

# Church News Ireland



**Image of the day – The Charles Wood Girls' Choir**

## **Image for today - The Charles Wood Girls' Choir in Armagh**

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Short reading and a prayer daily on this site

## Image of the day



## Catch The Charles Wood Girls' Choir in Armagh

**The Charles Wood Girls' Choir returns to this year's Festival under the direction of Christopher Gray, Director of Music at St John's College, Cambridge. Made up of talented young singers from across the UK and Ireland, the choir will be performing at several events throughout the week.**

Catch them on Tuesday 12th August at 7.30pm for Sung Mass in St Malachy's Church, Armagh or at their Lunchtime Concert on Thursday 14th August at 1.10pm in St John the Baptist Catholic Church, Portadown, and at the Gala Concert on Friday 15th August at 8.00pm in St Patrick's Church of Ireland Cathedral, Armagh.



The girls are in for a busy week of singing but also a fantastic week of learning and fun! We're very grateful to Ulster Carpets and the Esme Mitchell Trust for their continued support of the Girls' Choir.

Tickets to support the Girls' Choir and other events are available at the door or online at:  
[www.charleswoodsummerschool.org/events](http://www.charleswoodsummerschool.org/events).

## News

### **‘God’s timing is always the best’: The Christian faith of Maro Itoje**

**Maro Itoje captains his club, his country and now, the British and Irish Lions. The 30-year-old rugby player says he hasn't always taken his faith as seriously as he**



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**should.  
But he is  
now - and  
it shows  
on the  
field.**

We've  
probably  
all had  
those  
occasions  
when  
we've  
missed a  
Bible  
study or  
house  
group  
because  
of another



engagement. Perhaps it was because you had to work overtime, the babysitter bailed, or you went to a friend's birthday dinner.

How about being officially unveiled at London's O2 arena as captain of the British and Irish Lions?

That's exactly what happened to Maro Itoje in May. "I had to ask the Lord for forgiveness for missing a session!" he joked to the BBC.

## **Irish Govt warned EU hate speech law could ‘punish the quoting of Scripture’**

**The Irish Government has been urged to resist pressure to implement the European Union’s hate speech laws affecting “words, ideas and opinions”, The Christian Institute states on its web site.**

The Christian Institute’s report continues - The Irish Government has been urged to resist pressure to implement the European Union’s hate speech laws affecting “words, ideas and opinions”.

In Leaders’ Questions, Deputy Ken O’Flynn highlighted the case of Finnish MP Päivi Räsänen, who was dragged through the courts for quoting the Bible on sexual ethics.

In May, the European Commission gave Ireland two months to comply with the EU’s laws on hate speech, which is more extensive and wide-reaching than Ireland’s current rules, or else risk being referred to the EU’s Court of Justice.  
‘Thought crime’

Deputy O’Flynn queried whether quoting Scripture will “become a punishable act” if the Government introduces the laws.

He also asked: “Will this Government stand over a law that criminalises people for what they think, criminalises people for what they say rather than what they do?”





***The Lanyon Building, Queen's University, Belfast***

He continued: “We are not talking about the incitement of violence, we are not talking about threats or harassment, we are talking about words, ideas and opinions; often and sometimes unpopular and uncomfortable, but still lawful expressions, which are supposedly free”.

In response, Minister for Finance Paschal Donohoe stated that “any such further decisions are ones that always have

to be proportionate, and recognise the deep value of free speech, and the right for freedom of expression”.  
EU

According to The Sunday Times, a senior Government source reported that it does not intend to impose any new hate speech laws and that it has a “solid” defence against the EU’s claims.

Another source said: “We don’t believe the commission has given sufficient weight to Ireland’s existing common law on this or to our own existing legal framework”.

Following widespread criticism, Minister for Justice Helen McEntee removed incitement to hatred from the initial proposals of the Criminal Justice (Hate Offences) Act 2024. But the law still allows tougher sentences in instances where crimes are deemed to be motivated by hostility towards a protected group.

Under a previous version, there were concerns that churches could have been criminalised for preaching about biblical sexual ethics.

## **Church vows Christian tolerance for those intolerant of gluten**

**The Church of England is looking at how to give holy communion to people who are gluten and alcohol-free.**



Church guidance makes clear that bread must be made from wheat flour and wine must be the fermented juice of the grape in order to be consecrated as part of the service.

