



Image of the day

Bury St. Edmund's

C of I in-person worship to resume in Northern Ireland from Good Friday. See back page, 26.

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Bereavement support to all in need – Clontarf Parish launches new service



The impact of the pandemic on how we mourn our loved ones has led a Dublin parish to set up a new bereavement service.

The Dublin Bereavement Support Service (DBSS) was launched by Clontarf Parish yesterday – St Patrick’s Day.

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Comprising a team of trained bereavement counsellors who are volunteering their time and expertise, the service will initially operate via zoom until it can safely transition to a person-to-person counselling service. They will support people dealing with grief by providing freely accessible, professional bereavement support to all who need it.

The new DBSS was born out of conversations between the Rector of Clontarf, the Revd Lesley Robinson, and parishioners Jim Kieran and Dr Tony Walsh, both of whom are experienced bereavement counsellors, focussing on the impact that the pandemic and all the associated restrictions have had on the experience of loss and grief.

Many families have lost a loved one to Covid 19 and most could not be with the dying person in their final days and hours. Meanwhile, everyone who has been bereaved over the course of the last year has been denied many of the supports and rituals which are usually such an important part of the grieving process.

“Gone are the wakes and the reposing. Funerals have mostly been arranged over the phone with the services themselves being shortened, and the attendances greatly curtailed to the extent that sometimes even close family members have not been able to attend,” Lesley observes.

“After the funeral, the traditional gatherings centred around the sharing of food and memories have also had to be sacrificed, along with all the callers who would normally bring welcome support and distraction in those difficult days and weeks after the bereavement. All of this is so counter-intuitive and counter cultural in a society like ours

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which normally puts such emphasis on the rituals around death and bereavement and will no doubt lead to a lot of unprocessed grief around the loss of loved ones,” she adds.

Both Tony and Jim have been involved in bereavement support for many years through the Irish Hospice Foundation and the Bereavement Counselling Service which formerly operated out of St Ann’s, Dawson Street. Following the closure of the BCS a few years ago and in the current circumstances, they and the Rector agreed that a new bereavement support service would be both beneficial and necessary.



[The Revd Lesley Robinson, Jim Kieran and Dr Tony Walsh](#)

Jim used his network of former colleagues to bring on board a number of trained and experienced counsellors who agreed to be a part of this new venture, and the seed which had been sown began to sprout.

While the DBSS will be run under the auspices of Clontarf Church of Ireland parish, and is rooted in the Christian calling to show love and compassion to all, the service is open to everyone. The service is offered in an impartial,

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non-judgemental way which does not seek to impose religious beliefs on others and acknowledges that people's experiences of grief may differ, but all are equally valid. Initially, the service is being offered via zoom on a one to one basis, but later in the year when the vaccine rollout is more extensive and restrictions have been lifted, face-to-face counselling will be offered. As all the current volunteers are in the Clontarf area, the Parish Centre on Seafield Road will provide one venue, and another will be sourced elsewhere in the North Dublin area. Eventually it is hoped that with the addition of more trained volunteers the service will be extended into South Dublin.

The support service is being offered free of charge although



The Whiterocks, Portrush

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donations can be given if desired. Prospective clients can contact the volunteer counsellors directly by accessing the

contact details on the DBSS website
www.bereavementsupport.ie .

DBSS wishes to acknowledge the invaluable and generous contributions made by Tom Hennessy, Alive Coaching, Orla Fitzmaurice, Poppyvine Website Design, and Abigail Hicks, Designer and Illustrator in getting this venture off the ground.

Scottish Parliament passes controversial Hate Crime Bill

The Scottish Parliament has approved a new Hate Crime Bill by 82 votes to 32 and four abstentions, after a marathon debate.

It seeks to extend protection for vulnerable groups, abolishes the offence of blasphemy and adds a new offence of "stirring up hatred".

But the bill has sparked controversy as opponents raised concerns of a potential danger to freedom of speech with many Christian leaders worried that a vague understanding of "stirring up hatred" could criminalise speaking on topics such as sexual identity.

Speaking to Premier News, James Mildred, Head of Communications at lobbying charity Care said it is worrying the bill does not have what is called a "dwelling defence".

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“The fact that the hate crime bill doesn't have that I think that's really concerning for Christians,” he said.

