

## **Pope's UAE visit is a historic moment**



**Pope Francis makes historic visit to United Arab Emirates. His trip culminates today with the first-ever papal Mass on the Arabian Peninsula.**

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Pope Francis, who has made improved relations between Islam and Christianity a cornerstone of his pontificate, touched down on Sunday night in the United Arab Emirates, one of the few places in the Middle East where Christian observance is growing rather than declining due to persecution.

The first visit by a pontiff to the Arabian Peninsula, Islam's birthplace, concludes today (Tuesday) when Pope Francis celebrates mass before an estimated 130,000 of the UAE's nearly one million migrant Catholics.

The UAE, situated between theocratic Iran and religiously uncompromising Saudi Arabia, is a freewheeling trading hub, open to much-needed expat inflows and broadly tolerant of cultural and religious diversity. Around 80 per cent of its population are expatriates, leading Pope Francis to describe the country as a "model of coexistence, brotherhood, and encounter between different civilisations and cultures".

Despite proscribing apostasy and missionary activity, the UAE has managed to reconcile its constitutional status as a Sharia state with elements of globalism and modernity essential to diversify its economy away from oil.

It is the first Arab country to develop a peaceful nuclear energy programme under IAEA protocols. Its armed forces have served alongside Western allies from Kosovo to Afghanistan. And it is a global centre for research in renewable energy with international investments in everything from property to microprocessors.

The country has encouraged freedom of religion and endowed churches in a region where Salafist jihadism

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threatens to wipe out Christianity altogether. Last night there were rumours of an announcement today permitting more places of worship.

This, and the importation through immigration of cultural practices deemed “haram” (forbidden) causes acute discomfort among hardline Islamist movements and preachers who seek to delegitimise Gulf monarchies planning for a post-oil future.

None the less, there has been criticism among Western media of the Pope’s trip. True, Emirati exceptionalism has been partially obscured by the country’s growing strategic association with Saudi Arabia, its participation in the Yemen war (mentioned by the Pope in prayers before departing) and allegations of rights abuses. But this should be weighed against the prospect of a key, stable Gulf state sliding into the social and economic meltdown now common throughout the region, taking with it the prospects of millions of immigrants from some of the world’s most benighted locations.

Pope Francis has been diligent in building bridges with Islam while at the same time condemning the “murderous indifference” to the suffering of Christians in the Middle East. He met yesterday with the Abu Dhabi-based Muslim Council of Elders, led by his “friend and dear brother” Dr Ahmed al Tayeb, the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar and a key figure in the development of a moderate Sunni consensus. Pope Francis has explicitly distanced himself from his predecessor, the now retired Benedict XVI, who angered Muslims in 2006 in a lecture quoting a former Byzantine Emperor who sought to draw a link between early Islam and violence. This Pope

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has instead identified social, political and economic injustice as chief motivators of extremist terror.

Expatriate Muslims working in the UAE, many of whom are able to support their extended families throughout the troubled Middle East, argue that such an extreme perversion of their faith, which excises from its reasoning years of tradition, civilisational development and Koranic teaching, is straight from the Devil. “You can’t talk with these people,” one said recently. “You can only crush them.”

At the very least the papal visit should highlight the suffering of Christians in a region that hosted the birth of the early church. A post-religious Europe is quick to notice the plight of groups such as the Yazidis, or the dynamiting of ancient buildings and artefacts, but remains largely unmoved by the slow eclipse of a faith that helped lay its own early foundations.

## **4 Corners Festival focus on Lessons from Rwanda tomorrow**

St Stephen’s Parish, Millfield, Belfast, is hosting an event as part of the 4 Corners Festival tomorrow Wednesday February 6.

The subject of the evening is Lessons from Rwanda – Challenging Churches on forgiveness, justice, reconciliation.

Two Christian leaders from Northern Ireland, the Rev Dr Lesley Carroll and Derek Poole, who have both visited Rwanda, will share with the audience their impressions of how Churches there responded to the aftermath of the 1994 genocide.

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Carroll will draw on her meetings with victims, survivors and Church leaders and Poole on the study guide 'Lessons from Rwanda,' which he researched and wrote for Thrive Ireland/ Contemporary Christianity. They will explore scandalous forgiveness in the light of concerns about justice, repentance and reconciliation and other issues.

The discussion will be chaired by Diane Holt of Thrive Ireland who will invite questions from the floor.

This is a unique opportunity to hear at first hand local insights into the legacy of one of the darkest moments in 20th century history and to reflect on possible lessons for us here as we contend with our evolving post-conflict experience.