In February, following a meeting of the General Synod, the Church of England's legislative body, officials ruled that non-alcoholic wine and gluten-free substitutes must not be used for Holy Communion.



**AST** ARMSTRONG  
STORYTELLING  
TRUST

# **A Cloak of Wisdom**

## **Part of the Red Sails Festival**

**with Liz Weir, Vicky McFarland and Anne Harper**  
**Agherton Church**  
**The Diamond, Portstewart**  
**Friday 25 July**  
**2:00pm – 3:00pm**

In this newly commissioned piece merging words and music, let yourself be wrapped in tales of land, birth, death, magic and madness.

The audience will hear reimagined stories and new music performed on the harp and clarinet.

Suitable for audiences aged 16 yrs +

The Rt Rev Michael Ipgrave, the Bishop of Lichfield and chairman of the Church's Liturgical Commission, said such a move would have to overturn two settled positions in the Church of England. However, the comments sparked a row, with the Church accused of creating a barrier for those unable to consume wheat flour or alcohol.

The bishop has now clarified his position, saying the Church is now working "to provide guidance for best practice in the administration of Holy Communion" and become more inclusive.

In a written question submitted to the Synod, which will convene in York this weekend, Abigail Ogier, a Synod member from the Diocese of Manchester, asked the Bishop: "What progress had been made to ensure that people who are unable to consume gluten and/or alcohol in even trace amounts can receive holy communion?"

'Reduced-gluten bread and reduced alcohol-wine are appropriate matter for celebration of communion'

The Bishop replied: "Reduced-gluten bread and reduced-alcohol wine are appropriate matter for the celebration of holy communion in the Church of England."

Regarding plans to become more officially inclusive to those who cannot consume gluten or alcohol, the bishop confirmed that a taskforce is now working to offer further guidance on this.

He said that The Accessible Liturgy Working Group is undertaking work "to provide guidance for best practice in the administration of holy communion" and to consider a

case “where consuming even trace amounts of gluten or alcohol will not be possible for a communicant,” what the “theological, liturgical, and legal basis for the Church of England” would be on the matter.

Following the row in February the Church of England released a statement saying that many professional ecclesiastical suppliers have long provided wine or bread which may contain tiny traces of alcohol or gluten which can legitimately be considered non-alcoholic or gluten free.

The Bishop’s comments come amid increasing awareness of coeliac disease, an autoimmune condition in which the immune system attacks the body’s own tissues when gluten is consumed.

At least one in 100 people in the UK have coeliac disease, according to NHS figures.

## Cathedral Calls

### Music at St Patrick’s raises over €2,250 for Oscar's Kids

**Stuart Nicholson writes - A big thank you to everyone who came to our Oscar Night extravaganza last Friday and helped raise just over €2,250 for Oscar's Kids.**

Also a big shout out to our fabulous performers from both sides of the Atlantic pictured here.





If you missed it, then fear not - tickets for our Halloween gig in aid of BUMBLEance the Children's Ambulance Service go on sale very shortly.....

## **Cork's Helios art exhibition drew the crowds**

**During this year's Cork Midsummer Festival, the nave of St Fin Barre's Cathedral was transformed by a glorious glowing orb, a sun replica, which quickly became the talk of the town.**

Roughly 12,000 visitors came to the Cathedral in June to visit and to admire British artist Luke Jerram's installation. Helios, is a six-and-a-half metre exact replica of the sun

accompanied by a soundtrack including NASA recordings, birdsong, and other sounds from the natural world.

Jerram, who previously wowed Cork audiences with Gaia (an earth replica he installed in St Coleman's Cathedral, Cobh in 2024) and Museum of the Moon (shown at MTU Bishopstown campus in 2017), is often described as working at the intersection of art and science. He is well-known for bringing art to a broad audience and hopes to prompt in them a sense of wonder at the known universe and to provoke important conversations about our place within it.

The hard-working team at St Fin Barre's welcomed many thousands of extra visitors to the cathedral during the twelve-day run of Helios from the 9th to the 21st of June. Visitors ranged from the very young to the more advanced in years. Cathedral staff were delighted to accommodate numerous groups of school children as well as children and adults with special needs and disabilities. Despite the soaring visitor numbers, the atmosphere inside the cathedral remained tranquil, with a near constant stream of people sitting and even lying beneath the sun, deep in contemplation.

