



## **Irish Council of Churches praises Father Martin Magill**

The President of the Irish Council of Churches has praised the Catholic priest whose words at the funeral of Lyra McKee resulted in sustained applause.

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On Wednesday Father Martin Magill, the Parish Priest at St John's Parish, Belfast, told the packed St Anne's Cathedral: "Why in God's name does it take the death of a 29 year old woman with her whole life in front of her to get us to this point? As Christians recalled the death of Jesus on the cross, we remembered that his death was not in vain but was for us the doorway to eternal life. I dare to hope that Lyra's murder on Holy Thursday night can be the doorway to a new beginning."

Fr Martin received a standing ovation and on Friday it was announced that there will be new talks to re-establish power sharing at the Northern Ireland assembly.

Reverend Brian Anderson, who is a Methodist minister in Belfast, says Father Martin Magill may have played a significant role in finding a way to end Northern Ireland's political deadlock.

Rev. Anderson is hopeful the reaction to Lyra's death, and Fr Martin's words at the funeral, will help create an opportunity for political progress: "In some ways, what he said will allow them off their hooks and out of their corners - because there's a momentum now.

"Let's work towards a hopeful fresh start in Northern Ireland."

At Lyra McKee's funeral, the leaders of Sinn Fein and the Democratic Unionist Party sat side by side in St Anne's Cathedral, listening to Fr Martin's words. It was seen as a rare show of unity.

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“He was prophetic in that moment. There’s a groundswell going on and Martin captured it in his words and in his message”.

“I sent him a text on the morning (of the funeral) knowing he was going to speak and my text said to him ‘my prayer for you today is that the Spirit of the living God will fall afresh on you’. And I texted him at night and said ‘I think my prayer was answered.’”

The Methodist minister believes the church needs to continue to put pressure on politicians to find a way for the Assembly to restart its work as the devolved government. “Let’s speak strongly but fairly - with a Christian grace. Let’s work towards a hopeful fresh start in Northern Ireland.”

Rev. Anderson and Fr Martin have worked together in recent months to try to stop paramilitary killings and violence in Belfast, where the two men work in different parts of the city.

The Methodist believes his Catholic friend may continue to play a role in putting pressure on Northern Ireland’s politicians.

“He has this ability to be trusted. He has this ability to speak out. And he has this ability to come alongside those who have been victimised in different ways. So what happens with Father Martin, and I mean this generously, God only knows, as God uses him. But he has and is a significant voice for Northern Ireland.”

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## **Methodist President welcomes talks between Prime Minister & Taoiseach**

On hearing of the proposal for talks with the political parties announced yesterday by British Prime minister Theresa May and Leo Varadkar, the Irish Taoiseach, the President of the Methodist Church in Ireland, the Rev. Billy Davison in welcoming the announcement has issued the following Statement:

“ I am encouraged by this announcement and pray that all parties will respond positively to it. Coming so soon after the murder of Lyra McKee, I trust that the groundswell of support from the general public for a way to bring our politicians back to Stormont, will be a driving force for our political leaders to meet around the table and engage with each other to find a way forward for all our communities. The convening of such a meeting is the easy part its the dealing with all those issues outstanding between the two major parties which will enable the log jam to be broken”

## **Pro-life groups say changing NI abortion law goes against devolution rules**

The Women and Equalities Committee are calling on Westminster to change abortion law in Northern Ireland, but pro-life groups point out that none of them represent Northern Ireland.

A report <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmwomeq/1584/1584.pdf>

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released by a group of MPs is recommending new legislation to allow an unborn child with life limiting disabilities to be terminated in Northern Ireland.

Currently, abortions are only allowed in extreme circumstances and the plan is to allow them in cases of 'fatal foetal abnormality'.

Co-founder of pro-life group Both Lives Matter, Dawn McAvoy, told Premier News that changing abortion law is not Westminster's decision to make: "Westminster shouldn't interfere because abortion is a devolved issue to Northern Ireland.

"Health and justice are both devolved to our local assembly and that really is a strong part of the basis of the Good Friday Agreement from 1998. So it would be contrary to the understanding between the UK Government and Northern Ireland and that peace agreement."

However, there is currently no government at the Northern Ireland assembly at Stormont, leading campaigners to say there must be a timetable put into action by the UK government for women to access abortion legally in the meantime.

Those in favour of making terminations more accessible say many women already travel to England alone to undertake the experience or buy abortion pills online.

The report also cites a UN Committee who said there were 'grave' and 'systematic' breaches of women's rights in Northern Ireland's abortion laws.



Both Lives Matter point out though that the Women and Equalities Committee report does not take into account the 88% of submissions in a Comres poll made by the Northern Irish public by people who do not want Westminster to change the law on abortion.

They also highlighted that on page 58 of the report was another report about devolution concerns, supported by two members of the committee. It also drew attention to the fact that the UN committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women's (CEDAW) opinions about Northern Ireland's laws being breaches of human rights were not binding and that their comments should be taken with more measure.

