



Willowfield Parish Church ready to open magnificent new facilities

The official ceremony is at 11am on Saturday (May 20) and among those in attendance will be Belfast's High Sherriff, politicians, local community and church leaders, former Northern Ireland international footballer Stuart Elliot and some members of the Ulster Rugby team.

Willowfield Church's stated vision and purpose is: 'In the community, for the community'.



Driven by that objective, the halls have been extensively modernised and extended in the hope of providing a space for all.

Beyond the totally refurbished and enlarged building is the brand new U-Turn Project providing an outdoor sports facility plus children's play area.

This, in conjunction with the halls, will facilitate a host of programmes for all ages, with particular emphasis on children, teenagers and young adults.

Following Saturday morning's celebration there will be a church and community BBQ for all ages.

The Rector of Willowfield, Venerable David McClay, said: "God has placed Willowfield Church at the heart of the lower Woodstock. Our Parish area includes almost 8,000 homes in the local streets around Willowfield Church."

"We have the responsibility to reach towards every man, woman and child with the incredible good news that God has for us – that he loves us, that he sent his Son to live, to die on a cross and to rise again.

"Jesus did all this in obedience to his Father God because he loves us, not only demonstrating his kindness towards us by paying the price, and taking the punishment for all our wrong and our shame. Jesus has told us to take his love to others. He has said so clearly that his followers must not live selfishly for themselves but generously for others."

Kinghan Church: Service of Celebration for 160 years ministry with deaf and hard of hearing



Kinghan Church on Belfast's Botanic Avenue will celebrate 160 years of ministry to the deaf and hard of hearing community on Sunday, May 21, with the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, Rt. Rev. Dr. Frank Sellar, as its special guest speaker.

Presbyterian minister, Rev. John Kinghan, who was a teacher in the Ulster Society for the Promotion of the Education of the Deaf, the Dumb and the Blind in Belfast, started a mission to the deaf in 1857, using a room in the city's Sandy Row area. He later moved to a schoolhouse on Great Victoria Street but moved back to Sandy Row and new purpose-built

premises called 'The Bethel' in the 1870s. The Mission remained there until it moved to its present site in 1899.

Looking forward to attending the special service Dr. Sellar said, "Rev. Kinghan was a forward thinking individual who realised even at that time that deaf people in the city shouldn't be excluded from knowing the gospel in their own language and having their own place to worship.

"In the Gospel of Jesus Christ we have good news to share and declare – the hope of salvation, and it is for everyone. In Romans 10:15 the Apostle Paul says, "As it is written: 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!'" As the services are signed, Kinghan Church has been doing just that with their hands for over a century and a half and I give thanks for their work, witness and ongoing mission in the city."

Supported by the Presbyterian Church in Ireland's (PCI) Council for Social Witness, which seeks to deliver an effective social witness service on behalf of PCI and to the wider community, the ground floor church was especially designed to meet the needs of deaf and hard of hearing people.



Mary Carson has attended the church since she was eight-years-old. Now a grandmother, whose grandchildren also attend she said, “Every Sunday, we walked to Kinghan Church from the local deaf school, for our weekly service. There was no Sunday school available at this time, so this gave us an opportunity to meet other deaf children from the other deaf school.

Years later Mary met her husband Tom at the church. They were married and had their two children, who are hearing and were baptised there. “The congregation at that time was very mixed both old and young. Quite a lot of my friends and I had married and had our children

around the same time, which gave us the chance to let our families integrate and interact,” she said.

“Although the congregation’s dynamic was changing, as my friends and I became grandparents, we brought our grandchildren to church to help teach them the work of Lord as a family, again integrating and interacting with them and keeping the fellowship strong. This was very different in my childhood days as it’s special having your family with you at times of worship.”

While currently without a minister, the worshipping community meets every Sunday morning at 11am, with various groups, both within and outside of the church, using its facilities and services during the week.

The 160th anniversary service will take place at Kinghan Church, Botanic Avenue, on Sunday May 21 at 11am. All welcome.

Girls’ Friendly Society to celebrate 140th anniversary

The Girls’ Friendly Society is celebrating its 140th anniversary this year and a service to mark

the milestone event will take place in Christ Church Bray on Sunday May 21 at 3.00pm. The theme of the service will be 'Yesterday, Today and Forever'.

The Girls' Friendly Society was founded in London in 1875 by an Irishwoman, Mrs (Mary) Elizabeth Townsend, to help lonely girls who came from the country to work in the city.

