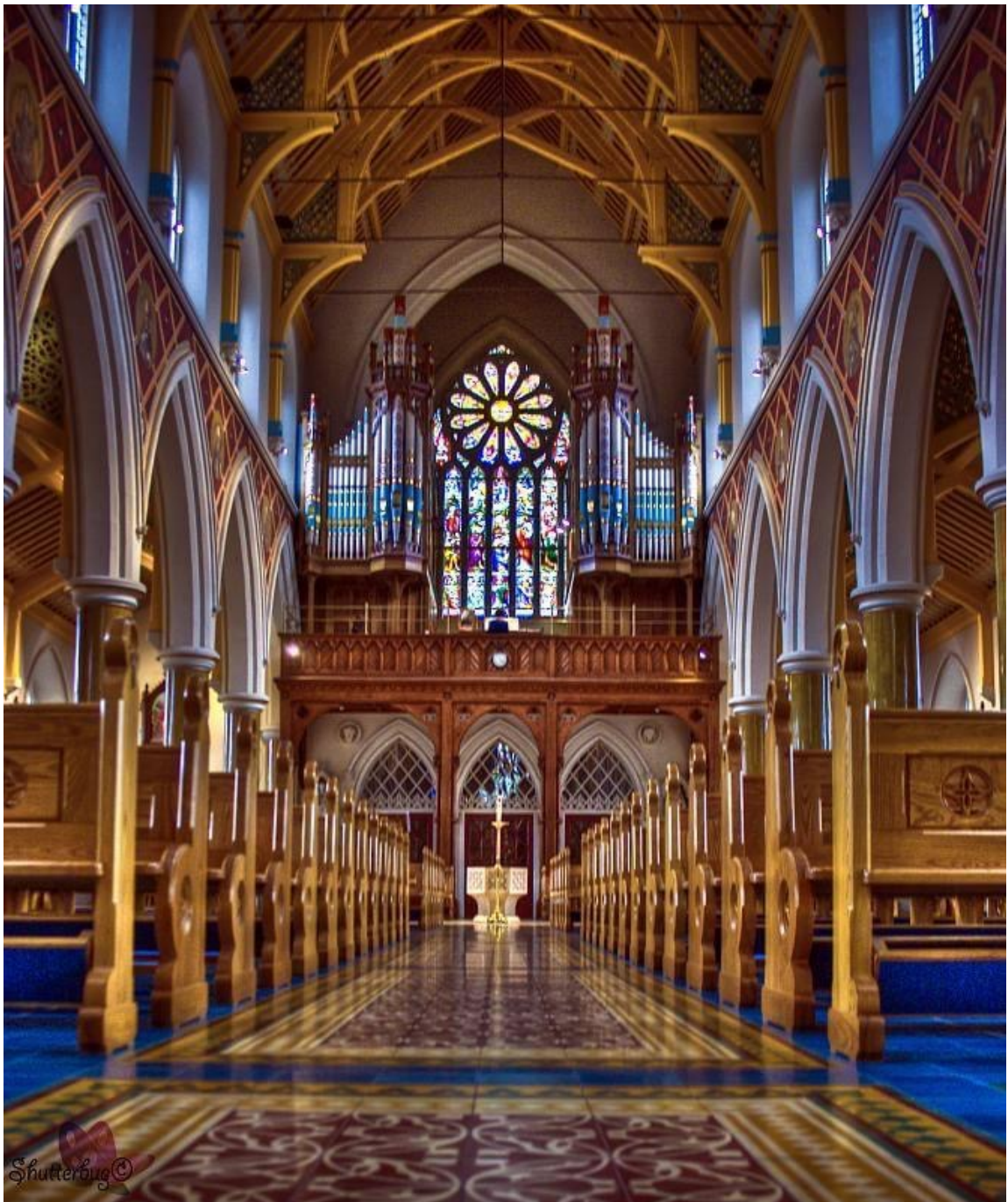


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Front page - Image of the day St Peter's Cathedral, Belfast

This neo-Gothic twin-spired Cathedral off Falls Road was built in 1866 for the city's increasing Catholic population. The building was designed in 1860 by Father Jeremiah McAuley, a trained Belfast architect prior to entering Orders, and completed in 1866. Its magnificent twin spires were added in 1886 and dominate West Belfast's skyline. The tower holds a carillon of 11 bells and, following major restoration, the cathedral now boasts fine examples of high Victorian Gothic decoration.

