



## **Largest Presbyterian church in US approves same-sex marriage**

Presbyterian Church USA changes its constitution to define marriage as "commitment between two people", rather than specifically a man and woman

Telegraph - The Presbyterian Church [USA](#), which accounts for just under two million members, voted on Tuesday to expand its definition of marriage to include gay and lesbian couples.

The church, which represents the largest Presbyterian denomination, made the announcement after the majority of its 171 regional governing bodies approved the change.

Its revised constitution will now read that marriage is "a unique commitment between two people, traditionally a man and a woman," as opposed to just a man and woman previously.

The new language, which was approved by the church's General Assembly last year, had to be ratified by more than half its regional bodies.

A grouping of congregations in the state of New Jersey became the 86th body to do just that on Tuesday.

The decision is likely to drive a further wedge between Presbyterian USA members, who have taken opposite sides on the issue.

At last year's Presbyterian General Assembly, the church also gave its pastors a green light to marry gay and lesbian couples in [states where such marriages are allowed](#).

"These decisions have been welcomed by some and are a disappointment to others," Gradye Parsons, stated clerk of the General Assembly, said at the time.

The Presbyterians' position stands in sharp contrast to that of the Roman Catholic church, the biggest single denomination among Americans, and fundamentalist Evangelicals who strongly oppose gay marriage.

In 2011, the Presbyterian Church USA voted to approve the ordination of openly gay and lesbian clergy.

The constitution's new wording will take effect on June 21.

The Presbyterian Church USA had 1.76 million members as of the end of 2013.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/northamerica/usa/11479650/Largest-Presbyterian-church-in-US-approves-same-sex-marriage.html>

## **Bert and Ernie gay marriage cake row could force Muslims to print Prophet Mohammed cartoons – lawyer**

Human Rights barrister claims gay marriage cake court case would erode right to refuse to act against conscience



***Bert and Ernie, with his Rubber Ducky***

Daily Telegraph - Muslim printers could be forced to produce cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed if the case against a Christian bakery which refused to make a Sesame Street gay marriage cake is upheld, a prominent human rights barrister has claimed.

Aidan O'Neill QC said a discrimination [case against Ashers Baking Company](#) – which cancelled an order to make a cake featuring the characters Bert and Ernie arm in arm under the slogan 'support gay marriage' – could undermine freedom of conscience.

Mr O'Neill was commissioned by the Christian Institute, which is supporting the bakery's legal

defence, to provide a legal opinion on the implications of the case, which is due to come before a court in Belfast later this month.

More at -

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/11477809/Bert-and-Ernie-gay-marriage-cake-row-could-force-Muslims-to-print-Prophet-Mohammed-cartoons-lawyer.html>

<http://www.independent.ie/irish-news/courts/bert-and-ernie-gay-marriage-cake-row-could-force-muslims-to-print-prophet-mohammed-cartoons-lawyer-31076606.html>

If Ashers Bakery lose 'gay cake' battle the Equality Commission faces an avalanche of cases, QC predicts  
<http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/if-ashers-bakery-lose-gay-cake-battle-the-equality-commission-faces-an-avalanche-of-cases-qc-predicts-31074867.html>

## **Guardian profile of Michael Wardlow, head of Equality Commission of N Ireland**

There is a badge on Michael Wardlow's suit that contradicts the image his critics paint of him as someone promoting an anti-Christian,

aggressively secularist agenda in [Northern Ireland](#).

It is a frail, thin steel outline of a fish – the sign many Christians wear that originates from the earliest underground years of the church to symbolise their faith.

The head of the [Equality Commission of Northern Ireland](#), which has found itself at the centre of the storm over a born-again Christian-run bakery [refusing to bake a gay-themed cake](#), is himself a devout follower of Christ.

More at -

<http://www.theguardian.com/society/2015/mar/18/northern-ireland-michael-wardlow-equal-treatment-faith>

## **[‘Real lives’ behind debate on marriage - Bishop Colton](#)**

The same-sex marriage debate should revolve around real names and faces instead of labels and categories, a Church of Ireland bishop and advocate of gay marriage has said.

Irish Examiner report - Paul Colton, the Bishop of Cork, Cloyne and Ross, said that too much in the debate on the May referendum so far had failed to put human experience into the picture.

Although the Church of Ireland bishops have not made any collective statement on the question of allowing civil marriage for same-sex couples, Bishop Colton has been an advocate for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender issues.