This was the first girls' or women's organisation in the Church of England. It was a society for friendship and recreation in which all girls might share, bound together in a fellowship of Christian love and service. The rapidly spreading movement came quickly to Ireland, Scotland and America in 1877, continuing in quick succession to Australia and other countries worldwide.

In Ireland GFS was started in Bray in 1877 and the first Central President was the Countess of Meath.

Large Congregation pays tribute to Former Dean of St Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin

St Patrick's Cathedral was full for a memorial service for former Dean, the Very Revd Victor

Griffin, which took place on Sunday May 14. President Michael D Higgins was in attendance as well as members of Dean Griffin's family and many friends and associates who gathered to remember a man who the preacher, the Archdeacon of Dublin, described as "political, courageous, fearless, controversial, author, loyal, friend, family man and above all, priest". Dean William Morton presided at the service which was sung by the cathedral choir.

Dean Griffin died on January 11 2017. He was Dean of St Patrick's Cathedral from 1968 to 1991.

In his address, Archdeacon David Pierpoint said that in politics Dean Griffin had many adversaries but twice as many friends and would have been both proud and humbled to have Uachtarán na hÉireann and the many representatives of politics and the State in attendance at the service.

Throughout his ministry, the Archdeacon said, Victor championed the cause of inclusivity and pluralism. Speaking out at times resulted in him being ostracized but this did not deter him from speaking out for what he believed.

“A tolerance so lacking in many groups in the 1960s, 70s and even 80s that he was accused of being anti-Irish, anti-republican, a protestant bigot and anti-Roman Catholic. He was however, supported and upheld by liberal Roman Catholics, concerned members of the Church of Ireland, the Jewish community and people of no religion. Victor’s mantra during that time was that Irish people should move away from exclusiveness to inclusiveness. Thank God for Victor’s stance, for that is, in general, the Ireland we live in today. Our political future is constantly being fashioned by people like Victor, taking risks, living out the gospel message of mutual love and respect for one another. He was indeed political, courageous and controversial,” Archdeacon Pierpoint said.

In ministry, he said that Victor was never afraid to wear his faith on his sleeve. He recalled the Dean saying to him: “Never be ashamed to wear your collar in public, whether in the streets, hotels or local bars, for that is where you will find your flock and a fulfilment in your ministry”.

In his writings, the preacher stated, Victor put paid to many myths both in society and the Church and also provided many useful books and booklets.

Describing Dean Griffin's dedication to St Patrick's Cathedral, the Archdeacon recalled the appeal he launched for its restoration in 1972 exceeding its target by almost £100,000, his negotiations with the Department of Education to get new buildings for the choir and grammar schools, his opposition to the widening of St Patrick's Street and he and his wife Daphne's campaign to save the Deanery. As a priest he seldom missed being present at the daily office or on Sundays and he and Canon Bradley insisted on perfection in liturgy.

Victor was devoted to his family and Archdeacon Pierpoint extended his sympathies to them.

He concluded with words from Victor's final sermon in St Patrick's Cathedral: "Finally, my friends, Farewell. Strive for perfection, be strong, be of one mind, live in peace and the God of peace will be with you. The Lord God omnipotent reigns, because Christ is alive and has won the victory over sin and death. By his resurrection we know that love is stronger than hate, good stronger than evil and life stronger than death".

Born in Carnew, County Wicklow, in 1924, Dean Griffin was educated at Kilkenny College

and Trinity College Dublin. He was ordained in 1948 for curacy at St Augustine's in Derry. He served a second curacy at Christ Church in Derry where he became Rector in 1957 until 1968 when he was appointed Dean of St Patrick's Cathedral. He retired in 1991 and was living in Limavady.

Victor Griffin married Daphne Mitchell of Londonderry at All Saints', Londonderry in May 1958; a teacher, she died of Multiple Sclerosis in 1998. The couple had twin sons, Kevin and Timothy, born in 1959

[You can read the full text of Archdeacon Pierpoint's sermon here.](#)

Labour waters down Northern Ireland abortion pledge

The Labour Party has toned down its promise to legalise abortion in Northern Ireland, pledging instead to “work with” the Stormont Assembly on the issue.

In a draft manifesto **leaked last week**, the party said it would “continue to ensure a woman's right to choose a safe, legal abortion – and we

will legislate to extend that right to women in Northern Ireland.”

The wording led to concerns a Labour government would force a change in the law on Northern Ireland against the wishes of the Assembly.

However, in the final version – published on Tuesday – the wording has changed to “we will work with the Assembly to extend that right to women in Northern Ireland.”

