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CNI
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Image of the day - A Queen's University dog

Front page photo of QUB dog - It was claimed in social media that the dog was reading pawlitics...

Reports

Faith leaders share their dreams for the future in Dublin Ecumenical Bible Week

Faith leaders from different backgrounds had the opportunity to share their dreams for the future of their faith at this year's Ecumenical Bible Week 'Thinking Allowed' event.

The result was a hugely varied evening of thought provoking contributions with everything from prayer, mission and culture to climate change, reconciliation and God's call in the pandemic up for discussion.

The question posed for the evening was: "What is your personal dream of faith into the future?" It was addressed by Archbishop Dermot Farrell, the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin; Archbishop Michael Jackson, the Church of Ireland Archbishop of Dublin; the Revd Lorraine Kennedy-Ritchie, Minister of Clontarf and Scots Presbyterian Church; Rabbi Dr Charles Middleburgh, Rabbi of the Dublin Jewish Progressive Congregation; Sr Liz Murphy, Sisters of Mercy and former Secretary General of AMRI; and the Revd Dr Sahr Yambasu, President of the Methodist Church in Ireland and Superintendent of St Patrick's Waterford Circuit. The chairperson of the panel was the Revd Alan Boal, Minister of Abbey Presbyterian Church.

‘You hope the world will be transformed’

Archbishop Dermot Farrell opened proceedings with the observation that faith was the substance of things hoped for and the realities of the unseen. He said he was living his faith in a culture that did not share his faith and this demanded courage and strength and involved having to bear witness to God in society. The challenge for him was to bring the Gospel to the people – people in the parishes, in culture, to people who didn’t know Christ and to people who may find it difficult to live their lives in the Good News. But he said the Apostles in the Upper Room were able to go out and spread the Gospel in much more hostile circumstances.

Archbishop Farrell said. “Sometimes I feel vulnerable and weak. But sometimes God does his best work when I am out of the way. Faith for me is a response to God. [...] Faith gives me a framework or contest for understanding various aspects of my life. The heart of faith is not the words formulated but God speaks to me through the power of the Spirit.”

Faith must embed outside the church

Archbishop Michael Jackson said there was little point in dreaming about faith into the future without acquainting yourself with faith in the past adding that the contemporary church was too hung up on short term gains without a real sense or understanding of long term goals. This meant that it kept inventing work for itself when it needed to trust to God.



He added that faith would have to embed outside the church. “A dream I have is that talk of God might somehow become talk in the world. There are many ways in which this can happen: ecology, social justice, community cohesion, engaging with the Stranger both of us as equals, citizenship,” he said.

Inside the church, he said that learning and teaching was important in the way that they take place in Judaism, Islam and Hinduism. “It is called: the school; or today the educational and cultural centres which say:

Come and see us; ask us anything and let us talk! And, by the way: Please stay to have something to eat! My dream would be that people of faith speak of God in a way that is attractive and infectious and learn and teach by means of parables,” Archbishop Jackson stated.

Finding opportunities for faith for the future

Sr Liz Murphy turned to the Roman God Janus to highlight the importance of looking to the past as well as the future.

Looking forward she cited theologian Karl Rahner who talked about the need to find opportunities for growth and faith for the generations coming behind us. She suggested that the role of women, digital literacy, opportunities coming out of the awfulness of Covid, the value of symbols and rituals could be sources of faith. She said faith could be found with artists, poets, storytellers and songwriter; with activists; in Christian mysticism; and in memories of the past.

‘We are not masters of the world’

The Revd Dr Sahr Yambasu explained that where he grew up people are born into a society of faith, nurtured in that faith and grow up in faith. One of the values learned was that everything was interrelated and everyone was important. In the west, he discovered, many people wanted to define him by his activities, by the speed in which he did them and the things he acquired in doing them. “I catch myself and say ‘your value does not exist in your achievements or your speed or in comparing yourself with others. That was impressed more and more in Covid times. Suddenly it occurred to me that it had to take an invisible virus to reflect and know that we are not masters of the world and not in control of this world... As I go into the future I go reminding myself that I or no one else is a master of the universe, only God. Our value is not decided by the sum total of our activities or achievements. My personal dream is

that we would know this fact and live it accordingly,” he stated.

