



Unique Easter walk shows Christ's Passion and Belfast in a new light

This Easter, people in Belfast have a unique opportunity to walk the journey of the Easter story in Belfast city centre. The Passion Walk, which is happening for the first time in Belfast on Good Friday and Easter Saturday 2015, offers a chance to experience the story of the Passion in

a fresh way, and perhaps see the city in a new light.

The Passion Walk is an individual reflective journey in which the city itself becomes the backdrop for the events of the Easter story. Participants walk at their own pace, with a specially designed audio guide, pausing at certain key locations to reflect on aspects of the journey of Jesus to the cross.

The Passion Walk was developed in Edinburgh in 2012 by writer Susan Mansfield, and has been redesigned for the Belfast cityscape at the invitation of a group of local Christians drawn from across the denominations. People who did the Passion Walk in Edinburgh said:

“A wonderful moving, experience from start to finish”

“It changed the way I see my city”

“It made the Passion feel as fresh as 2000 years ago”

Joy Gowdy, a native of Northern Ireland who did the Passion Walk in Edinburgh in 2013, was instrumental in bringing the project to Belfast. She said: ‘When I did the Passion Walk, I had no idea what to expect but from the moment I began listening to the narrative it drew me into a

new experience of the events of the first Easter. I knew I was returning to live in Belfast and was saddened that I might not get an opportunity to do The Passion Walk again.

“Through meeting and discussing with Susan Mansfield, and through her openness to doing something new, the Passion Walk will take place in Belfast this year. As I walked through Edinburgh, the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer - part of the narrative - spoke about God’s unfathomable love for the real world, for real human beings. What an amazing message to reflect on this Easter.”

Susan Mansfield, the creator of the Passion Walk, said: “One of the ideas at the heart of the Passion Walk is that the events of the first Easter took place in a busy city where many people were simply minding their own business. Many people who did the Walk in Edinburgh felt that they saw the story in a new light by walking it in the city where they live.

“It has been a privilege to redevelop the Passion Walk for Belfast. It has been the product of much talking, and walking - some of it in the pouring rain! I hope that Passion Walk Belfast is an experience which will offer people from all

church backgrounds and none the chance to engage with this timeless story.”

The Passion Walk will take place on Friday 3rd and Saturday 4th April. Participants in the Passion Walk begin their journey at Grosvenor House in Glengall Street, and finish at The Dock Cafe in Titanic Quarter. Booking in advance is essential, and can be done easily on our website, www.passionwalk.org, which also has more information about the Walk and how it works.

Ireland's faith leaders warned of rising intolerance

An unprecedented meeting of senior figures from the major faiths in [Ireland](#) has taken place at the Terenure Synagogue Hall in Dublin, as religious representatives gathered for a meal together. The event was organised by the [Jewish Representative Council of Ireland](#).

Irish Times - Among the 30 guests were papal nuncio Archbishop Charles Brown, the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin Diarmuid Martin, the [Church of Ireland](#) Archbishop of Dublin Michael Jackson, retired Church of Ireland primate Alan



Ireland's faith leaders met at a meal organised by the Jewish Representative Council of Ireland to discuss religious turmoil across the globe.

Harper, Rev Dr Alan Martin and Dr Sam Hutchinson of the Presbyterian Church, and Dr Andrew Dougherty of the [Methodist Church](#).

Also present were Dr Nooh Al-Kaddo and Shaheen Ahmed of the Clonskeagh mosque, Sheikh Yahya Al-Hussein of the South Circular Rd mosque, Dr Ali Al-Saleh of the Milltown mosque, Dr Ihab Ahmad of the [Cork](#) City mosque, Rabbi Zalman Lent, leader of Ireland's Hebrew congregation, and Leonard Abrahamson, president of the Jewish Representative Council of Ireland.

