



**Image of the day -
Pope, Anglican, and Presbyterian leaders marking
South Sudan's Independence Day in 2019**

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Front page photo - Pope Francis prays alongside Archbishop Paul Gallagher, the Vatican's foreign minister, Anglican Archbishop Justin Welby of Canterbury, and the Rev. John Chalmers, former moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, April 11, 2019, at the conclusion of a two-day retreat at the Vatican for the political leaders of South Sudan. Pope Francis, Archbishop Welby, and the Rev. Jim Wallace, moderator of the Church of Scotland, marked the 10th anniversary of South Sudan's independence July 9

Reports

Pope, Anglican, Presbyterian leaders marked South Sudan's Independence Day

Pope Francis, Anglican Archbishop Justin Welby of Canterbury and the Rev. Jim Wallace, moderator of the Church of Scotland, marked the 10th anniversary of South Sudan's independence in 2019 and again promised to visit the country when it has a stable peace.

But to get to that point, the Christian leaders told South Sudanese politicians, "This may require personal sacrifice from you as leaders — Christ's own example of leadership shows this powerfully."

South Sudan was celebrating its 10th Independence Day July 9, but for the previous eight years had been embroiled

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in a civil war. Nearly 400,000 people have been killed since December 2013 and about 4 million people have been displaced.

The civil war began in 2013 after President Salva Kiir dismissed Riek Machar, the first vice president, and their supporters began fighting one another. Since February 2020, Machar has returned to office, and the two are attempting to rule together.

The pope and the Anglican and Presbyterian leaders told the politicians, “We wish you to know that we stand alongside you as you look to the future and seek to discern afresh how best to serve all the people of South Sudan.”

As they did in a similar message to the politicians at Christmas, the religious leaders remembered “with joy and thanksgiving” the April 2019 retreat, prayer and discussions the politicians had at the Vatican with Pope Francis and Archbishop Welby.

“Weighty promises” were made on the occasion, they said. “We pray that those promises will shape your actions, so that it will become possible for us to visit and celebrate with you and your people in person, honoring your contributions to a nation that fulfils the hopes” South Sudanese had at independence.

“Your nation is blessed with immense potential, and we encourage you to make even greater efforts to enable your people to enjoy the full fruits of independence,” they said.



Pope Francis kneels at the feet of South Sudan President Salva Kiir April 11, 2019, at the conclusion of a two-day retreat at the Vatican for African nation's political leaders. The pope begged them to give peace a chance. At right is Vice President Riek Machar. On July 9, 2021, Pope Francis and other Christian leaders asked South Sudan leaders to continue to work for peace so they could visit. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

“When we last wrote to you at Christmas, we prayed that you might experience greater trust among yourselves and be more generous in service to your people,” the letter continued. “Since then, we have been glad to see some small progress.”

But, the religious leaders wrote, “sadly, your people continue to live in fear and uncertainty and lack confidence that their

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nation can indeed deliver the ‘justice, liberty and prosperity’ celebrated in your national anthem. Much more needs to be done in South Sudan to shape a nation that reflects God’s kingdom, in which the dignity of all is respected and all are reconciled.”

Caritas Internationalis, the Vatican-based umbrella organization for national Catholic charities, acknowledged the many and deep problems South Sudan faces as it tries to consolidate peace, promote reconciliation, feed the poor and promote development.

“To survive this young state will need international aid to build the nation through micro development programs in the rural areas where the land is still fertile. Without education, there will not be long lasting peace, and the country needs massive support to ensure aid for the integral health programs,” Aloysius John, secretary-general of Caritas Internationalis, said in a statement July 9.

Gabriel Yai, director of Caritas South Sudan, said that with the signing of a peace treaty in 2018, the promise that members of the various armed factions would be trained to form a single national army and with the swearing in of members of parliament, the nation finally has a chance.

“This is the golden opportunity for the international community to help in nation building,” Yai said in a statement distributed by Caritas Internationalis July 9. “Our country is more than ever in need of international political support to consolidate the political emancipation of leaders and to build a state army that will protect the people.”

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Church of England looks to 10,000 lay-led parishes to attract worshippers

Plans to establish up to 10,000 new predominantly lay-led churches over the next 10 years are among controversial proposals to attract congregants.

The plan is among the ambitious targets to be discussed at the General Synod, the Church of England's legislative body, which will begin its sessions on Friday.

