

Church News Ireland



Image of the day – Art by George Jones

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Art by George Jones

George is well known on the band scene and as a broadcaster. One recent years he his talent for art has become better known. As he himself remarked about our cover print today “Another commissioned painting with lots of brickwork and windows!” Those who know Cregagh Methodist Church will certainly appreciate this work.

People and places



Welcome home Ken!

In a happy but unexpected return, Revd Ken McGrath has been introduced as Bishop's Curate for Gilnahirk, the East Belfast parish where he was baptised and confirmed.



Ken's introduction follows four years serving as Associate Vicar in Holywood and the Vicar of Holywood, Canon Gareth Harron, gave the address at the service on 2 May.

"I am delighted to be coming 'home' to the parish where my family have worshipped from its very inception and where I was introduced to and encouraged in my Christian faith, says Ken.

"I have many happy memories of growing up in St Dorothea's. Actually, it was after reading the lesson at a service of Morning Prayer in my early teens that someone said to me, 'You could be a minister someday young McGrath'!"

"Annette and I are very glad to be joining the church family in Gilnahirk for this new chapter and together, leading the

parish forward into what I believe will be a time of growth for us all.”

Ken McGrath's journey

I was born and brought up in East Belfast and at the age of 13 gave my life to Christ at an Inter-Schools Camp in Donegal.

After Grosvenor High School I left Northern Ireland to study Human Biology at the University of Surrey, returning home to complete my PGCE at Queen's. In 1983 I got my first job teaching Biology with Chemistry in Sullivan Upper School, Hollywood.

In 1988 I married Annette and in 1991, God took us on our first adventure when we both left our jobs and moved to Nairobi, Kenya. I was vice-principal and later principal of a Christian school in the city and we worshipped in the Anglican Church of Kenya at Karen. We had a marvellous 5 years in Africa, during which time God answered our prayers for a family in the most unexpected way. Charlotte and John, whom we adopted as Kenyan babies, are now in their late twenties. Our daughter-in-law Hannah has joined the family and we are grandparents to Abigail.

We left Kenya in 1996 and settled in Coleraine where I became the first principal of North Coast Integrated College. It was during our time on the North Coast that I sensed a call to ordained ministry.

My curacy and first stint as a vicar, was in Lisburn Cathedral, and in 2009 I became incumbent of the Parish of

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Kilkeel. We moved to Holywood in 2018 where I spent four happy years as Associate Vicar.



Handel's Messiah opens 800th anniversary celebrations in Youghal

The 800th anniversary of St Mary's Collegiate Church in Youghal is being marked this year with services, concerts, art works and talks.

The celebrations started with a performance of G.F. Handel's Messiah in St Mary's, by the East Cork Choral Society and Orchestra.

Canon Andrew Orr, Rector of Youghal Union of Parishes, writes - The centre aisles of the church were full, with 280 people in attendance, in addition to the choir of 55 and orchestra of 11. Proceeds of the concert went to local

charities and the Red Cross Ukraine appeal, and in the audience were a number of guests who had recently arrived from Ukraine and who are now living in the Imperial Hotel.

“Unfortunately, the society’s long standing conductor, Colin Nicholls, was unable to be present due to illness, and everyone wished him a speedy recovery on the night. Thankfully, Dr. Ian Sexton was able to conduct from the chamber organ and the choir and orchestra were magnificent.

“This was a wonderful way to start our 800th anniversary celebrations. We were delighted with the full house on the night and the combination of music and the atmosphere of this extraordinary church made it a concert to remember. Huge thanks to Youghal Credit Union for their sponsorship and to all the team at St Mary’s who made it such a great night.”

News reports

Belfast Telegraph stands by its decision over 'Make Your Voices Heard' advert

A report in The Belfast Telegraph says the paper has stood over its decision to request changes to a pre-election paid advertisement from the Catholic Church before agreeing to publish.



The Catholic Bishops of Northern Ireland submitted an ad under the heading 'Make Your Voices Heard' to be printed in Monday's edition of the newspaper.

