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Image of the day -

**Irish hare, Rathlin Island
by North Coast Nature**

Reports

Archbishop, Pope and Church of Scotland Moderator write to South Sudan's leaders

Pope Francis and the Archbishop of Canterbury marked the 10th anniversary of the independence of South Sudan by urging its rival political leaders to make the necessary personal sacrifices to consolidate peace.

Francis, Archbishop Justin Welby and the moderator of the Church of Scotland, Jim Wallace, repeated their hopes of visiting South Sudan in a joint message to the country's leaders.

But they noted "much more needs to be done" to ensure peace and reconciliation.

"Sadly, your people continue to live in fear and uncertainty, and lack confidence that their nation can indeed deliver the 'justice, liberty and prosperity' celebrated in your national anthem," the three religious leaders wrote, noting they had made the same appeal in a Christmas message.

"We encourage you to make even greater efforts to enable your people to enjoy the full fruits of independence," they wrote, adding that this "may require personal sacrifice from you as leaders".

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There were high hopes for peace and stability when oil-rich South Sudan gained its long-fought independence from Sudan in 2011.

But the country slid into ethnic violence in December 2013.

The five-year civil war killed hundreds of thousands of people.

UN experts have warned that continued political, military and ethnic divisions were widening, leading to multiple violent incidents between the main signatories to last year's cease-fire, the possibility of renewed civil war, and nearly 100,000 people facing "famine-like conditions".

In April, the UN experts said the slow pace of reforms by President Salva Kiir's government and political disputes and disagreements over how to implement the February 2020



ceasefire and the 2018 peace agreement has led to frayed relations between Mr Kiir and First Vice President Riek Machar, who led the armed opposition in the civil war.

**Lincoln
Cathedral**

Francis has been hoping to visit South Sudan for years but has been prevented by security concerns.

In 2019, Francis invited South Sudan's rival leaders to the Vatican for an Easter summit, stunning onlookers when he knelt down and kissed their feet in a humble plea for peace.

Number of people recommended for ordination in C of E highest in 13 years

Each year the Church of England reveals the number of people recommended for training for ordination, with this year's statistics showing the highest number of people in 13 years.

In 2020, 591 people were recommended for training, the highest figure for 13 years, and 580 of them started training in September.

The figures have grown by 22 per cent compared to 2016, from 480 people.

Of those recommended, 431 plan to go into paid, or stipendiary, ministry - the highest number for 34 years. This figure is revealed in the context of plans by the Church of England to grow its number of lay ministers drastically - something being discussed at its General Synod in the next few days.

It plans to launch 10,000 lay-led churches in the next decade, with church planting leaders arguing that this is what led to rapid church growth in Africa.

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However, many paid vicars have criticised the fact that they they were referred to as "key limiting factors" when Canon John McGinley, the head of church-planting development at New Wine and a priest in the diocese of Leicester said: "Lay-led churches release the Church from key limiting factors. When you don't need a building and a stipend and long, costly college-based training for every leader of church...then actually we can release new people to lead and new churches to form."

The figures show that 230 people began training to be a Reader and or a Lay Minister in 2020.

Women made up the majority of the ordinands, at 54 per cent, and nearly a quarter were under 32 years old.

Ordinands from UK Minority Ethnic backgrounds made up 10.9 per cent of the intake.

The statistics also show the total number of clergy currently active in the Church. Overall, there were nearly 20,000 at the end of last year with just over 2,000 working in areas such as chaplaincies, theological colleges and dioceses and 320 clergy retired during 2020.

The Church of England's head of vocations, Revd Helen Fraser, paid tribute to the dedication of all those who kept the discernment process on course during the pandemic: "We thank God for his generosity and express our gratitude to our colleagues in the dioceses, parishes and national church, who have shown such dedication and perseverance," she said.



Pope leads Angelus from hospital balcony, praises universal healthcare

A large crowd gathered under blue skies outside the Gemelli Hospital in Rome on Saturday - where Pope Francis led the Angelus from a balcony on the 10th floor of the Gemelli hospital, where he is recuperating from the operation he had last week. The Holy Father appeared with several children who are also being treated at the hospital.

He expressed his joy at being able to be there and his profound gratitude to all, saying "I have deeply felt your closeness and the support of your prayers. Thank you from the bottom of my heart!"