Greeting all, “but most especially representatives of the Muslim faith in Ireland”, Jewish Representative Council chair Maurice Cohen said: “This evening we hope that the space we make at our table will be symbolic of our genuine desire to deepen the understanding between Jews and our Muslim and Christian friends .”

Mr Cohen said that while the group tended to bump into each other at civic ceremonies, “we do not really know one another well enough to stand together in times of crisis”.

More at -

<http://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/religion-and-beliefs/ireland-s-faith-leaders-warned-of-rising-intolerance-1.2150405>

Tony Ward speaks at ecumenical sports service day after Six Nations win

The value and importance of all sport at all levels was highlighted (Sunday March 22) at the 66th Annual Ecumenical Service of Thanksgiving for the Gift of Sport.

The service took place in St Ann’s Church, Dawson Street, and was addressed by former churchnewsireland@gmail.com

March 25

Ireland and Lions rugby player, Tony Ward, who spoke of his life long involvement in sport. The church was packed for the service and in attendance was Cllr Larry O'Toole, representing the Lord Mayor of Dublin along with the presidents of many school unions, secondary school students and people from the world of sport.



The Revd Vanessa Wyse Jackson, Cllr Larry O'Toole, the Revd Alan Boal, Desmond Campbell, Tony Ward, Canon David Gillespie, Fr Michael Foley and the Revd Yvonne Ginnelly.

The congregation was welcomed to the service by the Vicar, Canon David Gillespie, who was joined by fellow clergy from the Methodist, Presbyterian and Roman Catholic Churches including the Revd Yvonne Ginnelly of St Ann's,

Fr Michael Foley of St Mac Dara's College in Templeogue, the Revd Alan Boal of Abbey Presbyterian Church and the Revd Vanessa Wyse Jackson of Rathgar Methodist Church.

During the service lessons were read by the President of the Association of Schools' Unions, Desmond Campbell and Heatley Tector who represented YMCA Cricket Club. The intercessors were Tom Staunton of Sandford Park School, Felicity Caswell of Mount Temple Shane Winkworth of Gonzaga College and Robyn Lewis of St Andrew's College. Musical accompaniment was provided by the Alexandra College Choir under the direction of Dervla O'Sullivan.

In his address, Tony Ward spoke of the enduring friendships created through team sport. He said the beauty of sport was its unpredictability – anyone could have their place in the sun if they tried hard enough and put in the work. He said it reflected values which were important in life, that you get out of it what you put in. It also taught people to win and lose, to respect the opposition and your teammates and respect the referee.

He added that the weekend's Six Nations win for Ireland was very special, as well as being dramatic and unpredictable. "What a great day

for rugby and sport in general and Ireland. It was spectacular,” he said. Mr Ward praised the humility of Ireland’s head coach, Joe Schmidt and captain Paul O’Connell who he said were the same in victory as they were in defeat.

In a message to parents, teachers and coaches, the former out-half urged them to be conscious and sensitive towards children in their formative years. He said they must accentuate the positive and encourage children even when they make mistakes.

He concluded that no one sport is the greatest sport. “Sport, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder – whether that be hurling or rugby or tiddlywinks. We’re here tonight united in thanksgiving for the gift of sport, whatever sport that is,” he said.

The annual Ecumenical Service of Thanksgiving for the Gift of Sport began 66 years ago following discussions between the Revd George Crummy and Bob Graves, Irish rugby international. The service focuses on thanksgiving for all men women and young people whose lives have been enriched and blessed by the gift of sport, whether through active participation, patronage or through the

medium of radio, television or attendance at events.

Bishop facing backlash over handling of Belfast priest accused of getting parishioner pregnant

Catholic Bishop Noel Treanor has come under pressure from clergy members over his handling of an alleged sexual relationship between a priest and a parishioner.

Belfast Telegraph - West Belfast priest Fr Ciaran Dallat is believed to have left his parochial house to stay with a friend along the north coast as the storm over his alleged affair with a woman, who became pregnant and then miscarried his child, failed to dissipate.

