



Church of Ireland Gazette calls for blessings for same-sex marriages

The Church of Ireland Gazette has issued a controversial proposal that the denomination

creates a new affirmation ceremony for couples in civil same-sex marriages.

The Belfast News Letter reports - The radical proposal comes after the worldwide Anglican church agreed earlier this month to sanction its US branch over its “fundamental departure” from the faith by endorsing gay marriage.

Editorially independent of the denomination, this week’s Gazette argues for an innovative affirmation ceremony for civil same-sex marriage – based on the precedent of the Church blessing the remarriage of divorcees when that was contrary to Church teaching.

Some traditionalists would contend that both actions by the Church would contravene scripture but the Gazette argues that since the Church has long affirmed the former, it now has no excuse but to support the latter also.

A particular question arises, the Gazette editorial said, as to how the Church should approach committed members of the Church of Ireland who have entered into “civil same-sex marriages”. Only civil partnerships are available to date in its northern jurisdiction, while gay marriage is now lawful in the south.

“The teaching of the Church is clear that marriage is both heterosexual and lifelong in its purpose (Canon 31),” the editorial said.

However, the Church has already made provision for the remarriage in church of divorced persons, subject to special pastoral requirements in each case.

Therefore, the editorial suggests, “it is now for the Church to consider, as a matter of some urgency, what its pastoral approach is to be in relation to churchgoing couples who are in civil same-sex marriages”.

For heterosexual couples, the Church at first refused remarriage of divorcees, later moving to bless civil remarriages, and finally to the current position where remarriage of divorcees in formal church services is frequent.

For some people, the blessing of civil remarriages at the time was “hypocritical”, the Gazette said, because “it was seen as blessing something of which the Church did not approve”.

It added: “Yet, the service was an expression of the Church’s acceptance of individuals’ right to differ from the Church in terms of how they lived their lives in this regard.

“It was not hypocrisy; it was about the Church accepting that it is not, actually, infallible and that individual Christian people have a right, to some extent at least, to disagree with the Church while remaining fully in communion with it.

“While it remains a matter of debate that the rationale behind the remarriage of divorced persons in church gives grounds for the marriage of same-sex couples also in church, as things stand it is quite possible for the Church to recognise, through a specific pastoral ministry, that couples in civil same-sex marriages have entered into that relationship in a wholly conscientious manner.

“Such couples must be given their place in the Church, even though their decision runs counter to Church teaching.”

More at -

<http://www.newsletter.co.uk/news/northern-ireland-news/church-of-ireland-gazette-calls-for-blessings-for-same-sex-marriages-1-7184978>

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New petition launched to support Ashers Baking



The Christian Institute has launched a petition to support Ashers Baking Company ahead of the Christian-run bakery's appeal hearing next week.

The petition, which can be signed at christian.org.uk/supportashers, states: "I support Ashers Baking Co and the McArthur family in their stand for freedom of speech and freedom of conscience."

The McArthur family own and run Ashers, and face legal action after being taken to court by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.

Ashers declined to decorate a cake with the words “Support Gay Marriage” in May 2014 because of the McArthur family’s Christian belief that marriage can only be between one man and one woman.

The Equality Commission took Ashers to court and in May last year a District Judge ruled that the bakery had breached political and sexual orientation discrimination regulations.

The Court of Appeal in Belfast will hear the legal arguments on Wednesday 3 February.

Earlier this month, it was revealed that a top legal expert had joined the team defending Ashers.

Professor Christopher McCrudden of Queen’s University Belfast studied law at Yale and Oxford and specialises in human rights law. He joins a team led by David Scoffield QC.

Speaking about Professor McCrudden, The Christian Institute’s spokesman Simon Calvert said: “We are delighted to have such a formidable legal expert join an already strong team.”

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North West Schools in major new project 'Jointly Remembering the Centenary 2016'

A major new project has been launched in the North West which brings pupils from a dozen schools together to study two significant historical events which happened a century ago.

'Journey Together – North West Schools Jointly Remembering the Centenary 2016' is a regional church initiative which involves pupils from across the community, and from both sides of the border, in collaborative exploration of the Battle of the Somme and the Easter Rising, whose centenaries are being commemorated this year.

The project began on Wednesday with a workshop delivered by the Nerve Centre, under its Creative Centenaries programme. The 'Journey Together' project has been embraced by 12 second level schools in the North West and involves 60 students.

