

£2 million new church halls open in Belfast

For the opening of Bloomfield Presbyterian Church's £2 million new church halls complex on Sunday (9 May), it was a matter of 'third time lucky', when they were

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finally officially dedicated by the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland Right Reverend Dr David Bruce, who described the event as ‘another sign of the new and slowly changing times we are seeing...’

Planning for the major renovation and rebuilding project, began six years ago, but in February 2019, the upgrading and refurbishment of parts of the existing halls began, with work also taking place to demolish the old prefabricated halls to make way for a new extension. This would connect the old buildings with the new for the first time, making for one interconnected church building. The work took a year and was completed in March 2020, just before the first Covid lockdown. Having been invited twice, and cancelled twice, due to the ensuing lockdowns, Dr Bruce was able to dedicate the new complex.

The much anticipated event was witnessed via a live link by those in the main church building, and in the overspill hall for morning worship, along with many people watching online. Speaking after the service Dr Bruce said, “To see the result of a vision for the future come to fruition in this way, knowing that it has involved much patience and prayer, coupled with faithful sacrificial giving, and precise planning, is a very welcome and inspirational sight.

“It was a pleasure to be able to finally dedicate these halls to the glory of God, which will serve the ministry of Bloomfield Presbyterian in a way that will assist the congregation in its stated aim, ‘to know Jesus and share his love’ for many, many years to come. I hope and pray that this new space, designed and built with such care, will be used as a



The Moderator and Bloomfield's minister, the Very Rev Dr Frank Sellar

gathering place for the people of God, and a place of welcome for all," he said.

Reflecting on the current times, the Moderator continued, "To be here today is another sign of the new and slowly changing times we are seeing, for which we all give thanks. My prayer for my brothers and sisters in Christ in Bloomfield, as they get used to each other again, occupying the same space, albeit socially distanced, as they take time to gather again, opening up and hearing God's word together, along with churches up and down the land, my prayer is that the familiarity of it would begin to spark and glow in their minds and hearts afresh."

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Sitting on the corner of Cyprus Avenue and the Beersbridge Road in east Belfast, Bloomfield Presbyterian opened in 1897, close to the Belfast and County Down railway to Newcastle. Twenty years later its halls, which have been refurbished as part of the regeneration work, opened. Today the church draws around 340 families from the local area and further afield.

While the new halls had to be mothballed, they have been used to accommodate the return to in-person socially-distanced worship from July to December last year, and since worship returned again for Easter this year. A relocated and enlarged kitchen in the new complex has also been used to continue the work of one of Bloomfield's outreach ministries, the 'Soup Club' to the local district.

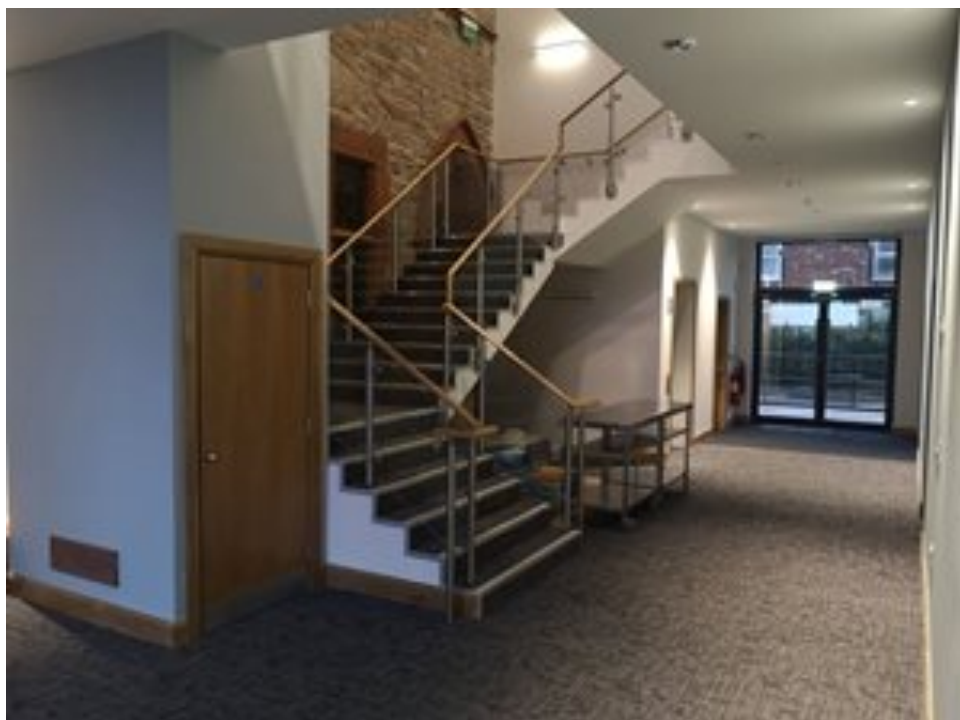
The new halls will be a fresh and spacious resource for the congregation and the community. The work has enabled the existing Megaw Hall to be extended, with a new welcome area and breakout rooms. The new complex includes a sports hall, large kitchen, washrooms and a minor hall, with the Session Room, small hall, and meeting rooms above.