“If they have neighbours over, and they happen to share their views on, for example, human identity, human sexuality, trans rights, they may worry that that could be reported, and they could then be under police investigation. I think for pastors as well as church leaders, they may be worried along similar line. Will what they say in sermons be investigated? That remains to be seen,” he continued.

However, for Christian Scottish MSP John Mason, the bill will help protect Christians. In a tweet he said: “Delighted that Hate Crime Bill passed this evening in Parliament. Seems to get the balance right between restraining hatred



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and protecting freedom of speech. Potential benefits for Christians and other religious people - we get increased protection from hatred against us.”

He continued by saying: “This Bill is at least a step in the right direction, but I accept it will not solve all the expressions of hatred we see. But stirring up hatred against Catholics or Protestants or Jews or Muslims could now be challenged more readily.”

The Scottish parliament has said "stirring up hatred" will only be considered an offence if it is intentional and has vowed to protect the right to disagree.

Retired US Bishop Daniel Herzog who partnered with Down diocese resigns from Episcopal ministry

The Rt. Rev. Daniel Herzog, retired bishop of the Diocese of Albany, announced on March 15 that he is resigning from the House of Bishops and ordained ministry in The Episcopal Church over unspecified disagreements with the church, Egan Millard writes.

In a brief email to the northern New York diocese, Herzog said he informed Presiding Bishop Michael Curry last week that he will end his ministry in The Episcopal Church, including the seat in the House of Bishops that all active and retired bishops are entitled to, effective the week after Easter. Herzog said he is doing so “because of the direction of the church” but did not elaborate.

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“This is without any anger or animosity, only sadness on the parting of friends,” Herzog wrote. “2021 marks fifty years of ordination. I am very grateful to Christ Jesus for the high privilege of serving Him and the Diocese of Albany, whose clergy and people I cherish in my heart.”

Herzog served as diocesan bishop from 1998 until his retirement in 2007, and during that time he expressed disagreement with some church decisions, including the 2003 consecration of the Rt. Rev. Gene Robinson, an openly gay man, as bishop of New Hampshire. After retiring



Iona Abbey

as bishop, he renounced his ordained ministry in The Episcopal Church and joined the Roman Catholic Church. However, he sought to rejoin The Episcopal Church in 2010, and then-Presidenting Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori restored his ordained ministry.

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Herzog's successor in the Diocese of Albany, the Rt. Rev. William Love, also disagreed with the church's stance on LGBTQ issues. Love resigned, effective Feb. 1, 2021, after a disciplinary panel found that he violated church law by banning same-sex marriages in his diocese.

Reached by email, Herzog did not answer Episcopal News Service's questions about why he resigned his ministry and whether he plans to rejoin the Roman Catholic Church. He reiterated that he is "relinquishing [his] role in the church and the Diocese of Albany," including his position as priest-in-charge of St. Augustine's Episcopal Church in Ilion, New York.

"I am continuing at St. Augustine's through Lent, Holy Week and Easter," Herzog told ENS. "Low Sunday will complete this commitment, and my public life within the diocese. The future is in the hands of God."

The next step in the process is the consideration of Herzog's request for release and removal by Curry and his Council of Advice, said Nancy Davidge, public affairs officer for The Episcopal Church.

Curry, in a statement provided by Davidge, confirmed that Herzog had requested release from ordained ministry.

"I appreciate Bishop Herzog's many years of faithful ministry and offer blessings upon him during this time of transition," Curry said.

Courtesy Episcopal News Service 16.03.2021

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'Thank you Jesus': Dolly Parton reacts to winning Grammy for best Christian song

Dolly Parton has reacted to winning a Grammy award for the best contemporary Christian music performance/song category.

Parton said she was "very humbled" to receive the honour for her duet with Christian rocker Zach Williams on the song 'There was Jesus'.

The past is frozen and no longer flows,
the present is all lit up with eternal rays.

C. S. Lewis



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"Thank you Jesus, thank you @zachwilliamsmusic, and thank you to the GRAMMYs and all of our fans. I am very humbled but proud," Parton tweeted.

The award was Parton's 10th Grammy and 50th nomination. Upon receiving the nomination, the acclaimed singer said that it was "always special" to get the nod, but that receiving such honours was not a big motivation for her as a musician.

"I don't work for awards and rewards," she added.

