



Declan Hanratty staged a hunger strike last year when the Dominicans announced they would be regrouping into fewer centres and Drogheda would not remain open.

Dominicans defiant over Drogheda church closure

The prior of the Dominican church in Drogheda, Co Louth, which is facing closure, has said “we won’t be bullied in any way shape or form to get out of here”.

Irish Times - Fr Tony McMullan also said that the priests had “taken a stance not to be defiant but we feel what is right is to stay” after the Dominican congregation ordered the closure under a consolidation plan.

Fr McMullan, as well as Fr Jim Donleavy and Fr Joseph Heffernan, also minister to a number of orders locally, including the Sienna nuns, the Cistercian monks and the Poor Clares, say they want to stay in Drogheda.

A local campaign began last September when the Dominicans announced they would be regrouping into fewer centres and Drogheda would not remain open. Other centres were earmarked for closure in Dublin; Athy, Co Kildare; Waterford and Limerick.

In response the sacristan, Declan Hanratty, began a hunger strike and a sit-in at the church. That ended after an understanding that there would be consultation with local people.

The “Save the Dominicans” campaign began and has so far collected 20,000 signatures.

Fr McMullan said the intention was not to be “disobedient but to be true to what we are. We

have a ministry here and to be bullied to get out of here is a big mistake.”

Badly handled

“The plan is to cease here and we want to stay here,” he said. “This has been very badly handled, the whole thing has been badly thought out and I am not out to be disobedient or defiant but to stand up for what is right.”

“I believe it is right to maintain a presence in Drogheda and it would be wrong to shove it aside,” he said.

Fr Donleavy said that “the Dominicans have been in Drogheda for 800 years. In September 1649, Cromwell breached the walls of this town and slaughtered 3,500 of its inhabitants, including two Dominican priests who were beheaded on West Street. We survived Cromwell and we will survive again.”

Fr Gregory Carroll, prior provincial for the order, said in a statement that the decision was “unavoidable. Maintaining 19 centres is an impossible task for a province of 124 members, of whom only 51 are under the age of 65.”

New Learn Eldership resource is a bestseller for Church of Scotland



Rev Dr Alister Bull and Rev Colin Sinclair and the new Learn Eldership resource

The Learn Eldership resource written by the Mission and Discipleship Council of the Church of Scotland has become the equivalent of a bestseller book with more than 3 000 advance sales.

Rev Dr Alister Bull, Mission and Discipleship Council Secretary, pictured with council convener, Rev Colin Sinclair, said: 'It is a fantastic achievement and does show the

church's high commitment to learning and development. Learn Eldership has struck a chord in many parts of the church and that is exciting.'

Printed in partnership with the Church of Scotland's publishing arm, Saint Andrew Press, advance orders have soared with 1,000 copies bought in one week alone.

To meet demand, the print run has now been increased to almost 6,000 copies, a number which is especially high in the UK religious books market. Ann Crawford of Saint Andrew Press says 'Because these advance sales are not through booksellers, but will be after publication, these figures are nevertheless a bestseller in anyone's terms.'

Learn Eldership will be published in early March. It is available to pre-order at a discounted rate of £5.50 when purchased through the Church of Scotland.

RTE success for Carrick choir

Carrickfergus Grammar School Choir has won the RTÉ Lyric FM Choir for Christmas competition (Secondary School category) for the

fourth year in a row, collecting prize money of €500 for its efforts.

The competition is now in its 16th year and has entries from throughout Ireland with well over 100 choirs taking part.

The Carrick choir is directed by Edward Craig and its strong ethos of non-selective membership is drawn from throughout the school.

The singers broadcast regularly and most recently could be heard on Radio Ulster on Christmas morning. They also enjoy going away together on tour and this has given the members the opportunity to sing in many magnificent venues in countries including France, Holland, England, Scotland and Ireland.

In March they competed in the Prague Youth Music Festival, winning a gold award and the prize for the outstanding performance of a mixed voice composition.

Catholic Schools Week - Communities of faith

Catholic Schools Week begins on Sunday 25th January and continues until Sunday 1st

February. The theme for this year is 'Catholic Schools: Called to Serve.'



CATHOLIC SCHOOLS
**Communities of Faith,
Knowledge and Service**

To launch Catholic Schools Week in Derry diocese, a Celebration of the Eucharist will be held in Saint Eugene's Cathedral, Derry on Thursday 22nd January at 10.00am. The main celebrant will be Bishop Donal Mc Keown. Everyone is welcome to attend.