Thanking the Moderator for coming, sharing God's Word, and officially opening the new complex, Bloomfield's minister, the Very Rev Dr Frank Sellar, said that while so much planning had gone into the new halls, no one could have foreseen the pandemic that what would come so soon after their completion, preventing their use.

"Looking back at the photographs of that Sunday in January in 2019, when we used the old halls for the last time, seems like a very different world. Over the next 12 months so much

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work was undertaken, from the demolition of the 1960s prefabricated hall, to the new build itself, to the painting and furnishing of the complex, all to get us



to the point when we could dedicate and use them for the Glory of God and the benefit of the community around us. Then in March 2020, Covid hit, and everything changed,” Dr Sellar said.

“They have effectively been mothballed since then, with the Moderator invited to come and officially open them twice, only to be politely cancelled on each occasion due to the first and then second lockdowns. Dr Bruce has been very accommodating, and I give thanks that he has been able finally to open them for us. I also would like to thank everyone who also made this day possible,” Dr Sellar said.

With 77% of the cost of the project already funded, leaving £450,000 to raise, looking to the future, Bloomfield’s minister said he very much looked forward the halls being used by both church and community, from the Boys’ and Girls’ Brigade, to parents and tots, dads and toddlers breakfast group, to Bloomfield’s Charis Youth Club for

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children and young adults with autism and additional needs, to PW and bowls.

“The money raised also purposely included a tithe of £180,000 for overseas mission, with £80,000 having already gone to our partners coping with Covid conditions in Rwanda. The opening of the halls also comes at a very happy time for Bloomfield. Our leadership team has expanded with 10 new elders ordained recently, so it is a nice coming together of both spiritual and physical elements of growth that has brought us to a good place, as we anticipate the future, and all God has in store for his people in this part of the city.”

C of E launches National Register of Clergy to enhance safeguarding

The National Register of the Church’s clergy with a licence or Permission to Officiate (PTO) was made publicly available on the Church of England website yesterday 12/05/2021.

The Register is an important development in strengthening safeguarding in the Church and was a recommendation in the [2017 Gibb Report](#) which looked into the Church’s handling of allegations against the late Bishop Peter Ball.

Having a single, reliable, up to date register will enable clergy, churchwardens, and members of the public to check the bona fides of all clergy with licence or permission to officiate.

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The National Register shows an individual's title and name, how they are engaged with the Church of England (current post/licence) and the diocese, area or benefice to which they are licensed. The Register does not include contact, biographical or historical information.

At the time of launch, the National Register includes those who are ordained, expanding to include lay ministry in due course.

Baptist minister calls for forum on united Ireland

Northern Ireland's first and only female Baptist minister has called for a Citizens' Assembly on the future of the island and tells Dail committee of its benefits, the Belfast Telegraph reports.

Reverend Karen Sethuraman has said unionism cannot ignore “the rising number of voices wanting to engage in conversations regarding our future”.

Rev Sethuraman told a committee in the Irish parliament that a Citizens' Assembly could provide a forum for both sides of the community to engage in.

She told the Dail: “A citizens' assembly extends the conversation beyond being politically-led to being people-led, providing an opportunity to cast vision, discuss and deliberate, learn and unlearn, enabling us to plan for the future.