The young people will take part in joint visits to the Somme Centre and Dublin, and in a series of workshops and other events which will explore this complex period in our history sensitively and



Fiona Fagan (right) of the Churches' Trust with pupils and staff from the twelve schools taking part in the 'Journey Together' project. On left is Niall Kerr from the Nerve Centre, which delivered the first workshop.

imaginatively. A major event is planned for Derry–Londonderry Guildhall in May 2016, to mark the completion of this phase of the project.

'Journey Together' is being coordinated by The Churches' Trust, an interdenominational organisation founded 30 years ago by local church leaders in response to the level of deprivation in the area and the necessity to work together to provide essential services to those in need. Central to the ethos of the Churches' Trust is promotion of a more united, shared and cohesive society, working in collaboration with churches, schools and a diverse range of community groups.

The leaders of the four main churches locally say they believe ‘Journey Together’ will have a positive impact on education and community relations in the North West. “We are grateful to participating schools for their support and enthusiasm, and to the various organisations which have joined us in providing financial support. We trust that the pupils involved will find this a rewarding learning experience and we hope that the social and educational benefits from ‘Journey Together’ will extend well beyond May.”

Belfast launch of C of I’s Human Sexuality guide online and on RTE

Belfast based Northern Visions Television (NvTv) has produced a news report on the launch of the Church of Ireland’s Select Committee on Human Sexuality in the Context of Christian Belief’s *Guide to the Conversation*.

The Northern Ireland launch took place in the Library at St Anne’s Cathedral on January 19, and the NvTv report includes interviews with the Dean of Belfast, the Very Rev John Mann, Chairman of the Select Committee, and the Most Rev Dr Richard Clarke, Archbishop of Armagh.



Dean John Mann speaks at the Belfast launch of the Guide.

The *Guide* is a new resource designed to assist members of the Church in the ongoing process of listening, learning and dialogue on the issue. It outlines the process to date along with contextual essays and contributions from different viewpoints.

You can watch the NvTv report on the launch of the *Guide* above. The report begins one minute 29 seconds into the programme.

For further details of the launch of the guide in Dublin and Belfast, see <http://ireland.anglican.org/news/6137>

Dean Mann has also been interviewed by RTE in his capacity as Chairman of the Select Committee. A short version of this interview is due to be broadcast on *Leap of Faith* – just after the 10pm news on Friday February 12, and a longer one on Sunday February 14 during the Sunday Spirit programme between 10am and 1pm, both on RTE Radio 1.

Spirit Radio reaches half a million people a week

Spirit Radio is celebrating its fifth birthday with the satisfying news that it is now reaching 540,000 adults each week and the station is most popular with young adults in the 25-34 age group.

The new figures for Ireland's Christian radio station are published in a listenership survey carried out by Amarách Research.

Speaking about the milestone, CEO of Spirit Radio, Rob Clarke, said it was clear there was a hunger for positive uplifting radio.

“Since we started Spirit Radio five years ago it has continued to grow from strength to strength; people have really warmed to our mix of compelling speech content and uplifting



The team at Spirit Radio

contemporary music with a positive message. These figures are a strong indication of the hunger for Christian radio in Ireland,” he said.

Rob Clarke related how, “Over the past five years we have received thousands of emails, texts and calls about the difference the station is making in people’s lives. We hear all the time from people who stumble across Spirit Radio and then keep listening.”

“We have had messages on more than one occasion from people who has been struggling with thoughts of suicide and then heard something a song or a speech feature that helped them step back from the brink.”

“We are really encouraged that so many of our listeners are young adults. I think they appreciate the space and opportunity the station provides to think about life’s big questions.”

Wendy Grace, presenter of Spirit Radio’s flagship talk programme ‘The Morning Show’ said that the station was providing a diverse mix of secular and Christian speech content.

“We are able to provide wide variety of news, current affairs and lifestyle issues that appeal to a broad cross-section of listeners.”

Grace is theme of bishop’s Lent series in Connor

The Bishop of Connor’s annual Lent Seminar series gets underway in Jordanstown on Tuesday February 9. This year, the Rt Rev Alan Abernethy will speak on the theme of Grace.