Parishes urged to be more welcoming to migrants

As incidents of racism increase, Irish parishes are urged to be more welcoming.

Irish Catholic - Parishes are being urged to play a fundamental role in making migrants and refugees feel more welcome in Irish society.

In a resource pack for parishes celebrating World Day for Migrants and Refugees next Sunday, Bishop Raymond Field encouraged parishes to reach out to offer support to migrants in their community.



Bishop Raymond Field.

He said that mental health difficulties “are the unspoken injury afflicting whole swathes of the migrant community”, and urged parishes to highlight the issue “bringing it from the periphery of people’s consciousness, so that through dialogue and improved collective awareness people can receive comfort, security and support from their community and parish”.

The Immigrant Council of Ireland reported late last year that the number of racist incidents reported to them had increased by 51% during 2014. Their founder, Sr Stan Kennedy told *The Irish Catholic* that “racism was the biggest single issue facing Europe” at the moment, and this was a challenge society must “take on”, with parishes in an ideal position to lead the way.

“I think Ireland has a great opportunity to become a model of welcoming migrants and refugees in Europe, because we still have a community spirit in parishes to welcome strangers, and integrate them in the best possible way,” she said.

Welcoming

Michael O’Sullivan, who works in the Columbans’ outreach centre to migrants in Dublin city, said “most people are not racist, but maybe are not as welcoming as they think they are”.

“The problem is people take it for granted that people are settling in and don’t move outside their comfort zone to make some effort to reach out,” he said.

“People in parishes and local communities should not underestimate the importance of

simple things like organising welcoming coffee mornings, doing something to mark festivals or national days of people from new communities, anything that would help people to feel they are welcomed.”

Three young men killed in Syria war were from Ireland

Justice Minister Frances Fitzgerald has confirmed that three Irish people have been killed in the conflict zones in the Middle East.

Independent.ie - The three young men who died were among up to 30 who travelled to the war zone to fight in recent years.

It is not known if they knew each other, but they all lived in Leinster - in Navan, Drogheda and Dublin - before they travelled to Syria.

The youngest victim was Libyan-born Shamseddin Gaidan (16), from Navan, who was killed in February 2013 after travelling to Syria without his parents' permission.

Gaidan moved to Ireland from Libya with his family in 2001. His father, Ibrahim, runs a halal grocery shop in Navan, Co Meath.

The teenager spent his summer holidays in Libya in 2012 and was supposed to fly back to Ireland via Istanbul in mid-August.

His family raised the alarm when he did not arrive in Dublin.

They later learned he had crossed the Turkish border into Syria.

In Syria, the teenager fought alongside rebel troops against the brutal regime of president Assad but was killed within months.

Gaidan was the second Irish person to die after joining the rebels in Syria.

Egyptian-born Hudhaifa El Sayed (22), from Drogheda, was shot dead in northern Syria in December 2012.

He moved to Louth with his surgeon father but was killed in a gunfight with regime forces in the northwestern Idleb province shortly before Christmas that year.

Speaking to reporters in Syria before his death, he admitted his parents were concerned about his choice.

"They are still worried for my safety out here," he said, but he added that one of his goals in life was "defending the weak against injustice and the oppressors".

He felt strongly that the fight in Syria was justified.

In late April 2013, Jordanian-born Alaa Ciymeh (26), who grew up in Dublin, was killed in Syria.

The Ciymeh family, who are Palestinian, moved to Ireland when he was very young.

Ciymeh attended the Muslim National School in Clonskeagh before going on to study at De La Salle College in Churchtown.

He moved back to Jordan in 2008

More at -

www.independent.ie/irish-news/three-young-men-killed-in-syria-war-were-from-ireland-30912606.html



Leo Varadkar becomes Ireland's first openly gay minister



The Irish health minister, Leo Varadkar, 36, who has publicly said he is gay – the first time an Irish minister has done so.

Health minister tipped as future party leader tells radio show: 'I am a gay man. It's not a secret'.

Guardian - Ireland's health minister has become the first member of a government in Dublin to [declare that he is gay](#). Tipped as a possible future prime minister, Leo Varadkar told Miriam O'Callaghan on RTÉ Radio 1 on Sunday morning: "I am a gay man. It's not a secret."

His declaration was made just [months before a national referendum on giving gay marriages equal status in Irish law](#). It was also the minister's 36th birthday and he said he wanted to be "fully honest" with the Irish people.

He said that he had briefed the Irish taoiseach, Enda Kenny, who is his party leader, that he was going to out himself live on radio this morning. "He [Kenny] said it was my private life, it's a private issue, and none of this was his concern," Varadkar said.