The 1967 Abortion Act, which legalised the practice in Britain, never applied to the province, where abortion is only legal if a woman’s life is at risk, or there is a permanent or serious risk to her mental or physical health.

The issue of abortion is devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly in Stormont, although the Westminster Parliament can technically impose a change in the law on the province.

However, previous attempts have failed, including a 2008 proposal that was blocked by the then Leader of the House of Commons Harriet Harman over fears it could lead the House of Lords amending existing British law.

English Catholic Bishops emphasise protection of EU citizens' rights in general election guidance

The bishops of England and Wales have issued guidance for the forthcoming general election, urging Catholics to question candidates on issues including Brexit, family policy and migration.

In a letter due to be distributed to parishes this weekend, the bishops said the election will determine “to a great extent” the approach taken to leaving the European Union as well as “the values we wish to treasure as our own in the UK and as partners with countries around the world”.

The letter then gives a list of specific questions Catholics could ask parliamentary candidates.

Situated at the top of the list are questions on Brexit, with the bishops emphasising that EU citizens living in the UK and UK citizens living elsewhere in the EU face an “uncertain future”.



“Where do your candidates stand on the future of EU citizens in the UK and reciprocal rights for UK citizens in the EU?” the bishops ask.

They also ask Catholics to quiz their candidates on family and life issues, particularly in upholding the last parliament’s decision to stop the legalisation of assisted suicide.

“Will your candidates uphold this decision?” The bishops ask. “Will they support measures to promote the intrinsic value of life at every stage?”

There is also a particular focus on the prison system, with the bishops writing: “In a civilised

society prisons should be places of redemption and rehabilitation. Our prison system faces unprecedented levels of violence and suicide.

“Do your candidates support urgent prison reform and better resourcing?” they ask.

In terms of immigration and refugees, the bishops say there needs to be a “clear policy on migration, which works for the economy and is respectful of the unity of marriage and family life.”

They also ask Catholics to question candidates on whether they will keep the UK’s commitment to resettling at least 20,000 Syrian refugees by 2020 – or possibly even expand the scheme – and whether they will promote a “welcoming society and stand against hate crime”.

In further sections, the bishops lend their support to the UK’s foreign aid budget and implore the faithful to ask their candidates how they will tackle modern slavery.

On the issue of education, the bishops remain steadfast in their defence of Catholic schools, saying they make a “positive contribution to society, serving over 845,000 children in England and Wales”.

“Will your candidates support parental choice for the education of their children?” they ask. “Will they support Catholic schools as part of this choice for faith-based education?”

The document concludes with a prayer: “Lord grant us wisdom to act always with integrity, seeking the protection and flourishing of all, and building a society based on justice and peace.”

Scots General Assembly: Syrian Minister's travel ban overturned

The Home Office has overturned a decision to refuse to grant a visa to the first female pastor in the Arab Christian world, scheduled to attend the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland this weekend.

Rev Rola Sleiman was invited by the Kirk to attend their annual meeting and said its world mission council confirmed to the UK Visas and Immigration department last month that her expenses would be covered during her eight-day stay.

She later received a letter saying her visa application had been unsuccessful because the UK government was not convinced about claims



concerning her incomes or that her expenses during the trip would be covered.

However, the British Embassy in Amman, Jordan has now informed the World Mission Council that it has reviewed her case and has decided to grant her permission to enter the UK.

Reacting to the decision, the Very Rev Dr John Chalmers, Principal Clerk to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, said: "We are grateful to the Home Office who have heard our request and granted a visa waiver enabling the Rev Rola Sleiman to travel and join us at the General Assembly in Edinburgh.

"It was clear from the support that we received overnight from the media, the public and the church that people felt a mistake had been made

and an important voice might be missing from our Assembly.

"In the end common sense prevailed and it has all happened in time for us to complete Rola's travel arrangements.

"We now look forward to welcoming her."

He had said before the visa was granted that he was hopeful the Home Office would eventually grant the visa.

Rev Sleiman who holds a Syrian passport is now expected to attend the Church's General Assembly on Saturday and represent the National Evangelical (Protestant) Church of Syria and Lebanon at the assembly services at St Giles on Sunday.

Today in Christian History, May 16

May 17, 1844: German biblical scholar Julius Wellhausen is born. His controversial theory about the Pentateuch—that it is a compilation of four literary sources (J, Jahwist; E, Elohist; D, Deuteronomist; and P, Priestly Editor), laid the foundation for most subsequent Old Testament criticism.

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