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Churches regret Westminster vote to introduce same-sex marriage and abortion in Northern Ireland

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Westminster MPs have voted to make plans to introduce same-sex marriage and more access to abortion unless Stormont functions properly by 21st October. Some church leaders are expressing their sadness.

MPs voted 383 votes to 73 in favour of same-sex marriage and 332 to 99 on the abortion amendment.

The amendments were attached to the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation) Bill, which aimed to help return powersharing to Northern Ireland, and were put forward by MPs Stella Creasy and Conor McGinn.

Bishop Harold Miller

Bishop Harold Miller of Down and Dromore issued a statement about the vote on the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation) Bill.

He said, “Yesterday’s vote in Westminster in relation to abortion and same–sex marriage in Northern Ireland was a great disappointment to me.

“Before the vote, Bishop Ken Kearon, on behalf of the Church and Society Commission, made the Church of Ireland position on these matters clear and urged that parliament should not impose its views in areas devolved to the Assembly. Now the vote has taken place, and the amendments passed by a large majority.

“All of us are frustrated with the slowness in restoring devolved government in Northern Ireland, but I do not believe that setting a date of 21 October after which legislation to change our laws on abortion and same–sex marriage will be introduced is the right course.

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“Again, I plead for all concerned to redouble their efforts to bring back a functioning Assembly and Executive and the self-determination which we so urgently need.”

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland has expressed its disappointment and regret following the votes on Tuesday, saying it was: "paving the way for liberalisation of abortion law and the introduction of same-sex marriage in Northern Ireland."

It has called on the Government to clarify how it will respond to the amendments in terms of their implementation and what consultation will be undertaken within the timeframe.

The Church of Ireland's Rt Revd Dr Kenneth Kearon, Bishop of Limerick and Killaloe, said before the votes: "While the absence of an Assembly is very regrettable, it is equally regrettable that MPs at Westminster are seeking to use the opportunity to introduce Northern Ireland-specific legislation on two of the most controversial issues facing the Province today."

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Regarding abortion he said: "The tradition of the Church of Ireland would reject an unrestricted access to abortion, while being concerned to ensure provision for hopefully rare circumstances and in a secure medical setting. Where individuals draw such a line will inevitably differ. Instances where the life of the woman is at serious risk have long been regarded within Church of Ireland teaching as situations where termination of a pregnancy would be justifiable."

"With respect to same-sex relationships, we have stated that 'the Church of Ireland defines marriage as between a man and a woman. The church has often existed, in history, with different views from those adopted by the state, and has sought to live with both conviction and good relationships with the civil authorities and communities in which it is set."

Other church leaders [gave their feelings before the votes.](#)

A spokesperson for Pro-life group **Right To Life UK, Clare McCarthy** said: "This amendment is an unconstitutional and disrespectful attempt to override devolution in Northern Ireland and to attempt to impose abortion on demand on the Northern Irish people. The law on this issue should be a decision for the people of Northern Ireland and their elected representatives, not for MPs in Westminster to decide.

"It is totally constitutionally inappropriate to bring forward abortion amendments to a Bill which has nothing to do with abortion in any way, to legislate on such a sensitive matter. Any imposition of abortion law on Northern Ireland from Westminster would undermine devolution and the Good Friday Agreement.

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“No consultation on this amendment was possible. The people of Northern Ireland had next to no opportunity to voice their opinions.

“Westminster must respect the principle and spirit of devolution and ensure the people of Northern Ireland, through their elected representatives, get to decide on what law and policy should apply in that jurisdiction.”

A deeply sad day for Northern Ireland - Evangelical Alliance

Peter Lynas the director of the Evangelical Alliance Northern Ireland, comments -

MPs at Westminster have voted to fundamentally undermine devolution potentially leading to far-reaching changes to abortion law and the redefinition of marriage in Northern Ireland.