In a brief address before the Angelus, he reflected on today's Gospel where we read that Jesus' disciples went out and anointed with oil many who were sick and then healed

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them. The oil he noted is in the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick which "gives comfort to spirit and body", but it is also a balm for "listening, the closeness, the care, the tenderness of those who take care of the sick person", easing the pain and helping them feel better.

He noted that we all will need this "anointing" some time in our lives, and "we can all give it to someone else" through simple gestures such as a visit, a call, a helping hand.

Pope Francis shared that during these days in the hospital he has experienced personally the importance of good health care, accessible to all, as it is Italy and other countries. He stressed that "This precious benefit must not be lost. It needs to be kept!". This requires the commitment of all, he noted, "because it helps everyone and requires everyone's contribution".

The Pope noted that economic pressures should not compromise the ability to provide essential healthcare service.

In conclusion, the Pope expressed his profound "appreciation" and "encouragement" to the doctors, healthcare workers, and staff. He asked us all to pray for the sick, especially those in the most difficult situations, underlining, "may no one be left alone, may everyone receive the anointing of listening, closeness and care". He said may we pray for this, "through the intercession of Mary, our Mother, Health of the Sick".

After the Angelus Pope Francis offered a special prayer for Haiti, where the President has been shot dead and his wife

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injured; for seafarers and for the protection of the sea, as it is Sea Sunday, and for Poland where a special pilgrimage to Chestochowa is taking place. Mentioning that is is also the Feast of St Benedict, Patron Saint of Europe he prayed for Benedictines and offered: "best wishes to Europe, that it be united in its founding values."

People and places

Presbyterian minister will be 'much missed' by Whitehead community

A Presbyterian Church minister has been thanked for the contribution he has made to the wider Whitehead community, The Carrick Times reports.

The Rev. Ian Carton recently accepted a painting on behalf of his wife, June, and himself, in recognition of their contribution to the seaside town.

Earlier this year, Rev Carton said he was to step down from his role as minister of Whitehead Presbyterian Church over the Presbyterian Church in Ireland's policy to deny full membership to anyone in a same-sex relationship.

The painting of the Whitehead seafront by local artist Ken Stewart, was presented to Rev Carton by Martin Clarke, acting chairman of Whitehead Community Association, supported by representatives of the Association, the Blackhead Path Preservation Group and other community groups.

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A spokesperson for Whitehead Community Association said: “Ian and June will shortly be moving on to pastures new and they will be very much missed by our little community.

“Both Ian and June were great supporters of most community initiatives, however, their legacy will be the setting up Whitehead’s Storehouse project which provides emergency needs of food and other necessities to vulnerable individuals and families in the Whitehead, Islandmagee and Ballycarry area.

“Ian has been the main driver of cross-religious events in Whitehead, a stalwart in terms of his support for our Victorian Street Fair and an all-round wonderful Christian and human being.”

Addressing the congregation of Whitehead Presbyterian Church on May 30, Rev Carton said he and his wife, June, had been “far from comfortable” with the direction of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland for some time.

“It seems to be, in our view, excluding people that we would like to welcome,” he said.

The decision to step down has been a “difficult” one, he added, as someone who had been born into and grown up with the church.

He added: These years that we have spent here in Whitehead really have been some of the best years of our lives.”

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He said that while he would remain in the role until the end of September, the couple had no idea what their next steps were going to be.

Many in the local community took to social media to express their support for the local minister's decision, with one commenting: "What loss to the church and a loss to Whitehead."

At the time, a spokesperson for the Presbyterian Church in Ireland said it was aware that Rev Carton had indicated he would be seeking the leave of his Presbytery to be released from his charge as minister of Whitehead Presbyterian.

The spokesperson continued: "When that point comes, we would want to wish Ian well for the future and thank him for the service that he has given, particularly to our congregation in Whitehead, over these past years."

Courtesy The Carrick Times.

New minister welcomed to Omagh and Fintona Methodist Circuit

The Superintendent Minister, Rev. Eleanor Hayden, and the Omagh and Fintona Circuit welcomed Rev. Leah McKibben as new Junior Minister to the Circuit at a service held in Togherdoo Methodist Church on Sunday, July 4.



John Stewart, Yvonne McQuade, Rev. Joe Sweeney, Judith McKibben, Rev. Dr. Stephen Skuce, Kenneth Strong. Rev. Eleanor Hayden., Rev. Robin McKibben, Rev Leah McKibben and Marion McKibben.

