



## The essential daily brief on the Irish churches

### Gene Robinson, first openly gay Episcopal bishop, announces his divorce

**Bishop Gene Robinson, whose 2003 election as the first openly gay Episcopal bishop rocked the Anglican Communion, has announced his divorce from his longtime partner and husband.**



*Episcopal Bishop V. Gene Robinson gave the invocation on Sunday, Jan. 18, 2009, to begin the Welcoming Ceremony for Barack Obama's presidential inauguration.*

Robinson, who retired in 2013 as the Bishop of New Hampshire, and his partner of 25 years, Mark Andrew, were married in a private civil union in 2008. The announcement was made public Saturday (May 3) in a statement to the Diocese of New Hampshire.

“As you can imagine, this is a difficult time for us — not a decision entered into lightly or without much counseling,” Robinson wrote in a letter. “We ask for your prayers, that the love and care for each other that has characterized our relationship for a quarter century will continue in the difficult days ahead.”

He explained his views on marriage and divorce further in a column for the [Daily Beast](#).

“It is at least a small comfort to me, as a gay rights and marriage equality advocate, to know that like any marriage, gay and lesbian couples are subject to the same complications and hardships that afflict marriages between heterosexual couples,” Robinson wrote.



*Episcopal Bishop V. Gene Robinson, right, entered a New Hampshire civil union with his longtime partner, Mark Andrew, left, at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Concord, N.H. At centre is Justice of the Peace Ronna Wise.*

Hundreds of parishes left the Episcopal Church in protest of his controversial consecration.

“Whenever you choose to or are called into living a public life, one of the prices you pay for that is public scrutiny, so it’s not surprising that people will pay attention to this,” said Susan Russell, an Episcopal priest at All Saints Church in Pasadena, Calif., and past-president of the LGBT advocacy group Integrity USA.

Robinson, 66, is now a fellow at the Center for American Progress in Washington, D.C.

“My belief in marriage is undiminished by the reality of divorcing someone I have loved for a very long time, and will continue to love even as we separate,” Robinson wrote in his column. “Love can endure, even if a marriage cannot.”

Due to changes in New Hampshire laws on same-sex marriage, Robinson became legally married to his partner when they didn’t opt out of the change in state law, according to Russell.

In 2012, the Episcopal Church voted to allow bishops to permit priests to bless same-sex marriages. Russell said further discussion about the church’s

canon law and prayer book in relation to LGBT concerns will be held at the denomination's convention next year.

Robinson went public with his sexual identity and divorce from his wife in 1986. He has since been open about the heavy toll he has faced under public scrutiny. Four years ago, he underwent treatment for alcoholism. Robinson declined to speak further in an interview.

Critics say Robinson's actions defied scriptural authority and thousands of years of Christian tradition. His divorce could fuel the fire, said Douglas LeBlanc, an Episcopalian who reported on Robinson's consecration when he was an editor at Christianity Today.

"I'm sure there might be some conservatives who might say, 'We told you so all along, if you depart from church teachings on homosexuality, you're opening the door to all kinds of chaos,'" LeBlanc said. "In many ways, I think you are. But I think it's imperative to say, the House of Bishops is not lacking on heterosexual sin."

The Episcopal Church's deliberations on same-sex marriage will likely continue regardless of Robinson's divorce, LeBlanc said. Some, though, might seize on the news of his divorce.

"People will perhaps rub his nose in this for the rest of his life when he's debating folks on the sexuality wars," LeBlanc said. "It probably won't shock a lot of people and will sadden a lot of people, too."



## SATURDAY 17 MAY SHARED STORIES

An opportunity to hear stories of lesbian and gay Christians

It's a privilege when someone shares their story. It might be of joy or of sadness, or both. This event is an opportunity to hear some stories from lesbian and gay Christians and from families too—then to think about how best we can respond. There'll be information about the sources of support available if the story is difficult.

