



Military precision, ond remembrances and Episcopal Church liturgy shape farewell to former President



Presiding Bishop Michael Curry, centre; Washington National Cathedral Dean Randy Hollerith, left; and the Rev. Russell Levenson Jr., right, rector of President George H.W. Bush’s Houston parish, perform the commendation.

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With a combination of military precision, Episcopal Church liturgy and fond, sometimes humorous, remembrances from his family and friends, the United States on Dec. 5 formally bid farewell to former President George H.W. Bush.

“When death comes, as it does to us all, life is changed, not ended,” the Rev. Russell Levenson Jr., rector of [Bush’s Houston congregation](#), said during his state funeral sermon. “The way we live our lives, the decisions we make, the service we render matter. They matter to our fellow human beings, to this world that God has given us and they matter to God. Few people had understood this as well or lived their lives as accordingly as President George Herbert Walker Bush.

“Now hear what I said: lived it. Not earned it or strived to achieve it. It was as natural to him as breathing is to each of us.”

Recalling Barbara Bush’s frequent comment to him of “good sermon, too long,” Levenson preached for just more than 12 minutes during the service at Washington Nation Cathedral, which ran nearly two and a half hours.

The service, which [can be viewed here](#), drew a capacity, invitation-only crowd of nearly 3,000 people, including family members, all five living U.S. presidents, senators, representatives, Supreme Court justices, Trump administration officials, diplomats and foreign dignitaries, including German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Britain’s Prince Charles.

It was the fourth presidential funeral held at the cathedral. The [previous three state funerals](#) at the cathedral were

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President Dwight Eisenhower in 1969, President Ronald Reagan in 2004 and President Gerald Ford in 2007. Bush gave eulogies at Reagan's and Ford's funerals at the cathedral. President Woodrow Wilson is entombed at the cathedral, but his 1924 burial service was not a state funeral.

The last funeral at Washington National Cathedral to approach such significance was the [service for U.S. Sen. John McCain on Sept. 1](#). But a state funeral is an honor reserved for presidents, part of the series of tributes coordinated by the [U.S. Army Military District of Washington](#).

Bush's casket arrived by hearse at the cathedral just before 11 a.m., accompanied by the Bush family. Presiding Bishop Michael Curry, Washington Bishop Mariann Budde, the cathedral's Dean Randy Hollerith and Levenson, of St. Martin's Episcopal Church in Houston, waited on the cathedral's steps with the Rev. Rosemarie Logan Duncan, the cathedral's canon for worship.

The military pallbearers slowly and precisely carried the casket up the steps to where Curry and Budde recited the traditional "reception of the body" prayers. "With faith in Jesus Christ, we receive the body of our brother George for burial," Curry said at the door.

The Bush family was escorted into the church and, at the front pew, the president's son, former President George W. Bush, greeted President Donald Trump and former Presidents Barack Obama, Bill Clinton and Jimmy Carter, and their wives, who sat together in the front pew across the aisle from the Bush family.

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Then, the cathedral's bells began to toll 41 times to mark the elder Bush's rank among U.S. presidents as acolytes and clergy, including those from other faiths, slowly led the pallbearers carrying the casket up the cathedral's long aisle. Hollerith and Levenson recited the



anthems from the Book of Common Prayer's Burial Office. [The order of the service is here.](#)

During the service, four eulogists, George W. Bush, former Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney (whose term overlapped Bush's), former U.S. Sen. Alan Simpson of Wyoming and Bush's biographer Jon Meacham, remembered the elder Bush.

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Meacham began the tributes, telling the congregation that Bush was “an imperfect man” who “left us a more perfect union.” Bush, Meacham said, knew that politics could not be completely pure if you wanted to win, and you had to win if you wanted to lead.

Meacham said Bush believed there was a reason he had been spared death during a World War II bombing raid in the Pacific, during which his crewmates died, and he spent the next 74 years of his life in service to that belief.

“His heart was steadfast. His life code, as he said, was ‘Tell the truth. Don’t blame people. Be strong. Do your best. Try hard. Forgive. Stay the course,’” Meacham recalled. “That was and is the most American of creeds.”

Meacham said Bush’s sometimes-mocked “Thousand Points of Light” and Abraham Lincoln’s appeal to the “better angels of our nature” are “companion verses in America’s national hymn.”

Both presidents, Meacham said, called on Americans to “choose the right over the convenient, to hope rather than to fear and to heed not our worst impulses but our best instincts.”

