



**Image of the day -  
Methodist and Anglican unity on Trinity Sunday**

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Photo above - President elect of the Methodist Church in Ireland and the Archbishop of Dublin at Christ Church Cathedral on Trinity Sunday - Photo Scott Hayes

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## **NI churches are not welcoming, say half of survey respondents**

**More than half of people questioned for a report on mental health have claimed that the churches in Northern Ireland are not places of genuine welcome.**

Nearly 80% believe that the churches and faith communities hold views that limit their ability to help those struggling with mental health and wellbeing, Alf McCreary writes in the Belfast Telegraph.

However, all respondents felt that the churches did have an important role to play in promoting good mental health.

Dr Andrew Cunning, director of the Christian organisation Left Side Up which produced its “Call to Action” report, said: “Our publication is designed to challenge the church while equipping and supporting it to do even better in the areas of mental health and wellbeing. In it we spent time in looking at the Bible, the issue of welcome, toxic theologies and alternative spiritual practices.”

Almost 150 people across Northern Ireland were surveyed, including Presbyterians, Anglicans, Baptists, Methodists, Catholics and members of the Vineyard Church.

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Three-quarters of these were women, 32% are leaders in the churches and faith communities, 86% are heterosexual and 13% are LGBT. Ages range from 18 to 65.

Some 55% said they have been diagnosed with a mental health issue and 33% believe that they have an undiagnosed mental health issue or illness.

Meanwhile, 78% believe mental health is connected to faith, while 49% have questioned their faith because of mental ill-health.

Also in the survey, 85% of people believed that the churches need to encourage open conversation about mental health and wellbeing.

Some individuals believe that the churches have made a positive contribution.

One said: “There are many within the church community who are kind, generous and good listeners.”

Another said: “People in my church community care for each other and try to support each other's wellbeing.”

Overall, however, 63% of the respondents in the survey say that they have experienced the Bible being used in a way that is damaging to mental health, and 64% “have found other spiritual practices outside of church that are helpful for their mental health and wellbeing.”

The report lists some “toxic theology “ situations, including the claim that “suicide is a sin”, as well as “Medication and

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treatment are the opposite to faith” and “your faith is too weak, otherwise you would be well.”

It also refers to “a lack of providing solutions that aren't in the Bible. The belief that everything is in 'God's hands' and to simply 'pray away' a situation is unhelpful when your mental health and circumstances do not change, in spite of praying and reading the Bible.”

The report recommends providing pastoral care to people who suffer from mental health issues and encouraging them to seek help.

Courtesy the Belfast Telegraph 29.05.2021

## **Ten-point climate change plan goes to Scots General Synod**

**The agenda and papers for Scottish Episcopal Church's General Synod 2021 are now available, detailing the business scheduled for the virtual hosting of the annual meeting on 10 & 11 June.**

Included in the agenda items is a ten-point guidance plan on the first step towards achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2030. Following the motion at last year's Synod for a programme of actions to be brought to General Synod 2021 to resource the SEC in working towards the 2030 goal, the Church in Society Committee's Technical Group on Climate Change has presented a programme of actions and useful resources “aimed to equip the whole church for the urgent

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response that is needed towards achieving net zero carbon emissions”.

The Group has set out actions for different levels of the SEC to pursue, as congregations, dioceses, provincial level and as individuals; suggested more detailed action on buildings; listed useful resources; and indicated further work to be carried out.

Further, a Toolkit is currently in preparation, designed to provide practical recommendations for the implementation of action plans and including for instance a means of working out a church’s carbon footprint.

“The changes we need to make encompass almost all aspects of our life as a church; not only our buildings, but in every area where we burn coal, oil or gas,” reports the Group. “We need to transition to renewable alternatives as far as we possibly can, and where this is not reasonably practical, we need to reduce, save and offset. We do not



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underestimate the challenge. But there are many steps we can already take which will make a difference and we need to plan now for how and when the bigger challenges could be met.”

Another main item on the Synod agenda is the Saint Andrew Declaration, a series of joint acknowledgments and commitments between the Scottish Episcopal Church and the Church of Scotland.

The Declaration is made “in light of our common calling within the life of the Church of Jesus Christ in Scotland, shaped by our understanding of the mission of God, our agreement in faith and the opportunities to share in ministry and mission”.