Varadkar said the taoiseach even asked him if he had visited one of Dublin's most famous gay bars. "He actually asked me if I had ever been to the PantiBar, and I told him 'no, I haven't,' and he said 'there you go Varadkar, I'm ahead of you already'."

He told the programme: "The only worry I have is that people see me differently or treat me differently. I hope they don't. I am still the same person. To me it is not a big deal, I hope it is not a big deal for people.

"There are people a lot braver than me, but I wanted to do it. I suppose I felt as a public figure I should say it. I want the next generation to feel

that they don't have to do an interview like this.” He added that it was his belief that Ireland was ready to have a gay prime minister.

More at -

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/18/leo-varadkar-ireland-first-openly-gay-minister>

Former Episcopal cleric bails Baltimore Episcopal Bishop charged with manslaughter

A US Episcopal bishop in Baltimore accused of killing a bicyclist while driving drunk and texting was released Thursday after posting \$2.5 million bail using money provided by the former pastor of a Connecticut parish.

Baltimore Sun - The bail was paid by a bondsman who received a \$35,000 check from Mark H. Hansen, the former pastor of an Episcopal church in Bristol, Conn., who was removed from his parish nearly 10 years ago.

The bishop, Heather Elizabeth Cook, was charged last week with manslaughter, driving under the influence of alcohol, texting while driving and other violations in the death of

bicyclist Thomas Palermo on Dec. 27 on Roland Avenue in Baltimore.

Authorities say Cook had a blood-alcohol level of 0.22 percent — more than twice the legal limit in Maryland — and left the scene of the crash before returning some 30 minutes later.

Cook was elected bishop suffragan last year, becoming the first woman bishop of the Maryland diocese. She has been placed on administrative leave.

Attorney David Irwin said that after posting bail Cook was headed to an inpatient treatment facility, and that as a condition of her release she was not permitted to drive.

Palermo, 41, was married with two young children. Cyclists have followed Cook's case closely.

Cook and Hansen attended General Theological Seminary in New York at the same time in the 1980s, according to the school's website, and Hansen participated in Cook's consecration ceremony last September.

Hansen, who lives in Millington on Maryland's Eastern Shore, is a lay pastor at St. Clement's



Mark Hansen and his wife Ceil

Episcopal Church in Kent County. He is also executive director of the St. Paul's Cathedral Trust in America, a nonprofit that supports the London cathedral.

Cook, who served on the Eastern Shore for 10 years, is listed on the St. Paul's Cathedral Trust website as a donor who gave more than \$1,000.

A spokeswoman for the Episcopal Diocese of Maryland described Hansen as a friend of Cook's. Spokeswoman Sharon Tillman said the church was not involved in the bail payment but was "grateful that she'll now be able to resume treatment."

Hansen signed a promissory note agreeing to pay \$215,000 in monthly installments of \$1,000, records show. If Cook fails to appear in court, Hansen could be on the hook for the full \$2.5 million.

'Connecticut Six'

Hansen became known as one of the "Connecticut Six" in 2003 for opposing a bishop's support for the election of an openly gay bishop in New Hampshire.

The case attracted national attention. Hansen and five other priests stopped forwarding dues to the diocese. In 2005, Hansen was accused of taking an unauthorized sabbatical and was suspended from his duties as rector of St. John's Church in Bristol, Conn. He was barred from leading any parish in the state for six months and was eventually defrocked.

At the time, Hansen told The Courant that he made a good-faith denial that he had abandoned the communion of the Episcopal Church but that the bishop did not withdraw his notice of inhibition.

Parishioners filed a federal lawsuit against the leader of the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut. They claimed Bishop Andrew D. Smith acted illegally when the diocese seized control of Hansen's church. The lawsuit was thrown out.

Last week, the leaders of the Connecticut Diocese expressed "deep sadness" at the death of Palermo, which they said was "magnified" by the charges against Cook.

"This is a profound tragedy for all involved, and especially for the Palermo family, Bishop Cook, and the leaders and people of the Episcopal Diocese of Maryland," Bishop Ian T. Douglas and Bishop Suffragan Laura J. Ahrens wrote in a message on the diocesan website.

Media Digest

Guard

Editorial on the two Archbishops' comments last week on the contents of the Archbishop of York's book *On Rock or Sand?* It states the hierarchs of the Church of England have launched themselves into the election campaign and the book's essays could look like a denunciation of

government policy. But it says their value lies in their attempt to widen our understanding of what politics can try to do.