You can register to attend this event [HERE](#) The evening begins at 7.30pm.

## **Kildare remembers St Brigid**

Kildare and Newbridge Group of Parishes held special services to mark St Brigid's Weekend, on Sunday last 3rd February 2019.

At 11.30am an All Age Service was held in St Patrick's Church, Newbridge.

At 3.30pm a Diocesan Celebration Service was held in St Brigids Cathedral, Kildare. The guest preacher was the Rev Richard Bromley, Mission Director of the Intercontinental Church Society. The service was led by Dean Tim Wight and Rev Fran Grasham, with Bishop Pat Storey. The music was led by the Cathedral choir under the direction of Thomas Charles Marshall. The organist was Simon Harden.





Brigid was a contemporary of St Patrick. Her spirituality had an enormous impact on the church in Ireland, in the period of growth and transition immediately following the time of St Patrick. At that time the church in Ireland developed through spiritual communities of monks and nuns.

The Cathedral Church of St Brigid lies in the centre of Kildare Town and was built in the 13th century. According to Kildare.ie it “occupies one of the most significant ecclesiastical sites in Ireland and is the site most associated with Ireland's most famous female saint, Brigid.” The cathedral is part of the Grouped Parishes of Kildare and Newbridge.

The site is one of the earliest documented Irish Christian places of worship. Kildare.ie also notes that “The present

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restored Norman cathedral occupies the site of the original early Christian foundation and church of St. Brigid. Born in 453 A.D., Brigid is said to have established a church at Kildare in 480 A.D., just 35 years after St Patrick established a church at Armagh.” It also describes how “Her original establishment would have been a very simple structure, most likely built of wood. It was from this settlement that the town and, much later, the county derived the name Cilldara – Anglicised as Kildare. In Irish cill, means cell or small church, and dara means oak. It would seem that the first church was built near an oak grove, or perhaps was itself built of oak.”

The Grouped Parishes of Kildare and Newbridge describe their mission as being, “To understand the depth of God's love for each one of us and to deepen our relationship with him.”

## **Anglican mission agency CMS appoints strategist Alastair Bateman as its new leader**

The Anglican mission agency CMS – the Church Mission Society – has appointed commercial strategist and consultant Alastair Bateman as its new Chief Executive Officer. When he begins his new position in May, Mr Bateman will succeed Philip Mounstephen, the former Executive Leader of CMS, who stood down last year having been selected as Bishop of Truro. Mr Bateman is currently Chief Operating Officer of Christian social transformation charity the Resurgo Trust.

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CMS described their new CEO as “a gifted strategist” and said he brings “a unique and proven ability for balancing



strategic planning with exploration and pioneering.”

In a statement, CMS said: “throughout his career both in the charity sector and consulting with blue chip companies, he has honed his ability to quickly grasp the big picture and understand key challenges. At CMS he sees developing an environment for healthy growth as one of his key focuses and says his previous roles in Christian charities, where he has repeatedly seen the power of prayer, have prepared him for this challenge.”

Prior to his appointment at Resurgo Trust, Mr Bateman was director of marketing strategy at the evangelical relief and development agency Tearfund. Before that he spent more than a decade consulting with companies including GlaxoSmithKline, Vodafone and Wyeth Pharmaceuticals.

“I’ve known of CMS for a long time, both through the work of individual mission partners and through the significant part CMS as a whole has played in the history of the last two centuries”, Mr Bateman said. “This CEO role seems like the perfect fit and it will be a privilege to continue to work in a



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context where prayer and worship are integrated with organisational life.

“Mission is as urgent and as relevant as it has always been. The needs of the world are enormous, expressed in broken relationships everywhere. These issues are too great to solve without God, which is why prayer is central. I value building relationships for life and look forward to doing this more at CMS.”

The Chair of CMS’ trustees, Charles Clayton, said:

“Alastair’s experience in the business sector and international Christian organisations, his leadership and strategic development abilities and his passion for mission will all be key to CMS at this time – as the world of mission is changing and we must keep a clear focus for the future.”

## **Tipperary singer Louise Morrissey is to feature in a new television country music programme on RTE 1.**

She will join a star-studded line up for a celebration of country gospel on Sunday, February 10 at 11.10am.

Tipperary’s international multi-award winning singer will be featured alongside well known country gospel singers James Kilbane from Mayo and Colin Elliott from Armagh.

The programme will be a rich musical coming together of north, south, east and west, of Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist and other traditions.

The programme has been in planning for several months.

