

December 11, 2018



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**‘Presbyterians must shine a brighter light on Church, and get back to being a place of compassion’**



**Rev Jonathan Frazer of Garnerville Presbyterian Church in east Belfast called on the church to do more to help people living with HIV**

**December 11, 2018**

A Presbyterian minister who went public to call on the church to do more to help people living with HIV says that he hopes his words will be the catalyst for others to follow, the Belfast Telegraph reports.

Rev Jonathan Frazer from Garnerville Presbyterian in east Belfast hopes to help cast aside months of controversy and debate to shine new light on Presbyterianism as a compassionate, welcoming haven for those in need.

The clergyman gave an interview to the BBC after it emerged that over 1,000 people in Northern Ireland were living with HIV, with 84 new cases diagnosed in 2017 - 54% of them being men in same-sex relationships.

There was controversy earlier this year when the Presbyterian General Assembly voted to deny people in same-sex relationships the right to be full members.

The move also meant their children cannot be baptised and while Rev Frazer admitted he chose his words carefully, he maintains it was important to show the church is willing to extend a hand of welcome to people who may be going through troubled times.

He said his call comes from a personal and church relationship between Garnerville and Positive Life, an organisation caring for those living with or affected by HIV.

"There's a family within the church whose daughter is very involved in this work and they approached me because they knew we had supported them already in some very simple, practical ways," he told the Belfast Telegraph.

December 11, 2018



"She asked if I would like to speak out because at some point the practical has to move on to something more and it has to move to the greater, to the spiritual.

"For me, with all that has happened in the Presbyterian Church in recent times, it was something I had to speak out about and be involved in.

"This is a reminder of what we were called to do, a reminder of our Christian mandate to reach out to those who are on the margins of our society.

"Our church has historically been very good at doing that, but that's been overshadowed in recent times."

Rev Fraser said he grew up in the church and is very proud to be a Presbyterian.

**December 11, 2018**

He said: "I love it and I don't criticise it, but let's get back to what we do best and that is loving people, not just the good Presbyterians who attend every week, but all of us.

"I think the church can be what the church was meant to be - a place of refuge, a place of hope.

"Living with HIV or being affected by HIV, life is not going to be easy for you, especially in Northern Ireland. If you're not getting any support, if you're struggling, then the church should be there as a place of refuge and hope.

"With HIV there's a nosiness to it. The first thing that people want to know is how you got it and there's a real sense that it's a moral disease, which needs to be taken away, and that stigma and discrimination people feel because of that needs to be taken away.

"The church should be the first people to do that. We need to stand up for those who are marginalised and those who will find no support anywhere else. The local church can provide something that no other organisation can."

While Rev Frazer admitted his words may not sit comfortably with some within the Presbyterian Church, he maintained the time has come to start rebuilding trust. He said: "I know my comments will sound very hollow to some and again that is one of the reasons why I have to speak out.

"I think a lot of trust has been broken. A lot of people will not like the fact that I'm speaking out, both from my own church and wider afield, but if we don't try to reform those bridges then there's no hope.

"What are we being called to do then?"

**December 11, 2018**

"Until we actually show that in practice that we can be that place of refuge and hope, then we can't do anything.

"It's up to us to take that extra step. I know I can't force people into coming to church. I can't force people into believing anything that I believe, but when we take that step towards each other that's when the trust can be rebuilt."

In the past 42 years, membership of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland has fallen by 160,000. The figures, outlined in the 2018 Presbyterian Blue Book, show that in 1975 the Church had 370,000 members. Last year, the total had fallen to 210,000.

Rev Frazer said: "In society there are many myths and misunderstandings that are unfair and unhelpful, but I think our church in a hierarchy sees all with compassion and love and seeks to show that.

"We might get some of the decisions wrong when we look historically at them.

"In hindsight we might not have carried out many things in the proper way, but I think we look at all with compassion and love and empathy and with a sense of belonging. We may not show it very well at times, but we do.

"This year's vote on same-sex relationships was passed by a majority, but not all, of the Presbyterian Church. That's important for people to remember.

