



NI justice minister David Ford.

NI Justice Minister to meet Church leaders on abortion legislation

Church leaders are to set to give their position on a proposed amendment to Northern Ireland's abortion law in a series of meetings being held with justice minister David Ford.

The minister is proposing to change the law in the North to permit abortion in cases where the unborn child will only live for a short time after birth and is deemed to have no chance of survival. Currently, abortion is only legal in Northern Ireland if a woman's life is at risk, or if there is a risk of permanent and serious damage to her mental or physical health.

The public consultation on the proposed change closes on January 17.

Speaking to BBC Radio Ulster, Mr Ford said that he had mentioned the pending consultation on changing abortion law to the four main Church leaders at a recent meeting on human trafficking issues, "but at this stage, as the public consultation is under way I thought it was appropriate to meet Church leaders.

"On the basis of the preliminary meetings, there was a range of opinions expressed and I expect that range to continue," he said. "But I think what is important is for people to look at the details of what is proposed and don't just respond to the concept of abortion in general, as if we are seeking to introduce the 1967 [British Abortion] Act in Northern Ireland, which we are not."

Minister Ford is also seeking opinions on whether the law should be changed to allow abortion in cases of rape and incest, but he said he “will not be making a formal recommendation” on this issue.

The NI Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) is seeking a change in the law to allow abortion in cases of rape, incest or “serious malformation” of a foetus which is due to be heard in the Belfast High Court on February 2.

The pro-life group Precious Life and pro-life Family Planning Association have both registered an interest in the proceedings.

Archbishop Martin in Stormont abortion row

The head of the Catholic church in Ireland has accused Stormont's justice minister of trying to exclude pro-life arguments from a consultation on changing the abortion law.

Belfast Telegraph - Abortions should be allowed in Northern Ireland where the foetus has a lethal

abnormality, David Ford's Justice Department has recommended.



Archbishop Eamon Martin accused Stormont's justice minister of trying to exclude pro-life arguments from a consultation on abortion law change

The department has begun a public consultation on amending the criminal law on abortion.

Archbishop Eamon Martin said: "I want to bring to your attention a consultation document from the Minister for Justice in Northern Ireland which proposes that totally innocent and terminally ill babies in the womb will no longer have an absolute right to life, nor the right to all the care

and medical support that we would expect and wish for any child or adult who is terminally ill.

"Notwithstanding the extraordinary and unprecedented attempt of the consultation document to exclude pro-life arguments from the debate, when we meet the minister and his officials this week, a delegation from the Catholic Church will be making a robust and unapologetic defence of the right to life of both mothers and their terminally ill children during pregnancy and calling for all the love and support that we as a society can give them."

He said this must include the ready availability of good quality before and after birth hospice care and counselling for those facing the trauma of having a terminally ill unborn child.

"With the support of my fellow bishops, I encourage all those who support a culture of life to respond this week to the consultation process of the Department of Justice and to ask their politicians where they stand on these issues."

Members of the public have been asked for opinions on possible changes to the law in cases of lethal foetal abnormality and rape. Currently,

neither circumstance allows a legal abortion in Northern Ireland.

Lethal foetal abnormality means a baby in the womb has a condition which means it will die while either in the womb or shortly after birth.

Mr Ford said he was making a strong recommendation for legislation to allow an abortion in circumstances where there is no prospect of the foetus being delivered and having a viable life.

See also -

<http://www.independent.ie/irish-news/church-planning-robust-defence-of-right-to-life-30899673.html>

Call to cut Catholic schools' funding 'shocking' - expert

The chairman of a forum which advises the Government on the demand for alternative school patronage has been accused of rushing the process of transferring Catholic schools to other patrons.

Irish Catholic - Religious education expert and theologian Dr John Murray said he was “shocked” by Prof. John Coolahan’s suggestion that the Department of Education needed to wield a “stick” against the Catholic Church if it wanted to make progress on the divestment of schools to other patrons.



Prof. John Coolahan.

Prof. Coolahan said the Church’s refusal to take “a proactive stance” in promoting the divestment of schools undermined the process from the outset, and he suggested cuts in school funding might be considered to concentrate minds.

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“I was shocked and disappointed at Prof. Coolahan’s suggestion of a financial threat to schools,” Dr Murray said.

“Schools are already facing increased financial pressures. Pupils will ultimately be the ones who suffer as a result of any further cuts,” he warned.

Countering Prof. Coolahan’s argument, the Mater Dei Institute lecturer said the reason the divestment of patronage had not happened quickly was because of a low demand for change.

