



Rev Steve Stockman of Fitzroy Presbyterian and Fr Martin Magill of Sacred Heart parish

Generosity and imagination - focus of Belfast's Four Corners inter-church festival

Lord Mayor Nichola Mallon will host the launch of the annual [4 Corners Festival](#) on Friday 23 January at 11 am in the Mayor's Parlour at

4Corners Festival

Bringing Belfast Together

Belfast City Hall. Now in its third year, the events of this year's festival focus on the themes of generosity and imagination. The programme is wide-ranging, including art exhibitions and an art tour, music, discussions, storytelling, talks, a prayer breakfast, and a dinner for refugees.

The festival was conceived by Rev Steve Stockman of Fitzroy Presbyterian and Fr Martin Magill of Sacred Heart parish. It has been organised by a small group of Christians from all four corners of the city. Festival events are deliberately located in all four corners of the city so that people are enticed to travel outside of their normal comfort zones, seeing new places and meeting new people. The organisers welcome people from all faith backgrounds and none to attend the events, most of which are free of charge or ask only for a donation.

The Lord Mayor said: "I am delighted to host the launch of this year's festival. In its previous two



years, it has helped people to cross boundaries
all across the city of Belfast. I look forward to

churchnewsireland@gmail.com

attending events and being inspired to use generosity and imagination to make our city a better place.”

Fr Magill and Rev Stockman got the idea for a festival after reflecting on occasions they had to travel to parts of Belfast with which they were unfamiliar. Astonished by what they saw in these unfamiliar areas, and deeply aware of how segregation continues to divide Belfast’s citizens, they hoped to prompt others to experience new areas of the city through a festival of events.

Rev Stockman said:

“To move from our political peace, which at times can be very fragile, to a robust social peace we need to find a generosity of soul that lives out Christian ideas like forgiveness, love of enemy and shalom. For those words to become a reality on our streets we will need to imagine new ways of acting towards one another. For that to happen we need to be exercising the muscle of our imaginations. Please God that this year’s 4 Corners Festival might contribute to that.”

Last year the “Listening to Your Enemies” event provoked a riot outside the Skainos building in East Belfast when a crowd gathered to protest

against one of the guest speakers, ex-IRA bomber Pat Magee, who was sharing the stage with Jo Berry, whose father was killed in the Brighton bomb. The festival will return to Skainos this year with an event called “Slighe Na Beatha” or “The Path of Life,” a journey through the Psalms with reflections and music provided by Scottish Gaelic Psalm singers (Saturday 7 February, 7 pm).

Linda Ervine of Skainos said:

“We hope this year’s event will help us examine where we are in Northern Ireland in terms of healing, using the backdrop of the Psalms, which have brought such comfort to people down through the ages.”

A full programme of events can be found at: 4cornersfestival.com

Pope: ‘We must be forthright in interfaith dialogue’

Inter-religious dialogue must be grounded in a “full and forthright presentation” of different faiths’ respective convictions, Pope Francis has said.

The Pope made the comments during a meeting at the Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall during the first day of his papal visit to South Asia. Francis was greeted at the hall by members of Sri Lanka's Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim and and Christian communities.



Sri Lankan Hindu priest Kurakkal Somasundaram presents a shawl to Pope Francis during the inter-religious meeting

Pope Francis said: “As experience has shown for (inter-religious) dialogue and encounter to be effective, it must be grounded in a full and forthright presentation of our respective convictions. Certainly, such dialogue will accentuate how varied our beliefs, traditions and

practices are. But if we are honest in presenting our convictions, we will be able to see more clearly what we hold in common. New avenues will be opened for mutual esteem, cooperation and indeed friendship.

“For too many years the men and women of this country have been victims of civil strife and violence. What is needed now is healing and unity, not further conflict and division. Surely the fostering of healing and unity is a noble task which is incumbent upon all who have at heart the good of the nation, and indeed the whole human family.”

He added: “For the sake of peace, religious beliefs must never be allowed to be abused in the cause of violence and war. We must be clear and unequivocal in challenging our communities to live fully the tenets of peace and coexistence found in each religion, and to denounce acts of violence when they are committed.”

As he did earlier in the day when making a speech upon his arrival at Colombo airport, Pope Francis spoke in English.

At this afternoon's meeting, he was welcomed by the Buddhists in attendance with a ritual chant and, following his speech, a Hindu religious leader placed an orange cape on Francis's shoulders.

