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Image of the day -

The church striving to make a difference in East Belfast

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Rachel Irish-Colligan and Reverend Adrian Green promoting a fitness trail for children that will be set up around the Cregagh area

Mount Merrion Parish Church has become a popular community hub in the Cregagh area that supports local residents and brings them together, Belfast Live reports.

Mount Merrion Parish Church has become a supportive hub for the Cregagh community.

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An East Belfast church has become a vital supportive hub to its community in recent years providing everything from food parcel support, fitness classes and refuge.

The Mount Merrion Parish Church, located in the shadow of the Kingspan Stadium, is a hive of activity for the majority of the week as local residents meet there to tend the community garden, take part in outdoor fitness classes, learn new skills and volunteer to help others.

Led by Reverend Adrian Green, he has forged close partnerships within the area working with the local school, businesses and community groups in order to help deliver projects that can benefit everybody.

Speaking to Belfast Live, Adrian said: "Over the past few years, but particularly during the pandemic, we have tried to make the church into a real community hub and asset that can help support everyone in the area.

"There is usually always something going on here with the food larder, which helps scores of vulnerable people in the community, our uniform recycling programme, fitness classes and community garden. We are also helping with a project that will help to improve the lives of local residents, having been chosen as one of a few pilot areas to trial a scheme that helps elderly residents learn to use the internet.

"We even found ourselves being used as a sanctuary recently when the flats were evacuated after an old grenade was found during an incident and people needed some shelter for a few hours until it was resolved.

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"We are lucky that we are in the heart of a wonderful and close-knit community that is always looking out for one another. This is highlighted by the free food stall we have out the front of the church which can be used by anyone who is in need, we quickly found that after a few weeks as many residents were leaving food out at the stall for others as there were taking it."

Rachel Irish-Colligan, an outreach community worker at the church, said that she got involved with it due to the support that it gave her over nine years ago when she found herself in a difficult position in life.

Originally from East Belfast, she had moved away from the area to start a family, but when that broke down she found



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herself coming back to the Cregagh with her children where she initially found herself struggling.

She said: "When I came back to the area after my divorce I found that I was really struggling to get by on my own.

"But thanks to the church and a Christian charity I was eventually able to get back on my feet and turn things around. Because of the support they gave me I felt that I wanted to do something to give back to them and help others who may be in the same position I was in.

Queen's bid to lure southern students up

Queen's University has launched a campaign to lure Dublin students north to Belfast, John Lee writes in Sunday Life.

In a slick online promotional campaign, the Belfast university says it is almost €9,000 a year cheaper to live and be educated in Northern Ireland than at Trinity College Dublin (TCD) or University College Dublin (UCD).

And it tells Irish students that the cost of eating out, socialising and travel is also cheaper north of the border. The promo package states: "Forget Dublin's rental squeeze: you won't face a scramble for a safe, affordable place to live in Belfast.

"Student accommodation in the leafy Queen's Quarter typically comes in under €365 (£326) a month, with rent prices in the city around 59% cheaper than Dublin.

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“In our friendly, culturally-energised city, just two hours north of Dublin, you'll also pay less for the fun stuff including travel, takeaways and entertainment.

Queen's — which will celebrate its 180th year since its foundation on October 16, 1841 — also tells students that they get more bang for their euro in Northern Ireland.

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“Belfast can be almost €2,000 per year cheaper to live than Dublin, with the biggest savings to be made on phone and utility bills which average 80% and 50% less, respectively. fees

“Queen's has 3,500 central student rooms available, while private rental accommodation is easily accessible and more affordable than in other student cities in the UK and Ireland.” It says its yearly rental of student rooms cost on average around €4,750 compared to €7,247 for TCD and €7,781 for UCD.

The average monthly rental for students in Belfast is €365 with both TCD and UCD charging €700.

And tuition fees in Belfast are almost half of that for Dublin — Queen's charges €7,778 compared to €14,500 for TCD and €14,460 for UCD.

Student grants are the same ranging from €2,000-€6,270 depending on household income.

Average weekly travel cost are cheaper in Belfast — €16 compared to €24 in Dublin.

Overall, say Queen's, the cost of living in Belfast is €13,000 compared with an average of €21,994 for Dublin.

On living expenses QUB says: “A promo-night cinema ticket will cost you €1.90 less than in Dublin, and an incredible €3.95 less for a standard student ticket.

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“A kebab meal will set you back €1.90 more in Dublin than in Belfast.”

Last year the university revealed that the number of students living at its campus had fallen “marginally”.