Those pages of the report suggest implementing more regional places of care for expectant women and measuring the impact of them before changing the law.

Dawn McAvoy said: "As a campaign, we are very much always bearing in mind the two lives that are in existence,



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at least, in every pregnancy and our name says both of those lives matter.

“So we have always said that when a woman in that circumstance receives a prenatal diagnosis where her unborn baby will probably not live for very long, much more can and should be done to provide support and care for women in those circumstances and their wider family, and that includes Northern Ireland, but across the UK”.

“If this legislation went to the House of Commons there is no guarantee that MPs seeking wider abortion change, that they wouldn’t tag amendments on and then the scope of the legislation would be pushed much wider.”

## **Archbishop of Canterbury invites ecumenical observers to the Lambeth Conference 2020**

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, is inviting leaders of other Christian Churches to send observers to next year’s Lambeth Conference of Anglican bishops. For next year’s event, invitations are being extended to a greater number of Pentecostal and Evangelical Churches and bodies than at previous Lambeth Conferences. A Lambeth Conference spokesperson said that this was to “recognise their importance in the changing face of world Christianity.”

The invitations include those Churches in Communion with the whole Anglican Communion – the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht, the Iglesia Filipina



**The former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, and Cardinal Walter Kasper, the then President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, chat as they walk to an ecumenical reception at the previous Lambeth Conference in 2008.**

Independiente (the Philippine Independent Church), and the Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar. They also include some Lutheran Churches in North America and Europe, which are in Communion with the Anglican provinces in those regions.

Representatives of more than 30 other Christian Churches are being invited to attend as ecumenical observers. These include Churches and Communion with which Anglicans are in formal dialogue, such as the Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Methodist, Lutheran and Reformed



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Churches and also multi-lateral bodies such as the World Council of Churches and the Global Christian Forum.

In addition to leaders of Churches in Communion and ecumenical partners, representatives from Churches formed by people who left the Anglican Communion are also being invited to send observers. These churches – the Anglican Church of North America (ACNA), the Anglican Church of Brazil and the Reformed Evangelical Anglican Church of South Africa (REACH-SA) – are not formally part of the Anglican Communion but are recognised to different extents by some of the Communion's provinces.

The Lambeth Conference takes place once every 10 years. The Archbishop of Canterbury invites all eligible bishops from the 40 Anglican Communion provinces, or member Churches, to take part, as well as the bishops from the five extra provincial dioceses – Ceylon, Portugal, Spain, Bermuda and the Falkland Islands. Recent Lambeth Conferences have been attended by a number of ecumenical guests and observers who attend sessions of the conference and may be invited to speak, but do not vote.

The Lambeth Conference 2020 – [God's Church for God's World: walking, listening and witnessing together] - will take place at the University of Kent in Canterbury from 23 July to 2 August. The Lambeth Conference is one of the four Instruments of Communion, or unity, within the Anglican Communion. The others are the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Primates' Meeting, and the triennial Anglican Consultative Council.

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## **Anglican Consultative Council – ACC-17 – gets underway in Hong Kong**

CAP - Most of the Anglican Consultative Council's sessions will take place at the Gold Coast Hotel, about 45 minutes from central Hong Kong. The venue is said to be more economical than a hotel in the main part of the city. Photo: Gold Coast Hotel

The members of the Anglican Consultative Council are arriving in Hong Kong for the start of an eight-day meeting that will examine the communion's mission and ministry, and during which some of its internal differences might surface.

Those issues include relief and development work, women, families, domestic violence, human trafficking, poverty and hunger, climate change, and indigenous people, according to the draft agenda.

<https://aco.org/media/345949/acc-programme-190328.pdf>

Members will also consider more church-related topics such as faith and order work, liturgical consultations, ecumenical and interreligious relationships, theological education and prayer initiatives.

The council meets every three or four years, and the Hong Kong meeting is the council's 17th session. The ACC last met in April 2016 in Lusaka, Zambia. It is returning to Hong Kong where it met in 2002 for its 12th meeting. The first meeting was held in Limuru, Kenya, in 1971.



The theme for ACC-17 is “Equipping God’s People: Going Deeper in Intentional Discipleship.” It follows a call from ACC-16 three years ago for a focus on intentional discipleship throughout the Anglican Communion. “Intentional discipleship” is defined as the deliberate prioritizing of individual and organizational actions to live as Christ’s disciples and to bring others into that life.

The ACC’s objective, according to its constitution is to “advance the Christian religion and in particular to promote the unity and purposes of the Churches of the Anglican Communion, in mission, evangelism, ecumenical relations, communication, administration and finance.” Among the ACC’s powers listed in the constitution is one that says it should “develop as far as possible agreed Anglican policies in the world mission of the church” and encourage the

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provinces to share their resources to work toward accomplishing those policies.