In a St Patrick's Day civic service attended by civic and community leaders, he said big debates like the current one on the marriage referendum could not be had in the abstract, but must be grounded in the real experience of fellow human beings' lives.

"One of the risks of any big debate in any community, society or institution, is that we take to ourselves the luxury and relative safety — or we even draw the battlelines — by having the discussion without putting names, faces and human experience on the idea," he told the service at St Fin Barre's Cathedral.

"Such is a risk as we approach the marriage referendum next May. We already are seeing too much of this in the public space."

He said we could all too easily dehumanise and objectify other children of God when we allowed ourselves to dislocate the people from ideas. He said labels and categories — like "the unemployed", "the disabled", "the immigrants", "the gays", "the single mothers", "the

homeless”, “the traditionalists”, “the liberals” — were convenient ways of removing faces and human experience from what was being said.

He openly supports civil same-sex marriage and has said he would like a discussion to take place on same-sex couples one day having marriages, or blessings of civil partnerships at least, in church.

Last week, the Irish Catholic bishops asked people to carefully consider what they said were profound implications that passing the referendum would have on the family environment and understandings of parenthood.

“We respect the views of people who think differently to us, trusting that our sincerely held views, grounded in faith, will also be heard and respected,” they said.

They said they could not support a move that would place the union of two men or two women on a par with the marriage of a husband and wife that is open to the procreation of children.

The Catholic hierarchy’s linking of marriage equality to issues around adoption and parenting in a separate piece of law has been described by People Before Profit TD Richard Boyd Barrett as intended to create an impression that gay people



can not be trusted with children. But the Catholic Bishops' Conference has said deliberate efforts are being made not to offend people in the debate.

Catholic Bishop of Elphin Kevin Doran said at the weekend that he regretted that people were hurt by what he said, or what they thought he had said, about gay people being parents. He had said people with children were not necessarily parents, and that "the jury's out" on whether people were born gay.

<http://www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/real-lives-behind-debate-on-marriage-319073.html>

## **Bishop Michael Smith appeals for information to locate bodies of 'The Disappeared'**

Bishop Michael Smith, Catholic Bishop of Meath, has made a fresh appeal for information that might help to find the bodies of victims who disappeared during the Troubles in the North. His comments were made as a search is underway in Coghalstown bog, close to Oristown in County Meath where the body of Brendan Megraw (23) was discovered last October. At the close of the Confirmation

ceremony in Oristown parish today, Wednesday 18 March 2015, Bishop Smith made the following comments:

“You will be aware that the Commission searching for The Disappeared is engaged at present in another search at Coghalstown bog, prompted by new information received. That four young men were murdered and their bodies dumped in unmarked graves in this area is a deep stain on the good name of this parish. These actions have brought immense pain and suffering to their extended families over the past forty years. All the families want is to give their loved ones a decent Christian burial. No retribution is suffered by anyone giving information since a law enacted both here and in Britain protects them. Sadly there may be people in the area that have information which would help in bringing closure to this sorry saga. In these circumstances that anyone in a position to relieve the suffering and pain of the families would refuse to do is a challenge to their conscience. They will ultimately be accountable before God.”

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## British Ambassador Addresses St Patricks Cathedral Patronal Service



***The British Ambassador to Ireland, Mr Dominick Chilcott and his wife, Jane, with Dean Victor Stacey in St Patrick's Cathedral***

St Patrick is a symbol of British and Irish relations, the British Ambassador, Mr Dominick Chilcott, said at the Patronal Eucharist of St Patrick's Cathedral on St Patrick's Day. The Ambassador delivered the address at the service and said relations between the two countries were "better than ever" although the sensitive history could not be ignored.

The large congregation was welcomed to the cathedral yesterday morning by the Dean, the Very Revd Victor Stacey, who also welcomed the Ambassador, the Friendly Brothers of St Patrick and visitors from around the world. The service was sung by the Cathedral Choir.

Noting that he was standing where Dean Swift had once stood, Mr Chilcott quoted Queen Elizabeth who spoke on the goal of modern British Irish relations during President Michael D Higgins' State visit last year: "It is that we who inhabit these islands should live together as neighbours and friends. Respectful of each other's nationhood, sovereignty and traditions. Co-operating to our mutual benefit. At ease in each other's company. After so much chequered history, the avoidable and regrettable pain of which is still felt by many of us, this goal is now within reach." He added that there was a high

level of respect and considerable trust between the two governments.

