

Church News Ireland



Image of the day – Armagh procession of light

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Armagh's procession of light

The two Archbishops of Armagh and some of those who took part in the procession of light which journeyed from one Cathedral to the other on the Eve of St Patrick's Day.

People and places

Patrick - an Ulster Scottish Saint



A new publication charting centuries of shared traditions of Saint Patrick in Ulster and Scotland has

March 18, 2022

been launched by the Ulster-Scots Agency to coincide with this year's annual celebrations.

To mark the launch of the new publication, the Agency's Chief Executive Ian Crozier visited Belfast Cathedral and met with Very Reverend Stephen Forde, the Dean of Belfast, who showed him the Cathedral's wonderful mosaic of St Patrick, which depicts the saint's journey across the North Channel and includes a Scottish Saltire at his feet. The mosaic is part of a side chapel of the Cathedral which was dedicated in 1932 to mark the 1500th anniversary of St Patrick's arrival in Ireland.

"Patrick, Ulster's Scottish Saint" is available free of charge from the Discover Ulster-Scots Centre in Belfast and St Anne's Cathedral. Updates on additional outlets will be posted on the Ulster-Scots Agency Facebook page.

Cathedral Sitout raises further £9,100 for Ukrainian Refugee Crisis

£9,100 was raised on Wednesday at the Dean of Belfast's Lent Sit-out for the Ukrainian Refugee Crisis.

The total raised across 8 days is over £27,000. Dean Stephen Forde said - "Thank you for the amazing generosity of individuals and organisations. All money contributed will be distributed through Habitat for Humanity, working especially with refugees in Poland and Romania and through Christian Aid via local and national church

March 18, 2022

organisations in Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Moldova, and reaching to Ukraine.”

Deadline for C of I survey on ethnic diversity, inclusion and racial justice

The Church of Ireland survey on ethnic diversity, inclusion and racial justice – an initiative of the Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland, the Most Revd John McDowell – is still

open to gather views on this important area of life in our society. However, it will close on Tuesday, 22nd March.

All members of the Church are invited to take part – just click here to participate. And please also feel free to share this with anyone who may be interested.

[\[https://www.ireland.anglican.org/news/11144/ethnic-diversity-inclusion-and-racial?\]](https://www.ireland.anglican.org/news/11144/ethnic-diversity-inclusion-and-racial?)



March 18, 2022

For comments or queries, please email Dr Lucy Michael, the co-ordinator for the survey, at enquiries@lucymichael.ie

C of I can return to Common Cup in Holy Communion

A Pastoral Letter from the Archbishops of Armagh and Dublin regarding the return to the use of the Common Cup in Holy Communion permits the restoration of the practice.

The archbishops in the letter state, “With the general phasing out of restrictions in most social settings, the House of Bishops has sought independent expert scientific advice on the return to the use of the Common Cup in Holy Communion. The advice we have received is that such a return would be reasonable now, especially in a vaccinated population and where anyone displaying symptoms of Covid-19 is encouraged to stay away from church services”.

News reports

Church leaders share 'deep concern' over Ukraine war with Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill

Both the Archbishop of Canterbury and Pope Francis have had separate phone calls with the leader of the Russian Orthodox Church in which they discussed the need for peace in Ukraine.



The Archbishop of Canterbury expressed his "deep concern" over the war in Ukraine during a video call with Patriarch Kirill of Moscow on Wednesday afternoon.

Archbishop Justin Welby raised the "urgent need for peace in Ukraine" and for a ceasefire, Lambeth Palace said.

He described the war as "a great tragedy" and said that "war and violence is never the answer" as he pressed Patriarch Kirill to join him in "speaking for peace in public".

"The Archbishop said we need to find ways to live as neighbours in Europe without the aggression and human suffering which have been too much part of our life and history," said a statement from Lambeth Palace.

March 18, 2022

The Archbishop said that Christians were called to be peacemakers and must "do what we can to enable politicians to do their work of establishing the freedom and rights of all people in Ukraine".

"Both leaders emphasised the need to achieve a lasting peace based on justice as soon as possible and agreed to continued communication," the readout from Lambeth Palace concluded.

Kirill is a close ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin and has faced criticism for refusing to condemn the invasion of Ukraine.

In a separate video call on Wednesday, Pope Francis told Kirill that the Church "must unite in the effort to aid peace, to help those who suffer, to seek ways of peace, and to stop the fire".

"The ones who pay the price of war are the people, the Russian soldiers and the people who are bombarded and die," he said.

