



Backlash over Belfast course aimed at homosexual Christians

A church in Belfast has been forced to defend its upcoming event aimed at helping homosexual Christians.

Willowfield Parish Church on My Lady's Road is set to host an Evangelical Alliance-led event next month to help people with same-sex attractions remain celibate and Christian.

An advertisement for the course reads: "The Living Out Course is designed to help church leaders to understand how they can help those

who experience same-sex attraction to stay faithful to biblical teaching and flourish at the same time."

However, the church rector David McClay told the Belfast Telegraph that he and his family had been subjected to abusive phone calls, accused of wanting to run a "gay therapy course".

"We have gay people in our congregation every Sunday. We have been totally misrepresented by what has been posted on social media," he said.

He insisted next week's event wouldn't advocate so-called conversion therapy for gay people.

"Same-sex attracted people will be sharing their stories in order to help them become disciple-like and maintain living a celibate life," he said. "It's to help people of all ages who are seeking to be Christian.

"I understand that some people are angry because they have been given the wrong information. I totally refute that we are involved in conversion therapy, nor do the Evangelical Alliance ever run courses like that. The course is designed to better support people in this situation.

See Belfast Telegraph report at -
<https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/belfast-church-denies-its-running-gay-cure-event-36651438.html>

Archbishop Clarke delivers Bibles gifted by Belfast's Book Well to seminary in Zambia

On Tuesday 27th February, the Primate of All Ireland, the Most Reverend Richard Clarke, along with Church Mission Society Ireland President, the Revd Adrian Dorrian, spent the day teaching in St John's Anglican Seminary in Kitwe, Zambia. CMSI mission partners Lyn and Keith Scott are on the staff at the seminary and an in-depth visit to the seminary is a central part of the trip for the visitors from Ireland.

Adrian Dorrian, who has been staying on campus, has joined the ordinands for their Morning Worship each day this week. On Tuesday he also delivered a class on constructing liturgies, talking the ordinands through the 'A Service of the Word' from the Church of Ireland's *Book of Common Prayer*. Adrian is a member of the Liturgical Advisory



Committee and delivers training in liturgy for readers in the Diocese of Down and Dromore.

Archbishop Clarke delivered the second class of the day, in which he spoke about worldwide Anglicanism, emphasising its roots in the early Church and the circumstances that led to the formation of the Church of England, its missionary endeavour and the eventual formation of provinces across the globe and the development of the Anglican Communion as it is today.

Perhaps the most valuable part of the day was spent in the afternoon, where the Archbishop and Adrian meet with the students in a more informal setting. This was a chance to find out more about the similarities and differences between the Churches in Zambia and Ireland, and hear some of the personal reflections and stories of the ordinands. One of the real challenges facing the Church in Zambia is the resourcing of leadership training – the students at the seminary are there at significant cost in terms of time and commitment to both them and their families, and the Archbishop was both challenged and encouraged by their deep commitment to their vocation.

Between the classes, Archbishop Clarke also blessed a number of Bibles that had been brought to Zambia by the team as a gift from The Book Well (www.thebookwell.co.uk), a Christian bookshop in Belfast run by Richard Ryan (formerly manager of The Good Book Shop based in Church of Ireland House in Belfast). These are really important resources for the college as the NRSV texts will provide consistency in Biblical Studies (students do have their own Bibles, but it is good that they now will have access to the same version) and will also be useful in examinations as well.

Mr Ryan sent the Bibles with this message: “When I attended the CMS Ignite Conference last September, I spent some time in the prayer room. At one of the stations, I read through some of the newsletters from the various teams currently out on mission. I was drawn in particular to the one from Keith and Lyn... possibly because I’d received correspondence from Keith in the past. As I left the prayer room, I felt an enormous prompting to get in contact with Keith. After seeking clarification on the next step to take, I emailed Keith to ask if there was anything in particular he needed. His response took me by surprise. There was a need, and it was for a couple of dozen plain Bibles that the students could use at the college. I knew in my heart that God was in the prompting, and that this was what I needed to provide.”

Dublin Interfaith Forum calls on Irish Government to demand end to mass killing in Syria

Dublin City Interfaith Forum (DCIF) has expressed its deepest condemnation of the recent and ongoing events in Ghouta, Syria. DCIF, in which the United Dioceses of Dublin & Glendalough is involved, issued a press

statement this morning calling on the Irish Government to demand an end to mass killing in Syria.

“As well as being subject to a seven-year long civil war, the people of Ghouta have been bombarded with airstrikes by the Syrian Regime forces and its Allies. These actions have resulted in the deaths of more than 500 people, with over two-thousand or so wounded. In addition to such tactics, planes have struck residential areas in which more than 400,000 people live, destroying more than a dozen hospitals, making it difficult if not impossible to treat the wounded,” the statement reads.

