

Church News Ireland



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the European Union**

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Image of the day

Columbanus and the European Union

Inspiring address by Dr Mary McAleese this week in Myshall as she reflected on St Columbanus and his writings.

She touched on a number of themes including his inclusive vision for what was to become the European Union, as well as on the issues of human dignity, freedom and reconciliation.

News

Project Servator is on the green at Royal Portrush

The Police Service of Northern Ireland is deploying Project Servator at The 153rd Open at Royal Portrush which returned to the North Coast this week.



Officers in uniform and officers in plain-clothes will be deployed this week, and we will be engaging with spectators and local businesses to encourage everyone to be our eyes and ears, by reporting any suspicious or unusual behaviour.

Trust your instincts and please report anything suspicious to police on the ground.

You can also report online at <https://orlo.uk/FbXue> or call us on 101.

Always dial 999 in an emergency.

Community support for family of Portadown footballer in critical condition

A community is coming together to support the family and loved ones of a Portadown footballer who is fighting for his life in hospital following a collision over the weekend.

Aaron Moffett (38) was involved in a collision near Markethill while making his way back from the Twelfth celebrations in Keady on Saturday.

The crash happened on the Coolmillish Road at around 4.30pm.

The former Dollingstown FC captain and club stalwart, who is from the Knocknamuckley area, remains in critical condition.



Ballygally in the sunshine

Dollingstown chairperson, Hubert Watson, said Aaron has been with the club for 18 years and is loved and admired by everyone.

“Thirteen years as club captain club and then once he retired he became the club’s secretary,” he said.

"Throughout his playing career he lifted 14 or 15 trophies for the club and he has been a leader both on and off the pitch.

"Everyone associated with the club has been shocked by this terrible tragedy, all we can do now is hope and pray for a miracle.”

Mr Watson said many people in the local community have been reaching out to show support for Aaron which has been “unbelievable”.

"My phone has been going non stop with players, members of the club, former players, players from other clubs, it just show the extent of his character and the respect people have for him," he said.

"I've been getting phone calls from across the country, Newry, Armagh, Coleraine, Sligo, right across the island- people just offering the their support and prayers."

Mr Watson has visited Aaron in hospital following the crash.

C of E facing a civil war over same-sex blessings

Church of England parishes are facing civil war over same-sex blessings, it has been claimed.

The blessings, for same-sex couples who have already entered a civil marriage or partnership, have been given by vicars since a vote two years ago. But not everyone has to perform them and it has become a point of contention between liberal and conservative clergy.

It has now emerged that junior priests are being “overruled or marginalised” in their parishes by vicars who are against the blessings.



Along the Antrim coast

‘Junior priests are being overruled in the parishes by vicars who are against the blessings’

One priest complained that, in some cases, vicars are promising at their interviews to offer same-sex blessings but, once in post, have gone back on their word. They claimed juniors are being “treated horrifically, called names and put down”.

It is up to the discretion of each vicar to offer the blessings, known as Prayers of Love and Faith (PLF), in their church, according to Church guidelines.

The Rev Chantal Noppen, of the diocese of Durham, said in a written question to General Synod, the Church of England's legislative body, which is convening in York: "Clergy who in conscience cannot offer the PLF are assured that they will not be required to do so.

"What corresponding protections or support are in place for Parochial Church Councils (PCCs), lay leaders, or clergy colleagues who do wish to offer PLF, but find themselves overruled or marginalised?"

The Archbishop of York, the Most Rev Stephen Cottrell, said that the current guidance is that it's always at the discretion of the minister.

The historic vote in 2023 was criticised by progressives who claimed it did not go far enough towards full equality because same-sex marriages are still prohibited. Conservatives were also against it, arguing marriage should only be between a man and a woman.

The House of Bishops is working towards presenting final proposals regarding the institution's stance on sexuality to the General Synod in 2026.

Gabriella Swerling Social and Religious Affairs Editor writing in The Daily Telegraph. 14/07/2025.

Education

Strabane Academy Exodus Team in Romania

Today our team have begun our kids programme. We are meeting for two hours each morning and afternoon.



We had 17 children this morning and enjoyed games, crafts, singing, learning a memory verse (Timothy's Hungarian is surprisingly impressive), a Bible story and quiz. Lots of energy and fun!

Foyle graduate in orbit

Congratulations to Alex McNeill, Class of 2021, who has graduated with a First Class Masters degree in Earth and Planetary Science from University of Manchester. Well done, Alex!

Remarkably, Alex's older brother Jack, also a former pupil, graduated from the same university with the same degree six years ago.

At Foyle College, we are committed to celebrating the successes of our #foylefamily beyond their school years. If you are a summer 2025 graduate, and former pupil, we would love to join with you in celebrating your tertiary level achievements by sharing them with our wider school community.



Afternoon tea with Daniel



Lisneal College and Cathedral Youth Club Fountain hosted an afternoon tea with Daniel O'Donnell.

All proceeds went to St Columb's Cathedral. A great afternoon of entertainment.

Cathedral Calls



The statue of Elizabeth of Russia on the west front of the Abbey, alongside Martin Luther King Jr.

