

The essential brief on the Irish churches

Portadown inter-church group backs People's Park project

The £5.5m redevelopment of The People's Park has been welcomed by the town's inter-church group which says it can "help build bridges of reconciliation in Portadown".



Portadown Inter-church Forum, which is made up of lay people from churches across the community divide, has pledged to play its part "to bring people together and reflect on what a shared future in the town means".

The forum was recently briefed on the work currently under way to enhance the park as a 'shared space'.

The co-chairs of the forum, which was launched in 2010, are Dr Alan Turtle and Mr Tony Creaney, both of whom have been involved in cross-community work for nearly 25 years.

A representative for the forum said, "The plans are very exciting and will be a real enhancement of that area. The vision of the park as shared space is exactly what Portadown needs with all of the tension and divisiveness it has endured in recent times.

“Of course, shared space has many benefits for all in this community but with the benefits come responsibilities – to respect the space and other communities, to not provoke division or support intolerance, and to reach out a hand of friendship and understanding to those from another background.”

Peter Osborne, chair of the Community Relations Council, which supports the inter-church group, said, “Here is an opportunity for civic leaders in Portadown to seize with enthusiasm the regeneration of the People’s Park with an enhancement of sharing, not separation.

“We appreciate the challenges that continue to exist in Portadown. We want to continue to engage with local communities to move on from the past constructively and the regenerated People’s Park has an important role to play in how that happens.

“The PEACE Programme has contributed much over many years to building reconciliation and supporting the peace.”

Pat Colgan, chief executive of the funding body, the SEUPB, said, “Upon completion, this EU funded project will create a new shared space that can be used by all communities to help promote reconciliation and understanding.

“This is one of the key objectives of the PEACE Programme which, over the past seven years, has provided approximately €100 million to projects like the People’s Park across Northern Ireland and the border region of Ireland.”

Eco Congregation Ireland Says It’s Time to Celebrate Creation

Church of Ireland parishes are encouraged to join with faith communities throughout the world in celebrating “Creation Time” from September 1st to October 4th 2014.



Creation Time, which is endorsed by the World Council of Churches and actively promoted by Eco–Congregation Ireland (ECI), is an opportunity to reflect on the wonder and

mystery of God's Creation and to choose better ways to relate to the living earth, ways that reflect God's ways of justice and peace.

This year's theme is 'God, Whose Farm is All Creation', which ties in with the fact that 2014 has been designated by the United Nations as the International Year of Family Farming (IYFF).

The goal of IYFF is to reposition family farming (which is the predominant form of agriculture in the food production sector world-wide) at the centre of agricultural, environmental and social policies in the national agendas by identifying opportunities leading to a shift towards more equal and balanced development.

Resources on the theme, including sermon starters, liturgy, prayers and background information, are available on the Eco-Congregation Scotland website – <http://www.ecocongregatonscotland.org/creationtime>. Recommending these 'excellent resources', ECI chairman Ven Andrew Orr says: 'Family farms are the backbone of rural life throughout Ireland and even those who live in urban areas often have a family farming connection just a generation or two ago. With their generations of experience, small local farmers often understand the importance of caring for their environment; but across the globe family farming is under threat from a combination of multinational corporations, government policies and climate change. These resources help us to cherish and give thanks to God for our farming communities and those who supply our food, and encourage us to take action to protect God's creation.'

ECI encourages parishes and individuals to consider ways in which they can be more sustainable by taking an eco-friendly approach to worship, lifestyle, property and finance management, children's and youth work, community outreach and contact with the developing world.

A good starting point is to work through the ECI church check-list, which can be found in the first section of Resources on the ECI website – www.ecocongregationireland.com/modules. This need not take more than an hour and you might be pleasantly surprised to see what steps you are already taking as well as picking up ideas for new initiatives!

ECI, an ecumenical project of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting, receives a small sub each year from the five denominations involved – Roman Catholic, Church of Ireland, Methodist and Presbyterian and the Religious Society of

Friends. In order to continue its work, ECI is also reliant on donations and grants. We would be grateful if parishes would consider holding a retiring collection for the work of ECI after their Creation Time or Harvest Thanksgiving service.

Contact: Ven Andrew Orr: andreworr1234@gmail.com

Midleton College Principal Appointed Principal of Kilkenny College

The Board of Governors of Midleton College – a Church of Ireland co-educational, day and boarding, second-level school in Cork – announced yesterday that the school principal, Mr Simon Thompson, has been appointed as the new Principal of Kilkenny College.



Announcing Mr Thompson's departure to the Midleton College community, the chairperson of the Board, the Right Reverend Dr Paul Colton, Bishop of Cork, Cloyne and Ross said that Mr Thompson's eleven years as Principal at Midleton College had been marked by 'full, energetic and faithful service.'

Dr Colton congratulated Simon Thompson on his appointment to Kilkenny College, one of the largest Protestant boarding schools in the State.

