



In this issue - Catholic management response to Education Minister Richard Bruton, and web links to media reports.

NI Election: Methodist Church highlights 5 principles

The Methodist Church in Ireland, through its President, the Rev. Bill Mullaly has issued a statement in the light of this week's announcement by the Secretary of State Mr.

James Brokenshire MP, declaring the date for an Assembly Election.

The President states, "In an increasingly uncertain political world, it is unfortunate that the Northern Ireland Assembly has come to the point of being prorogued thus plunging the Northern Ireland people into another election so quickly after last May's election.

'Realising that the political temperature has been raised and that words such as "brutal" are being used to describe the type of election people can expect I ask that such language be absent from the vocabulary of any of our political parties.

'There are five principles which I feel should be borne in mind by all those standing for election:

- The Restoration of Trust
- Acting generously
- Accepting Responsibility
- Being accountable
- Seeking the Common Good

'Finally the words from the Prophet Micah are most appropriate:

What does the Lord require of you but to seek mercy, love justice and walk humbly with your God'

NI Election: Reconciliation is difficult, so is Leadership - Corrymeela statement

The corrymeela Community issued the following statement -

Reconciliation is difficult. We know this. But the alternative is worse. As of tonight, the Northern Ireland Assembly at Stormont has collapsed. Whatever private good will exists between the two main parties is irrelevant and we are facing a snap election.

Today for our reading at Corrymeela, we read the lines from Luke's gospel: *"An argument arose among them as to which one of them was the greatest. But Jesus, aware of their inner thoughts, took a little child and put it by his side, and said to them, Whoever welcomes this child in my name welcomes me."* It is a relevant text, showing that leadership is demonstrated in

gestures of inclusion; gestures that are the antidotes to divisive questions of power and greatness.

All of the people living in this part of Ireland deserve leadership that is creative and envisioned in its hope for a future that is to the betterment of all citizens; those who are Irish, or British, or both or neither.

Today, as we move formally into an election cycle, we call on all politicians to demonstrate gestures of inclusion, and to follow those gestures with action. We call on politicians to speak of the achievements of peace and reconciliation in their electioneering, and ask them to honour those from within and without their party lines, national identities and community affiliations.

Reconciliation is difficult, so is Leadership. As Corrymeela we are willing to host gatherings – on and off the record – for community groups and political leaders who wish to meet each other in a spirit of cooperation, reconciliation and good will. A reconciling future will be built on a reconciling present. Let us share and make stories of

reconciliation in this time rather than stoking fears and suspicion.

NI Election: The need for grace and hope in this election - EA director

Peter Lynas, Northern Ireland director of the Evangelical Alliance, commented on the forthcoming NI election:

“Politics is important, but it is not the be-all and end-all. The people of Northern Ireland, influenced by churches and others, must take the lead in ensuring gracious, truthful and hope-filled conversations during this election period.”

“The four b’s - boilers, ‘bedroom tax’, the budget and Brexit - are unlikely to be solved by an election. Nor are the many other issues being added daily to the negotiating table. There are also concerns that an election could lead to direct rule, potentially taking issues like abortion and marriage out of local hands.”

“We are a deeply relational community, shaped by a culture of generosity and hospitality, influenced by our Christian heritage. Northern

Ireland is known for radical acts of forgiveness and hope springing up in dark places. We must continue to build on the difficult lessons from the past.”

“As the election rhetoric begins, we pray that our political leaders will use their words wisely. We pray for an election based on issues rather than identity. We pray for grace filled conversations working towards a more hopeful future. Finally, we pray not for a sticking plaster, but for supernatural solutions leading to a society filled with healing, wholeness and life transforming love.”

Catholic management responds to Minister Bruton’s school admission policy proposal

The Catholic Primary Schools Management Association broadly welcomes the public consultation process on school admission policies announced by the Minister for Education and Skills, Richard Bruton TD. However, it notes that the issues arising from it may well impact in adverse ways on minority groups and urges that these be taken properly into account.

Responding to the Minister's announcement, Seamus Mulconry, General Secretary of Catholic Primary Schools Management Association, said, "This issue is being misleadingly referred to as the 'baptism bar'. It is important to clarify that there is no requirement for parents to have their children baptised in order to gain admission to a Catholic school.

