

# Church News Ireland

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**Image of the day – Dinant cathedral, Belgium**

## People and places

### New General Secretary of the Irish Council of Churches

**The Irish Council of Churches has announced the appointment of Dr. Damian Jackson to the position of General Secretary.**

Dr Jackson brings five years of experience with the Irish Council of Churches and the Irish Inter–Church Meeting in the role of Program Officer when his primary responsibilities included developing connections between local and national inter–church work and resourcing churches’ work together on social justice issues including migration and asylum, anti–racism, housing insecurity and homelessness, and climate justice.

Commenting on his appointment, Dr Jackson said “I’m excited to continue the work of my predecessors in the Irish Council of Churches and Irish inter–Church Meeting and look forward to supporting our member churches as they seek to use their distinctive voice to advocate for those who are unheard and marginalised in our society today. While churches have much to learn and many challenges to respond to, particularly as a result of the Covid–19 pandemic, they also have a particular calling to justice and a reach throughout the island that offers great possibilities for positive interventions of hope.”

President Bishop Andrew Forster responded to the appointment: “On behalf of the ICC and IICM I’m delighted



May 20, 2022

with the appointment of Dr. Jackson as ICC General Secretary. His work as Program

### **Dr. Damian Jackson the new General Secretary ICC**

Officer over the last five years has broadened and deepened the reach of

ICC and I look forward to him bringing that wide knowledge of the landscape of churches in Ireland to his new role. His passion for the pursuit of church unity in diversity is clear and that unity is the foundation upon which the collaboration between our churches in justice and reconciliation work is built.”

Bishop Brendan Leahy of the Irish Bishops Conference commented: “In wishing Damian well, I know from working closely with him in recent years that he will make a wonderful contribution. He is following in the line of many fine General Secretaries who have served competently and with a great passion for the unity of Christians and the Irish Inter–Church Meeting in its almost fifty year history.”



Previous to his role with ICC, Dr Jackson undertook postdoctoral research at the Irish School of Ecumenics in Trinity College, Dublin on the ethics of the use of personal information in emergency response. His PhD studies analysed the responses of churches in Ireland to undocumented migrants.

## **PCI responds to Secretary of State's latest abortion move**

**The Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI) has described the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland's further intervention yesterday (19 May) to ensure the commissioning of the most destructive liberal abortion regime in these islands as, 'a continued assault on the preciousness of life.'**

In a joint statement, Reverend Trevor Gribben, Clerk of the General Assembly and General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, and Reverend Daniel Kane, Convener of PCI's Council for Public Affairs, said, "Our deep and abiding concern is for the welfare of everyone, which includes the unborn child, but also the long-term good of mothers, and the fact that all life is precious whether pre-born or post-natal. We never thought Northern Ireland would lead the way with such immoral and liberal laws, having had legislation previously that sought to strike a careful balance between protecting the life of the mother and the unborn child. We see today's intervention by Mr Lewis as not only unjust, but a continued assault on the preciousness of life."

“As a caring community of faith we recognise the sensitivities and complexities which arise for women, and their families, who experience a crisis during pregnancy that leads them to consider termination. This is why we have voiced our support and advocated for the introduction of state-of-the-art perinatal care services to offer practical, emotional and spiritual support in these difficult circumstances,” they said.

The senior Presbyterians were speaking after the Secretary of State used powers given to him by the UK Parliament earlier this year to empower him to direct Northern Ireland Departments, in this instance in relation to commissioning abortion services.

Mr Gribben and Mr Kane continued, “In recent weeks the Secretary of State and UK Government have indicated that listening to the people of Northern Ireland has led to changes in their thinking around legacy and their approach to the Northern Ireland Protocol. And yet with this action the Secretary of State is ignoring the voices of the 79 per cent of the 21,000 individuals and organisations who responded to the Northern Ireland Office’s 2019 abortion consultation, opposing its plans.

“Mr Lewis was under no obligation to bring forward this maximalist approach to implementing the recommendations of the 2018 Report of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, known as ‘The CEDAW Report’. Not only that, but he has in effect, been given a blank cheque to interfere unilaterally with many aspects of the devolved administration in Northern Ireland. As we have consistently said, such a power grab by the UK Government

would be unthinkable in the Scottish, or Welsh devolved contexts.”

In conclusion, Mr Gribben and Mr Kane said, “While the Secretary of State’s move to undermine the principles at the heart of the finely balanced devolved settlement in Northern Ireland is a political act, we see the removal of protection of the lives of unborn children as an unacceptable, immoral and retrograde step.”