As usual, Bishop Alan will deliver two seminars in three venues across the diocese – Bushmills Parish Centre and Lisburn Cathedral will also host these events. Seminars begin at 7.30pm each evening and finish at 9.30pm with a break for refreshments and fellowship. Dates and venues are as follows:

Tuesday February 9 – Jordanstown Parish Centre
Wednesday February 17 – Bushmills Parish Centre
Tuesday February 23 – Lisburn Cathedral

Wednesday March 2 – Jordanstown Parish Centre
Monday March 7 – Bushmills Parish Centre
Tuesday 1 March 15 – Lisburn Cathedral

Bishop Christine of Newcastle takes her seat in House of Lords

Bishop of Newcastle Christine Hardman on Jan. 26 become the second female bishop in the Church of England to take her seat in the U.K.'s House of Lords – the upper house of the U.K. Parliament. The ceremony took place the day after her neighboring bishop secured a Lords' victory over the government on child poverty reporting.

Bishops have played a part in Britain's legislature since before the era of democracy; and today some 26 bishops have seats in the upper chamber. The archbishops of Canterbury and York and the bishops of London, Durham and Winchester are automatically members of the House of Lords. The remaining 21 places are taken by the most senior diocesan bishop by length of service. However, under transitional arrangements, for the next nine years the most senior female diocesan bishop will jump the queue and leapfrog their male counterparts.

At the start of business in the House of Lords this afternoon, Hardman was led into the Lords' Chamber by Bishop of Southwark Christopher Chessun and was followed by Archbishop of York John Sentamu.

Immediately prior to becoming a bishop, Hardman served the Diocese of Southwark as an archdeacon. Her new diocese, Newcastle, is in the Church of England's Province of York.

Her Writ of Summons – the Queen's instruction to sit as a bishop – was presented to a House of Lords official who read it out loud. Hardman swore the parliamentary Oath of Allegiance. She was then taken to her place on the bishops' benches, shaking the hands of the Lords' Speaker and the Leader of the House of Lords on the way.

“Joining the House of Lords is a great privilege and responsibility,” Hardman said before the ceremony. “God cares about the world as a whole – not just about the Church. I look forward to engaging and working with the other bishops and with key partners for all that leads to the flourishing of communities.

“I will make the most of this opportunity to speak on behalf of those whose voices are not always heard, and particularly alongside the Bishop of Durham to speak up for the North East.”

News links to reports on faith, politics and education

NI pupils will loose out in GCSE grade changes

News Letter

The decision by the Education Minister, Mr John O'Dowd, not to follow the English grading system in GCSEs will adversely affect pupils in Northern Ireland in the future, particularly those who wish to apply to universities across the water.

<http://www.newsletter.co.uk/ni-pupils-will-loose-out-from-changes-to-gcse-gradings-1-7183927>

No chill factor for Protestants at NI universities

News Letter

Stormont's minister responsible for universities has denied there is any "pervasive under-representation" of Protestants in higher education.

<http://www.newsletter.co.uk/no-chill-factor-for-protestants-in-ni-universities-farry-1-7184356>

Strabane priest unrepentant about outing paedophile cleric in USA

News Letter

A Londonderry priest who has been frozen out of his priestly duties in the USA after refusing to cover up sex crimes by another priest, says he has no regrets about what he did.

<http://www.newsletter.co.uk/londonderry-priest-unrepentant-about-revealing-paedophile-cleric-1-7184605>

Youth club worker at Donegal evangelical church sexually assaulted girl

Belfast Telegraph

Donegal youth club worker at evangelical church sexually assaulted girl (13) 'every day' in back of converted van -

<http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/republic-of-ireland/donegal-youth-club-worker-at-evangelical-church-sexually-assaulted-girl-13-every-day-in-back-of-converted-van-34402658.html>

Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission set for abortion law battle

Belfast Telegraph

<http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/northern-ireland-human-rights-commission-set-for-abortion-law-battle-34402916.html>

Northern Ireland's over 50s less likely to heed advice over alcohol

Belfast Telegraph

<http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/northern-irelands-over-50s-less-likely-to-heed-advice-over-alcohol-34399971.html>

440 suspensions in one year at school with 353 pupils in Newtownards

Belfast Telegraph

<http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/440-suspensions-in-one-year-at-school-with-353-pupils-in-northern-ireland-34399716.html>

Sexual consent workshops to be compulsory for new TCD students

The Journal

The classes will be mandatory for first-year undergraduates in student accommodation in Rathmines.

