

European pilgrimage route for Irish saint in bid for special status



Deborah Girvan, President of the European Columban Way, outside Saint Columbanus Ballyholme Parish Church in Bangor, Northern Ireland, where there is a dedicated stained glass window to Saint Columbanus

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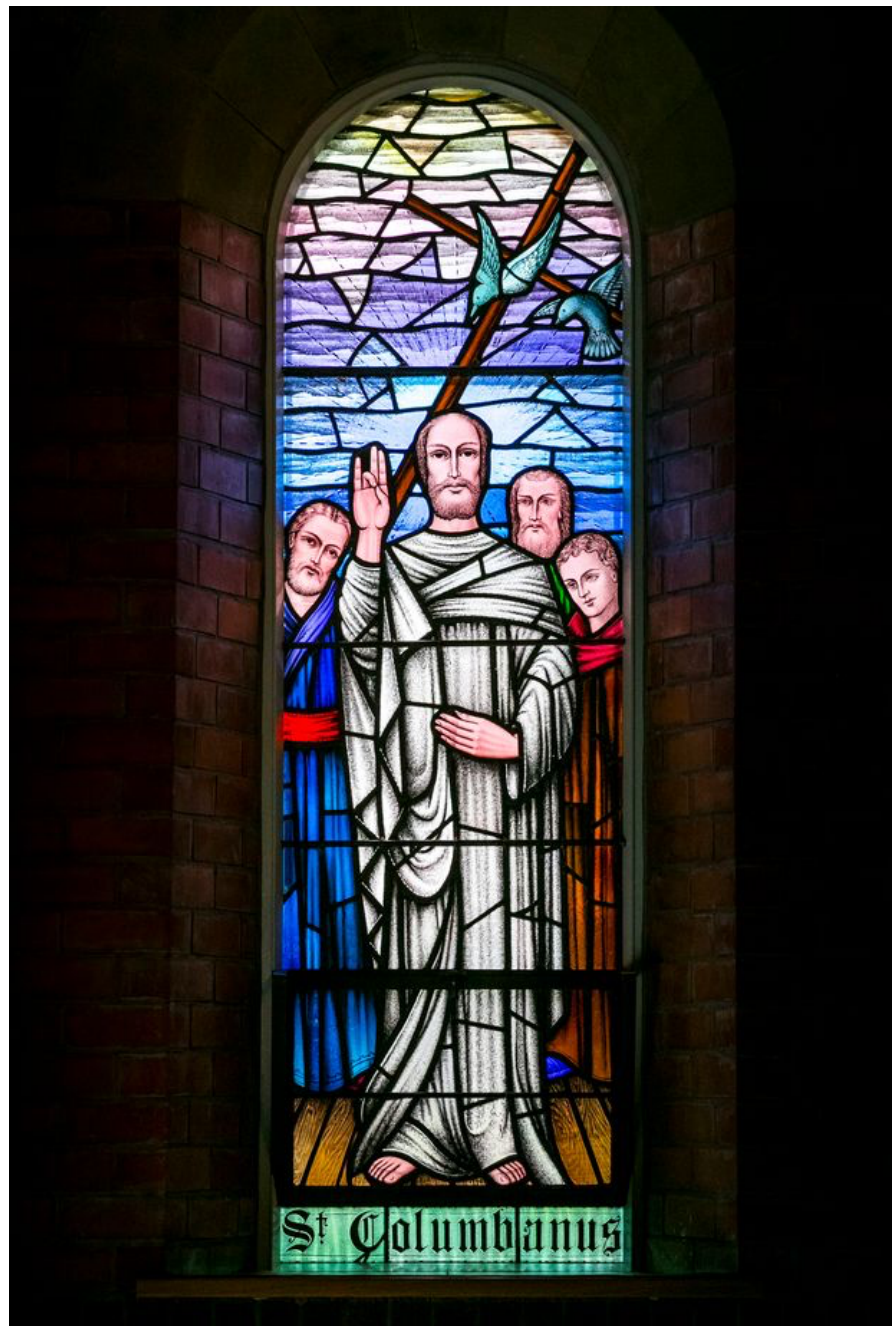
A near-2,000 mile pilgrimage by an Irish missionary could become a recognised European cultural route and trigger a tourism bonanza, campaigners said.

The News Letter reports - A satnav map of the evangelising journey of Bangor monk St Columbanus from Ireland to modern-day Italy in the early days of Christianity has been created. It follows a donation from French benefactors.

Europe's leading human rights organisation has been urged to bestow official status on the saint's route in the month ahead.

Deborah Girvan, president of the European Columban Way, said: "This is escalating, it is growing, there is huge momentum behind this.