Some special evening events were held beneath Helios, each of which was sold out well in advance. Irish composer, Amanda Feery performed her thought-provoking piece Nest to an appreciative audience, and music producer, Cian Sweeney offered a piano meditation which incorporated guided meditations and breath work into an improvised piano performance. For the more astronomically minded visitors there was an evening talk entitled Cosmos. During

this presentation Blackrock Castle Observatory's lead astronomer Alan Giltinan inspired and delighted attendees as he shared some incredible insights into the lesser-known aspects of outer space.

Luke Jerram's Helios was presented collaboratively by St Fin Barre's Cathedral and Cork Midsummer Festival and was kindly supported by Cork City Council and Ecclesiastical Insurance.

## Clergy and ministry

### **Cork priest celebrates 70 years of service**

**Macroom parishioners gathered in St Colman's Church for a Mass celebrating the long service of Monsignor James O'Donnell (94).**

"My life can be divided into three portions; 24 years of Ordination, 24 years between Ordination and Macroom, 36 years in Macroom," Monsignor James O'Donnell said as he began a speech reflecting on his 70 year-career. – 'It has been a tremendous privilege to minister.'

### **Church and Community Manager for Christian Aid Ireland**

**CAI are delighted to announce that Kaye Steele has been appointed to the role of Church and Community Manager, following the departure of Dave Thomas.**



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Kaye, who is our Church and Community Officer, comes from Bushmills in County Antrim and has worked on the staff of Christian Aid Ireland since 2020.

In her new role, she will coordinate our church engagement and fundraising across the island of Ireland, managing a 5-person team.

Kaye's involvement with our work began in 2013 when she spent a year working with the Christian Aid Collective, based in Christian Aid's Glasgow office. The Collective is a community of young adult Christians who use their voices to advocate for change and take action against injustice and poverty.

Last year, she helped lead a 7-strong group of supporters, staff and our Board Chair to visit our projects in Zimbabwe.

Please join CAI in congratulating Kaye on her new role. We wish her very blessing for the important work that lies ahead.

## **Discover how your church can establish a wellbeing space**

**How can your church simply, safely, and sustainably attend to mental and emotional wellbeing for both church and community?**

To help meet this need, Renew Wellbeing is a registered Christian charity which helps churches open spaces of

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welcome and inclusion in partnership with mental health teams.

The charity, which works with many Christian denominations, was started by Ruth Rice (above) after she suffered her own mental health crisis.

Ruth will be visiting Northern Ireland in September and will speak in both Magheralin and Willowfield parishes on Sunday 28 September:

10.00am in Dollingstown; 11.30am in Magheralin; 7.00pm in Willowfield

You're warmly invited to send along one or two representatives to hear Ruth and to learn more about Renew Wellbeing.

You are also very welcome to visit the Renew Wellbeing space hosted by Magheralin Parish which is open every Monday afternoon (currently closed for a summer break but open again from Monday 11 August onwards).

Rector of Magheralin, Revd Simon Genoe says:

“Our Magheralin Renew Room is a sacred space where people, both from within and beyond the church community, gather for a time of peace, gentle games and activities, and meaningful friendship, all with a focus on wellbeing. There are optional prayer activities for those who wish to take part, but there is absolutely no pressure.

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"I personally love dropping into Renew now and again for a coffee and a game of Scrabble, and to hear how this special place, where it's OK not to be OK, has been a real lifeline for so many. I would commend Renew Wellbeing to every parish."

What are Renew spaces?

Renew spaces are simple cafe-style spaces run by local churches where hobbies and activities are shared or co-produced.

Each cafe space is attached to a quiet room or prayer space where inner habits of wellbeing are shared.

Each church partners with a mental health professional from the local council or other suitable organisation to ensure good inclusive practices for safe spaces where it's OK not to be OK can be sustained.

Visit [renewwellbeing.org.uk](https://renewwellbeing.org.uk)

## Events

### Go Wild this Summer at Belfast Zoo

Looking for a wild day out for the whole family? With over 100 animal species spread across 55 acres of beautiful scenery, Belfast Zoo is the perfect place to explore, discover and connect with nature.





🦒 See everything from giraffes and lions to tiny tamarins and towering dinosaurs!

🍴 Grab a bite at one of our delicious food and drink spots, including Treetops Tearoom.

🏃 Let the kids run wild in our large adventure playpark - perfect for burning off energy!