The Declaration states that: “In the course of our discussions we have acknowledged our shared history and have named past conflicts, divisions and hurts. In doing so, we have learned from one another and have asked forgiveness of each other where we have caused pain by our words and actions. Within the context of these discussions, we have acknowledged that the theological, sacramental and liturgical emphases within our respective churches are consonant with the tradition which each represents.

“Alongside this, we have sought to acknowledge that our churches belong together as part of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ. In so acknowledging, we seek to explore ways in which we may work better together as partners in ministry and mission, to serve Christ by serving the people of Scotland.”

## **‘Eat lots of cake’ — tips offered for a successful Messy Church**

**Plenty of cake is a significant part of ensuring that Messy Church works, a two-year survey of ways to make it function well suggests, Paul Wilkinson writes in the Church Times.**

The report, *A Voyage of Discovery*, published last month, has produced a list of “clear actions” that churches should consider if they want Messy Churches to be “churches that make disciples and grow deeper in discipleship”. It concludes with the tongue-in-cheek injunction: “Oh. And cake. Eat lots of cake.”

### **More serious suggestions include:**

“Decide to be a community of reflective practice. Make space for reflection in every aspect of Messy Church. This isn’t about adding more activity, but about a shift in attitude that increasingly values the space for listening and reflection, and affirms it when it happens.”

“Decide to notice God at work. Get into the habit of spotting what God’s doing and speak with each other about what you notice. Doing this brings about a change of culture that underpins the new practice.”

“Decide to be church all month. Make space to be Messy Church in different, perhaps smaller ways in those weeks between the main gatherings.”

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“Decide to value quality as well as quantity. . . Big numbers are important, but value also the significance of the small or single.”

“Decide to give up something — even something you enjoy — to prioritise Messy Church and make it a deeper, richer experience.”

“Decide to journey together. . . This might be adults being together with children, or teams being alongside each other. Decide to be deliberately intergenerational, and to be hospitable to others who are different.”

“Decide to enjoy it. Notice what is life-giving, what makes people smile, what lightens their eyes, and follow that light.”

“More than anything, decide to be disciples and to make disciples.”

Messy Church was set up 17 years ago by the Bible Reading Fellowship to offer families and children food, activities, and worship. About 2800 groups are registered in England.

The study was conducted by the Church of England’s Evangelism and Discipleship Team among 24 groups in the Bristol, Durham, and Hereford dioceses. It covered a cross-section of urban and rural communities of varying socio-economic groups. It reports: “Insights generated from the experience of local leaders are particular to each context. However, there are plenty of gems uncovered so far which we want to celebrate and share.”



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It lists a series approaches to deepening discipleship. They include: exploring questions about faith with all ages together; developing a strong thread of social action; adding an extra gathering into the monthly programme; mentoring team members to improve their leadership skills; and encouraging under-18s to take part in the team leadership.

The report concludes: “Our hope is that these findings can be shared widely and freely, that the initiatives they inspire will also be shared with that same extravagance, and that this virtuous cycle of generosity will enrich all churches, not just Messy ones.

“As the effects of the pandemic ebb away, it’s a chance to explore new ways of being church. Our hope is that this research will be part of bringing life in all its fullness to Jesus’ Church in her old and new forms.”

## **Scots Anglicans to include Presbyterian missionary in their calendar of saints**

The Faith and Order Board of the Scottish Episcopal Church is recommending to its General Synod that Jane Haining be included in the SEC Calendar of saints and heroes of the faith on 17 July each year “on account of her faith-filled life and example that saw her die in the Nazi Concentration camp of Auschwitz Birkenau”.

Jane Haining was a Church of Scotland Missionary in Budapest who was caring for Jewish children at the outbreak of the Second World War. She was asked to return to her native Scotland when war broke out, but refused to

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abandon the children in her charge, and was transported to Auschwitz. She is the only Scot known to have died at the concentration camp.

“Jane Haining is well known in Hungary (there is a street named after her in Budapest) but less so in Scotland,” reports the



Board. “Work has been going on between SEC and Church of Scotland colleagues on educational materials on Jane Haining and the Holocaust for Scottish schools.

“She is an outstanding example of Christian witness in a life lived for others – and in this case, those of other faiths – and the willingness to face death as a result.”

## People and places

### **Be vigilant as legislation allowing for euthanasia is “weaving its way” through the Oireachtas**

Bishop Brendan Leahy of Limerick has urged people to be vigilant as legislation allowing for euthanasia is “weaving its way” through the Oireachtas, adding that people had seen throughout the Covid pandemic what could be achieved when people said “yes” to life. Going forward, “we cannot be indifferent to the cries of the off- the-radar homeless, the bewildered addicts, the unborn who may be denied life, the vulnerable elderly,” he said.