The plans have led to disquiet among some Christians, who have criticised them as a "cost-cutting" exercise, arguing that lay people, who are not ordained, are no substitute for priests.

They raised their concerns amid a decline in church attendance, which fell by between 15 and 20 per cent from 2009 to 2019. A typical church has an average weekly attendance of 31.

On Monday, the Archbishop of York, the Rt Rev Stephen Cottrell, will deliver an update on "Vision and Strategy", his blueprint for the Church over the next decade.

Last year, he drew criticism for his project over accusations that he was "dismantling the parish church system", despite his stated aim being to "expand, reimagine and revitalise" it.

Under the latest plans outlined in a General Synod paper entitled "Simpler, Humbler, Bolder", officials reiterated the aims for "a revitalised parish system within which new and inherited worshipping communities flourish together".

“We think this could result in 10,000 new communities starting by 2030, reaching people in all spheres of their life – home and local community, work and education, social and digital,” the paper reads.

31 - The average number of weekly worshippers at a typical church after a ten-year decline in attendance

“To do this would mean that most churches and all dioceses would start something new to reach people in their contexts.”

Responding to the proposals, Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali, the former Bishop of Rochester, said: “It’s important to have ordained ministry in every church.

“We need their leadership, faith, and ability to liaise with the wider church.”

One rural parish volunteer, who did not want to be named, said: “There is some success in groovy evangelical churches. But we don’t know if that will last. This plan is basically condemning the parishes to die.”

Canon John McGinley, who is leading the initiative, said that many of the 10,000 churches would start small, and some would remain as 20 or 30 people meeting in a home. The definition of a church was “tight”, he said: “It must proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, have regular worship, be open to everyone and sacramental, and have more than 20 people.”

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Dave Male, head of evangelism and discipleship at the Church of England, said: “We expect that most of these new groups will arise from existing parishes and so would be under the oversight of clergy even if meetings are not directly led by the parish priest.”

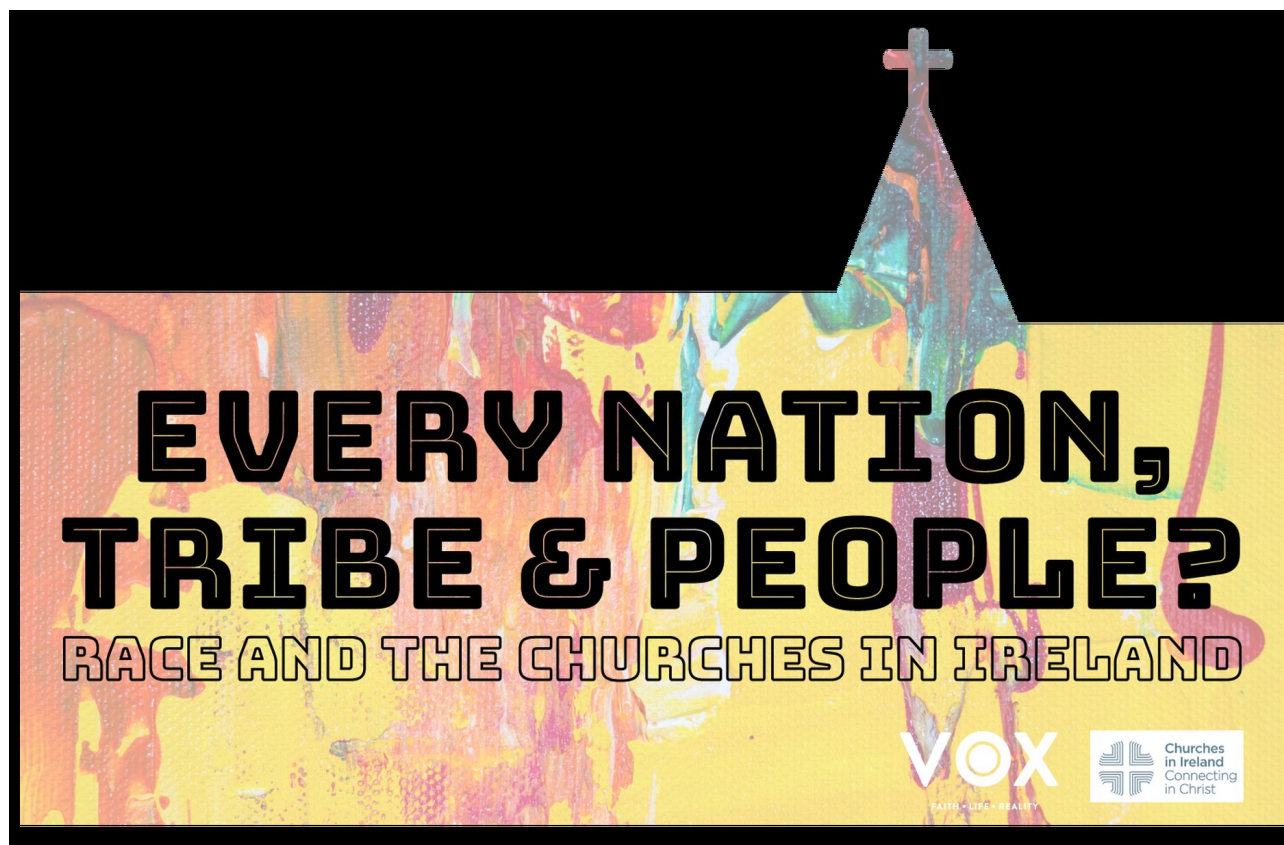
Every Nation, Tribe and People? Race and the Churches in Ireland Research Project

