



Image of the day - Hillsborough Castle Gardens

Reports

Pro-life campaigners ready to take legal action over NI abortion rules

Pro-life campaigners are poised to take legal action if the UK government moves forward with plans to expand abortion services across Northern Ireland.

Westminster voted through drastic changes to abortion regulations in the province while Stormont was suspended, but the services are yet to be commissioned.

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Brandon Lewis, is expected to announce the next step in the implementation of the changes on Thursday.

The Abortion (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2021 give Mr Lewis powers to bypass locally elected politicians and direct Stormont ministers - including health minister Robin Swann - to implement a "fully-funded abortion service".

The Society for the Protection of Unborn Children (SPUC) has raised £100,000 towards a judicial review into the validity of what it calls a "devolution power grab" by Westminster.

While the legal action is not scheduled to take place until October, SPUC said it was "ready to go to court within hours" to stop Mr Lewis issuing directions before the case can be heard.

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The Northern Ireland Office has responded to the threat by saying fresh legal action would be "inappropriate and unnecessary" because abortion services will not be commissioned until next year.

In a letter, it said, "The immediate effect of the direction will be that work needs to be carried out by the Department of Health before services will be commissioned in practical terms and the direction will take account of the commissioning time required.

"The direction will therefore result in the commissioning of those services some time in 2022 rather than in the immediate period prior to the currently listed hearing date.

"Although the direction does make provision for interim services this only includes ongoing support for the services which are already in place in Northern Ireland and as such maintains the status quo rather than changes it ... an application for interim relief is unnecessary, and if made should be refused."

In a letter to Mr Swann, SPUC's lawyers urge him not to act on any directions from Mr Lewis until the completion of the judicial review. It also asks him not to act without approval from the Executive Committee.

Liam Gibson, SPUC's NI Political Officer said: "If this power grab by the Westminster Government is allowed to stand it will condemn to death an untold number of unborn babies and also fatally undermine the devolution settlement.

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"London is stripping locally elected Ministers of power and denying the people an accountable government with a democratic mandate.

"The situation means that enormous powers have been vested in a politician who is not answerable to the people of Northern Ireland."

John Deighan, SPUC's deputy CEO added: "These are the most challenging times the pro-life movement has ever faced in Northern Ireland.

"We need the prayers of pro-life supporters and their financial assistance too as we seek to raise the funds required to finance these court cases."

Tearfund appoints new International Director - Cork based

Tearfund has appointed Veena O'Sullivan as its new International Director.

She will take up her new role on 19 July, overseeing the evangelical aid agency's international work.

Originally from India, she lives in Cork, Ireland, with her family, where she will be based for her new post, although the position will involve spending a significant amount of time at regional offices.

Veena has been with Tearfund since 2000, when she joined as desk officer for India.



Veena O'Sullivan

She then led Tearfund's HIV work globally, and was involved in peacebuilding and projects aimed at ending sexual and gender based violence.

Most recently, she led Tearfund's regional programmes in Asia.

Tearfund CEO, Nigel Harris, said: "We were blessed with an outstanding shortlist of candidates, but believe that Veena's love of Tearfund, commitment to integral mission, passion for the church and expertise shaped by twenty years within Tearfund make her the ideal choice for this role.

"She brings a vision to the role that will be hugely exciting in this next season."

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Commenting on her new position, Veena spoke of the additional challenges that have been brought on by Covid-19.

"This pandemic season has brought huge challenges for people living in poverty all around the world," she said.

"During this time the global church has shown its incredible capacity for generosity, hospitality and compassion. But even before Covid-19, at Tearfund we knew the strength of this grassroots network of faith based communities playing key roles as caregivers, educators and activists.

"Faith leaders have a unique opportunity to use their sphere of influence to speak up against injustice and for those living in poverty.

"Tearfund's approach involves equipping and partnering with churches and communities who, like us, are determined to see an end to extreme poverty and injustice. It's a privilege to play a part in this vital work."

Pandemic leaves 10,000 British children orphaned

More than 12,000 children in Britain have either been orphaned or lost a caregiver due to the pandemic, a study has found.

Almost 10,000 of these are children who have been orphaned – defined as a person under the age of 18 who

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has experienced the death of one or both parents, the figures show.

An international team of researchers from the US Center for Disease Control (CDC), Imperial College London and the University of Oxford, among others, compiled the report using data from 21 countries that account for 77 per cent of all Covid deaths.

They calculated that around 1.5 million children had lost a parent, grandparent or caregiver as a direct result of the pandemic in the 14 months between March last year and April this year.

“For every two Covid-19 deaths worldwide, one child is left behind to face the death of a parent or caregiver,” said Dr Susan Hills, study lead author from the CDC. The researchers based their methodology on a similar study that estimates the number of children orphaned due to Aids.



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They built a model that took into account people who had died as a direct result of contracting Covid, but also excess deaths as a result of lockdowns, such as the inability to receive treatment for new and existing health problems.