Paying tribute to Simon Thompson's work at Midleton College, Bishop Colton said:

Simon Thompson arrived in Midleton College as Principal at the start of the 2003-2004 academic year. Since then he has served indefatigably and conscientiously. As he departs, we are all conscious, I am sure that, even in the eleven years he has been with us, he leaves his mark positively on the long and noble tradition of our school. He has overseen the growth of the school to the largest pupil and teacher numbers it has ever had in its three centuries in existence. Under his leadership a school development plan was envisioned and finalised. The Colton Building and other developments on our campus were realised. Plans have been laid and fund-raising advanced for the new sports complex. The pre-school *Singing in the Rain* was established.

The curriculum was broadened to include additional languages and business subjects, as well as home economics. Hugely significant too has been his work with the Governors in creating new governance structures for the College, including a Board of Management and a Board of Directors.

Simon Thompson will start his work as Principal of Kilkenny College on 25th August next at the start of the new school year. During the vacancy at Midleton College and while the recruitment of a new Principal gets under way, Mr Bud Morrissey (Deputy Principal), has generously and readily agreed to serve as Acting Principal.

Black Santa funding for humanitarian relief in Gaza

The Black Santa Appeal at St Anne's Cathedral, Belfast, is to donate £5,000 to humanitarian relief efforts in Gaza.

Contributions to the annual Black Santa Sit-Out at Christmas on the steps of St Anne's are collected throughout the year and so the Cathedral is in a position to respond to crisis situations such as that happening in Gaza.

The money will be channelled through Christian Aid to those who need it most. Christian Aid has launched an [emergency appeal for Gaza](#).

Funds raised will help provide emergency healthcare, access to clean, safe drinking water and psychological support to the more than 1,000 children who are suffering as a result of what they have seen and experienced.

Announcing the donation, The Dean of Belfast, the Very Rev John Mann, said: "The helplessness that we all feel when hearing of the suffering of the vulnerable children of Gaza goes beyond and above our opinion as to the cause of this conflict. We want to reach out and support those who can bring some relief. This donation comes with our prayers for a speedy end to the violence."

Church leaders in Wales call for Gaza ceasefire

The Archbishop of Wales and leaders of other Welsh churches are calling for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and for humanitarian help for civilians.

In a joint letter to the Welsh media (July 31), they express their concern for the security of Israeli and Palestinian civilians and condemn the escalating violence.

They also urge people to support the Christian Aid Gaza Emergency Appeal and to support a vigil for peace at the National Eisteddfod on August 5.



Prayers for peace at St John the Baptist Church, Cardiff

The letter follows:

Dear Sir/Madam

In the face of the horrific conflict in Gaza, we have witnessed concern by communities across Wales over the past fortnight in the organising vigils and solidarity marches. Welsh communities are feeling powerless when confronted with harrowing stories and figures being released about the conflict.

As church and other faith group leaders in Wales we are calling for an immediate ceasefire. We are strongly opposed to the ongoing conflict and are concerned for security of Israeli and Palestinian civilians alike, condemning escalating violence by all sides. We believe we have a moral obligation to help the poor and vulnerable whose lives are being devastated by this terrible conflict and urge the people of Wales to support efforts to tackle the root causes of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and call for lasting peace and justice across the region.

Sincerely we urge the UK Government's Foreign Secretary Phillip Hammond to take decisive action to help bring about both a ceasefire and investigations into attacks on civilians and monitoring of the human rights situation.

The current crisis is a result of decades of political failure. Without genuine dialogue and a determination from all sides to achieve a just peace, Palestinians and Israelis will be destined to live through the horrors of violence again and again.

For those attending the National Eisteddfod in Llanelli next week, a vigil will be held outside the Christian Aid tent on Tuesday 5 August at 6pm.

Against the backdrop of escalating violence and the humanitarian needs of over 149,000 displaced people, Christian Aid is appealing to people across Wales to back its Gaza Emergency Appeal with action and donations to support partners to provide emergency healthcare assistance, access to clean water and shelter and psychological support for children.

For more details on the appeal, how to donate and how to petition for ceasefire visit: www.christianaid.org.uk or Text HELP to 70007 to give £5.

Sincerely,

Major Derek Jones, Divisional Commander, The Salvation Army

Most Revd Dr Barry Morgan, Archbishop of Wales, The Church in Wales

Ros Morley, Meeting of Friends in Wales (Quakers).

Revd Meirion Morris, General Secretary, The Presbyterian Church of Wales.

Revd Peter M. Thomas, General Secretary, Baptist Union of Wales.

Revd Dr Geraint Tudur, General Secretary, Union of Welsh Independents.

Revd Simon Walkling, Moderator of the United Reformed Church National Synod of Wales.