"Wars are always unjust, since it is the people of God who pay. Our hearts cannot but weep before the children and women killed, along with all the victims of war. War is never the way.

"The Spirit that unites us asks us as shepherds to help the peoples who suffer from war."

Former Methodist President banned from ministry following safeguarding investigation

One of the Methodist Church's most senior leaders won't be permitted to return to ministry after a safeguarding panel revealed the results of an investigation into a complaint made against him.

Rev Steven Wild, who was chair of Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Methodist Circuit and a former president of the Methodist Conference, was suspended in September 2021 after allegations were made.

The detail of the allegations has not been revealed by the Methodist Church despite requests from church related media.

The only information given was the complaint didn't involve children.

In a statement, Mark Dunn-Wilson, deputy chair of District said: "The Connexional safeguarding panel has considered the complaints, which did not relate to children, and concluded that the information provided to them was sufficient to determine that Mr Wild should not be permitted to return to his ministry.

"A new Chair of District had already been nominated and subjected to Methodist Conference approval, will assume their responsibilities in the District in the summer.



"This process has been an extremely difficult and upsetting one for all those concerned and I would ask that you pray for everyone involved and be gracious in your response to this announcement."

The results of the investigation have been met with scorn by Rev Steven Wild. In a statement seen by Premier, he said: "I have been deeply saddened at how the Methodist safeguarding team has treated me, the length of time it has taken for their process to unfold, and on several occasions the profoundly disturbing manner in which the processes have been undertaken.

"As a direct result my physical and mental health, and that of my family, has suffered hugely.

March 18, 2022

"I want to make it absolutely clear that I categorically deny that I have ever - or would ever - intentionally behave in a way that would bring the Church that I have loved and faithfully served for over 40 years into disrepute.

"I have requested an independent investigation into how this process has been conducted and consequent judgements made, and that has been agreed. I hope at that time it will become clear to all that there have been countless failures in this investigation at all levels."

Rev Wild, who was born in Rochdale, decided to become a Christian at the age of 12.

He's been a popular preacher in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly since he became Cornwall District Evangelism Enabler in 1998. A decade later, he became chair of the Cornwall District.

He served a year as President of the Methodist Conference from July 2015.

He was due to retire in the summer.

Ending his statement, he said: "I have been so grateful for the hundreds of letters of support I have received and they have been a great source of strength to myself and my family.

"I would now be grateful if we can be left alone in my retirement to reflect and seek to rebuild our lives."

Anglican Cathedral's Community Kitchen helping refugees in Brussels

Hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian refugees who have fled the war are now travelling further West across Europe. This week, hundreds are queuing outside a Reception Centre at Porte de Hal in Brussels. The queue which includes many children, moves very slowly.

The Community Kitchen at the Anglican Pro Cathedral, Holy Trinity Brussels, which was set up in 2019, has geared up to help.

Gayl Russell the Project Manager did an online Cash & Carry order on Tuesday spending €1000 buying, amongst other things, seventy kilos of apples, 500 bottles of water and one hundred kilos of rice – ingredients for 2 weeks' worth of extra meals they intend to cook for the new refugees.

On Wednesday, they made an extra 200 meals on top of the regular 450 a day and took them down to the queue of Ukrainian refugees. Despite the incredible generosity of the public who have given lots of snacks, biscuits, and chocolate, the refugees were delighted to receive a full hot meal of rice in a spicy tomato veggie bean sauce.

Church News Ireland

March 18, 2022

Webinars, music, resources, broadcasts, and books



PCI Talks Education - podcast

The world of education has been increasingly in the spotlight, with all that the last couple of years has brought compounding and exacerbating existing challenges.


March 18, 2022

Education is also part of PCI's DNA – through the role of transferor governors and boards of management alongside the people in our pews who serve as school leaders, teachers, classroom assistants, support staff and other roles.

In this podcast Dr Andy Brown (2nd Broughshane PC and Convener of PCI's State Education Committee), Colin Berry (The Mall PC, Armagh and Principal of Markethill High School) and Ruth Dalzell (2nd Comber PC and SUNI E3 worker for North Belfast & Newtownabbey) talk to Karen Jardine (PCI Public Affairs Officer) about why local church engagement with schools matters, and how it can be done.

Listen wherever you get your podcasts from or via:
<https://audioboom.com/channels/5019668>

Church Army guest at Zoomed Out?