Meanwhile, a Vatican spokesman has said the Pope is fit and well despite cancelling a lunchtime meeting with Sri Lankan bishops. "The health of the Pope is good. He was a little tired but now has his strength again," he said.

President attends Dublin Mass in Solidarity with the People of France

President Michael D Higgins attended a special Mass in solidarity with the people of France at the Pro-Cathedral in Dublin yesterday evening (Tuesday January 13). The Mass was celebrated by Archbishop Diarmuid Martin and was attended by C of I Archbishop Michael Jackson.

The Mass was organised in collaboration with the Ambassador of France H.E. Jean-Pierre Thébault. It was attended by other religious leaders, members of the Diplomatic Corps, and members of the French community in Dublin were invited.



The event was an opportunity for all those in Dublin who wished to show their solidarity in prayer with the people of France following the shattering attacks of the past week.

NI gay couple 'must separate for Scotland marriage'

A gay couple who wanted to convert their Northern Ireland civil partnership into a marriage in Scotland say they were told they would first have to live apart for two years.

BBC News - In Scotland, civil partnerships can now be converted to a marriage under a new law that came into effect in December.

The couple, who did not want their surnames to be used, said they were initially told they could convert their civil partnership to a marriage, and had set a date for the wedding.

Belfast-born Sean met his partner John, who is from Scotland, in 2000, and they had a civil partnership in Northern Ireland several years later.

"A lot of John's family couldn't attend, so we thought for our 15th anniversary we'd get married," he told [BBC Radio Ulster's Talkback programme](#) on Monday.

'Dissolve'

John said: "I called the registrar in Inverness to ask them if it was possible to convert our civil partnership to a marriage, and we were advised that it was no problem whatsoever."

The couple had begun to make plans to get married and had set the date for last Friday, but the registrar contacted them to say that they could not legally marry after all.

More at -

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-30784496>

Ecumenical Prayer service as Irish Farmers' Association Celebrates 60th Anniversary



Archbishop Diarmuid Martin, the Moderator, Revd Dr Michael Barry and Archdeacon Ricky Rountree.

Over 1,700 people attended an event to mark the 60th anniversary of the IFA's foundation as the NFA in the National Convention Centre, Dublin, last week.

The Archbishop of Dublin was represented by the Archdeacon of Glendalough, the Ven Ricky Rountree, at the special commemoration.

The event was addressed by IFA President, Eddie Downey, EU Commissioner for Agriculture Phil Hogan, and Minister for Agriculture Simon Coveney. Tributes were also paid tribute to former IFA Presidents and activists and there was a visual presentation of the history of the association. The MC for the day was Mary Kennedy of RTE.

In his address to the Commemoration, IFA President Eddie Downey said fair reward and decent income for farmers remained at the forefront of IFA's agenda.

During the event there was an ecumenical prayer service led by the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, the Most Revd Dr Diarmuid Martin, Archdeacon Rountree and the Revd Dr Michael Barry, Moderator of the Presbyterian Church.

The Irish Farmers Association was founded in 1955 as the National Farmers' Association and has been one of the most effective groups in influencing policy and protecting the development of agriculture in Ireland. It sees itself as having a vital role in the future development of agriculture as a world player in providing food and related products on a global scale.

C of I in Lurgan drives home open door message



St. Saviours Parish Craigavon puts up their Mission 2015 Banner, to announce a Year of Mission within the Church of Ireland Diocese of Down and Dromore.

The Church of Ireland Diocese of Down and Dromore, wants local communities to know that they are open to everyone, no matter what their background or experience of church.

Lurgan Mail - The Diocese has embarked upon a Year of Mission in 2015 and every parish is

displaying a banner declaring that it is ‘for you’ – not just the churchgoer, but the person beyond their gates.

The Bishop of Down and Dromore, the Rt Revd Harold Miller explains:

“A former Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple, famously once said that, ‘The Church is the only society that exists for the benefit of those who are not its members’.

“Especially throughout this Year of Mission 2015, that’s the message we want to send to every community in which we are placed – our doors are open and we’re here for you.”

C of E Archbishops propose programme of reforms and renewal

The Archbishops of Canterbury and York have warned that decline in the Church of England has to be reversed if it is to continue its nation-wide ministry.

In a paper prepared in advance of the forthcoming General Synod meetings next month, Most Revs Justin Welby and Dr John

Sentamu say: "The urgency of the challenge facing us is not in doubt. Attendance at Church of England services has declined at an average of 1 per cent per annum over recent decades and, in addition, the age profile of our membership has become significantly older than that of the population. Finances have been relatively stable, thanks to increased individual giving. This situation cannot, however, be expected to continue unless the decline in membership is reversed."

