



***Rev. Dr. Graham Connor of Second Saintfield Presbyterian Church, Convener of the Church's Council for Congregational Life and Witness with Very Rev. Dr. Stafford Carson, Principal of Union Theological College, the keynote speaker at the church's Close to Home Conference.***

## **Presbyterian 'close to home' conference explores covenantal theology**

A conference in Belfast yesterday organised by the Presbyterian Church's Council for Congregational Life and Witness, attracted ministers, elders, church staff and key church leaders from across the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

Keynote speaker, the Very Reverend Dr. Stafford Carson, Principal of Union Theological College, unpacked the essence of God's Covenant with His people, His promises and assurances contained within it, which are at the heart of the Church.

The conference also heard a virtual guest speaker, Dr. Bryan Chapell, the former Chancellor of Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri. Dr. Chapell informed discussion during the workshops via video.

Looking forward to the conference, Dr. Carson said, "A key feature of our Presbyterian theology is the concept of God's Covenant, the relationship between God and His people. In Leviticus God said, 'I will be your God and you will be My people' and we need to understand and not lose sight of what this Covenant means, how God commits Himself to us and our continued response.

“For us as Presbyterians, this is the theological framework that underpins our denomination and by which we understand our own salvation and identity as God’s people. It is also the basis by which we pass on our faith to our children and young people as we embrace them at the heart of the family of God. So it is important to take stock and engage with each other as we look at the practical implications of Covenant Theology. In doing so, we want to improve our ministry to children and young people in particular and congregational life as a whole.

In a pre-recorded message from the United States, Bryan Chapell said that, in essence the heart of Covenant Theology is God’s heart for His people and His willingness to pledge Himself to them for their good. “Our primary responsibility in that relationship is that we would love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. While we don’t establish the Covenant by our obedience, nonetheless, the Covenant has expectations of obedience and relationship.”

Dr. Chapell also looked at baptism and the inclusion of children in the Covenant of Grace and the responsibilities placed upon parents and congregations as part of a ‘covenant community’. His video contributions also helped

to shape discussion during the workshops, which focused on how people relate to one another within a covenant community and how being a covenant community should shape and inform weekly church activities – particularly for children and young people.

The Convener of the Council for Congregational Life and Witness, Rev. Dr. Graham Connor, who opened the conference, said it was important from time-to-time to look at the foundational theology that underpins the Church, especially in relation to children and young people.

“Through this conference we wanted to continue an on going discussion that energises and encourages people to prayerfully think about the character of their church life and consider how it can be more intentionally shaped by our Covenant Theology.

“Key to this is an understanding that God’s covenantal promise is not only for us, but our children, grandchildren and for all generations. Having children, young people and their families at the heart of church life means equipping Christian parents to pass on faith to their children. It also means supporting parents in keeping the vows they would have taken when their children were baptised as infants and

supporting congregations keep the vows they take collectively at baptism too.”



***Keith O'Brien - The unprecedented move is the first time that a cardinal has been removed from office in living memory***

## **Pope accepts O'Brien's resignation as cardinal**

Pope Francis has accepted the resignation from the College of Cardinals of Irishman Archbishop Keith O'Brien.

The unprecedented move is the first time that a cardinal has been removed from office in living memory. Archbishop

Irish Catholic - O'Brien dramatically stepped down as head of the St Andrews & Edinburgh Archdiocese in 2013 after admitting that "there have been times that my sexual conduct has fallen below the standards expected of me as a priest, archbishop and cardinal".

However, up to this point he retained the title of cardinal and the privileges associated with the office, including that of eventually electing a successor to Pope Francis. He now loses all these rights and ranks with immediate effect.

In a brief communique announcing the Pope's decision, the Vatican said "with this provision, His Holiness would like to manifest his pastoral solicitude to all the faithful of the Church in Scotland and to encourage them to continue with hope the path of renewal and reconciliation".

The Catholic Church in Scotland has welcomed the decision to accept the resignation.

Archbishop Leo Cushley of St Andrews & Edinburgh said "as most people are aware, Pope Francis is a good and prayerful man whose character embodies justice and mercy. I am confident therefore that the decision of the Holy Father is fair, equitable and proportionate".

Dr Cushley, who has had the task of rebuilding morale in the wake of the scandal, said:  
“Cardinal O’Brien’s behaviour distressed many, demoralised faithful Catholics and made the Church less credible to those who are not Catholic”.