Church Army are has announced that Sophie Jelley, Bishop of Doncaster, will be our guest at Zoomed Out? LIVE on Monday 28th March. Find out more here 
churcharmy.org/zoomedout

Patrick - Live from St Anne's Cathedral, Belfast

New Irish Arts presents music and stories to celebrate Ireland's patron saint. They say, "As we approach St. Patrick's Day, you're invited to watch our Patrick event, recorded last year in St. Anne's Cathedral Belfast, thanks to generous support from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland.



“Featuring music from New Irish Choir and Orchestra and the story of St. Patrick, filmed in beautiful Irish scenery, you can watch for free at the link below. Enjoy- and share with your friends!

Faith and Hope - a new series from BBC

The BBC has announced a strand of religious programming “Faith and Hope” this Spring. Highlights include the actor Jill Halfpenny presenting a series visiting locations of faith and place in Northumbria; seven pilgrims following Saint Columba’s route through the Scottish Isles; Diarmaid MacCulloch exploring spiritual silence in a series of essays “Talking About Silence” on Radio 3; and on BBC1 “A Believer’s Guide” following people through major life events. For the run of major religious festivals in the spring, the BBC

March 18, 2022

will include programmes for Easter, Holi and Eid including “My First Festivals and My Life” on CBBC. BBC iPlayer has all the content on “The Faith and Hope” page.

Podcast features St Matthew’s Parish Church, Belfast

In the latest episode of the Historical Belfast Podcast Jason Burke visited St Matthew’s Parish Church, consecrated 150 years ago on 11 March 1872. Jason chatted with Sam Guthrie (Queen’s University Belfast) who has been busy working on an exhibition about the social history of St Matthew’s and the surrounding community of the Shankill. Listen here: <https://www.buzzsprout.com/.../10232662-the-crozier-s-return>

It's Newsletter time

Looking at the impact of volunteering, Mothering Sunday, supporting Ukraine & more - pass it on!

Click now to get your copy: <http://ow.ly/oBiL50lisoH>

Killeter Parish in the Derg valley

“Every generation must give their church a future and leave a legacy with and for God. St Bestius is taking theirs. Exciting seeing all God is doing in us and through us.

“Enjoy this video which showcases all we have achieved and are achieving as God leads us on. Keep supporting your church family and be part of the story...”

https://youtu.be/JAzeCylCa_w

Perspective

St. Brigid gets less recognition than St. Patrick - here's why by Lisa Bitel

On March 17, the world celebrated the feast day of St. Patrick, a zealous British bishop of the fifth century who became famous for spreading Christianity in Ireland. Patrick is Ireland's main patron saint.

But as a medieval historian, I suggest that we also pause to remember another of Ireland's patron saints, the nurturing, compassionate St. Brigid.

This year, following a three-year campaign by a feminist organization, herstory.ie, the Irish government finally acknowledged Brigid's importance by declaring a new national holiday on her feast day of Feb. 1. Until now, Ireland counted her among their official three patrons, along with St. Patrick and St. Columcille, or Columba, but gave workers a day off only on St. Patrick's Day.

So who is St. Brigid?

Unlike Patrick, who came from Britain, Brigid was born in Ireland, sometime around B.C.E. 450, the child of a slave and a king in the province of Leinster.

Unfortunately, Brigid left no historical record of her missionary work. Patrick wrote two letters that still exist: one a defense of his missionary career and the other a rebuke to a slave-raiding British king. All information about Brigid comes from biographies of saints written long after she lived. A churchman named Cogitosus was the first to write about Brigid, in about B.C.E. 650, or approximately 200 years after her birth.

Cogitosus recounted Brigid's many purported miracles: As a girl, she gave away the household's butter and bacon to hungry beggars and dogs, then miraculously replaced the food for her family. Later in life, she turned a wooden column into a living tree with one touch and hung her cloak on a sunbeam. After she founded her monastic community at Kildare and became its abbess, she also traveled, preached and was said to have cured Christians of serious debilities such as blindness and muteness, all in imitation of Christ. While many early female saints have miracles attributed to them, few of them actively proselytized.

Cogitosus tells us that Brigid worked some other unique marvels.

She miraculously ended the unwanted pregnancy of one of her fellow sisters, "causing the foetus to disappear without coming to birth and without pain," as Cogitosus put it. She tamed both domestic and wild animals, which was handy when her cows went astray. She could also, according to Cogitosus, manipulate the landscape. Once when her kinsmen were building a plank trackway through the bogs, Brigid moved a river to make it easier for them.

March 18, 2022

Instead of battling wrongdoers, she found peaceful resolutions to violent situations. Once, for example, she deterred a band of bloodthirsty murderers by making it appear as if they had committed a killing that never even happened.