While parishioners have organised a rally of support for Fr Dallat to take place tonight outside St Peter's Cathedral, where he is still officially an assistant priest, several members of the clergy have said they believe he should not be allowed to return to ministry.

They have also criticised Bishop Treanor for not advising Fr Dallat to stand aside pending an investigation when he first became aware of the claims more than a fortnight ago.



Bishop Noel Treanor

The Catholic Church last night said that "Bishop Noel Treanor and the Diocese of Down and Connor assure all parishioners and the public at large that all concerns and allegations that are raised in a substantiated manner are taken seriously."

And Passionist priest Fr Brian D'Arcy, one of Ireland's best known clerics, said he was disappointed the alleged relationship had become a "source of scandal".

"They are both adults. It should be dealt with in a mature and helpful way that can allow both of

them to continue with their lives. It should not be the source of such scandal to anybody that people have to live their lives in some sort of shadow," said Fr D'Arcy.

Fr Dallat has been accused by a 49-year-old businesswoman, known only as 'Linda', of having an affair with her. She claimed she miscarried his child in July 2013 after a five-week pregnancy...

... One priest serving in the Diocese of Down and Connor criticised Bishop Treanor for failing to "handle this matter more effectively when he had two weeks to do so".

"The thing to do was to ask Father Dallat to step aside temporarily while an investigation took place. This would have made the woman involved feel that her suffering and her complaint were being taken seriously by the Diocese. Now the situation is a whole mess," he wrote on an online blog.

Another wrote: "Bishop Treanor has let a lot of people down, including "Linda" and her family, the people of the Cathedral Parish, and also Fr Dallat who ... should have been suspended, pending a full investigation. Bishop Noel showed very poor judgment, and further suffering for many has been the end result of that. I hope he acts differently in future cases; I for one will be watching closely." In relation to the alleged affair, one priest said that Fr Dallat's behaviour was "inexcusable".

"He must answer for those actions both before his Bishop, in this life, and his God, in the next."

The revelations have reopened the wider debate about celibacy and the priesthood. One priest wrote on the blog: "To put it bluntly celibacy is not working for the majority of priests ... Fewer and fewer men are seeing priesthood as a legitimate option, in particular because of celibacy ... Things simply cannot go on as they are, either in Down & Connor or beyond."

More at -

<http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/bishop-facing-backlash-over-handling-of-belfast-priest-accused-of-getting-parishioner-pregnant-31089600.html>

Hell hath no fury like a preacher's 'lover' scorned - Gail Walker comments in Belfast Telegraph -

<http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/opinion/columnists/gail-walker/hell-hath-no-fury-like-a-preachers-lover-scorned-31089365.html>

Ian Paisley did deal with Sinn Fein 'to see Northern Ireland at peace before he met God'

Reverend Ian Paisley decided to do a deal with Sinn Fein because he wanted to see Northern

Ireland at peace before he died and met God, a new book has revealed.

Liam Clarke in Belfast Telegraph - The book, called *The British and Peace in Northern Ireland*, features contributions and insider recollections from prominent players in the peace process.

In his contribution, Sir Jonathan Phillips - now warden of Keble College at Oxford University but who was political director of the Northern Ireland Office in 2004 - says Paisley made the disclosure to then Prime Minister, Tony Blair.

Sir Jonathan recalls the Leeds Castle conference in 2004 - high-level political talks aimed at reviving a stalled Stormont - when there were fears for Paisley, then the DUP leader, after he was forced to travel by ferry and car through Scotland instead of flying.

"When asked by Tony Blair whether he was serious about trying to do a deal with Sinn Fein [Paisley said] that, yes, he was, because he wanted to see Northern Ireland at peace before he met his Maker," said Sir Jonathan, being interviewed by the book's editor, Dr Graham Spencer of the University of Portsmouth.

"That was very clearly, in my view, a reference to a personal religious positioning on the part of

someone who, at the time, thought himself to be seriously ill and perhaps closer to the end of his life than turned out to be the case."