Mulroney, standing at a podium very near Trump, praised Bush’s efforts to preserve and strengthen the North Atlantic Treaty Organization after the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the Iron Curtain. He also praised Bush’s work to achieve the original NAFTA agreement, which he said had been “modernized and improved by recent administrations.” Trump has been critical of both NATO and NAFTA and [recently announced](#) he would withdraw from the later,

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apparently in an effort to force Congress to approve a new version of the trade pact with Canada and Mexico.

“Fifty or 100 years from now, as historians review the accomplishments and the context of all who have served as president, I believe it will be said that in the life of this country, the United States — which is, in my judgment, the greatest democratic republic that God has ever placed on the face of this earth — I believe it will be said that no occupant of the Oval Office was more courageous, more principled and more honorable than George Herbert Walker Bush,” Mulroney said.

During Simpson’s folksy and humorous eulogy, he recalled a time when he said he had fallen from Washington’s A list to what he called the Z list because of his political choices. Bush invited him and his wife to join the Bushes for a weekend. The four had a highly visible departure from the White House. Simpson remembered Bush saying his staff told him not to issue the invitation, but he overruled them, citing friendship over politics.

Bush never hated anyone, Simpson said, recalling that both men had strong mothers who taught them that “hatred corrodes the container it is carried in.”

Bush understood the choices that leaders had to make, the former senator said. Bush was once presented with a bipartisan bill on the budget process, health care, Social Security solvency and other policy issues. To fund the bill, taxes would have to be increased and that would require the president to go against his well-known promise of “Read my lips: No new taxes.” The bill passed in the Senate, but Bush’s fellow Republicans in the House defeated it and,

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Simpson suggested, Bush's willingness to break his no-taxes vow for the sake of the bill led to his failure to be elected to a second term.

Simpson said Bush told him that when faced with tough choices, he chose "the country that I fought for" rather than choosing his party or his legacy.

"Those who travel the high road of humility in Washington, D.C., are not bothered by heavy traffic," Simpson said.

During [his eulogy](#), George W. Bush said his father almost died of a staph infection during his teenage years. That and his World War II experience "made him cherish the gift of life, and he vowed to live every day to the fullest," the 43rd president said of his father, the 41st.

"To his very last days, dad's life was instructive," Bush said. "As he aged, he taught us how to grow with dignity, humor and kindness, and when the good Lord finally called, how to meet him with courage and with the joy of the promise of what lies ahead."

Bush said his father "taught us that public service is noble and necessary, that one can serve with integrity and hold true to the important values, like faith and family.

"He strongly believed that it was important to give back to the community and country in which one lived. He recognized that serving others enriched the giver's soul."

Bush said he learned years later about how his parents' faith sustained them when his sister, Robin, was dying of leukemia at age 3. "Dad always believed that one day he would hug his precious Robin again," he said.



Presiding Bishop Michael Curry, visible in the foreground to the right of the flag, and the Rev. Russell Levenson Jr., rector of President George H.W. Bush's Houston congregation, to the left of the flag, were among those who led President George H.W. Bush's casket out of Washington National Cathedral after the Dec. 5 funeral.

Bush began to cry as he ended his reflection, saying "And in our grief, let us smile, knowing that dad is hugging Robin and holding mom's hand again."

During his sermon, Levenson said Bush's life showed that "faith means more than words," adding that Bush's faith was "a deep faith, a generous faith, a simple faith in the best sense of the word.

"He knew and lived Jesus' two greatest commandments, to love God and to love your neighbor," Levenson said. "The

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president served not just some, but all that God sent his way.”

On the day [Bush died at age 94](#), Levenson said the president’s friend James Baker stood at the foot of Bush’s bed, rubbing his feet for about 30 minutes, causing Bush to smile. Levenson said he had the sense of Jesus’ service on Maundy Thursday, washing his friends’ feet.

Later, all those who were with Bush knelt and placed their hands on the president and prayed “and then we were silent for a full long measure as this man who changed all of our lives, who changed our nation, who changed our world, left this life for the next,” he said.

“It was a beautiful end; it was a beautiful beginning.”

The funeral then continued in the traditional structure of the Burial Office and, after Curry, Budde, Hollerith and Levenson performed the commendation, the military pomp began once again. The pallbearers moved into place and lifted Bush’s casket as the organ began to play the hymn “For all the saints.” The sharp sounds of military commands could be heard over the music as the clergy led the casket from the church.