The Ambassador suggested that St Patrick was symbolic of the relationship between Britain and Ireland. Acknowledging that historical sources were not what they might be, he said it seemed that Patrick was from Wales and came to Ireland, first as a slave and later to bring the word of God. Like Patrick, people have travelled back and forth between these islands since before recorded history, he said. But modern transport and technology made that travel much easier.

No other patron saint enjoyed such broad appeal as St Patrick, Mr Chilcott said adding that many involved in building brands stood in awe of Ireland's success with the St Patrick's brand which resulted in the greening of many buildings worldwide, including the British Embassy in Ballsbridge. He concluded that both St Patrick and Dean Swift would be greatly pleased by relations between Britain and Ireland today.

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## **Ennis to host Ireland's biggest gospel music festival**

Details of Ireland's biggest gospel music festival have been announced. The 6th annual Gospel Rising Music Festival will return to Ennis from 8th to 10th May 2015, having previously been held in the Clare County Capital as well as in Limerick, Bray and Portlaoise.

Choirs from all around Ireland and beyond will perform in venues throughout the Clare County capital, while leading Irish and international choral experts will facilitate workshops in gospel music, performance and singing for choir and non-choir members.

This year's Gospel Rising Music Festival is hosted by The Really Truly Joyful Ennis Gospel Choir, and is supported Failte Ireland and the Shannon Region Conference and Sports Bureau.

"This is a fun, energetic and inclusive event which calls on all music lovers who are interested in this growing genre of music in Ireland," explained Lindsay Rountree of the Gospel Rising Music Festival.

Mr. Rountree explained the festival was established by a team of volunteers belonging to

several different gospel choirs from all over Ireland who saw the interest for a "social, educational and fun event which would bring together lovers of gospel music from all over the country to learn from each other and form networks and friendships."

"The festival consists of a series of workshops with big and small groups, covering choir harmony singing in gospel styles, different solo singing styles and levels, choreography and big group singing. There are also of course numerous gigs over the whole weekend with many of the gospel choirs that attend the festival keen to get up on stage and show their style of gospel music which makes up this new cosmopolitan genre of music in Ireland," added Mr. Rountree.

"We are delighted to see the festival return to the town where it was first hosted in 2010," commented Fiona Walsh of The Really Truly Joyful Ennis Gospel Choir.

"With just 150 attending in 2010, it was a great first time round for all participants, experiencing the only gospel music event of its kind in Ireland at the time. Now with over 350 attending every year, the Festival continues to bring new workshop facilitators to the fore in Ireland and

get as many gospel choirs as possible together to share their work with everyone who attends. We look forward to playing our part in making this year's event a success," added Ms. Walsh.

This year's workshop facilitators are drawn from all over Ireland and UK and include Bazil Meade (founder and principal of the World famous 'London Community Gospel Choir') and Karen Gibson (one of the UK's most respected gospel tutors).

Irish contributors include Kathleen Turner (singer/songwriter and vocal tutor at the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance), Edel Meade (award-winning Dublin-based jazz singer, composer and lyricist), Aisling McKenna (Soloist and member of the Gardiner Street Gospel Choir and Valley Gospel Singers) and Susan Hurley (Dublin based gospel and folk singer).

"We are delighted to support this music festival and keep it in the Midwest following last year's hosting of the event in Limerick City," said Karen Brosnahan, General Manager of the Shannon Region Conference and Sports Bureau.

"There are gospel choirs popping up all around Ireland, and this festival gives non-choir members the opportunity to get that inside look and feel of what happens when they are part of a



choir. We are calling on all gospel music enthusiasts to visit Ennis this May and to celebrate the continued rising of gospel music in Ireland," stated Ms. Brosnahan.

<http://www.eturbonews.com/56559/ennis-host-irelands-biggest-gospel-music-festival>

## **Mother's Union's report highlights commercialisation of children**

Parents remain concerned about the impact advertising and marketing are having, both directly and indirectly, on the lives of children and young people a new Report reveals.

Research published yesterday by Mothers' Union reveals that despite welcome attention since 2010, four in five (80%) parents in Britain are concerned about the commercialisation of childhood, and a similar proportion (81%) say that the media encourages their children to ask their parents to buy them things that they see advertised, indicating the potential impact of "Pester Power".