“Most importantly, the forum would contribute to a unifying framework as a Nation of Neighbours based on common ground, common values and a common vision regarding healthcare, education, employment, economy and identity.

Rev Karen Sethuraman is the first female Baptist Minister in Ireland and is currently a Pastor of SoulSpace, a Peace and Reconciliation hub, based in Belfast.

Her passion is peace and reconciliation/social justice and she is a champion of gender equality.

The Rev Karen is also one of the founders of Spectrum - a space set up in Belfast for LGBT+ people of faith. Karen feels particularly called to minister outside the Church walls, journeying with people who feel they ‘don’t fit’ in Church.

She has served as Chaplain to two Belfast Lord Mayors.

“I believe these are what matter to people most. Brexit is a stark reminder of the importance of carrying out the ground

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work before a border poll is called. The baton of peace and reconciliation has been passed on to us today.

“We have a responsibility as peacemakers to have this conversation.”

Rev Sethuraman was raised in a unionist community in east Belfast, and has spent 20 years in her ministry working on peace and reconciliation across communities.

She was speaking at the Oireachtas Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement on Tuesday. She was backed in her call by Trevor Lunn, a former member of the Alliance Party, and now an independent MLA for Lagan Valley.

Mr Lunn, the son of an Orangeman, described himself as a “soft” unionist and said he is open to discussions on a united Ireland.

He told the committee: “Such a poll is not likely or desirable for a few years but the discussion has started and given the major changes now taking place across these islands, the outcome cannot be predicted despite the efforts of Unionists to play down the notion that it could go against them.”

He added: “In anticipation it is imperative that voters across the island should be well informed and there is an onus on both governments to provide the necessary information.

“For that reason I support the demand of the organisation which I have recently joined, Ireland's Future, for the establishment of a Citizens' Assembly on an all-island basis

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to seek that information and provide a forum for non-political discussion about the problems and/or benefits arising from reunification.”

Mr Lunn said threats of loyalist violence should not prevent conversations on the future of the island being held.

Courtesy Belfast Telegraph, 12.05.2021

“A new day is dawning” – Joy as Dublin churches reopen



Sandra Ganley greets the Rector of Rathmichael, the Revd Sean Hanily on Monday evening while Rector of the neighbouring St James’s Church Crinken, the Revd Trevor Stevenson, looks on.

Parishioners and members of the wider community in Rathmichael were joined by Archbishop Michael

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Jackson on Monday May 10 as churches reopened for public worship after four and a half months of lockdown.

The Rector, the Revd Sean Hanily, led the service of Compline and welcomed people back through the church doors for the first time since Christmas.

The service was attended by local public representatives including Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill TD and clergy from neighbouring parishes, Fr John O'Connor from St Anne's in Shankill and the Revd Trevor Stevenson from St James's, Crinken. Also present was former Rector, Canon Billy Marshall and his wife Margaret as well as Canon George Salter. The service was streamed live and safety measures were in place for the congregation. The Rector said he felt it was important to mark the easing of restrictions in a public way with people from the whole community present to celebrate.

In his sermon, the Archbishop noted that for almost half a year churches had been closed except for the saddest of human events – funerals – and a very muted version of the happiest events – weddings. He paid tribute to all who worked so hard while church buildings were closed and added that the reopening of churches heralded a new beginning.

“We are all about to start afresh. It is important for those of us who can do so to come to church and to start as we intend to continue. It is equally important that those who come to church continue to look after those who now cannot come to church and to ensure that they are not and do not

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feel excluded from the worship of God as we move forwards. I want to thank all of you who have made the continuity of worship possible. I want to thank you for looking after yourselves, your families and your neighbours. Much done; much still to do. A new world is opening before us as a new day is dawning. Let us rejoice today,” he said.

Drawing on Psalm 122, the Archbishop asked who our fellow pilgrims are as we move out of the time of the coronavirus. He suggested that only the incautious and the irresponsible would predict that things would return to where they once were soon. While we still live in altered times and in the shadow of anxiety, he pointed out that most of the time the sun was shining and new times beckoned.

“Like the pilgrim who has arrived in Jerusalem, and on this day when places of worship may open again to worship lawfully, let us shut our eyes and open them again and look around us and count the blessings and the opportunities of being in church again. We love our churches. We love to be in them. Let us rejoice in them and treasure them. They are our Jerusalem that points us towards eternity and towards our God,” he concluded.

