



**Image of the day - Belfast sunset**

## Reports

### Confirmations in Cork C of I parishes cancelled

Yesterday afternoon, Wednesday, 30th June, following the updating today of the public health information on the Government website [ <http://www.gov.ie> ] to include formal reference to ‘other religious ceremonies’, namely Holy Baptisms, First Communion and Confirmations’, the Bishop of Cork, Cloyne and Ross, Dr Paul Colton has written to clergy in the Diocese as well as to all confirmands, their parents and guardians, to announce that Confirmations in the Diocese have been cancelled at seven parishes and areas on dates arranged between July 11 and September 25.

Following the expressed hope in the Government announcement of 2nd June that such ceremonies may proceed from 5th July (subject to the public health situation) plans had been put in place to do all the 2020 and 2021 Confirmations in Cork, Cloyne and Ross between 5th July and the end of September.

Today’s Government announcement in the light of the developments in the public health advice from NPHET at the start of this week makes clear that ceremonies ‘such as Baptisms, First Communion and Confirmations should not take place at this time.’ It goes on to state that ‘further advice will follow on the resumption of these ceremonies when it is safe to do so.’ This means that there is no timeline



July 1, 2021



for the resumption of those sacraments or ceremonies for now.

The full text of Bishop Colton's letter to those who had hoped to be confirmed follows:

'Dear Parents/Guardians and Confirmands,  
Confirmation Services

In the last 24 hours I have been endeavouring to get a definitive clarification from representatives of our Government about yesterday's public health announcements. The usual Covid-19 updates on the website <http://www.gov.ie> contained no reference to Holy Baptisms, First Communion and Confirmations, but when departing from yesterday's Press Conference An Tánaiste Leo Varadkar remarked that they were 'off'. As you know the Government had previously announced on 2nd June that, as and from 5th July, it might have been possible to proceed with Confirmation Services taking into account 'the disease situation in the local community'.

July 1, 2021

I am disappointed to have to bring you the news that the Government website has been updated today under the heading 'Other religious ceremonies' as follows:

“It is advised that religious ceremonies such as Baptisms, First Holy Communions and Confirmations should not take place at this time. Further advice will follow on resumption of these ceremonies when it is safe to do so.”

Unfortunately, as you will have heard in the news, 'the disease situation' makes pressing on impossible for now, and we are back to where we started. The commentary since An Taoiseach's speech at lunchtime refers to uncertainty for the coming three month period. Today's announcement gives no indication when the 'further advice' referred to will be issued.

I am conscious that we had no Confirmations in the Diocese in 2020 because of the Coronavirus Pandemic, that we have also had none in 2021, and that this is the second time I have had to bring you news of the cancellation, until further notice, of your special day. This means that all of the dates that had been tentatively set are, for now, cancelled. I look forward to the day when I may indeed celebrate your Confirmation with you.'

## **Aberdeen church holds Farmers Market to support local businesses**

An Aberdeen church stepped up its efforts to help local businesses recover from the COVID-19 crisis.

July 1, 2021



## Queen's Cross Church in Aberdeen hosted its first outdoor Farmers Market on Saturday.

An Aberdeen church stepped up its efforts to help local businesses recover from the COVID-19 crisis.

Queen's Cross Church held an outdoors Farmers Market for the first time on Saturday to bring some cheer to the local community as lockdown restrictions continue to ease.

The event was held between 10am-2pm in accordance with the strict COVID-19 guidelines and the 11 producers were not charged to pitch their stands.

Rev Scott Rennie, minister of Queen's Cross Church, said: "We were delighted to hold our first market in the West End.

"Over lockdown, many of us have rediscovered the benefits of local produce and shopping locally.

[churchnewsireland@gmail.org](mailto:churchnewsireland@gmail.org)



“So, we decided this would be a great time to bring some great local producers together for a market in the heart of the community.

“The variety of different producers drew people from across the city to sample some great local produce and crafts.”

Depute Provost of Aberdeen, Jennifer Stewart, said it was great that the church offered a place to local businesses to support them in their recovery from the COVID-19 crisis.

Speaking before the event, the local councillor said: “I am delighted to be working with Queen’s Cross Church to host a Farmers /Craft Market.

“The church is active in the local community and benefits from a lovely garden setting, central to the West End.

“It is always good to be doing something which can support local people and businesses particularly at this time.

“The setting I am sure will enhance a wonderful and enjoyable community day.”