Rev. McKibben worked for more than 10 years with the Bible Society in Northern Ireland prior to entering Edgehill College to train for the ministry.

Her father, Rev. Robin McKibben, a retired Methodist minister, has served on the Enniskillen Circuit in the Letterbreen and Florencecourt Methodist churches.

Rev. McKibben's family has a strong link with the Methodist Church in Ireland, where her two uncles, Rev. Brian and Rev. Jo Sweeney served.

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The welcome service was led by the Circuit's Superintendent Minister, Rev. Eleanor Hayden.

Rev. Dr. Stephen Skuce, District Superintendent of the North Western District, was present and delivered an inspiring address.

Books, broadcasts, resources, and Webinars

Presbyterian Church to mark links with NI's parliament with online exhibition

The Irish Presbyterian Church is to acknowledge its significant role in housing the first parliament in Northern Ireland with a special event at Assembly College in south Belfast in September, Billy Kennedy writes in the News Letter

The event is part of a series to mark the centenary of Northern Ireland acknowledging that Assembly College housed the parliament for 11 years after King George V opened the legislature on June 22, 1921.

Union Theological College, as Assembly College is known today, has created a special online exhibition to mark the centenary. It uses the college's own archive material to relate how uniquely a church college became a home to a parliament. Online visitors can read letters from Sir James Craig, Northern Ireland's first prime minister, requesting the possibility of using the building.

Sir James called for negotiations around an appropriate annual rent, which would facilitate relocation of the college and enable the training of the church's ministers to continue - the principal role of the college to this day. Handwritten minutes of meetings, photographs, reports from newspapers, including the Belfast News Letter, and other letters can also be viewed.

Joy Conkey, librarian of the College's Gamble library, and creator of the online exhibition, explained that it is a history few know about.

"Most people would associate Northern Ireland's parliament with the impressive building at Stormont, home of the current Northern Ireland Assembly. But very few people probably know that for the first decade of its life, while Stormont was being built, parliament met here," she said.

The Government of Ireland Act 1920 established a 'Parliament for Northern Ireland' and a 'Parliament for Southern Ireland', based on the two-chamber Westminster model. The Gamble library at Assembly's College became the home of the Northern Ireland House of Commons, while the college chapel on the ground floor, was remodelled to accommodate the parliament's upper chamber, the Northern Ireland Senate.

Northern Ireland's first prime minister Sir James Craig made a tentative inquiry in a letter on May 2, 1921 "to ascertain whether the College could be made available for use as 'our new Parliament House'", Agreement was reached and the parliament's first sitting was in September that year.

The College negotiated an annual rent of £8,000, equivalent of nearly £402,000 today, higher than what the fledgling government had originally proposed.

Presbyterian Historical Society YouTube

The Workmans of Victorian Belfast - By Dr Alice Johnson, Belfast Metropolitan College.

Focusing on one of the middle-class family, the Workmans, who were one of the leading Presbyterian families in Belfast and who held key positions in the city's main institutions in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, this talk explores the cultural, social and religious life of 19th century Belfast as evidenced by this family. Two Workman members in particular, together with their wives and families, are examined - the industrial Thomas Workman (1843-1900) and the Presbyterian minister, the Rev Robert Workman of Newtownbreda (1835-1921).

This video is a presentation of the talk originally planned for March 2020 as part of the PHSI Annual Lecture Programme but had to be cancelled due to the Coronavirus emergency. [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OZNi98Tyzag>]

Media review

Ireland's war dead and those killed on UN service remembered in the rain

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Irish Times report by Patsy McGarry

It rained and rained, and the gulls shrieked throughout, both disturbing the solemnity to such a degree that when Dr Hemant Kumar intoned his pre-prepared Hindu prayer it had more immediate resonance: “may the heavens be at peace, may the sky be at peace...peace be to the water” .

The downpour eased later towards the end of ceremonies for the National Day of Commemoration, which concluded with a full stop superbly punctuated by a fly-past of three Air Corps aircraft on the very last note of the National Anthem.