[You can read the Archbishop’s sermon in full here.](#)

Pope, at audience with public present, talks about the power of prayer

Holding a general audience with visitors and pilgrims present for the first time in more than six months, Pope

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Francis said he was very pleased to see people “face to face.”

“I’ll tell you something: it’s not nice to talk in front of nothing, just a camera. It’s not nice,” the pope told about 300 people who attended the audience May 12 in the San Damaso Courtyard of the Apostolic Palace.

Because of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the last general audience open to the public was Oct. 28. After that, the pope returned to livestreaming the audience from the library of the Apostolic Palace.

Greeting Polish speakers at the audience, the pope noted that May 13, the feast of Our Lady of Fatima, marked the 40th anniversary of the attempt to assassinate St. John Paul II.

The Polish pope, who was riding in the popemobile at the start of a weekly general audience when he was shot by Mehmet Ali Agca in 1981, was convinced “that he owed his life to Our Lady of Fatima,” Pope Francis said. “This event makes us aware that our lives and the history of the world are in the hands of God.”

In his main audience talk, Pope Francis focused on overcoming obstacles to prayer, but also on the power of prayer.

Prayer, he told the crowd, is not always “a walk in the park.” While it may be easy to “parrot” prayer, “blah, blah, blah,” he said, real prayer requires effort.



Pope Francis greets people during his weekly general audience in the San Damaso Courtyard of the Apostolic Palace at the Vatican May 12, 2021. It was the first time in more than six months that visitors and pilgrims have been able to attend the audience.

Prayer “certainly gives great peace, but through inner struggle, at times hard, which can accompany even long periods of life,” he said.

Often when a person wants to pray, he said, “we are immediately reminded of many other activities, which at that moment seem more important and more urgent. This happens to me, too; ‘I’m going to go pray. But no, I have to do this and that.’ We run from prayer; I don’t know why, but that’s how it is.”

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But “almost always, after putting off prayer, we realize that those things were not essential at all, and that we may have wasted time” on things that were not as important as prayer, he said. “This is how the Enemy deceives us.”

Pope Francis told the story of a man he knew in Buenos Aires, Argentina, “my other diocese,” who was told that his 9-year-old daughter was sick, and the doctors were convinced she was about to die. The man took a train to the Basilica of Our Lady of Luján and prayed outside all night, “fighting for the health of his daughter.”

When he got back to the hospital, he found his wife smiling because their daughter suddenly improved, the pope said. “I saw this myself,” Pope Francis said. “Prayer works miracles because prayer goes straight to the center of the tenderness of God who loves us like a father. And when he does not give us the grace” of what was asked for in prayer, “he gives us another, which we will see over time.”

Appointment of Lord-Lieutenant for County Down

The Queen is pleased to appoint Mr Gawn William Rowan Hamilton DL as Her Majesty’s Lord-Lieutenant for County Down to succeed Mr David Lindsay, who is due to retire on 25th September.

Gawn Rowan Hamilton was educated at Eton College and Cambridge. An accountant by training, he has worked for Ernst & Young and Schrodgers plc and was CFO and Co-founder of Mergermarket Ltd until 2009. He has been an

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investor in 15 start-up companies ranging from expert networks to technology-led bio-engineering businesses. He was Co-founder and CFO with Taskmaestro Ltd and is currently a Non-Executive Director of Eagle Alpha, an alternative data business in Dublin.

In a voluntary capacity, Mr Rowan Hamilton helped establish the Hans Sloane 350 Committee, which holds events in the memory of Sir Hans Sloane in Killyleagh, his birthplace. He was President of the River Dibney Conservation Trust from 2010-2016 and was also President of the Irish International Fly Fishing Fair raising funds for river conservation.

In 2017, he co-founded Killyleagh Community Association and is the current Treasurer. The organisation is responsible for arranging free community events and many smaller initiatives to address local issues such as anti-social behaviour and littering. In 2020, he helped establish and coordinate the Killyleagh Area Covid Helpline, with over 95 volunteers delivering in excess of 500 packages during the pandemic.

