



The essential daily brief on the Irish churches -

Good Friday



Good Relations Conference

On Saturday, 5th April Presbyterians gathered in Assembly Buildings for a morning conference entitled *Dealing with the Past, Shaping the Future*.

The conference was jointly organised by the Presbyterian Good Relations Panel and Church and Society Committee with 134 delegates in attendance. In light of the recent unsuccessful Haas talks, the Presbyterian Church, mindful of its need to encourage better Christian witness and citizenship in our society, wanted to create a space where delegates could hear, think and pray about the issues of flags, parades and dealing with the past.

Over the course of the morning, delegates listened to addresses from Rev. David Cupples, minister of Enniskillen Presbyterian Church and Dr. Norman Hamilton, former Moderator and co-convener of the Church and Society Committee. A panel discussion also took place exploring some of the issues further.

The Moderator, Dr. Rob Craig opened the conference by reading from Isaiah 40. He referred to his visit to Rwanda last year and spoke of his experiences of talking to the Rwandan people who are allowing the future to shape their present more than the past. He went on to talk about the people of Israel during the time of exile, when their faith, nation, identity and their very existence were on the point of extinction. Yet the Lord was at work, He had plans, He would not grow weary. Dr. Craig encouraged the delegates that our God is the God of transformation who can inspire hope and courage, helping us to not only deal with the past but also shape the future.

Rev. David Cupples addressed the need to recognize and affirm the sovereignty of God when we are dealing with issues of the past. In considering how we move forward, he asked delegates to consider not only our sectarian past but also our increasingly secular society at present.

Dr. Norman Hamilton spoke about the importance of engaging with politics, reminding delegates that the word politics means, “of, for, or relating to citizens”. Given that the issues raised by the recent Haass talks proved to be complex and controversial, Dr. Hamilton spoke about the need for wider society to help shape the way these issues are handled, with the Church playing its part in this.

The **panel discussion** elaborated on issues raised from the day. Taking part on the panel were Rev. Lesley Carroll, minister of Fortwilliam and McCrory; Prof. Peter McBride, Chief Executive of Northern Ireland Association for Mental Health (NIAMH); and Rev. Michael Davidson, minister of Drumgooland and Kilkinamurry Presbyterian congregations. Audio excerpts at -

<http://www.presbyterianireland.org/News/Article/April-2014/Good-Relations-Conference-2014>

Presbyterians make early start to Easter day

It will be an early start for many Presbyterians this Easter Sunday, 20th April, when thousands are expected to attend dawn services at a range of venues around the country.

It's a tradition that has been going on now for over forty years and there is still huge enthusiasm to rise early on this most special day in the Christian year.

The earliest start is a 6am service at the Cloughmore Stone high above Rostrevor and it's an even earlier start when you realise that you first have to walk up to where the stone is situated.

Most other services follow at 6.15 or 6.30 am at venues scattered around the countryside from Ballintoy Harbour and Slieve Gallion car park to the Splega Dam and Slemish car park.

If your alarm clock lets you down then there are more leisurely starts at several locations including the slipway in Ballygally outside Larne and Hillsborough Large Park where worshippers will gather at 7am.

Depending on the weather services vary in length but involve praise, prayer, scripture reading and a short address with the time and venue adding to the celebration of the resurrection. Some even offer a tasty breakfast afterwards.

“Rising early on Easter morning and gathering with others to worship, celebrate and give thanks as the sun rises makes for a very special way to mark Christ’s resurrection,” says Presbyterian Moderator Dr Rob Craig. “In a way we are connecting with the first women who came and found the empty tomb and joining with them in proclaiming the good news of the risen Lord to the whole world.”

Venues and times are:

6.00am: Cloughmore Stone, Rostrevor.

6.15am: Slieve Gallion Car Park.

6.30am: Whitehead, Seafront Car Park; Second Donegore Presbyterian Church, Parkgate; Spelga Dam; Ballintoy Harbour; Portglenone Forest; Slemish Car Park; Magheramason Car Park; Dungannon Park.