Please reply (for catering purposes) to [mail@acceptingsexuality.org](mailto:mail@acceptingsexuality.org)

Accepting  
Sexuality

SOMEONE TRUSTS  
US WITH THEIR  
STORY

HOW DO WE  
REACT?

HOW SHOULD WE  
REACT?

WHO CAN  
HELP?

Knock Methodist Centre  
17 Knock Road  
Belfast  
BT5 6LA

10.30am–2.00pm  
(Coffee from 10.00am)

Lunch provided  
(contribution of £5  
invited if waged, free if  
unwaged)

Accepting Sexuality is an  
informal group of  
Methodists, ordained and  
lay, working for the  
inclusion of LGBT people  
in the Church. All are  
welcome to its events.

***Accepting Sexuality is an informal group of ordained and lay Methodists working for the including of LGBT people in the church.***

Robinson is no longer the only openly gay bishop in the Episcopal Church. Bishop Mary D. Glasspool was consecrated in Los Angeles in 2010.

In the past decade, the Episcopal Church followed the decline in other mainline Protestant denominations and lost about 10 percent of its members. It had about 1.8 million members in 2012, the last year for which statistics are available.

From Bishop Gene Robinson:

To our diocesan family:

It is time to share with you, our diocesan family, that my partner and husband of 25+ years, Mark, and I have decided to be divorced. As you can imagine, this is a difficult time for us -- not a decision entered into lightly or without much counseling. I'm sure that you will understand the private nature of this change in our lives and our commitment to keeping those details appropriately private. Our life and ministry among you continues to be something that both of us count as an honor and blessing.

We ask for your prayers, that the love and care for each other that has characterized our relationship for a quarter century will continue in the difficult days ahead.

+Gene

See also -

<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/05/04/a-bishop-s-decision-to-divorce.html>

## Evangelical Alliance ejects Oasis Trust

**The Evangelical Alliance has ended the Oasis Trust's membership after a dispute sparked by the Trust's founder, the Revd Steve Chalke, who announced his support for same-sex relationships.**

Church Times - Mr Chalke, who is also the Baptist minister of



*Out of the Alliance: the Revd Steve Chalke*



Oasis Church Waterloo, in south London, wrote an article for the magazine *Christianity*, in January last year, in which he argued that Christians should support permanent and monogamous same-sex relationships ([News, 18 January 2013](#)).

In a statement on Friday, the Evangelical Alliance (EA) said that it was discontinuing Oasis's membership of the Alliance after several months of discussion between the two groups. The EA statement said that even though the board of Oasis had not taken a view on the issue, it had not complied with requests to give equal prominence to the "traditional" view on same-sex relationships on its website, and in its resources. "After many months of prayerful discussion," the statement said, "the Evangelical Alliance council concluded that a relationship between an organisation, and one of its members in which the member felt it could not comply with a reasonable request from council, was not tenable."

A spokesperson for Oasis said that the board was saddened by the EA's decision, and insisted that Mr Chalke's views had not been imposed on any staff, volunteers, or church members: "We have made several changes to our online content, and believed that we had reached a point where both parties could be satisfied that our relationship would continue.

"We would like to take this moment to restate our profound belief that the ethos, values, and mission of Oasis sit firmly within the Evangelical tradition." After Mr Chalke's comments on same-sex relationships last year, the director of the EA, Steve Clifford, said that Mr Chalke had departed from 2000 years of Church teaching on the issue, and from Evangelicals throughout the UK.

Nevertheless, Mr Chalke insisted that he was still an Evangelical, and said that it was his interpretation of the Bible that had informed his views. He also said that, following the civil-partnership ceremony of two gay Christians, he had conducted a service of blessing at his church in Waterloo, despite a ban by the Baptist Union on blessings for same-sex relationships. Mr Chalke was previously criticised by Evangelicals in 2004, after the publication of his book *The Lost Message of Jesus*, which rejected the doctrine of penal substitution ([News, 15 October 2004](#)).

