



**Image of the day -
St Columba's Way a new Irish camino
See People and Places**

Reports

Blackpool apologises for removing Franklin Graham Ads

The British city of Blackpool must apologise for removing Franklin Graham ads from public buses, admit the act was discrimination, and pay the organisers of the Lancashire Festival of Hope a total of 109,000 pounds.

Judge Claire Evans handed down the terms on Friday morning, with agreement from both sides. The city published the apology on its website and must pay the fines in one week.

The court calculated the cost of removing the bus ads at 84,000 pounds for the Festival of Hope's legal fees and an additional 25,000 for "just satisfaction," because the city violated the UK Human Rights Act of 1998.

When the city removed the ads, it claimed this was necessary because of "heightened tension" caused by Graham's position on LGBT issues. But internal emails showed officials expressing their own disapproval of Graham and looking for a legal reason to stop the advertising campaign. Roughly 200 area churches sponsored Graham's event, which was attended by about 9,000 people.

"This is an important moment for religious freedom in the UK," Graham said in a statement to Christianity Today.

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“We’re grateful to God for the final outcome of this case, and for what it will mean for churches and Christians across the UK in the years ahead. The Good News of Jesus Christ must be proclaimed. My prayer is that this case will encourage Christians to stand firm.”

The terms cannot be appealed and the court order is public, so the case can serve as a precedent in British law.

Evan’s ruling in April found that the city “gave preference to the rights and opinions of one part of the community,” while disregarding the rights and opinions of others.

“A pluralistic tolerant society allows for the expression of many different and sometimes diametrically opposed beliefs,” she wrote.

In its official apology, the city acknowledges that the advertisements themselves were not offensive, even if some find Graham’s beliefs about same-sex relationships offensive. They described the act of removing the ads as discrimination.

“We discriminated against Lancashire Festival of Hope because of the religious beliefs of Franklin Graham and in doing so interfered with Lancashire Festival of Hope’s right to freedom of speech,” the statement says. “We sincerely apologise to the organisers of the event for the upset and inconvenience caused.”

The city now has new policies for bus advertisements. The new policy says the city will reject ads deemed “likely to cause widespread or serious offence to members of the

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public,” but also states the city is “fully committed to meeting its obligations under the Human Rights Act 1998.”

Reckless vote decimates aid for years and does untold damage to Britain’s standing, says Christian Aid

Responding to this week’s House of Commons vote on the aid cut, Pete Moorey, Christian Aid's head of UK advocacy and campaigns, said:

“This reckless and controversial vote will essentially decimate aid for years to come. It beggars belief that, in the middle of a global pandemic with extreme poverty rising, we are turning our backs on the poorest and most vulnerable people in the world.

“Rather than listening to current and former Archbishops, Cardinals and church leaders across the UK, this last minute vote speaks of a government trying to escape its responsibilities to the world’s poorest people.

“This decision will do untold damage to Britain’s standing and reputation at home and abroad. We will continue to oppose these cuts. Now more than ever, the UK should be leading the way in tackling crises such as climate change, Covid, and conflict that are affecting so many of the world’s poorest communities.”

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Holy Land: Rabbis call for justice in Jerusalem

Rabbis For Human Rights are calling on the new Israeli Government to immediately announce one year moratorium on Jewish settlement and displacement of Palestinians in East Jerusalem, in particular in Sheikh Jarrah and in Silwan..

They say: 'We call for the immediate establishment of a committee of inquiry to conduct a comprehensive study of this issue, including the eviction proceedings, the appropriation of properties, the unequal application of the absentee property law, and the discrimination against Palestinians pursuing their right to reclaim property lost in Jerusalem.

'The East Jerusalem Palestinian neighbourhoods of Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan are flashpoints for violence and discrimination. Settler organizations have been systematically making use of the unequal application of the absentee property law in Israel to expel Palestinians from the homes they have lived in since the 1950s and replace them with Jewish settlers, moving towards what has been called the "Judaization" of East Jerusalem. You can learn more about this issue in the short video below, produced by our friends at J Street.

'In the Jewish imagination, Jerusalem is perceived as a fulcrum of justice. It is our obligation to act in the spirit of Isaiah, who prophesied: "I will restore your judges as of old,

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And your counsellors as of yore. After that you shall be called City of Justice, Faithful City" (Isaiah 1:26).

'The new Israeli Government has a rare opportunity to pause and stop the unethical and unjust application of the law. As Isaiah goes on to say, Zion will be redeemed in justice. It is time to start that redemptive process.'