Williams also celebrated the award with a post online:

"Humbled to have won 'Best Contemporary Christian Music Performance/Song' for 'There Was Jesus' today at the 63rd Annual Grammy Awards," he wrote. "Thank you to @DollyParton and everybody who was involved in making this song. All glory, praise, and honor to Him!"

Clerical

Canon of Derry Cathedral

The Rector of Castledawson, the Rev Colin Welsh, has been appointed a canon of St Columb's Cathedral in Londonderry by the Bishop of Derry and Raphoe, the Rt Rev Andrew Forster, who commented, "I wanted Colin to take up this role because of all that he does not only in the parish but in the wider diocese," Bishop Andrew said. "It's an acknowledgement of his faithfulness, his ministry and his goodness." Mr Welsh, who is the rural dean for the Maghera and Kilrea Rural Deanery, succeeds the Rev Canon Sam McVeigh, who retired in January.

+Revd Canon George Mitchell

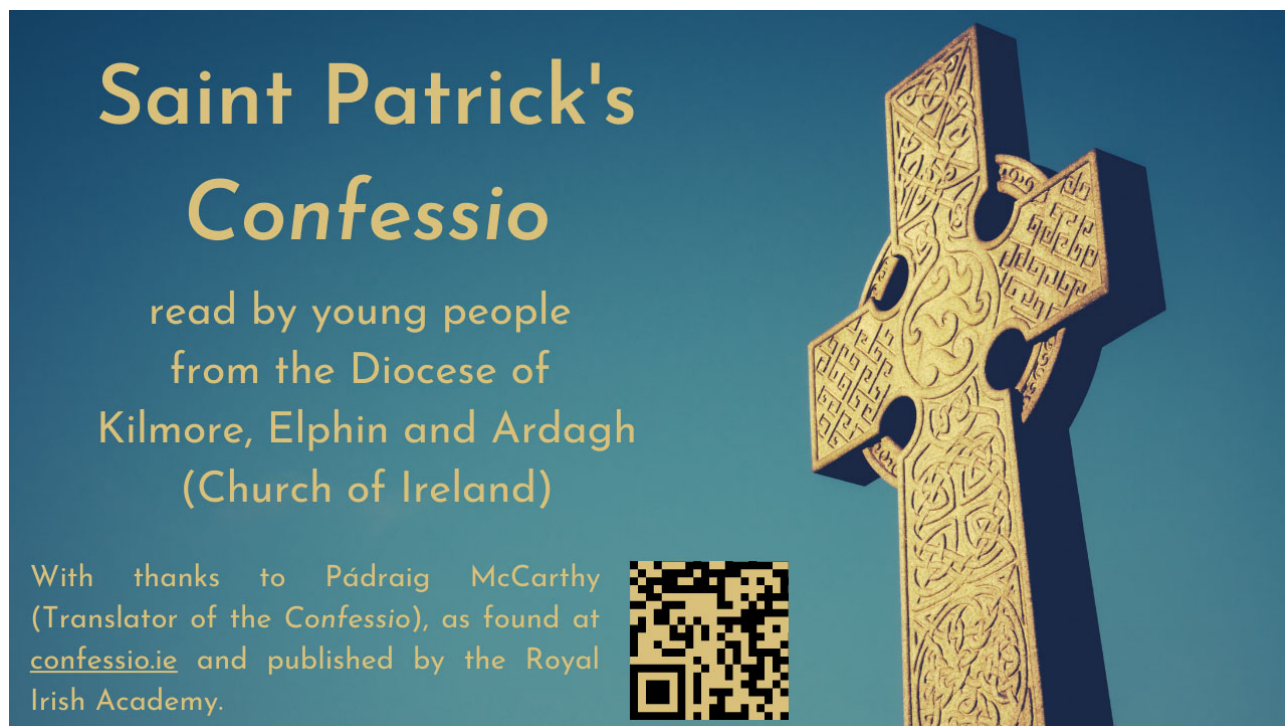
The death has taken place of Revd Canon George Mitchell. He was ordained in 1946 and served two curacies in the Diocese of Connor – St Matthew's Belfast (1946–48) and Ballymoney (1948–51). He had a brief spell as a clerical vicar at St Anne's Cathedral before being appointed to the incumbency of Broomhedge in 1952. He left Broomhedge in 1959 on being appointed rector of Carrickfergus where he remained until his move to Bangor in 1970. In 1978 he became a Canon of St Anne's Cathedral, Belfast. He retired in 1988. He was pre-deceased by his wife Moyra and daughter Carol.