Attendance, at the National Museum, included President Michael D Higgins, members of the Council of State, Taoiseach Micheál Martin, Tánaiste Leo Varadkar, Green Party leader Eamon Ryan, members of the Government, Sinn Féin president Mary Lou McDonald, Northern Ireland Deputy First Minister Michelle O’Neill, Lord Mayor of Dublin Alison Gilliland, and members of the diplomatic corps. More at -

[[] <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/religion-and-beliefs/ireland-s-war-dead-and-those-killed-on-un-service-remembered-in-the-rain-1.4617420>]

[[] <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-57796429>]

Bishops issue warning over schools 'ban'

Independent.ie

Catholic bishops have warned that ending church involvement in running some ... The warning came after comments in The Irish Catholic newspaper by ... and

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Fionnán Sheahan's exclusive take on the day's news every afternoon, ...

[[] <https://www.independent.ie/irish-news/news/bishops-issue-warning-over-schools-ban-40639194.html>]

Tackling climate change, C of E Synod

Church Times

Coverage of address to the General Synod on Friday by First Church Estates Commissioner Loretta Minghella, updating the Synod on progress relating to tackling climate change by the National Investing Bodies.

[<https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2021/16-july/news/uk/investors-are-doing-their-bit-to-fight-climate-change-says-minghella>]

Opinion. Reflection on Northern Ireland at 100 years. Wallace Thompson

I was born into a Protestant and Unionist family in Ballymoney in 1953. Some family members were in the loyal orders and “B” Specials. Early in life I imbibed a unionist and orange mindset, but was brought up to treat everyone with respect. We had Roman Catholic neighbours and friends, and relationships were very good. Northern Ireland, to me, seemed a contented place.

When I was in my mid-teens, the Troubles erupted. Almost overnight, we descended from peace to street protest to full-blown terrorism. Like most Protestants, I wasn't



Opinion Commissioned by Contemporary Christianity

psychologically prepared. Rev Ian Paisley articulated my fears and concerns, and I quickly declared myself a Paisley man.

Dr Paisley was to have a big impact on me not only politically but also spiritually. I had always been a nominal Protestant, but I now became a committed evangelical Protestant, and my faith in Christ has been the primary driver in my life ever since. My unionism is multi-faceted, but I am a unionist primarily because of my desire to protect and promote my faith. Indeed, I am on record as saying that my loyalty to the British Throne is conditional on that Throne remaining Protestant.

When my forefathers signed the Ulster Covenant in 1912, their grounds for resisting Home Rule were both positive and negative. They were positive in the sense that they

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wanted to remain part of a United Kingdom that was prosperous and Protestant, and a British Empire that was majestic and glorious. Negatively, they were fearful of being annihilated in a Home Rule Ireland, which they regarded as antipathetic to their Protestant faith and their Britishness. To them Home Rule would be Rome Rule.

When Northern Ireland emerged in 1921, its future looked uncertain. However, one hundred years on, it has not only survived but it is in reasonable shape. It's certainly a happier and more peaceful place than in 1971 when we marked its 50th anniversary at the height of a brutal IRA terrorist campaign which ultimately failed in its key objective of forcibly achieving a "united Ireland". Sinn Fein now sit in government in a Northern Ireland Assembly within the UK.

But I'm under no illusions. All is not well, and it is incumbent upon us as Unionists to face certain realities. Although I voted to leave the EU, Brexit has been problematic for Northern Ireland. Some of my friends warned me that we would be betrayed by Boris Johnson and his English nationalist cronies, but I have been shocked by the extent of that betrayal, and it has made me question the value of a Union where we are simply not wanted. Indeed, we are being treated with contempt.

Brexit has also caused tensions within and between the component parts of the UK. Scotland might leave. English nationalism seems to be in the ascendancy. It's entirely possible that the UK could break up.

Furthermore, and crucially, my forefathers fought to remain within a UK that no longer exists. The glue that held it

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together included Protestantism and Empire. The UK is now a secular society and the Empire has long gone. The Roman Catholic Home Rule Ireland that my forefathers feared, and were determined to resist, has been replaced by a largely secular and cosmopolitan society.

Add to that the demographics. The Protestant majority in Northern Ireland has evaporated, and we are faced with a set of circumstances that our forefathers wouldn't recognise. The mantra of "united we stand" doesn't really work anymore.

So, how do we respond? Some argue that we must be persuaders for the Union and try to convince Roman Catholics of its benefits. I am happy to promote the Union, but, deep down, I feel it is time for a proper discussion about future relationships within this island and between these islands.