"There was a lot of debate, sincere people on both sides who felt they were upholding their biblical principles. But I think you can say we got distracted by our doctrines. We forgot about people. In the church we're not called to think about doctrine, we're called to think about people.

**December 11, 2018**

"We have many people in our church who have struggled with that vote, who have contemplated leaving the Presbyterian Church and my church, but Jesus doesn't call the church at large, He calls us as individuals and as individuals we have to ask how can we make someone who's living with HIV feel like they belong?"

"This isn't an attempt to kick up a bit of dust and make a point about wider Presbyterianism. It's about keeping a focus on the support the church can be there to offer."

"There is positive support there for people and I want to see that acknowledged. The church seems to have lost that part of its voice."

"There are a lot of issues out there which we as a church can have a positive impact on."

"We need to shine a brighter light on the Presbyterian Church, be the leader of society which we have been in the past and get back to being seen as a place of compassion."

## **Moderator praises the work of Storehouse**

On a pre-Christmas visit to Storehouse North Down in Bangor, Presbyterian Moderator, Rt Rev Dr Charles McMullen, praised the work of the charity as a 'deeply caring and compassionate ministry' and 'a tremendous demonstration of churches, community and businesses coming together to show the love of God.'

Set up in 2012, the charity provides emergency food packages to individuals and families in the North Down area who find themselves in a difficult situation through no fault of their own. Each package provides everything that the family,

December 11, 2018



or an individual, will need for 7 days. All those in need are referred to the Storehouse by churches, charities and various agencies with support ranging from one-off requests to continued support over a 6 month period.

Margaret Bailie, chairperson of Storehouse North Down, and a member of Bangor West Presbyterian Church, said that over 3300 people benefit from its work each year, “Our vision is that we will see the day coming when no one in North Down has to go hungry. When we started in September 2012 we gave out 17 hampers in our first month, 6 years on that has increased to around 40 per week, 160 a month.

“Last year alone there were 1800 hampers distributed, which included 500 food packages at Christmastime. One of

**December 11, 2018**

the main reasons for this increase I think is the changes to the benefit system, especially because people in need have to wait such a long time for their new benefits to kick in. Sadly, the need is there and it is growing,” she said.

Storehouse North Down covers Holywood across north County Down to Bangor along the coast to Donaghadee and down the Ards Peninsula. “We partner with many different charities and agencies throughout our local communities who are working day in day out with families and individuals in difficult situations. No one knows when they might need our help and support and that always increases around Christmastime.

“With the involvement of over 50 churches of all denominations working together, organisations like St Vincent de Paul and Christians Against Poverty, we can do so much together to show the love of Christ. But we couldn’t do it without the hundreds of people who share our dream and each week drop food into trolleys in churches across North Down.

“We are also incredibly grateful to our volunteers and to the many businesses who support us as well, like ASDA in Bangor and Sainsbury’s at Holywood Exchange, who gave us around 50 trolleys full of food this year. Eurospar and the Co-Op in Bangor support us in different ways so, to them and all who also support us in our collections, we can’t thank you enough.”

Speaking after his visit, Dr McMullen praised the work of Storehouse, its volunteers and especially Margaret Bailie who he said was such a driving force. “This is a deeply



**December 11, 2018**

caring and compassionate ministry that makes such a difference and is having a profound impact on the lives of so many people.

“It is also a tremendous demonstration of churches, community and businesses coming together to show the love of God, but it is an absolute tragedy that in this day and age it is needed and increasingly so.”

Dr McMullen said that he was ‘very touched’ by the label that accompanies all the hampers, which simply says ‘A small gift because God really loves you’. “Our Lord Jesus Christ told us to feed the hungry. He also said ‘whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’ As His disciples we also need to heed the words of the Apostle James who said, ‘...faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead....faith without deeds is useless.’ I give thanks that here at Storehouse so much action demonstrates an incredible faith and love of our neighbour.”