‘A waking nightmare looming’

Rabbi Dr Charles Middleburgh shared his vision for the future which he termed a “waking nightmare looming ever larger before us all”. He said that due to humanity’s wanton abuse of the planet, our world faces catastrophe of a kind that will make our perceived powerlessness in the pandemic seem like nothing at all. Citing the devastating impacts of rising sea levels and temperatures, he predicted that millions would migrate to Europe resulting in terrible conflict.

“The Abrahamic Faiths have a lot to answer for in this regard, gifting believers with the idea that the planet and all that is in it was put there for human benefit. We are all guilty of crimes against the planet and it is high time we acted concertedly to try and make amends,” he stated. “Nothing less than a global alliance of the faiths, working with the faithful to mitigate as far as is possible the most egregious of our past actions is acceptable. Failure to do this will result in disaster for billions of people, and the structures of faith will be collateral damage, and deservedly so.”

‘The Lord is rousing our spirits’

Bringing the presentations to a close, the Revd Lorraine Kennedy–Ritchie said she grew up in a part of the world that will only get access to the vaccine in three years’ time. But she said that the Lord was using the pandemic to call us back to being present in our circumstances. “The Lord is

rousing our spirit and calling us back as his people of faith. We need the institutional framework.

There needs to be governance. But he is calling us, rousing our spirits to flourish where we are planted in the midst of the pandemic,” she commented. “I am experiencing this pandemic with members of my family in West Africa, South Africa and Ireland. The pandemic is challenging us in how we respond as citizens, human beings and members of communities. The Church has suddenly taken on a meaning that was not present before.”

Church of England looks to 10,000 lay-led parishes to attract worshippers

Plans to establish up to 10,000 new predominantly lay-led churches over the next 10 years are among controversial proposals to attract congregants.

The plan is among the ambitious targets to be discussed at the General Synod, the Church of England’s legislative body, which will begin its sessions on Friday.

The plans have led to disquiet among some Christians, who have criticised them as a “cost-cutting” exercise, arguing that lay people, who are not ordained, are no substitute for priests.

They raised their concerns amid a decline in church attendance, which fell by between 15 and 20 per cent from 2009 to 2019. A typical church has an average weekly attendance of 31.

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On Monday, the Archbishop of York, the Rt Rev Stephen Cottrell, will deliver an update on “Vision and Strategy”, his blueprint for the Church over the next decade.

Last year, he drew criticism for his project over accusations that he was

“dismantling the parish church system”, despite his stated aim being to “expand, reimagine and revitalise” it.

Under the latest plans outlined in a General Synod paper entitled “Simpler, Humbler, Bolder”, officials reiterated the aims for “a revitalised parish system within which new and inherited worshipping communities flourish together”.

“We think this could result in 10,000 new communities starting by 2030, reaching people in all spheres of their life – home and local community, work and education, social and digital,” the paper reads.

“To do this would mean that most churches and all dioceses would start something new to reach people in their contexts.”



