

Dublin Archbishop Michael Jackson hits out at homelessness in Christmas Day sermon



Archbishop Michael Jackson has blasted the “illusion of opportunity” that society creates.

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The Church of Ireland cleric said in his Christmas sermon the inequalities across basic services is the opposite of the “glib agenda” that talks about equality and opportunity for everyone.

Speaking on Tuesday in Christchurch Cathedral, Dublin, he said: “There have always been inequalities but the institutionalization of inequalities around the basics of food and shelter, of housing and human dignity runs counter to a modern and glib agenda of equality and opportunity for all.

“Many are not able to access these opportunities nor will they ever because inequalities have become endemic in our society.

“The gap between those who have more and those who have nothing grows deeper and wider and becomes institutionalized.”

He added: "Our public understanding of the needs of The Other grows more shallow and superficial. This is the point at which rhetoric itself drives wedges deep into the heart of reality.

"What people hear increasingly bears no relation to what they experience in their own life.

“Belief and faith, as ways of being and of living, whether religious or otherwise, are fundamental to the imagination. Imagination is life-giving to community itself.

“A change-driven approach to society asks a lot more of a contemporary generation in self-sufficiency and self-motivation, self-help and self-care than we have worked out.

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“But it deprives us of specific types of relationship. More and more of life you and I have to do on our own especially if we do not work within listening distance of a spiritual community.

“Christmas introduces us to human exclusion – we continue to see exclusion at work in our society, despite the pleading and the advocacy of so many good people.”

Women in top divinity posts in Edinburgh

It was of course John Knox who coined the phrase ‘the monstrous regiment of women’. So it’s tempting to wonder what Knox, glowering down from his plinth in the quadrangle of New College, the home of the University of Edinburgh’s School of Divinity, would make of events there this year.

Not only was this the scene of the celebration of 50 years of female Church of Scotland ministers this year, but this autumn women started work in two of the most senior positions in the college.

“I think he’d get a shock,” says the Rev Professor Susan Hardman Moore, new Principal of New College, and therefore responsible for the trainee Church of Scotland ministers at Edinburgh.

“And we don’t mind about that!” adds Professor Helen Bond, Head of the School of Divinity.

Helen is the first woman to hold her position in the University’s history – “And about time, too,” says Susan.

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“It is quite bizarre that it has taken until 2018,” agrees Helen, “But when we came in 2000 [the two arrived at New College at the same time, although it is

Professor Helen Bond (left) and Rev Professor Susan Hardman Moore

Susan’s second spell] there were only two other women on the staff. Now we must be up to about 40 per cent, so I think it’s just taken a while for women to percolate up.”

Helen specialises in the New Testament and very early Christian history. She got what she calls ‘the divinity bug’ at St Andrews University, before doing a PhD at Durham and working in Manchester and Aberdeen before arriving at Edinburgh. Of the new job, she says: “I’m still not quite sure what I’ve let myself in for!”



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“I suppose you get to that stage where you’ve been somewhere for 18 years, and it’s time to do something a little bit different,” she adds.

“It used to be a three-year post and now it’s five years so it’s more of a commitment. Although at the end of the five years I go back to being a regular professor here, so I do have to live by any of the changes I implement!

“One of the things I am quite keen to do is work more on our outreach and outward-facing roles. New College could be offering a lot of courses – CPD (continuing professional development) events for ministers, courses for lay people in the churches.

“We have already been doing that sort of thing but I’d like to see it on a wider basis, and not just in terms of Christianity and not just in terms of the churches, but wider as well. We have got expertise over the range of religion, not just Christian and Jewish but almost any religious tradition you can think of.”

Looking at new ways of doing things is very much part of Susan’s job as well, as the Church of Scotland seeks to recruit more ministers and develop more flexible patterns of ministry. It’s something she feels she has a perspective on, as someone who took an unconventional route to ministry in the Church.