They waited alongside the hearse parked in front of the cathedral as the casket was loaded for the trip to Joint Base Andrews where Air Force One waited to take the Bush family home to Houston. The former president lay in repose at St. Martin’s Episcopal Church until 6 a.m. on Dec. 6. Another memorial service was held at the church later that morning.

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Bush then travelled by train and then by motorcade to the George H.W. Bush Presidential Library in College Station, Texas, where he was buried next to his wife, who died in April, and their daughter Robin.

‘Don’t force conscientious objectors to participate in abortion’, Irish Catholic Bishops

Irish Catholic Bishops have stressed the importance of allowing “all healthcare professionals and pharmacists” to hold conscientious objections to abortion.

In a statement issued following their Winter General Meeting in Maynooth, the Bishops expressed dismay that “for the most part, the voices of those who voted against abortion in May’s referendum have been ignored.”

In May, the Republic of Ireland voted by referendum to remove an amendment inserted into its constitution in the 1980s to prohibit abortion.

The repeal of the Eighth Amendment, backed by 66.4% of voters, allows legal provision to be made for abortion in the Republic of Ireland.

The Irish health minister Simon Harris said in November that women from Northern Ireland, where abortion remains prohibited except in a few specific circumstances, would be allowed to access abortion services in the Republic.



In its statement, issued yesterday, the Irish Catholic Bishops said: “We are dismayed that, for the most part, the voices of those who

voted against abortion in May’s referendum have been ignored. Even what many people would have deemed to have been very reasonable legislative amendments seeking to provide women with information and to prohibit abortion on the grounds of sex, race or disability, have been rejected.

“As we stated after our Autumn Meeting, Irish society must have respect for the right of conscientious objection for all healthcare professionals and pharmacists. They cannot be forced either to participate in abortion or to refer patients to others for abortion.

“Every one of us has a right to life. It is not given to us by the Constitution of Ireland or by any law. We have it ‘as of right’, whether we are wealthy or poor, healthy or sick. All human beings have it. The direct and intentional taking of human life at any stage is gravely wrong and can never be justified.”

The statement continues: “Women’s lives, and the lives of their unborn children, are precious, valued and always



deserving of protection. Any law which suggests otherwise would have no moral force. In good conscience it cannot be supported and would have to be resisted.

“We offer our prayerful solidarity with everyone dedicated to the sanctity and protection of human life at all stages. We ask everyone of goodwill - whether at home, in parish, in school or at work - to continue to choose and to celebrate the preciousness of life.”

During their winter general meeting, a delegation of bishops met with individuals representing various pro-life groups from both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

The aim of the gathering was to “acknowledge their on-going commitment to upholding the dignity of unborn human life and to consult on the setting up of a new Council for Life under the aegis of the Bishops’ Conference which will operate from March 2019.”

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Presbyterians deny standards ‘are at risk’ at theological college

The principal of Union Theological College in Belfast has played down claims that the quality of its theological courses are “at risk” .

Media reports earlier this week highlighted that the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) had warned that academic standards at the Union Theological College (UTC) are potentially “at risk” in a number of areas.

The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) monitors standards in UK higher education institutions, while Union Theological College (UTC), owned and run by the Presbyterian Church, provides theological degrees for Queen’s University, Belfast (QUB).

However UTC Principal Dr Stafford Carson said that the QAA monitoring report, based on a visit in October, only applied to 25% of teaching.

The report only applies to optional non-degree modules for would-be Presbyterian leaders, and it has no bearing on degrees, he said. Media reports are a “non-story” because he voluntarily approached the QAA and asked it to assess the modules only two years ago, as part of the college’s aim of “meeting robust academic standards” for non-degree courses.

“This is really a non-story” Dr Carson said. “Since we asked QAA to inspect our ministry courses in 2016, the inspectors

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Dr Stafford Carson says the review was part of a planned process he requested



come and review them, we get the reports with areas for improvement and we fully comply with them.”

It is understood that QUB accepts Dr Carson’s assessment of the latest QAA report, in particular that it has no bearing on theology degrees UTC provides for QUB.

“The university has received a copy of the QAA Educational Oversight report and is considering the findings,” a QUB spokeswoman said. “We have no further comment”.

Prayer tour of Eco Candle for climate justice of Enniskillen churches

The Eco Candle, a symbol of prayers for climate justice, has arrived in Enniskillen this week.

The candle is part of the ‘Shine a Light on Climate Justice’ initiative of Eco Congregation Ireland which encourages churches of all denominations to take an eco–approach to worship and other contact with the developing world.