This is a deeply sad day as MPs vote to remove legal protection from the most vulnerable members of society. I understand some will see this as a victory for equality and choice. But equality must treat both mother and child fairly and choice must recognise both lives in a pregnancy.

Unfortunately Westminster MPs have placed personal agendas ahead of the people and the peace process in Northern Ireland. For over 50 years Northern Ireland has chosen a different way which means 100,000 people are alive here who otherwise would not be. Today that changes.

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The law on abortion in Northern Ireland strikes a difficult and delicate balance, acknowledging the life, health and dignity of both women and unborn children. Abortion is also a devolved matter and was last debated at Stormont in 2016.

If all meaningful legal protections are removed from the unborn child our culture has lost something which is priceless. At the very least we would want to see a public consultation in Northern Ireland about any proposed legal changes.

In the meantime, the church will continue to advocate for, and support, the life, health and humanity of both women and unborn children and for the best medical care for both.

On marriage, it is a covenant commitment between a man and a woman. Many will see this as a victory for equality. However, confusing equality with the redefinition of marriage is a mistake. It is sad that MPs with no mandate have chosen to ignore devolution and change the law in NI.

However, the church in Northern Ireland will continue to champion marriage and family while also reaching out and ministering to all those in need. *Ps 2 - the nations will rage, but God is on the throne.* Be blessed.

Archbishop Eamon Martin unveils new statue of Saint Oliver Plunkett

Archbishop Eamon Martin, Archbishop of Armagh, Apostolic Administrator of Dromore and Primate of All Ireland, has unveiled a new statue of Saint Oliver Plunkett in Saint Patrick's Cathedral Armagh to honor the martyrs of

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yesterday, today and tomorrow.

The statue was unveiled at Mass in the cathedral on Tuesday 9 July where priests, religious and the faithful of the diocese and from across Ireland and abroad, gathered to remember all those who are persecuted for their faith.

In his homily Archbishop Eamon said, “Last November, during a Mass to remember persecuted Christians, I announced my hope for a shrine here in Saint Patrick’s Cathedral, Armagh, to our former Archbishop, Saint Oliver Plunkett, to help us remember in prayer all those who are persecuted for their faith.

“Saint Oliver was appointed Archbishop of Armagh on this day, 350 years ago –July 9 1669. For many years the people of Drogheda and the surrounding areas in Louth and Meath have faithfully kept his memory alive; Saint Peter’s Church in Drogheda will continue to be the National Shrine to Saint Oliver Plunkett, where his relics are venerated. But in this significant year I think it is appropriate that we acknowledge Saint Oliver in a special way here in our

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Cathedral, and, through him, honour all the martyrs of yesterday, today and tomorrow.”

Archbishop Eamon explained the commissioning of the statue. He said, “We commissioned the Dublin-born artist, Dony MacManus, to prepare the bronze sculpture which will be unveiled, blessed and dedicated this evening at the end of Mass. I asked Dony if he could inspire both devotion and admiration for the courage and serenity shown by Saint Oliver in face of such a horrific execution. Secondly, I wished that his work would speak into the reality of Christian persecution today; but, most importantly, I asked Dony if he could help us to see, in this sculpture of Saint Oliver, the face of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who humbly gave His life for us on the Cross.

“I am grateful to Dony for bringing all his God-given talents to this task, and also for the prayerful way in which he has approached his work. I also thank the many people from all over Ireland and beyond who have made this commission possible by their prayers and financial support.”

Archbishop Eamon said that he hopes that in the days, months and years to come, countless visitors to the Cathedral will have an opportunity to share in the fruits of Dony’s efforts. He said, “This sculpture is much more than a work of art. I trust that it will draw us to prayer for our brothers and sisters around the world who are suffering for their faith; and I hope in that way that we will all feel called to witness more strongly in our daily lives to Jesus Christ, who loved us ‘even unto death’.”