Catholic Primate of Ireland, Archbishop Eamon Martin, tweeted that he was 'disturbed' by the Telegraph's 'refusal' to publish the advert unedited.

However, this newspaper reiterated that there was absolutely no attempt to alter the church's core anti-abortion message, a fact underlined by the publication of editorial on the same statement last week.

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“All advertising containing uncontested opinion and views, especially ahead of an election, is subject to review before publishing. We are subject to regulation by the Advertising Standards Authority,” a Belfast Telegraph statement read.

“We are surprised that Archbishop Martin took to Twitter to highlight this rather than speak directly to us.

“The suggested edits did not alter the Church's core anti-abortion message.”

New Archbishop of Wales says challenges facing the world must be overcome with Christ's example

The new Archbishop of Wales says the challenges facing the world must be overcome with Christ's example of love, service, honesty and forgiveness.

The 14th Anglican Archbishop was speaking during his service of enthronement at St Deiniol's Cathedral in Bangor yesterday. Amongst the guests were the Archbishop of Armagh, Most Rev. John McDowell and the Most Rev. Mark Strange the Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church of Scotland.

In his address Most Rev Andrew John said we are facing "new and demanding challenges", including the war in Ukraine, the soaring cost of living and climate change. "They are challenges which need to be met with a different



type of power - one of love, service, honesty and forgiveness, as exemplified by Christ."

Archbishop Andrew said, "When we resist evil and injustice (as we must) we also need something which takes us beyond the missiles, beyond conflict to a place where there can be reconciliation and a restoration of peace. We believe that God raised Jesus from the dead, not to take terrible revenge on those who laid hands on him but, extraordinarily,

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to offer forgiveness. God does not crush or brutalize but offers hope for all people."

Expressing concern for the mental health of young people in particular, the Archbishop stressed a better future meant more than just economic prosperity :



"I've been conscious of the strain presented today by social media pressures and perfectionism stress with its attendant effects on mental health of young people especially. The echo chambers which reverberate with unkindness do us no good at all. It is not easy to build resilience when pressure levels are unremittingly high. Values and securities which foster spiritual and emotional well-being are as essential to any society as are sound economic policies."



The Most Rev. Mark Strange the Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church of Scotland.

Archbishop Andrew said the challenges faced during the pandemic made us resilient and resulted in kindness to each other, particularly to the most vulnerable. He praised the response of churches, as well as the dedication of key workers, such as in the NHS :

"I want also to thank colleagues - ministers and priests alike for ministering when it was profoundly difficult: taking funerals when few could gather to grieve, maintaining contact when face to face gatherings was not possible. For your faithfulness and creativity, we thank you all for staying true to your calling: this power to touch human frailty is immensely important. The power to serve, to bless and to

give reminds us we are all called to be Good Samaritans whose heroism may seem trivial to some but is life saving for others."

Forging a better future meant rediscovering the power of apology, said the Archbishop. Starting with the Church, he acknowledged it had misused its power in the past, including in relation to survivors of abuse. He apologized unreservedly.

Archbishop Andrew, who is also the Bishop of Bangor, also said church denominations could do more to work together and said he would be inviting them for "honest conversations" on new ways of doing so. He also extended a hand of friendship to other faiths, saying "we can do more together than apart".

The power of apology also needed to be rediscovered by others in order to restore trust and confidence, he said :

"Our national life, political and cultural, needs to be shaped in a way that inspires confidence that when mistakes are made and deliberate wrongs are done, we acknowledge truthfully our own part and, in words familiar to Anglicans, neither dissemble nor cloak our failings before the face of almighty God. There is a power in saying sorry and taking appropriate action so confidence and trust can be restored."

We also needed to be honest in relation to climate change, said the Archbishop, "to hold ourselves accountable for our own use of earth's resources and what effect we have as individuals."

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He concluded, "The power to choose, to orientate ourselves to this way of living, is truly transformative. My hope, my prayer is for us in Wales to live this good news in the big and in the smaller decisions we make."