## **The Way of the Cross in Rathkeale**

**Rathkeale is a town with many challenges and many opportunities to witness to the healing and redeeming Grace of God in Jesus Christ. This year the Roman Catholic Priest, Fr. Phonsie Cullinan, the Church of**

**Ireland Priest, The Rev'd Keith Scott and the Methodist Minister, The Rev'd Liz Hewitt decided to seize the opportunity to witness to the work of Christ on the cross by organising an ecumenical walk in "the Way of the Cross" through the town for Good Friday.**



Original artwork for the "Stations" was

commissioned from Patrick Lynch, a text acquired which had its origins in the Anglican Church of Zambia, and the walk got under way.

On Good Friday evening, in what can only be described as spectacular sunshine and warmth, a large crowd of people from all three Churches was joined by Bishop Trevor in a journey through the Passion of Jesus which stopped for prayer and reflection at various points in the town, including the Church of Ireland Church, the site of the original Methodist Church and the Roman Catholic Church. The walk ended at the old Augustinian Abbey at the eastern end of the town. As the prayers concluded at the Abbey all were encouraged to offer one another a sign of peace. In the warm sun people greeted one another without distinction or reluctance, Traveller, Settled, Roman Catholic, Methodist and Anglican. Just for one moment the Cross which breaks down the dividing walls of hostility shone through and the Kingdom of God was revealed.

A spokesperson for the C of I diocese of Limerick & Kilaloe said, "Our diocese has much to offer and much to bear witness to in the wider communities in which we find ourselves, let us pray that there will be many more moments like this, moments, when together with our sisters and brothers in every denomination and none, we join together and bear witness to the justice, peace, and reconciliation of God's Kingdom which has come in Jesus Christ."

## **Warm tributes to a much loved bishop**

**A presentation function took place recently at the Church of Our Lady of the Wayside, Jenkinstown.**



*Conor McCaughley Dpty Chairman of the Pastoral Council with Fr Padraig Murphy PP Lordship and Ballymascanlon presenting an Ardagh Chalice to Bishop Gerard Clifford on his retirement from pastoral duties*

Dundalk Democrat - Fr Padraig Murphy PP was the principal celebrant at the Mass while Bishop Gerard Clifford and Fr Patrick Larkin (retired PP) concelebrated. Conor McCaughley, on behalf of the parishioners of Lordship and Ballymascanlon, presented the bishop with an inscribed Belleek china replica of the Ardagh Chalice.

Mary Cumiskey presented the bishop's sister, Rose Briody, with a bouquet of flowers while Rose McEneaney gave an address and Aileen Murphy made a presentation on behalf of the parish pastoral council.

Bishop Clifford is a native of the area, so it seemed appropriate that the parish of Lordship and Ballymascanlon should mark his retirement as auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Armagh. It is the parish where he has lived during his 23 years as a bishop in the diocese.

While many know of his work as a bishop in the archdiocese, few may realise the contribution he has made to the Church in general.

After more than 10 years as catechetical advisor (or ecclesiastical inspector) in the primary schools of the diocese he was, while a curate in Portadown, appointed in 1979 as Diocesan Director for Ecumenism.

The following year he moved as curate to the parish of Kilmore in Armagh and continued his work in ecumenism. In 1984 he was appointed the first full-time executive secretary of the Irish Bishops' Conference and held that post until 1991 when he was appointed Auxiliary Bishop of Armagh.