A new in–depth online survey on the experiences of people from ethnic minorities and attitudes towards ethnic diversity in churches on the island of Ireland is now live.

This is an all–island piece of research led by the Irish Council of Churches, Irish Inter–Church Meeting and VOX Magazine, with the support of Evangelical Alliance Ireland, Evangelical Alliance Northern Ireland and Tearfund Ireland.

In the last couple of years, discussions of racism and discrimination have become more prevalent across the island, with divergent narratives evident in concerns about provision of accommodation for people in the asylum systems, and marches in support of Black Lives Matter.

“As organisations who reach across the island, we as churches need to be able to speak into these conversations, and if we are to be able to contribute with authenticity and integrity, we need to first look at ourselves. We therefore want to deepen our understanding of the experience of and attitudes towards racism and discrimination in churches in both jurisdictions on the island of Ireland,” comments



Damian Jackson, Programme Officer, with the Irish Council of Churches. “We explore the potential for unity, integration and inclusion and examine how the church can lead the way in tackling racial injustice.”

He hopes that parishes will circulate the survey and encourage the widest participation. The survey is anonymous and they hope to gather views from all Christians across both jurisdictions on the island of Ireland. They estimate it will take about 10–15 minutes to complete. It can be found at:

[<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/DNYNF5Q>.]

Further information is available at

[<https://irishchurches.org/research>]

“We believe this research is an important step in enabling churches to be able to move from welcome to inclusion and to be salt and light across

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the island of Ireland. To do that we need to know what the barriers to inclusion and fruitfulness in church are for people from ethnic minorities so that we can look more closely at ourselves as individuals and organisations and more truly reflect the call to love our neighbours both within and outside the church,” Mr Jackson concludes.

Bishops begin global conversations in the build up to face-to-face Lambeth Conference in 2022

A series of organised Bishops’ Conversations are taking place over the next six months as part of the preparations for next year’s face-to-face Lambeth Conference of Anglican Bishops.

The first round is taking place this week and have been described as “a joy” by the Chief Executive of the Lambeth Conference company, Phil George.

“After months of planning and preparations, we have been delighted to welcome so many people to the first of our online Bishops’ Conversations”, he said. “It was a joy to know that so many bishops from around the world were joining to take part. With around 500 bishops registered for these sessions, this is such an important opportunity for bishops to meet with one another and tune in to the conference themes before the face-to-face event planned for 2022.”

The first round of Bishop’s Conversations, “Called Together”, began on 6 July and more are taking place today (8 July).

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Groups of around 20 bishops are meeting using online conference software in groups of about 20. Bishops will remain in the same groups for the duration of the six-month programme. Through facilitated discussion, the bishops are taking part in Bible studies before discussing the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic in their own local contexts.

Bishop Peter Stuart, of Newcastle in the Anglican Church of Australia, said: “it was like a gathering of old and new friends who moved easily into conversation. We quickly learnt that we share a deep bond in speaking about the way of Jesus and bear a similar weight in the ministry of being a bishop.

“The conversations were humbling as we heard of the harsh political environments experienced by some of those present as well as the impact that many had experienced with Covid-19 pandemic. We moved comfortably to open and generous prayer for each other.”

