

Image of the day - Epiphany, Henry Clarke

New stamp to mark 150 years since disestablishment of the C of I



(L-R) Bishop of Cork, Cloyne and Ross, The Right Reverend Dr. Paul Colton and Archbishop of Dublin & Glendalough The Most Revd Michael Jackson reviewing the new stamp last month.

A stunning image of the sun, moon and the stars reflecting in a stained glass church panel will adorn a new series of stamps unveiled by An Post today to mark the 150th anniversary of the Disestablishment of the Church of Ireland.

The new national €1 stamp bears the image of the iconic panel that graces the window of the Cathedral of Saint Fin Barr in Cork city. Alison Bray reports in [Independent.ie](https://www.independent.ie).

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The new series, designed by Dublin's Vermillion Design company, pays homage to the Church of Ireland's break from the Church of England and the State when it was officially disestablished on January 1, 1871.

The act, along with the introduction of Home Rule and the Land Act under then British Prime Minister William Gladstone was among his efforts to deal with the so-called 'Irish question' while removing the status of a State church "that had commanded the allegiance of only a minority of the population," according to An Post.



Commemorative postage

The Most Revd Dr Michael Jackson, Archbishop of Dublin and Bishop of Glendalough, gave his blessing to the new series.

He said: "Disestablishment has enabled the Church of Ireland to be free to shape its own future. Today's Church of Ireland wants to invest the energy of that freedom in the life of today's Irish society.

churchnewsireland@gmail.com

“When the Irish Church Act 1869 dissolved the union between the Church of Ireland and the State, an early strategist of the disestablished church said that the Church of Ireland was ‘free to shape her future course, independent of State control’ and focus on its own personal and spiritual mission.



Rathlin ferry with Fair Head and Mull of Kintyre

“Disestablishment would see the Church of Ireland becoming an entity in its own right from 1871, tied to neither the Church of England nor the State. It has enabled the Church to find afresh its independence and mission. It has conferred freedom for laity and clergy to develop a synodical way of life and understanding and to engage with confidence with those of other traditions”, he concluded.

The Sun, Moon and Stars panel is among 74 stained glass windows in St Fin Barre’s Cathedral which feature the

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watercolour paintings of William Burges, who was awarded first prize in the architectural competition to rebuild the cathedral in 1863, and Horatio Walter Lonsdale.

The image was reproduced by the kind permission of the Dean and Chapter of the Cathedral.

The stamp and a special First Day Cover envelope are available from today at all main post offices and online for the next year.

Report courtesy of independent.ie

Methodist Church shocked and saddened by the killing of George Nkencho

The Rev Dr Tom McKnight, President of the Methodist Church in Ireland, and Rev Dr Sahr Yambasu, President Designate of the Methodist Church in Ireland in a statement expressed their concerns. They write -

Along with the Methodist Church in Ireland, we are shocked and saddened by the killing of George Nkencho in the garden of his home in Clonee, West Dublin on December 30th.

Our deepest sympathy goes out to his family. The loss of a deeply loved member of their family at such a young age is an unbearable pain for anyone to carry. The awful circumstances in which his death happened involves a scale of suffering, few of us could appreciate. As a church, we pray for his family in the pain of their loss.

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The nature of George's death is obviously one that has brought incredible shock to those who knew him and to the wider community and country. The various factors that led to him being shot must be thoroughly investigated. With this in mind, the



investigation by GSOC must be given its place and nothing should hamper those seeking to examine the details of what happened. It is crucial that all who feel involved in this situation engage at this time with the GSOC investigation.

We are extremely concerned about false information circulating on social media relating to George himself and his death. He was a young man without previous criminal convictions from a close family. Such misinformation is not only deeply dishonouring to George and his family, but very dangerous.

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We wholeheartedly denounce any expression of violence towards members of An Garda Síochána.

Very disturbingly, there has been vile material posted and shared in recent days that is disgusting and blatantly racist. We call on all who observe any such hate crime material to report it to An Garda Síochána.

Those closest to George and the community around him are understandably distraught at this time. It is a very sensitive situation with emotions running high. We want to give every encouragement to those in the community who are seeking to lead in appropriate and healthy expressions of grief.

Some crucial broader issues that we must take seriously

Our Council on Social Responsibility has been concerned for a long time about racism and sectarianism in our society. As a church we have been committed to reconciliation in a wide variety of ways in our communities. We recognise the importance of all in our society being valued, enabled to thrive and play their part. Anything that undermines this, that causes members of society to feel that they are not invested in its prosperity and functioning and that undermines confidence in the function of the state is of great concern. We urge all at every level of community involvement to work for understanding, reconciliation and peace.