Moderator describes Secretary of State's new powers as 'ill-considered and irresponsible'

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland has called on the Secretary of State to step back from undermining Northern Ireland's devolved institutions with new sweeping powers that ride roughshod over local decision making. Presbyterian Moderator, Right Reverend Dr David Bruce, described the regulations as 'ill-considered and irresponsible' and says that they should be withdrawn by the Secretary of State.

In his statement, Dr Bruce, said, "As a Church with a strong pro-life position, we have put on record our total opposition to the imposition of abortion laws in Northern Ireland. Such laws have removed protection from the lives of unborn children. On Friday we spoke of our grave concern at news

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the Secretary for State was seeking powers to implement these laws over and above the heads of locally elected representatives by directing Northern Ireland's Department of Health. These radical, and unreasonably sweeping powers, go much further than we had been led to believe would be the case."

Dr Bruce continued, "Far from working hard to encourage the building of consensus around highly contentious issues, the regulations laid before Parliament today drive a coach and horses through Northern Ireland's hard won and finely balanced devolved constitutional settlement. These powers not only devalue Northern Ireland's purposely unique system of negotiated government, they also give the Secretary of State the freedom to interfere directly, and at will, with every single department of devolved government in Northern Ireland. For instance, the Secretary of State is seeking to be able to unilaterally direct what should happen in Northern Ireland's schools, taking local power and decision making away from governors, teachers and parents on sensitive issues, therefore undermining the right of schools to embrace a particular ethos."

The Moderator concluded by saying, "The Secretary of State, and those supportive of devolution, cannot claim to be upholding Northern Ireland's fragile devolved settlement while at the same time pursuing such an ill-considered and irresponsible intervention which undermines that very system. The Presbyterian Church in Ireland has always been supportive of devolution, has encouraged it, and prayed for it. These radical sweeping powers, that ride roughshod over local decision-making on such sensitive areas, are simply unacceptable. The Secretary of State

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should withdraw the regulations, and if not, Members of Parliament should refuse to grant him the powers that he seeks.”

Whitehead and Islandmagee walkers lap Ireland twice



Parishioners of St Patrick’s & St John’s United Parish of Whitehead & Islandmagee walked enough miles between January 1 and March 17 to complete two full circuits of Ireland!

Late last year, the select vestry decided it would be a good idea to challenge parishioners and friends to join in a virtual

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sponsored walk around the island, starting on New Year's Day 2021 and finishing on St Patrick's Day.

The main objective was to encourage people to get out and exercise, stay fit and aid positive mental health. The walk also raised money for church funds.

A register was established on the parish Facebook page so people could send in their weekly miles' tally, and once a week the total miles were updated, alongside a map of Ireland which indicated how far parishioners had got on the walk, keeping everyone involved.

The event proved a great success. Not only were sufficient miles collectively recorded to complete one circuit of Ireland – equivalent to 1,970 miles – but by St Patrick's Day, parishioners were just 6.5 miles short of completing a second circuit.

A quick post was put up on Facebook and within an hour the parish had achieved its target and some more... The grand total of miles walked came to a whopping 4,310!

Well done to all who took part and supported this fun effort.
Kate Bushby - Connor Diocese

Judge: Scottish church worship ban infringed human rights

The ban on church services in Scotland was unconstitutional and breached human rights, a court has ruled, in the first legal victory against Covid laws.

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A judge ruled on Wednesday that Scottish ministers' decision to criminalise communal church worship in the current lockdown "disproportionately infringed" the freedom to express religious beliefs secured in the European Convention on Human Rights. It was also found that forced church closures were unlawful because they breached the Scottish constitution.