### **Be vigilant as legislation allowing for euthanasia is “weaving its way” through the Oireachtas**

The Association of Catholic Priests (ACP) has asked the Irish bishops to engage in a conversation about the Church’s treatment of gay Catholics and the need for a sensitive and respectful pastoral outreach.

In its letter, the ACP, which represents over 1,000 Irish clergy, said this had been underlined recently by the “insensitive and unnecessary intervention” of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) in its document on the blessing of same-sex unions. It noted that only one Irish bishop “had the courage to respond to the CDF statement and his words were deeply appreciated”.

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## **Convicted pedophile priest due to be deported to Ireland from Australia after losing an appeal to retain his Australian citizenship.**

Fr Finian Egan, an Irish-born former Catholic priest (85), was transferred to Australia in 1959 and was charged in 2012 with eight counts of historical sexual offences between 1961 and 1987 against three girls aged between 10 and 17.

In 2018, he was dismissed by the Catholic Church and stripped of his priesthood after the Diocese of Broken Bay presented its case to Rome.

He was stripped of his Australian citizenship last August while serving time in prison.

He was sentenced to a maximum term of eight years, with a non-parole period of four years from December 2013 after being found guilty by jury in the NSW District Court.

## **Equipping for Life - Job Opportunity**

Equipping for Life are currently seeking to recruit an Area Support Officer who will support the development of Equipping for Life centres and projects across Northern Ireland.

For more information about the post please visit the news section on the homepage on EFL's website:

<https://equippingforlife.org.uk/> .

Applications close on Friday 11th June.

For further information please contact:

[churchnewsireland@gmail.org](mailto:churchnewsireland@gmail.org)



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[pat@equippingforlife.org.uk](mailto:pat@equippingforlife.org.uk)

Pat Hutchinson MBE Development Officer Equipping for Life

Days & Hours of work:

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday ( Working from Home) 8.00 am to 3.30 pm

07889572800

## **Books, Broadcasts, Resources and Webinars**



**Sally Axworthy MBE**

### **Diplomatic relations with The Holy See - talk with British Ambassador**

[churchnewsireland@gmail.org](mailto:churchnewsireland@gmail.org)

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In the last of their 'Cannonball Conversions' series of talks, the team at The Edinburgh Jesuit Centre invited the British Ambassador to The Holy See, Sally Axworthy MBE, to discuss 'Ecological Conversion Co-operation between the UK & the Vatican'. Sally is about to leave the post after five years and took the opportunity to reflect on her time as Ambassador, which coincided with a period of seismic change for the church.

You can watch the talk on the Edinburgh Jesuit Centre's Facebook page here:

[ [www.facebook.com/EdinburghJesuitCentre/videos/326355042394966](https://www.facebook.com/EdinburghJesuitCentre/videos/326355042394966) ]

To find out more about the Edinburgh Jesuit Centre click here:

[ ] <https://edinburghjesuitcentre.org.uk>

## **Webinar on 'Online Church – Practical Lessons from the Frontline'**

The Council for Mission will host a webinar on 'Online Church – Practical Lessons from the Frontline' on Thursday, 3 June, from 2.00pm to 3.30pm. Bookings should be made by next Monday, 31 May, to the Revd Colin McConaghie at [councilformission@ireland.anglican.org](mailto:councilformission@ireland.anglican.org). The keynote speaker will be Nick Shepherd, from the Church of England Digital Lab, and the webinar contributors will be the Revd Andrew Quill (Rector of Dromore in the Diocese of Clogher), the Revd Nicola Halford (Rector of Enniscorthy) and the Revd Cliff Jeffers (Rector of Fanlobbus, Dunmanway). The webinar will be an opportunity to reflect on missional



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opportunities, to hear how parishes have remained online post lockdown, and to discuss practical questions.

## Media review

### **Almost 7000 survivors of clerical abuse avail of Catholic Church-funded counselling**

Irish Examiner

The service is funded by the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference and the Association of Leaders of Missionaries and Religious of Ireland. Mon, 31 May,

[[] <https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/arid-40302536.html> ]

Irish Times

Over the past 25 years the Catholic Church in Ireland has provided a counselling service for almost 7,000 survivors of institutional, clerical, and religious abuse, and members of their families.