The research, which was carried out by ComRes with over 1,000 parents in Great Britain in 2010 and 2013, also demonstrates that the proportion

of parents who think advertising that can be seen by children is well regulated has decreased since the charity's previous research in 2010. Just 30% of parents in Great Britain agree that advertising is well regulated in 2013, compared to two in five (39%) who said this in 2010.

Speaking as the research was published, Head of Faith & Policy and report author Lucinda Hasell said, "the subject of the commercialisation of children has received a lot of welcome attention in the last few years, but our research shows that parents are still concerned about this issue, and only half (51%) of those we spoke to felt equipped to manage the influence of advertising and the commercial world on their family. Further steps need to be taken to ensure that children are not exposed to inappropriate advertising and marketing and that parents are empowered to manage the impact of the commercial world

Mothers' Union will be continuing the Bye Buy Childhood campaign, and is calling on the Government to consider why parents are still concerned about the commercialisation of childhood. Through the report they make six recommendations to Government that they believe will ensure children and family life are not adversely impacted by commercialisation.

“We are calling on politicians to ensure that this important issue remains a priority for the next government” said Mrs Hasell “Nearly half of parents we spoke to (45%) felt that advertising treated children as adults and 68% felt that advertising seen by children can be harmful to them. It is important that industry adheres not simply to the letter of existing regulation, but also considers how to meet the spirit of the regulation. Parents need to have support in both this way and also in the resources and information available to them, to ensure that the childhood of their children is valued by society as a whole.”

Chief Executive of Mothers’ Union, Reg Bailey, whose own 14 recommendations to Government (Bailey Review 2011) have largely been met, agreed that more still needs to be done to maintain vigilance on the way commercialisation affects children.

“We’re not looking to wrap children up in cotton wool. We want to say to parents, government, industry and all those who support children, that developing emotional resilience is a key part of enabling our children and young people to deal with the challenges and pressures they face as they engage with the commercial world.

Nevertheless, this shouldn't have to be an uphill struggle for parents – they too need to be provided with effective support. These recommendations are a vital step on the way.”

The qualitative research reveals that parents want to equip their children to be confident and ‘their own people’. Mothers' Union ongoing campaign will work to ensure that parents, children and young people are educated, equipped and empowered to help create and increase resilience.

To read the report and to get involved in the campaign visit [www.byebychildhood.org](http://www.byebychildhood.org)

See also - YouTube adverts commercialising childhood - Mothers' Union | Christian News on Christian Today

<http://www.christiantoday.com/article/youtube.adverts.commercialising.childhood.mothers.union/50209.htm>

Vloggers increasingly target children with ‘covert advertising’ - Online - Media - The Independent

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/media/online/vloggers-increasingly-target-children-with-covert-advertising-10114715.html>

## Anglicans part of initiative to bring Pope Francis to Vancouver

A group of Vancouver residents representing a broad interfaith community have invited Pope Francis to tour the Downtown Eastside and two First Nations reserves.



***Tom Beasley and Judy Graves with a letter to Pope Francis asking the pontiff to visit Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. An interfaith group has sent letter with hope the pontiff will bring focus to poverty in area.***

Vancouver Sun - The unusual request involves members of the Jewish, Muslim, First Nations, Anglican, Catholic and United Church

communities, who believe Pope Francis could spur real change in the welfare of the city and province's poor and homeless.

The invitation has received the endorsement and support of both the Catholic Archdiocese and the Anglican Diocese, who agreed to deliver the written message directly to the Pope through Vatican emissaries in addition to a couriered invitation that the group delivered to the Vatican's front door.

<http://www.timescolonist.com/news/b-c/pope-francis-invited-to-vancouver-s-downtown-eastside-1.1793737>

## Media digest

### News Letter

#### **Axing foreign language funding makes us more insular**

<http://www.newsletter.co.uk/axing-foreign-language-funding-makes-us-more-insular-1-6638086>

#### **Cuts to primary school language classes 'scandalous'**

<http://www.newsletter.co.uk/cuts-to-primary-school-language-classes-scandalous-1-6636441>

#### **Some NI Catholics 'questioning their nationalism and considering DUP'**

[churchnewsireland@gmail.com](mailto:churchnewsireland@gmail.com)

<http://www.newsletter.co.uk/some-ni-catholics-questioning-their-nationalism-and-considering-dup-1-6638540>