In a short statement, the former cardinal O’Brien said: “I wish to repeat the apology which I made to the Catholic Church and the people of Scotland some two years ago now on March 3, 2013. I then said that there have been times that my sexual conduct has fallen below the standards expected of me. For that I am deeply sorry”.

“I thank Pope Francis for his fatherly care of me and of those I have offended in any way.

“I will continue to play no part in the public life of the Church in Scotland; and will dedicate the rest of my life in retirement, praying especially for the Archdiocese of Saint Andrews and Edinburgh, for Scotland, and for those I have offended in any way.”...

...It is understood that Cardinal O’Brien’s decision followed a private discussion with Pope Francis. Church officials said that was preceded

by a period of prayer and penance in order to allow the cardinal to reflect upon his misconduct.

Dr O'Brien had been accused of "inappropriate acts" by three serving priests and a former priest while they were in seminary.

It was alleged that some of these incidents were sexual advances after alcohol-fuelled parties in seminary.

## **Methodists and Anglicans 'close enough for unity' - Church Times**

The Church Times, the leading newspaper of the worldwide Anglican Communion, yesterday reported on the launch of the inter-church report at Downpatrick on St Patrick's Day. It states -

Anglicans and Methodists know enough about each other, and need to stop timidly "watching every careful step", seeking "impossible perfection" before agreeing to unity.

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***From left: Bishop Harold Miller; Archbishop Richard Clarke, Revd Gareth Powell, Mrs Gillian Kingston, Archbishop Justin Welby***

This is the message of a report by the Anglican-Methodist International Commission for Unity in Mission (AMICUM), launched by the World Methodist Vice-President, Gillian Kingston, and the Archbishop of Canterbury on Tuesday.

*Into All The World: Being and becoming Apostolic Churches*, a report to the Anglican Consultative Council and the World Methodist Council, is the outcome of 20 years of work. It hints at an impatience also noted in last year's report by the Joint Implementation Commission,

which warned of "frustration and even boredom" with the Anglican-Methodist Covenant ([News, 23 May 2014](#)).

The Anglican co-chair of AMICUM, the Rt Revd Harold Miller, and the Methodist co-chair, the Revd Professor Robert Gribben, write: "We have surely reached the point where we know enough about each other. Those who know Anglicans and Methodists from the outside truly wonder what prevents us from taking the next steps. . .

"If we are honest, we are often willing to be friendly as long as nothing changes. If we do act ecumenically, we do it minimally, watching every careful step. Or, in our unity discussions we ask of each other an impossible perfection. . .

"The Churches themselves are in need of repentance and conversion, of *metanoia*, which means a willingness to turn from our own self-absorbing, restricting concerns, to Christ alone."

The report argues that "there are no church-dividing differences between us in faith, in ordered ministry, in the succession of such ministries, and in the value of episcopacy." The only remaining barrier to union is, it suggests, "for Methodists and Anglicans to come together under the sign of the historic episcopate, "for

that represents the larger history of transmission of which Methodist Churches are already a part".

*Into All The World* provides examples from around the globe of where unity is already a reality, including united Churches in the Indian sub-continent, and places where bilateral agreements have been developed. Union must be "full" and "visible", the report says. It argues that there is an "inseparable biblical connection between mission and unity", and points to missional challenges, particularly declining congregations in the West.

The Commission's chairmen call on local churches to take on the work. "You must decide whether we have given evidence enough of our unity in Christ to enable you to move forward."

The report's appendix contains "toolkits" with questions for debate at national and local level; and it recommends the creation of a new committee "to oversee and foster relationships".

It notes: "It is very important that each party in a bilateral relationship be honest with themselves, and before God, about any attitude of superiority which they may have about their Church. . . . There can be factors of race, wealth, size, style, or culture which lead to a subconscious and unspoken sense of dominating or being

dominated. These need to be handled sensitively."

There is also a reference to the need to face "painful things" that have happened in the past rather than avoid them. Other matters to be explored include worship styles ("the danger, if there is no conversation about this, is that the stronger wins"), discipline and authority, and disparity of stipends.

## **Methodists and unity - Church Times editorial**

The leading article in this week's Church Times comments on the international Anglican/ Methodist report -

It is a brave ecumenical Commission that admits in the preface to its latest report that "the Churches are . . . awash with ecumenical reports". This honestly acknowledged fact, together with a to-boldly-go title and the acronymic nature of the authors, mean that queues might not be forming for copies of *Into All the World: Being and becoming apostolic Churches* by the Anglican-Methodist International Commission for Unity in Mission (AMICUM). This would be a pity, since the report

is intelligent and well informed, outlining the progress towards unity that has been made by the two denominations, mapping the ground still to be covered, and detailing ways in which different manifestations of the two Churches around the world have approached the matter.