It is free and involves a network of counsellors in Ireland and abroad which provides essential therapy to those who have suffered such abuse, said Auxiliary Bishop of Armagh, Michael Router. He is a director of Towards Healing which, with its forerunner Faoiseamh, provides the counselling service.

[[] <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/religion-and-beliefs/up-to-7-000-abuse-survivors-assisted-by-catholic-church-support-service-1.4579440> ]

### **Investigation into paedophile Douglas vicar led by same man who looked into Jimmy Savile case**

3FM

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Ray Galloway has been appointed by the Church of England National Safeguarding Team to investigate the case of Graham Gregory, who died in who died in prison in 2019. Gregory was jailed in 2018 for assaulting children aged eight to 13 between 1975 and 1990.

[[] <https://www.three.fm/news/isle-of-man-news/investigation-into-paedophile-douglas-vicar-led-by-same-man-who-looked-into-jimmy-savile-case/> ]

### **Illinois interest in Northern Ireland's oldest library**

Illinois News

The oldest public library in Northern Ireland, built in 1771 by Archbishop Richard Robinson. The Church of Ireland in the 18th century created many of ...

[[] <https://illinoisnewstoday.com/northern-irelands-oldest-library-marks-250-years-of-history/220527/> ]

### **Eve Pitts: the Church of England's first Black female vicar – and one of its fiercest critics**

The Guardian

At her next stop, Saint Nicolas' church, 15 minutes away in Kings Norton, Pitts met the full force of institutional racism – and made national news.

[[] <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/may/27/eve-pitts-church-of-england-first-black-female-vicar-fiercest-critics> ]

### **'Eat lots of cake' – tips offered for a successful Messy Church**

Church Times

About 2800 groups are registered in England.

Advertisement. The study was conducted by the Church of England's Evangelism and Discipleship Team ...

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[[] <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2021/28-may/news/uk/eat-lots-of-cake-tips-offered-for-a-successful-messy-church> ]

## **Church of England cathedrals linked in cycling relay challenge**

BBC News

Cyclists are setting off from Newcastle on a relay challenge linking all 42 Church of England cathedrals. It marks the launch of the 2,000-mile ...

[[] <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-tyne-57230209> ]



## **Pointers for prayer**

Your hand is upon your people, O God,  
to guide and protect them through the ages.  
Keep in your service  
those you have called and anointed,  
that the powers of this world may not overwhelm us, but  
that, secure in your love,

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we may carry out your will  
in the face of all adversity. Amen.

O God our ruler and shepherd, you anointed Jesus  
as the king and servant of your people. Make us attentive to  
your word, that we may accept your reign over us and serve  
you alone. Amen.

Friends 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.

### *Intercessions*

....

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.

...

### *Intercessions*

....

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,

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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.

*...Intercessions....*

Hear our prayers  
that we may love you with our whole being  
and willingly share the concerns of our neighbours. Amen.

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. Amen

## Speaking to the Soul

**They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity — all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.**

Acts 2:46-47 NLT

What amazing days these were! The believers were seeing astonishing things happen and, not surprisingly, their

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numbers were growing day by day. It was an exceptional period in every way, and they had the added advantage that everyone spoke well of them. In the days to come the church would often be reviled, rejected and persecuted by other people so this was a time of great favour. And amidst all the excitement and encouragement the believers maintained their regular rhythm of prayer and worship.

In these early years of the church the Jewish Christians continued to worship in the Temple and to maintain their Jewish identity. Alongside their Jewish acts of worship, they met regularly with the other followers of Jesus. These meetings would have been in homes which was where Christians worshipped for many years to come. The New Testament writers often refer to the importance of offering hospitality and the reason for this was that the early church was dependent on people being willing to host the meetings for prayer and worship.

Our circumstances are different in many ways from those early Christians and not least because many of us worship in church communities that have their own buildings. However, wherever we worship it is vital that we maintain a regular rhythm of prayer and fellowship. It would be rare these days for churches to meet together on a daily basis but in these busy and distracted days I think it is vital for us to seek to meet together at least weekly.

There is no law about this, thank God, but we do need to ensure that we are receiving regular spiritual nourishment and are able to support one another effectively. Without a regular rhythm of worship and fellowship it is so easy for our faith to struggle.



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## QUESTION

What is your own rhythm of worship and fellowship, and how might it be strengthened?

## PRAYER

Dear Lord, thank you for the blessing of church life. Help me to be faithful in supporting my Christian brothers and sisters. Amen