## **Troubles charity WAVE wins £30,000 award**

<http://www.newsletter.co.uk/troubles-charity-wave-wins-30-000-award-1-6638620>

## **Irish Examiner**

### **Teachers' union 'too busy' to invite**

### **Education Minister to annual conference**

<http://www.irishexaminer.com/breakingnews/ireland/teachers-union-too-busy-to-invite-education-minister-to-annual-conference-668056.html>

## **Irish Times**

### **Rise of Sinn Féin represents main threat to growth, says economist**

<http://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/rise-of-sinn-f%C3%A9in-represents-main-threat-to-growth-says-economist-1.2143204>

## **Irish Independent**

### **Sinn Féin biggest threat to economic growth, warns top economist**

<http://www.independent.ie/irish-news/politics/sinn-fin-biggest-threat-to-economic-growth-warns-top-economist-31075716.html>

## **Sinn Féin Assembly antics show it just can't be trusted - John Bruton**

<http://www.independent.ie/opinion/comment/sinn-fin-assembly-antics-show-it-just-cant-be-trusted-31075423.html>

## **UTV**

### **Troubles charity WAVE wins £30,000 award**

<http://www.newsletter.co.uk/troubles-charity-wave-wins-30-000-award-1-6638620>

## **FT**

Report on proposals brought to Synod by the Church Commissioners, to consider using up to £100m of the Commissioners endowment fund to support future Church growth. Article states this would be in addition to the £2m already approved to train senior clergy and potential leaders. The proposal by the Commissioners is criticised in the article which says the Church is asset raiding to pay for recruitment. A spokesman for the Church said its own research suggested the proposals to grow the Church would work. Andreas Whittam Smith, the First Church Estates Commissioner is also quoted.

<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/15bf3054-c721-11e4-8e1f-00144feab7de.html?siteedition=uk#axzz3UiEQQcMi>



## **Guard**

Report that MPs have rejected an amendment made by the Lords to the modern slavery bill, which would allow migrant workers to change employer. The system of "tied visas", introduced by the government in 2012, means that workers who are brought to the UK by their employer cannot legally leave their job and find employment elsewhere. MPs voted against adopting the amendment, which was backed by the Bishop of Carlisle. The modern slavery bill will now return to be debated in the Lords again.

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/17/modern-slavery-bill-lords-amendment-rejected-mps>

## **Tel/Times**

Reports ahead of the Chancellor's budget say he will announce a £40million fund to repair church and cathedral roofs.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/budget/11479034/Budget-2015-The-death-of-the-annual-tax-return.html>  
<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/business/budget2015/article4385216.ece>

## **Guard**

Report on a new project by the [Churches Conservation Trust](#) that lets visitors "camp" inside some of England's historic country churches. After a successful pilot scheme last year, the trust announced the expansion of its

"champing" breaks (that'll be churches + camping!), with three churches available to stay in which are All Saints' Church in Northamptonshire, the Church of St Mary the Virgin in Kent, and the Church of St Cyriac and St Julitta in Cambridgeshire.

<http://www.theguardian.com/travel/2015/mar/17/let-us-stay-country-churches-offer-overnight-stays-for-60pp-a-night>

## **Times**

Articles on the memorial service in Westminster Abbey for the life of Lord Richard Attenborough, who died last August, aged 90. They state hundreds of actors, benefactors and lovers of the arts, attended the service in memory of one of their greatest champions. Quoting from his brother's maiden speech in the Lords, Sir David Attenborough said the arts are not a luxury but for everyone.

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/medianews/article4384654.ece>

<http://www.mailonsunday.co.uk/debate/article-2999753/EPHRAIM-HARDCASTLE-Sir-David-Attenborough-end-Lords-like-brother-Richard.html>

## **Ind**

Article on when Easter 2015 falls and why it changes every year which looks at church history of the event.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/when-does-easter-2015-fall-and-why-does-it-change-every-year-10114173.html>

## **Times**

Further items on the Exclusive Brethren Church. Paper's opinion column says charity commissioner should stand up to them and another looks at faith schools operated by the church.

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/opinion/leaders/article4385042.ece>

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/education/article4385080.ece>

Vancouver Sun - The unusual request involves members of the Jewish, Muslim, First Nations, Anglican, Catholic and United Church communities, who believe Pope Francis could spur real change in the welfare of the city and province's poor and homeless.

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<http://www.timescolonist.com/news/b-c/pope-francis-invited-to-vancouver-s-downtown-eastside-1.1793737>