"The issue the Minister is proposing to address only occurs in the small number of schools who are oversubscribed. The vast majority of Catholic schools are not oversubscribed and enrol all applicants. The issue mainly arises in areas of Dublin and in small pockets of the commuter belt surrounding the capital.

"Reforms to admissions policies will do nothing to alleviate the shortage of school places: only extra school places can achieve that."

The CPSMA pointed out that the Church was already engaged in this issue and that Archbishop Eamon Martin, in a recent interview in the *Sunday Business Post*, stated that, "I could understand where a local parish primary school is in an oversubscribed situation, that preference would be given to children who are in that local

Catholic parish. And then maybe to children who are in the local area who may not be Catholic.”

Mr Mulconry concluded, “While we see the Minister’s reforms in this area as having little impact on Catholic schools, we believe that attention needs to be given to the impact on any such changes to minority faiths and to the ability of those communities to live out their own ethos.”

See also News Links below.

Belfast Cathedral organist to call time after 34 years

The organist at St Anne's Cathedral is set to step down in August after 34 years of service.

Ian Barber's retirement has been received by the Belfast Cathedral board with both sadness and "a deep sense of gratitude".

The Dean of Belfast, the Very Rev John Mann, paid tribute to Ian and said the congregation has been spoilt by his playing.

He said 34 years as organist at the cathedral was a "staggering achievement".



Belfast Cathedral organist Ian Barber

"The organ of St Anne's Cathedral has had a relatively small number of regular players over the 110 years that it has been in existence," he said.

"When one adds to that fact the quality of his musicianship and the quiet modesty with which he displays it, it is hard to properly pay tribute to Ian's service to the Church of Ireland, St Anne's Cathedral and the musical life of the city of Belfast."

However, Dean Mann said that while Ian is planning to retire on August 31, he hopes he will still return for some one-off performances.

"We have some months yet to enjoy his sensitive accompaniments and both the robust and the poignant voluntaries with which we are spoilt week by week, but we hope, too, that he can be persuaded to make occasional guest appearances, even after his well-earned retirement," he said.

St Anne's Master of the Choristers, David Stevens, added his tribute, saying he was extremely grateful to Ian for all of his years of service to St Anne's, and particularly for his friendship and support.

"The music department has undergone a number of changes in the past few years, yet Ian's organ playing, generosity of time and friendly encouragement have been constant and very much appreciated," he said.

Ian was made an Associate of the Royal School of Church Music in October 2014 in recognition of his service at St Anne's Cathedral.

The son of a Church of Ireland clergyman (*Ven. Eric Barber, Archdeacon of Down & Rector of Holywood*), Ian grew up in Holywood and attended Campbell College in east Belfast as a boy.

He went on to win a scholarship to the Royal School of Church Music, before progressing to the Royal College of Music in London.

Upon graduating Ian was also made a Fellow of the Royal College of Organists (FRCO) with a choirmaster's diploma.

During his career he travelled to North America before moving to Canada where he played the organ in St Mark's Church in Ottawa.

After two years he went to the Bishop's University in Quebec to study for a Degree in Theology and Clergy Training.

When he qualified he moved to St Thomas' Church in St Catharine's, Ontario, as an organist.

When he returned to Northern Ireland, Ian took up the post of organist and choirmaster at St Columb's Cathedral in Londonderry.

He also taught at Victoria College and later Strathearn School in Belfast, where he was the head of music for some 21 years.

St Anne's Cathedral's new chamber organ was dedicated and named The Barber Organ in honour of Ian in September 2014.

Ian is married to Jean, who turns the music pages for him at services. - Belfast Telegraph report

Vatican rejects Order of Malta's criticism of investigation

The Vatican is striking back at the Order of Malta, rejecting attempts to discredit its commission investigating the ousting of a top official of the ancient Catholic lay order.

In a sharply worded statement released on Tuesday, the Holy See said it “reaffirms its confidence” in the commission appointed last month by Pope Francis to report on the “present crisis of the central direction” of the order.

The statement added that the Vatican “counts on the complete cooperation of all in this sensitive stage” — a reference to the order’s refusal to cooperate with the investigation on grounds of its sovereign status.