Average attendance at Sunday services has dropped by nearly half during the last 40 years and currently stands at around 800,000.

The archbishops also warn of a coming crisis in clergy staffing levels, saying: "The age profile of our clergy has also been increasing. Around 40 per cent of parish clergy are due to retire over the next decade or so. And while ordination rates have held up well over recent years they continue to be well below what would be needed to maintain current clergy numbers and meet diocesan ambitions."

Of the Church's 16,200 church buildings, 12,500 are listed. Of all England's Grade I listed

buildings, 45 per cent are cathedrals and churches. The archbishops say that the "burden of church buildings weighs heavily" on congregations. They add that there is "no central investment in reaching out into the digital and social media world" and say: "If the Church of England is to return to growth, there is a compelling need to realign resources and work carefully to ensure that scarce funds are used to best effect."

The two archbishops praised four task group report calling for administrative changes in the Church in different areas, due to be debated by the Synod next month. They also signalled the possibility of an injection of funds from the Church Commissioners to enable reforms to be carried out, saying: "If all the above has to be done within the confines of current funding there will be a long period before its impact can be real, not least given the need to support dioceses through the transition from the present way in which national funds are distributed."

They concluded: "We believe that these reports, to be discussed in February, provide a basis for developing and delivering a major programme of

renewal and reform within the Church of England as a matter of urgency."

Church Times report at -

www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2015/16-january/news/uk/discipleship-is-important-part-of-c-of-e-reform-programme

The statement can be read in full at:

<http://cofecomms.tumblr.com/post/107894352727/in-each-generation-a-programme-for-reform-and>

Pope Francis: Paris attacks the result of a 'deviant form of religion'

In response to the Islamist terror attacks in Paris last week Pope Francis has criticised "deviant forms of religion".

In his 'state of the world' address to the diplomatic corps today, which lasted more than half an hour, Pope Francis referred to the "tragic slayings in Paris".

"Other people 'are no longer regarded as beings of equal dignity, as brothers or sisters sharing a common humanity, but rather as objects'. Losing their freedom, people become enslaved, whether to the latest fads, or to power, money, or even

deviant forms of religion” he said, quoting his Message for the 2015 World Day of Peace from December 8 2014.

“These are dangers which I pointed out in my recent Message for the World Day of Peace, which dealt with the issue of today’s multiple forms of enslavement. All of them are born of a corrupt heart, a heart incapable of recognising and doing good, of pursuing peace.”

Pope Francis called on religious communities to condemn terrorism, especially Muslim leaders. He said: “I express my hope that religious, political and intellectual leaders, especially those of the Muslim community, will condemn all fundamentalist and extremist interpretations of religion which attempt to justify such acts of violence.”

The Pope added that extremist mentalities had caused a “true world war fought piecemeal.” He said: “They affect, albeit in different forms and degrees of intensity, a number of areas in our world, beginning with nearby Ukraine, which has become a dramatic theatre of combat. It is my hope that through dialogue the efforts presently being made to end the hostilities will be

consolidated, and that the parties involved will embark as quickly as possible, in a renewed spirit of respect for international law, upon the path of mutual trust and fraternal reconciliation, with the aim of bringing an end to the present crisis.”

The Pope decried the “chilling” fundamentalist terrorism in Syria and Iraq. He said: “This phenomenon is a consequence of the throwaway culture being applied to God. Religious fundamentalism, even before it eliminates human beings by perpetrating horrendous killings, eliminates God himself, turning him into a mere ideological pretext. In the face of such unjust aggression, which also strikes Christians and other ethnic and religious groups in the region, the Yazidis for example, a unanimous response is needed, one which, within the framework of international law, can end the spread of acts of violence, restore harmony and heal the deep wounds which the ongoing conflicts have caused.”

He went on to express his “personal closeness” to the Christian communities of the Middle East saying that their extinction would leave the region “mutilated.” He said: “Here, in your presence, I

appeal to the entire international community, as I do to the respective governments involved, to take concrete steps to bring about peace and to protect all those who are victims of war and persecution, driven from their homes and their homeland. In a letter written shortly before Christmas, I sought to express my personal closeness and the promise of my prayers to all the Christian communities of the Middle East. Theirs is a precious testimony of faith and courage, for they play a fundamental role as artisans of peace, reconciliation and development in the civil societies of which they are a part. A Middle East without Christians would be a marred and mutilated Middle East!”

