with the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons about to come into force, we pray for constructive relationships between nations.

As we begin a new year that none of us would have imagined this time last January, we pray for God to give a sense of purpose and faith that he has good plans for us, however the year unfolds.

We pray today for all who are facing the new year alone, having lost loved ones recently. We ask that God will give them hope for the future, and show us how we can come alongside them with comfort and companionship.

Uganda is preparing for general, presidential and parliamentary elections this Thursday. Pray for the elections to take place peacefully and safely in light of the continued threat of the coronavirus.

Today we pray for COP26. The global climate conference, rescheduled from 2020, will be taking place in Glasgow in

January 7

2021. We pray for ambition and action from world leaders on climate change, and pray that those already affected by climate chaos would be kept safe.

Speaking to the soul

On the seventh day God had finished his work of creation, so he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because it was the day when he rested from all his work of creation.

Genesis 2:2-3 NLT

The French Revolution turned everything upside down including the arrangement of time. They adopted decimalization in a thoroughgoing way dividing up each day into ten hours, and each week into ten days. But it didn't catch on. After only a few years they returned to the seven-day week which we find in Genesis.

Rhythm is deeply important in life and the importance of taking regular rest is crucial. People have often told me that they are much too busy to take rest or to go on holiday. But the fact is that the rhythm which God set in creation is of foundational importance. We cannot disobey the fundamental rule of nature that we need time to recharge our batteries and to renew our commitment to God.

The Old Testament law gave a great deal of attention to the importance of the Sabbath. It was a holy day, a day set apart for God, and was not to be trifled with. People who worked on the Sabbath were to be put to death (Exodus

31.15). This all sounds very extreme to our ears, but it emphasizes the crucially important nature of the day in God's eyes. It is a fundamental rule of creation that if God needed a rest day each week then so do we.

The last few years have seen Sunday become far less distinctive. When I was a boy, the majority of people who we passed on the way to our church were people going to church. Now the roads are filled with people heading off for shopping, sport and a huge variety of leisure activities. But nothing has changed. We still need space to be refreshed and renewed and an opportunity to refocus our lives on God.

QUESTION

How are you going to ensure that Sunday is set apart for God in the rhythm of your life?

PRAYER

Thank you, Lord, for the gift of a day of rest. Help me to treasure the day and to use it as a time to refresh my life and my relationships and to get closer to you. Amen.