Link - [www.youtube.com/watch?v=7yLIIFVp_dw]

People and places



Blog

From reflection to action: time to embrace the agency of children in Africa

'Rebuild' – an invitation to leaders in youth and children's ministry

Connor's youth and children's officers are inviting anyone involved in these vital ministries to come together to share and encourage one another for the new season ahead.

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Christina Baillie (youth) and Victoria Jackson (children) have joined forces to organise Rebuild – an event taking place in St Patrick’s Parish, Broughshane, on September 11.

“It has been a tough year, but as churches reopen there are more opportunities to relaunch children’s and youth ministry within our parishes,” Victoria and Christina stated: “This can feel daunting, and so we want you to know you are not alone! Rebuild will be an opportunity to come together, to encourage one another and share ideas as we look ahead.”

Participants will be encouraged by Bishop George Davison, resourced by Victoria and Christina in a number of children’s and youth sessions, and inspired by each other in small group discussion time.

This will be a thank you to leaders for their hard work over the challenging last year and the event will include lunch at the end.

Rebuild is open to everyone who is involved in children’s and youth ministry, including clergy, employed children’s and youth workers and volunteers. The event begins at 10am on September 11.

To ensure correct numbers for social distancing and for lunch those wishing to attend are asked to book, free of charge, using Eventbrite. Links at -

[[] <https://connor.anglican.org/2021/07/15/rebuild-an-invitation-to-leaders-in-youth-and-childrens-ministry/>]

Methodist Church welcomes President Higgins comments on gambling advertising

The Council on Social Responsibility (Southern Executive) has welcomed the recent comments by President Higgins criticising gambling advertising on national television. “The sudden appearance of expensive adverts glorifying gambling along with the growth in online gambling has given us renewed concern this year, given its impact on many lives and broken relationships. We look forward to mature and helpful public discussion on this in the coming months.”

Church leaders celebrate St Columba and Irish ‘Camino’ at Long Tower

Leaders from the four main Christian denominations in the North West gathered outside Áras Cholmcille – the St Columba Heritage Centre, in the grounds of Long Tower Church – on Thursday afternoon for a short ecumenical prayer service.

It had been arranged to mark the arrival in Londonderry of a group of walkers who had been retracing St Columba’s footsteps from Glencolumbkille to Greencastle, a route now known as An Slí Cholmcille – St Columba’s Way – which it is hoped will come to be regarded as the Irish ‘Camino’.

The walkers were led by the Roman Catholic Bishop of Raphoe, Dr Alan McGuckian, who is an avid walker, and had been accompanied on the route from Letterkenny to

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Derry by the Bishop of Derry, Dr Donal McKeown. Thursday was the penultimate day of their 12-day trek.

Among those waiting to greet the group at Long Tower were the Bishop of Derry and Raphoe, Rt Rev Andrew Forster, the Rev Keith Hibbert from Cumber & Cumber Upper Presbyterian Churches, and Rev John Montgomery from Carlisle Road Methodist Church. Bishop McGuckian's brother, Fr Barney McGuckian SJ, was also waiting at the St Columba Heritage Centre to welcome the pilgrims.

Opinion

NIO Legacy Proposals: 'Soft' Options Will Not Suffice – By Dr Anna Bryson

The inclusion of an oral history archive as one of four key legacy mechanisms was a welcome element of the 2014 Stormont House Agreement. Building on the valuable work of Eames-Bradley and Haass-O'Sullivan, it recognised the need to engage perspectives beyond those that are typically captured in the courtroom. When done properly, oral history offers a powerful means of giving voice to those whose stories have been wilfully or carelessly ignored. It captures the messy and complex realities of the conflict that shaped our relations with family, friends, neighbours, Churches, schools, employers and so forth. Taken together, these diverse perspectives can help to humanise 'the other'. They can also usefully inform work on the broader patterns and themes of conflict such as the gender dimensions of conflict,

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urban and rural experiences of violence, and intergenerational trauma.

In the course of the past twenty years I have conducted more than 250 lengthy interviews for a range of oral history projects. Those I have interviewed include direct victims and survivors, former security force personnel, ex-combatants, fire and rescue and frontline health workers, religious leaders, funeral directors, ex-prisoners, teachers, community workers, business people, politicians as well as a wide range of other civic society representatives. As the Northern Ireland representative for the Oral History Society I also regularly give advice and training to community groups seeking to establish oral history projects and thus know how much good work has been done and continues to be done here.