Pope Francis also mentioned Nigeria, particularly when reflecting on terror, and called the kidnapping of girls by Boko Haram an “abominable trade” and a “scourge” which needs to be eradicated.

Emphasising the importance of dialogue in order to achieve peace, Pope Francis reflected on the recent decision by the US and Cuba to initiate a rapprochement. He said:

“One example close to my heart of how dialogue can build bridges comes from the recent decision of the United States of America and Cuba to end a lack of communication which has endured for more than half a century, and to initiate a rapprochement for the benefit of their respective citizens.”

WCC expresses shock over killings in Nigeria

The World Council of Churches (WCC) has expressed deep shock over the attacks by extremist group Boko Haram in Nigeria, which is said to have cost the lives of more than 2,000 people, including children used in suicide bomb attacks.

“A mind-set which deploys young children as bombs and which indiscriminately slaughters women, children and elderly people is beyond outrage, and disqualifies itself from any possible claim to religious justification,” reads a statement issued by the WCC headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland on 12 January.

In the statement, the WCC calls on the Nigerian government to respond meaningfully to these attacks and to ensure protection of the people from any and all such atrocities.

The WCC also joined its voice with those of Nigerian religious leaders who have called for the international community's solidarity and engagement, expressing deep disappointment at the relative – even discriminatory – lack of international media coverage. “As much as the WCC joins in the international solidarity with the people of France in the aftermath of the recent attacks in and near Paris, we are deeply saddened that the tragic events in Nigeria have not attracted equivalent international concern and solidarity,” reads the statement.

The WCC has member churches in Nigeria. The Council have been actively engaged in inter-religious peace initiatives in the country in cooperation with local partners.

A high-level Christian-Muslim visit to Nigeria in 2012 was co-led by the WCC general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit and Prince Ghazi of Jordan of the Royal Jordanian Aal Al-Bayt Institute (RABIIT). The two organizations have

been working together to establish a centre to monitor religiously based violence and promote inter-religious harmony, justice and peace. The centre in Abuja will open during the first half of 2015.

Bishop charged in cyclist death to remain in Baltimore jail

A Baltimore judge declined Monday to reduce the \$2.5 million bail set for an Episcopal bishop charged with killing a cyclist while drunk and texting.

An attorney for Heather Cook, the No. 2 leader for the Episcopal Diocese of Maryland, said after a hearing that Cook can't make bail at that amount and will stay in jail.

The diocese has said that Cook struck Tom Palermo with her car on Dec. 27. She was charged with manslaughter and other offenses. Prosecutors say in addition to being drunk at the time of the accident Cook was texting on her cellphone. The cellphone was issued by the Diocese of Maryland, according to spokeswoman Sharon Tillman.

At a bail review hearing Monday afternoon Assistant State's Attorney Kurt Bjorklund asked District Court Judge Nicole Pastore Klein to remove the possibility of any bail. Bjorklund pointed to a previous drunken driving conviction and noted that Cook left the Palermo collision scene for about 30 minutes. He suggested that those are signs Cook is dangerous and a flight risk.

Bjorklund called Cook "an extreme danger to public safety," adding that she had already demonstrated "extremely reckless and negligent driving" in 2010, when she was charged with drunken driving in Caroline County. In that instance Cook registered .27 percent blood alcohol content during a breath test. The legal limit in Maryland is .08.

Defense attorney Jose Molina argued for a lower bail, saying Cook has admitted to having an alcohol problem and would agree to go into a treatment program or house arrest prior to a trial. After the accident and before her arrest, Cook had checked into Father Martin's Ashley, a drug and alcohol treatment facility.

But Klein sided with the state, determining that Cook is a flight risk, and poses a danger to public safety.

“She was a flight risk because she left the scene,” Klein said. “It concerns me that she struck someone and left. That represents a reckless and careless indifference to life.”

Cook was elected as the Episcopal Church of Maryland’s first female bishop in September.

**On Twitter? - Get CNI headlines -
click logo on CNI home page**

Media digest

Tel

Report on a General Synod paper setting out the case for an overhaul of finances and organization for the future of the Church of England. It states the Archbishops of Canterbury and York have warned the CofE will no longer be able to carry on in its current form unless the downward spiral of its membership is reversed "as a matter of urgency" and it could face a dramatic shortage of priests within a decade. It also states the

two archbishops called for the Church to invest more in building up its presence on social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter to get its message across online as part of a "major programme of renewal and reform".

