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Reaction to Archbishop Martin's view on united Ireland

A surprise call from the head of the Catholic Church here for a united Ireland has been

criticised as potentially damaging to reconciliation efforts.

Belfast Telegraph - Archbishop of Armagh Eamon Martin's forthright support for a united Ireland was reported by music magazine Hot Press this week.

"I do believe that Ireland should be one," he said.

"And I would like to work for that, and continue to work for that, by peaceful means and by persuasion, recognising that there are many people on this island who do not want that."

The Londonderry-born Primate of all Ireland continued by revealing that he believes the current border between Northern Ireland and the Republic is less important than it was, and will become even less so in a modern Europe.

He explained that his own diocese of Armagh straddles the border, with 60% of its parishioners in Northern Ireland and 40% in the Republic - "but we see ourselves as one".

"The vision of a united Europe was one in which political borders would be less important and we'd work more on our common humanity, on our common economic needs, on our common

social needs as a people of Europe and I think that has largely happened," he said.

"To the extent I think the border between Northern Ireland and the rest of Ireland has become increasingly less important, I would like to see that trend continuing."

Alliance MLA Stewart Dickson claimed the Primate's outspoken backing for a united Ireland is risking "deflecting" from reconciliation attempts.

"While the Archbishop is entitled to his views, if wider society concentrated on such a matter, it would run the risk of deflecting from the challenges of reconciliation to focus on division, deepening them instead of removing them," said Mr Dickson.

And a spokesman for the Ulster Unionist Party, hit back at the Archbishop's comments, saying they believed increasing numbers were happy with the border.

Swatragh cross-community schools service marks joint project

Children from two primary schools in Swatragh, Co Londonderry, have taken part in a cross-

community service of dedication in the local Church of Ireland.

Pupils from Carhill Integrated Primary School joined others from St John's RC Primary to dedicate a wild flower garden at Killelagh Parish Church. For the children it represented the culmination of a project they had been working on. They had met previously to plant the garden in the church grounds.

Wednesday's Service was led by the Priest-in-Charge of Maghera and Killelagh, Rev Terence Kerr. Pupils from both schools read scripture and performed music, and the children prayed together.

Rev Kerr said the Service was part of the Parishes' contribution to the Diocese's Year of Opportunity 2016. "It was a joyous occasion for the Parish of Killelagh and a significant event for the community in Swatragh. The church grounds are obviously better-looking, thanks to the children's joint efforts; but, what's more important, is the effect it has on the people around them. We, as a community, are being transformed – for the better.

"The pupils who took part in this Service had a brilliant time getting to know each other a little better. And they have set a wonderful example to

us, the adults. Psalm 8:2 says: 'Through the praise of children and infants you have established a stronghold against your enemies.' Wednesday's Service gave us the opportunity to fortify that stronghold, and to radiate Christ's light in Swatragh."

Irish Churches and the EU Referendum

The ICC European Affairs Committee have produced a discussion paper entitled The Irish Churches and the EU Referendum, addressing important questions to help churches and individuals engage with this important decision.

A statement from the Irish Council of Churches comments, "The countdown has commenced with less than a month until the UK Referendum on EU Membership on 23rd June, and a great amount of debate has been generated within the media by both the 'stay' and 'leave' campaigns.

"When opting in or out, perhaps other questions come to mind, such as: what is the EU for? What impact might the Referendum result have on Ireland, both North and South? And, how might a

Christian perspective impact upon the decision-making process?”

The paper draws a connection between the values of the EU and Christian values:

The stated Core Values of the EU can be seen as being in line with the essential Christian belief in the equality and inherent integrity of every person, and their entitlement to equal respect and treatment.

It then proceeds to examine practical implications of EU membership and possible implications of an EU withdrawal for the island of Ireland.

Copies can be downloaded [here](#) or collected at the ICC office.

Refugee challenge is to generosity of spirit, Archbishop Clarke

The Archbishop of Armagh, The Most Revd Dr Richard Clarke, gave a lecture on Wednesday 25th May at the Armagh Public Library, on the theme of responding to the refugee crisis and displaced people across the world, entitled ‘The Stranger at the Gate’



Ruth Taillon, Director – The Centre for Cross Border Studies, Archbishop Richard Clarke and Dean Gregory Dunstan, Keeper of the Armagh Public Library

This was an inaugural lecture for what is envisaged as an annual series organised jointly by the Armagh Public Library and the Centre for Cross Border Studies. The lecture was attended by a wide range of people from across the island.