Researchers used estimates of populations, family dynamics, fertility rates and death rates to calculate how many fatalities were because of Covid and also affected a child.

It is the first time that experts have managed to estimate how the pandemic has affected the number of orphans.

They were able to calculate numbers, by nation, for how many children were orphaned (death of one or both parents); lost their primary caregiver (death of a custodian or grandparent if the parents are not around); or experienced the death of a secondary caregiver (a grandparent who lived with the child, but was not the main carer).

It revealed that 1.56 million children had lost someone in at least one category and a quarter (27 per cent) were secondary caregivers, where the children still had an adult to depend on. But Covid killed the primary caregiver of 1.14 million children worldwide, and 1.04 million were orphaned, the figures show.

The researchers warned that the figures were a “lower estimate” and the true figure could be one order of magnitude higher because of the under-reporting of deaths.

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Peru was the country hardest hit with more than 92,000 children being orphaned, compared with 9,595 in the United Kingdom.

The report is published in The Lancet.

People and places

Larne parish hosts mobile vaccination clinic



Northern Ireland's First Minister, Paul Givan, and Health Minister, Robin Swann, visited the mobile vaccination clinic in the Inver Hall, St Cedma's Parish, Larne, on Thursday July 15.

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The venue was one of a number of appointment-free pop-up clinics established across Northern Ireland as part of a push to get younger people vaccinated.

All clinics are offering first doses of the Covid-19 vaccine to anyone over 18.

The clinic in Larne was open from 5pm to 8pm, and those who received their vaccinations in the Inver Hall will be able to return for their second vaccination on Thursday August 26 (times to be confirmed).

Pictured with the Government Ministers are Bob McCann, Chair of the Northern Health and Social Services Trust, and Fiona O'Neill, site co-ordinator, and the rector of St Cedma's, the Rev David Lockhart.

Following the official visit in the hall, the First Minister asked to see around St Cedma's Church which the rector said he was very pleased to facilitate.

Barbecues and picnics!

Parishes in Down & Dromore are making the most of the opportunity to host events outside.

Last Sunday 18 July, a brilliant time was had by all at the Community BBQ and Fun Day held in the grounds of St Martin's off the lower Newtownards Road.

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The fun and food was hosted by The Gathering Belfast, the diocesan church plant in Titanic Parish which is led by Ross Munro.

Next up for The Gathering, a church picnic in Carnfunnock Country Park near Larne.

Sinclair Seaman's Presbyterian Church

Sinclair Seaman's Presbyterian Church (1858) is set in Corporation Square in Belfast's dockland, beside the recently filled in (1848) Ritchie's Dock. It was planned as a Mariner's Church, for visiting seamen, and built at a cost of £4500, mostly paid for by the Sinclair family as a memorial to John Sinclair of the provisions firm J & T Sinclair. It replaced an earlier interdenominational chapel in nearby Pilot Street known as the Bethel, built by the Seamen's Friendly Society, which the Presbyterians had taken over in 1848.

It was designed by Lanyon, Lynn & Lanyon; built in Scrabo stone with the tall Italianate campanile tower prominent in the surrounding area.

The church is of unique interest due to the interior, mostly the work of Rev. Samuel Cochrane (minister 1902 -45). The pulpit is in the shape of a ship's prow, flanked by chronometers and navigation lights from a Guinness barge. The font is an adapted compass binnacle. The church is adorned by many other nautical artefacts including model ships, lighthouses, collection boxes in the shape of lifeboats etc. The inner porch with Arts and Craft style leaded lights was added in 1927.

Poem For Today

When All the Others Were Away at Mass

By Seamus Heaney

When all the others were away at Mass
I was all hers as we peeled potatoes.
They broke the silence, let fall one by one
Like solder weeping off the soldering iron:
Cold comforts set between us, things to share
Gleaming in a bucket of clean water.
And again let fall. Little pleasant splashes
From each other's work would bring us to our senses.

So while the parish priest at her bedside
Went hammer and tongs at the prayers for the dying
And some were responding and some crying
I remembered her head bent towards my head,
Her breath in mine, our fluent dipping knives-
Never closer the whole rest of our lives.

Opinion

Amnesty plan is so flawed it's hard to know where to start - Alban Maginness

LEGACY PROPOSALS WOULD SHAME THE CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY

In releasing its contentious legacy proposals, the British Government has defied the law of political gravity in Northern Ireland and has succeeded — for the first time — in unifying all the leading political parties here against their outrageous plans.

Accompanying this unprecedented political unity, there has been a huge outburst of visceral anger by all sorts of victims' groups and the relatives of those who suffered the murder of their loved ones during the Troubles, whether they were killed by soldiers, or paramilitaries.

Besides a general distrust of Boris Johnson, people realise that, by introducing a de facto amnesty for former members of the Army, as well as ex-paramilitaries, their basic right to justice through the courts will be removed.