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Louise,  
James and  
Colin are  
joining with  
Rev. Alan  
Mitchell from  
Sligo and  
Portstewart,  
RTE and the  
Sligo Gospel  
Choir for an  
Irish country  
music



celebration

titled A Celebration of Country Gospel Music.

Presented by Rev. Alan Mitchell, A Celebration of Country Gospel Music will feature country gospel songs and hymns.

Expect to hear many favourites such as One Day at a Time, I Saw the Light, Amazing Grace, The Old Rugged Cross as well as You Can't Buy Heaven and many others.

Viewers will also hear personal stories from Louise, Colin and James about their many experiences in music, their lives, work and faith journey.

Alan Mitchell will include prayers and scripture as well as a short talk on the power of country and gospel music for praise, prayer and as a wonderful way to help bring positive change to our everyday lives.

The Sligo Gospel Choir will join each singer on a number of their songs.

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The 50 strong choir was formed in 2010 and gather their membership from Sligo, Mayo, Roscommon, Leitrim and Donegal.

RTE in recent years have returned to focus on the rich exciting life that country music has in Ireland.

Louise Morrissey has been part of this Irish country music success story and she has long been one of Ireland's best loved singers and entertainers.

Louise has achieved great success in both Ireland and the UK, and has brought her easy style of country and folk to many other countries, including the USA and Canada.

Louise joining with James Kilbane and Colin Elliott is a wonderful coming together in traditions and styles as one family.

Over the last 250 years rural Ireland has contributed to the development and style of country music, mainly in America, but also Australia and internationally.

Country music has its deep roots in Irish and Scottish society, folk and traditional music.

Some of the first immigrants to leave Ireland landed in the southern states of America and brought with them our shared Irish traditions, tunes, instruments, dance, stories and faith.

As time passed this culture and music has evolved into American society that has given us country music that so many love today.

Country gospel has been a key of this evolution from legendary singers as Hank Williams, June Carter, Dolly

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Parton, Johnny Cash, George Hamilton IV and many others who all sang gospel.

On Sunday, February 10 at 11 am, it is hoped that lovers of country music, families, homes and communities across Ireland will join with Louise Morrissey, James Kilbane, Colin Elliott, Rev. Alan Mitchell, the Sligo Gospel Choir and RTE 1 television for this special country music programme.

## **News briefs**

**+++Dedication of chapel and icon in Cork hospital** - On Sunday 3rd February, the Bishop of Cork, Rt Rev Paul Colton visited Cork University Hospital to dedicate the new Chapel of Christ the Healer. Recent developments at the hospital have meant that the old Cofl chapel had to be closed, and the chapel has been relocated along the same corridor. When at Cork University Hospital, the bishop dedicated a new icon - 'The Christ Child' Jesus - written by Cork iconographer, Fr David O'Riordan, for the chapel

**+++Rector for Ahoghill and Portglenone** - The Rev Dennis Christie, Curate of Ballymena and Ballyclug, has been appointed rector of the Grouped Parishes of Ahoghill and Portglenone in Connor diocese.

Dennis, 43, is married to Jennifer and they have three children.

He has a BEng in Architectural Engineering from Queen's University; an MSc in Transport from Imperial College, London; a Prof. Cert. in Ministry from the University of Chester and he graduated with a MTh in Theology from

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Trinity College,  
Dublin, in 2016.

Prior to his  
training for  
ordination,  
Dennis worked  
as a Transport  
Planning  
Consultant for 15  
years in both the  
public and  
private sector.



He served placements in Holy Trinity Parish, Dromore, Co Tyrone; St Barnabas' Parish, Homerton, Hackney, London; and St Mark's Parish, Dundela, Diocese of Down and Dromore.

Dennis did his Deacon Intern Year (2015-16) at Muckamore Killead & Gartree Parish, Connor Diocese. He was ordained a priest in Connor Diocese in September 2016 and has been curate at Ballymena and Ballyclug since then.

Dennis loves spending time with his family, walking the family dog Bob, reading, music, and following football and cricket.

Speaking of his appointment as rector of Ahoghill and Portglenone, Dennis said: "Jen and I are very excited about the prospect of serving God in this community, and we will be saddened to be leaving our church family in Ballymena.

"Serving as a Curate in the Parish of Ballymena, alongside Rev Mark McConnell and among so many encouraging



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parishioners, has been a great experience for my family and I." The date for the Service of Institution is to be confirmed.



**+++Retirement of The Rev Helen MacArthur -** Helen conducted her final set of three services as Priest-in-Charge of the grouped Parishes of Ardclinis, Tickmacrean, Layde and Cushendun on Sunday January 27.