He was appointed Deputy Lieutenant for County Down in 2010.

Books, Broadcasts, Resources and Webinars

The Clergy Support Trust's annual Festival Service

The Trust's annual Festival Service was held on Tuesday, 11 May in St Paul's Cathedral, London. The service was a

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choral celebration of the trust's work in helping Anglican clergy (serving and retired) and their families across the UK and Ireland. It is available after broadcast at this link and the Order of Service can be downloaded here.

<https://www.clergysupport.org.uk/festival>

The Archbishop of Armagh commends the work of the Clergy Support Trust from which clergy in Ireland have benefitted in the past.

SCM Press resources for Mental Health Awareness Week

SCM have a selection of resources to encourage and support people to look after their mental health.

*Raging with Compassion

*Shame and the Church

*Spirituality, Theology and Mental Health.

Take a look > bit.ly/33zdQR6

Tutu talks

“What they do not tell you about leadership is how many times you get it wrong before you get it right,” says @MSF_southafrica's Samantha Mkandhla.

Watch here: events.tutu.org.za

This TutuTalk is presented with partners Motsepe Foundtn and TutuFellows.

churchnewsireland@gmail.org

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Local churches changing nations

New Wine Ireland's Summer21 Digital Conference plans!

This July, the conference is going digital and you are invited to join in. Summer21 is taking place 8th-11th July and can be streamed and enjoyed from the comfort of your own home.

The organisers state, "We have a great line-up planned and will be sharing more with you in the coming weeks as we get closer to the conference and because you can catch up and enjoy sessions on demand, you can attend more sessions this year than you possibly could at Sligo! What's more, you'll be able to watch and re-watch after the conference too – so if something crops up and you miss a few sessions, you can catch up afterwards – there's never been a better year to join us, from wherever you are in the world!"

To find out more, book your ticket and register your kids go to newwineireland.org/summer21

Pointers for prayer

Mighty God, in whom we know the power of redemption, 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.
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.

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O God, your Son remained with his disciples after his resurrection,

teaching them to love all people as neighbours.

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... concluding with:

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.

Holy God,

you have called us to follow in the way of your risen Son,

and to care for those who are our companions,

not only with words of comfort, but with acts of love.

Seeking to be true friends of all,

we offer our prayers on behalf of the church and the world.

Petitions... concluding with:

Guide us in the path of discipleship,

so that, as you have blessed us,

we may be a blessing for others,

bringing the promise of the kingdom near

by our words and deeds. Amen.

Speaking to the Soul - What Would Love Do?

A Reading from Romans 13:1-14

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1 Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. 2 Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. 3 For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval; 4 for it is God's servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer. 5 Therefore one must be subject, not only because of wrath but also because of conscience. 6 For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, busy with this very thing.

7 Pay to all what is due them — taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honour to whom honour is due. 8 Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. 9 The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet"; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, "Love your neighbour as yourself." 10 Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.

11 Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; 12 the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; 13 let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness,

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not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. 14 Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

Meditation

I am someone who believes that the morality of our actions is particular to our circumstances. When it comes down to it, God gives us surprisingly few absolute moral laws, and sometimes even those spin out into complex arrangements. Take “Do not bear false witness,” and then move out to the more general “Lying is wrong” — which is pretty clearly only almost always true — but then what about the classic example, where the Nazis knock on your door and want to know about the Jews in your basement? Then which kind of “witness” is most “false”?

I begin to appreciate Paul’s complicated relationship with the law.

As a Pharisee, Paul loves the law — he sees all its wisdom, all its goodness, all it reveals of God. But he knows better than anyone how following the letter of the law without understanding its spirit can lead precisely away from God. The law lays traps as well as clears paths for sinful humans. Worse, to make ever-more-elaborate laws is to risk becoming a Pharisee: to begin to ask not, “What is right?” but “What can we get away with?”

Today Paul writes that love, rather than complex amendments, fulfills the law. The commandments describe nothing more or less than how to go about loving your neighbor. Owe nothing to anyone but love.

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Our lives are usually complex. If I'm right, no two moral situations are exactly the same. Every one we face is new. Complicated legal codes are tempting because we need help navigating — but no moral code, however sophisticated, will be enough. Instead, we're told to turn to a simple question: what would love have us do?