'Ministers had overreached [and] had this gone without challenge it would have set a very dangerous precedent' Following the judgment, at a remedies hearing yesterday afternoon, the judge said that churches in Scotland – which were due to open tomorrow – could open with "immediate effect".

In the historic ruling, Lord Braid agreed that the measures went further than was lawfully allowed and that the Scottish

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Government regulations “amount to a disproportionate infringement of the petitioners’ human rights”.

The ruling was made after 28 church leaders from a range of Christian denominations launched a judicial review at the Court of Session arguing that the Holyrood government had acted beyond its power under emergency laws.

It marks the first successful judicial review against Covid laws in the UK, and also sets a precedent for any future lockdowns, not just those in Scotland.

Handing down judgment, Lord Braid said: “It is impossible to measure the effect of those restrictions on those who hold religious beliefs. It goes beyond mere loss of companionship and an inability to attend a lunch club.” He also ruled that online worship was not real worship, stating it was not for ministers to “dictate to the petitioners ... that, henceforth, or even for the duration of the pandemic, worship is to be conducted online”.

Lord Braid added: “That might be an alternative to worship, but it is not worship. At very best for the respondents, in modern parlance, it is worship-lite.”

He also concluded that the government made its decision without explaining why it had decided not to consider other measures – such as limiting the numbers of congregants. But he emphasised he was not saying that coming together for worship was safe or that churches “must immediately open”.

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Responding to the ruling, Rev Dr William Philip, one of the petitioners, said: “Scottish ministers’ approach to banning and criminalising gathered church worship was clearly an overreach and disproportionate, and if this had gone unchallenged it would have set a very dangerous precedent.”

Pope cuts cardinals’ salaries to save money

The Pope has announced plans to cut the salaries of cardinals and priests as part of an effort to put the Holy See’s finances in order.

Cardinals will see their salaries fall by 10 per cent as of April 1, while priests will have theirs reduced by 3 per cent, the pontiff wrote in an apostolic letter yesterday.

The salaries of department heads and secretaries of dicastery administration system will also be reduced by 8 per cent under the measure, which is designed to avoid the need for job cuts.

“An economically sustainable future today requires, among other decisions, the adoption of measures concerning staff salaries,” read the notice.

“Although the Holy See and the Vatican City State are adequately capitalised, it is necessary to ensure sustainability and a balance between income and expenditure in current economic and financial management.”



Information about salaries is murky but in 2014 the newspaper *Il Messaggero* reported that, within the Vatican, bishops are given €5,000 (£4,300) each month, not including donations they receive which are earmarked for charitable purposes. The Holy See – the governing body of the Roman Catholic Church – expects a loss of almost €50 million (£43 million) this year, it said last month, as the fallout from the pandemic continues to weigh on the budget.

Individual donations given to Pope Francis for charity work have fallen, while the €30 million (£26 million) typically received from the Vatican museums each year has been cut by half following months of closures.

The salary cuts will not apply if the person concerned can show that they cannot meet their healthcare needs, or that of their relatives, the letter stated.

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Francis I also implemented a two-year salary pay freeze on all employees except for lower-level lay workers.

Since becoming Pope in 2013, Francis has sought to put the Holy See's finances in order, while bringing greater accountability and transparency to the Vatican.

Following a string of scandals at the Vatican bank and allegations of mismanagement, he created a new finance ministry, brought in an outside auditor and strengthened the city state's financial watchdog agency.

Clerical

Canon Bob Wilkinson celebrates his 100th birthday

Many congratulations to the Rev Canon Bob Wilkinson who celebrated his 100th birthday on Wednesday March 24.

Bob spent all his ministry serving the people of



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Armagh Diocese, but moved to Portrush on his retirement in 1987.

Born in Letterkenny, Bob was educated at Foyle College in Londonderry and at Trinity College, Dublin. He was ordained in 1947, and was appointed to St Mark's Parish, Armagh, as curate-assistant in 1949.

He remained in Armagh Diocese, serving as rector first in Mullavilly, then in Cookstown and finally in Ballymore, Tandragee, until his retirement to Portrush in 1987.