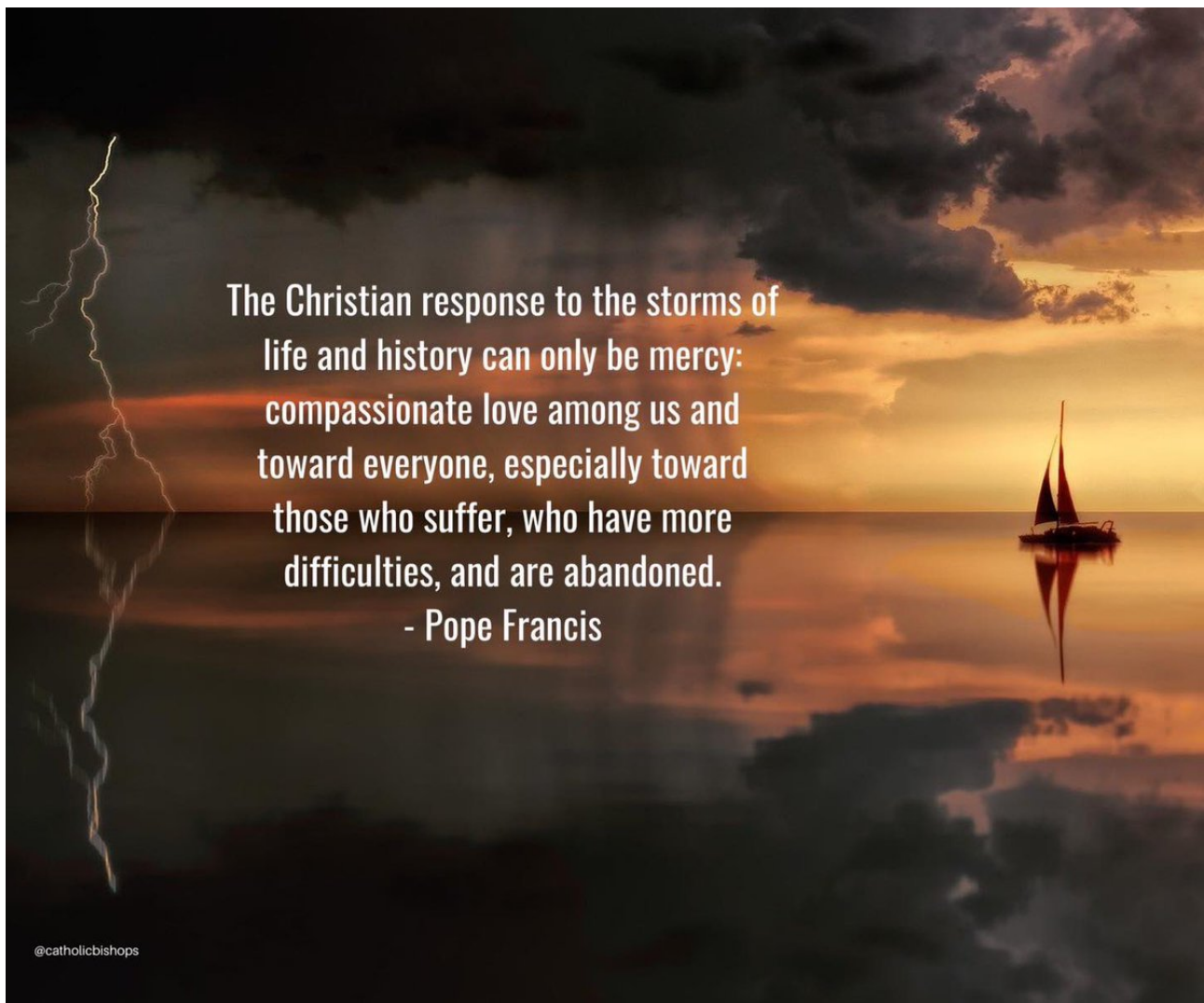
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Responding to the proposals, Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali, the former Bishop of Rochester, said: “It’s important to have ordained ministry in every church.

“We need their leadership, faith, and ability to liaise with the wider church.”

One rural parish volunteer, who did not want to be named, said: “There is some success in groovy evangelical churches. But we don’t know if that will last. This plan is basically condemning the parishes to die.”

Canon John McGinley, who is leading the initiative, said that many of the 10,000 churches would start small, and some



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would remain as 20 or 30 people meeting in a home. The definition of a church was “tight”, he said: “It must proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, have regular worship, be open to everyone and sacramental, and have more than 20 people.”

Dave Male, head of evangelism and discipleship at the Church of England, said: “We expect that most of these new groups will arise from existing parishes and so would be under the oversight of clergy even if meetings are not directly led by the parish priest.”