“I started out as a Methodist lay preacher when I was in sixth form (in Staffordshire). It didn’t enter my head to go into ordained ministry because I’d never seen a woman minister in my life.

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“When I came up here to begin with I was involved in the Methodist Church around Edinburgh.

“But after a while we started to go up to Perthshire and I became a member of the Parish Church in Comrie, because there is no Methodist Church in that area. And that led me to becoming a Reader in the Church of Scotland, and having become a Reader, in the evolution of my spiritual journey, it didn’t make sense to me any longer to separate a ministry of Word and Sacrament. So I applied for OLM (Ordained Local Ministry).

“So I have not come through the traditional route, I have come with this background of engaging in lay ministry, and I think in some ways that gives me some experience to draw on in developing these new things that have to do with lay training.”

Susan’s academic life started with a degree in theology at Cambridge, after which she trained as a teacher. However, she got a scholarship to Yale Divinity School in the US, which led her to take a PhD in history, focusing on the Puritans (16/17th century religion and the Reformation is her specialty).

Lurgan rector’s visit to Kurdistan with Open Doors

Revd Mark Harvey, rector of Shankill Parish in Lurgan, reflects on a recent visit to Kurdistan in Northern Iraq with Open Doors.



Revd Mark Harvey (at the back in blue shirt) with other visiting leaders.

He writes - "What was intended as a casual conversation over breakfast turned out to be something rather different. At the New Wine Ireland conference in Sligo last July, I shared that breakfast conversation with Eddie Lyle, president of Open Doors UK & Ireland. After discovering common acquaintances (Eddie is originally from Northern Ireland) and some helpful pointers towards Shankill engaging in partnership with Open Doors, Eddie asked me if I would consider joining him and ten other church leaders from the UK on a short trip to northern Iraq in September. A few days later I confirmed that I would be delighted (whilst a little apprehensive) to join the team.

"We arrived in Erbil, capital of the Kurdistan region and there followed four very intense, challenging and humbling days as we listened to, observed, questioned and prayed

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with the Iraqi church leaders and the members of various Christian communities we were so privileged to meet.

“The horrors of ISIS were never far below the surface in our conversations. It was harrowing to hear first-hand accounts of the sheer brutality with which they have sought to eradicate these historic Christian communities from a land which has been their home for millennia. The

resilience of clergy and of their people in the face of this religious genocide was wonderfully inspiring. The courage and vision of the churches standing up in the face of sheer blood-lust, providing shelter, care and pathways towards healing and restoration were a challenge to someone who ministers in a still divided community. We also learned of the plight of Muslim background believers (MBBs – those who have chosen to convert to Christianity from Islam), and how they are ostracised from their families and communities, often under the real threat of physical harm or even death.

“The work that Open Doors supports through local partners amongst those who have suffered so much is a source of real hope for the thousands of Christians who are seeking to rebuild their lives and their communities. From trauma counselling and support, to socio-economic projects, and training for church leaders (both lay and ordained), the work is creating a new hope and confidence that is far more than just survival. Hope is alive and well amongst Iraq’s historic

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Christian communities. People are being equipped with new skills in order to ensure dignity and future prospects through employment opportunities. Homes and churches are being rebuilt and along with them the strength of many communities is being restored.”

Pope Francis blamed for fall in Dublin Zoo visitors

Dublin Zoo has blamed the Pope for causing a drop of almost 100,000 in visitor numbers this year, the Press Association reported.

Director Leo Oosterweghel claimed the pontiff "pulled the rug" from beneath them in a year when they also had to contend with the Beast from the East and one of the hottest summers on record in the Republic.

The popular attraction was forced to shut its doors for three days in August during the visit of Pope Francis.

The Papal tour included a mass in the Phoenix Park, the home of the zoo.

Mr Oosterweghel said: "We took a hit. We're down. We're still above the million but we're probably down 100,000 visitors."

Last year more than 1.1 million people visited the zoo. That figure is expected to be in the region of 1.01 million people at the end of 2018.