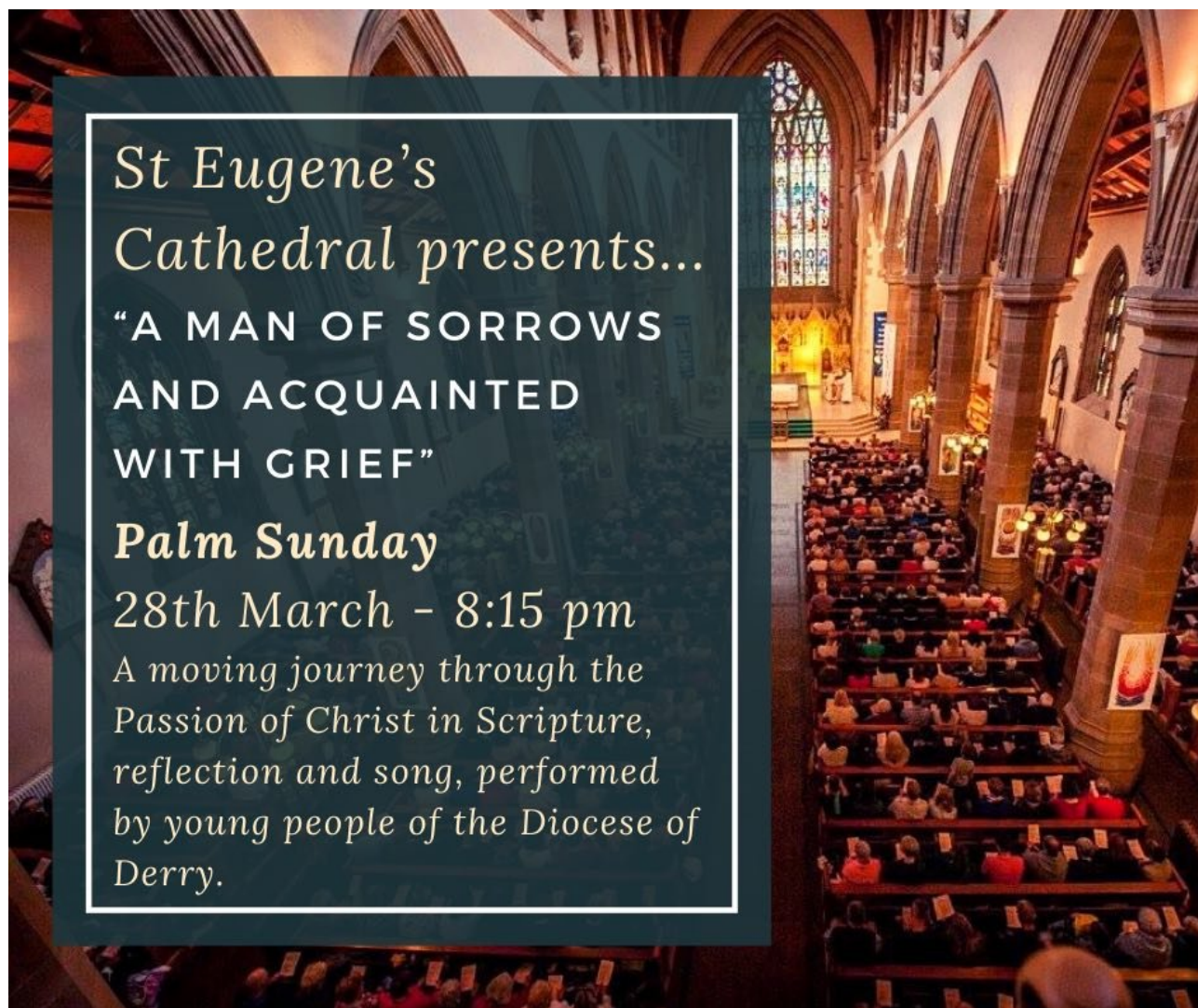
In Portrush, Bob became an active member of the Holy Trinity Parish family. He has one surviving daughter, Paula Fleetwood, and three grown-up grandchildren.