Even after her death, miracles supposedly continued to occur at her shrine. In fact, Brigid's intervention from beyond the grave helped builders gather materials to build a new and magnificent shrine for her at Kildare, or so wrote Cogitosus. She guided an immovable boulder down a hill to her community for their new millstone. She caused a problematic door to hang correctly. These were minor but useful miracles – typical, I would argue, of the sensible saint.

Royal patronage for Patrick

By comparison, Patrick's earliest hagiographers, writing only decades after Cogitosus, depicted their saint in constant conflict with the "heathens" he tried to convert to Christianity.

When Patrick arrived in Ireland in the mid-fifth century, he seems to have bullied Ireland's most powerful king into baptism, but only after dueling and then miraculously killing the king's chief druids. In hagiography, druids were the Irish and British version of pagan wizards. After watching the druids perish, King Loegaire Mac Néill decided, "it is better to believe than die," wrote Patrick's hagiographer, Muirchú around B.C.E. 700.

Also according to Muirchú, Patrick routinely cursed unbelievers. When one evildoer tried to lure Patrick into an

ambush by pretending to be ill, Patrick supposedly caused the patient to drop dead. Patrick was always larger than life in these early accounts, baptizing hundreds of souls at a time.

Around the same time that these hagiographers worked, Brigid's cult center at Kildare became one of the wealthiest and most powerful religious communities in Ireland.

Cogitosus wrote that Kildare was "the head of virtually all the Irish churches and occupies the first place, excelling all the monasteries of the Irish. Its jurisdiction extends over the whole land of Ireland from sea to sea."

Throughout the Middle Ages, Leinster elites continued to donate land and goods to Kildare. They vied to place their female kinfolk as abbess of Kildare until the community closed during the 16th-century dissolution, when the occupying English Protestant government of Ireland shut down all monasteries.

Kildare, however, could never match the status of Armagh, Patrick's chief church, which had the advantage of even greater royal patronage and grander donations by mightier kings.

Similarly, within the church hierarchy of medieval Europe, as in Catholicism today, Brigid could never outrank Patrick, because she was not a priest. Only priests could baptize, ordain, perform the sacrament of the Eucharist and give last rites. Women were not, and still are not, allowed to become ordained priests in Roman Catholicism.

March 18, 2022

In the 19th century, when Irish nationalists sought a symbol of their Catholicism and country in the budding fight for independence, they chose the missionary bishop and founder of Armagh. A national holiday was declared in 1903 to honor St. Patrick.

Brigid's church falls to ruin

In the meantime, Brigid's church at Kildare had fallen into ruin. It was only in 1875 that it was rebuilt by the Protestant Church of Ireland.

Brigid's devotees resigned themselves to Kildare's secondary status as "one of the two pillars of the Kingdom, along with Patrick the pre-eminent," as one medieval hymnist put it.

This is despite a tale, circulated by a ninth-century hagiographer, that Brigid was accidentally ordained as a bishop – apparently, Bishop Mel was so "intoxicated with the grace of God" as he prepared to veil Brigid that he read the wrong prayers over her. "This virgin alone in Ireland ... will hold the episcopal ordination," Mel declared, and a column of fire shot from the saint's head. Unfortunately, other clerics refused to take the story seriously.

Brigid was venerated as "Mary of the Gael," a saint for women, shepherds, beggars, refugees and those in childbirth. Her feast day, Feb. 1, is the same day as Imbolc, an ancient holiday celebrating the start of spring, season of fertility. Indeed, her associations with Imbolc have long raised suspicions about the possible pre-Christian origins of her cult at Kildare.

March 18, 2022

Today, some people keep St. Brigid's Day by weaving a special reed cross or visiting a holy well whose waters, blessed by Brigid, are believed to heal illness. The Brigidine Sisters of Kildare attend their ever-burning flame for Brigid, as nuns did in the Middle Ages. These seem like modest observances compared with the massive parades that flood the main streets of towns around the globe in annual celebration of Patrick.

This year on March 17, when you're wearing the green and singing "Dirty Ol' Town," take a moment to whisper thanks to St. Brigid, the compassionate, sensible, native-born patron saint of Ireland, and ask if Ireland's premier patron saint should be a woman.

Lisa Bitel is a professor of history and religion at USC Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences. Courtesy The Jerusalem Post March 14, 2022

Speaking to the soul

Short reading and a prayer - daily on this site

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The publication of Church News Ireland is overseen by Very Rev Dr Houston McKelvey OBE, QVRM, TD. He may be contacted at houstonmckelvey@mac.com

March 18, 2022