In his lecture, which drew on Matthew ch.25 and Hebrews ch.13, Archbishop Clarke said, “We need to be ready to protect, in every way we can and in every part of this island, those who are already within our gates but who are now being

treated with suspicion, hostility and even violence.”

He continued, “All should be met with all equal dignity, justice and humanitarian support that they deserve, and ideally within a programme that is integrated across the entire board, including those asylum seekers already in the country ... One of the issues on which we must be certain is that those who are now the strangers at our gates, or within our gates, have not left their homelands for motives other than desperation.”

Archbishop Clarke concluded: “The greatest challenge is to our generosity, not simply a financial generosity (which may in fact not be of a particularly major nature), but a generosity of spirit, that for which we can neither legislate nor regulate, but which we can nurture and foster, in ourselves as in others.”

Church of Scotland celebrates 50 years of women elders

The Church of Scotland celebrated 50 years of women's ordination Tuesday with a gathering that included the first woman Moderator and some of the longest-serving women elders from congregations across Scotland.



Pauline Weibye retiring Secretary to the Council of Assembly with Gladys Ramsay, one of the first women to be ordained as a church elder in July 1966..

Moderator Rt Rev Dr Russell Barr welcomed guests and introduced the host Dr Alison Elliot, who was the first woman to be Moderator and one of the few elders to be appointed to the post.

He also asked the crowd to acknowledge Gladys Ramsay, who was ordained as an elder on July 10 1966 at Camperdown Church in Dundee just weeks after the Church agreed to admit women to the eldership.

Mrs Ramsay, who is currently the session clerk in her church, said being an elder means giving others help and support.

"Since the time I started serving, I've always found it a great honour and privilege to meet with people sharing their joyous moments and being with them at sadder times, through bereavements and illness. I would recommend eldership to all who feel they could accept the invitation to serve."

Dr Elliot, now an elder at Greyfriars Kirk, said ordaining women as elders was first discussed in 1914, but it had taken 50 years of "batting it back forth from committees to the Assembly to Presbyteries and back to the Assembly and so on," before the Church finally agreed to ordain women as elders.

Death of 'champion' of victims at Protestant residential homes

A 'champion' for the rights of the victims at Protestant residential homes Bethany House, Dublin and the Westbank Orphanage has died.

Victor Stevenson (57) passed away after a short illness on Sunday and as a child spent time in the Braemar Rescue Home for Protestant Girls in

Cork and Westbank Orphanage in Greystones, Co Wicklow. One of the lucky ones he was adopted from Westbank at the age of seven and lived his life in Bangor.

Children from Westbank were used in Northern Ireland as child labour on farms, in return for payment to Westbank, and were often paraded around church halls to raise money for the orphanage.

In recent years Mr Stevenson devoted all of his energies to raising the issue of recognition and compensation for the Protestant victims of Ireland's welfare regimes.

With former residents he demanded that the Irish government add the Braemar Rescue Home for Protestant Girls, Westbank Orphanage and the Nursery Rescue Society to the terms of reference of the Mother and Baby Home Commission of Inquiry currently sitting in Dublin.

In Mr Stevenson's memory his friends have pledged to continue to press this demand. They have described him as a "true friend and champion of all who suffered the physical, psychological and emotional ill-effects of prejudice and of ignorance."

He leaves behind his wife Beverley and two children Emma and Sam. His funeral service took place on Wednesday to Calndeboye Cemetery, Bangor.

See News Focus, CNI, May 27

News briefs

St Mary's Church in Navan is a blaze of colour this weekend. They are holding their **Flower Festival** with the theme '**Land and Sea**'. It is part of the celebration of the Bicentenary of St Mary's Church. A special Preview event was held on the evening of Thursday 26 May, during which the Flower Festival was officially opened by Serena Williams-Ellis. She lives in Ardbracken House, which was once the home of the Bishops of Meath. The Rector, Canon John Clarke, welcomed over 50 guests and then asked Bishop Pat Storey to say a prayer. Rev Eileen Armstrong read the poem 'Drop a Pebble in the Water'.