Kilmore appointment

The Revd. Mark Smith has been appointed as Bishop's Curate of the Kildrumferton Group in the Diocese of Kilmore, Elphin and Ardagh. Mark has previously been serving as Curate in the parish of Holy Trinity, Frogmore (just south of St Albans over in England) since 2017, and had several years working for a church in London in a lay capacity before that.

Mark is married to Ruth, a chartered accountant by training, but currently working full time as a Mum, looking after their 16 month old daughter, Martha. Ruth is originally from the Castleblayney area and so is looking forward to moving back to Ireland after a longer-than-expected stint in England. Mark and Ruth are looking forward to their home in Ballyjamesduff being a place of hospitality, fellowship and friendship when restrictions permit.

Books, broadcasts, resources and webinars



St Patrick's Confession Project

This year, to celebrate St Patrick and the biblical Gospel he believed and preached, yKEA (the youth Department of the Diocese of Kilmore, Elphin and Ardagh) have recorded a video of St Patrick's *Confessio*, read by over 30 young people.

There are lots of legends and misconceptions about who Saint Patrick was and what his mission was. However, we are privileged to have the real Patrick preserved for us in his own words in two writings: his 'Confessio' and his 'Epistle to Coroticus', both of which are readily accessible: www.confessio.ie

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To celebrate Patrick and also to make people — young and old — more familiar with the truth about him and the Lord he served, over 30 young people from the majority of parishes in the Diocese of Kilmore, Elphin and Ardagh recorded themselves reading a section of the Confession (based on the translation by Pádraig McCarthy and published by the Royal Irish Academy, as found at confessio.ie). The completed video is available to watch at this link: <https://youtu.be/kb7WnhYcV3I>

This video was created for Saint Patrick's Day 2021, when, in the midst of continuing Covid-19 restrictions, the usual events and celebrations for this day cannot happen. We hope that it will be an encouragement to all who watch it, and that they, like Patrick, will know personally the difference the Lord makes to those in difficult circumstances.

Rage & Hope: 75 Prayers for a Better World

[New book marks Christian Aid's 75th anniversary with prayers for the world's crises](#)

Christian leaders, activists, writers and theologians from all over the world have joined together to offer prayers for the world's biggest injustices in a new book to celebrate Christian Aid's 75th anniversary.

From climate injustice to Black Lives Matter to violence against women, from discrimination against Dalits in India to the coronavirus pandemic; from extreme poverty in Burundi to inequality in Myanmar, [Rage & Hope: 75 Prayers for a](#)

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Better World is being published to mark Christian Aid's 75th anniversary.

With a foreword by one of the world's leading theologians – US Bible scholar Walter Brueggemann - the book also includes prayers from Bishop Rachel Treweek, Bishop Paul Butler, Archbishop Matthew Man-Oso Ndagoso, the Catholic Archbishop of Kaduna, writer Rhidian Brook, priest Winnie Varghese and theologian Robert Beckford.

Published by SPCK, *Rage & Hope* also includes a prayer from Dr Rowan Williams, chair of Christian Aid and the former Archbishop of Canterbury.

Christian Aid's work began in 1945, when it was founded by British and Irish churches to help refugees following the Second World War.

Since then, the organisation has provided humanitarian relief and long-term development support for poor communities worldwide, while highlighting suffering, tackling injustice and championing people's rights. Christian Aid's history includes making a difference in crises such as the Biafra war, advising Martin Luther King during the civil rights movement of the 1960s, campaigning to make poverty history in the 2000s and standing together with those facing the full force of climate injustice in countries around the world today.

Amanda Khozi Mukwashi, Christian Aid's chief executive, has contributed to the book, as well as the previous three CEOs Loretta Minghella, Daleep Mukarji and Michael Taylor

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– whose combined leadership of the organisation spans 30 of its 75-year history.

Christian Aid's head of public engagement Chine McDonald, who co-edited the book with colleague Wendy Lloyd, writes in the book's introduction: "There are not many books on prayer that straddle the line between prayers of rage and lament, and those of hope.