Revd Dr Stephen Wigley, Chair of the Wales Synod of the Methodist Church in Wales

Gaza crisis: unimaginable suffering - Christian Aid

With each new day more innocent civilians are being killed as a result of Israel's offensive in Gaza, states Christian Aid.

As of 29 July, at least 827 Palestinians civilians, including 243 children, have been killed in the Gaza Strip. More than 240,000 people have been forced from their homes, fleeing in desperation from one place to another in one of the most densely populated spaces in the world. However, nowhere has proved safe. They cannot leave.

As UN compounds and civilian structures, including 22 medical facilities and countless homes, continue to be targeted, [people are dying as they wait to evacuate](#) the rubble of their homes.

Two civilians have also been killed in Israel as a result of indiscriminate rocket fire from Gaza. We're deeply concerned for the security of both Israeli

and Palestinian civilians and condemn all violence against civilians without exception. We will address humanitarian need wherever it is.

In the name of humanity, this has got to stop immediately. The international community must act to end this culture of impunity.

FCO Minister concerned by persecution of Christians in Iraq and Syria

Following increasing hostility and threats from terrorist group ISIL towards the Christian community in Iraq and Syria, the UK's Minister for the Middle East Tobias Ellwood said:

Yesterday I met representatives of the Iraqi Christian community in London and heard at first-hand some of the appalling reports from Mosul about the threats to Christians by ISIL, leading to many



leaving the city which has been the home of Christians for over 1,800 years. This is the latest example of the brutality and intolerance of this group, which has claimed responsibility for numerous atrocities in Iraq and Syria.

We strongly condemn the persecution of Christians and other minorities on the basis of their religion or belief or ethnicity. The burning of churches and branding of homes is reprehensible, as is the destruction of mosques and desecration of holy sites.

This underscores the need for the international community to support Iraq in facing the threat of ISIL. The UK is providing £5 million in humanitarian aid to Iraq, working with international and regional partners. It also shows the urgent need for formation of an inclusive Iraqi government that can uphold the rule of law and protect Iraq's minority communities. In parallel, the UK is intensifying support for the Syrian moderate opposition who have a pluralistic, democratic vision of a future Syria and are leading the fight against ISIL and Assad's attempts to stoke sectarian tensions in the region.

Press Review

Tel/Guard/Express

Reports that the Archbishop of Canterbury has accused both Israel and Hamas of breaking the rules of war in Gaza. They state Justin Welby said the ariel bombing was "increasingly" failing to distinguish between civilians and combatants and suggested that Israel will inevitably continue to come under attack from Palestinians while they remain "condemned to hopelessness". He accused both sides of breaching "age-old customs for the conduct of war" - Israel by bombing civilian areas and Hamas by siting rocket launches within them. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/gaza/11000909/>

[Israel-and-Hamas-breaking-the-age-old-rules-of-war-in-Gaza-Archbishop-of-Canterbury.html](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jul/30/world-disgrace-gaza-un-shelter-school-israel)

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jul/30/world-disgrace-gaza-un-shelter-school-israel>

<http://www.express.co.uk/news/world/493708/Britain-pledges-extra-3m-for-Gaza-UN-school-attacked-by-Israeli-shells>

BBC/Ind

Reports that the government should consider intervening to stop the Church of England disciplining gay vicars who marry, a former Conservative chairman has said. They state Lord Fowler raised the case in the House of Lords of Jeremy Pemberton, who had his licence to preach revoked after marrying his partner. The Bishop of Sheffield, Steven Croft, spoke in the debate and said: the Church would be holding "a two-year process of structured conversations to explore the changing attitudes to human sexuality and their implications for the life of the Church and its disciplines".

<http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-28567274>

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/government-should-stop-gay-vicars-being-sacked-by-church-of-england-says-conservative-lord-fowler-9638952.html>

BBC

Report that a vicar says he is "exasperated" after a restored cross on the site of a medieval meeting place in Cambridgeshire was stolen. The hand-crafted cross was taken from Sutton Crossways near Ailsworth, Peterborough, between 20 and 22 July, police said. The site was restored in 2002 to mark the Queen's Golden Jubilee. Vicar William Burke said stone carvings had been targeted many times in the area due to their high value.

<http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-cambridgeshire-28564510>

Guard/Times

Reports that the Mayor of London, Boris Johnson won in a case against conservative Christian lobbyists who took him to court over banning a bus ad. It states gay rights campaigners were allowed to run an advert on the side of London buses two years ago saying: "Some People are Gay. Get Over It." But a counter advert from a Christian group entitled "Not Gay. Post Gay. Ex-Gay and Proud. Get Over It", was banned as the Mayor said it was offensive. The Christian Legal Centre's case was defeated when a court ruled that Christians had not proved Boris Johnson was motivated by a desire for electoral advantage in the forthcoming mayoral election.

<http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2014/jul/30/stephen-bates-diary-boris-christian-gay>

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/law/article4162485.ece>