After Serena Williams-Ellis cut the Opening Ribbon guests had an opportunity to view the excellent floral displays. The Festival was organised by Leona Rennicks assisted by Margaret Kingston. It was the work of a

dedicated team of people who made the whole event possible, as well as support from generous sponsors. Flower Clubs from Navan, Trim, Ardee, Drogheda, Maynooth and Tipperary put in a vast amount of work to make the displays. The Festival is open today and tomorrow, Sunday 29 May, from 11am to 8pm

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Rathfarnham Parish Church is holding a **Come & Connect Service** this Sunday morning at 10.30 am. The service will celebrate the church's stained glass windows focusing particularly on five windows in keeping with the Five Marks of Mission (Tell, Teach, Tend, Transform, Treasure). All are welcome.

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Canon Frank Bell (87) died peacefully and at one with himself and his maker early Monday morning. He was the elder brother of Canon John Bell. Both served in Down and Dromore.. Frank was laid to rest on Wednesday at Kilmore Parish Church. Northern Ireland. Amazing tributes from all and deeply moving (yet funny) eulogy from Lorna Bell.

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Two Derry students have been awarded first and second place in a national essay-writing competition for senior cycle students. Conal

Fagan, 17, of **St Columb's College** took first place in the **Life Advocate Awards**. This was the inaugural year of the Life Advocate Awards which were set up to encourage research and critical-thinking on human rights and right to life issues. Students were asked to discuss the words of Mahatma Gandhi who said: "The measure of society is in how it treats its most vulnerable members".

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Only two per cent of Anglicans in England and Wales are converts, a new study suggests. The director of the Benedict XVI Centre at St Mary's University, Twickenham, Dr Stephen Bullivant, has gathered statistics on religious affiliation from the annual British Social Attitudes surveys. His report, [*Contemporary Catholicism in England and Wales*](#), launched on Tuesday in the House of Commons, deals mainly with the Roman Catholic Church, but looks at other denominations for comparisons. His deduction is that, in a group of 100 Anglicans, 93 will have been brought up as such, five will have started life in another Christian denomination, and only two would have belonged to no religion. The sample group was 1681 Anglicans. [Click here](#) to read the full article on the *Church Times* website.

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The traditional **Anglican initiation rite of Confirmation** has “**lost its pivotal role**” for many Anglican churches in **New Zealand**, a report to this month’s General Synod of the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia said. But proposals to replace it with a new rite of The Laying on of Hands for Affirmation, Renewal and Reception, were postponed to allow further consultation. The report accompanying a bill with proposed new formularies for the baptism of adults and the baptism of children, said that the changes in the understanding and status of confirmation has mainly occurred since the 1970s when baptism became the sole rite required for Christians to receive communion in Anglican churches in the country. “This work on confirmation has identified a crisis in our church,” the Revd Michael Wallace from Dunedin said. “But I believe the crisis is not with the rite of confirmation itself, but with our church’s approach to catechesis and formation.”

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The **Church Commissioners for England** have lost their bid to force energy giant **ExxonMobil** to report annually on the impact of climate change reduction efforts.

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Archbishop of Uganda Stanley Ntagali, has warned **against syncretism** – the practice of merging different religious beliefs. The warning came after a prominent Christian politician made a public visit to her ancestral shrine to give thanks for her re-election – a practice in line with the country's traditional religions.

Cathedral, choral and musical

Down Cathedral presents a **Piano Recital by Gustavo Romero** (America) on Sunday 12 June at 4.00 pm. *'A pianist of genius'* Washington Post. Admission - Adults: £15. Tickets available from Down Cathedral Office, Down County Museum and The Saint Patrick Centre. Tickets also available from Matchett's, Belfast, Michael McCracken (07773846028) and may be purchased at the door. Proceeds towards the Down Cathedral Organ Restoration Appeal.

East Belfast Community Choir chosen to perform with Russell Watson live in Belfast - A cross community choir from East Belfast have been selected to perform with singer Russell Watson during his concert at Belfast Waterfront later this year. Contact Singers, beat off stiff competition from other local choirs, after the [tenor asked](#)

[community choirs to apply](#) for the opportunity to accompany him on stage for a number of songs.

The East Belfast based choir have been singing together for over 20 years now and what started as a small community choir, now boasts more than 45 members.

Choir member Claire Bonner said they were delighted when they got the news.

"When we broke the news to the members, a lot of them thought we would be singing with Russell as part of a larger choir, alongside several others.

"So when we explained that we were in fact, the only choir performing with him, they were delighted.

"We are over the moon to be chosen from what we understand was a large number of entries and can't wait to perform with Russell in November."