## **History of Larne parish church now on video**

The history of St. Cedma’s Parish Church and graveyard has been captured on a video launched by narrator Patricia Beattie last week.

The video was produced by director Paul Connelly. It features shots around the grounds, inside the church and around Larne. In addition, Paul Connolly filmed the church

December 11, 2018



**Paul Connolly, Managing Director of Smart Video Ltd, who produced the DVD, with writer and narrator Patricia Beattie, a parishioner of St Cedma's.**

in 3D and this can be accessed on the church's website [www.larne.connor.anglican.org](http://www.larne.connor.anglican.org)

Patricia said: "This will be the first church in Ireland to have such a facility and should promote interest from former parishioners, those wishing to visit Larne and Northern Ireland, as well as being a very useful tool for the church to use."

Using the backdrop of the church interior Patricia narrates the church history pointing out the many richly coloured stained glass windows, the encaustic tiles of the chancel

**December 11, 2018**

floor and east wall and the 32 panelled chancel ceiling where signs of saints, Celtic crosses and Christograms are painted in gold leaf on green linen

The church has had a long history with over 1,500 years of continuous worship on the site. It is recorded that there was a Augustinian monastic settlement on the site around 536 AD, followed by a Franciscans one in the 15th century, with a ministry to the sick of the area, and this was followed by the present Norman built church.

Although the thick walls of the church remain, the church interior, under the direction of the architect Samuel P Close, was greatly altered in the late 19th and early 20th centuries by gifts from parishioners and others including the jewel coloured stained glass windows, two of whom were created in the 1920s by the famous Belfast artist Wilhelmina Geddis.

Patricia added: “The history of Larne is encapsulated in this church and graveyard, as the latter was the only burying site for the Larne district until 1870 and so all denominations and none are buried here with even friends sharing the same grave.

“I hope that this video, which lasts for 20 minutes, will be available for young and old to learn about the history of Larne and in particular some of the history of this unique place of worship - 1500 years of worship for all.”

The video can be purchased at a cost of at least £10 from church administrator Anne Shaw, Inver Parish office, email: [stcedmas@btconnect.com](mailto:stcedmas@btconnect.com) or phone 028 28 274633.

**December 11, 2018**

Proceeds will be donated to the church hall building fund.  
Report courtesy the News Letter.

## **South Belfast St Simon's church hall 'final farewell' after 90 years serving community**

A weekend of festivities have been held to mark the closure of an South Belfast church hall that welcomed thousands through its doors.

St Simon's Parish hall opened its doors to the first visitors in 1939, and saw Village residents through WWII and every year since.

But now the distinctive red brick building is changing hands, with hopes that St Simon's will be able to provide new space for its congregation through a church refurbishment paid for by hall's sale.

Rev Moore said: "The church hall was opened in 1939, prior to the beginning of the Second World War, to serve as a social space for the many organisations within St Simon's Parish and as a gathering place for many important events within the Village.

"Thousands of young people from the area have been through it's doors as members of the uniformed organisations, Church Lads' Brigade and Girls' Friendly Society, Sunday School along with adult organisations such

**December 11, 2018**

as Mothers' Union and Ladies Guild, Bowling and Badminton Clubs and the many important events in the life of the Parish.

"By Easter 2019 when it is transferred to South City to be refurbished and re-opened as a Community Facility for the area the hall will have been in use by the Parish and local community for 90 years."

The hall has also hosted dance club, the Village Festival committee, family celebrations after weddings and baptisms and the local school.

All those who have ever used the hall were invited to bid their final farewell at a reunion and thanksgiving service for the Second Sunday of Advent event.

## **Powerscourt NS Pupils Win Science Video Competition**

Pupils from Powerscourt National School in Enniskerry have scooped the top prize in the Primary School section of the ReelLIFE Science video competition for 2018. Their video '*Science and Me: The Skin*' was chosen from 175 entries by a panel of judges netting them €1,000.