See also Opinion in this issue. Gilles Fraser comments.
31 - The average number of weekly worshippers at a typical church after a ten-year decline in attendance

C of E Bishops back women's Down's Syndrome legal challenge

The Archbishop of York, Stephen Cottrell, together with the Bishop of Carlisle, James Newcome, the Church of England's lead bishop for health and social care, and the Bishop of Newcastle, Christine Hardman, said people with disability should be “valued, respected and cherished”.

The “#downrightdiscrimination” campaign led by Heidi Carter (née Crowter) and Máire Lea-Wilson argues that the law discriminates in its treatment of people with Down's Syndrome. The bishops said: “The Church of England has consistently argued that the law on abortion is discriminatory on two counts.

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“In the first instance, it permits abortions to be carried out solely on the basis of disability; secondly, it removes the twenty-four week time limit for abortions in cases of disability.

"We do not believe that such discrimination, founded on the probability of disability, is justifiable.

“There is something profoundly disturbing in our current contradictory stance which says that people living with disability are valued, respected and cherished, but that disability in and of itself represents a valid ground for abortion.

“It is right that this should be scrutinised by the Courts and we commend Heidi Crowter and Máire Lea-Wilson for bringing their challenge to the High Court while continuing to recognise that Parliament has within its powers the ability to end this discriminatory practice.”

In February 2018 the Church of England’s General Synod unanimously backed a motion call for people with Down's Syndrome to be welcomed, celebrated and treated with dignity and respect.

Pope Francis sets his sights on a visit to North Korea

Talks are under way with intelligence officials over a papal trip to Pyongyang, says Vatican news agency

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Pope Francis is reportedly planning one of his most audacious trips yet – to North Korea.

Pope Francis has a record of trips to countries he feels are neglected and has expressed sympathy for Korea

It would be the first ever papal trip to the so-called “Hermit Kingdom”.

One of the themes of Francis’s papacy has been his eagerness to reach out to what he calls “the periphery” – relatively obscure countries with small or even non-existent Catholic communities.

Among the smaller nations he has visited are Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Paraguay and the Central African Republic.

The 84-year-old pope is recuperating from an operation on his colon, performed by doctors in Rome on Sunday. However, his willingness to travel to distant destinations appears to be undiminished.

The Vatican announced this week that the Argentinian pontiff will visit Hungary and Slovakia in September and now comes word that he has his sights set on North Korea.

The head of South Korea’s intelligence services is working on a possible visit by the pope, according to Fides, a Vatican news agency.



Park Jie-won is to meet Archbishop Alfred Xuereb, the Vatican's ambassador in South Korea, to discuss a papal visit to Pyongyang, the north's capital.

It is not the first time the prospect of Pope Francis travelling to North Korea has been discussed. During an audience at the Vatican in 2018 with Moon Jae-in, the South Korean president, Pope Francis expressed his willingness to visit the north of the divided peninsula.

Mr Moon, who was on a tour of Europe at that time, passed on a “verbal invitation” from Kim Jong-un, the North Korean “Supreme Leader”.

However, plans for an apostolic visit fell through after talks between Mr Jong-un and Donald Trump, the then US president, broke down in Hanoi in 2019.

Monsignor Lazzaro You Heung-sik, the bishop of Daejeon in central South Korea, said: “I’m convinced that a possible

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visit to Pyongyang could represent a turning point, which would allow us Koreans to dialogue and understand each other better, and perhaps even reach the reunification of the South and the North.”

Pope Francis has previously expressed his sympathy with Korean families who have been separated for the past 70 years since the peninsula was divided after the Korean War but no pope has ever visited North Korea and there are no diplomatic relations between the Vatican and Pyongyang.

A Vatican spokesman would neither confirm nor deny that planning for a visit was under way, merely noting that the pope is “currently hospitalised” and recovering from his operation.