As the Commission suggests, no more introductions are needed to bring the two Churches together. Each has long exercised eucharistic hospitality, joint working on ethical and political matters is now the norm, and there are many more formal agreements in parishes around the country. The commitment made a few years ago not to do apart what could be done together has borne fruit. As a result, one of the final hurdles, the interchangeability of ministers, is once again the focus of debate.

The apostolic-succession question has sent the Methodists back down the garden path on more than one occasion, to their justifiable annoyance. In this report, however, the Anglican understanding of succession, and the problem it poses for the interchangeability of ministers, is explained fully and sympathetically. "Anglicans believe that the historic episcopate is a precious aspect of the fullness and wholeness of the Church, of catholicity." More challengingly, it states: "The historic episcopate does not require

that there should be an empirically verifiable manual transmission of ordination, going back to the apostles, in every case. The emphasis is on the formal intention of a Church not to make a new church . . . but to preserve the visible historical continuity of the Church from the beginning." Seen in this light, there is an equivalence in the ordaining of ministers and superintendents in the Methodist Church, made more overt in countries such as the United States. Just how equivalent these are needs to be teased out further.

The value of such reports rests entirely on how they are received, and this depends on how accurately their readers see themselves represented. It is impossible to read sentences that begin "Anglicans believe" or "Methodists believe" without being aware of the range of doctrinal views encompassed by each tradition. This is a weakness that has thwarted unity attempts in the past; but it is also a strength. A Church that can hold together divergent views on every aspect of Christian belief and practice ought to be better able to tolerate that diversity in another.

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## **Young Northern Irish Christians determined to reconcile**

The Archbishop of Canterbury was one of two key speakers at a St. Patrick's Day [#IAmAPeaceMovement](#) event which brought together 300 young Christians from all over Northern Ireland.

The Lord Mayor of Belfast, Councillor Nichola Mallon, was the second speaker at the gathering which organized by the team of [Summer Madness](#), Ireland's largest Christian festival, and led by [Church Army](#) Evangelist Jasper Rutherford.

Archbishop Welby's address highlighted that Christian life is about growing into God, even though the world crushes young people's identity and may even twist it, in Christ it remains unchanged. He called young Christians to be people who bring reconciliation in Ireland.

Led by Archbishop Welby, young people prayed for peace and commissioned each other to be active in peace-building and societal healing.

Rutherford reminded the audience about the theme of peaceful conflict resolution in Northern Ireland by alluding to the story in Genesis 26

where Isaac reopens wells that have been closed. Conflict arises as a result of this action but rather than escalate it, Isaac confronts difference and moves forward.



## **A St Patrick's night to restore fractured Northern Irish identities**

*The Revd Catherine Simpson writes - This was a St Patrick's night I don't think I will ever forget; it was inspirational and emotional. We were reminded of who God says we are through Christ and challenged to be led by the Holy Spirit, not held back by the past.*

Peace movements have always existed, but in a country where everything is tribal and



communities exist in a mutually comfortable apartheid, the difference about this event was the presence of young adults. They came to bring change, not to make sure their political convictions were represented.

Hearing each other's heart was the mark of the [#IAmAPeacemovement](#) night. Both the Lord Mayor and [the] Archbishop [of Canterbury] came and set aside their vocational roles to reveal their true identity and aspirations.

I am humbled, challenged and passionate to be a part of what God is birthing on this island. Those words from Micah 6, "What does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God," have resonated since Tuesday night in my head and heart.

This was a significant visit, not just for Anglicans but for all Christians. The first time in fifty years an Archbishop of Canterbury was at St. Patrick's burial site on St. Patrick's Day and his message of reconciliation showed what his key priority was. We need encouragement and guidance for a peace-building process that has been pushed aside and derailed, much like the political system.

And Archbishop Welby did just that through his presence and his message. He reminded us to follow the road of reconciliation, steeped in prayer and proclamation.

We need pioneers of peace; the peace-makers of the past must pass on the legacy of peacemaking. We must lift our heads once more and move forward in a way not yet seen. We need to raise up a generation who are prepared to proclaim the Gospel and then live it, a generation whose identities are fully formed in Jesus Christ.