Many people are aware that it is only in exceptionally rare cases that there would be an actual trial; nonetheless, they still do not want that theoretical possibility to disappear.

The families of victims see this as a point of principle that should be upheld, not compromised.

For most of us, justice has no time limit.

People also believe that Boris Johnson is engaged in a cynical political exercise, not designed to advance the interests of victims, or their families, but rather to protect from prosecution a tiny number of veteran soldiers in England.

And, in doing this, he is pandering to the populist campaign of the Daily Mail to protect these retired squaddies from what is improperly termed vexatious prosecution.

This is a totally bogus term, as no court in the land would ever tolerate the vexatious prosecution of any citizen.

The Prime Minister is anxious to hold on to all those ex-Labour seats in England that the Tories, surprisingly, won in the last election.

To provide a way out for these veterans will go down well in those marginal constituencies and consolidate the Tory vote. While the headline reports about these proposals concerned the egregious amnesty proposal, there are two other areas that have caused major concern.

These are the ending all legacy inquests and the ending of all civil claims against the British Government in Troubles-related cases. This goes for inquests, or civil cases that have already commenced.

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In both instances, there will be formidable difficulties in implementing these proposals, because they involve complex legal and human rights issues.

As far as legacy inquests are concerned, they arise out of the European Convention on Human Rights. Under Article 2 — that is the right to life — such inquests into controversial killings have to be compliant with the Convention, in so far as they are thorough, effective investigations that secure meaningful accountability.

In other words, under human rights law you cannot simply abolish them. Despite Brexit, the UK is still a signatory to the ECHR and is subject to the decisions of the court in Strasbourg. It was that court's case law that shaped and formed what we know as legacy inquests.

In addition, for the past 20 years, the courts in the UK have been subject to the Human Rights Act and, therefore, will apply the same sort of human rights tests as the Strasbourg court.

Therefore, it is hard to imagine the UK Supreme Court agreeing to the abolition of legacy inquests.

As far as civil actions against the state are concerned, it is a basic right at common law to take these actions.

Nobody under the law should be deprived of a legal remedy and, therefore, the wholesale abolition of these cases, especially those that are commenced, or at hearing, would contravene that basic right.

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If that were made law, albeit confined to Troubles cases, this would amount to a very serious assault by the Government on the rights and liberties of citizens here.

In a major intervention, Barra McGrory QC, the former DPP, has been scathing: “This is a shocking proposal... in that it seeks to abolish completely all meaningful and judicial accounting processes.”

And he warned: “This is a step that would abolish an historical and ancient judicial process by which controversial deaths can be examined and the legality of that is very questionable.”

If these proposals were introduced by the Chinese Communist government, the British Conservative party would be up in arms about the blatant abrogation of human rights in China.

It is no exaggeration to say that these plans would make even Stalin blush.

It is, therefore, gratifying that all the Stormont parties are against these proposals, in particular the de facto amnesty for soldiers and paramilitaries. We can only hope that this strong, united opposition will derail them.

First Minister Paul Givan, who looks and sounds confident in his new position, has rightly appealed to the other Stormont parties to “engage collectively to oppose the plans”. As it stands, this bird will not fly.

Courtesy The Belfast Telegraph 21. 07.2021

churchnewsireland@gmail.org

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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.

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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.

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 sorrow, 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.

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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

For you have been given not only the privilege of trusting in Christ but also the privilege of suffering for him. We are in this struggle together. You have seen my struggle in the past, and you know that I am still in the midst of it.

Philippians 1:29-30 NLT

We don't know the exact nature of the problems in the Philippian church. It had been planted in a hostile environment and was led by new Christians who were probably still trying to get their heads around Christian doctrine and practice. I often hear people say that it would be good if we could get back to being like the early church, but I'm not so sure. The early church may have had the blessing of newness and enthusiasm, but they battled with many critical problems that we would never have to face, and we have huge resources of Christian experience and literature to draw upon.

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Paul offered the Philippian church the huge encouragement that they were not alone. They were in this struggle together. Paul knew exactly what they were going through and they had had the benefit of seeing him at work. They knew what a struggle he had had, and were also aware that he continued to be up against huge challenges.

To use a much-used word these days Paul empathised. He could enter into the experience that they were going through.

From time to time I hear people say that they don't need to go to church because they can worship perfectly well in their back garden. I am, of course, absolutely delighted that their garden is so inspirational but nothing can take the place of Christian fellowship. We need one another. To be sure, churches aren't perfect, and they are often agonisingly imperfect, but sharing life with frail human beings just like ourselves is exactly what we need. As we go through the challenges and awkwardness of life we need, just like the Philippians, to hear someone say to us "we're in this struggle together".

QUESTION

When have you been particularly aware of the empathy and support of other Christians?

PRAYER

Loving God, thank you for the blessing of Christian fellowship. Amen

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