In fact, Rev Paisley was suffering from a leaking heart valve and, on the way home, he called with a specialist in Glasgow who adjusted his medication, bringing about a swift recovery. The DUP leader later told friends he took this as a sign that making peace was a job that God approved and was giving him time to complete.

Other senior British officials who either wrote a chapter or were interviewed for the book include Jonathan Powell, Tony Blair's Special Adviser and Sir John Chilcott, NIO permanent Secretary, 1990 until late 1997.

The British and Peace in Northern Ireland, edited by Graham Spencer, is published by Cambridge University Press, £19.99 paperback, £55 hardback

On the Run scheme 'damaged integrity of criminal justice'

On the Run letters to Irish republicans saying they were not being sought by police "damaged criminal justice system," say MPs.

BBC News - The integrity of the criminal justice system has been damaged by the controversial On the Runs scheme, a parliamentary watchdog has said.

The Northern Ireland Affairs committee said the "one-sided, secretive scheme of letters" sent to over 180 Irish republicans should never have existed.

It came to light when one letter caused [the Hyde Park bomb trial to collapse](#).

The On The Runs (OTRs) were republicans suspected of involvement in terrorist crimes but who had never been charged.

The scheme involved the provision of so-called "comfort letters" by the government designed to give them assurances that they were not being sought by police.

More at -

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-32020826>

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The aftermath of the IRA's 1987 bombing of Enniskillen in which 11 people died.

IRA fugitives granted 'possibly unlawful' amnesty linked to 1980s atrocities

Six IRA fugitives connected to two of the most notorious atrocities of the [Northern Ireland Troubles](#) were among those given “get-out-of-jail cards” under a controversial scheme that MPs have described as possibly unlawful.

Henry McDonald in The Guardian - The six [IRA](#) “on the runs” are suspects in the 1983 Harrods

bomb that killed six people outside the London department store and the Enniskillen massacre four years later in which 11 people died, the Guardian has learned.

Security sources in Northern Ireland say one of the six, who is wanted for questioning over the 1987 Poppy Day explosion in the County Fermanagh town, is at present living in England.

The six were among almost 100 IRA activists who were given “letters of assurance” from Tony Blair’s government as part of moves to secure Sinn Féin’s support for policing and justice reforms under devolution.

More at -

<http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/mar/24/ira-fugitives-granted-possibly-unlawful-amnesty-linked-1980s-atrocities>

NI Affairs Committee On The Run report – an example of something being “hidden in plain sight”

Alan in Belfast gives an excellent initial summary of the NI Affairs Committee’s 111 page report

<http://sluggerotoole.com/2015/03/24/ni-affairs-committee-on-the-runs-report-an-example-of-something-being-hidden-in-plain-sight/>

Finaghy churches – Exploring Easter together

This week a vacant shop in the heart of the Finaghy area of Belfast opened its doors as a prayer space for the local community. The prayer room offers a peaceful setting filled with prompts to spiritual reflection and response to God. Members of a prayer ministry team are on hand and visitors also have the opportunity to pre-book for the Easter Trail, an innovative retelling of the Easter story through dance and drama. Each free tour lasts an hour, with tour guides accompanying participants around the different church locations and scenes.

Six local churches are involved in the venture: Finaghy Methodist, Finaghy Baptist, Christchurch Kings' Hall, Finaghy Elim, Bethany Hall and Lowe Memorial (Presbyterian). The joint outreach has grown out of bi-monthly prayer meetings where pastors and church members met together to pray that God would bring revival and renewal to Finaghy.

The Easter trail walks will begin on the evening of Friday 27 March, continuing through Saturday and ending on Palm Sunday afternoon.

UK Churches welcome call for benefit sanctions review

A coalition of major UK Churches, with a combined membership of more than 800,000 people, has welcomed the call for a full independent review of the benefit sanctions system. The recommendation comes in a report from the Work and Pensions Select Committee that has been released today.