One of the few foreigners to have struck up a rapport with Kim Jong-un is Dennis Rodman, the former US basketball star. “We ride horses, we sing karaoke, we go skiing ... we do a lot of cool things,” he said in one interview. “For some reason he likes me, he trusts me.”

People and places

Model pupils of Dunmanway raise funds for charity and awareness of climate change

A sponsored walk by pupils of a historic school in west Cork has raised more than €300 for Christian Aid



Ireland and highlighted the impact of climate change on some of the world's poorest people.

Children at the Model School in Dunmanway (Photo above) walked around the grounds of their school for 5 kms while carrying a basin or bucket, symbolising the long journeys made by women and girls in drought-affected regions, in search of water.

Their walk was inspired by Rose Jonathan (68), a widowed grandmother from the Kitui

region of eastern Kenya where severe drought and a changing climate mean that she must spend up to seven hours a day walking to fetch water for her family and livestock. Rose has been the sole carer for her six

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grandchildren since her husband died and her daughters moved to the city for work.

In the rural areas of many African countries, it falls to women and girls to collect water for their families and farm animals, and in drought-affected regions this can involve long and often dangerous journeys on foot. In Kenya, Christian Aid is responding to the crisis by funding the building of earth dams (low-tech community ponds) which capture and store water when the rains do come.

Andrew Coleman, Christian Aid Ireland's Bandon-based Church and Community Officer, said: "The Model School in Dunmanway is rightly proud of its most famous past-pupil, Sam Maguire, after whom Gaelic football's most prestigious trophy is named. But we reckon they should be just as proud of this generation of young people for their compassion for those on the frontline of the climate crisis.

"Our thanks go to all the children and their parents as well as their teacher Mrs Buckley. We don't have a silver cup to give you but in our eyes, you're champions!"

Books, broadcasts, resources, and Webinars

Live @ Five with 'The Wondrous Machine'

The Wondrous Machine series of recitals at St Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin, continues with eight further concerts given by Cathedral Organists David Leigh and Stuart

July 9 · Stuart Nicholson

William Walton

Coronation March 'Orb & Sceptre'

Felix Mendelssohn

Nocturne & Scherzo

from A Midsummer Night's Dream op.61

Johann Sebastian Bach

Prelude and Fugue in E^b *bwv.552*

Percy Whitlock

Canzona & Scherzetto

from Sonata in C minor

Johann Strauss II

Overture: Die Fledermaus *op.362*

July 16 · Stuart Nicholson

Johann Sebastian Bach

Prelude and Fugue in B minor *bwv.541*

Joseph Rheinberger

Introduction & Passacaglia *op.132*

from Sonata no.8 in E minor

Percy Whitlock

Fantasie Choral no.2

Henri Mulet

Carillon Sortie

July 23 · David Leigh

Marcel Dupré

Three Preludes and Fugues *op.72*

Five Antiphons from *op.18*

Choral et Fugue *op.57*

July 30 · David Leigh

Marcel Dupré

Three Preludes and Fugues *op.36*

Symphonie – Passion *op.23*

August 6 · David Leigh

Marcel Dupré

Triptych *op.51*

Sept Pièces *op.27*

August 13 · David Leigh

Marcel Dupré

Suite Op.39

Movements from

Le Tombeau de Titelouze

Suite Bretonne *op.21*

Paraphrase sur le Te deum *op.43*

20 August · David Leigh

Marcel Dupré

Cortège et Litanie *op.19*

Miserere Mei *op.46*

Lamento *op.24*

Psalm 18 *op.47*

27 August · David Leigh

Marcel Dupré

Deux Esquisses *op.41*

Troisième Esquisse

Movements from

Le Tombeau de Titelouze

Le Vitrail de St Ouen *op.65*

Souvenir *op.65 ii*

The Wondrous Machine
Live@Five! Summer 2021

Tune in online by visiting our website
www.stpatrickscathedral.ie/live_at_five

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Nicholson every Friday during the summer months at 5.00pm.