Irish Black people along with people of other ethnicities, including those who have migrated here, have experienced racism at different levels within Irish society. To pretend that racism doesn't exist, by comparing it to other countries or otherwise, is wrong. We feel that there should be the development within Ireland of some forum that provides a

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listening space where people who have experienced racism in Ireland can share their stories so that we can all learn. Such a provision has great potential for truth, healing and community cohesion and enables us all as a society to prosper well.

Presiding Bishop condemns 'coup attempt' at US Capitol



Presiding Bishop Michael Curry strongly denounced the riotous assault on the United States Capitol on Jan. 6 by supporters of President Donald Trump, referring to it as an “attempted coup.” Churchwide, bishops responded with statements and prayer services.

Transcript of the Presiding Bishop’s Call to Prayer -

Today is January the 6th, 2021. It is the Feast of the Epiphany. And on this particular day at this particular moment, even as our nation’s capital is being endangered



Presiding Bishop's address here is also on You Tube - try clicking on image above!

and assaulted, we pray that the Lord Jesus Christ, we pray that God, in his Way of Love, might prevail in all of our hearts.

The events at our Capitol today are deeply disturbing. We believe the actions of armed protesters represent a coup attempt. We are a democracy, with long-standing institutional norms that must be honoured, foremost among them, following the processes laid out in the Constitution and Federal statute to facilitate the peaceful and orderly transition of power.

Today's protesters pushed through police barricades and forced their way into Congressional chambers, and the Capitol building are now threatened, and threatening the safety of lawmakers, their staff, and others who work in the Capitol complex. This threatens the integrity of our democracy. The national security of our nation, the

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continuity of government, and the lives and safety of our legislators, their staffs, law enforcement, and all who work in the Capitol.

I, therefore, ask you now to join me in prayer for our nation, praying first from the prayers that accompany Morning Prayer. - There followed several prayers for peace and justice.

From Ulster to Auschwitz



Belfast Synagogue

An incredible story that stretches from Ulster to Auschwitz - Lill Saether's family were Jewish immigrants from Russia. They lived in Newry for over 20

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years. Her Grandmother went to school, got married and was raising a family there.

However in 1942 Lill's family were in German occupied Oslo when the Nazis started rounding up the Jews. The destination was Auschwitz.

On Tuesday 26 Jan, 2021, Lill Saether will tell the story of what happened to her Grandparents, her Mum, Uncle and Aunts. Thanks to her Grandmother's diary and her mother's recollections Lill can give a gripping and detailed account.

Its a profoundly moving story you won't want to miss.

Thanks to the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland for hosting this Zoom event on the week of Holocaust Memorial Day. The event is free but registration is required:

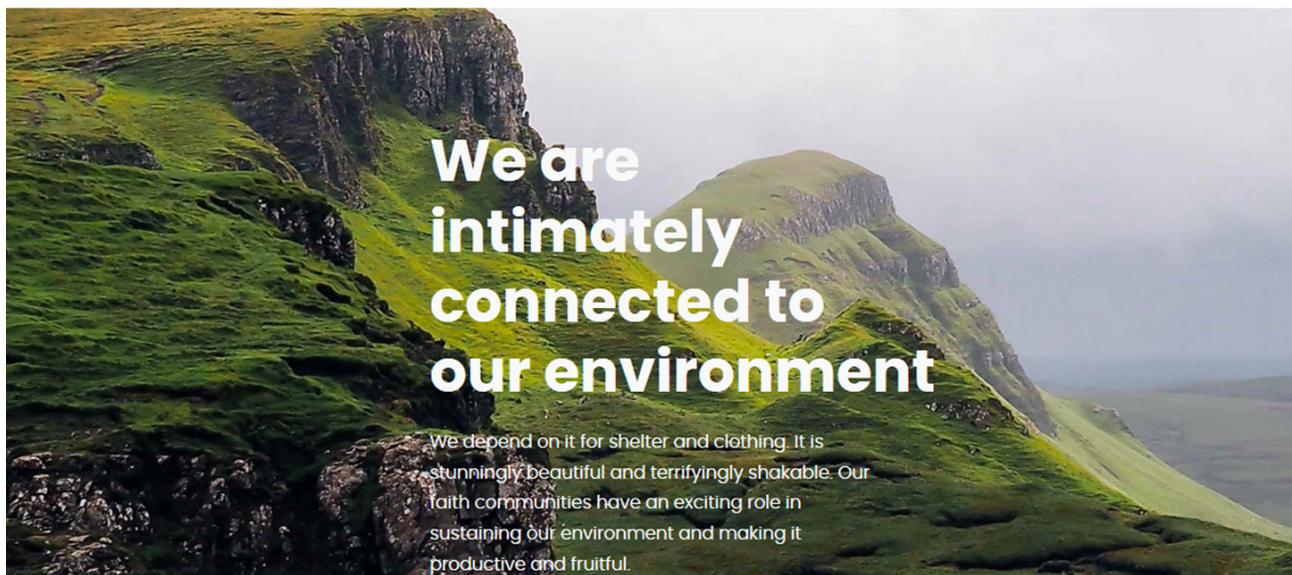
[<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/from-newry-to-norway-how-my-mother-survived-the-holocaust-tickets-133322610517>]