Based in NUI Galway and supported by the Science Foundation Ireland Discover programme, the Community Knowledge Initiative, the CÚRAM Centre for Research in Medical Devices, the National Centre for Biomedical Engineering Science and the Cell EXPLORERS programme, ReelLIFE SCIENCE challenges Irish schools

December 11, 2018



**Students from Powerscourt NS, Enniskerry, Co. Wicklow with teacher Rachael Kinkead, Science Foundation Ireland Senior Executive Laurie Ryan and ReelLIFE SCIENCE Director Dr. Enda O'Connell at the 21st Galway Science and Technology Festival Exhibition in NUI Galway.**

and community groups to communicate science and technology via engaging and educational short videos.

The winners were announced during Science Week 2018. The panel of judges included aeronautical engineer and astronaut–candidate Norah Patten, BT Young Scientist and Technologist of the Year 2018, Simon Meehan and comedian and TV presenter Dara Ó Briain

**December 11, 2018**

Commenting on Powerscourt NS's video, Norah Patten said that it was "nice to see all of the kids participating. Lots of easy to understand science communicated. Love the Lego part, very easy to understand and well planned.

Any age group could watch this and learn something new from it" while Dara Ó Briain commended the "strong involvement from the class" and that there was "loads to learn" from the video.

The video was made and starred Third and Fourth class students who are taught by Rachael Kinkead.

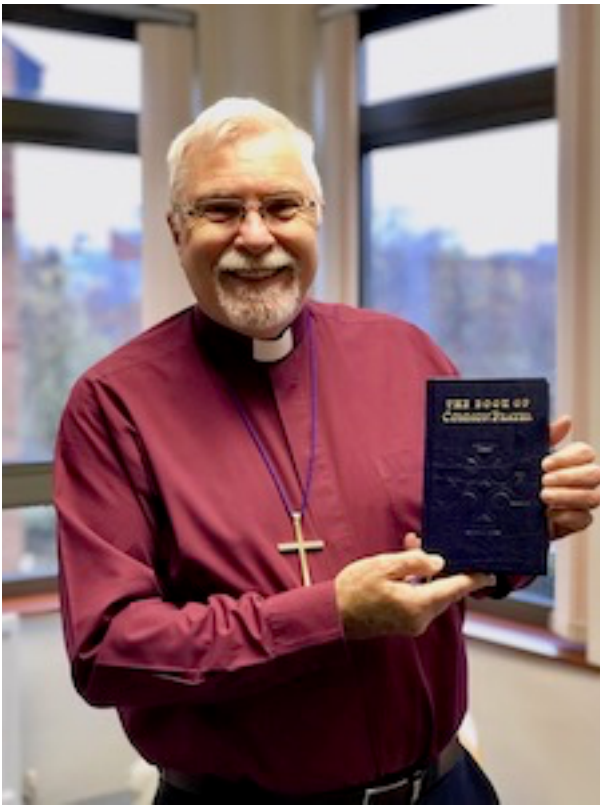
## **Revised pew edition of Book of Common Prayer available for Christmas**

A newly revised pew edition of *The Book of Common Prayer* in a smart blue cover, containing the newly approved *Order for Morning and Evening Prayer for Use on Sundays*, is now available.

*The Book of Common Prayer* pew edition is priced at £20/€22 (with a 10% discount for orders of 10 or more).

Bishop Harold Miller, Chair of the Liturgical Advisory Committee, says: "The new edition of *The Book of Common Prayer* has arrived! For several years, the BCP has been out of print, but I think all will agree that the new edition, with its new navy blue cover, looks and feels every bit as beautiful as its predecessor.

December 11, 2018



“The pagination is almost exactly as in the green book, so the two books can be used together. The new edition incorporates changes made by General Synod in the intervening years, plus the new *Morning and Evening Prayer for Use on Sundays*. And the first thing many people will notice is that it has four marker ribbons instead of the previous three. We look forward to how the new BCP edition will be used to proclaim

the Church’s worship of God in our time.”

Orders can be placed online or by email: [cip@ireland.anglican.org](mailto:cip@ireland.anglican.org)

The *Church of Ireland Directory 2019* is also now available, at £16.50/€18.50.