“What was originally presented by the department as a high demand for change was not actually accurate. A substantial number of parents, pupils and teachers are very happy with the current system and are reluctant to change.

“That is inevitably going to cause difficulty and slow the process down. It has nothing to do with opposition to change from the bishops as has been suggested,” he said.

Dr Murray added he found it “strange” that Prof. Coolahan would ask Church leaders to be pro-

active in the process of handing over some Catholic schools to secular patrons.

“A bishop’s responsibility is to provide for his Catholic community, so it would be unfair to ask him to push for change unless there is a strong demand for it.

“There is no need to rush this process. It will take time to get it right,” he said.

Ulster Muslim leader sorry for ISIS remark

One of Northern Ireland’s top Muslim figures has apologised after saying the extremist group ISIS had turned his home city into one of Earth’s most peaceful places.

News Letter - Dr Raied Al-Wazzan on Sunday said he was wrong to have made the claim and apologised for the offence he had caused.

Among those speaking out after the remarks was pastor James McConnell, who was himself the subject of a police probe for controversial remarks about Muslim people.

He said that he had found Dr Al-Wazzan's comments "disgusting", but added that the Belfast-based Iraqi man should enjoy the same freedom of speech as everyone else, and he does not feel Dr Al-Wazzan should be subjected to the same kind of PSNI questioning which he faced.



Dr Raied Al-Wazzan

ISIS (also known by a variety of other names including IS) came to widespread public attention last year for its extreme persecution of minority groups, and its bloodthirsty violence. It overran

the northern Iraqi city of Mosul, where it retains strong control.

Dr Al-Wazzan, who is a senior figure at Belfast Islamic Centre, told the News Letter he had meant to say that he condemned all violence, on all sides, “but that unfortunately it didn’t come out very clear”.

Among those condemning Dr Al-Wazzan’s comments was DUP MP Jeffrey Donaldson, who has been vocal about ISIS attacks on religious and racial minorities, and has called for military measures against the group.

Speaking on Friday, Dr Al-Wazzan described the group (which also goes by the names ISIL and Islamic State) as being “less evil than the Iraqi government”.

He added: “Since the Islamic State took over, it has become the most peaceful city in the world... you can go from east to west of the city without fear.

“My family is living there at the moment and that’s what they are telling me.”

Mr Donaldson said: “Whilst it may be safer for Muslims in Mosul under IS rule, it is not safer for

Christians, or Yazidis or any other minorities in that city or region.

“They have faced mass slaughter and persecution and I hope everyone in the Islamic community would condemn the actions of Islamic State.

“I think that he [Dr Raied Al-Wazzan] needs to clarify his comments.”

Many others vented their fury on the internet, some saying that Dr Al-Wazzan should be deported.

Pastor James McConnell (formerly of Whitewell Metropolitan Tabernacle) retired last year after sparking a massive row by describing Islam as “Satanic”, and saying he did not trust Muslim people – with the PSNI even interviewing him over the subject.

Of Dr Al-Wazzan’s remarks, he said: “I thought they were disgusting. I thought he gave himself away. Maybe he didn’t mean to make those remarks, but I think he got caught up in the excitement.” More at -

<http://www.newsletter.co.uk/ulster-muslim-leader-sorry-for-isis-remark-1-6515099>

Scourge of anti-semitism should be consigned to history – Nicholson

Ulster Unionist MEP Jim Nicholson has condemned the recent terrorist attacks in Paris, and has raised concern about the wave of anti-semitism in Europe.

Mr Nicholson said:

"The events that have unfolded in Paris since the brutal massacre at the offices of Charlie Hebdo, which saw 12 innocents murdered, have been truly harrowing.

"On Friday, a Jewish supermarket was attacked and people held hostage just hours before the beginning of Shabbat. Among the hostages were children. Four of the hostages were killed. My thoughts and prayers are with the loved ones of these innocent victims of terrorism.

"In cities across Europe, Jewish communities have been feeling less and less safe over the past number of years. Many synagogues and Jewish schools are under 24 hour protection. Even Belfast's Jewish community has been

targeted in recent times in anti-semitic acts of vandalism.

"This is all the more poignant as the European Parliament this month remembers the liberation of Auschwitz. How tragic that 70 years after the end of the Second World War, Jews feel unsafe in major European cities. Anti-semitism, like all forms of racial hatred, is a scourge that should be consigned to history.

"Both the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz and the events of the past week remind us that freedom often comes at a cost. For the sake of those who gave their lives in the name of liberty, we must continue to stand firm against terror and the forces of hatred."