I regard myself not only as a British citizen and an Ulsterman, but as an Irishman. I have an affection for Ireland, its history, heritage and culture. I certainly feel Irish, whereas I don't feel Scottish, English or Welsh.

Ultimately, my Protestantism is more important to me than my Unionism, but nationalists and republicans have a lot of work to do to persuade me that I, as a Protestant Unionist, would be better off - or even welcome - in a united Ireland. It's all very well for them to speak soft and honeyed words, but when I see, for example, the intolerance displayed towards Orange parades, I am far from convinced.

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But I am up for the discussion. As I said recently in the "News Letter", "It's about future generations, and we need both sides to be able to listen to each other, and to seek to genuinely understand each other's perspectives, concerns and expectations. In this centenary year there needs to be a meaningful, open and honest debate".

Wallace Thompson is a retired civil servant, is an elder in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Secretary of the Evangelical Protestant Society, Chair of the Caleb Foundation and member of the Independent Orange Order. He is also a founder member of the DUP and served as a DUP Special Adviser. (The views expressed in his article are his own).

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.

Lord of the Church, we pray for our brothers and sisters throughout the world who acknowledge your presence and power in their lives. We pray for those who are laughed at or victimised because of their faith in you. We pray that you will give us strength to be true to our faith when it is questioned or belittled.



We pray for our church and our community and for a renewal of our vision and dedication to the work you have called us to do.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Lord of all nations, we pray for the needs of this world.

We pray for those nations where communities are broken by prejudice and hatred, where the fear of violence is never far away. We pray that where human endeavours to find peace and reconciliation seem so inadequate your power to draw people together will bring renewed hope for the future.

We pray for those who have knowledge and power in the fields of medicine and science. Let them not be corrupted by greed and ambition but grant them wisdom, integrity, humility and compassion to use the knowledge they have gained only for the good of all people.

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Throughout the world-wide community of nations may there be a sense of responsibility for each other and a desire for equality and justice for all your children.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

God of compassion, we pray for all those who are suffering with anxiety, stress, grief or pain and illness.

Long ago a woman believed she would be healed if she could just touch the clothes of Jesus. May we today believe that if we pray to you for those we know and love, your healing power will also flow into their lives bringing wholeness of body, mind and spirit.

In a moment of quiet our hearts reach out to you in prayer for the needs of those we love.

Grant us strength in our weakness, comfort in our sorry, peace of mind in our anxiety and stress and the renewed hope for life which only your presence and power can bring.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Lord of time and of eternity, we pray for those who have died and are now with you in your kingdom

We thank you for the communion we share with all those who have gone before us and pray that our lives may reflect on earth the light that surrounds them in your eternal kingdom.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Lord, be present among us this morning and may the transforming power of your Spirit work in us and through us today and throughout the coming week.

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Merciful Father accept these prayers, For the sake of your son, our saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Speaking to the Soul

You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book.

Psalm 56:8 NLT

Everything seemed to be going wrong for David when he wrote this psalm. He was being attacked continually by the Philistines. They were constantly slandering him and spending their days spying on him, looking for an opportunity to kill him. But amidst it all David affirms his confidence in the Lord knowing that with God on his side he couldn't lose. He had a deep conviction that his all-knowing God had not only kept track of all his woes, but had stored them up. I love the beautiful description that God had collected all his tears in a bottle and written them all down in a book.

We all experience times of difficulty and tragedy. Such times are woven into the fabric of life and there is no avoiding them. But when we are in the dark valley of suffering it is wonderful to know that God doesn't merely know that we are there and accompany us, but also takes our tears and anger seriously. He doesn't try to jolly us along and urge us to sing a few uplifting songs of worship to get over it. He sits with us in our sadness and recognises the pain that we feel. He won't ever forget what we've been through.

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The writer to the Hebrews speaks of the way in which Jesus is able to understand perfectly the struggles that we face, because he experienced them himself. He cried out to his heavenly father with loud cries and tears. (Hebrews 5.7) It is very tempting to put on a brave face when we confront difficulties but God would encourage us to be honest and to share our frustrations and sadnesses with him, with the sure knowledge that he not only understands our difficulties but comprehends them more completely than we ever will.

QUESTION

In what ways do you find it helpful to know that God remembers all your times of struggle and sadness?

PRAYER

Loving God, thank you that you take my times of struggle so seriously, and understand them completely. Amen