Eco–Congregation Ireland Online meet up

ECI is holding an online meet–up on Saturday, 16th January 2021, at 11.00am. All are welcome!

This online event will be to help share experiences and ideas. There will be input from a congregation that has received its Eco–Congregation Ireland Award, as well as a church on their journey towards its Award.

Participants are welcome to bring their questions about any aspect of their ECI journey, whether that is about getting started, working towards an ECI Award, the ECI Awareness



and Endeavour Certificates or hosting the ECI Climate Justice Candle. If you would like to attend, please email

[info@ecocongregationireland.com] to register and to get the Zoom link.

Eco–Congregation Ireland is an initiative of the Irish Inter Church Meeting, and includes members from the Roman Catholic Church, Church of Ireland, Presbyterian Church, Methodist Church and Religious Society of Friends.

Down & Dromore leader training goes online

Applications are welcome ahead of the Parish Reader Course commencing on 19 January in an online format.

Parish Readers are people of all ages and from all walks of life who have a calling to assist in leading public worship. The role usually involves the reading of liturgy, bible readings, prayers and assisting at Holy Communion. Parish Readers may assist in any or all of the ways outlined above

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and on a regular or occasional basis depending on how they are needed by the Rector. While the role is normally restricted to involvement in public worship it is significant in its support for clergy leading the service. Parish Readers should undergo a short training course of 6 weeks before being approved to exercise this ministry. They must also have the support of their Rector before applying.

Training Course details for 2021 -

19 Jan: Introduction – A History of the Office

26 Jan: Key factors in Leading Worship

2 Feb: Prayer Book 1 – Overview

9 Feb: Prayer Book 2 – The Church Year

16 Feb Prayer Book 3 – Service of the Word

23 Feb Prayer Book 4 – Leading Intercessions

The approval granted for a Reader will normally last for 3 years and cease on the appointment of a new Rector. There is no cost for the course.

Download an application form here.

[<https://www.downanddromore.org/news/2021/01/parish-reader-training-moving-online>]

Please email your application to Andrew on or before 19 January.

[andrew@downanddromore.org]

@ @ @

Survey prompts religious belief in young adults over the course of the pandemic

A new poll of Britain's Generation Z finds older adolescents and younger adults are more likely to believe in God than are millennials, the demographic ahead of them.

The survey, conducted by YouGov in late November, found that 23% of Britons aged 16 to 24 said they believe in God, with an additional 13% saying they believe in a "higher spiritual power."

By contrast, only 19% of those aged 25-39 said they believe in God, with 16% saying they believe in a higher power. Both groups fell behind the general British population, 27% of whom overall say they believe in God.

According to The Times, the share of Gen Z members who claim to believe in God is up from 21% in January (when the question was asked of 18 to 24-year-olds), raising the possibility that some have embraced religious belief over the course of the ongoing pandemic caused by the novel coronavirus.

Worsening situation: PCI decides to close

Yesterday afternoon (7 January) the Northern Ireland Executive's 'Faith Leaders' Forum' was convened by Junior Ministers, Gordon Lyons MLA and Declan Kearney MLA. In light of the advice that church leaders and other faith leaders received during the meeting from Dr Michael McBride, the Chief Medical Officer (CMO), and Professor Ian Young, Chief Scientific Advisor (CSA), regarding the worsening Coronavirus situation, the Presbyterian Church in churchnewsireland@gmail.com

Ireland (PCI) has decided that all in person Sunday gatherings for worship, along with most other in person church gatherings, should cease in all PCI congregations from midnight tonight until Saturday, 6 February 2021.

Speaking on behalf of the denomination, the Clerk of the General Assembly and General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, said, “Our churches are part of the local community and we recognise the very serious situation that Northern Ireland finds itself in today. With the extremely high level of transmission of the Covid-19 virus, combined with the numbers in hospital and intensive care, the very clear warning from the CMO and CSA this afternoon was that over the next number of weeks this situation is going to worsen significantly.”