7.00am: Hillsborough Large Park; Ballygally Slipway; The Warren, Cloughey; Belshaw’s Quarry, Lisburn.

Easter Message From The Archbishop Of Dublin

Easter Day gives us one of the most beautiful expressions of joy and gladness that there is in the Christian tradition.

Resurrection is not only something done to Jesus and by Jesus, it is also a new gift given by God to the creation as we make the move from old life through death in Christ to new life with Christ. And so we seek to come to terms with all that is new in life itself. Every year we are given the opportunity to come through the sorrow and the sadness of Holy Week, the betrayal and the bitterness of The Passion to the triumph of life over death in The Resurrection.

Sunday is, therefore, a special day. Every Sunday is a celebration of resurrection. It is for this reason that Sunday is so life-giving and life-affirming in the Christian life and in the way of following Jesus in our own daily lives. We are not required to be perfect but we are asked to follow. We are not expected to be better than everyone else but we are asked to show

the way. We are indeed asked to celebrate Sunday and not just to hope that somebody else is doing it while we are not bothering. And so being a Christian today is what it has always been: service and leadership.

These are qualities and characteristics that cannot exist independent of one another. They need to work together if we are to be healthy people and healthy communities. They make sense as mirror images and as two sides of the one coin. Their relationship is instinctive: the Jesus who died for us also rose for us. Their expression is equally instinctive: the same Jesus did not leave his friends comfortless but returned to them in the days after Easter to equip them for service and for leadership. Their offering to the world of our day lies in our hands and on our lips: the same Jesus gives us the courage and the compassion to be his ambassadors of peace every day of the week.

Every Sunday is an Easter on which we celebrate the victory of life over death, however hard this may seem and however unlikely this may look to us at any given time. It is God's precious gift.

I wish each and all of you a very Happy Easter.

Christ is risen!

The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia! Alleluia!

Methodist President's Easter Message

Christ is Risen! There is no context, no experience which life can bring in which that truth does not hold.

Christ is Risen; that truth holds, in the hospital ward when we have just been told the news we dreaded; that truth holds, across this island even where there is tension, protest, and "recreational rioting"; Christ is Risen; that truth holds, even when we face challenges within the Church.

The Gospel writers are honest about the fact that even after Jesus' Resurrection the disciples are frightened. John tells us that that first Easter Sunday the disciples were together, but they had the doors locked because



they were afraid. They were afraid to hope, and their fear is understandable. They had been through so much. It was hard to believe that Jesus was alive. No matter what promises they had been given it was difficult for them to believe that there was the possibility of a better future. And Jesus comes and stands among them and says “Peace”.

We run the risk, in this part of the world, of hope being eroded by fear. Our fear too, is understandable. Fear that we will never have peace in our community. Fear that there will be no discernable end to economic downturn. Fear that there will never be jobs for our children. Fear that things will never get any better. Fear that if we speak up we will get into trouble. Fear that no one understands us. Fear holds us back from even imagining, let alone working for a better, different future.

Christ is Risen. That truth holds. Fear does not have the final word.

There are signs of hope around us. “Quiet Peacemakers”, churches who work with their communities to benefit all, many people committed to working for the common good. Christians who are faithful witnesses to God in their places of work, neighbourhoods and homes. Every week I am told “wet feet” stories of individuals and congregations who are committed to blessing others.

Christ is Risen. That truth demands a response. Personal commitment to Jesus must spill over into the way we live our lives. Every other allegiance must be second to allegiance to Jesus. Fear does not have the final word. Our context calls for courage. Will we speak up against the evils of sectarianism and racism; will we work so that everyone gets opportunities for excellent education and employment; will we love our neighbour?

Call it unrealistic; call it naïve but it is true, Christ is Risen, and there is no context in which that truth does not stand. Jesus still stands among people who run the risk of being held back by fear and says “Peace”.

The Losers and the Winners

An Easter message from The Rt Revd Harold Miller, Bishop of Down and Dromore:

This is a weekend when, humanly speaking, our world is turned upside down. On Good Friday, as Jesus is



cruelly nailed to the cross, everything appears to be lost. Corruption has won. Intrigue and power, both political and religious, have trumped the humility and love of Christ. Judas has gone off financially richer, and the vision of the disciples for the coming of the Kingdom of God is exposed as a pipe-dream.