Queen’s Cross Church is a lively, modern community hub and £1.7 million was spent on renovating its halls which opened in 2018.

The interior, accessed through an attractive glass entrance, comprises of a flexible activity space and a café/restaurant called ‘Cognito at the Cross’ which has re-opened.

## **God's grace transforms sinners into apostles, pope says**

**Even the lowliest of sinners can become the greatest of apostles by answering God's call and allowing his grace to work in their heart and mind, Pope Francis said.**

The life of St. Paul, who went "from being a persecutor of Christians for not observing the traditions and the law" to being one of the great apostles, highlights the power of God's grace, the pope said June 30 during his weekly general audience.

"How often, in the face of the Lord's great works, does the question arise: How is it possible that God uses a sinner, a frail and weak person, to do his will? And yet, none of this happens by chance, because everything has been prepared in God's plan. He weaves our history and, if we correspond with trust to his plan of salvation, we realize it," he said.

Arriving in the San Damaso Courtyard of the Apostolic Palace, the pope took his time greeting pilgrims and blessing newlyweds. Before concluding the audience, the pope also took time to thank his personal driver, Renzo Ciecì, who was retiring.

"He began working when he was 14 years old, riding a bicycle. Today, he is the pope's driver. Let us applaud Renzo and his faithfulness. He is one of those people who bring the church forward with his work, with his goodness and with his prayers. I thank him so much, and I also would like to take

July 1, 2021



Pope Francis greets people during his general audience in the San Damaso Courtyard of the Apostolic Palace at the Vatican June 30, 2021. The pope continued his series of audience talks focused on the Letter to the Galatians and reflected on St. Paul's life and the power of God's grace.

the opportunity to thank all the laypeople who work here at the Vatican,” the pope said.

In his main audience talk, the pope continued his new series of talks on the Letter to the Galatians, reflecting on the theme, “Paul, true apostle.”

St. Paul shows “a father’s concern” for the Christian community, he said, and in reading his Letter to the Galatians, “we immediately discover that Paul has a profound knowledge of the mystery of Christ.”



July 1, 2021

When problems arise, such as the dispute over whether Gentiles must be circumcised, St. Paul did not follow “the shallow arguments used by his detractors” but instead “chose to go deeper, because what was at stake was the truth of the Gospel and the freedom of Christians.”

“He does not stop at the surface of the problems, as we are often tempted to do in order to find an immediate solution that deludes us into thinking that we can all agree with a compromise,” the pope said. “This is not how the Gospel works, and the apostle chose to take the more challenging route.”

One of the ways St. Paul explains his reasoning is by reminding the Galatians of his history of violent persecution against Christians and “that he is a true apostle not by his own merit, but by God’s calling.”

“On the one hand, he insists on underlining that he had fiercely persecuted the church and that he had been a ‘blasphemer, a persecutor and a man of violence,’ the pope said. “On the other hand, he highlights God’s mercy toward him, which led him to experience a radical transformation, well known to all.”

Pope Francis said St. Paul’s “wonder and gratitude” despite his past showed that, through the grace of God, even one who fought the disciples of Christ “could become a herald among the Gentiles.”

“The call always implies a mission to which we are destined; that is why we are asked to prepare ourselves seriously, knowing that it is God himself who sends us and supports

July 1, 2021

us with his grace,” the pope said. “Let us allow ourselves to be led by this awareness: The primacy of grace transforms existence and makes it worthy of being placed at the service of the Gospel.”

## People and places

### Sun shines for Hillsborough Muddy Church



After hosting a (very) Muddy Church in their grounds in November 2020, Hillsborough Parish was thrilled to welcome 176 people to a ‘Less Muddy Church’ on a recent sunny Sunday.

Inspired by Psalm 23, the families and children set out to find the lost sheep by following a trail around the church grounds using QR codes. Once all the sheep were found (so to speak) Hillsborough’s Youth Pastor, Frank Dillon, led a short open-air service.

July 1, 2021

Afterwards there were free chips and ice-cream for everyone and a chance to catch up in the sunshine.

## **Graham family creates special memories and supports cancer charity**



The Rev Canon Kevin Graham and his wife Cheryl with their sons Jamie and Luke after Kevin and Cheryl renewed their wedding vows in St Colman's, Kilroot, the church in which they were married almost 25 years ago.

The Graham family has raised well over £20,000 by walking a marathon in aid of the work of Macmillan Cancer Support.