The Cathedral had hoped to be able to let listeners into the Cathedral to enjoy these concerts live in the building, sadly, for the time being at least, we must continue these recitals online. If restrictions permit then a small number of tickets will be released as and when possible.

Click here to view these concerts online
www.stpatrickscathedral.ie/live-at-five

Opinion - The C of E is abandoning its flock - Giles Fraser

The CofE's great leap forward will cull clergy and abandon parishioners

“We don’t preach morality, we plant churches. We don’t preach therapeutic care, we plant churches.” Justin Welby, July 2021

There are some forms of Christianity that exist only in order to reproduce. Christians are here to make new Christians who, in turn, are called to go out there and make even more new ones. The purpose of church life is to beget more church life. Randy for converts, these good shepherds admire the sheep in the pews principally for their reproductive qualities. And you can tell it’s these sorts of Christians that are now running the show in the Church of England, because those of us who are deemed to be infertile or firing evangelistic blanks are being slated for the knacker’s yard. The latest group to be targeted for a cull are the clergy themselves. In more senses than one, we are

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being directed to Genesis chapter nine, verse seven: “Go forth and multiply!”

The new growth strategy from head office is code named Myriad, Greek for ten thousand. The idea is to have 10,000 new churches by 2030, creating a million new disciples. Don't worry about the figures too much, they are nothing more than fantasy numbers plucked from the sky. As a general rule, church growth is inversely proportional to the big talk coming from head office. Of course, we are all supposed to nod along, as if this is some fabulous, exciting initiative. As Martyn Percy, the Dean of the Cathedral in Oxford, explained, it's becoming a bit like one of those Stalinist 10-year plans, something we are all obliged to cheer, yet one that is totally disconnected to reality.

The latest Great Leap Forward for the C of E looks like this. Get rid of all those crumbling churches. Get rid of the clergy. Do away with all that expensive theological education. These are all “limiting factors”. Instead, focus relentlessly on young people. Growth, Young People, Forwards. Purge the church of all those clapped-out clergy pottering about in their parishes. Forget the Eucharist, or at least, put those who administer it on some sort of zero hours contract. Sell their vicarages. This is what our new shepherds want in their prize sheep: to be young, dumb, and full of evangelistic... zeal.

You think I am over-stating the matter? This is how Canon John McGinley recently explained the thinking behind Myriad:

“Lay-led churches release the church from key limiting factors. When you don't need a building and a stipend and

long, costly college-based training for every leader of the church ... then we can release new people to lead and new churches to form. It also releases the discipleship of people. In church planting, there are no passengers.”

Project Myriad, or something like it, has been in the wings for several decades. When I was first a priest it was called The Decade of Evangelism. It was an embarrassing disaster. And throughout my time, there is always another tiresomely new initiative on the go with some enthusiastic sounding name like Springboard. Most of my clergy friends inwardly groan when they hear of yet another exciting new strategy.

But Covid has finally given its proponents the opportunity they need. When the Archbishop of Canterbury decided to celebrate and broadcast the Eucharist on Easter Day 2020 from his kitchen, rather than popping down a few stairs to Lambeth Palace’s fine 13th-century chapel, he was clearly making a point: all those old stones are holding us back, they are unnecessary. It’s called “a new way of being church”. Our new churches will meet in people’s homes, not in churches. Around 20-30 will gather in the living rooms of the wealthiest people in the parish — who else has a living room that can sit this many people?

Of course, the shepherds know that many of the sheep don’t like the direction in which they are being led. The recent revolt of the Diocese of Winchester against their Bishop is a case in point. They threatened a vote of no confidence and he has stepped back from ministry. As Jeremy Clarkson has recently discovered, sheep can be remarkably bolshy creatures with a mind of their own. So, inevitably, the shepherds are trying to calm their flock with soothing words.

We want a mixed economy church, they say. We are not seeking to send unproductive clergy to the knacker's yard. We are not wanting to sell off your medieval church to be converted into yuppie flats. This isn't about replacing the organ with the overhead projector or clearing out the books from the Vicar's Study and replacing them with office equipment. Let many flowers bloom, they say.