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A stone with a bronze cast dedicated to Saint Columbanus which sits at the entrance to Bangor Abbey

“Regardless of the outcome of Brexit, this is an era of intolerance and uncertainty.

“The hope is that this can become a symbol of peace and understanding and it could see a platform for significant educational and cultural exchanges.

“It has potential to unite Europe and not disunite it.”

Columbanus’s peregrination from Ireland to Bobbio in what is now northern Italy, where he set up a monastery, is celebrated as a golden age for Irish influence and learning in Europe.

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Robert Schuman, one of the founding fathers of the European Union, said Columbanus was an inspiration for the modern Europe.

He travelled more than 3,000 kilometres across Ireland and Europe at the end of the 6th and the beginning of the 7th century.

Columbanus was born on the Wexford/Carlow border and became a monk in the monastery at Bangor, Co Down, under the abbot St Comgall for more than 20 years.

The saint founded monasteries in Annegray, Fontaine-les-Luzeuil and Luxeuil-les-Bains in the foothills of the Vosges mountains in eastern France, in Bregenz on the banks of Lake Constance in Austria and in Bobbio near Milan.

His journey forms the basis of the pilgrimage route called the Columban Way beginning in Bunclody, Wexford, where he was born and ending in Bobbio, where he died.

A stone from Bangor outside a church in Bregenz represents the post-Second World War rebuilding of Europe. Kenneth Irvine, from the Friends of Columbanus Bangor, said a satellite navigation system paid for by the French had been a major advantage for tourism.

A phone app contains all the monastic sites, places to stay and eat and other places of interest. Mr Irvine said he hoped it would become a cultural route of the Council of Europe, a post-Second World War human rights organisation which pre-dates the EU, but that needed a lot more planning and work.

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He added: “The potential for tourism and bringing people is significant.” A Co Down tour guide has suggested there are 18 million faith tourists in the US who are interested in how Christianity started and the monastic movement.

What of 2019 for the Cof I?

The writer of C of I notes in the Irish Times stated last Saturday -

And what of 2019? Well, who knows, but some things, apart from the routine, have been flagged. The *Church of Ireland Gazette* will move from being a weekly to a monthly publication promising ‘more debate ... more views ... more features ... and more fun’. It is a bold move and one which it is hoped will garner more support for one of the vital parts of the Church’s life.

Next year also brings the 150th anniversary of disestablishment, or more precisely, the anniversary of the passing of the Irish Church Act. The legislation did not come into effect until 1870 and it was some time before it was fully implemented, so the celebrations may be prolonged. The centenary celebrations produced three books – a collection of centenary essays entitled *Directions* which was published by APCK; *Irish Anglicanism, 1869–1969*, edited by Fr Michael Hurley; and RB McDowell’s *The Church of Ireland, 1869–1969* (even though this did not appear until 1975!) – a number of shorter historical studies, and a splendid exhibition, with a catalogue, in the National Gallery. What the 150th will produce is still largely unknown although there will be a book of essays reflecting on aspects of the life of the Church of Ireland between 1969 and 2019.

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Lisburn parish support for Baby Basics



In the last couple of months Baby Basics has had a huge amount of support from several parishes in Connor diocese, one of which was St Paul's in Lisburn.

St Paul's rector the Rev Arthur Young undertook to do Baby Basics over the Harvest period and many organisations in the church joined in the 4-week challenge.

Sister Karen Webb from Connect Base visited the church back in October to tell the congregation about the diocesan project and how it is helping needy families in the Belfast area. The church then took on the challenge with gusto and got lots of organisations involved including the Girls' Brigade and the Toddler group.



Diocesan Children's Officer Jill Hamilton visited the Girls' Brigade and explained the Baby Basics Belfast story to two different age groups. The girls were extremely enthusiastic and excited about being involved in supporting the project. A huge thanks to Alison Stevenson, Captain of the GB, and all the leaders who were so willing to encourage and support the girls in this endeavour.

Heather Marsden, who oversees the toddler group 'Lots of Tots' helped to co-ordinate the whole church collection and sorted out all the donations. Heather also organised a van to transport everything to the Connect Base as there was so much!!

Jill said: "We are hugely grateful to all the organisations and the members of the church congregation in St Pauls' who took part in the Baby Basics 4-week challenge. Their

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donations gave us a huge much needed boost as our stock of donations had been almost completely depleted.

“The donations given by St Paul’s are already going out to families who have recently been referred to Baby Basics. We continue to be very busy with referrals from agencies across Belfast.”

Jill said the Christmas period can be especially busy. “It is wonderful to be able to help families in need and through this tremendous effort from St Paul’s we will be able to deliver help to dozens of families in the coming weeks and months,” she said.