Wishing Bob a happy birthday, Holy Trinity Parish stated on Facebook that 'many have come to love and value his friendship and care, warmed by his gentle good humour and kindly spirit.' He is resident in Killowen, Coleraine, in Derry Diocese from which he also received warm congratulations.

Congratulations to the newest Redemptorist Deacon

Ryan Holovlasky CSsR, ordained to the Order of Deacon last Sunday morning by Bishop Noel Treanor, Bishop of Down and Connor in Clonard Church.

Continued on next page



*St Eugene's
Cathedral presents...*

**"A MAN OF SORROWS
AND ACQUAINTED
WITH GRIEF"**

Palm Sunday

28th March - 8:15 pm

*A moving journey through the
Passion of Christ in Scripture,
reflection and song, performed
by young people of the Diocese of
Derry.*

Books, Broadcasts, resources and webinars

Passion of Christ in Scripture, reflection and song

A moving journey through the Passion of Christ in Scripture, reflection and song, will be performed by young people of the Diocese of Derry!

This event will take place on Palm Sunday (28th) at 8:15 pm in St Eugene's Cathedral.

[<http://steugenescathedral.com/webcam.html>]

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Prayer Book Society - Communion and the Nature of God

This Saturday @ 2:30pm - Dr Bridget Nichols, Lecturer in Anglicanism & Liturgy at the Church of Ireland Theological Institute will speak on "The Prayer Book Communion and the Nature of God". Free and open to all, sign up here - [<http://bit.ly/pbslent21>]

VOICES Mission for Holy Week & Easter from Down & Dromore

Online from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday. Eight life-changing messages from the gospel accounts of Jesus' passion, death and resurrection. With worship led by Mount Merrion Church and Christ Church Kilkeel.

All of the speakers are either Diocesan Evangelists or Church Army Evangelists and you will find the films daily on the Down & Dromore website plus YouTube and Facebook.

Palm Sunday: Shallow Voices (Mark 11: 1–11) with Ann Higgins

Monday: Contrasting Voices (John 12: 1–11) with David Charleton

Tuesday: A Voice from Heaven (John 12: 20–36) with James Crockett

Wednesday: The Voice of Truth Still Speaks (John 13: 21–32) with Myrtle Morrison

Maundy Thursday: The Voice of Love Still Speaks (John 13: 1–17) with John Menagh

Good Friday: God's Voice from the Cross (Matthew 27: 11–45) with Jasper Rutherford

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Saturday: Courageous Voices (John 19: 38–42) with Janet Fleming

Easter Sunday: God's Voice Calls Your Name (John 20: 1–18) with George Newell

[[] <https://www.downanddromore.org/news/2021/03/voices-mission-for-holy-week-and-easter>]

Retaining and regaining talent in Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland's long-established pattern of educational migration means the loss of thousands of young people each year. Yet the Executive has no policy in place to retain or regain this talent. Read more in Pivotal's latest report:

[[] <https://bit.ly/3vRHSwl>[[]]

Interview: Derek Scally, author of The Best Catholics in the World

In the March 22 episode of 'Inside Politics' Irish Times Berlin correspondent Derek Scally joins Hugh to speak about his brand new book: The Best Catholics in the World. Having spent the last twenty years living and working in Germany, Scally has witnessed a nation engaging earnestly with their past, and asks why the same cannot be said for his native Ireland and the legacy left over by the Catholic Church. Speaking to campaigners, survivors, writers, and historians, Scally embarks on a quest to unravel the tight hold the Catholic Church has had on the Irish. In this conversation, they discuss the origins of the book, the intersection of church, state and people and the strands of religion still intertwined in Irish society.

[[] <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/inside-politics/inside-politics-interview-derek-scally-author-of-the-best-catholics-in-the-world-1.4516753>]

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Daily Prayer: Common Worship Morning and Evening Prayer

The Church of England

[<https://cofe-daily-prayer.captivate.fm/>]

Media review

Taoiseach, Government compared to Cromwell over restrictions, church closures

The Irish Times

In Ireland, churches and all religious denominations (places of worship) are closed". Mr McNamara said the Scottish supreme court had on Wednesday ...