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The Dean of Clogher, the Very Revd Kenneth Hall (right), from St Macartin's Cathedral with the Revd Chris MacBruithin, Curate, and Scott Elliott with the Eco Candle.

The Eco Candle spends a week in each church and last weekend it arrived at St Macartin's Cathedral, Enniskillen, and will remain there until December 8 after which it will go to St Michael's Church.

Eco Congregation Ireland offers resources and support to help churches take practical eco-action in the context of their Christian faith.

A simple church check-list helps churches assess what they are already doing and determine future priorities. Its resources also include sections on Worship and Teaching, Children's and Youth Work, Property and Grounds Management, Finance and Waste, Personal Lifestyles, Working with the Local Community and Thinking Globally.

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Successful merger of three Dublin parishes with more expected in 2019

Archbishop Diarmuid Martin has announced the successful merger of three Dublin parishes into one with more expected in 2019.

More than three years of local planning and consultation has resulted in the establishment of the new Parish of St. Pappin's in Ballymun, incorporating the former parishes of Shangan, Balcurris and Sillogue.

Priests in the new Parish said they had “overwhelmingly positive support” for the move.

The announcement comes as another Dublin Parish Church begins a new future today when Archbishop Martin joins Cardinal George Alancherry for the inauguration of the new Irish headquarters of the Syro-Malabar Church in the Church Lady of the Rosary of Fatima, in Rialto. The Syro Malabar Catholic Church is in full communion with the Catholic Church, with five million followers worldwide. Originating in Kerala in India, it has around 4,000 followers in Dublin alone. The Syro Malabar Community will share use of the Church for worship with Rialto Parish and will be using the newly named St. Thomas' Pastoral centre for other activities.

In Ballymun, all three Churches of the former Parishes will continue to be in use; the Church of the Holy Spirit, Sillogue Road, which will be the primary Church of the Parish, as well as the Church of the Virgin Mary, Shangan Road and

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St. Joseph's in Balcurris. All three are within 1.5km of each other.

The Diocese is providing financial support towards upgrading work on St. Joseph's and the Virgin Mary Church with over €100,000 spent to date on both. At the same time, the former Presbytery at St. Joseph's is being renovated and turned into a new Parish Pastoral Centre at an estimated cost of €250,000. The new centre will have a small Oratory where people can gather for prayer and reflection. It is envisaged that the Parish of St. Pappin's will also use this space as a resource for pastoral outreach and community support, especially for those in the community struggling with mental health, bereavement or addiction issues. Three priests, Fr. Declan Blake, Fr. Ciaran Enright and Fr. Anthony Omolade will run the new Parish.

The amalgamation effectively began in October 2016 when the religious order, the Columbans returned the running of the parish of Balcurris to the Archdiocese. The Columbans carried out extraordinary outreach in the area during their time there, spanning over 40 years. At Mass of Farewell at that time, Archbishop Martin assured parishioners that St. Joseph's would be kept open saying; "This is a turning point in the history of the Catholic community of Ballymun. Ballymun is a community, which encountered much suffering. It is a community, which was victim of many promises made, but never fulfilled. It is a community, which on many occasions must have felt abandoned. It was, however, a community, which never gave up. It is a community, which did so much for its children and young people exposed to pressures of drugs and violence. The

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community can be proud of its schools and indeed can be proud of its children.”

So began a process of bringing three congregations and parish pastoral councils together, beginning with the Easter Vigil in the Holy Spirit Church last year. The Church was full and parishioners gave very positive feedback, saying they found the new direction encouraging and hopeful.

Throughout 2017, they came together for Advent and Lenten reflection evenings, Reconciliation Services and Reflection Days for those involved in various Ministries in the three churches as well as Child Safeguarding Representatives.

At the start of this year, the proposed amalgamation was discussed with all three Parish Pastoral Councils and there was broad support for the proposal. In May, parishioners across all three parishes were fully briefed on what was being planned and again there was a really positive response and local support for the merger.

Fr. Declan Blake, of St. Pappin’s Parish, said they were now looking to the future with confidence. “The gatherings of the faithful from the three Churches as one parish community has been encouraging and life giving and we expect the new parish will enable us to deepen this sense of belonging and worshipping together. We also want to reach out to the young people of our parish in every possible way. The youth from the three parishes are in school together and the new Parish Pastoral Centre opens up to us possibilities in the areas of faith development and pastoral care of young people.”

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The amalgamation now leaves the total number of parishes in the Archdiocese of Dublin at 197 with further mergers expected next year.