Poll: 10% of clergy have suffered violence at work

Ten per cent of Church of England clergy have been the target of violence at work during the past two years, new research by Royal Holloway, University of London suggests.

Surveying hundreds of vicars, academics also found 68 per cent and 19 per cent had experienced verbal abuse or threatening behaviour respectively.

Professor Jonathan Gabe from the School of Law at Royal Holloway said: "The clergy have a difficult job, especially when faced with the risk of violence, as documented in our survey.

"The research suggests that further thought needs to be given as to how best to help clergy manage when faced with such violence."



The government-funding poll concluded that mental illness, declined requests for money and alcohol or drugs were among the main reasons behind the verbal abuse clergy encountered.

Commissioned by the National ChurchWatch, it found more than one-third of those who experienced threatening behaviour had done so multiple times. Nick Tolson, the Director of National Churchwatch, said: "These figures are a reminder that clergy have to deal with difficult circumstances where they are at risk of violence.

"It is vital that they receive training in dealing with these issues."

Differences are not a danger, says Pope Francis in Christmas Day message

Pope Francis has urged people to see their differences as a source of richness and not of danger in his Christmas message to the world.

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Delivering the traditional 'Urbi et Orbi' message to around 50,000 people in St Peter's Square, the Pope called for 'fraternity among people with different ideas, yet capable of respecting and listening to one another'.



In an apparent reference to the debate over migration and nationalism in many countries around the world, the Pope said God wanted 'love, acceptance, respect for this poor humanity of ours, which we all share in a great variety of races, languages, and cultures'.

'Our differences, then, are not a detriment or a danger; they are a source of richness,' he said.

He touched on conflicts around the world, calling for a political solution in Syria and an end to fighting in Yemen where he said the people had been left 'exhausted by war and famine'.

In Ukraine, which has had an increasingly tense relationship with Russia, he appealed for 'a peace respectful of the rights of every nation'. For Africa, he prayed that there would be 'a new dawn of fraternity to arise over the entire continent'.

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Other places of concern mentioned in the Pope's address were Venezuela and Nicaragua, and the Korean Peninsula.

He warned that without fraternity, even the best of human endeavours 'risk being soulless and empty'.

The Pope also remembered Christians around the world who are celebrating Christmas 'in difficult, if not hostile, situations' as he prayed that religious liberty would be respected.

'God is a good Father and we are all brothers and sisters,' he said. 'This truth is the basis of the Christian vision of humanity.'

Libyan authorities exhume bodies of 34 Ethiopian Christian martyrs

The bodies of 34 Ethiopian Christians executed in Libya by Islamic State (IS) in 2015 have been exhumed from a mass grave, Libyan authorities said last week.

The grave was unearthed on Sunday, after information was obtained during investigations of arrested IS members, the interior ministry's Criminal Investigation Department (CID) said on its Facebook page.

A video posted on social media in April 2015 appeared to show IS militants shooting and beheading the Christians, who were wearing orange jumpsuits, on a beach.



ISIS militants march their Ethiopian Christian prisoners along a beach in Libya prior to their execution in this still image taken from an undated video made available to a social media website on April 19, 2015

The video, in which militants call Christians crusaders who are out to kill Muslims, showed about 15 men being beheaded on a beach and another group of the same size shot in their heads in scrubland.

Both groups of men are referred to in a subtitle as 'worshippers of the cross belonging to the hostile Ethiopian church'.

The CID displayed drone images of the mass grave, which appeared to be on a farm near the coastal city of Sirte.

The bodies will be repatriated to Ethiopia once 'domestic and international legal procedures are completed', it said.

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Hundreds of thousands of people have migrated from sub-Saharan Africa to Libya in recent years, many hoping to eventually reach Europe.

Islamic State took control of Sirte, the hometown of Libya's former leader Muammar Qaddafi, in 2015 and lost the city late in 2016 to local forces backed by US air strikes.

Also in 2015, 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians were executed by ISIS in Libya. Their bodies have been repatriated to their home province of Minya and they are regarded as martyrs.

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BBC News

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Mass grave containing up to 800 babies to be excavated in Ireland probe

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<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-46708762>

Excavation at Tuam mother-and-baby home set to begin in 2019

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Mr Varadkar said he does not believe an excavation of this size has been done before in **Ireland** but emphasised the Government believed it was the ...

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State papers: MP wanted Catholic Church to excommunicate IRA members

Belfast Telegraph

The Northern **Ireland** Assembly speaker suggested that the **Church** should excommunicate IRA members in a bid to limit their funerals to "modest ...

McGuinness planned the firing of shots over coffin in church grounds

Irish Times

McGuinness planned the firing of shots over coffin in **church** grounds ... been accorded to a former or serving head of State or government of **Ireland**".

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The Irish Sun

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