“In the spirit of justice and good will, DCIF calls on the Irish Government to take imminent action in seeking an end to such mass killings and to save and protect the lives of innocent civilians in Ghouta and Syria in general. Finally, the DCIF asks that all legal efforts be made to address and remedy what is taking place in Ghouta and that the Irish Government and the Irish people generally make representations on behalf of the people of Syria, who continue to suffer horrendously, since the Civil War broke out seven years ago,” the DCIF statement concludes.



Rev Raj from Portadown meets the Queen

Last month, Seagoe curate, Revd Canon Rajkumar Sathyaraj, was delighted to be presented to Her Majesty the Queen at Buckingham Palace. Raj explains...

“I was invited to Buckingham Palace on the 14 of February to attend a reception that had been organised to recognise the contribution of people from the Commonwealth countries to life and society in the UK. I could hardly believe my



eyes when I saw the invitation and eventually realised it was for me.

“People from different walks of life were invited including the Ambassadors of the 52 commonwealth nations, there were three Bishops including Archbishop Sentamu of York and a few Roman Catholic and Protestant clergy. There were some sportsmen and women and also a few who had made a name for themselves in the field of arts and culture.

“We were presented to HM The Queen, Prince Charles and Lady Camilla and later in the

evening I had the privilege of meeting the Prime Minister Teresa May and the Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson. It was a marvellous experience to be in the picture gallery with all its beautiful paintings and to actually meet Her Majesty, the Queen who was so gracious and kind.

“I returned praising God for giving me this wonderful privilege and also decided to pray sincerely and regularly for the Queen and all those in authority.”

Archbishop Eamon Martin “Be vigilant for the vulnerable during extreme weather”

Ahead of the expected extreme cold weather due in Ireland this week, Archbishop Eamon Martin has issued the following statement to encourage parishioners to support the more vulnerable amongst us:

“The weather forecast for the coming days is expected to be exceptionally cold and to include a significant snowfall. This bad weather will affect and frighten many people across our country. Some will be afraid because they are alone, elderly, suffer from underlying medical

conditions while others will be cold and hungry. They may too proud to admit their vulnerability.

“Parishes are at their strongest when they support their weakest. In the words of Jesus “whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me” (Matt 25:40). Christ spoke of the parable of the Good Samaritan who cared for a stranger. It was enough that he was a person in need for the Samaritan to act – and to follow up afterwards to underpin that care.

“There is in each of us a Good Samaritan. The natural disposition of the human heart is to love. At this challenging time I am asking all able people of goodwill to:

- be alert – in person or by telephone – to the needs of vulnerable neighbour, old and young
- check if they have enough food, fuel supplies and adequate clothing
- assist in clearing pathways to homes, and offer transport for essential journeys
- use, as appropriate, the online reporting system provided by the Peter McVerry Trust to support rough sleepers on our streets: homelessdublin.ie/report-rough-sleeper
- donate warm cloths to charity shops

- support local farmers as it is lambing season and the death rate for all livestock increases sharply in extreme weather.

Catholics arrested at immigration protest outside US Capitol

On Tuesday, a group of Catholics rallied inside the US Capitol Building in support of amnesty for “Dreamers”: illegal immigrants who entered the United States as minors.

Among those present was Bishop John Stowe of the Diocese of Lexington, Kentucky. “We stand with the Dreamers, we are one with the Dreamers. And now I ask God’s blessing upon those who are acting in civil disobedience, part of a long-standing tradition of not supporting unjust laws,” Bishop Stowe told the crowd.

House Speaker Paul Ryan appeared in the Capitol while the protest was underway.

Ryan’s Republican Party, which holds a majority in both chambers of Congress, have made amnesty for Dreamers contingent on **certain reforms** to immigration policy. Democrats have so far refused their terms.



US Capitol Police arrest members of the Catholic community and supporters of DACA recipients

Around 30 to 40 demonstrators were arrested. These included including several women religious from the Sisters of Mercy.

“I have never been arrested in my life, but with the blessing of my community, I am joining with two dozen other Catholic sisters and Catholic allies to risk arrest today as an act of solidarity with our nation’s wonderful, beautiful Dreamers,” Sister Elise Garcia **told Catholic News Service**.

“To our leaders in Congress and in the White House, I say ‘arrest a nun, not a Dreamer’.”

The confrontation with police was not unexpected, however. Fr Thomas Reese, a Jesuit and columnist for Religion News Service, wrote an article the day before titled “Tomorrow I Plan to Get Arrested”. (The title and article have since been updated to reflect the fact that he was indeed arrested.)

Like Stowe’s speech, Reese’s article drew on the history of civil disobedience in American politics. “Many of my Jesuit colleagues were arrested during the 1960s and ’70s when demonstrations about Vietnam, civil rights and farmworkers were common. As part of these demonstrations, peaceful civil disobedience was not uncommon,” he wrote.

All those arrested at the protest were released by 4pm.

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