## News links

### **Pope Francis to visit Abu Dhabi in February**

<https://catholicherald.co.uk/news/2018/12/06/pope-francis-to-visit-abu-dhabi-in-february/>

### **Casting off ‘rules and rigidity’ won’t save the Irish Church**

<https://catholicherald.co.uk/magazine/a-strenuous-avoidance-of-the-hard-sayings/>



**December 11, 2018**

**Benedict XVI's fine line on Catholic dialogue with Jews**

<https://catholicherald.co.uk/magazine/benedict-xvis-fine-line-on-catholic-dialogue-with-jews/>

**Some unionists are thinking the unthinkable about living in a united Ireland**

<https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/some-unionists-are-thinking-the-unthinkable-about-living-in-a-united-ireland-1.3725241>

**Esmond Birnie: Brexit deal would leave NI with big disadvantages**

<https://www.newsletter.co.uk/news/esmond-birnie-brexit-deal-would-leave-ni-with-big-disadvantages-1-8733160>

**Bishops Brexit fear over visits to parishioners with hard border in Ireland**

<https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/brexit/bishops-brexit-fears-over-visits-to-parishioners-with-hard-border-in-ireland-37609255.html>

**Nuns will have no role in new maternity hospital**

<https://www.irishtimes.com/news/health/nuns-will-have-no-role-in-new-maternity-hospital-st-vincent-s-says-1.3725499>

**Bishop urges professionals to resist abortion laws**

<https://www.independent.ie/irish-news/bishop-urges-professionals-to-resist-abortion-laws-37609932.html>

**Not enough teachers or money to roll out key exam reforms in Ireland**

**December 11, 2018**

<https://www.independent.ie/irish-news/education/not-enough-teachers-or-money-to-roll-out-key-exam-reforms-new-report-37610055.html>

## **Santa Claus Converts To Calvinism, Moves Everybody To Naughty List**

<https://babylonbee.com/news/santa-claus-converts-calvinism-moves-everybody-naughty-list>

[South Belfast church to stop Roma group using its building after exploitation claims](#)

The Irish News

A SOUTH Belfast **church** is to stop a Roma group using its building after one of its leaders ... The Leadership Team at City **Church** on University Avenue said this Sunday would ... of the Romanian Roma Community Association of Northern **Ireland** (RRCANI), was accused ... Enjoy reading the **Irish News**?

[Inside the Belfast college that moulded peace-makers and Brexiteers](#)

Irish Times

Fresh out of Methody he joined the **News** Letter in central Belfast in 1964 ... and with the former **Church of Ireland** primate, Archbishop Robin Eames, ...

['It's nothing but an insult' - scout group devastated to receive eviction notice from parish](#)

[Independent.ie](#)

However, parents are now in uproar with their local **church** after they were told their ... Sandra Phipps told [Independent.ie](#) that they are devastated by the news. ... "To receive this eviction notice by our own church's solicitors so

**December 11, 2018**

close to .... Much-loved: Former 'Glenroe' star Farmer dies aged 81 Irish News.

[Pope Francis sends letter on Irish Mother and Baby Homes](#)  
Irish Times

He does however say he is praying that “efforts made” by the Government and the Catholic **Church** in **Ireland** will help “face responsibly this tragic ...

[Pope Francis says Irish \*\*religious\*\* orders must accept blame for horrific mother and baby home ...](#)

Irish Mirror

The Pope has demanded Irish **religious** orders accept blame for the horrific treatment of children who died in mother and baby homes, it has emerged.

[Silent Night turns 200: Celebrating a classic Christmas carol in Salzburg](#)

Irish Examiner

The good **news** is that you are unlikely to be the only one singing while ... Gruber spent his later life, as organist and choirmaster of the local **church**.

[Pope's letter about Tuam Home makes no mention of compensation](#)

Galway Daily (press release)

Pope Francis gave no mention of the **church** helping with the cost of ... The **Irish** Times reports that in a response letter dated November 13 Pope ...

December 11, 2018

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