Reflecting on the life and death of Saint Oliver Plunkett, Archbishop Eamon said that it reveals to us the face of

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Christ. “At his canonisation on 12 October 1975, Pope Paul VI – now Saint Paul VI – said that, “the sacrificial love of Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, is reflected and manifested in this new Saint”. He said Saint Oliver is “for the entire world, an authentic and outstanding example of the love of Christ ... He laid down his life out of love, and thereby freely associated himself in an intimate manner with the sufferings of Christ. Indeed, his dying words were: ‘Into thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit. Lord Jesus, receive my soul.’”

“Historians tell us that Archbishop Oliver was a devoted shepherd, attentive to the sanctification of his clergy and enthusiastic for the education and Christian instruction of young people. His message was one of peace and reconciliation. Pope Paul VI described him as a “vigilant preacher of the Catholic faith” and a “champion of pastoral charity”.

“Four years later, Pope Saint John Paul II who, as Cardinal of Cracow, had been to Oliver’s canonisation, came to Drogheda and venerated the new saint’s relics.

“There he said: Saint Oliver “was the defender of the oppressed and the advocate of justice, but he would never condone violence. For men of violence, his word was the word of the Apostle Peter: “Never pay back one wrong with another” (1 Pt 3 :9). As a martyr for the faith he sealed, by his death, the same message of reconciliation that he had preached during his life. In his heart there was no rancour, for his strength was the love of Jesus, the love of the Good Shepherd who gives His life for his flock. His dying words were words of forgiveness for all his enemies”.

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Archbishop Eamon continued, “And this is so true. At the gallows in Tyburn, London, in 1681, Oliver began his final message by rejecting the fraudulent charges and false testimony that had been brought against him. But then, his words turned to forgiveness. Archbishop Oliver said:

“I do heartily forgive them, and also the judges, who by denying me sufficient time to bring my records and witnesses from Ireland did expose my life to evident danger. I do also forgive all those who had a hand in bringing me from Ireland to be tried here, where it is morally impossible for me to have a fair trial. I do finally forgive all who did concur directly or indirectly to take away my life; and I ask forgiveness of all those whom I ever offended by thought, word or deed”.

First Holy Communion cost for NI parents hits seven-year high

The survey found that children making their First Holy Communion pocketed an average of £345 from family and friends

It is a costly time for parents when their child takes their first First Holy Communion - and it's getting even more expensive.

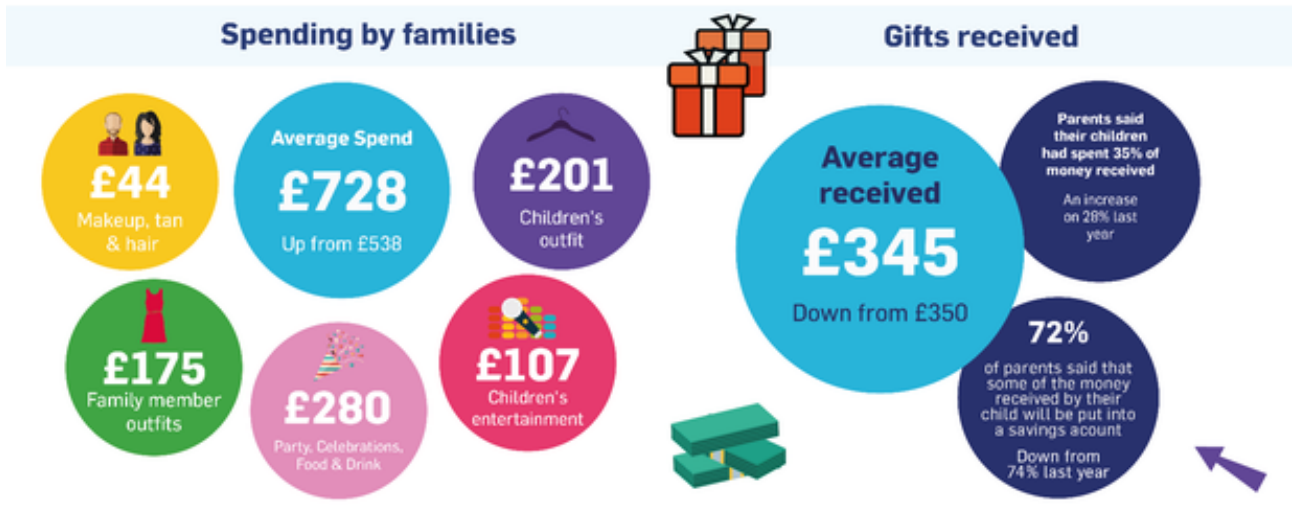
Research from [Ulster Bank](#) found families in Northern Ireland spend an average of £729 on the milestone event - an increase of £160 on the 2018 figure.