Remembering Modern Martyrs - Elizabeth of Russia

On 18th July, Westminster Abbey remembers Elizabeth of Russia, who was martyred alongside other members of the Russian royal family in 1918.

In 1884, the young Princess Elizabeth of Hesse arrived in Moscow for her marriage to Grand Duke Sergei. A granddaughter of Queen Victoria and related to many European royal families, she soon acclimatised to her adopted country, even converting to Orthodoxy of her own choice in 1891.

After her husband's assassination, Elizabeth felt called to abandon her life of riches for one of prayer and ministry among the poor. She began the Convent of Saints Martha and Mary in Moscow in 1909, selling her jewels and living among her sisters in the convent as they cared for the poor and ill. She said to the first sisters upon entering: "I am leaving the brilliant world where I occupied a high position, and now, together with all of you, I am about to ascend into a much greater world, the world of the poor and afflicted." At its peak between 1914 and 1917, the convent had as many as 150 sisters working among and on behalf of the poor of Moscow.

Despite her work for the least of these, her status as a member of the royal family resulted in her martyrdom in a mine shaft with one of her sisters and other members of the royal family on 7 May 1918 during the Russian Revolution. A soldier present testified that Elizabeth had cried 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do', as she was seized, clutching an icon of Christ to her chest.

Elizabeth's example as a worker of God's mercy and love, not least in her forgiveness both of her husband's assassin and her own murderers, reminds us of the importance of forgiveness in the Christian life. As our Canon Theologian, the Reverend Dr James Hawkey writes on Elizabeth of Russia in the book *The Noble Army: The Modern Martyrs of Westminster Abbey*:

"Forgiveness is fragile: to forgive is always a choice, an active decision which, if embraced, can liberate and lead to a new future. Elizabeth's life, including her death, shows us that from forgiveness can emerge new possibilities, bearing



Another view of Elizabeth of Russia's statue on the west front of Westminster Abbey.

rich fruit which would otherwise be impossible. We might call such a world the New Creation, because its origin is found within the reconciling love of Christ himself, which pours out from the cross. Learning how to forgive, and how to accept forgiveness, especially in contexts of complexity and confusion, is often the work of a lifetime. But it is a work which gives life, and which robs the grave of its victory.

We invite you to pray with us, on 18 July:

Almighty God,
whose servant Elizabeth gave away her possessions and
devoted herself to prayer and the service of love and mercy:
help us, by your Spirit, to be faithful unto death; through
your son Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with
you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
Amen.

Newry Cathedral mosaic



Special shout out to our very talented Cathedral Sacristan, Dalton Short, who made this magnificent mosaic. It's currently on display in the cathedral. Drop in to see it in person.

Three charities benefit from Cars at the Cathedral

On behalf of the Dean, the Very Rev'd Niall J.W. Sloane, and all the wonderful colleagues at Saint Mary's Cathedral, we are delighted to share the success of our recent event, "Cars at the Cathedral" held on Saturday, 3rd May as part of Riverfest Limerick.

Thanks to the incredible support of our local community and the car enthusiasts who took part, we were thrilled to present cheques of €1,100.00 each to three deserving charities:

Children's Grief Project
Limerick Island Community Partners
Saint Mary's Parish (Athlunkard St.)

Each charity will be able to continue their vital work in the community with these generous donations.

A huge thank you to everyone who contributed to the success of "Cars at the Cathedral" – from the event organisers and sponsors to all the volunteers and attendees. Your support is truly appreciated, and together, we're making a real difference in Limerick!

We look forward to seeing you at future events and continuing to support these amazing causes

Clergy and ministry

Naval chaplaincy beckons

Rev Sabrina Cooke has been thanked for her ministry at Lamp churches.

Sabrina finished her curacy with at Lamp on Sunday and now moves on to the next chapter of her ministry with the Royal Navy as a chaplain. The parish group wished Sabrina every blessing as she moves to this new role.

Promotion for lead chaplain of Army Cadets

The Army Cadets' national lead chaplain role has been promoted to Chaplain to the Forces Class 2 (equivalent to Lt Col).

This elevation reflects the vital role chaplaincy plays in supporting cadets and adult volunteers as part of our Wellbeing strategy. This promotion marks a milestone for the Army Cadets and the wellbeing of our young people.

Congratulations to Padre Alan Jeans MBE, who continues in this role and now becomes the highest-ranking Chaplain in Army Cadets history. With over 20 years of voluntary service and an MBE for his work, his leadership has significantly shaped our holistic and inclusive chaplaincy programme.

Resources

'Christ Alive' – Dublin Lay Reader's Reflections on Finding Christ in the Unexpected

Diocesan Reader, John Deane–O'Keeffe has released a new book which brings readers on a weekly journey finding Christ in unexpected places.

Titled: Christ Alive: Reflections from the Shadows of Life into the Light of God, the book is published by Resource Publications.

John Deane–O'Keeffe is a lay reader whose home parish is Holy Trinity, Killiney. He also contributes regular columns to the Church Review (the diocesan magazine of Dublin and Glendalough) and the Church of Ireland Gazette.