"In 75 years of Christian Aid's work, we have seen the best of humanity and the worst of it; we have seen that the world is a broken place – its systems unjust and unfair – and yet through it all we have seen glimmers of hope.

"We believe that our Christian faith should compel each and every one of us to pray authentic prayers to a God who hears us; who invites us to pour out our rage and lament and have the audacity to hope that God is able to do the impossible. We understand the theme of rage and hope to be an expression of lament, a 'protest so deep that it must become a prayer, for only God can provide the needed hope that justice will prevail and that the future will be different'."

Elizabeth Neep, Senior Commissioning Editor at SPCK says: "From the first time we heard about the likeliness of a book to mark the 75th Anniversary of Christian Aid, we knew it was something we wanted to be a part of. Not only has the work of Christian Aid been a constant source of inspiration for our team here, but a prayer book that draws together voices from across the world and provides words to process our laments and set our hearts upon hope feels like the very thing we need as we seek to live out our faith both this year and in the years to come."

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Rage & Hope: 75 Prayers for a Better World is out on 18 March and available to pre-order here: <https://spckpublishing.co.uk/rage-and-hope>

Others who have contributed to the book include:

Global church leaders

Most Rev. Dr. Matthew Man-Oso Ndagoso, the Catholic Archbishop of Kaduna, Nigeria

Bishop Rachel Treweek, the Bishop of Gloucester

Bishop Paul Butler, the Bishop of Durham

Bishop Pat Storey, Bishop of Meath and Kildare

Israel Olofinjana

Duleep de Chickera is a former bishop of Colombo, Sri Lanka

Journalists and writers

Martin Wroe

Roy Jenkins

Anne Muir

Activists, campaigners and academics

John Bell

Evie Vernon

Professor Maggi Dawn

Mandy Marshall

Bekah Legg

Sarah Corbett of the Craftivist Collective

Ecumenical webinar on partition

Celebrating ISE Irish School of Ecumenics at 50 Webinar Series, "Centenary of the Partition and a Shared Island" - March 25

churchnewsireland@gmail.org

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One hundred years ago, the island of Ireland went through a process of partition creating a 26 county Irish state and Northern Ireland that remained in the UK. Although the Irish Peace Process has been considered one of the most successful cases in the world since the 1998 Belfast Agreement/Good Friday Agreement, the conflicting opinions of partition remain alive in the rhetoric of the politics, economies, cultures, and societies on the island.

This ISE at 50 webinar, 'Centenary of the Partition and a Shared Island' explores the challenges and opportunities for greater mutual understanding, reconciliation, and peaceful coexistence of people living on the island. In the roundtable webinar, chaired by Etain Tannam (Trinity College Dublin), we are fortunate to be able to draw on the depth of wisdom and range of expertise embodied in our contributors: Johnston McMaster (Irish School of Ecumenics), Cate Turner (Healing Through Remembering), Niall Ó Dochartaigh (National University of Ireland Galway), Mary Murphy (University College Cork), and Duncan Morrow (University of Ulster).

This webinar, 'Centenary of the Partition and a Shared Island' is part of the webinar series to celebrate Irish School of Ecumenics – ISE at 50. ISE was founded in 1970 by Fr. Michael Hurley, with a vision of a place where people from diverse backgrounds and disciplinary perspectives could explore the meaning and possibilities of peace and reconciliation together. ISE continues to uphold Fr. Hurley's vision within the School of Religion in Trinity College Dublin.

Booking at -

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[[] <https://www.eventbrite.ie/e/centenary-of-the-partition-and-a-shared-island-tickets-140263603213>]

Media review

Michelle Obama says she was 'not surprised' by Meghan Markle's racism claims about the Royal Family

The Irish Post

Michelle Obama has weighed in on the fallout from Prince Harry and Meghan Markle's interview with Oprah Winfrey which aired last week.

The former First Lady of the United States said she was "not completely surprised" by Markle's claims of racism within the Royal Family.

Ms Obama did however take a thinly veiled swipe at the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, saying that she chose to focus on the people she served, rather than on herself, while in public service.

<https://www.irishpost.com/news/michelle-obama-says-she-was-not-surprised-by-meghan-markles-racism-claims-about-the-royal-family-206450?utm>

Church and Covid: There is a whole ecclesiastical world which is disappearing

Irish Times

Participating in a Zoom Eucharist is a bit like walking on water...My hope in documenting this new liturgical

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phenomenon is that it will stimulate reflection, conversation and personal and communal discernment.