## **String quartet concert in Navan for Ukrainian doctors fund**

A string quartet concert is being staged in St Mary's Church of Ireland, Navan on Saturday 28th May in aid of the Ukraine relief effort. All proceedings will go to Medical Help Ukraine, a charity founded by Ukrainian doctors working in Ireland who provide direct and non bureaucratic support for hospitals in Ukraine. Meath Chronicle

[[] <https://www.meathchronicle.ie/2022/05/18/string-quartet-concert-in-navan-for-ukrainian-doctors-fund/> ]

## **4,000 people flock to Rossnowlagh Friary for Relic of St Peregrine blessing**

**An estimated 4,000 people flocked to the Franciscan Friary in Rossnowlagh last weekend for a blessing with the Relic of St Peregrine.**

He is the patron saint for persons suffering from cancer, AIDS, and other life-threatening illnesses.

May 20, 2022

Remarkably, after Fr Vincent Finnegan OFM posted that he “got a loan” of the precious relic on Friday, it went viral on Facebook.

By that night, it had been viewed by over 40,000 people and shared by another thousand people for what is deemed to be a first class relic.

This means that it contains a body part of the saint, such as bone, blood, or flesh.

What Fr Vincent thought might be a hundred or so turning up on the Saturday turned out to be in excess of 700 people.

But by the following day, the numbers were substantially greater and rose to their thousands, partly due to the good weather but also through word of mouth and of course, social media.

Fr Vincent told the Donegal Post that they were overwhelmed by the number that turned up over the two days and humbled by the people and their stories that were being told:

“It was absolutely phenomenal and emotional for a lot of people. It was something that I hadn’t expected and sadly to be so much in demand.

“Maybe it is a reminder to us all that there are a lot of people struggling with their health and other people’s health at this time.

“I got the loan of this relic on Friday. I knew a lot of people in the area who are either suffering from cancer themselves or they have someone in their family or immediate family that are suffering with cancer.

“So I thought that I would offer the blessing from 3-5pm on the Saturday and Sunday with the original intention of having it in one of the parlours here. Then to have a wee chat with those who came in, give them a blessing and take their names and have a Mass to offer their intentions to God...

Report courtesy of Michael McHugh and Donegal Live

## News reports

### Archbishop of Canterbury issues call to prayer for the fifteenth Lambeth Conference

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, has issued a call for people to pray for the Lambeth Conference of Anglican bishops, and to set aside Trinity Sunday – 12 June – as a dedicated day of prayer. Bishops from dioceses serving communities in more than 165 countries throughout the world have been invited to Canterbury in Kent, England, for the once-a-decade gathering, which will take place from 26 July to 8 at the University of Kent in Canterbury, Canterbury Cathedral, and Lambeth Palace.



“The Lambeth Conference theme of ‘God’s Church for God’s World’, reminds us that we are called upon as Christians to pray for the needs of the world”, Archbishop Justin said in a message posted on the official Lambeth Conference website. “There are many calls upon our prayers at this time: world peace, the global climate crisis, the effects of the pandemic – to name but a few.

“I invite you to call all those in your care to pray for the Lambeth Conference”, he said. “Please pray that as we meet and consider our shared mission and ministry, that we may hear the call from God. In turn, that we might add our voices to call others to make a difference for Christ in the world.”

Brother Christopher John, part of the chaplaincy team at the event, has prepared a prayer guide which is available in English, French, Spanish and Portuguese.

Describing the prayer guide, which can be used in the lead-up and during the Lambeth Conference, Brother Christopher John said: “this prayer guide has contributions from religious communities in Europe, Africa, Oceania, the Americas, and Asia. . . Through it, we hope that the prayers we share here will encourage all who use it to unite in prayer for the bishops gathered in the Lambeth Conference.”

The prayer guide includes prayers around some of the topics expected to be discussed during the Lambeth Conference, including mission and evangelism, peace and reconciliation, the environment and sustainable development, discipleship, and inter faith relations

## Canada's National Indigenous archbishop resigns after sexual misconduct allegations

**Mark MacDonald has resigned as National Indigenous Archbishop of the Anglican Church of Canada and formally relinquished his exercise of ordained ministry following allegations of sexual misconduct.**

In a pastoral letter to the church, Archbishop Linda Nicholls, Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, said MacDonald had acknowledged the sexual misconduct. MacDonald's resignation took effect 20 April, in accordance with the Church of Canada's Canon XIX on Relinquishment or Abandonment of the Ministry. The primate confirmed to the Anglican Journal that there is no criminal allegation.