In these days, people of faith can feel a bit like that. So often the values we embrace, the things we believe and the way we live can seem to others a bit out-of-date and even odd. Indeed, to believe that following this one man Jesus Christ is the most important thing in the world is perceived by many as just plain foolish!

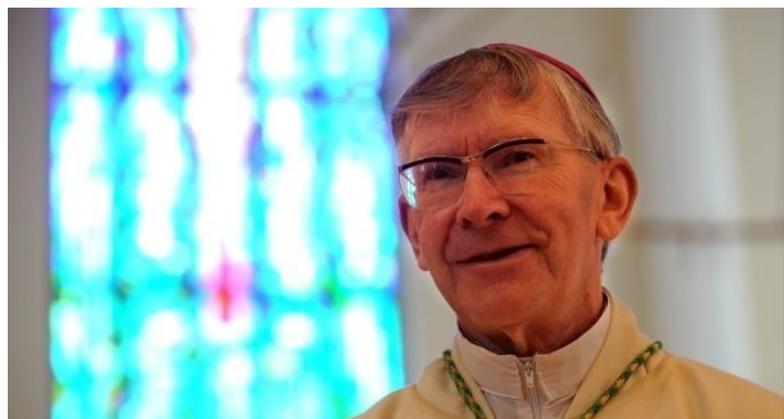
That's why Easter Day and the reality of the resurrection are central to Christians. As Jesus is raised from the tomb we are at first confused that this can actually happen; then excited that it has happened; then empowered by it to live life differently and confidently.

There are many people in our society today who think of themselves as being losers: those of us whose dreams remain unfulfilled; those of us for whom relationships have broken down; those of us who are not sure that we have any value, or are even loveable. The proclamation of the resurrection is that Jesus has died and been raised for all. There is no loss in our lives which cannot be turned to gain through faith in him. We are winners!

Have a happy and blessed Easter. Why not drop in to a church to celebrate this great reality?

Bishop: Sick and elderly suffer in priest shortage

The sick, elderly and bereaved in the diocese of Cork are suffering as there are not enough priests to cater for their spiritual needs.



Irish Examiner - According to the Bishop of Cork and Ross, priests in the diocese are "so run off their feet" they cannot make as many visits to the housebound as they traditionally did.

The diocese has disclosed a number of priests are opting to work beyond the normal retirement age of 75 as they realise there are not sufficient numbers to replace them.

There are over 100 priests in Cork and Ross but most are aged 55-60. To cater for a decreased number of vocations, large numbers of parishes have been combined and 90% of the diocese's Catholic schools now have a lay chairperson rather than a priest at the helm.

Bishop Buckley will tell those gathered at today's Holy Thursday Chrism Mass, where priests renew their vows, that the lack of priests remains "an acute difficulty" as more priests are retiring than are being ordained.

In his message, he asks local parish communities "to pray ceaselessly that there would be sufficient priests in the years ahead". More at -

<http://www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/bishop-sick-and-elderly-suffer-in-priest-shortage-265609.html>



Bishop Denis Nulty of Kildare and Leighlin

Lay voice more vital than ever to Church renewal says Bishop

The Church in Ireland must take creative steps to help laypeople be more involved in the life of the Church, a leading priest-theologian has said.

Irish Catholic - As Church leaders discuss greater lay involvement, Fr Tom Whelan, a prominent specialist in liturgy, said that the Church had to move beyond panic about the shortage of priests, and look at how laypeople could lead weekday celebrations.

His call was echoed by Prof. Eamonn Conway, Head of Theology, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick who warned that engaging the laypeople

should not be seen as 'plan B'. "There is a real need now to rediscover the essential and integral role that the laity play in the life of the Church," he said.

Fr Whelan said he was concerned that a certain panic has set in regarding the shortage of priests which is not necessarily warranted.

"If we are to look at our situation in an international context then we need to admit that we have not yet reached crisis point.