"First there was the extraordinary winter, it was hard to recover," Mr Oosterweghel said.

"Then we had this incredibly hot summer."

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He added: "Then his Holiness arrived the last week of August - we were closed for that whole period."

Mr Oosterweghel said all the confusion over access to Phoenix Park that week

depressed visitor numbers. "People weren't sure," he said. "We lost the last week of August which is our biggest week.

"The end of the school holidays ... if the weather is good you have 10,000 people here in one day so we lost out."

"(We had) the bad winter, the hot summer and his Holiness who pulled the rug a little bit."

But there was a silver lining as Mr Oosterweghel got to experience having a Pope in his back garden.

The director, who has been at the helm for 18 years, lives on site.

"It was amazing to have an empty Phoenix Park, all I had to do was open my window and I could hear him," he said.

Despite the difficult trading conditions, Mr Oosterweghel said: "We're still in the black, we're still in surplus.

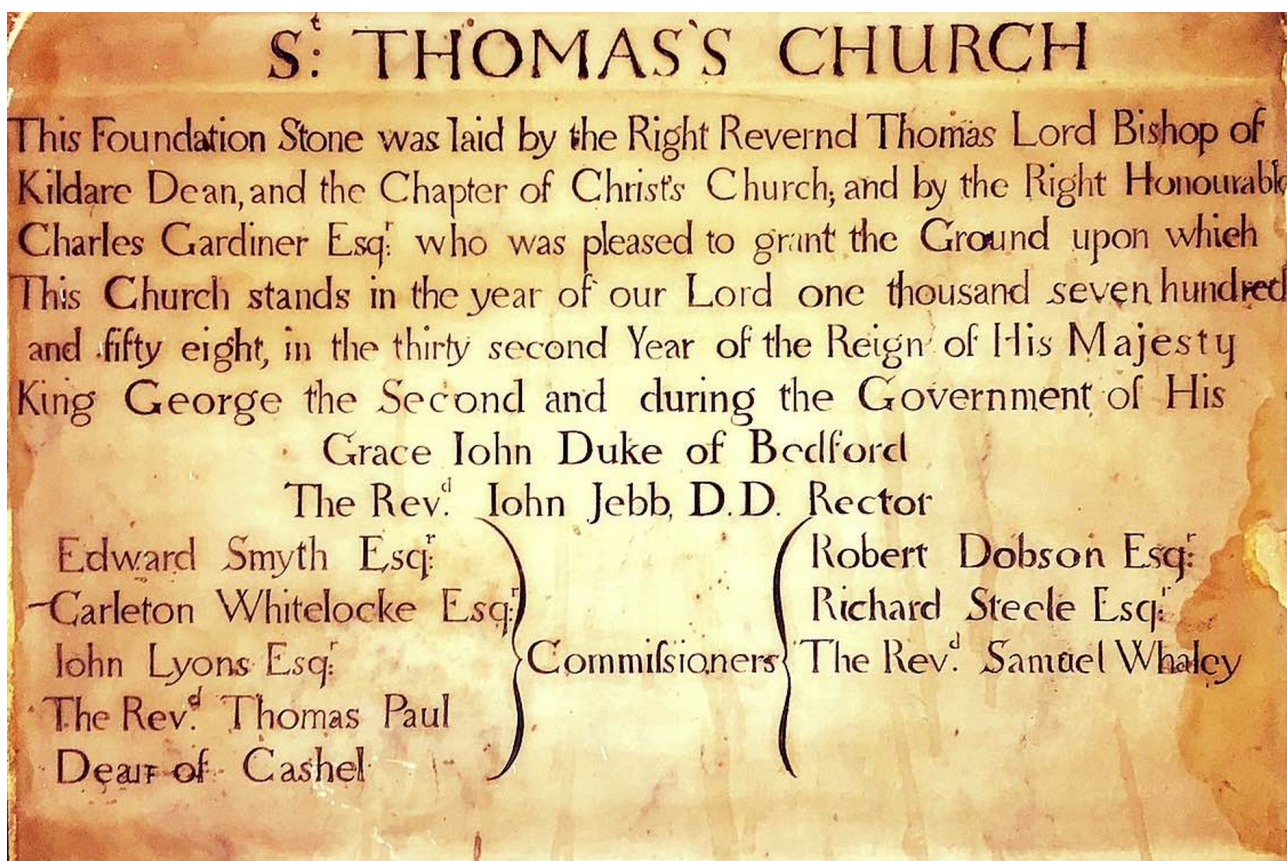
"We're still over a million - it just shows you how robust the business is."