Christ Alive is a book of fifty–two lessons, one for every week of the year, that takes the reader on a clever, humorous, roller–coaster voyage of discovery, where Christ is consistently found in places where we might least expect or want – from Vladimir Putin to prisons, from psychopaths to the homeless, with a little visit to our mums, dads, and the seven deadly sins along the way.

There is a lesson included for every week of the year.

In his preface John says that the reflections are drawn from the streets, prisons, campus, church and from the people, but mostly from the heart. He says the book “aims to bring the message of faith, hope and love into the open air of our everyday lives. And just as Jesus walked among us in our daily struggles and joys over two millennia ago, he walks the same paths with us today. These pages reflect the realities of life outside and inside traditional walls where grace meets grit and where goodness abounds”.

Speaking at the launch of the book, Archbishop Michael Jackson noted that John brought his broad range of experience and acumen to bear in writing the weekly meditations. “As a criminal law lecturer and preacher, he can draw out a wide range of insights and tell a story where we see the overlap of biography and parable. His motivation is not to amuse but to bring to bear on the darker areas of life the light of God. I thoroughly recommend this book,” he said.

Timothy Mooney, Associate Professor, School of Philosophy, University College Dublin, added: “In its turn moving and amusing, this book is suffused with hope and cheerfulness as well as an irrepressible sense of humour. Through his insightful interpretations of recent events and deft use of examples, John Deane–O’Keeffe shows the reader how the belief in the risen Christ has lost little of its inspirational power.”

John Deane–O’Keeffe is a church pastor, prison and hospital chaplain, and forensic criminologist. A Cambridge and Oxford graduate (where he tutors), he lectures in Ireland and Britain in criminology, forensic psychology,

criminal law, and theology and works across the criminal justice system as it intersects with offenders, crime victims, prison inmates, and faith. Additionally, he has been sworn as a United Kingdom magistrate, where he served in the Law District of Northumbria.

In the media

Islamophobia is a grievous concept for free speech - Daily Telegraph

Dominic Grieve lost the Conservative Party whip over trying to block Brexit in Parliament, writes Charles Moore.

He stood unsuccessfully as an independent in the 2019 general election. Perhaps as compensation, the arch-Remainer Sir Keir Starmer made him head of a working group tasked to find the right definition of “Islamophobia”. Mr Grieve is its only non-Muslim member. The report is expected soon.

Several peers, including myself, have written a letter to Mr Grieve, expressing concern. Last week, at a stormy meeting in Parliament, Mr Grieve alarmed most of his audience.

They wanted to know what power his group would have. Would its definition offered become official, therefore compelling public bodies, universities, schools, museums and the media to operate it? Would Parliament have the chance to debate the definition in advance?

Mr Grieve said any definition would be “non-statutory” and so would not chill free speech. But it would be bound to do so if it imposed penalties on those so accused. He even said he hoped his definition would come down on “micro-aggressions”, a cant concept of the diversity and inclusion trade. He also refused to make public the advice he has received. When the working group was started in February, its press release stated that the Islamophobia definition would be “reflective of a wide range and perspectives and priorities of British Muslims”. What about the perspectives and priorities of adherents of other religions who are not being offered such protection? And what about the very large proportion who have no serious religious affiliation but wish to be free to express their views?

Mr Grieve does not seem to see that a definition forged for Muslims by Muslims is inherently divisive. How can “community cohesion” be assured if one group can impose its definition on everyone else? A possible counter argument is that Jews are specifically protected against anti-Semitism, so why not Muslims against Islamophobia?

There are two answers here. The first is that Jewishness is defined by ethnicity. A Jew is a Jew regardless of what he or she believes. Anti-Semites hate him or her equally regardless. Islam, like Christianity, is not a race, but a universal faith. No free society could exist if one could not criticise the tenets of a faith or the behaviour of its adherents. The second answer – more controversial, I admit – is that the official sanction of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s definition of anti-Semitism may have been a mistake. Examples of anti-Semitism attached to the definition include “accusing Jewish citizens of being

more loyal to Israel, or to the alleged priorities of Jews worldwide, than to the interests of their own nations”, and “denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g. by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavour”. I would strongly agree that many people who say such things are anti-Semitic. I would disagree that such remarks are intrinsically anti-Semitic. We can judge them for ourselves without force of law.

Similarly, it may be that some people angry about the “grooming gangs” hate Muslims; but it is also the case that fear of being called Islamophobic prevented proper investigation of the gangs for many years. Does Mr Grieve really want to help cover-up? Let me make a proposition: too many Muslim leaders in this country are over-sensitive to criticism of their faith and of them. Does that make me Islamophobic?

Germany urges weapons suppliers to speed up European rearmament - The Financial Times' headline

The FT has interviewed German Defence Minister Boris Pistorius, who is calling for weapons production to increase as Europe seeks to deter Russian aggression.

The front page image shows North Korean leader Kim Jong Un shaking hands with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, after pledging "unconditional support" for the Kremlin's goals in the war in Ukraine over the weekend.”

Speaking to the soul

Short reading and a prayer - daily on this site

Church News Ireland

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Church News Ireland

www.churchnewsireland.org

Link in Monday through Saturday from
early morning

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