<https://www.irishtimes.com/news/health/coronavirus/church-and-covid-there-is-a-whole-ecclesiastical-world-which-is-disappearing-1.4510970>

Four fantastic films about the life of St Patrick and where to watch them

The Irish Post

https://www.irishpost.com/life-style/four-fantastic-films-about-the-life-of-st-patrick-and-where-to-watch-them-204675?utm_

This 82-mile Trek Through Stunning Parks and Coastlines Is Northern Ireland's Best-kept Secret

Travel & leisure

The St. Patrick's Way is a one-week trek through Northern Ireland's most dazzling parks, peaks, and coasts, with odes to the trail's namesake saint along the way.

<https://www.travelandleisure.com/trip-ideas/nature-travel/st-patricks-way-trail-one-week-trek-northern-ireland>

Leo Varadkar's Protestant Sinn Féin jibes another example of Ireland's shift to Trumpian politics

Irish Central

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Tanáiste Leo Varadkar labeled Sinn Féin a "sectarian" party because they have no Protestant TDs or Senators, only to be publicly embarrassed moments later by a Protestant Sinn Féin TD.

<https://www.irishcentral.com/opinion/leo-varadkar-protestant-sinn-fein-trumpian>



Pointers for prayer

Heavenly Father,
your Son battled with the powers of darkness,
and grew closer to you in the desert:
help us to use these days to grow in wisdom and prayer
that we may witness to your saving love
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Almighty Father,
whose Son was revealed in majesty
before he suffered death upon the cross:

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give us grace to perceive his glory,
that we may be strengthened to suffer with him
and be changed into his likeness, from glory to glory;
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Hold in your hands, Lord
our families & friends
our neighbours
those whom we worry about
and those who worry for us.
And in these same hands
hold every family,
especially those for whom today
has brought new burdens and fresh sorrows

We remember with thanks the numerous Mothers' Union members who, over the years, have used their God-given gifts to change the world. We pray that, in our day, we'll also be willing to use our gifts to help transform lives and communities

We pray today for the church across the world, especially in places where they are experiencing hardship and persecution. We stand together with our sisters and brothers and pray for God to bring relief from their circumstances.

Holy God,
you know the disorder of our sinful lives:
set straight our crooked hearts,
and bend our wills to love your goodness
and your glory

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in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Almighty God,
you have created the heavens and the earth
and made us in your own image:
teach us to discern your hand in all your works
and your likeness in all your children;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who with you and the Holy Spirit reigns supreme over all
things,
now and for ever.

Speaking to the Soul

If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them gets lost, what will he do? Won't he leave the ninety-nine others in the wilderness and go to search for the one that is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he will joyfully carry it home on his shoulders.

Luke 15:4-5 NLT

This is such a beautiful story. You can picture the shepherd as he makes sure the 99 precious sheep are safe and warm, and then trudges out into the wilderness to look for the one that was lost. It's a heart-warming story but it doesn't make any sense. Economically why would you run the risk of endangering the 99 by leaving them all alone in the desert whilst you go out and search for just one sheep who constituted only 1% of your business? Surely the shepherd would have been better advised to protect 99% of

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his business and hope that the silly lost sheep would wander home.

The only explanation for a shepherd acting in this way is love. He sets out to search for the lost sheep for the pure and simple reason that he has compassion. And that gives us an insight into the way in which Jesus lived and worked. He spent a lot of time with people who everyone else considered to be lost causes. He could have spent his time comfortably in Jerusalem having interesting conversations with the religious people. But no, Jesus chose to go to the people who lived on the edge of society – poor people, children, women, people with leprosy, prostitutes and tax collectors. He was looking for the lost sheep.

In our churches today we need to make sure that we never stop seeking the lost sheep. It is very easy to get comfortable in church life and to shape all that we do to suit us. But Jesus reminds us that we exist in his name to reach out to people who may be completely unlike us and who may have been rejected by society. And when they turn to Christ and find new life in him – Wow! - we should have a celebration!

QUESTION

In what way are you seeking to reach the lost?

PRAYER

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Lord Jesus Christ thank you that you have been a shepherd to me. Help me to reach out to others with your arms of love. Amen.