Earlier this month the Churches called for such a review in their report [Time to Rethink Benefit Sanctions](#) which cited new evidence about the negative impact of the current regime. They revealed that, in 2013/14, nearly seven million weeks of sanctions were handed out to people, with around 100,000 children affected. The data, obtained under the Freedom of Information Act, also shows that people who receive the sickness and disability benefit Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) because of a long-term mental health problem are being sanctioned at a rate of more than 100 per day. The most common

reason for being sanctioned is being late or not turning up for an appointment.

Time to rethink
**BENEFIT
SANCTIONS**



"The Select Committee Report describes a system that is broken and needs urgent review," said Paul Morrison Public Issues Policy Adviser for the Methodist Church. "Churches are often at the forefront of helping people who have been sanctioned and who are in desperate need of food, support and advice. It is unacceptable that vulnerable people can be left with no means of support as punishment for often very minor mistakes.

"The people we have met have spoken of the shame, demoralisation and loss of self-worth caused by this system. As Christians we believe that everyone is loved, valued and made in the image of God, and we have a responsibility to

challenge any structure or system that undermines that dignity. We hope that whoever forms the next government will treat this issue with the urgency and seriousness it deserves."

"So far, more than 1,400 people have [written to their MPs](#) about sanctions as a result of the campaign," added Niall Cooper, Director of Church Action on Poverty, "It's great that people in churches understand how important this issue is. We know that sanctions have a disproportionate impact on those who are most vulnerable: young people, care leavers, homeless people, single parents, the mentally ill and those with long-term illness. The new government must act to ensure that the benefits system provides a safety net for everyone, rather than making people destitute."

[Time to Rethink Benefit Sanctions](#) was published by the Baptist Union of Great Britain, Church Action on Poverty, the Church in Wales, the Church of Scotland, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church and features the stories of people like Sarah* who have had their benefits sanctioned:

Sarah worked as a charity project coordinator until she was laid off due to funding cuts. She was asked to apply for eight jobs a week, but

always applied for more as she was keen to get back to work. One week she was unable to fill out her job search on the computer because there were workmen fixing her roof and she had to stay in the house. Instead she filled out her search in a booklet. She contacted the jobcentre to explain, and ask if they needed any proof to support the booklet as she had emails from prospective employers and had even attended interviews. They said they didn't need anything from her.

When Sarah went to collect her money she was told she had been sanctioned. However, she did not receive the letter telling her she had been sanctioned so was unable to apply for discretionary funds to help support her and her family. Sarah successfully appealed the decision, though she says that Jobcentre Plus staff repeatedly tried to discourage her from doing so.

"Usually I'm quite a confident person, but they crush you. I found the experience at the Jobcentre Plus so awful I'd rather starve than go back there again. They should properly train the people in the job centre to treat us like people ... That whole attitude that people are scroungers is terrible, there's just no respect."

The Department for Work and Pensions has failed to respond to a further FOI request regarding whether sanctions make it easier for the DWP to achieve its targets. This is despite the fact that the Information Commissioner's Office ordered the DWP to respond by 15 March.

Landmark event to preserve Gaelic within the Church of Scotland

A landmark event for the future of Gaelic in the Church of Scotland was held in Glasgow at the weekend.

The first ever conference exploring how the Church of Scotland can nurture the Gaelic language was described by those attending as a "miracle" and a "milestone" within the Gaelic speaking world.

The event was organised after Moderator-Designate, Rev Dr Angus Morrison, identified the urgent need for the Church to do more to promote Gaelic.

Speaking after the conference, Dr Morrison said: "It was a significant moment in the history of

Gaelic use and provision in the Church of Scotland. I believe we can only go forward from here.



Moderator-Designate Rev Dr Angus Morrison and Gaelic broadcaster Cathy Macdonald hosted the landmark event at St George's Tron

"The conference was clearly appreciated greatly by those who attended."