"If it is disproportionate in Scotland, it is disproportionate in Ireland because we are bound by the same convention." He said Ireland is the only country in Europe where churches are closed

[[] <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/taoiseach-government-compared-to-cromwell-over-restrictions-church-closures-1.4519308>]

NI's General Teaching Council cannot function properly: chief

Belfast Telegraph

The General Teaching Council is riddled with dysfunction and bullying, leaving it unable to operate effectively, its chief executive and registrar has told Stormont's Education Committee.

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Education Minister Peter Weir has set up a review of the industry body set up to regulate the teaching profession in Northern Ireland, amid concerns over how it operates. Chief executive Sam Gallaher admitted he is fearful in the short term over the Council's ability to operate effectively. Mr Gallaher, who has been in the post since 2018, painted a bleak picture of the Council he inherited for MLAs yesterday, and admitted that some members were only there to bring the organisation down.

BBC report at -

[[] <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-56516509>]

Analysis: Libya report leaves more questions than answers.

BBC News

Mr Shawcross's appearance before the committee was also spiked by the government's statement on Tuesday ruling out any move to compensate victims with £12bn of frozen Libyan assets.

That raises the question as to why the government waited until the day before the author of the report was compelled to give evidence before going public with its decision.

Did it suit London to allow victims and unionist MPs to hold on to the hope that compensation would be paid?

[[] <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-56511329>]

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The EU healthcare option that ended with Brexit

BBC News

An EU healthcare option, no longer available in the UK due to Brexit, was growing in popularity on both sides of the Irish border, figures have shown.

The Cross-Border Healthcare Directive (CBHD) allows EU patients to arrange health treatment in most other European countries and claim back some costs.

Reimbursement is considered for both private and state-funded treatments.

More than £50m was spent reimbursing CBHD patients on both sides of the Irish border over the past five years.

It was particularly popular among cataract patients in the Republic of Ireland, about 2,000 of whom travelled to Belfast on so-called "cataracts buses" to have eye surgery in private clinics in recent years.

[[] <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-56002574>]

Press comment - NI needs a strategy in place to halt brain drain - Suzanne Breen

An independent think tank is calling on Stormont to urgently address the 'brain drain' that sees 17,500 Northern Ireland students heading to Britain – enough to fill an entire university.

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Most of those departing don't return which leaves the local workforce struggling to attract high-paying jobs because it has too few people with degree-level qualifications, and too many with GCSEs or lower.

“Despite all this, the Executive currently does basically nothing to reduce or stop the brain drain. Pivotal is calling for this to change,” the think tank said in a report published today.

“University qualifications are important for driving economic growth, but Northern Ireland continues to lose huge numbers of young people to elsewhere in the UK for study and work.

“This has hurt the economy for decades, and will become an even bigger issue as employment trends change, but the Executive has no strategy in place to address it.

“To get ready for global changes in the job market, Northern Ireland needs to retain and regain more of this talent.” The think tank said that, in coming decades, the overwhelming majority of new jobs would require high skills and qualifications, such as degrees, while fewer than 10% would seek people with good GCSEs or lower.

“Without addressing educational migration as part of a broader upskilling strategy, Northern Ireland is missing out on the contribution these graduates could make to a growing economy,” it added.

Around 17,500 students from Northern Ireland are enrolled in courses in England, Scotland or Wales — “an entire

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university's worth of young people” or around two-thirds of the 25,000 students currently at either Queen's University or Ulster University.

While educational migration is common elsewhere in the UK, Northern Ireland does not have an inflow of students to make up for those who leave — around five times as many depart as arrive.

Two-thirds of those who leave don't come home, and this is “compounded by the fact that 15% of graduates from local universities then move to other parts of the UK to find work”, the think tank said.

Pivotal director Ann Watt said: “This is not an easy problem to solve. One major factor is likely to be the lack of high-quality, high-wage jobs available in Northern Ireland — a fact that is mutually reinforcing with the brain drain itself because it is harder to attract high-quality jobs when the skills base is low.

“Breaking that dynamic will require a concerted effort but, right now, Northern Ireland is doing little or nothing.”