The Assistant Bishop of Wellington, in the Anglican Church of Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia, Bishop Eleanor Sanderson, said: “as we shared from our different contexts, I was deeply encouraged and humbled to know of the coordinated work of our Anglican family supporting those most vulnerable in the Covid-19 pandemic. . .

“Our conversations together increased my awareness in a way that will shape my prayers and will also inform how I can seek to partner with Jesus in mobilising the people within my own diocese to work against such inequality.”

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Bishop Graham Usher, of Norwich in the Church of England, said: “I’m excited that through conversation, study and prayer – as well as our experience of sharing the Gospel in our communities – that I will learn, be encouraged and challenged, and so come to see more of the face of Christ.

“That image of Christ is illuminated for me by my sisters and brothers around the Anglican Communion and I am so grateful for the spiritual richness that I discover, often from places of material poverty and those on the frontline of the impact of Covid and climate change.”

All active bishops in the Anglican Communion were invited to take part in the conversations. In some parts of the world, accessing reliable internet connections can be more challenging. In such cases, the Lambeth Conference have made small bursaries available to support those with technical needs.

Many Anglican bishops will often meet each other through different Anglican networks and initiatives, but these online sessions being held in advance of the Lambeth Conference “provide an important opportunity for new connections and relationships to be formed”, the Lambeth Conference company said in a statement.

The sessions have been designed by a working group chaired by Bishop Emma Ineson, newly-appointed Bishop to the Archbishops of Canterbury and York. Other members include Bishop Anthony Poggio, the Adviser to the Archbishop of Canterbury on Anglican Communion Affairs; Professor Joseph Galgalo, from the Anglican Church of Kenya; Bishop Pradeep Samantaroy, from the Diocese of

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Amritsar in the united Church of North India; Lord Stephen Green, Chair of the Lambeth Conference company trustees; and Matthew Frost, a member of the Archbishops' Council of the Church of England.

More information about the Bishops' Conversations can be found on the Lambeth Conference website.

People and places

Moderator taking part in Republic of Ireland's National Day of Commemoration

As the principal public representative of the all-Ireland denomination, the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, Right Reverend Dr David Bruce, will attend and participate in the Republic of Ireland's National Day of Commemoration tomorrow (11 July). The annual event, which takes place in Dublin remembers Irishmen and Irishwomen who lost their lives in past wars, or on service with the Irish Defence Forces with the United Nations.

Traditionally, the National Day of Commemoration takes place on the nearest Sunday to 11 July, the day in 1921 that a truce, which ended the Irish War of Independence, was signed. Not only does this year's event fall on the 11 July itself, it is also the centenary of the signing of the Truce.

Like last year, due to the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic, it will be a scaled back commemoration with Dr Bruce taking part in a Christian act of worship. Attending the event at

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HM Queen Elizabeth visited Manchester Cathedral which is celebrating its 600th anniversary. She was received by the Dean, Very Rev Richard Govinder



Collins Barracks will be the President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins, who is also the

Supreme Commander of the Defence Forces, Taoiseach, Micheál Martin TD, and other guests. President Higgins will lead the commemoration and lay a wreath which will be followed by a minute's silence.

During the service, Dr Bruce will read from John's Gospel, "The words of Jesus, recorded by the Apostle John, here in the last of the four Gospels, are profound words of comfort and reassurance for all followers of Christ. Jesus tells us 'Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were

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not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”

Dr Bruce continued, “Then, in answer to a question from Thomas, who wondered how they could follow Him if they didn’t know where he was going, Jesus told them, as he continues to tell all humanity today, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’

“It is a privilege to be able to represent Presbyterians again in this significant act of remembrance in the life of Ireland. I am sure that as we remember Irishmen and Irishwomen who lost their lives in past wars, or on service with the United Nations, these words, which are found in John 14, have most certainly been spoken by many a military padre down the years to the wounded and those on the cusp of life or death,” he said.

The first National Day of Commemoration took place on 13 July 1986. As a minister of the Dublin congregations of Clontarf, Ormond Quay and Scots Presbyterian Churches, Dr Bruce took part in the National Day of Commemoration a few years later in 1990, reading the Lord’s Prayer in Irish. As Moderator, he also took part in last year’s commemoration, reading from Ephesians 2:13-22.

Pope Francis: Pray constantly — but don’t lose touch with reality A prayer that is alien from life is not healthy. A prayer that alienates itself from the concreteness of life becomes spiritualism, or worse, ritualism.”