"That is not to say that crisis is not around the corner but we have not reached crisis point yet," Fr Whelan said.

He was speaking as the hierarchy circulated a discussion document about how parishes should continue to celebrate the liturgy on a weekday in the absence of a priest. A major liturgical conference also took place earlier this month to consider options around what parishioners can do when there is no priest available to say Mass.

Bishop of Kildare & Leighlin Dr Denis Nulty said "there is absolutely no doubt that lay people are and should be at the centre and at the heart of the Church in Ireland.

"In the past there was a plenitude of priests which did not necessitate the involvement of the laity to the extent that is required today.

"Lay people are vital to the life of the Church given the shortage of priestly vocations today. They live out their baptismal calling through this involvement," he said.

- See more at: <http://www.irishcatholic.ie/article/lay-voice-more-vital-ever-church-renewal-says-bishop#sthash.v14ml4UN.dpuf>

EYRIE - Flying High with the Birds of Prey

Recently, EYRIE Youth Club, a club for children with ASD (Autistic Spectrum Disorder) and their brothers and sisters provided by the Belfast Central Mission's EAGLE



(Embracing Autism through Guidance Love and Education) Project, welcomed Birds of Prey and The Pet Farm to one of their club nights for the children to enjoy.

The event was a great success as evidenced by the picture above. All of the children had a great time engaging with and learning about the animals.

EYRIE looks forward to organising more activities just like this one to help the children with their social skills and to add something extra to their youth club experience.

Belfast Central Mission's EAGLE Project is a service working closely with statutory services and voluntary agencies, the project is tailored to meet the needs of individual children and their families.

- See more at: <http://www.irishmethodist.org/news/15-april-2014/eyrie-flying-high-birds-prey#sthash.Ex1RfJV3.dpuf>



Read and share classic Bible stories with your kids

8/10 parents think it's important to 'pass on' Bible stories – the **FREE Bible Bedtime** app helps you get started. Featuring Martin Coleman's fantastic take on the words, beautiful illustrations and the option to

create your own pictures. Perfect for kids and adults alike, to read together or on your own.

We want this app to help you and your child to explore these classic stories for yourselves. What do you both make of what you read?

You and your child can also use your own pictures in the app. You can print out the basic black and white pictures of the stories to colour in with your child by printing the PDF's from the links on the right. You could also grab some paper and get your child to draw their own picture, or even make a model out of Lego or cardboard or plasticine if you want.

Once you've decided what you want your picture to be, just go to the page of the story you want to use. Then click 'change picture' (top right of the screen).

Now take a photo of your masterpiece on your iPad. You can drag and spin the photo around until you're happy with the size, rotation and so on. Then hit 'save picture' and, hey presto, your picture is now in the story!

At the end of every story, you can even 'publish' your pictures, so you can share them with your friends on email or Facebook. That way, your child's very own picture will be part of a Bible story. We think that's pretty cool.

To download the FREE app for iPad, scan the QR code on the right or visit biblesociety.org.uk/biblebedtimeapp on your iPad. Alternatively, search the app store for 'Bible Bedtime'.

Bible Bedtime is part of Bible Society's [Pass It On campaign](#) – encouraging people to 'pass on' Bible stories, because we believe every child should have opportunity to experience the Bible.

<http://www.biblesociety.org.uk/about-bible-society/our-work/bible-bedtime/>

Funds lost as wealthy churches quit in new gay protest

Two of the wealthiest Church of -Scotland congregations are quitting the Kirk just weeks before the General Assembly over the issue of gay ordination.

Brian Donnelly, Herald Scotland - The move is a new cash blow with the two congregations contributing £315,000 between them to the Church.

One of the congregations has already left, with the second negotiating terms.

The departure of St Catherine's Argyle, in the leafy Grange district of Edinburgh, and New Restalrig in Willowbrae, also in the Scottish capital, comes as almost 1000 key figures are due to gather for the annual meeting of the Church in the city in May.

The two confirmed breakaway congregations are in the "higher givings bracket" and so among the wealthiest in terms of donations.