Connor mission experience group visits Nepal

A Mission Experience Team Abroad (META) made up of members of two Connor parishes currently in Nepal for a two-week visit.

The team leaders are the Rev Bill Boyce (St Brigid's, Glengormley) and Canon John McCammon (St Patrick's, Coleraine) who are

joined by Nevin Kidd, Eleanor Boyce, Peter Kirch (all St Brigid's) and Alan Robinson (St Patrick's).



The team from St Brigid's, Mallusk and St Patrick's, Coleraine, which is now in Nepal with CMSI.

While there, the team will be helping facilitate a leadership training conference with Sundar Dhoka Church in Kathmandu. They will also visit one of the remote 'house churches' supported by Sundar Dhoka Church.

This is a first visit to Nepal for the some of the team members, while Nevin and Bill are making their third visit. The trip is facilitated by Church Mission Society Ireland (CMSI). Updates are

posted on the CMSI website and links will be added here during the visit.

Meantime Dr Frank Dobbs, Agherton Parish, flew to Connor's link diocese of Yei in South Sudan, on January 8 with a team led by CMSI's Jenny Smyth.

Probe into vandalism at Killarney church

An investigation has been launched into an act of vandalism at a church in Killarney, Co Kerry.

RTE - The incident happened at St Mary's Church of Ireland in the centre of Killarney where the windows were broken.

The church is famous for its victorian windows.

A large hole was discovered in one of the iconic nativity windows at the rear of the altar was discovered shortly before the 11am service this morning.

Two other windows had also been damaged.

Gardaí found a number of broken bottles as well as broken plant holders at the scene.

The windows of St Mary's, a mix of stained and painted glass are regarded as fine examples of 19th century glass painting.

The biblical scenes and re-productions of Pre-Raphaelite paintings are a major tourist attraction in the town centre.

The church is also the setting of regular concerts.

Most of the colourful windows were donated by the Herbert family, local landlords associated with Muckross House, now a museum and with Cahernane House, now a hotel.

Gardaí in Killarney have asked anyone who saw anything suspicious in the vicinity to contact them.

Pray that moderation will prevail, French cardinal urges faithful

Catholics should pray that France will continue to show “moderation, temperance and control” in response to the terrorist attacks in their city, the cardinal archbishop of Paris has said. In a letter to Parisian Catholics published on the website of the Catholic newspaper La Croix, Cardinal André

Vingt-Trois wrote: “This week our country, and in particular our city, has been the scene of unprecedented acts of violence and barbarity. For us, for many years, death and war were always elsewhere, even though French soldiers were engaged in various countries trying to build peace. Some have paid with their lives.



Cardinal André Vingt-Trois: 'Pray to the Lord for the victims of the terrorists'

“But violent death has suddenly appeared among us. France, and even beyond our borders, are in a state of shock.

“The majority of our fellow citizens have lived this situation as a call to recover certain fundamental

values of our republic, such as freedom of religion or freedom of opinion.

“The spontaneous gatherings of these past few days have been marked by great contemplation, without a show of hatred or violence. The sadness of grief, and the belief that we all have something to defend, unite the French.

“A cartoon, even if it is distasteful, a critique even if it is gravely unjust, cannot be put on the same level as murder. Freedom of the press, whatever the cost, is the sign of a mature society.

“That men born in our country, our fellow citizens, can think that the only just response to mockery or an insult is the death of their authors places grave questions before our society.

“That French Jews are once again paying a price for the troubles that are agitating our national community only reinforces their gravity.

“We also honour the police officers who have died while carrying out their work.

“I invite the Catholics of Paris to pray to the Lord for the victims of the terrorists, for their spouses, their children and their families.

“We pray also for our country, that the moderation, temperance and control that have been displayed so far will be confirmed in the weeks and months ahead and that no one will give in to the easy identification of a few fanatics with an entire religion. And we also pray for the terrorists, who discover the truth of God’s judgment.

“We ask for the grace to be peacemakers. We must never despair of peace, if we build justice.”

Gay clergy: Scottish minister tells of exodus of Presbyterians

A minister in the Free Church of Scotland says although they are welcoming in an exodus of worshippers due to Scottish Presbyterians’ stance on gay clergy, they are not “triumphalist” about the fact.

News Letter - Minister of Stornoway Iver Martin said that two congregations within his area have

transferred from the Presbyterian Church of Scotland to his own denomination in the past nine months.