<http://www.thejournal.ie/tcd-mandatory-sexual-consent-workshops-2569766-Jan2016/>

Banking enquiry: For €6.5m, you would expect a lot more from this report

Irish Independent

<http://www.independent.ie/opinion/analysis/for-65m-you-would-expect-a-lot-more-from-this-report-34403449.html>

Banking Inquiry: Eight years on we have one report and no repercussions

Irish Examiner

<http://www.irishexaminer.com/viewpoints/columnists/michael-clifford/banking-inquiry-eight-years-on-we-have-one-report-and-no-repercussions-378549.html>

Times

Speaking on Holocaust Memorial Day, the Archbishop of Canterbury, said that the Holocaust highlighted the dangers of "caricaturing" or ridiculing people for their

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beliefs, and he urged Christians not to be silent accomplices to discrimination (see above). He said: "It's incumbent upon those who take political office or those who have influence in the media to speak up for the defenceless and the marginalised and not to pander to popular prejudice."

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/faith/article4675836.ece>

ITV

Video clip of the Archbishop's interview on Good Morning Britain discussing plans for a scheme to get primary school children thinking about saving as a skill for later life (see above).

<http://www.itv.com/goodmorningbritain/news/archbishop-of-canterbury-justin-welby>

Tel/[Christian Today](#)/Politics Home

Donald Trump would present a "very challenging" situation if he wins the race for the White House, the Archbishop of Canterbury has said. In a wide ranging interview on ITV's Good Morning Britain, Archbishop Justin was asked how he viewed the prospect of Mr Trump as the leader of the free world, said, "It would certainly be very challenging, wouldn't it?"

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/12125439/Archbishop-of-Canterbury-Donald-Trump-will-be-very-challenging-if-he-becomes-US-president.html>
<https://www.politicshome.com/foreign-and-defence/articles/dot-commons-diary/justin-welby-donald-trump>

BBC/ITV

The Government has announced that it will take in unaccompanied refugee children who are in conflict zones such as Syria but will not take any children who

have fled to Europe. The Home Office says it will work with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees to identify "exceptional cases" of children in Syria and neighbouring countries who should be given shelter.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-35422777>

<http://www.itv.com/news/2016-01-28/what-is-britain-doing-to-help-resettle-refugees/>

Premier

A new award scheme has been launched for churches across England and Wales to recognise how environmentally friendly they are. Eco Church is backed by former Archbishop of Canterbury Dr Rowan Williams and aims to help churches be greener. Launched by Arocha UK, the first award was made to St Paul's Cathedral, London.

<http://www.premier.org.uk/News/UK/Rowan-Williams-backs-new-Eco-Church-project>

Ind

Faith schools have been accused of adopting an approach bordering on "religious racism" by turning away pupils simply on the grounds of their religion. Rabbi Dr Jonathan Romain told a conference it would be "intolerable" if schools were to close the door to pupils because of their race - yet it was permitted to segregate them on religious grounds. He was speaking at a conference organised by Westminster Education Forum as a group of 15 organisations - including teachers' unions, Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Lib Dems and Greens, - wrote an open letter to Education Secretary Nicky Morgan urging her to retain the 50 per cent limit on the religious selection of pupils attending free schools.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/faith-schools-accused-of-religious-racism-for-turning-away-pupils-a6837401.html>

International Business Times/Coventry Tel

A police investigation has been launched after a pornographic film was shot in the grounds of a Warwickshire church. The Revd Paul Tullet, the vicar at Water Orton Parish Church, met with officers from Warwickshire police on Tuesday amid claims the film posted online outraged public decency.

<http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/police-probe-pornography-filming-after-actress-lyen-parker-defiles-137-year-old-warwickshire-church-1540425>

<http://www.coventrytelegraph.net/news/local-news/village-churchyard-porn-film-prompts-10795057>

Christian Today

Report of clashes over faith and the nature of the European Union at a debate hosted by the think tank Theos. The session coincided with the launch of a report entitled "A soul for the union". Dr Dave Landrum, head of advocacy at the Evangelical Alliance, asked whether it was possible for Europe to survive without its original Christian identity. Audience members objected to the statement including Andrew Brown, author and religious editor at the Guardian.

Tel/Mail Online

One of the world's finest stained glass windows which survived the Blitz because the Luftwaffe were instructed not to bomb the cathedral has been restored and put back on show. More than 400 colour panels dating back to the 16th century were carefully removed from the

January 29

famous Lady Chapel at Lichfield Cathedral, Staffs, and painstakingly cleaned for the first time in over 200 years.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/history/world-war-two/12125347/Stained-window-spared-by-the-Luftwaffe-restored-to-former-glory.html>

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3419093/Lichfield-Cathedral-s-stunning-16th-century-stained-glass-windows-sparkle-like-haven-t-two-centuries-painstaking-restoration.html>