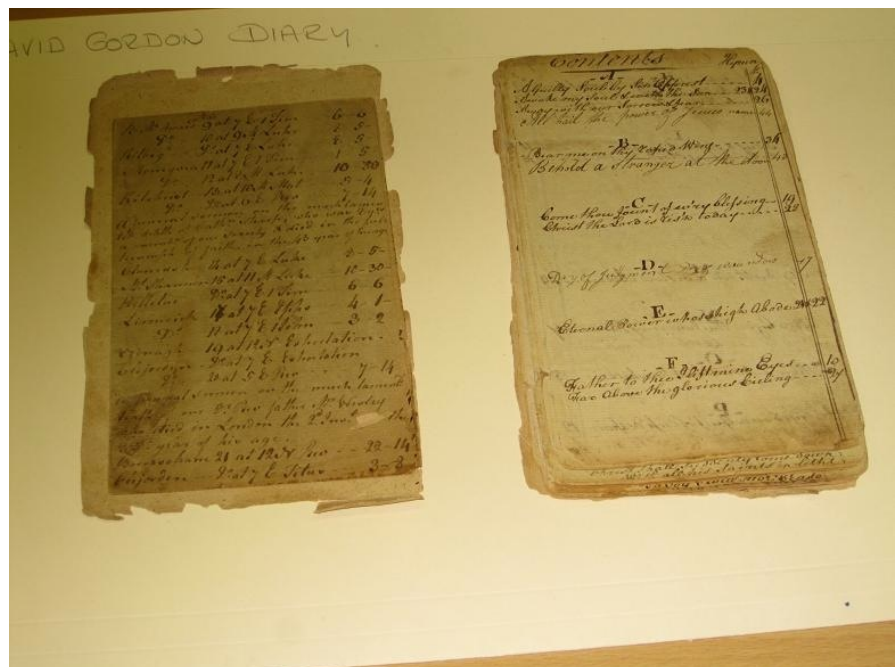
The episcopal motto he chose 'Ut Unum Sint', (that they may be one), expresses the hoped-for reconciliation of the two principal Christian traditions in Ireland, something for which Bishop Gerard has worked assiduously over the years.

His many gifts and selfless contribution to the work of the Irish Bishops' Conference over the last twenty years have been particularly marked in the areas of ecumenism, education and in pastoral care. He was a member of the Bishops' Commission for Ecumenism, the Advisory Committee on Ecumenism, the Inter-Church Standing Committee on Mixed Marriages, the Irish Inter-Church Committee (also known as the Ballymascanlon Conference).

He was a member of the Episcopal Commission for Missions and in more recent years his sensitivity and compassion were evident in Cura during his successful tenure as president of the crisis pregnancy agency. Bishop Gerard is the longest serving auxiliary bishop in the history of the diocese, and the longest serving bishop in the diocese since Cardinal Michael Logue who died in 1924.

## Irish Methodist preacher's diary returned from USA

Over 200 years ago, a young itinerant Methodist preacher noted the time, dates and locations of his daily preaching appointments and the texts on which he preached.



*The Gordon Diary*

He also copied hymns from various sources to be used in worship. As David Gordon penned his record and compiled his hymnal, he could hardly have imagined that these small notebooks with their copperplate entries would be among the possessions his descendants would take with them to America; he would have had even less idea that the items would be lovingly preserved and ultimately given to the local Conference of the United Methodist Church there for safe-keeping; and he could not have begun to conceive that they would one day be flown back across the Atlantic to be handed over to the Methodist Church in Ireland in a special ceremony attended by dignitaries from both Church and State.





*Photographed after the handover ceremony: (L-R) The Rev Ian Henderson (President of the Methodist Historical Society of Ireland), Gregory S Burton (American Consul General), the Rev Dr Bob Williams (General Secretary of the UMC General Commission on Archives and History), the Rev Dr Heather Morris (President of the Methodist Church in Ireland), the Rev Robin Roddie (MHS Archivist) and Frank Flood (Deputy Joint Secretary of the British-Irish Intergovernmental*

David Gordon was born in Ballymena in 1757. He entered the Methodist itinerancy in 1785 and died 15 years later. Though relatively short, his ministry was very fruitful as Gordon was instrumental in the conversion of Gideon Ouseley, the most celebrated and effective Irish evangelist of his day.