Whether you're watching sea lions dive, spotting rare babies in the monkey house or snapping a pic for our photo





**RED SAILS FESTIVAL**  
PORTSTEWART

**Nasim Heidari**  
and special guests

PERSIAN SONGS AND MUSIC FROM  
ITALY SPAIN IRELAND INDIA BRAZIL

21st July. 7pm. Star of the Sea Church  
Free Admission  
[www.portstewartca.org](http://www.portstewartca.org)

PORTSTEWART COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION  
Radius HOUSING  
Beyond Skin  
Red Sails Festival logo (red sailboat)



competition, there's something new to discover around every corner.

 Plan your visit today and Go Wild this Summer at Belfast Zoo!



<https://ow.ly/ozea50Whbcf>

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## Willie Drennan Band & Friends at the Red Sails Festival

**Join in a toe-tapping evening of Ulster-Scots folk music with the brilliant Willie Drennan Band & Friends as part of the Red Sails Festival .in Portstewart**

Wednesday 23rd July. 7:30pm. The Bandstand

Expect lively tunes, great fun, and plenty of rhythm – everyone welcome!



### Lunchtime Concerts June/July 2025, 1.15pm

**Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> June**

Lorraine Galvin (soprano) and Irina Dernova (piano)  
Music by Bach, Poulenc, Britten, Linnane, Bernstein and Mozart

**Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> July**

Luke Lally Maguire (piano)  
Music by Schubert

**Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> July**

Deborah Armstrong (piano)  
A celebration of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Maurice Ravel

**Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> August**

Christopher Bowen (tenor) and Matthew Marshall (guitar)  
'The flowering branch' : including music by Dowland, Britten and McNeff

For details on all of the musical events held in Saint Mary's Cathedral please log  
onto [www.saintmaryscathedral.ie](http://www.saintmaryscathedral.ie)

**Admission to the concerts is free (with a retiring collection)**



## In the media

### Why has it taken Ireland a decade to exhume the bodies of the 800 dead babies of Tuam?

**Caelainn Hogan writes in The Guardian**

**The mass exhumation is vindication for campaigners – but their battle for justice is far from over.**

A young girl played on a swing near a mass grave as the names of hundreds of children who died in a mother-and-baby institution in Ireland were read out during a memorial service late last year. The bright day turned to dark in the time it took.

Now, the playground near the site in Tuam has been dismantled and the long-awaited exhumation has begun. But why has it taken more than a decade since it emerged that those dead children were likely buried in sewage chambers on the grounds of a publicly funded institution run by nuns and the local council?

A technical drawing from the 1970s of the council housing estate built on the grounds showed “old children’s burial ground” written directly above “proposed playground”. Local authorities knew long ago.

News first broke in 2014 after Catherine Corless, who was working on a history project, tracked down death certificates

for nearly 800 children for whom there were almost no burial records. She had gone to the Bon Secours Sisters, the Catholic organisation that ran the home, to the local bishop and the authorities. Little was done until she went to the media.

It is a vindication of Corless's work that the exhumation is taking place, but also disturbing that it was never a certainty.

I had already started writing a book about survivors of Ireland's institutions for "unmarried mothers" when a test excavation publicly confirmed "significant human remains" at Tuam, dating to the time the nuns ran the home, between 1925 and 1961. In 2018, the public was asked what should be done. I keep thinking of the "talking stone", a lump of grey felt handed around a public meeting organised by Galway county council, which owned the site, in a Tuam hotel. We were asked to hold it and say what we wanted to happen about a mass grave of babies. Options ranged from memorialisation alone to the full forensic excavation happening today. While it was important to talk about it, it also felt surreal and even wrong, with some people asking why the site was not being treated as any other crime scene.

One man described Tuam as "ground zero" and begged: "Dig those bodies up, every one of them, all over the country. Give the children some dignity." Even if one family was able to get an answer, it was worth it. A woman from the housing estate pointed out that she had "no right to tell a survivor you cannot identify where your brother or sister is" and hoped the children would not be left "in a cesspit with just a plaque".

It was survivors, families and all those who wanted the truth for them who fought relentlessly against an ongoing silence from church and state. It was activists such as Izzy Kamikaze, who found an old map showing cesspools in the grounds that were known locally to have included a burial site. Bones had been found sporadically down the years.

As the former Irish president Mary McAleese said about systemic abuse: “We heard it through the media, we heard it through the courage of victims, we heard it through lawyers, we heard it through government. We never really heard it openly, spontaneously from our church.”

I would say we never heard it first from those in power either, even when, in the case of the Tuam children, they had access to the information long before, from earlier investigations.