Courtesy Sunday Life.09.05.2021



€70,000 boost for Collon Church of Ireland

Local projects are to benefit from funding under the Local Built Heritage projects, part of the Historic Structures Fund 2021.

"These grants will be a very welcome boost to the local trades by facilitating works with a total value of almost €9m

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and leveraging an estimated 13,000 days' labour nationally. We must do everything we can to protect our built heritage and safeguard them for generations to come,' TD Fergus O'Dowd stated.

One of the biggest winners is the Collon Church of Ireland.

Late in 2013 a group of local concerned people came together and set up Friends of Collon Church Limited. The Friends group was initially 12 members and others later joined bringing the wider Friends group to about 20 people from all sides of the Collon village community. The Friends group was immediately supported by the Conservation Office of Louth Co Council with the aim of saving the historic building.

The church was first opened in 1815 and was in continuous with its own rector until 1964 when it united with Ardee Union. It continued in use until 2013 when it was closed because the electric wiring failed. This caused a crisis because Ardee Church could not meet the cost of the repair. During 2013 the Church was closed and its condition deteriorated.

Various fundraisers were held, including concerts in Collon House and a Town and Villages Scheme grant saw €80,000 added to the pot, allowing the committee to commence work on the roof. The unique ceiling was in grave danger due to leaks.

After many years of planning and despite the problems of Covid, work began on a new roof last year and the building was upgraded to a place of National Importance in the



National Inventory of Architectural Heritage moved from regional importance to national importance.

Collon and its church are closely associated with the Foster family, who arrived in County Louth in the 1600s. Originally tenant farmers, by the turn of the eighteenth century they were significant landowners with two seats in the Irish House of Commons. In 1764 the Fosters erected the first Anglican church in Collon and in 1810 they decided to build anew on a site immediately to the south of the old church. Begun in 1811, the present church was completed by September 1815 at a cost of £8,000.

The church has been allocated a grant of €70,000 under the latest Historic Structures Fund.

Cllr Dolores Minogue, who has backed the cause of the church for some years, says it's wonderful news.

'Anybody who has walked through the doors into Collon church have been amazed by the ceiling and how it is laid out. It would make a great debate chamber for local schools interested in politics and who knows, maybe some will feature in the footsteps of the Fosters in the years to come. I can see the church having many uses and will be a huge community asset,' she said.

Funds at Green Pastures church in Ballymena rise to over £22m

Funds at the evangelical Green Pastures church in Ballymena climbed to £22m as the congregation welcomed another 64 people while raising money to pay for its new building, according to accounts, Margaret Canning writes in the Belfast Telegraph

The church, led by Pastor Jeff Wright, the former owner of Wrightbus, moved to a new 'super church' in April. The address of the building, called the Gateway, is Faith Avenue. The £2.37m income of the church is described in a directors' report filed with the accounts as “testament to the lovely giving heart of its people and to God's promise that if we act in faith and with good planning, He will release His provision”.

The accounts cover May 1, 2019, to the end of August last year — a time of trading difficulties and insolvency at Wrights Group and, later, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

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While no longer a director at Wrights Group, Mr Wright remained its chief shareholder.

Over the 16 months covered in Green Pastures' results, donations of just under £2m were made — down from £3.8m in the year to the end of April 2019.

The congregation was nonetheless praised by the directors for its generosity towards fundraising for the new building. There was “great generosity... towards our Project Nehemiah fund, enabling the gathering of capital in preparation for our socio-economic and spiritual regeneration at the Gateway site,” the church said.

Green Pastures church has been asked for further comment on how much remains to be paid off on the new building.

During the year, the church had a net income of £2.37m and total expenditure of £1.38m, leaving a surplus of £990,730, which was contributed to the new building.

Total church funds rose from £21.16m to £22.15m, while £1.4m of restricted funds were also spent on the new building.

There was £373,639 cash at bank, of which £316,062 was in a restricted fund for the new building. The trustees said they expected more donations to come in and that they expected the church to take out a loan.

It has 800 worshippers and aims to build “a spirit-filled people, inspired by Christ enjoying us, enjoying him”.

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The Wrightbus companies collapsed under debts of £60m in 2019, with the group's donations of £15m over six years through parent company Cornerstone Group to Green Pastures attracting controversy.

According to the financial report filed at Companies House this week, “the church's desire is to be a reflection of God's heart through a vibrant, 21st century church”

Its congregation is described as a “people who are driven by compassion to reach lost and hurting people, and to be a transforming presence in the communities we serve”. The report described how the church had met in person and online during the year.

“We celebrated with 64 people who came to a new faith in Jesus Christ (last year 89), 30 of whom actively engaged



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and completed a discipleship programme. Fifty-two people were baptised in this time period,” it said.