O God of grace and glory,
we give You thanks for the
rhythm of the seasons
and the constant provision
for our needs in life.

Pointers for prayer

Grant, O Lord, we beseech thee,
that the course of this world
may be so peaceably ordered by thy governance,
that thy Church may joyfully serve thee
in all godly quietness;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

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Guardian of the weak,
through the teachings of your prophets
you have claimed our cities, towns, and homes
as temples of your presence and citadels of your justice.
Turn the places we live into strongholds of your grace,
that the most vulnerable
as well as the most powerful among us
may find peace in the security
that comes in the strong name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

God of grace and powerful weakness,
at times your projects were ignored, rejected, belittled, and
unwelcome.

Trusting that we, too, are called to be prophets,
fill us with your Spirit,
and support us by your gentle hands,
that we may persevere in speaking your word
and living our faith. Amen.

O God,
sustain us in the complexity of our humanity
as you sustained David--
playing the harp of youth,
throwing stones at giant problems,
loving our friends beyond wisdom,
dancing worship,
mourning children,
breaking our hearts in psalms, and
longing for warmth in our old bones. Amen.

Friend in Christ,
God invites us to hold the needs of our sisters and brothers
as dear to us as our own needs.
Loving our neighbours as ourselves,

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we offer our thanksgivings and our petitions
on behalf of the church and the world.

Hear our prayers, God of power,
and through the ministry of your Son
free us from the grip of the tomb,
that we may desire you as the fullness of life
and proclaim your saving deeds to all the world. Amen.

As you heard the prayer of Isaac and Rebekah, O God,
and guided them in the way of your love,
so listen now to those who call upon you.
Move us to praise your gracious will,
for in Christ Jesus you have saved us from the deeds of
death
and opened for us the hidden ways of your love.
We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Lord God, friend of those in need,
your Son Jesus has untied our burdens
and healed our spirits.
We lift up the prayers of our hearts for those still burdened,
those seeking healing,
those in need within the church and the world.
Hear our prayers
that we may love you with our whole being
and willingly share the concerns of our neighbours. Amen.

Creator God,
you call us to love and serve you
with body, mind, and spirit
through loving your creation

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and our sisters and brothers.
Open our hearts in compassion
and receive these petitions
on behalf of the needs of the church and the world.
Holy One,
hear our prayers and make us faithful stewards
of the fragile bounty of this earth
so that we may be entrusted with the riches of heaven.
Amen.

We praise your abiding guidance, O God,
for you sent us Jesus, our Teacher and Messiah,
to model for us the way of love for the whole universe.
We offer these prayers of love
on behalf of ourselves and our neighbours,
on behalf of your creation and our fellow creatures.
Loving God,
open our ears to hear your word
and draw us closer to you,
that the whole world may be one with you
as you are one with us in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Speaking to the Soul

You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavour? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless.

Matthew 5:13 NLT

I have often heard people say that they are happy for individuals to have a Christian faith so long as it's a private matter. Jesus' words here prove that there is no way in

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which a Christian can keep their faith private. It can't be done because those who live close to God will be fundamentally affected by their faith and this will inevitably exhibit itself in the way they conduct themselves. Like salt their influence will have an impact on all those who come into contact with them.

Salt is very different from the foods that it accompanies. It is useful and tasty precisely because it is different. So too as Christians we are encouraged to be different from the society in which we live. Our morality and standards are not shaped by our society but by God and so it should never be a surprise when we stand out from the people around us. The apostle Paul was very clear about the need for this when he addressed the small group of Christians in Rome. The pressures upon them must have been immense but he urges them not to “copy the behaviour and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think.” (Romans 12.2)

One of the key characteristics of salt is that it is a preservative. With refrigeration we are hardly aware of this function of salt, but until recent history it was of crucial importance. Jesus calls on his followers to get deeply involved in the life of society in order to uphold high standards. The worst of all worlds is when salt becomes contaminated and loses its distinctive taste. Churches, similarly, need to beware of fitting in with society so closely that they have nothing distinctive and godly to share.

It is high praise when someone is described as “the salt of the earth” and we should all long to live so close to God that

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we are able to share his distinctive flavour with the people around us.

QUESTION

In what way are you able to be salt in your community?

PRAYER

Lord God, help me to live so close to you that your loving, gracious influence touches those around me. Amen