The annual survey also found children making their [First Holy Communion pocketed an average of £345](#) from family and friends, up £17 on the 2018 figure.

Ulster Bank Communion Survey 2019

An assessment of the amount that parents spend on First Holy Communion, how it is funded, how much money children receive and how they spend it

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This is the second highest amount gifted since the survey began in 2012.

The amount spent by families reached a seven-year high this year with an average of £280 going on parties, celebrations and food and drink.

Children's outfits accounted for close to 30% of the total budget while the rest was divided among clothes for other family members (£175), children's entertainment (£107) and hair and make-up (£44).

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While spending for survey respondents was up overall on 2018 figures, costs for clothing other family members and amount spent on grooming were both marginally lower than in previous years, dropping by 5% and 19% respectively.

In keeping with previous years' trends, families with girls making their [First Holy Communion incurred much higher expenditure](#) , spending £807 which was around 24% more than families with boys marking the occasion.

Most families financed their child's special day themselves with just 2% of families of surveyed claimed to have taken out a loan to meet the costs of celebrations.

On average, children spent a total of 35% of the money they received with the biggest proportion of this spend going on toys, computer games, and clothes.

According to the survey, 72% of children will place a proportion of their First Communion money in a savings account opened in their own name.

[Head of Personal Banking at Ulster Bank, Terry Robb](#) , said: "For many children, making their First Holy Communion is the first big occasion they experience and while it's nice to buy a new toy or computer game to mark the event, we're pleased to see the majority of children putting all or part of this money into a savings account.

"It's never too early for children to learn about the importance of saving for the future and we believe being exposed to positive saving habits at home can help these children grow up to be financially responsible."

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New National Lead for evangelism and witness for the Church of England

The Church of England is pleased to announce the appointment of The Very Revd Dr Stephen Hance as its new National Lead for Evangelism and Witness.

In this key role, Stephen will be responsible for working with dioceses, churches and other organisations to equip the Church's million regular worshippers to be a confident witness in every part of their lives and enable a growing Church.

Stephen will also be responsible for a national project to identify, equip and release 1,000 new evangelists in the Church of England by 2025. His appointment emphasises the importance the Church attaches to our commitment to 'motivate the million.'

Stephen is currently the Dean of Derby, a position he has held since 2017. He was previously the Canon Missioner of Southwark Cathedral and Director of Mission and Evangelism for the Diocese of Southwark from 2013 to 2017. Stephen is founder and convener of the Cathedrals and Growth Network and is a former member of the General Synod.

The Revd Canon Dave Male, Director of Evangelism and Discipleship for the Church of England, said:

"We are very excited that Stephen is joining our Evangelism and Discipleship Team. This is a crucial role in the life of the Church. His wide experience and passion for evangelism will be key in helping 'to motivate the million'."

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The Revd Canon Chris Russell, the Archbishop of Canterbury’s Advisor for Evangelism and Witness, said:

“I am absolutely delighted that Stephen has been appointed to this post. His experience, commitment, and knowledge of the church will be the most wonderful gift – to the new team, to the Church of England and, most importantly to enable God’s people to communicate the gift of the love of Christ to all. I can’t wait to work alongside him.”