It also provided pastoral care to its 800-plus adult members and the community. There were 403 volunteers. It delivered over 1,000 meals to the families of church members who work in the NHS and provided snacks for NHS workers in hospitals.

Courtesy the Belfast Telegraph 08.05.2021

Opinion - New process of truth and reconciliation is a way for NI to move on - Jonathan Powell

In the 14 years since I worked on the Good Friday Agreement and its implementation I have been involved in many other peace processes around the world, from Colombia to Mozambique.

There is always a stage you reach in every successful process when you have to find a way to confront the past so you can move forward. Otherwise you just keep being dragged back into the very history you are trying so hard to escape.

I am no fan of the way this Conservative government has handled Northern Ireland nor do I know what their plan is with regard to the legacy of the Troubles, partially leaked yesterday and condemned by most political leaders in Northern Ireland.

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I certainly believe it would be wrong to have a one-sided amnesty just for soldiers and policemen and their role in the Troubles.

But if their plan is to deal with the past in an even-handed way in consultation with victims, and with the Irish government, and establish a workable truth and reconciliation process, then I would welcome it as the only way in which Northern Ireland can finally move on.

We tried before Tony Blair left office to find such a route to truth and reconciliation by establishing the Eames-Bradley Commission in 2007. Unfortunately it was unable to find a consensus on the way forward.

And since then we have seen peace repeatedly interrupted by the arrest of republican leaders, like Gerry Adams in 2014, and the attempted prosecution of police and soldiers for crimes committed during the Troubles.

Substantial police resources are being poured into historical investigations and prosecutions which are rarely successful and almost never bring satisfaction to any side. Contrast that with the healing brought about by the Bloody Sunday inquiry exposing the truth of what happened on that terrible day to all the families who had suffered for so long.

Blanket amnesties are no longer right or even possible in modern conflicts. And this is a deeply sensitive issue in which the rights of victims who have suffered so much should be central.

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But you have to balance peace and justice rather than being absolute about either — you don't want to create more victims in the future at the cost of trying to secure absolute justice for victims of the past.

That is why in other peace processes the two sides have opted for transitional justice programmes, as in Colombia, or truth and reconciliation programmes as in South Africa.

What most victims want are the facts about what happened, that those responsible acknowledge their responsibility and to find a way to reach closure.

In Northern Ireland, as elsewhere in the world, that has to be done through a process that does not necessarily end up in court, which in any case, as time passes, is less and likely to result in a successful prosecution.

It needs to be a system tailored specifically for Northern Ireland. But examples elsewhere in the world show there are ways forward where there is imagination and the political will to face the past.

I hope that rather than just preventing the prosecution of the security forces for crimes committed in the Troubles, the Government will now consult victims, political parties and civil society in Northern Ireland as well as the Irish government on the right way to establish a new process of truth and reconciliation.

If not, Northern Ireland's progress towards a lasting peace risks being constantly interrupted by the reappearance of the bloody history from which it is trying to escape.

Jonathan Powell was chief of staff to Tony Blair and chief British negotiator in Northern Ireland from 1997-2007

Courtesy The Belfast Telegraph - 07.05.2021

Books, Broadcasts, Resources and Webinars

Clergy Support Trust's 366th Festival Service

Archbishop Justin Welby invites you to join Clergy Support Trust's 366th Festival Service, hosted at St Paul's Cathedral on 11 May 2021 from 6pm.

The choirs of Liverpool, Southwark and St Paul's sing their own anthem and a joint hymn. Four people supported by the trust share their stories, while the Bishop of Durham gives the homily.

Invite your friends to watch the Festival on the trust's website at: <https://www.clergysupport.org.uk/festival>

Thy Kingdom Come Prayer Movement

Christians worldwide gear up for 6th annual Thy Kingdom Come Prayer Movement

Hundreds of thousands of Christians worldwide will be gearing up to take part in the sixth Thy Kingdom Come— a global ecumenical prayer movement for evangelisation,

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occurring annually from Ascension to Pentecost (13th – 23rd May this year).