But that is not how it works in practice. Follow the money. Parish churches are being stripped of their clergy. The Diocese of Chelmsford is culling 61 posts by 2021 with a further 49 under threat by 2026. Others are following suit. But as these "limiting factor" clergy are being culled, central funds are being directed towards new evangelistic initiatives through what is called Strategic Development Funding from the £9 billion piggy bank held by the fabulously wealthy Church Commissioners. Dioceses can now apply for money from a £45-million pot set aside to support this new look C of E. And many of the new jobs that are being funded are not for parish-based clergy, but for a whole new level of managers with new-fangled titles like assistant archdeacon and mission enablers. This is the mechanism by which the church is being transformed. Even those Bishops that want to resist this dismantling of traditional structures are being out manoeuvred.

Perhaps the most sinister phrase in Canon McGinley's lecture is the disparagement of "passengers". If you go to church to sit at the back, say your prayers, listen to the sermon and receive the Eucharist, or if you are bruised and just looking for a place of healing, that means you. If you are not a part of the great push forward, you are just so much baggage. Little wonder there is now a white-hot anger within

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the rank and file of the priesthood. Consider this from the former Dean of Exeter Cathedral, Jonathan Draper.

“It is ironic, of course, that these proposals are being pushed by those who have both presided over the church’s decline and had the long and expensive theological education which they would jettison. There is nothing from the leadership of the church that reflects on their own part in decline, their own ineptitude, bullying, sense of entitlement, and in the failure to connect with the very people they would like to see fill the houses of the sufficiently wealthy in this brave new ecclesial world.”

I have never seen this level of fury from within the church during my 25 years as a priest.

So, what is the answer? After all, the proponents of evangelism first do have a point – the Church of England is dying fast. First, I would say that all efforts to put evangelism first are self-defeating. The Church feels like a gauche teenage boy going out to the pub deliberately to find a girlfriend, covering himself with cheap aftershave and rehearsing his unconvincing chat-up lines. It’s all so cringeworthy and needy. The way you make yourself attractive to others is by being fully yourself, and having confidence in what you are – even if that is a little strange and different. It’s when you stop obsessing about attracting others that you become more attractive to them.

But also, the church is not called to be successful. It is called to be faithful. I would prefer for us to die with dignity, being faithful to our calling, rather than to turn ourselves inside out trying to be superficially attractive, thus abandoning the faith as we have understood it. Indeed, the

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Bible is full of stores of the faithful remnant. In Biblical theology, the remnant are those faithful people that survive some catastrophe. Today, these are the people who come to church, faithfully to say their prayers — people of devotion and not necessarily of evangelistic vim and vigour. They are the beating heart of the parish. Eleanor Rigby, Father McKenzie: these are my heroes. And long term, these are our most effective evangelists. I am deeply offended that they are now called passengers.

Secularisation is indeed a catastrophe for the churches. But we won't outlast this period of history by being more business-like or by adopting slicker models of evangelistic marketing. We won't be saved by panicky spread-sheet evangelists, Indeed, we must be more of what we have been called to be – more thoughtful, more prayerful, less fearful, more obedient to God's call. We are resurrection people after all. Institutional death should hold out no terror for the faithful. And it will only be this lack of fear that can make us attractive once again.

Courtesy of the author. Posted on his web site Un Heard

Giles Fraser is a journalist, broadcaster and Rector at the south London church of St Mary's, Newington

Pointers for prayer

Grant, O Lord, we beseech thee,
that the course of this world
may be so peaceably ordered by thy governance,

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that thy Church may joyfully serve thee
in all godly quietness;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Guardian of the weak,
through the teachings of your prophets
you have claimed our cities, towns, and homes
as temples of your presence and citadels of your justice.
Turn the places we live into strongholds of your grace,
that the most vulnerable
as well as the most powerful among us
may find peace in the security
that comes in the strong name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

God of grace and powerful weakness,
at times your projects were ignored, rejected, belittled, and
unwelcome.
Trusting that we, too, are called to be prophets,
fill us with your Spirit,
and support us by your gentle hands,
that we may persevere in speaking your word
and living our faith. Amen.