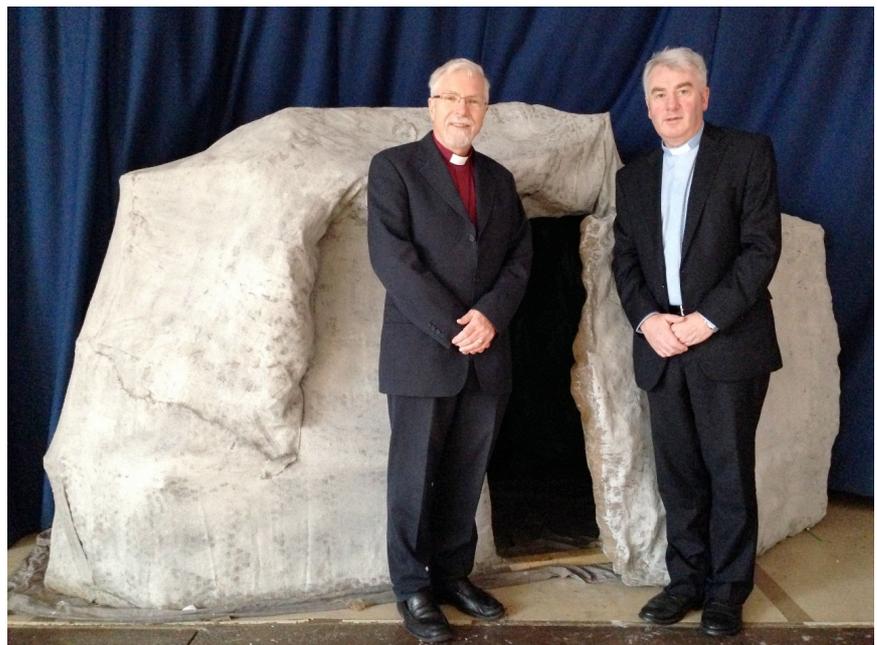
Reverend Robin Sydserff, minister at St Catherine's Argyle, is understood to have strong support in his congregation – which generated income of £200,000 a year – in objecting to the direction of the debate over the issue sparked by the appointment of openly gay Reverend Scott Rennie to an Aberdeen church in 2009.

A move was made to allow -the -ordination of gay ministers at the General Assembly last year, sparking a number of resignations by congregations. Reverend David Court, formerly of New Restalrig, whose congregation donated £115,000 a year, has also now officially signed off, or demitted, from the Kirk and has become a member of the Free Church of Scotland.

His flock of more than 100 now worship in a mission hall in Craigentiny in the city, with New Restalrig under the guidance of locum minister Reverend Peter Nelson.

Cross And Tomb Recreated Outside Willowfield Church, Belfast

A large cross and replica tomb will sit outside Willowfield Parish Church on the Woodstock Road from 6.00pm on this Good Friday evening until 12 noon on Easter Day.



Rt Revd Harold Miller, Bishop of Down and Dromore, and Revd David McClay, Rector of Willowfield, with the model of the empty tomb

The tomb will be 'guarded' by volunteers from the congregation and some will be dressed in traditional uniforms resembling those worn by Roman soldiers.

"In recreating this scene, we want to bring home to our community and passers-by the awfulness of the cross and the death of Jesus Christ by execution almost 2,000 years ago," said Willowfield's rector, Archdeacon David McClay.

"People are welcome to come and view and spend time at the cross and tomb and the 'soldiers' will be happy to talk about their own faith in the risen Christ."

Archdeacon McClay continued: "1 Peter 3.18 tells us that Christ died for our sins, once and for everyone, the just one for the unjust one, to bring us to God.

"God reaches towards us as individuals and he reaches towards our community and our city with His love. We see this clearly in His cross and in His death and in His resurrection."

On Saturday, there will be opportunities for prayer for healing next to the cross and empty tomb (10.30am–12.30pm).

Willowfield's sunrise service of worship on Easter Sunday (6am) will be followed by Holy Communion at the tomb, celebrating the resurrection of Jesus.