C of I in-person worship to resume in Northern Ireland from Good Friday

The Church of Ireland bishops have agreed that churches in Northern Ireland can resume in-person worship from Good Friday, 2nd April.

Attendances will continue to be limited, for the time being, because of the need for social distancing and congregations will have to wear face coverings. The bishops say their decision is “permissive rather than instructive” and the return to in-person gatherings in church should be cautious and careful.

Where Church of Ireland churches do choose to resume in-person worship, parish officers must carry out a risk assessment and ensure that good mitigation is in place. Those churches which choose not to ‘re-open’ at Easter, and which prefer to continue with online and/or drive-in services for the time being, are free to do so.

The decision means that in the dioceses which straddle the border, churches in one jurisdiction will be free to resume in-person worship from Good Friday, whereas those on the other side of the border will have to remain closed to congregations. The reason for the disparity is that in the

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Republic – where the vaccine roll-out has been slower – the decision to close churches was made by the government whereas, in Northern Ireland, the suspension of services was undertaken voluntarily by the Churches.

The Catholic bishops also issued a statement.

- **Bishops in the North announce a cautious return to public worship for the faithful from 26 March, in time for the celebration of Holy Week and Easter.**
- **Bishops emphasise the need for continued caution and a rigorous application of all mitigations and safeguards required to ensure the safest possible return to public worship in our Churches.**
- **Every person should consider carefully if returning to collective worship is the safe and appropriate step for them, at this time. Families are encouraged to join those celebrating the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus in churches, from the ‘domestic church’ of their own living rooms, *via* live-streaming.**
- **Bishops, together with other Church leaders, encourage all on Easter Sunday to pray and reflect in a spirit of remembering, solidarity and hope in the context of the current pandemic.**

For full statement see -

<https://www.catholicbishops.ie/2021/03/17/statement-by-the-northern-bishops-announcing-that-public-worship-may-resume-in-northern-ireland-from-friday-26-march-2021/>

C of I Bishops statement -

Last year on St Patrick's Day, advice was issued to all our clergy with the unprecedented instruction that in the light of evolving Government advice, until further notice, all Sunday and midweek services should be suspended, and all Parish organisations and activities should cease. At that time, we had little knowledge of Covid-19 nor could we have imagined the devastating impact it would have upon the world, our country and on individual lives. We continue to remember in our prayers the sick, the bereaved, the isolated and fearful and also to give thanks to God for the courageous and sacrificial actions of our health care workers who have worked tirelessly in our hospitals and wider community to care for all whom the virus has impacted upon most directly.

A difficult year has passed, and a hard road has been travelled but we have reached a new junction. In person gatherings for worship and Parish organisations have been voluntarily suspended since early in January 2021, but we have decided that the time has now come for a cautious and careful return to in-person church services from Good Friday (2nd April 2021). This news will be warmly welcomed but is simply permissive rather than instructive. Some may wish to continue online and/or drive-in services for the time being due to their own local situation. From 1st April outdoor gatherings in a public space will allow for 10 people from 2 households to meet up. This therefore means that customary Easter Dawn services cannot take place this year in their normal form. Parish activities and meetings also remain suspended in the interim, but meetings of General

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Vestry can take place at the close of Sunday worship as part of an in-person gathering.

No changes have been made to the operation of church buildings as places of worship. Congregation numbers will continue for the time being to be limited according to 2 metre social distancing seating capacity. Parish officers must carry out a risk assessment and ensure that good mitigation is in place and that face coverings are worn by congregation members on their arrival and exit from the church building and throughout services. We all need to play our part in preventing any further transmission of Covid-19 within the community. Marriages and funerals will continue to take place in line with the current restrictions. We note that the same position of a cautious return to in-person worship at Easter time has been adopted by the Methodist Church, Presbyterian Church and Roman Catholic Church and welcome the co-operation and strong working relationship between the churches.

The message of Easter is one of Hope. From the cross of Calvary to the empty tomb, from death to new life. Echoing the words of the First Minister yesterday, we would encourage everyone to reflect on the road we together have travelled and to continue to pray this Easter for recovery from the pandemic, healing, peace, and a renewed hope. As we journey onwards, we are mindful that we still have further to travel, but we do so trusting in our crucified and risen Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

+John Armagh

+Andrew Derry and Raphoe

+David Down and Dromore

+George Connor

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