Ms Watt said that Stormont must take urgent action.

“Efforts to understand why the brain drain is happening have been inadequate because of a lack of engagement that asks the young people who move elsewhere why they leave and don't come back.

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“The Executive should consider enhanced investment within the knowledge economy as part of a wider economic strategy.

“Northern Ireland is the only devolved nation that has reduced investment in higher education in recent years. Successive budget cuts over the past decade have resulted in a current structural deficit for local universities.”

The think tank said that upskilling those who do stay here would unlikely be enough to create a workforce fit for the future.

It noted that a quarter of all working-age adults born here were living in England and Wales, according to the 2011 census.

“The history of conflict and sectarianism has played a part in young migration for decades. However, the effects of any social factors hasn't been properly investigated,” the think tank said.

“Over the coming months, Pivotal will carry out primary research asking young people why they leave NI and what would make them want to come back.”

Suzanne Breen, is Political Editor of the Belfast Telegraph.

Pointers for prayer

Most merciful God,
who by the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ



delivered and saved the world:
Grant that by faith in him who suffered on the cross,
we may triumph in the power of his victory;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Almighty and everlasting God,
you hate nothing that you have made
and forgive the sins of all those who are penitent:
Create and make in us new and contrite hearts
that we, worthily lamenting our sins
and acknowledging our wretchedness,
may receive from you, the God of all mercy,
perfect remission and forgiveness;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

God of wilderness and water,
your Son was baptized and tempted as we are.
Guide us through this season,
that we may not avoid struggle,
but open ourselves to blessing,
through the cleansing depths of repentance

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and the heaven-rending words of the Spirit. Amen.

Artist of souls,
you sculpted a people for yourself
out of the rocks of wilderness and fasting.
Help us as we take up your invitation to prayer and
simplicity,
that the discipline of these forty days
may sharpen our hunger for the feast of your holy
friendship,
and whet our thirst for the living water you offer
through Jesus Christ. Amen.

As Jesus, in the days before his passion,
offered prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears,
we pray for those who suffer, those who are in need,
and those who seek reconciliation...

God of compassion,
you know our faults and yet you promised to forgive.
Keep us in your presence and give us your wisdom.
Open our hearts to gladness,
call dry bones to dance,
and restore to us the joy of your salvation. Amen.

God of suffering and glory,
in Jesus Christ you reveal the way of life
through the path of obedience.
Inscribe your law in our hearts,
that in life we may not stray from you,
but may be your people. Amen.

Speaking to the Soul

Taking the twelve disciples aside, Jesus said, “Listen, we’re going up to Jerusalem, where all the predictions of the prophets concerning the Son of Man will come true. He will be handed over to the Romans, and he will be mocked, treated shamefully, and spit upon. They will flog him with a whip and kill him, but on the third day he will rise again.”

Luke 18:31-33 NLT

Monday

22

March

Jesus’ death on the cross was only a few days away. He took his disciples to one side to put them in the picture and to give them a vivid description of what was going to happen. But, incredibly, they didn’t understand a word of it. It was all a complete mystery to them and the coming days were going to come as a total shock. They understood that Jesus was an amazing teacher and healer but they had yet to grasp the true meaning of his life, and didn’t want to think about his death.

As we approach Easter we live in a society that is equally unaware of the significance of Jesus’ death. This is a great tragedy and we need to reflect on the ways in which we could help people to grasp the importance of this time. I think we should be very glad that Easter eggs are still a focus of huge attention. 80 million boxed eggs are sold every year in the UK and more than 500 million cream eggs! That’s a lot of eggs and I am not for a moment suggesting

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that they all lead to deep spiritual enlightenment or anything like it! But the egg does convey a clear and powerful picture of new life, and so we have been handed the most amazing visual aid to help explain to people the new life that Jesus came to bring.

QUESTION

Thinking of the people you meet each day, how might you be able to help them to understand the true significance of Easter?

PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, thank you that you were willing to go to the cross out of love for me. Help me to gain a deeper understanding of your perfect love this Easter. Amen.