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jan/19/guardian-view-on-church-of-england-and-politics>

Ind

Article by columnist Yasmin Alibhai Brown, discussing how inequality is threatening to destroy our democracy. It mentions the Archbishop of York and the Archbishop of Canterbury who warned that economic growth pursued maniacally has increased inequality and is an "evil" which must now be tackled.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/inequality-is-threatening-to-tear-our-democracy-apart-yet-the-government-is-only-encouraging-it-9986388.html>

Times

Report on results of research that found belief in life after death is as common in Britain as it was 30 years ago, although the number of people who say they believe in God or call themselves Anglicans has

fallen significantly. It states in those three decades the proportion of people who hold all five of the religious beliefs covered by the study - God, life after death, Heaven, Hell and sin - has also slightly increased to almost a third of the UK's population. Report mentions the Archbishop's comments about a decline in church attendance and members becoming significantly older. It also quotes Linda Woodhead, professor in the sociology of religion at Lancaster University, saying the church should capitalise on the large pool of latent faith in Britain. Paper also includes opinion column on the subject.

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/faith/article4327006.ece>

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/opinion/leaders/article4327081.ece>

BBC

Report that the Bishop of Rochester spent a night sleeping in the cold and wet to raise funds and awareness for the homeless. It states James Langstaff bedded down outside Bromley Parish

Church, south London, along with about 20 other people on Saturday to raise £10,000 for the Bromley night shelter and charity Housing Justice.

<http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-30870145>

Express/Huff Post

Reports on Victoria Wasteney, a senior occupational health therapist at a mental hospital in east London, who is taking the hospital to an employment tribunal after accusing it of religious discrimination. It states Miss Wasteney said she asked fellow nurse Enya Nawaz if she could pray for her, but was sent home for allegedly harassing Miss Nawaz. She claims Miss Nawaz came under pressure to file a complaint on religious grounds.

<http://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/552780/Christian-nurse-takes-hospital-to-tribunal-for-faith-discrimination>

http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2015/01/18/nurse-christian-muslim_n_6496460.html?utm_hp_ref=uk&ir=UK

Mail

Report on government's wedding law review which could allow weddings in the

open air, in people's homes and gardens or with the couple and guests in the nude. It states Justice Secretary Chris Grayling today rejected the idea of allowing naturist weddings, saying he had 'absolutely no intention' of allowing naked couples to tie the knot.

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2915498/You-leave-wedding-hat-Minister-rules-legalising-NAKED-weddings-marriage-review.html#ixzz3PFNdh3iV>

Mail

Columnist Dominic Lawson discusses differences in belief and faith in the light of the Pope's 'air punch' about those who insult God.

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-2916084/I-hope-Pope-won-t-punch-wife-never-eye-eye-religion-writes-DOMINIC-LAWSON.html>

Tel & Mail

Report that a church that only gets visited by the Queen every four years cancelled her appointment because of health and safety fears after a lump of plaster fell from the ceiling. It states church officials

decided it was too dangerous to admit members of the public to St Mary the Virgin church at Hillington on the Sandringham estate because of the risk. The Queen and Prince Philip had been due to attend the service.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/queen-elizabeth-II/11354242/Church-cancels-Queens-visit-over-loose-plaster-health-and-safety-fears.html>

[http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2915668/Health-safety-officials-force-Queen-change-Sunday-worship-plans-Majesty-s-choice-church-Sandringham-estate-closes-plaster-falls-ceiling.html?](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2915668/Health-safety-officials-force-Queen-change-Sunday-worship-plans-Majesty-s-choice-church-Sandringham-estate-closes-plaster-falls-ceiling.html?ITO=1490&ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490)

[ITO=1490&ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2915668/Health-safety-officials-force-Queen-change-Sunday-worship-plans-Majesty-s-choice-church-Sandringham-estate-closes-plaster-falls-ceiling.html?ITO=1490&ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490)

Star

Report that the body of DJ Jimmy Savile will be dug out of his grave in a Scarborough Cemetery in North Yorkshire, following complaints from outraged families of loved ones buried at the site. His remains will be cremated and scattered at a secret location. It states Savile's family has rubber-stamped the plan and the church has said there would be no problem with the request.

January 20

[http://www.dailystar.co.uk/news/latest-news/420834/
Savile-body-to-be-dug-up-following-requests-from-loved-
ones-of-others-buried-with-him](http://www.dailystar.co.uk/news/latest-news/420834/Savile-body-to-be-dug-up-following-requests-from-loved-ones-of-others-buried-with-him)