I also know from first-hand experience that people truly value the opportunity to be heard and to know that their story and that of their community will be preserved for future generations. For example, an elderly man whom I interviewed reportedly died alone with just two things by his side – a childhood prayer book and a copy of his interview transcript. Having trained as a historian I am also well aware of how important it is to counter ‘top-down’ elite narratives wherein the details of the lived reality of conflict are all too often missed. For example, I well remember the child of a former police officer talking about his paranoid fear of answering the phone (in case he betrayed the fact that his dad was home) and the republican mother who explained that she went through the horrors of childbirth without any form of pain relief because she did not trust the midwife and was terrified that she might get her neighbours in trouble if

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Dr Anna Bryson

drugs weakened her natural inclination to ‘say nothing’. In sum, I passionately believe that oral history and broader work on memorialisation could make an invaluable contribution towards moving our society forward in a spirit of mutual understanding and respect.

On the face of it, the fact that the NIO appears to be privileging oral history work in its current discussions with the five parties and the Irish government (‘oral history and memorialisation’ are front and centre of the forthcoming meetings with the parties) should be manna from heaven for someone like me.

However, in view of the grave concerns outlined elsewhere on this blog by my colleague, Daniel Holder, regarding the government’s apparent ambition to derail the Stormont House Agreement and to instead introduce an amnesty in the name of ‘victim-centred reconciliation’, I am extremely concerned that a ‘soft-focused’ oral history approach is

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being offered up as a consolation prize in lieu of other routes to justice and accountability. There is a related danger that those working in the field of oral history might be co-opted to legitimise and give cover to the UK government's current proposals.

When it comes to dealing with the past, victims need and deserve choice. The UK government is yet to deny that plans are afoot to disrupt proper and effective (Article 2 compliant) investigations and indeed existing inquest proceedings. It has also yet to be convincingly explained how closing down criminal justice investigations would facilitate a 'truth recovery' process in practice.

Whilst most victims understand that prosecutions are likely only to succeed in a very small number of cases, it is a sad reality that the type of information victims and survivors wish to access has to date only come to light through formal investigative mechanisms with recourse to police powers and coroner's inquests. In this context it is cold comfort indeed for families who have been waiting decades for precious information about the deaths of their loved ones to suggest that 'we can't offer anything more than a swift desk-top review of your case – but you can have access to a museum of the Troubles or an oral history archive instead'.

Having entered the firm caveat that oral history work must complement rather than substitute for the other truth recovery and justice-facing mechanisms, how could it be primed to make a meaningful contribution to 'dealing with the past'?

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As part of the Stormont House Agreement Model Bill Team's submission to the NIO's 2018 public consultation we argued that the original proposal to park the Oral History Archive in the Public Records Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) was flawed. We queried the independence of the governance model and instead highlighted the need to work with and through existing groups, consolidating and sharing rather than diminishing and threatening the good work that has already been done. In terms of logistics, the fact that the government now appears open to the type of 'hub and spoke' or aggregator model that we put forward is welcome. What will not work, however, is any attempt to substitute the PRONI with either an alternative 'state-centric' governing authority or a consortium that is unwieldy to the point of impotence.

The need for independent and transparent oversight of the oral history governance model remains paramount if we are to secure genuine cross-community buy-in and to thus advance real and meaningful reconciliation. One possible solution is to look to the type of body that regulates publicly funded academic research. For example, the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funds – in accordance with clear and transparent priority themes and assessment criteria – world-class peer reviewed research across the arts and humanities. Through its 'Connected Communities' programme it has successfully facilitated partnerships with dozens of community-based organisations.

Rather than tasking one or more Northern Ireland-based archive, museum or third-level institution with responsibility for overseeing this vitally important programme of work I

would propose that such an ‘honest broker’ must be engaged to guarantee independence and ethical governance and to provide objective criteria for funding calls and assessment of applications.

To facilitate the safeguarding, preservation and sharing of existing collections, the collection of new oral history accounts, the creation of a centralised digital hub, and the all-important work on patterns and themes the government could ring-fence funds to facilitate oral history and memorialisation work and then administer these via an independent body like the AHRC. The phases of funding might include:

1. PRESERVATION:

- Building on the work of Accounts of the Conflict, community organisations, academics and others (across the UK and Ireland) currently holding oral history material relating to the conflict would be eligible to apply for resources to assist with cataloguing, digitisation, renegotiating access arrangements, and sensitivity reviews. This would be done with a view to future-proofing their oral history collections and facilitating the sharing of material with a central repository (although there would be no obligation to do so).

2. TRAINING:

- Community groups (including those representing victims and survivors) and individual academics would be eligible to apply for funding to train others (including family / advocacy support workers) to conduct oral history interviews in line

with relevant technical, ethical and legal standards. This would enable new material to be collected and shared with a central repository (although there would be no obligation to do so). This recognises that many people only feel comfortable talking to a trusted member of their own community or organisation.