*The Revd Catherine Simpson is training for the ordained ministry in the Church of Ireland, currently in her Deacon intern year in Christ Church, Castledawson in the Diocese of Derry and Raphoe. She is passionate about seeing generations raised up who are prepared to proclaim the Gospel and then live it - a community of disciples making disciples, who transform the community in which they live and work toward peace-building and societal healing within Northern Ireland.*

## **Colloquium to Focus on Re-Ordering Liturgical Space**

*Search* Journal is organising a colloquium entitled 'Re-Pitching the Tent: Re-Ordering the Church Building for Worship and Mission'. The event, which is being run with the Church of Ireland Chaplaincy at Trinity College Dublin with the support of Ecclesiastical Insurance takes place in the Long Room Hub of TCD on Saturday April 18 from 10.00 am to 4.00 pm.

The keynote speaker will be Richard Giles, a facilitator in creative worship and a consultant in liturgical design. Other speakers include Thomas Gordon, Dean of Leighlin Cathedral; Michael Burrows, Bishop of the United Dioceses of Cashel, Waterford, Lismore, Ossory, Ferns and Leighlin; and Margaret Quinlan an award winning conservation architect working in Ireland.

Richard Giles holds degrees in town planning and theology. As canon theologian for the Diocese of Wakefield, he worked extensively with parishes to rethink and redesign their buildings as part of mission strategy. His particular expertise in the design of liturgical space bore fruit in the publication of *Re-Pitching the Tent*, now in its third edition.

From 1999 to 2008, as Dean of Philadelphia Cathedral, he oversaw the radical renovation of the cathedral to become a place of

transformative worship. In 2008 he became a Visiting Fellow of St John's College, Durham. He continues to work as a facilitator of creative worship and a consultant in liturgical design.

To register, avail of the Paypal facility at [www.searchjournal@ireland.anglican.org](mailto:www.searchjournal@ireland.anglican.org) or send a cheque for €30.00 or UK£23.00 (Students: €15.00 or UK£11.50) to Michael Denton, 10 Dun Emer Drive, Dublin 16. Refreshments are included in the registration fee. Prior booking essential.

## Media digest

### **Belfast Telegraph**

#### **Belfast Telegraph Woman of the Year**

**Awards:** Brave missionary Maud Kells is crowned

<http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/woman/woman-of-the-year/belfast-telegraph-woman-of-the-year-awards-brave-missionary-maud-kells-is-crowned-31081051.html>

### **‘Pagan’ warning over burning of Temple in Londonderry**

Presbyterian clergy disagree

<http://www.newsletter.co.uk/pagan-warning-over-burning-of-temple-in-londonderry-1-6644707>

## **Irish Examiner**

### **Cork same-sex couple become first to tie the knot at an Irish casino**

<http://www.irishexaminer.com/breakingnews/ireland/cork-same-sex-couple-become-first-to-tie-the-knot-at-an-irish-casino-668093.html>

### **1 in 7 UCC students were victims of rape or sex assault**

<http://www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/1-in-7-ucc-students-were-victims-of-rape-or-sex-assault-319537.html>

## **Irish Independent**

### **Archbishop Martin hits out at 'obnoxious jibes' at gay community from 'No' camp**

<http://www.independent.ie/irish-news/archbishop-martin-hits-out-at-obnoxious-jibes-at-gay-community-from-no-camp-31081097.html>

## **Irish Times**

### **'Black Africans' face most racist abuse in Ireland, says report**

<http://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/black-africans-face-most-racist-abuse-in-ireland-says-report-1.2146079>

## **News Letter**

### **Trio of education board members with SF ties**

<http://www.newsletter.co.uk/trio-of-education-board-members-with-sf-ties-1-6644823>

## **Teachers' warning on conscience clause bill**

<http://www.newsletter.co.uk/teachers-warning-on-conscience-clause-bill-1-6644735>

## **Festivals and orchestras cost little compared to welfare top-up fund - Editorial**

<http://www.newsletter.co.uk/festivals-and-orchestras-cost-little-compared-to-welfare-top-up-fund-1-6644812>

## **Queen's axes funding for major annual festival**

<http://www.newsletter.co.uk/queen-s-axes-funding-for-major-annual-festival-1-6644496>

### **BBC**

#### **NASUWT wants end to short-term arrangements for teachers**

Northern Ireland's largest teaching union is urging employers to stop using short-term arrangements to cover long-term teaching requirements.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-31975843>

### **BBC**

Report on a new project bringing together science and religion offering trainee priests and Christians who are scientists the chance to engage with contemporary science. It states the [project](#) - backed by the Church of England - is to

receive more than £700,000 to promote greater engagement between science and Christians, as part of a three-year Durham University programme. Trainee priests and others will be offered access to resources on contemporary science, and the scheme will research attitudes towards science among Church leaders.