During the service the Archbishop was greeted by young people from across Wales who brought their words of encouragement and prayers for the ministry of the Archbishop and the whole of the Church in Wales. There was also a new setting of medieval Welsh poetry and words from the Bible composed by the Welsh composer Paul Mealor.

At the culmination of the service Archbishop Andrew was enthroned in the Archepiscopal Chair in front of the High Altar at the east end of the cathedral. The Chair will remain at Bangor Cathedral throughout Archbishop Andrew's tenure of office as Archbishop.

In the media

The Underneath: New podcast series digs deep into evangelicalism in Northern Ireland

Sluggie O'Toole

‘People who like Billy Graham.’ That’s how one academic jokingly defined the term ‘evangelical’ to me in a recent conversation for The Underneath podcast. And, having spent the past year carrying out interviews with a huge



range of people in religious Northern Ireland, this light-hearted definition may well be the most accurate one I've come across. From Edwin Poots' views on the age of the earth, to the multi-million-pound new church builds in Ballymena, to the four hundred thousand Northern Irish members of evangelical denominations, evangelicalism is very much the norm here within Protestantism....

In the States, the term evangelical means something a little more concrete, used as it is by pollsters and media types to

refer to conservative and mainly white, Protestants. As a theologian and writer living in Northern Ireland, I have been interested in getting beneath the surface of evangelicalism as it shows up here, to explore what it's really like to be an evangelical, what it entails beyond the 'issues' that dominate our headlines.

As an identifier, evangelical covers a massive range of churches, groups and individuals in Northern Ireland who claim it as their own. In the past few months, I have had conversations with a gay ex-Presbyterian who feels the term describes her, as well as with Ian Paisley Jnr who also claims it for himself. This kind of diversity within evangelicalism may be stretching the much-tortured 'broad church' metaphor beyond its limits, and I've been left wondering if 'evangelical' actually means much at all any longer. For what it's worth, I think it does, and as we inch closer and closer to an Americanised way of seeing our identities, 'evangelical' seems to be intimately bound up with specific stances on moral issues.

The Underneath has been the product of many things, and chief among them is my curiosity about my own upbringing, an evangelical Protestant background shared by so many people across Northern Ireland. And, as a model evangelical, I attended church on Sundays, often twice; I led Bible studies for my fellow teenagers; worshipped and studied at Youth Fellowship and took part in every weekend away and mission trip I could get time off for. It wasn't until I was about nineteen that I began to see what it took many others no time at all to realise — that evangelicalism was only one way of doing Christianity. That although utterly pervasive in contemporary Northern Irish Protestantism,

evangelicals, in a global and historical context, are a pretty recent arrival on the Christian scene.

This would have been hard to tell the fifteen-year-old me, furiously preparing the next lesson for Wednesday Group about 'putting on the armour of God.' Evangelicalism and its central tenets, the ultimate authority of the Bible and the 'in the world but not of the world' notion, for example, were not debatable beliefs but were actually litmus tests for a true Christian. This is the Protestant way, though, it seems. Whether in politics or religion, we are constantly bickering over who is in and who is out; who is truly a unionist or who is truly going to heaven.

The central metaphor guiding *The Underneath* comes up in the initial episode. In it, I talk about how being a young evangelical is like being a fish in a tank. That while that tank may be very well equipped and kept scrupulously clean, because the fish is in water it never thinks to consider the nature of its enclosure, and the human hands that made the limits it is allowed to swim freely within. This series aims to look closely by zooming out. To see evangelicalism as a social phenomenon as much as a set of theological commitments is to realise, perhaps uncomfortably, that the water so many of us were swimming in was not some transparent medium for the gospel of Jesus, but like everything else, was formed by history, politics, power, trauma and accident.