Mr Gribben continued, “In light of our ongoing consultations and the current serious and worsening situation, and in line with unequivocal public health guidance that people should stay at home, we have written to our congregations in Northern Ireland, informing them that all in person Sunday gatherings for worship, along with most other in person church gatherings, should cease in all PCI congregations from midnight tonight until Saturday, 6 February 2021.

“It is of course regrettable and disappointing that over these next few weeks our congregations will no longer be physically gathering for worship. However, because of the alarming rise of Covid-19 infections in the community, this is the right decision to take, both for the safety and protection of people and also to contribute to the overall reduction of inter-person contact in line with the government’s ‘stay at home’ message.”

The Clerk concluded by saying, “In these difficult days, as we continue to look to God, and encourage others to find their hope in Him, let us help and pray for one another, lifting up all those on the frontline, those in authority making difficult decisions and especially all who mourn and miss loved ones.”

C of I bishops: in-person church activities should cease

Following further briefing today by the Chief Medical Officer, Dr Michael McBride, and the Chief Scientific Advisor, Professor Ian Young, and in consultation with the Executive Office, as Church Leaders we fully recognise the very serious position that Northern Ireland finds itself in at this time with the extremely high level of transmission of the Covid-19 virus. The escalation of numbers in hospital and intensive care is placing immense pressure on our healthcare staff; the number of deaths, and the very clear warning from health officials that over the next weeks, the situation is going to worsen significantly, is of grave concern to us all.

We recognise that clergy and parishioners have together worked steadily to implement protocols which have ensured that public gatherings for worship have been as safe as possible since the re-opening of our buildings in early summer. We also appreciate that the Northern Ireland Executive has acknowledged over the last 10 months the importance of people being able to gather in person for worship. The ongoing engagement between faith communities and the Northern Ireland Executive is warmly

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welcomed and is something which we believe has been, and continues to be, of benefit to wider society.

However, in light of the current serious and worsening situation and in line with clear public health guidance that people should stay at home, we have decided that all public gatherings for worship and all other in-person church activities should cease for our particular denomination, until Saturday, 6th February 2021, subject to review in late January, with the exception of weddings, funerals, arrangements for recording and/or live-streaming, drive-in services and private prayer (as permitted by regulations). We note and welcome the fact that the same position has been adopted by the Presbyterian Church, Roman Catholic Church, Methodist Church and others in Northern Ireland. In making this decision for the 'greater good' of all within our community, we continue to remember in our prayers the sick and bereaved, all who are suffering, and those whose lives have been directly impacted by Covid-19, praying too for those in positions of responsibility who are faced with making difficult decisions at this challenging time.

+John Armagh

+Andrew Derry and Raphoe

+David Down and Dromore

+George Connor

The long read - Archbishop right to wield crozier over Sinn Fein and SDLP

Nelson McCausland in the Belfast Telegraph

Eamon Martin reprimands Parties for shunning NI centenary

Archbishop right to wield crozier over Sinn Fein and SDLP

Archbishop Eamon Martin, the Catholic Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland, has been vocal over the past week about matters on both sides of the border.

Last Friday, he described a New Year's Eve sketch on RTE, the Republic's state broadcaster, as “deeply offensive and blasphemous”. The sketch, which was supposed to be satirical, had portrayed the virgin birth of Christ as “sexual harassment” by God.

Archbishop Martin also joined with the leaders of the three largest Protestant Churches in issuing a joint statement about the centenary of Northern Ireland.

Such a joint statement was obviously going to be fairly bland, but Archbishop Martin also wrote about the centenary and the future in the Irish Catholic newspaper.

He stated that he was an Irish nationalist and it is not the first time he has said that. Back in 2016, at the centenary of the 1916 Easter Rising, he said: “I do believe that Ireland should be one and I would like to work for that and continue to work for that by peaceful means and by persuasion, recognising that there are many people on this island who do not want that.”

He was open and honest about his political beliefs, but it raised an obvious question: would the leaders of the main Protestant Churches today be as overt in publicly identifying as unionists, stating that they believe in the Union and committing to “work for that”?

Archbishop Martin was writing as a nationalist as well as a Church leader, but he went on to recognise that, “For unionists and, indeed, loyalist communities in Northern Ireland, it represents for them a significant moment in the establishment of the Northern Ireland state. I would like to see the 2021 centenary as an opportunity for greater mutual understanding, for opportunities to build further reconciliation and peace.”