<http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-31965758>

### **Times/Tel/Mirror/Mail**

Reports that a solicitor who made a last-minute decision to take a Mediterranean cruise with her husband was among 18 tourists killed when they were caught up in the terrorist attack at a Tunisian museum. They state Sally and Robert Adey, from Shropshire, were at the Bardo Museum with fellow cruise passengers on Wednesday when Islamic State (Isis) gunmen armed with grenades and assault rifles attacked the tour group. Mrs Adey grew up in Scothern, near Lincoln, and her family have lived and farmed in the village for generations, also supporting the local church. The Bishop of Lincoln, Christopher Lowson, said: "For a holiday to end in such appalling circumstances is beyond anything that we could imagine."

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/uk/article4387615.ece>

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/crime/11484354/British-victim-of-Tunisia-terror-attack-was-on-last-minute-cruise-with-her-husband.html>

<http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/tunisia-bardo-museum-attack-isis-5365011>

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3002147/They-shot-moved-Tourists-caught-Tunisian-museum-massacre-reveal-gunmen-slaughtered-indiscriminately-father-forced-watch-wife-child-killed.html>

## **FT/Guard**

Further reports on Lord Green, the former HSBC chairman, speaking of his "dismay and regret" about the tax evasion scandal that engulfed HSBC's Swiss private bank. It states the Tory peer, who is also an ordained Church of England priest, was speaking at an event in a City of London church on Wednesday night when he was confronted by a camera crew from Channel 4 News. *Guardian* headlines says he claims he 'was not asleep at the wheel.'

[http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/cb378de0-ce07-11e4-86fc-00144feab7de.html?](http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/cb378de0-ce07-11e4-86fc-00144feab7de.html?siteedition=uk#axzz3UiEQQcMi)

[siteedition=uk#axzz3UiEQQcMi](http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/cb378de0-ce07-11e4-86fc-00144feab7de.html?siteedition=uk#axzz3UiEQQcMi)

<http://www.theguardian.com/business/2015/mar/19/lord-green-denies-asleep-at-wheel-hsbc>

## **Mail**

Report that United Nations investigators have found evidence ISIS are committing genocide against the Yazidi minority in Iraq. The human



rights office published a horrifying report describing killings, torture, rape, sexual slavery and the use of child soldiers by the extremists, suggesting they may be guilty of 'war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide.'

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3002547/IS-likely-committing-genocide-against-Yazidi-minority-Iraq-UN.html#ixzz3Uu9cf3VX>

## **Mirror**

Report on burial of Richard III says on Sunday, a cortege with his coffin will tour villages in Leicestershire and the battlefield site at Bosworth then be placed on public display at Leicester Cathedral before re-burial next Thursday.

<http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/king-richard-III-reburied-leicester-5363050>

## **Ind**

Review of *God and Mrs Thatcher: The Battle for Britain's Soul* by Eliza Filby, which it says shows the extent to which the former Prime Minister's politics were rooted in her religious faith and her particular understanding of Christian theology, derived from her preacher father. Mentions her conflict with the churches - particularly the Church of England.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/god-and-mrs-thatcher-the-battle-for-britains-soul-by-eliza-filby-book-review-10120108.html>

## **Spectator**

Further article on an Islamic prayer service held in St John's Church, Waterloo in London. It is described as 'a deliciously pagan gesture.'

<http://www.spectator.co.uk/the-week/ancient-and-modern/9473712/allah-zeus-and-the-church-of-england/>

## **Mail**

Residents in Sierra Leone's remaining Ebola hotspots will be confined to their houses for three days next week, officials said, as the government tries to end the outbreak that has killed over 10,200 people across West Africa. It states the number of Ebola cases in the region has fallen in recent months, though a spike in Guinea highlights the risk of complacency. An official said that residents would be allowed out to attend church on Palm Sunday for a few hours.

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/reuters/article-3003075/Sierra-Leone-lock-Ebola-hotspots-week--officials.html#ixzz3UuAG71oK>

## **Mail**

Item on Dame Judi Dench unveiling a sculpture at the Actors' Church in Covent Garden, central

London. The life-size bronze sculpture of Saint Paul on horseback is by artist Bruce Denny, and is a representation of Saint Paul on horseback, frozen in time at the dramatic moment of his conversion. The Reverend Simon Grigg is quoted saying the statue speaks of surprising faith and will enhance the experience of visitors to the church.

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/pa/article-3003434/Dench-share-stage-daughter.html#ixzz3Uu8ilvZi>

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