In recent years, Northern Irish Protestantism has been caught up in the culture wars. The Presbyterian Church in Ireland drew its lines firmly on LGBTQ+ participation and membership in 2018, effectively banning queer people from

taking communion, having their children baptised or becoming members of the Church. Christian advocacy groups like CARE and the Evangelical Alliance have made reproductive rights a central issue, representing the anti-choice Christian movement as if it were the only view held by people of faith within Northern Ireland. That opinion is divided on these issues amongst the people in the pews is a fact this podcast series takes seriously, platforming the stories of those often edged out by the noise and clamour of louder, more powerful voices. The four episodes, titled after the earliest stories in Genesis (Creation, Fall, Flood and Babel) cover some core evangelical themes. The importance of hell, the centrality of heterosexuality and the constant desire to draw lines separating the In from the Out. And while this is an affectionate look at the underneath of evangelicalism, it is, at times, harrowing. Listeners will hear personal stories of hurt alongside tales of discovery and from outside of traditional church walls.

Amongst the stories of people impacted by evangelicalism in NI, the four episodes feature some prominent public figures, including Naomi Long, Doug Beattie and the director of Evangelical Alliance UK, Peter Lynas. It has been a massive privilege to sit with such a range of people and listen to their stories and learn from such varied perspectives. It is my hope that this series reaches those that it has been made for: the committed church-goers, and the massively disillusioned; the evangelical leaders and those marginalised by them; the young people terrified of hell and damnation; the teenagers on fire for Jesus; those who have been subjected to or have sought, conversion therapy within a religious setting. This series has been made with balance and fairness very much in mind, but it

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certainly does not shy away from calling out harm when it is clearly there. The conviction behind The Underneath is simple: the truth of things often lurks below what we can usually see and what we are typically allowed to hear.

The Podcast is available on Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts or Spotify.

<https://sluggerotoole.com/2022/05/01/the-underneath-new-podcast-series-digs-deep-into-evangelicalism-in-northern-ireland/>

Webinars, music, resources, broadcasts, and books

Ireland and the Magdalene Laundries: A Campaign for Justice

Book details long battle to get justice for Ireland's Magdalene survivors

By Claire McGettrick, Katherine O'Donnell, Maeve O'Rourke, James M. Smith and Mari Steed. 304 pages; Bloomsbury, \$26.95

René Ostberg writing in the National Catholic Reporter - In June 2018, more than 200 women gathered in Dublin for a special two-day event. Many of the women were elderly and accompanied by family and caregivers. Some were returning to Ireland for the first time since emigrating long ago. The women were welcomed at a reception by Irish

President Michael Higgins and attended a formal dinner with the Lord Mayor of Dublin Mícheál MacDonncha. But the highlight was a roundtable listening exercise, in which 146 of the women gave testimonials for a report.

The first words of the report are by a woman known only as Charlotte: "I'm still there."

"There" is a nursing home on the grounds of a former Magdalene laundry, a convent-run institution where Charlotte was admitted more than 40 years ago to work — without pay or allowance to leave of her own will. Charlotte is not, nor ever was, a religious sister. Like the other women at the Dublin event, she is among the more than 10,000 women and girls who were institutionalized in religious-operated laundries in Ireland between 1922 and 1996, when the last Magdalene laundry closed.

As Charlotte's statement makes clear, the trauma inflicted by the laundries lasts to this day. Thanks to Ireland's monumentally unwise marriage between church and state upon its independence in the early 20th century, the code of the country remains one of secrecy and denial. Even the act of acknowledging the women of the Magdalene laundries, much less honoring or seeking transformative justice for them, has required immense advocacy work.

The "Dublin Honors Magdalenes" event and its listening exercise report were organized by Justice for Magdalenes Research, an advocacy group formed in 2003. Ireland and the Magdalene Laundries: A Campaign for Justice details the group's efforts to gain apologies to Magdalene survivors from both the Catholic Church and Irish state, financial

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redress and comprehensive health care for survivors, and access to church and state archives for survivors seeking their personal records.

Some of Justice for Magdalenes Research's efforts have been successful, while others have been complicated by the Irish government's bureaucratic obstinacy and by continuing church secrecy. The book is thus intended as a social justice model that "merges academic, advocacy, and activism."

More at -

[[] <https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/book-details-long-battle-get-justice-irelands-magdalene-survivors>]

Church News Ireland

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