Hosted by well-known Gaelic broadcaster Cathy Macdonald, an audience of over 50 people enjoyed presentations from Margaret Mary Murray, Head of Service at BBC Alba, and the Rev John Urquhart, who has been developing contemporary and traditional Gaelic worship

materials in partnership with Sabhal Mòr Ostaig in Skye.

They were also joined by Professor Donald Meek who talked about the development of Gaelic resources, Assistant Editor of The Scotsman Donald Walker who looked at the Gaelic print media, and Rev Hugh Stewart who provided a minister's perspective.

Titled 'An Ciad Ceum' (first step) the aim was to identify ways to develop the Gaelic language for future generations.

Some of the ideas discussed included harnessing the power of online resources, conducting a national survey to assess how the Church is equipped to provide Gaelic worship and encouraging presbyteries to include Gaelic provision within their presbytery plan.

The next step is to forge an action plan through the Church of Scotland's Gaelic Group

World Council of Churches delegation expresses solidarity with Ukraine

A ten-person delegation organized by the World Council of Churches (WCC) visited Ukraine from 17 to 20 March, reporting that “the delegation has heard a consistent call for the World Council of Churches and the ecumenical movement to inform the international community about the situation in Ukraine, to promote a more adequate humanitarian response to the human suffering resulting from the conflict, and to support and strengthen the efforts of the churches and faith communities of Ukraine for justice and peace.”

According to a WCC communiqué issued on 20 March, “Delegation members had the opportunity to visit a displaced persons’ shelter in Kiev and were able to encounter people who had been obliged to flee from the fighting. Delegation members were also able to travel close to the conflict zone, near Lisichansk, and to witness for themselves the destruction and disruption resulting from the crisis. The delegation also heard of the central role being played by churches in providing humanitarian aid in the affected regions, though the unmet needs still remain very great.”

The visit was facilitated by the WCC member church in Ukraine, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate). The delegation met with representatives of the Ukrainian

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Orthodox Church (UOC) and the All Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations (AUCCRO), a group encompassing almost every church tradition in Ukraine as well as the Muslim and Jewish communities

The communiqué describes the UOC as “the majority church in Ukraine – with congregations in all parts of the country and on both sides of the line of conflict”. It has “officially declared and reiterated its commitment to the territorial integrity and unity of Ukraine”.

Members of the delegation included WCC general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit; Conference of European Churches president Bishop Christopher Hill; the WCC president for Europe, Archbishop emeritus Anders Wejryd; Moderator of the General Synod of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, Rev. Karin van den Broeke; and a vice-moderator of the WCC central committee, Metropolitan Gennadios of Sassima.

Pope Francis gets a special pizza delivery

When visiting Naples last weekend, Francis was hand-delivered a 'pizza pie', made by a local pizzeria. The pope was riding through the city on



Pope Francis was riding through Naples on his popemobile when he received the handcrafted pizza

his popemobile when he was approached by Enzo Cacialli, who handed him the tasty gift decorated with yellow cherry tomatoes and mozzarella to match the Vatican flag. The words 'Il Papa' were also spelled out in dough.

Francis recently told an interviewer that he missed the anonymity of life before his installation, adding that he would love to leave the Vatican and grab a pizza without being recognised.

Caciali was therefore encouraged by a manager at Pizzeria Don Ernesto, Roberto Biscardi, to

make the pope a special pizza. Biscardi told NBC News: "We are very religious here. And for us the pope is someone truly special.

"We just wanted to give our passion for pizza to the pope."

A video has been uploaded on YouTube showing Cacialli delivering the gift to a rather bemused-looking Francis.

"It's really hard for me to understand what I managed to do," **Cacialli told CNN.**

"Giving a pizza you made with your own hands to the pope is very emotional. It's really hard for me to express the value of this gesture for a man we really love and value, for a beautiful person full of humanity."