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He expects numbers to "bounce back" next year and the zoo has an ambitious master plan it is due to roll out in the coming years.

260th Anniversary Service in unique Dublin church



A memorial plaque from St Thomas's Church.

Family and friends with historic connections to St Thomas's Church on Cathal Brugha Street, Dublin, attended a special 260th Anniversary Service to mark its foundation, on Friday December 21 (The Feast of St Thomas the Apostle).

The Service, which was led by Archbishop Michael Jackson, brought together local religious, political, sporting, cultural and academic figures, each with a particular interest in the oldest church site in continuous use in Dublin 1.

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St Thomas's current building is unique having been paid for by the Irish Free State Government as compensation for the original building's destruction in the Civil War in 1922. Indeed during its reconstruction, Cathal Brugha Street itself was formed.

The foundation stone of the first St Thomas's Church was laid in 1758 upon land granted by the Right Honorable Charles Gardiner. Since then St Thomas's has witnessed many changes in both Dublin city's development and its local Protestant population. In 1825 for example there were 17,108 members of St Thomas's Parish.

In April 2017, the Parish was closed and the church, which is now in diocesan control, has begun to seek new opportunities to build upon 260 years of Christian worship and service in the area.

Declassified files: Margaret Thatcher blasted Irish failure to extradite IRA priest suspect

Margaret Thatcher accused the Irish government of doing nothing to help extradite a priest who allegedly worked for the IRA, state papers have revealed.

Suspected IRA quartermaster Father Patrick Ryan was the subject of a lengthy legal battle in 1988. Fr Ryan was arrested by Belgian police at his home where they found large quantities of cash and bomb-making equipment. The UK requested to have him extradited from Belgium where he was believed to have been involved in an IRA unit.



Father Patrick Ryan was arrested in Belgium after police found cash and bomb-making equipment

The Belgian authorities refused the UK's request and later extradited him to the Republic of Ireland. Fr Ryan, a former Pallottine priest from Tipperary, became the centre of a row between Irish and British authorities after the Republic refused to extradite him to the UK.

The rift caused tension between the British prime minister and taoiseach Charlie Haughey which spilled into a meeting between the two leaders at the end of the European Council in Rhodes in December 1988. Minutes of the "frank exchange" which lasted under an hour, reveals the PM's frustration over the extradition process saying she felt "badly let down" over the matter.

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Mrs Thatcher described Fr Ryan as a “really bad egg”. “I and my soldiers – we are at the receiving end,” she told the taoiseach. “Ryan is a very dangerous man. Both the Belgians and our services know this. He is at liberty still.” Mrs Thatcher pressed the then taoiseach on why the Irish government failed to arrest him or support the British warrant.

“People like Ryan with contacts with Libya, with expert knowledge of bombing – they can skip – I feel so strongly on this and feel so badly let down,” she added.

Mr Haughey defended the decision saying that when Fr Ryan arrived in Dublin, officials had no knowledge as to why he should be extradited.

He said: “It is a pity that every time you and I meet we have one of these difficult issues on something that is marginal between us.

“We can never get to the major questions which we should be discussing – like the possibility of progress with the North.

“I don’t know how we can get away from this constant bickering, attacking each other after each incident.”

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