The handover of his diary and hymnbook took place today in Belfast, with the Rev Dr Bob Williams presenting the historic documents to Irish Methodist Archivist the Rev Robin Roddie. Special guests included the American Consul General and the Deputy Joint Secretary of the British-Irish Intergovernmental Secretariat, along with senior representatives from the Methodist Church in Ireland. Dr Williams commented on the fragility of the little collection of pages which had survived to bear witness to the strength of the spiritual bonds between the United Methodist Church and the Methodist Church in Ireland. American Consul General Gregory S Burton also highlighted the close relationship between Ireland and the United States, while Methodist President the Rev Dr Heather Morris commented on the heritage of faithfulness and spiritual passion that connected eighteenth-century Methodism with the Church of today.

In addition to the Gordon diary, those attending the ceremony also had an opportunity to view many other significant items of Methodist memorabilia held in the Methodist Archives in Edgehill College. Nor did Dr Williams leave empty handed. Having handed over the documents, he was presented with a small wooden bust of John Wesley to take back with him to the United Methodist Archives in the United States.

### **‘Life to the End’ Mizen to Malin Cyclists**

**On Saturday, 3rd May, 10 parishioners from the Church of Ireland Parishes of Castleknock and Mulhuddart, with Clonsilla, set off on a charity cycle from Mizen Head to Malin Head – 640 km in 6 days – in aid of the Irish Motor Neurone Disease Association. They are all friends of Bishop Paul Colton who was rector of their parish from 1990 to 1999.**



*Bishop of Cork meets up with some of the Castleknock Cyclists on the road between Durrus and Drimoleague, Co. Cork.*

What is truly remarkable is that one of their number, Eddie Greene, aged 70, was himself diagnosed with Motor Neurone Disease several years ago. While MND – an incurable neurological condition – takes its toll physically, Eddie is undaunted in both spirit and determination. The cycle has been aptly named ‘Life to the End: Mizen to Malin.’

Eddie started the cycle today at Mizen Head with a group of his friends from Castleknock Cycling Group. They are aiming to raise funds for the Irish Motor Neurone Disease Association.

Bishop Paul Colton caught up with the group before they managed to get out of the Diocese of Cork, Cloyne and Ross, to wish them well and to give them his support. (No sign of him getting on a bike too!).



*Eddie Greene*

Bishop Colton said:

They are all an inspiration. Eddie is an amazing example of human determination and generosity. He always has been in the way he works voluntarily and helps others in so many practical ways. Even now he and his friends are still trying to help others. I hope many will be inspired by their efforts and lend their financial support.

People can donate online via the online [charity website Life to the End: Mizen to Malin.](#)

## **Appointment in Limerick**

**The Very Rev'd Sandra Pragnell has announced the appointment of Edna Clare Wakely M.Th. (TCD), B. Music, Hons. (Rhodes University, South Africa), L.R.S.M., R.U.L.M., Professional Certificate in Ministry (St. John's College, Nottingham) as Curate-Assistant in Limerick City parish. Edna will take up her new post this month.**

Edna was born in County Tyrone, Northern Ireland. She was educated at Omagh Academy, Queen's University,





Belfast, Rhodes University, South Africa (where her husband was Professor of Old Testament and Hebrew) and Trinity College, Dublin. She has also lived in Edinburgh and Austin, Texas while her husband was on sabbatical leave. The family relocated to Churchtown, Dublin in 2001. She has two daughters, Jenny, a qualified solicitor and Joanna, who also studied law. Both daughters live in Dublin. She is a qualified music teacher and has taught privately and in various schools in South Africa, as well as The High School in Dublin. During her years in South Africa Edna was organist at Christ Church, Grahamstown, and after coming to live in Dublin, at St. John's Sandymount for eleven years.

Edna enjoys meeting new people (while also keeping up long-standing friendships) music teaching, choral singing, attending concerts, poetry, sunshine, gardening, walking, reading, cycling, travelling, needlework (and other crafts) baking, entertaining spending time with friends, and Biblical Studies (Her Masters' thesis, "It is no secret that the Old Testament is a lost treasure in the Church today," is on aspects of the Old Testament).