July 1, 2021

The Rev Canon Kevin Graham and his sons Jamie and Luke had originally planned to take part in Macmillan Cancer Support's 'Mighty Hike' which was due to take place along the north coast last Saturday, June 26.

But when the event was cancelled due to ongoing Covid-19 restrictions, Kevin, Jamie and Luke secured the charity's blessing to go ahead with their own fundraising marathon, and walked from St Bartholomew's, Stranmillis, where Kevin is rector, to St Colman's, Kilroot, and back – a distance of 26.2 miles

The change of plan meant the family was able to add something very special to their day, because at the halfway point, Kevin and his wife Cheryl renewed their wedding vows in an intimate family service celebrated by the Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev George Davison, in St Colman's, where they had shared their original vows almost 25 years ago.

Kevin was inspired to sign up for the marathon hike after Cheryl received a terminal cancer diagnosis last November, and Jamie and Luke agreed to undertake the challenge with their dad.

Looking back on the day, Kevin said conditions for walking had been perfect at the start, as the sky was overcast and the temperature a pleasant 15 degrees. "It was ideal for walking and we reached Kilroot in less than three and a half hours. We were delighted that the rector, the Rev Nigel Kirkpatrick, and churchwardens were there to open up for us.

July 1, 2021

“Inside the church, there were just the four of us and Bishop George. Cheryl and I renewed our vows. It was a very emotional service, and Bishop George read some inspiring words from Corinthians 13.”



The Rev Canon Kevin Graham and his wife Cheryl with Bishop George Davison after Kevin and Cheryl renewed their wedding vows in St Colman’s, Kilroot, the halfway point of Kevin’s fundraising marathon walk.

Kevin said spirits were high as the trio started their half-marathon walk back to Stranmillis. “After a while, the sun burned away the clouds and it was very hot as we walked along Belfast Lough, and we were all a bit quiet. But when we reached Duncrue we knew we were back in Belfast, and livened up again,” he said.

July 1, 2021

“We were delighted to get back to the rectory, lie down in the back garden and reflect on the money raised. We are delighted too with the support people have given us.”

At time of writing, the Graham Family JustGiving page was standing at a phenomenal £21,238, and with separate donations and gift aid, Kevin is hopeful the final tally for Macmillan Cancer Support will be in the region of £26,000. The JustGiving page is still open for donations.

There was further positive news this week, when a visit to her oncologist on Tuesday revealed that Cheryl’s treatment has reduced the size of the tumour.

Kevin said that the walk with his sons, and the intimate family service at which he and Cheryl renewed their vows, had been very special. “We wanted to create special memories as a family, but other people will benefit too,” he said.

## **Parish of Kilmore & Inch takes on CAP Centre**

On Sunday 27 June, the Parish of Kilmore and Inch celebrated the recommissioning of CAP Mid Down following the appointment of Norman Gibson as Debt Centre Manager. Norman took up the post upon the retirement of the founding manager, Winston Shaw.

Norman and the team were commissioned by Bishop David McClay at a service attended by local clergy, CAP



July 1, 2021



## Bishop David McClay, Norman Gibson and Revd Stephen Smyth

supporters, and public figures. Mr James Myles, Manager of Belfast Central CAP Centre, gave the address.

In line with CAP's policy, the Centre Manager's home church has oversight for the centre and so the baton was passed from Edengrove Presbyterian Church, Ballynahinch, to the Church of Ireland Parish. The Debt Counselling Team is still drawn from a wide range of churches in the area.

Alison Flanagan, National Leader of CAP Northern Ireland, who attended the service said:

“Back in 2013 the Mid Down CAP Debt Centre led by Winston Shaw opened its doors and over the years since then things have grown so much under Winston and a great team of volunteers. Strong working relationships with other churches and external agencies have been developed and 193 calls have made to access debt help. Now the baton is being passed on.

July 1, 2021

“We are so pleased today to celebrate and recommission the Centre for this next part of the story – the story that Kilmore Church and the church community are now partnering in. We look forward to the continuance and growth of the work here under the leadership of Norman Gibson in the months and years ahead.”

The rector of Kilmore and Inch, Revd Stephen Smyth said, “We’re very excited about Norman taking over the role of Debt Centre Manager. CAP has been doing wonderful work in mid-Down and we’re humbled to have the opportunity to continue it. We ask for God’s grace as we assume this new responsibility.”