The order’s leader suspended Albrecht von Boeselager as grand chancellor over a condom

distribution scandal involving the order's charity branch.

The order's leader Fra' Matthew Festing [sent a letter to members on January 14](#) in which he said he was only protecting the order's sovereignty in refusing to cooperate with the Vatican commission.

News briefs

+++ Corrymeela In the City - "Corrymeela is delighted to welcome you to an evening of quiet prayer, reflection and gospel reading. Beginning at 5.15pm in Fitzroy Church, University Street, Belfast on 29th January 2017 (please enter through the side door towards the café area). Corrymeela in the City will be followed by a cup of tea and a chat for any who wish to join us. No booking required – all are welcome."

+++ Blessed are the Brave, Corrymeela Ballycastle - "A weekend for LGBT affirming faith leaders. 20 – 22 January, 2017. The retreat will run from 6.30pm on Friday to 2pm on Sunday and costs £99 for a shared room, £139 single occupancy. This is our fifth Blessed are the Brave event. Each year we have welcomed new and

repeat participants on a weekend designed specifically for faith leaders from the Christian traditions who are inclusive of the lives, relationships and leadership of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender people. We spend time in reflection together, in learning, reflecting on biblical texts, day to day stories, and offering encouragement and support. Additionally, at retreats at Corrymeela, we offer tools and learning from the many years of responding to sectarianism that are relevant for people who are engaging in dialogue about LGBT lives within the life of the Christian churches. This weekend is not only for those who are LGBT themselves, but for those Christian faith leaders who are inclusive of LGBT people. There are more details on the FAQ sheet linked below.

Interested? **please read our FAQs**, If you require further assistance, please contact: Corrymeela Belfast Office, +44 (0)28 9050 8080 or email **belfast@corrymeela.org**

+++ Firsthand insight on Middle East at QUB Chaplaincy - The Church of Ireland & Methodist Chaplaincy at Queen's University Belfast will be hosting an evening with Mike Bassous, the General Secretary of the Bible Society in

Lebanon, in partnership with the Bible Society in Northern Ireland on Thursday, 26th January, at 7.30pm. The Bible Society says: “Our television screens are full of images and stories from the Middle East, and our hearts break for those people we see who have lost everything and struggle to find meaning amongst the rubble and destruction. But what stories are we not hearing? What about the stories of hope? We are thrilled that Mike will be spending time with us here in Northern Ireland, sharing his story of hope. Take this opportunity to come along and hear his first-hand account of what the reality of life is in the Middle East. The challenge that he brings might shake us somewhat, but the stories of hope that he has to share will amaze you. Somehow, in the midst of war and an atmosphere of persecution, God is still at work. His Kingdom is still advancing. We would love for you to come and hear Mike’s message from the Middle East.” The evening is free to attend, but due to demand, registration is required. Please click [here](https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/mike-bassous-in-belfast-tickets-30556970722) to reserve your place: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/mike-bassous-in-belfast-tickets-30556970722>.

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www.churchnewsireland.org

News links to reports on faith, politics and education

Minister reduces number of subjects NI schools must offer

BBC News

The Education Minister Peter Weir has changed a major departmental policy developed by his Sinn Féin predecessors.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-38644160>

Priest files complaint over RTÉ comedy sketch

Irish Examiner

A Co Kerry priest has lodged a complaint with the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland over the “ridiculing of the Eucharist” on the Late Late Show.

<https://www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/priest-files-complaint-over-rte-comedy-sketch-439266.html>

Ireland to consider banning schools from using religion in admissions

National Secular Society

The **Irish** Minister for Education and Skills has set out plans to tackle the **religious** discrimination endemic in the **Irish** education system, hitting out at ...

<http://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2017/01/ireland-to-consider-banning-schools-from-using-religion-in-admissions>

Reform plans for faith-school admission in Ireland

BBC News

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-38634076>

Ban on using religion to deny school place among options for reform

Belfast Telegraph

<http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/republic-of-ireland/ban-on-using-religion-to-deny-school-place-among-options-for-reform-35371024.html>

Bruton announces school admission reform options -

[RTE.ie](http://www.rte.ie)

<https://www.rte.ie/news/2017/0116/845185-school-admissions-plan/>

Mixed reaction to Richard Bruton's plan to tackle school enrolments

Irish Examiner

Concern was raised on behalf of **Church of Ireland** primary schools, that they might no longer be able to cater for pupils who have to travel longer ...