3. CAPTURING UNHEARD VOICES:

- Drawing on an inventory of what has already been done, this stream of funding would enable a wide range of victims' representatives, oral history networks, community groups and individuals to conduct oral history projects in line with clear and transparent priority themes such as gender, geography, class and age.

4. SHARING:

- Existing archives (e.g. Linen Hall Library, PRONI, Ulster Folk and Transport Museum) that are interested in curating and preserving oral history accounts and in building a central digitised online hub for the sharing of such materials (working with and through existing community archives and organisations) would be eligible to compete for ring-fenced government funding to enable them to do so. This central digitised online hub would be a vitally important component of the broader programme, drawing together and disseminating as diverse an array of perspectives as possible.

- Existing and proposed new museums, exhibitions and creative arts projects could also apply to this fund for

programmes of work that enable them to share diverse perspectives on the conflict.

5. PATTERNS AND THEMES

- Academics and others would be invited to apply for funding to develop thematic projects drawing on the materials shared with the online digital repository created in phase 4. These proposals would be peer-reviewed to ensure academic rigour. This phase is designed as an incentive for oral history groups to share at least some of their material with the central hub. In preparing reports on key patterns and themes academics would of course be able to draw on other source material but the driving source for the priority themes would be the material shared with the central repository.

The latter work on patterns and themes overlaps with what was originally envisaged under the terms of the 'Implementation and Reconciliation Group'. As myself and my colleague, Louise Mallinder, argued on this siteback in 2018, this work is essential if we are to holistically address the needs of victims and survivors, narrow the space for 'permissible lies', and highlight appropriate steps to ensure that past violations do not recur. At the heart of difficulties about how we deal with legacy issues is of course the fact that there is precious little agreement on the causes and consequences of past violence. Oral history offers an important means of opening up the space for healthy and respectful debate on those differences and can thus function as a catalyst for reconciliation. In order for this to happen, however, it must be cultivated as a carefully co-ordinated complement to the other legacy mechanisms rather than a

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smokescreen to subvert truth and accountability. The latter will not work. It could moreover do untold damage to the credibility of oral history and its capacity to help finally address the legacy of the past.

(Dr Anna Bryson is a Senior Lecturer at the School of Law, QUB. Since 2014 she has been working on the government's legacy proposals as part of the 'Model Bill Team'. The other members of the Model Bill Team are Professor Kieran McEvoy and Professor Louise Mallinder, QUB Law, and Brian Gormally, Daniel Holder and Gemma McKeown from the Committee on the Administration of Justice. See www.dealingwiththepastni.com

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 give you thanks, most gracious God, for the beauty of earth and sky and sea; for the richness of mountains, plains, and rivers; for the songs of birds and the loveliness of flowers. We praise you for these good gifts, and pray that we may safeguard them for our posterity. Grant that we may continue to grow in our grateful enjoyment of your abundant creation, to the honor and glory of your Name, now and for ever. Amen. ~ The Book of Common Prayer



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.

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.

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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.

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

Speaking to the Soul

This letter is from Paul and Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus. I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus, including the church leaders and deacons.

Philippians 1:1-2 NLT



The apostle Paul is absolutely clear that it is not what you know but who you know that really matters in life. And so he begins this warm and encouraging letter by focussing on Jesus. He is only writing to the church in Philippi because of his relationship with Jesus, and he identifies the fact that, as a community, they belong to Jesus. So far as Paul was concerned everything turns on knowing the Lord Jesus Christ personally.

Paul describes his own relationship with Jesus as being that of a slave. Philippi was a busy Roman colony and there would have been huge numbers of slaves, probably about 20 per cent of the population. Everyone would have understood what Paul was saying. Slaves were owned by their master who totally controlled their lives to the extent that they didn't even possess their own bodies. They had no ancestors, no name, and could have no possessions. On

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the face of it that all sounds pretty grim, but Paul's discovery was that to be a slave of the best master of all, the Lord Jesus Christ, was the most joyful and liberated way of life. He was delighted to be entirely controlled by Christ's agenda.

Paul first visited Philippi on his second missionary journey (Acts 16.11-40) and there he met Lydia who became the first Christian convert in Europe. Lydia opened her home to Paul and that's where the first church in the city was established. He describes the Christian community there as being God's holy people who belong to Christ Jesus. In effect he was affirming the fact that they were also the slaves of Christ. They had deliberately chosen to commit themselves to the Lord and to be a holy people.

Every day we are all under pressure from many directions, just like the Philippians. And the same is true for us as it was for them – it's not what we know, but who we know that counts. Knowing Jesus as our Saviour and Lord is everything.

QUESTION

Do you consider yourself to be a slave of Christ?

PRAYER

Loving God, thank you for the freedom and joy that you give to those who commit themselves to you as Lord. Amen