Refreshments were served in a marquee afterwards.  
Christians Against Poverty in Northern Ireland

CAP is very active in NI and is supported by a number of our parishes:

- 19 CAP Centres in NI offering in-depth debt help
- 7 job clubs to help people back into employment
- 12 life skills groups that teach people on a low income how to live well
- 187 new households have asked for help this year
- 53 households have become debt free this year – 79 individuals 45 children

Get help

Christians Against Poverty works with the church to bring good news, hope and freedom. CAP can help people who are feeling the weight of debt, struggling to find work,

July 1, 2021

battling addictions or just need a bit of help budgeting. To find a local centre use the postcode search on CAP's website here or call CAP free on 0800 328 0006.



## Pointers for prayer

O Lord,  
we beseech thee mercifully to hear us;  
and grant that we, to whom thou hast given  
an hearty desire to pray,  
may by thy mighty aid be defended and comforted  
in all dangers and adversities;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Almighty God,  
you have broken the tyranny of sin  
and have sent the Spirit of your Son into our hearts  
whereby we call you Father:  
Give us grace to dedicate our freedom to your service,  
that we and all creation may be brought



July 1, 2021

to the glorious liberty of the children of God;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Jesus' homecoming was attended by enthusiastic crowds but also by dissenters, who attributed his good works to Satan. That we might be faithful to the One who calls us his "family", blessing his goodness and striving to follow his example, we pray "True Son of God and Son of Man," and respond, "Keep us faithful, keep us true."

That the Christ's church would remain faithful in its witness to the truth of the gospel, we pray: True Son of God and Son of Man.

Keep us faithful, keep us true.

That where the church of Jesus Christ finds itself a minority in the midst unfaith, it may not succumb and accept defeat. True Son of God and Son of Man.

Keep us faithful, keep us true.

That homes of the church that are afflicted with violence, anger, or abuse, may find refuge and counsel in God's Word. True Son of God and Son of Man.

Keep us faithful, keep us true.

That our congregation may be enabled to embrace the lost, the fallen, and the wayward of our community. True Son of God and Son of Man.

Keep us faithful, keep us true.

That those who participated in baptismal and confirmation preparation , may be blessed with increasing faith and strengthened in continued, regular worship we pray: True Son of

July 1, 2021

God and Son of Man.  
Keep us faithful, keep us true.

Pardon us, O God, when we are so concerned with ourselves and those near to us that we fail to pray for others. Instill within us your compassion. True Son of God and Son of Man.  
Keep us faithful, keep us true.

Let your loving Spirit, O God, announce again the "Abba" word of our divine parentage and our sure inclusion as members of your family. Amen.

## Speaking to the Soul

**“God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.”  
Matthew 5:3 NLT**

Robert Powell acted the part of Jesus in Franco Zeffirelli's film Jesus of Nazareth. He claims that his life was changed by the experience and recalls the day when he was filming the Sermon on the Mount. Powell had no time for Christianity but as he preached the sermon he said that he was so affected by its beauty that he began to cry. The tears were not in the script but Zeffirelli wisely kept them in the movie. It is easy to see why he was so affected by these words because they take us to the heart of what it means to be alive. They stand before us as a challenge and encouragement to us all as we seek to understand what it means to live the Christian life.

Today's verse is the first of the so-called Beatitudes. Before we launch into it we need to be clear what Jesus meant by the Kingdom of Heaven, an expression he often used. The Kingdom of Heaven comes where God is allowed to be in control and, amazingly, that can happen in our lives today which is why Jesus encouraged us to pray for his Kingdom to come here on earth as it is in heaven. The Kingdom of Heaven gives us a preview of what heaven itself will be like, and it is by definition life at its very best.

Jesus declares that the people who possess this wonderful Kingdom of heaven are those who are spiritually poor. The word used here for 'poor' in the original Greek language speaks of absolute poverty or destitution. Jesus is saying that the way into the Kingdom of Heaven is to understand that, spiritually, you've got nothing to offer apart from empty hands. We need to come to Jesus in absolute weakness knowing that we are totally dependent upon him. The moment arrogance and self-confidence creeps in, we spoil everything. From first to last we are dependent on our loving and gracious heavenly Father.

## QUESTION

Where have you seen the Kingdom of Heaven come on earth?

## PRAYER

Lord God, help me depend totally upon you so that in my life your Kingdom will come here on earth as it is in heaven.

Amen