Of his appointment, Stephen said:

“The Church of England is committed to sharing the good news of Jesus Christ in our nation so that all may know of God’s love for them. We understand that we need to refocus our prayer and energy on evangelism and witness so that this can happen. These priorities have been at the heart of my own vocation ever since I was a teenager, and I am

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thrilled to be joining the Evangelism and Discipleship Team at such a key moment.

“I pray that we may be a church inspired by the love of God and enabled to speak of that love to others.”

Stephen was ordained as a deacon in 1993, and as a priest in 1994. From 1993 to 1996, he served his curacy in the Diocese of Portsmouth. He then served as Team Vicar of St. Saviour's Hanley Road in the Diocese of London before moving to Southwark Diocese in 1999, where he was Vicar of Ascension Balham Hill and then Director of Mission and Evangelism for the Diocese of Southwark.

Stephen will take up his new role at the end of September.

Church of England to formally recognise monks and nuns

Monks and nuns will be formally recognised by the Church of England for the first time since the Reformation, after criticism over its response to a series of child abuse scandals.

For the first time since Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries in the 16th century, the Church has voted to create a law, known as a canon, so that it can regulate religious groups.

It follows heightened concerns about safeguarding, after some religious communities faced allegations of sexual abuse in a damning report from the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) in May.

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The report criticised the Prince of Wales for his friendship with Peter Ball, a former Bishop of Gloucester who abused his position as a senior member of the clergy to “manipulate vulnerable teenagers and young men for his own sexual gratification”.

IISCA’s report concluded that the Church’s response to claims of child sexual abuse was “marked by secrecy, prevarication and avoidance of reporting alleged crimes”.

Addressing the General Synod, Dr David Walker, Bishop of Manchester, said: “The IICSA report relating to the abuse perpetrated by Peter Ball under the cover of setting up religious communities is truly shocking.

“I live with a sense of shame and disgust as the proper human and Christian response to reading that report.”

He cited the IICSA recommendation that asks the C of E to introduce “guidance which deals with safeguarding within the context of a religious community affiliated to the Church”.

It continues: “It must ensure that these organisations meet adequate requirements for safeguarding and child protection. The needs of victims should be prioritised when designing safeguarding policies and practices.”

Following a unanimous vote at the General Synod in York yesterday morning, the House of Bishops has more oversight in how it can regulate monks and nuns.

The regulations specify conditions relating to safeguarding children and vulnerable adults, as well as financial affairs and the making of vows.

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The canon will also specify the minimum number of members required for a community to be eligible for regulation. Dr Walker said it would provide structure following the “growth in new religious communities”. One nun, Sister Catherine Harvey of the Sisters of the Love of God in Oxford, questioned the canon’s introduction while there is a decline in the numbers of those observing private religious life.

“It does seem ironic that after 150 years of religious life, the Church has chosen a time when we are in terminal decline to regulate and recognise us by canon,” she said. “The answer most often given is that of safeguarding. It is right that the shame of the Church should have concrete expression in this form. The need has been highlighted by the death of our brother Peter Ball.”

July 11 - Today in Christian history

July 11, 1533: Pope Clement VII excommunicates England's King Henry VIII for remarrying after his divorce.

July 11, 1656: Barbados expatriates Ann Austin and Mary Fisher become the first Quakers to arrive in America. Officials promptly arrested them and deported them back to England five weeks later.

July 11, 1681: Oliver Plunkett, Archbishop of Armagh, is executed, having been found guilty of treason. He was the last Catholic to die for his faith in England and the first Irish martyr to be beatified.

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July 11, 1886: Protestant missionary Horace Underwood secretly baptizes Mr. Toh Sa No in Korea—the first recorded Protestant baptism in that country. However, an underground church was probably already active in Korea, begun by Korean workmen who had heard the gospel in China.

July 11, 1955: Congress puts "In God We Trust" on all U.S. currency.