At a council meeting in the 1960s, an influential politician argued against the impending closure of Tuam, saying, “The county has the benefit of the money spent there.” I reported how a Tuam survivor fostered by the same politician spoke of abuse and exploitation for labour. She died before seeing any justice.

“Our Lord was crucified and so were the women of this country,” PJ Haverty, a Tuam survivor who first took me to the burial site, told me. “The nuns had power, it was all about money and it was all about power.” His mother had gone to the nuns day after day trying to get her baby back.

Tuam was just one in a system of institutions that operated until as recently as 2006, where unmarried pregnant women were sent to give birth, were effectively incarcerated and, in many cases, were forcibly separated from their children: more than 50,000 mothers and more than 50,000 children. A commission of investigation, forced by the news of Tuam, began in 2015 and concluded in 2021, finding that 9,000 children had died in these “homes”. But it called the institutions “refuges” and dismissed survivor testimonies about the inhumanity and abuses. The official redress scheme now excludes thousands of survivors, seemingly to cut costs.

In 2018, during the government press conference announcing the decision to excavate, I was told by the then children’s minister Katherine Zappone that Tuam could set a precedent for other institutions. There are many families still searching for answers. There are also mass graves on the grounds of similar institutions in the UK, the US and Canada. The crimes of the Catholic church are global.

At the memorial last year, Tuam survivor Peter Mulryan told me he didn’t want to sign the legal waiver required for redress, under which recipients agree not to take any further action against the state about their experience, so preventing any legal justice, describing it as “another insult to survivors”. But, at 81, he felt he had no choice and is happy others are taking the case to court. Mulryan was one of many Tuam children “boarded out” to a farm, and he told me he was brutally exploited there, with no justice or redress. His mother was sent to the Galway Magdalene laundry for the rest of her life. Corless found a sister he



never knew about, who had died at Tuam. He has spoken out for most of a decade, hoping to find her.

Religious sisters did speak to me for my book, but were often silenced by superiors or after legal advice. Meanwhile, voices from within the religious right, including the president of the Catholic League in the US, have called Tuam “a hoax”, in a country where reproductive rights are rolled back and Catholic hospitals have increasing influence. The Bon Secours order is part of an international healthcare conglomerate worth billions in the US.

Terry Prone, whose PR firm acted for the Bon Secours Sisters, wrote a now infamous email when the news first broke, calling it the “O my God – mass grave in West of Ireland” story and warning a French TV journalist: “You’ll find no mass grave, no evidence that children were ever so buried.”

Ireland’s mother-and-baby homes are a stain on the Catholic church – but this latest refusal to atone is a new low.

At a reading of my book, a man repeated the hoax claim, even after public photos from the test excavation showed the slits in a huge tank, making any proper burial impossible, the blurred photos of infant bones inside, and a baby’s blue shoe. Despite this, religious and political conservatives in Ireland, rallying against recent progressive changes, have even argued for bringing back such institutions.

From the earliest years, the state knew that “illegitimate” children in these institutions were dying at sometimes five

times the rate of children born within marriage. Death certificates show children dying of malnutrition, or marked as “imbecile”, one boy convulsing for 12 hours before dying. The children’s lives were not valued.

I think of Julia Devaney, a domestic worker in Tuam, who described it in taped interviews as barracks-like, smelling of the wet beds of frightened and deprived children, while nuns treated officials from local authorities to lavish dinners on the grounds. Devaney said a nun who worked there left the Bon Secours because of what she saw. “They knew well that the home was a queer place, ’twas a rotten place,” said Devaney. “I feel a sense of shame that I did not create a war.”

Survivors are still fighting their long battle for truth and justice, hoping similar injustices will never be repeated. I believe that even today church and state perpetuate the silences and inequalities that led to a mass grave of children. This excavation can be a reckoning, a reminder to those in power to listen to those who are owed real accountability: the survivors and the families of the many children who can no longer speak.

Caelainn Hogan is an Irish journalist and the author of Republic of Shame. The Guardian 17/07/2025

## Speaking to the soul

Short reading and a prayer - daily on this site

## Church News Ireland

The publication of Church News Ireland is overseen by Very Rev Dr Houston McKelvey OBE, QVRM, TD. He may be contacted at [houstonmckelvey@mac.com](mailto:houstonmckelvey@mac.com)

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# Church News Ireland

[www.churchnewsireland.org](http://www.churchnewsireland.org)

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early morning**

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