However, he didn't stop there and wrote: “I am somewhat disappointed that many of our nationalist and republican political leaders have dismissed the centenary of 2021 altogether, because for me I think it's really important to seize it as a moment to reflect on where we've come from.” For “nationalist and republican” read “SDLP and Sinn Fein”. When the Northern Ireland Office set up the Northern Ireland Centenary Forum last year, the five largest political parties were invited to participate, but neither the SDLP nor Sinn Fein turned up for the inaugural meeting.

Sinn Fein chairman Declan Kearney MLA said his party had declined and added: “There is nothing to celebrate about the lived experiences of republicans, nationalists and democrats in the northern state.”

His message was clear and his use of the word “democrats” simply compounded the offence in that it implied that “democrats” must be anti-state.

SDLP leader Colum Eastwood said his party had chosen not to take part in the forum, because the party does not believe the UK Government “is truly interested in telling the difficult story of partition”.

The double standards of both nationalist parties was particularly evident in Derry City and Strabane District Council. In 2015, the council had agreed to establish a working group for an inclusive programme of commemorations covering “significant events” in the period 1913-1923. However, nationalist and republican councillors reneged on that commitment when it came to 2021.

It was a pan-nationalist decision that kicked equality, integrity and parity of esteem out of the Guildhall and it will be remembered in the same way as the naming of the Raymond McCreesh playpark in Newry.

That is why the statement by Archbishop Martin, himself a native of Londonderry, was particularly significant. His “disappointment” at the approach of nationalist and republican politicians must have stung the SDLP and Sinn Fein and the Sinn Fein response came once again from Declan Kearney.

However, he failed to address the Archbishop's “disappointment” and simply accused him of making “a misdirected political intervention”.

The SDLP seem to have been more reticent, looking over their shoulder at Sinn Fein and then settling on a strategy of silence.

So, what should unionists make of it all? As regards Archbishop Martin, it would be churlish of unionists to ignore what was a significant intervention and some unionists have already welcomed his comments.

It would also be foolish to ignore the response from Sinn Féin, or forget the perfidious pan-nationalist treatment of unionists in Londonderry and Strabane.

But this is not just a matter for unionists. What should nationalists make of it all? Archbishop Eamon Martin, the Catholic Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland, has been vocal over the past week about matters on both sides of the border.

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Pointers for prayer

Whether or not we've made any specific New Year resolutions we pray for the resolve to grow in our faith and relationship with God this year. We ask for a closer walk with Christ as we navigate the unusual circumstances of the months ahead.

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.

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.

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Today we pray for the UK's new financial commitments in 2021. The recent Spending Review included the aid budget being slashed to just 0.5% of GNI and didn't commit to a permanent £20 uplift in Universal Credit.

Today we pray for people who will be homeless in 2021. As we look towards the new year, people experiencing homelessness will once again be faced with a new set of distinct challenges.

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

May the joy of the angels, the eagerness of the shepherds, the perseverance of the wise men, the obedience of Joseph & Mary, and the peace of the Christ-child be yours this Christmas and the blessing of the Father, Son & Holy Spirit be with you. Amen

Speaking to the soul

The Lord God asked, "Have you eaten from the tree whose fruit I commanded you not to eat?" The man replied, "It was the woman you gave me who gave me the fruit, and I ate it."

Genesis 3:11-12 NLT

The story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden has a very contemporary ring to it. Blaming others is as much a way of life today for many people as it was for Adam long, long ago. He knew he had done wrong because he had eaten the forbidden fruit but he was desperate to wriggle out

of the situation and dump the blame on Eve. But he even went further than that, suggesting that God bore some responsibility because he had given Eve to him.

We all know the temptation to blame others. Our parents, our children, our teachers, our employers and the governments under which we have lived were all far from perfect so we generously heap the blame on them. But it isn't good enough, and we know it. We need to take responsibility and recognize that although we are certainly not the only guilty party, we must accept responsibility and own up to the fact that we have done wrong.

I have known people who continually blamed others. That is so sad. Their attitude not only made their own lives miserable but spread misery to those around them. Others may indeed be to blame but if we only draw attention to their failures we will get a completely distorted understanding of them. May God help us to be generous, loving and forgiving when we see the faults of others, recognizing our own shortcomings. Dumping the blame on other people might feel satisfying for a short while but it offers a miserable way of life.

QUESTION

Think of someone whom you are inclined to blame. What would be the better way of responding to them?

PRAYER

Lord, forgive me that I am often tempted to blame others when things go wrong. Help me to take responsibility for my failings and to show more patience and forgiveness when others do wrong. Amen.

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