This completed seven full years of devoted service to the group in Connor diocese. After the last service, parishioners, friends and local clergy gathered for a celebratory dinner at the Londonderry Arms Hotel in Carnlough.

Following the meal Helen was presented with a painting of Lurigethan Mountain, a reminder of her many journeys up and down the Coast Road to minister to her three churches in Glenarm, Carnlough and Cushendall. She also received a

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gift token for Steenson's Jewellers in Glenarm and a bouquet of flowers.

Representatives of each church said a few words on behalf of their parishioners, all saying how much Helen has been appreciated and that she will be greatly missed. Everyone wished her well in her retirement.

Helen responded with grateful thanks for the gifts and the good wishes. She picked out a few notable moments from among many in each parish that she said she will cherish.

Helen now plans to use the extra time she will have on her many creative hobbies and activities.

**+++Quote for today -** ' Then the new earth and sky,the same yet not the same as these will rise in us as we have risen in Christ.And once again,after who knows what aeons of silence and the dark,the birds will sing out and the waters flow, and lights and shadows move across the hills and the faces of our friends laugh upon us with amazed recognition...Guesses of course,only guesses.If they are not true,something better will be.For we know that we shall be made like him,for we shall see Him as He is.' Amen.

**CSLewis (1898-1963)** in his posthumous *Letters to Malcolm* attests to his strength of Faith,romantic imagination,and communication skills

## **February 5 in Christian history**

**February 5, 1597:** Twenty-six Japanese Christians are crucified for their faith in Nagasaki, Japan. By 1640, thousands of Japanese Christians had been martyred.

**February 5, 1631:** English clergyman Roger Williams arrives in America. After questioning Massachusetts' fusion

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of church and state, he was banished. He bought land from native Americans and founded Rhode Island, where he established America's first Baptist church in America. His writings on religious liberty were greatly influential in securing that freedom later in America.

**February 5, 1736:** Methodism cofounders and brothers John and Charles Wesley arrive in Savannah, Georgia. They were to be missionaries to the native Americans, and John was to be pastor of the Savannah parish. Their efforts failed. "I went to America to convert the Indians; but O! who shall convert me?" he asked two years later.

**February 5, 1837:** Dwight Lyman (D.L.) Moody, the greatest evangelist of his day and one of the greatest revivalists of all time, is born in Northfield, Massachusetts. Speaking to 10,000 or 20,000 at a time, he presented his message, by voice or pen, to at least 100 million people.

**February 5, 1864:** Having already established herself as a poet, 44-year-old Fanny Crosby pens her first hymn. She went on to write 8,000 more before her death 50 years later.

## **News links**

### **Free Presbyterians tried to evict Ian Paisley before he died, says widow**

<https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/free-presbyterians-tried-to-evict-ian-paisley-before-he-died-says-widow-37778944.html>

### **Eileen Paisley hurt by DUP MP son's behaviour but punishment was 'very severe'**

The Irish News

<http://www.irishnews.com/news/northernirelandnews/2019/02/04/news/eileen-paisley-hurt-by-dup-mp-son-s-behaviour-but-punishment-was-very-severe--1542534/>

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**'Vatican official came into my room and raped me': ex-nun**  
**Independent.ie**

Irish **News** .... German Doris Wagner, a former nun with the male and female **religious** community, "The ... That had occurred in 2008 when she was 24, Ms Wagner explained: "I joined **religious** life when I was 19. ... abuse of nuns by male superiors, in 23 countries including **Ireland**, Italy and the USA.

**Fight at Co Derry graveyard leads to seizure of guns, knives and suspected acid**

Irish Mirror

Two loaded shotguns as well as knives, blades and suspected acid were seized in **church** grounds in Co Derry on Saturday morning, it has emerged.

**Forgive those who trespass: Church report tells vicars to offer their land as official campsites for ...**

Daily Mail

The recommendation in a **Church of England** report comes after travellers have faced a wave of accusations of trespassing when they set up ...

**Many people in mostly Christian countries believe values clash with Islam – poll**

Almost one-third in UK see rift, finds survey ahead of pope's visit to Arabian peninsula. The poll on attitudes towards religion, carried out by YouGov, was commissioned by the Muslim Council of Elders to mark the first papal visit to the Arabian peninsula. **More from The Guardian**

**Top US cardinal let priest accused of sexual abuse lead Mass**

Cardinal Daniel DiNardo allowed the accused priest to lead the 9 a.m. Thursday Mass at his parish, the statement said, because he "was already scheduled to celebrate" it. **More from Religion News Service**

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