[\[https://www.archbishopofyork.org/news/latest-news/christians-worldwide-gear-6th-annual-thy-kingdom-come-prayer-movement?utm\]](https://www.archbishopofyork.org/news/latest-news/christians-worldwide-gear-6th-annual-thy-kingdom-come-prayer-movement?utm)

Media review

Good Friday Agreement negotiators call for NI Protocol suspension

BBC News

[\[https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-57030871\]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-57030871)

Covid-19: Cargo plane leaves NI with medical aid for India

BBC News

[\[https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-57019631\]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-57019631)

Education spending on NI's disadvantaged pupils 'ineffective'

BBC News

[\[https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-56984871\]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-56984871)

Mother speaks out against suicide forum after son's death

BBC News

[\[https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-56845565\]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-56845565)

Pointers for prayer

Mighty God,

in whom we know the power of redemption,

churchnewsireland@gmail.org



you stand among us in the shadows of our time.
As we move through every sorrow and trial of this life,
uphold us with knowledge of the final morning
when, in the glorious presence of your risen Son,
we will share in his resurrection,
redeemed and restored to the fullness of life
and forever freed to be your people. Amen.

Living God,
long ago, faithful women
proclaimed the good news
of Jesus' resurrection,
and the world was changed forever.
Teach us to keep faith with them,
that our witness may be as bold,
our love as deep,
and our faith as true. Amen.

Creator of the universe,
you made the world in beauty,
and restore all things in glory
through the victory of Jesus Christ.

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We pray that, wherever your image is still disfigured by poverty, sickness, selfishness, war and greed, the new creation in Jesus Christ may appear in justice, love, and peace, to the glory of your name. Amen.

O God, your Son remained with his disciples after his resurrection, teaching them to love all people as neighbors. As his disciples in this age, we offer our prayers on behalf of the universe in which we are privileged to live and our neighbours with whom we share it.

... *Petitions...*

Open our hearts to your power moving around us and between us and within us, until your glory is revealed in our love of both friend and enemy, in communities transformed by justice and compassion, and in the healing of all that is broken. Amen.

Speaking to the Soul - Remember my fetters

A Reading from Colossians 3:18-4:18

18 Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives and never treat them harshly.

20 Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is your acceptable duty in the Lord. 21 Fathers, do not provoke your

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children, or they may lose heart. 22 Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything, not only while being watched and in order to please them, but wholeheartedly, fearing the Lord. 23 Whatever your task, put yourselves into it, as done for the Lord and not for your masters, 24 since you know that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you serve the Lord Christ. 25 For the wrongdoer will be paid back for whatever wrong has been done, and there is no partiality. 1 Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, for you know that you also have a Master in heaven.

2 Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with thanksgiving. 3 At the same time pray for us as well that God will open to us a door for the word, that we may declare the mystery of Christ, for which I am in prison, 4so that I may reveal it clearly, as I should.

5 Conduct yourselves wisely towards outsiders, making the most of the time. 6 Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer everyone.

7 Tychicus will tell you all the news about me; he is a beloved brother, a faithful minister, and a fellow-servant in the Lord. 8 I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts; 9 he is coming with Onesimus, the faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you about everything here.

10 Aristarchus my fellow-prisoner greets you, as does Mark the cousin of Barnabas, concerning whom you have received instructions — if he comes to you, welcome him.

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11 And Jesus who is called Justus greets you. These are the only ones of the circumcision among my co-workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me.

12 Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you. He is always wrestling in his prayers on your behalf, so that you may stand mature and fully assured in everything that God wills.

13 For I testify for him that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis.

14 Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas greet you.

15 Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters in Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.

16 And when this letter has been read among you, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you read also the letter from Laodicea.

17 And say to Archippus, "See that you complete the task that you have received in the Lord."

18 I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.

Meditation

Here's a trick question: do you love all your children equally? We love some people more than others. But that won't do when we talk about our children. It's anathema to prefer one child to another, and where it happens, it's

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tremendously damaging to a family. No, no: children must all be loved “the same.” But no one else gets that protection. We are each free to choose who we love, and some more, and some less. More than that, if it’s not a free choice, it’s meaningless.

Then, of course, Jesus comes along and says we have to love everyone — and our brains hurt. How do we begin to endeavor to love everyone? We can’t. We give up.

The problem is that we began with a bunch of faulty assumptions: mostly that love is a kind of thing that comes in quantities, and which can be measured by feelings. The right answer to the question, “Do you love all his children the same?” is a resounding, “No!” And why? Love focuses on the beloved: it is an attitude reserved to one particular person, unique from love for anyone else. To say I love any two people “the same” is to make them interchangeable. Love will brook nothing of the kind.

Paul’s lesson today is one in the practical application of love. To love a husband is not to love a wife; to love a child is not the same as loving your father; to love a master, someone in authority over you, is different from loving a slave — or anyone you have authority over. Love comes in permutations as endless as our relationships to one another, no more or less.

To love one another, then, is to respect the individual personalities and unique relationships in which love is to be exercised. These are the fetters God has given us, and he can be trusted, because he is, himself, Love.