She is greatly looking forward to starting her curacy in Limerick City parish, working amongst the people there, and getting to know them in the coming months.

## Dublin's May issue of The Church Review

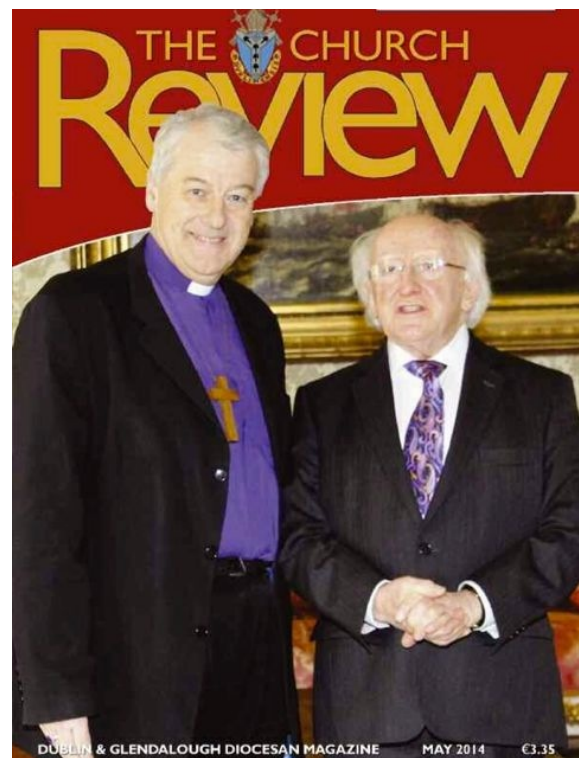
**The May edition of the Church Review is out now. This month's issue of the diocesan magazine of Dublin and Glendalough is packed full of news and information from around the dioceses.**

Canon Patrick Comerford writes about Sir Thomas Myles, the forgotten surgeon who masterminded the Kilcoole gunrunning 100 years ago.

There is a report on the institution of the Revd Olive Donohoe in Athy and there is an outline of proceedings at the Church of Ireland Primary Schools Management Association's fourth conference.

The annual Ecumenical Service of Thanksgiving for the Gift of Sport is highlighted and there are reports on the first meeting of the Anglican Jewish Commission to take place in Dublin and the 91st annual meeting of the Irish Council of Churches.

The commissioning of diocesan readers and the launch of the St Mary's Home recipe book are also featured this month.





Notes from Christ Church and St Patrick's Cathedrals and from parishes the length and breadth of the United Dioceses are included.

## **Canon Sam Barton - tribute**

**The death took place last week of Canon Sam Barton, rector of the Fahan group of parishes. He had been ill. His funeral took place yesterday afternoon, the service being conducted by Canon Harry Trimble.**

Rt Reverend Ken Good, Bishop of Derry and Raphoe, said in a statement, "Throughout the diocese, and far beyond, there is shock and sadness at the news of the death of Canon Sam Barton.

'Sam was much loved not only by his parishioners in the Fahan Group of Parishes but also by the wider community as well as throughout the diocese. He had a remarkable rapport with people and was known and respected for his active engagement in community life.

'After ordination as deacon in 1984, his parochial ministry, apart from a curacy in Ballywillan in the Diocese of Connor, was served entirely in Derry and Raphoe. He has undertaken many responsibilities in the diocese including Diocesan Education Coordinator, Communications Officer and Canon of St Eunan's Cathedral, Raphoe.

'Sam faced his illness with great courage, with realism and with strong faith. He deeply appreciated the support he and his family received from so many people. I assure Sandra and Niall and the wider family of our deep sympathy, our prayers and our support."

**See also - Press comment today - Catholic Herald on Jean McConville**

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