July 11 News Links

[Gay marriage and abortion vote: Church leaders express 'disappointment'](#)

Belfast Newsletter

The Presbyterian **Church** in **Ireland** said it was disappointed that the amendments had been voted through while the Stormont impasse continues.

[DUP under pressure over watershed abortion and same-sex marriage vote by MPs](#)

Belfast Telegraph

The Presbyterian **Church** said it was disappointed that the amendments ... "The lack of access to abortion for women in Northern **Ireland** has already ...

[Same-sex marriage and wider access to abortion in North backed by MPs](#)

[Independent.ie](#)

The Presbyterian **Church** in **Ireland** expressed its "disappointment and regret" on the votes, saying they pave the way for "liberalisation of abortion law ...

[Northern Ireland church leaders raise concerns over amendments that could allow same-sex ...](#)

Premier

Rev Trevor Gribben, General Secretary of the Presbyterian **Church** in **Ireland**, told Premier: "Well basically the amendments that are going to be ...

[Westminster to introduce same-sex marriage and abortion in Northern Ireland if Assembly not ...](#)

Premier

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The **Church of Ireland's** Rt Revd Dr Kenneth Kearon, Bishop of Limerick and Killaloe, and Chair of the **Church** and Society Commission said: "While ...

[A deeply sad day for Northern Ireland](#)

ChristianToday

The law on abortion in Northern **Ireland** strikes a difficult and delicate ... However, the **church** in Northern **Ireland** will continue to champion marriage ...

[10000 March for Life in Ireland](#)

Church Militant

In Dublin on Saturday, July 6, thousands of participants in the All-**Ireland** Rally for Life marched against the legalization of abortion in the Republic of ...

[Tributes as chair of abuse inquiry Anthony Hart dies](#)

ITV News

... School in Bangor said he was "very saddened" at the **news** of his death. ... **Church of Ireland** Bishop of Down and Dromore, Reverend Harold Miller said: ... "He served the Lord, the church and the community with faithfulness and ...

[Sir Anthony Hart: Historical abuse inquiry chairman dies](#) - BBC News

[Historical abuse inquiry chairman Sir Anthony Hart dies suddenly](#) - The Irish News

[Mummified Crusader restored to duty in St Michan's crypt after beheading](#)

The Times

A **church** in Dublin has reopened its crypt to the public four and a half ... Experts from the National Museum of **Ireland** have been helping to restore the ...

[Irish Primate: Bring back "temperance movement"](#)

The Catholic Universe (press release)

The leader of the Catholic **Church** in **Ireland** has called for the reintroduction of a "temperance movement" in Irish society in an attempt to deal with ...

[Amid rise in gang violence, Irish archbishop calls for new temperance movement](#)

Catholic News Agency

An archbishop in Northern **Ireland** has called for the reigniting of a ... The archbishop spoke after Mass at St. Peter's **Church** in Drogheda to honor the ...

[€2k prize on offer for Cork church's organ competition](#)

[BreakingNews.ie](#)

€2k prize on offer for Cork **church's** organ competition ... The city's **Church of Ireland** community is planning several commemorative events next year ...

[Despite its enforced political evolution northern Ireland is still a sectarian state](#)

The Irish News

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That is revealed in The Irish **News** front page statistic (July 1), showing that Catholic youths make up 76 per cent of young people in custody. In the US ...

[Methodist Church responds to Church of England General Synod vote](#)

Premier

Methodist Church responds to **Church of England** General Synod vote ... Premier's **news** output takes a lot of time, money and hard work to produce.

[Prime minister will not have choice of archbishop](#)

The Times

Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair both clashed with the **Church of England** over the nomination of bishops or archbishops by refusing to appoint the ...

[Report Urges the UK Government Must Prevent Christian Persecution](#)

World Religion News

Foreign Office staff as well as British diplomats, abroad and in the UK, must undergo mandatory training in **religious** literacy so that they are equipped ...

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