Spreading the Gospel and “continuing to further the mission of the church” needs to be at the heart of the meeting, said Ballentine, who will be attending her second ACC meeting.

Of the communion’s 40 autonomous churches, or provinces, and six other national or local churches known as “extra provincials only Nigeria and Uganda are not sending members to the Hong Kong meeting. The ACC17 roster is here -

[https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/345952/acc-17-members\\_updated-190410.pdf](https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/345952/acc-17-members_updated-190410.pdf)

The representative nature of the ACC makes it the “appropriate place” to raise the issue of the conflict that emerged after it was learned that Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby decided to exclude the same-sex spouses of bishops invited to the 2020 Lambeth Conference.

Discussion of the Lambeth Conference is now scheduled for the late morning of May 4 as one of three items in the 19th of the meeting’s 21 business sessions. Also on that session’s agenda are a discussion of ACC finance and organizational matters (carried over from the previous session) and the first of two times when the members will consider resolutions. The session is scheduled to last 75 minutes. The last meeting of the ACC saw passage of 45 resolutions, all of them on one up-or-down consent calendar vote.

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The location of this meeting has changed since April 2016 when ACC officials and the Anglican Episcopal Church of Brazil announced that Sao Paulo, Brazil, would host the 2019 conference. In September 2017, the Anglican Communion Standing Committee said that the meeting would move to Hong Kong because, according to the Anglican Communion News Service, it had been scheduled at what “would be a challenging time for [Brazil] and for the Anglican Church there.”

Concerns were raised about the country’s political and economic instability along with the province’s “discussions on human sexuality and marriage,” which were due to take place at its 2018 provincial synod. Brazil’s Anglicans voted in June 2018 to change their canons to permit same-sex marriage.

## **Leader of bombed evangelical church in Sri Lanka offers forgiveness to attackers**

The leader of an evangelical church bombed in Batticaloa, Sri Lanka on Easter Sunday offered forgiveness to the attackers.

Pastor Roshan Mahesen also spoke of his commitment to continue the church’s mission.

Speaking in London this week Pastor Roshan said: “We are hurt. We are angry also, but still, as the senior pastor of Zion Church Batticaloa, the whole congregation and every family affected, we say to the suicide bomber, and also to the group that sent the suicide bomber, that we love you





and we forgive you, no matter what you have done to us, we love you, because we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

“Jesus Christ on the Cross, he said father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing. We also, who follow the footsteps of Jesus Christ, we say, for the Lord forgive these people.”

In the video shared by Sri Lankan Christian ministry ‘The Life’, Pastor Roshan said: “I want to take this opportunity to thank every church around the world, every believer, every person known to me and unknown to me who has contacted me, calling me, sending messages of condolences, and then words of encouragement.

“I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart, every word you speak brings such comfort and strength. We will stand and continue what the lord has purposed in our life and we are ready, and we will continue to fulfil the mission the Lord has given us.”

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## Muslims to gather at Cathedral gates in stand against terrorism

Muslims will gather at the gates of a Welsh cathedral on Sunday in a show of solidarity with Christians a week after the terrorist attacks on churches in Sri Lanka.

Members of the Muslim community in Bangor will gather outside Bangor Cathedral during its morning service and then meet with worshippers to express their sympathy.

Ayad Mawla, from the Bangor Islamic Centre, wrote to the Dean of Bangor, condemning the “abhorrent events” and asking for permission to make a symbolic gesture of solidarity against terrorist attacks on religious buildings.

The Bishop of Bangor, Andy John, welcomed the “gracious gesture” from the town’s Islamic community.

He said, “We are all conscious that there are forces which seek to set people against each other and to create a climate of fear and suspicion. This gracious gesture by our Muslim friends shows we can overcome hatred and violence and I’m delighted the Cathedral in Bangor will host this meeting of solidarity. It builds on the excellent relationships we have established together between Cathedral and the Islamic community.”

## Today in Christian history

**April 27, 1667:** Blind, bitter, and poor, Puritan poet John Milton sells for ten pounds the copyright for *Paradise Lost*

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—a book that would influence English thought and language nearly as much as the King James Version and the plays of Shakespeare. The theme of the epic appears in its opening lines: "Of man's disobedience, and the fruit / Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste / Brought death into the world, and all our woe, / With loss of Eden.

**April 27, 1775:** Moravian minister and missionary Peter Boehler dies. He met John Wesley in 1737 while both were sailing to minister in America, and his assurance of faith and belief in joyous, instantaneous conversion left a permanent mark on Wesley

**April 28, 1789:** In the South Pacific, a band of hedonistic sailors stages the famous mutiny on the Bounty. The mutineers then sailed to uninhabited Pitcairn Island, where they soon fell into drinking and fighting. Only one man and several women (taken earlier as slaves) and children survived. The man, Alexander Smith, discovered the ship's neglected Bible, repented, and transformed the community. The Bible is still on display in a Pitcairn church.

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