<http://www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/mixed-reaction-to-richard-brutons-plan-to-tackle-school-enrolments-439427.html>

Bishops try to find new compromise in 'baptism barrier' row

Irish Independent

<http://www.independent.ie/irish-news/education/bishops-try-to-find-new-compromise-in-baptism-barrier-row-35372996.html>

'Baptism barrier' and schools -

Irish Times - Letters

<http://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/letters/baptism-barrier-and-schools-1.2939124>

Minister to tackle Baptism barrier in lifetime of Government

Irish Times

<http://www.irishtimes.com/news/education/minister-to-tackle-baptism-barrier-in-lifetime-of-government-1.2939303>

Catholic group says 95% of their schools don't have a baptism barrier

The Journal

As it stands schools are legally permitted to select students based on their religion.

<http://www.thejournal.ie/minister-bruton-plan-deal-baptism-barrier-3188793-Jan2017/>

'Sectarian' £250000 boost for Tyrone and Mid Ulster community halls

Mid Ulster Mail

Across Mid Ulster, the funding went to St Tida's **Church of Ireland** Parish Hall Bellaghy (£30,840); Sixmilecross Orange Order (£25,080); Glasmullagh ...

<http://www.midulstermail.co.uk/news/sectarian-250-000-boost-for-tyrone-and-mid-ulster-community-halls-1-7776264>

Mail

Report that the Archbishop of Canterbury is joining business leaders at the World Economic Forum in Davos, as they focus on pressing issues such as tackling inequality, reforming capitalism and promoting 'responsible leadership'. Archbishop Justin joins a British delegation which includes Chancellor Philip Hammond, Bank of England governor Mark Carney and the former prime minister Gordon Brown.

http://www.dailymail.co.uk/money/markets/article-4125534/The-FTSE-bosses-heading-Davos-tackle-poverty.html?ITO=1490&ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490

Times

Report that one of the Queen's chaplains has criticised a Glasgow church (St Mary's Cathedral) that allowed a Koran reading during a service, saying that it should apologise to Christians "suffering dreadful persecution at the hands of Muslims". In a letter to the paper (below), the

Revd Gavin Ashenden said that the fallout from the decision provided a lesson in the limitations of interfaith dialogue. Article notes that Kelvin Holdsworth, the provost of St Mary's called in police after members of the church received "hate-filled messages" from far-right extremists after the service.

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/queen-s-chaplain-condemns-koran-reading-in-cathedral-5x2g3czx9>

Letter from Gavin Ashenden

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/edition/comment/trumps-support-for-nato-and-a-uk-trade-deal-tqk89sgt5>

Premier/ Lancs Guardian

Reports that the Bishop of Lancaster, Geoff Pearson, has announced his retirement, for this summer, after nearly 43 years of ministry. Bishop Geoff, who has held the suffragan bishop role for more than a decade, said, "I have a mixture of feelings as this announcement is made. There is a real sadness about leaving colleagues and being part of the momentum that is building around the Diocesan Vision 2026."

<http://www.premier.org.uk/Across-the-UK/Lancashire-Cheshire/Anglican-Bishop-of-Lancaster-to-retire>

<http://www.lancasterguardian.co.uk/news/anglican-bishop-of-lancaster-announces-his-retirement-1-8336280>

BBC/Exp/Mirror/Mail

Reports on the funeral of two cousins who died after a suspected hit-and-run incident. Zaneta Krokova and Helina Kotlarova were holding hands when they were hit by a car in Oldham on New Year's Eve. The funerals took place at St Paul's Church and were led by the Revd Nick Andrewes, who said the girls' deaths "reminds us how precious, and yet how fragile, is the life and love that we share".

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-manchester-38623492>

<http://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/754904/funeral-oldham-hit-and-run-on-new-years-eve-cousins-zaneta-krokova-helina-kotlaro>

<http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/hundreds-gather-funeral-girls-aged-9631498#ICID=nsm>

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4124288/Funeral-young-cousins-killed-car-smash.html>