O God,
sustain us in the complexity of our humanity
as you sustained David--
playing the harp of youth,
throwing stones at giant problems,
loving our friends beyond wisdom,
dancing worship,
mourning children,
breaking our hearts in psalms, and
longing for warmth in our old bones. Amen.

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Friend in Christ,
God invites us to hold the needs of our sisters and brothers
as dear to us as our own needs.
Loving our neighbours as ourselves,
we offer our thanksgivings and our petitions
on behalf of the church and the world.

Hear our prayers, God of power,
and through the ministry of your Son
free us from the grip of the tomb,
that we may desire you as the fullness of life
and proclaim your saving deeds to all the world. Amen.

As you heard the prayer of Isaac and Rebekah, O God,
and guided them in the way of your love,
so listen now to those who call upon you.
Move us to praise your gracious will,
for in Christ Jesus you have saved us from the deeds of
death
and opened for us the hidden ways of your love.
We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Lord God, friend of those in need,
your Son Jesus has untied our burdens
and healed our spirits.
We lift up the prayers of our hearts for those still burdened,
those seeking healing,
those in need within the church and the world.
Hear our prayers
that we may love you with our whole being
and willingly share the concerns of our neighbours. Amen.

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Creator God,
you call us to love and serve you
with body, mind, and spirit
through loving your creation
and our sisters and brothers.
Open our hearts in compassion
and receive these petitions
on behalf of the needs of the church and the world.
Holy One,
hear our prayers and make us faithful stewards
of the fragile bounty of this earth
so that we may be entrusted with the riches of heaven.
Amen.

We praise your abiding guidance, O God,
for you sent us Jesus, our Teacher and Messiah,
to model for us the way of love for the whole universe.
We offer these prayers of love
on behalf of ourselves and our neighbours,
on behalf of your creation and our fellow creatures.
Loving God,
open our ears to hear your word
and draw us closer to you,
that the whole world may be one with you
as you are one with us in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Speaking to the Soul

**God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right,
for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.**

Matthew 5:10 NLT

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The life to which Jesus calls us is one of blessing. This is life at its very best. But Jesus never tried to disguise the fact that his followers would face rejection and persecution just as he did. Jesus assures his followers in every age that it is inevitable that if they stand up for the truth, there will be many people who have a vested interest in bringing them down.

Persecution is normally subtle. For the majority of Christians in Eastern Europe during the communist era the challenge was not the likelihood of imprisonment or martyrdom. That happened from time to time for a few, but the ever-present challenge was in education and employment. I recall talking this through at the time with parents in Romania who wanted to know how to help their children at school when they had to sit through atheism classes. Christian children would find it very hard to enter university and because they were not cardcarrying communists they would find it very difficult to find a good job. If they did find a job then, almost always, it would be completely unrelated to their abilities and opportunities for promotion were almost unthinkable. To work hard in an ill-fitting job would need exceptional grace and that was the daily experience of most Christians.

In our society the challenges are very different but they are inevitable. In a society that has long since rejected Christianity, it can be exceptionally hard to speak about personal faith. We will often be accused and even mocked for being out of touch with the way things are these days. To live with a continual barrage of sarcasm is the experience of many Christians and it can be very hard to bear. And if you find yourself in a position where you believe your

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organisation is acting unethically, it can be incredibly tough to stand up for truth and justice.

Jesus is not encouraging us to go looking for persecution and suffering, but rather to be totally unsurprised when it happens.

QUESTION

In what ways have you faced resistance because of your Christian faith?

PRAYER

Loving God, give me your strength day by day so that I will be able to stand strongly for you, whatever the challenges.
Amen