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/11340590/Church-of-England-cannot-carry-on-as-it-is-unless-decline-urgently-reversed-Welby-and-Sentamu.html>

Ind/BBC

Reports that the Church and Archbishop of Canterbury is unable to stop a priest, who was convicted in 1999 of indecently assaulting three young girls, from wearing a dog collar and using the title Rev. The articles quote from a private letter from the Archbishop to one of the alleged victims. The reports stress that the priest, Guy Bennett, has been disqualified from holding any office in the Church of England.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/archbishop-of-canterbury-justin-welby-admits-church-cannot-stop-banned-paedophile-exvicar-from-using-reverend-title-9973505.html>

<http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-30779029>

Tel

Comment piece on the Paris killings, asking "what if the terrorists were Christians?" saying to understand how to respond to the Charlie Hebdo atrocity, we only have to imagine what would happen if the situation was reversed. It also questions whether a huge public outcry over the shootings is precisely what the terrorists want and says the killers were just madmen.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/11340029/What-if-the-terrorists-were-Christian.html>

FT/BBC/Guard

Reports that [Boko Haram](#) extremists in Nigeria launched a cross-border assault into Cameroon on Monday, and contrasts the global response to terrorist attacks in France with what is happening elsewhere. They state hundreds of civilians have been killed over the past ten days in what is proving one of the most brutal episodes yet in Boko Haram's five-year old attempt to carve out a strict Islamic state in Nigeria's remote and impoverished north east. Matthew Hassan Kukah, the Catholic bishop of Sokoto is quoted saying, "We would have loved to see a situation when the prime minister of Britain had a sense of responsibility to mobilise the international community on our side. You get a feeling almost of betrayal."

<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/1c7f835e-9a7a-11e4-86c2-00144feabdc0.html#axzz3Og9apF00>

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-30788480>

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/12/-sp-boko-haram-attacks-nigeria-baga-ignored-media>

Mail

Report on how an American comedian's anger about Rupert Murdoch's twitter comments on Muslims and the Paris terrorist attacks has evolved into a hashtag which has taken off on Twitter. It states Aziz Ansari started the twitter hastag #RupertsFault which has taken on a life of its own.

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2907411/RupertsFault-hilarious-hashtag-lamprooning-media-tycoon-controversial-tweet-blaming-worlds-Muslims-terrorism.html#ixzz3Og8333ei>

ITV

Further report on an investigation into allegations of abuse at a Church of England care home. It says the church has launched a review into Kendall House, a care home in Kent where a number of residents claim they have had children with birth defects and serious health problems as a result.

<http://www.itv.com/news/2015-01-12/review-into-shocking-allegations-care-home-gave-girls-cocktail-of-drugs-which-led-to-birth-defects/>

Mail

churchnewsireland@gmail.com

Report on possible reforms to wedding laws which could allow couples to get married naked in naturist weddings. It states the 2013 legislation that allowed gay weddings also said the Government would examine changes to the way marriages are solemnised. This week ministers will look at reforms which could allow weddings in the open air or in people's homes and gardens and explore whether weddings may be conducted by non-religious organisations from humanists to political pressure groups.

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2907393/And-bride-wore-Nude-weddings-legalised-rethink-marriage-laws-allow-couples-marry-home.html#ixzz3Og6N6uXR>

FT

Report that the number of fraud cases coming to trial in the UK rose 25 per cent in 2014, driven by large numbers of investment scams. It cites the example of a church trustee who stole £5.3m from parishioners, which he spent on gambling and spread betting.

<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/6b5049fe-9a7b-11e4-8426-00144feabdc0.html?siteedition=intl#axzz3Og9apF00>

Mail

Article on Eton classmates of Oscar-tipped actor Eddie Redmayne and Prince William and where they are now. It mentions Ed Millais, who it says was a barrister, but is

now a committed Christian. It states he has become an apprentice at St Andrew's Church, Chelsea, where he still works running the Sunday School and after-school club.

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2907008/How-Eddie-Redmayne-went-riches-riches.html#ixzz3OgBi2YNL>

Mail

Report that an Episcopal bishop for the Diocese of Maryland, Heather Cook charged with killing a cyclist while drunk and texting had her bail set at \$2.5 million and will stay in jail. Prosecutors say in addition to being drunk at the time of the accident Cook was texting on her cellphone.

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/ap/article-2907169/Bishop-charged-cyclist-death-remain-Baltimore-jail.html#ixzz3OgDcYYab>