"This is devastating news," Nicholls said in her pastoral letter. "The sense of betrayal is deep and profound when leaders fail to live up to the standards we expect and the boundaries we set. Our hearts hold compassion for human frailty and space for repentance while we also ache with the pain that such betrayal causes first to the complainant; then to so many others and to the life of our Church."

The primate has asked Sidney Black to serve on an interim basis as National Indigenous Bishop.

Nicholls said the church's prayers first and foremost must be for the complainant affected by MacDonald's actions. "The betrayal of trust by someone in such a prominent role of

leadership will require a long road of healing and our constant prayers,” the primate said.

She also asked the church to pray for Black and the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples as they move forward to confirm the Covenant and Our Way of Life documents for Sacred Circle, the self-determining Indigenous church.

Finally, Nicholls invited Anglicans to hold MacDonald and his family in prayer.

“The ripple effects of this misconduct will be felt throughout the Church both in Canada and internationally, but most especially within the Sacred Circle and Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples,” Nicholls said. “We mourn with them. I trust that the good work that the Sacred Circle has initiated will continue to deepen and grow.”

A public announcement posted to the Anglican Church of Canada website reiterated the church’s commitment to workplaces “free from violence, coercion, discrimination, and sexual harassment”; that no one should be subjected to sexual misconduct of any kind; to deal “promptly, seriously and systematically with all complaints of sexual misconduct”; and that anyone who holds positions of trust or power in the church should not take advantage of or abuse that trust.

The statement cited A Call to Human Dignity, the declaration of principles adopted by the Anglican Church of Canada’s General Synod in 2001 for protection of parishioners and staff, as well as the Safe Church Charter of the Anglican

Communion, which the Canadian General Synod adopted in 2019.

## In the media

### New sex education programme for Catholic primaries in NI

BBC News NI

**A new relationship and sex education (RSE) programme has been provided to Catholic Primary schools in Northern Ireland.**

Flourish was approved by the Irish Bishops' Conference and has been adapted for the Northern Ireland curriculum.

It includes topics like how babies are made, bullying, same-sex attraction and puberty - including discussion of periods and wet dreams.

However, contraception is not included.

The Catholic Schools' Trustee Service (CSTS) said that was because Flourish was "designed to encourage age appropriate conversations".

"For this reason, contraception is not mentioned in the primary resources as it would not be age appropriate," it told

The Department of Education (DE) in Northern Ireland requires each school to develop its own RSE policy.



The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) has previously developed RSE guidance and resources for schools, including material on issues like consent, healthy relationships, sexual violence, LGBTQ+ matters and contraception.

However, what is actually taught to pupils about RSE is a matter for each school to decide based on their school ethos.

That has been criticised by some experts are "inconsistent and insufficient".

The retired judge, Sir John Gillen, has also previously said sex education should be mandatory in Northern Ireland's primary schools.

### **'Bodies, friendship and families'**

The Flourish programme was provided to Catholic primary schools in the Republic of Ireland in 2021 and has now been adapted for primaries in Northern Ireland.

The lessons are age-appropriate and have been developed by the CSTS and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS).

For example, children in Primary 1 are taught about their bodies, friendship and families in which children are taught that "God wants us to respect our parents and guardians". There was some controversy around the programme in the Republic of Ireland, however, with criticism from some parents' groups and politicians that issues like contraception and same-sex relationships were not properly addressed.

However, some Flourish lessons released in Northern Ireland do mention same-sex attraction.

In a lesson on love for Primary 7 classes, for instance, children are encouraged to discuss: "Is romantic love always between a man and a woman?"

"Explain to the children that when a person is attracted to someone of the same sex as them in a romantic way they are said to be homosexual or gay," the lesson continues. "Female homosexuals are known as lesbians."

### **'Healthy and supportive relationships'**

Another lesson states: "Be mindful that children may bring up that babies can come into families by adoption, surrogacy, fostering and to same-sex couples.

"Emphasise that babies are a gift from God in all circumstances and that God is at the centre of love in all families."

However, there is no mention of contraception in the Flourish programme.

In the lesson on how babies are made, children in Primary 7 are taught that babies are "precious gifts from God".

"From the time they are tiny cells in their mother's womb, they need to be minded and they are born completely helpless," a lesson on caring for new life states.

In a statement to BBC News NI, the CSTS said "the reference to the stage of gestation at which a baby is formed is in keeping with the ethos of Catholic education". "It is Catholic understanding that a baby exists from the moment of fertilisation," they said.

There is also a lesson plan on climate change, which is based on the campaigner Greta Thunberg.

In a statement to accompany the lessons, the chief executive of CSTS, Fintan Murphy, said Flourish would ensure pupils were taught how to form "healthy and supportive relationships".