Russell has always been a strong supporter of unsigned local artists and choirs, especially after being a judge on the BBC prime time show Last Choir Standing.

The series saw around 60 amateur choirs competing each week to be the Last Choir Standing. Russell enjoyed being part of the show immensely and as a result, expressed his wishes to have a local choir accompany him on his Up Close & Personal UK tour.

"I love being accompanied by choirs and the energy and excitement they bring. I am really looking forward to this tour and feel that a local choir will be the perfect addition to the evening," Russell said.

Tickets for Russell Watson at Belfast Waterfront are available online, or by calling 028 9033 4455 from the box office at The Ulster Hall.

For more information on Belfast Contact Singers visit their [Facebook page](#).

News links to reports on faith, politics and education

Homeless mother accepted as student in Trinity College

Irish Examiner

<http://www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/homeless-mother-accepted-into-trinity-college-401554.html>

Minster FM/York Press/Yorkshire Post

Reports that the Archbishop of York joined cast and crew of the York Mystery Plays as they prepared for the premiere at the Minster (see above). Archbishop Sentamu, greeted some of the hundreds of volunteers and actors and prayed for God's blessing on the production. He said, "I'm thrilled that York Minster is continuing the region's cultural and religious heritage by staging the Mystery Plays. To have God's story from creation to last judgement brought to life in this place of wonder will I hope inspire all who come to see it, as the Minster itself has inspired people for over a millennium."

<http://www.minsterfm.com/news/local/1996999/videos---the-mystery-plays-return-to-york-minster-tonight/>
<http://www.yorkpress.co.uk/news/14519580.Archbishop-meets-cast-and-crew-before-Mystery-Plays-premiere/>
<http://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/what-s-on/theatre/for-only-the-second-time-in-700-years-york-minster-hosts-the-greatest-story-ever-told-1-7934023>

Newcastle Evening Chronicle

Reports that the Bishop of Newcastle has issued a plea for better funding for North East schools, in her first speech in the House of Lords. Funding for education, infrastructure and apprenticeships was needed if the Government wanted to make the Northern Powerhouse idea a reality, said Bishop Christine.

<http://www.chroniclelive.co.uk/news/north-east-news/bishop-newcastle-uses-maiden-speech-11389706>

Pension Age

Further reports that a resolution lead by the Church Commissioners asking ExxonMobil to report on how its business will be affected by efforts to combat climate change has received "significant support" from the company's shareholders. The resolution, filed by the Church Commissioners and New York State Comptroller asks Exxon to report on how its business model will be affected by global efforts to limit the average rise in temperatures to below 2-degrees celsius. 38.2 per cent of shareholders supported the Church Commissioners' resolution.

<http://www.pensionsage.com/pa/Church-Commissioners-receive-strong-support-for-resolution-against-ExxonMobil.php%20.php>

Ind

Reports that the University of Newcastle and Southampton have announced plans to address fossil fuel divestment. The moves come after the University of Cambridge recently faced pressure - from both student activists and the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams - to withdraw its investments from fossil fuel companies.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/student/news/universities-of-newcastle-and-southampton-announce-plans-to-address-fossil-fuel-divestment-calls-a7050386.html>

Mirror/Christian Today/Even Stand/ITV

Reports that the Revd Simon Harvey, vicar of St Mary's Islington, North London confronted an intruder in his home and later found that jewellery belonging to his late wife was missing. Revd Harvey tweeted a photograph of he took of the the man leaving his home.

<http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/reverend-wants-meet-burglar-who-8057880>

<http://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/vicars-heartache-after-thief-steals-his-late-wifes-jewels-a3257051.html>

<http://www.itv.com/news/london/2016-05-26/vicar-pleads-for-help-to-find-late-wifes-jewellery-after-confronting-man-in-his-home/>

Christian Today

Reports that the number of women attending church is declining faster than the number of men according to research carried out by Pew Research Centre. Fewer than three in ten women attend religious services weekly, only slightly more than the numbers of men. Patricia Miller, writing in *Religion Dispatches*, which published the research, says the years that women's church attendance began to decline coincides with when religious leaders in the Catholic Church and the evangelical movement "fused religion with the culture wars".

Comment

Guardian: Giles Fraser - The world is getting more religious, because the poor go for God.

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2016/may/26/the-world-is-getting-more-religious-because-the-poor-go-for-god>

Christian Today: Leave the EU or Remain, the Church of Scotland shouldn't be voting on it.

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