Iver Martin said two congregations in his area had transferred in the past nine months

Asked if he could foresee losses in the Presbyterian Church of Ireland if they were to soften their stance on homosexual clergy, he said: “I would think so.”

It comes after top Irish Presbyterians told the News Letter the church is unlikely to consider allowing gay ministers in the future, after a

majority of presbyteries in the Presbyterian Church of Scotland voted in favour of such a move.

Rev Martin told the News Letter that the congregations of Tarbert on the Isle of Harris – numbering up to 70 – had recently transferred from the Church of Scotland to the Free Church of Scotland.

In Stornoway, a congregation of about 300 had similarly transferred.

“I wouldn’t call it a boom at all,” he said. “I don’t think anybody is responding to this in a triumphalistic manner.”

The 57-year-old said: “I would call it probably the worst crisis in the [Presbyterian] Church of Scotland in my living memory.”

He added: “At the very least the Church of Scotland have lost really good people – both ministers and congregations.

“And I wouldn’t be content with that if I was the Church of Scotland. I would not be at ease with a situation where you had unrest within a denomination on this scale.”

<http://www.newsletter.co.uk/gay-clergy-scottish-minister-tells-of-exodus-of-presbyterians-1-6514803>

Boko Haram's 'deadliest massacre': 2,000 feared dead in Nigeria

Amnesty International calls the killings ‘a disturbing and bloody escalation’ and a local defence group says its fighters have given up trying to count the bodies

Hundreds of bodies – too many to count – remain strewn in the bush in Nigeria from an Islamic extremist attack that Amnesty International described as the “deadliest massacre” in the history of [Boko Haram](#).

Fighting continued on Friday around Baga, a town on the border with Chad where insurgents [seized a key military base](#) on 3 January and [attacked again on Wednesday](#).

“Security forces have responded rapidly, and have deployed significant military assets and conducted air strikes against militant targets,” said a government spokesman.

District head Baba Abba Hassan said most victims are children, women and elderly people

who could not run fast enough when insurgents drove into Baga, firing rocket-propelled grenades and assault rifles on town residents.

“The human carnage perpetrated by Boko Haram terrorists in Baga was enormous,” Muhammad Abba Gava, a spokesman for poorly armed civilians in a defence group that fights Boko Haram, told the Associated Press.

He said the civilian fighters gave up on trying to count all the bodies. “No one could attend to the corpses and even the seriously injured ones who may have died by now,” Gava said.

An Amnesty International statement said there are reports the town was razed and as many as 2,000 people killed.

If true, “this marks a disturbing and bloody escalation of Boko Haram’s ongoing onslaught,” said Daniel Eyre, Nigeria researcher for Amnesty International. More at -

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/09/boko-haram-deadliest-massacre-baga-nigeria>

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Pope Francis begins visit to Sri Lanka and the Philippines



Pope Francis will begin his papal visit to Sri Lanka and the Philippines today

Pope Francis begins a visit to Sri Lanka and the Philippines today, marking **the first trip by a pope to south Asia in 15 years.**

He will be welcomed in Sri Lanka tomorrow morning by the country's new president, Maithripala Sirisena, who was only sworn in on Friday after beating the long-standing incumbent, Mahinda Rajapaksa.

The Pope's arrival comes as President Sirisena said he would investigate allegations that his predecessor sought to retain control of power by organising a coup.

During his three days in the country the Pope will canonise Sri Lanka's first saint, Blessed Joseph Vaz, an Oratorian priest and missionary during the Dutch occupation of the 17th century.

He will also visit Sri Lanka's most revered Marian shrine, the sanctuary of Our Lady of the Rosary at Madhu, in the north of the country.

During the civil war the 400-year-old shrine housed tens of thousands of refugees. At one point in the war shelling killed about 40 people there.

Commentators have suggested Pope Francis will call for reconciliation at the shrine between the majority Sinhalese ethnic group and the Tamils in the north. The shrine is revered by Sinhalese and Tamil Catholics.

The Pope will also meet Buddhist leaders in Colombo amid growing concern about Buddhist fundamentalism. One group led by monks, Bodu

Bala Sena (BBS), has called on Francis to apologise for colonialism.

During his three days in the Philippines, meanwhile, the Pope will spend one day in Tacloban, the region devastated by typhoon Haiyan.

He will have lunch with survivors and meet priests and religious at a cathedral wrecked by the typhoon.

In Manila Pope Francis will meet families whose members have been separated by economic migration and will address a gathering young people.

The Pope is likely to draw millions of pilgrims during his trip. When St John Paul II visited in 1995 his final Mass was attended by five million people.