"We are confident, from feedback already received, that schools will find the resources extremely valuable in enhancing the work they already undertake in this important area of the curriculum," he said.

"We encourage all our schools to review the materials in consultation with their school community, in particular parents and carers, to assess the appropriate use of the resources within their particular school context."

A similar RSE programme for Catholic post-primary schools in Northern Ireland is also being developed.

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## **Board quitting over 'abusive' emails in fresh twist to Green Pastures saga**

Belfast Telegraph

The board of the Green Pastures 'megachurch' in Ballymena has announced its intention to resign after weeks of turmoil, Andrew Madden reports.

It follows the resignation of lead pastor Jeff Wright and eight members of the church's executive team, and a review of complaints against Mr Wright made by members of the church.

According to an email, the board was told that Mr Wright had informed members of Green Pastures that church property was to be sold, with contracts to be signed in the near future.

After that, a group calling itself Green Pastures People's Voices emailed other parishioners to call for a meeting with the board, demanding "transparency" over recent events. The board then launched an investigation into a GDPR breach regarding "unsolicited emails" sent to its members. The Charity Commission is also investigating the church. In the latest twist to the saga, board members said they intended to resign after receiving abusive and threatening emails.

"Over recent months, the board of Green Pastures Church has been navigating a very challenging situation," they added.



“Having acted in good faith throughout, the board has prayerfully sought to ensure that Green Pastures Church can continue its ministry while operating with the principles of good governance.

“Given the scale of the challenges and our legal responsibilities, we have kept the Charity Commission fully informed.

“In recent weeks, several board members have received a number of unfortunate messages which have been abusive and at times threatening. This has been deeply disappointing.”

Board members stressed the emails had not come from Mr Wright, and were the “sole responsibility of the individuals who sent them”.

“Having reflected on our concern, the board has consulted with the Charity Commission and informed [it] of our intention to resign,” they said.

It is understood that Mr Wright was suspended for the review into complaints against him but met with church members.

This prompted further complaints and the resignation of the church's executive team.

An email from the board to church members earlier this month said the review concerned “alleged behaviours by [Mr Wright] which have purportedly had a detrimental and

significant impact on the mental and spiritual wellbeing of staff”.

“This review is being carried out by Trusted HR Limited... an independent firm with expertise in this area and who have no connection to the church or board. [We] await the outcome of this review,” the board said.

“At this stage, the board do not believe that the complaints give rise to moral or financial failures. Rather, we understand that they mostly centre around issues relating to the style of leadership.

“The board has communicated with the Charity Commission in respect of the complaints received and the process that has been instigated.

“The Charity Commission has advised that the board has acted in accordance with the principles of good governance and has endorsed the actions taken to date.”

The church is linked to Wrightbus, of which Jeff Wright was once a director.

Green Pastures opened next to the Wrightbus factory near Galgorm in 2007. It later moved to a 97-acre plot of land on the outskirts of Ballymena.

Its current site was once valued at £75m but was sold to the church for a reported £4m.

Green Pastures was contacted for comment.  
Mr Wright was not available for comment.

## Perspective

### Awakening a hope that inspires by Sharon Prentis

Wars, rumours of wars, pestilence and disease. At times, it is difficult to see how things can change. The news can seem like perpetual darkness only punctured by occasional light - if at all!

Holding on to faith requires acting against the spirit of the times. According to the African American theologian Howard Thurman it means having the courage to live in a way that 'kindles a hope that inspires.' When Martha and Mary sent for Jesus, they were grieving the death of their brother Lazarus (John 11:19-21). Although they knew how much their friend, Jesus loved them, they must have felt such desolation.

It is times like those, during acute pain and disorientation, when we look for something that can bring relief. It is also in those times that we learn the courage to speak out of the despair that has no answers and still dare to hope. Living in a way that kindles hope means bearing witness to the present reality, but says also that the impossible is possible.

As we embrace this certainty, in faith, we are alerted to the fact that we are not by ourselves. There is something beyond our immediate experiences which we can hold onto.

The writer of Proverbs encourages the reader to 'Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and not lean on your own understanding' (Proverbs 3:5). The first step is acknowledging that trouble and suffering do not always make sense. When we do that, what we then have left is not resignation but an opportunity for the illumination that faith brings - looking past difficult experiences to potential opportunities for grace. Sometimes they are obvious to us, other times they are not!

We can have the courage to face the future knowing that we do this not in our own strength but by God's Grace. Following Christ means being daring - putting our confidence completely in him when things may not look as though they are working out.

*The Revd Canon Dr Sharon Prentis is Dean of Ministry, St Mellitus College.*

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## Church News Ireland

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