Media digest

BBC Sunday

The Bishop of Worcester, John Inge, sets out the case for wider community use, wi-fi and open

churches in an interview on Radio 4's Sunday Programme yesterday. (21 minutes into programme)

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b04xkyp8>

Mail/Tel/Times

Reports that more than a million people surged through Paris behind dozens of world leaders walking arm-in-arm on Sunday in a rally for unity described as the largest demonstration in French history. Millions more marched around the country and the world to repudiate three days of terror that killed 17 people and changed France. It states more than 40 world leaders headed the somber procession - Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas; Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov - setting aside their differences with a common rallying cry: We stand together against barbarity, and we are all Charlie.

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/ap/article-2905230/Unity-defiance-Thousands-converge-Paris-rally.html#ixzz3OaH1nzf0>

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/france/11338909/Paris-march-After-a-minutes-silence-they-roared-We-are-not-afraid.html>

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/world/europe/article4320545.ece>

Mail/Guard

Articles on tweets by Rupert Murdoch and JK Rowling on whether all muslims should feel responsible for the Paris attacks. Rowling's response to the Murdoch tweet suggesting muslims should feel responsible wrote, 'I was born Christian. If that makes Rupert Murdoch my responsibility, I'll auto-excommunicate'. They state her message was re-tweeted 17,000 times.

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/aap/article-2906168/JK-Rowlings-magic-reply-Murdoch-tweet.html#ixzz3Oa9pm9EA>

<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/jan/11/jk-rowling-condemns-murdoch-tweet-charlie-hebdo-harry-potter-news-corp-muslims-christian>

Metro

Report that up to 2,000 mostly women, children and the elderly have been killed by Boko Haram in the deadliest attack in the war against the Nigerian Islamist insurgents, it has emerged. It states hundreds of bodies are remain strewn in the bush near the town of Baga, on the border with Chad where the group attacked earlier this week.

<http://metro.co.uk/2015/01/11/boko-haram-massacre-up-to-2000-women-children-and-the-elderly-5018039/>

Mail

Further report that former Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Carey has warned that fear of criticising Islam has led Britain to operate a self-imposed blasphemy law. Writing in the **Sunday Times**, the former Archbishop said: 'A de facto blasphemy law is operating in Britain today. The fact is that publishers and newspapers live in fear of criticising Islam.'

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2905283/Fear-criticising-Islam-given-Britain-self-imposed-blasphemy-law-warns-former-archbishop-Carey.html#ixzz3OY0wYp4n>

BBC

Further report that a Gloucestershire priest is leading the call for a change in church law which over funerals for victims of suicide to be debated at the General Synod next month. It states Reverend Canon Dr Michael Parsons wants **Canon B38 to be amended** to allow those who have taken their own life to be given a "normal funeral service". Currently, a "modified service" should be used by the clergy but there is no approved alternative liturgy available.

<http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-gloucestershire-30767492>

Mail

Report that Dawn French is to return to her role as vicar Geraldine Granger, better known as the Vicar of Dibley, for a one-off episode of the hit comedy inspired by the Church's historic decision to allow women bishops. It states the actress has spent the past few days filming a '*Bishop of Dibley*' BBC special in Central London locations, including the Inner Temple.

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-2904869/The-ultimate-proof-women-Church-Dawn-French-s-TV-vicar-consecrated-Bishop-Dibley.html#ixzz3OXz3XEfv>
<http://www.express.co.uk/entertainment/tv-radio/551460/Dawn-French-return-Bishop-Dibley-Red-Nose-Day-special>

Mail

Report that a vicar caught speeding for the fourth time in four years escaped a driving ban because it would stop him preaching to his rural parish. It states Reverend Tudor Rowlands, 74, was caught doing 40mph in a 30mph area and already had nine points on his licence from three previous offences. Mr Rowlands, whose parish is in Powys, North Wales, said a ban would affect the 'spiritual health of communities' if he couldn't reach elderly people who cannot get to church.

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2905985/Vicar-spared-speeding-ban-despite-caught-fourth-time-losing-licence-stop-preaching-rural-parish.html#ixzz3OaCMZHuB>

Mail

Report that Pope Francis told new mothers they should feel free to breastfeed during a ceremony to baptise 33 infants in the Sistine Chapel on Sunday. "You mothers give your children milk and even now, if they cry because they are hungry, breastfeed them, don't worry," he said, departing from his prepared text.

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2905272/Feel-free-breastfeed-pope-tells-mothers-Sistine-Chapel.html#ixzz3OaEJ7gsR>