



Fr Barney McGuckian (left)

Jesuit priest says Ireland must tackle its drinking problem

The last Jesuit director of the Pioneer Total Abstinence Association has urged Irish society to tackle its excessive drinking for the sake of its children, Catholic Ireland reports.

Referring to Childline's figures which revealed its volunteers received 1,200 calls, texts and online contacts from children

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on Christmas Day, Fr Barney McGuckian expressed concern that much of this was alcohol related.

“The worst thing about excessive drinking is not the men it makes drunk but the children that it makes afraid,” Fr McGuckian told CatholicIreland.net.

He said the fact that Childline had been inundated with calls from children suggested that “there must be some great pain going on”. He appealed to parents to make sacrifices in their consumption of alcohol for the sake of their children.

Fr McGuckian was speaking after members of the Pioneers gathered in Gardiner Street church in Dublin to mark the Pioneer Association’s 120th anniversary and the historic transfer of the Association’s governance from the Jesuits to lay people.

Explaining the reason for the transfer, the 82-year-old priest said, “The Jesuits haven’t the numbers to keep things going and to guarantee it. I’ve known for over 20 years that I was the last Jesuit. We have been planning this for a long time.”

Over the years of his involvement Fr McGuckian has noted the shift from teenage drinking in the 1970s to teenage drunkenness in the 1980s to teenage drunkenness plus drugs from the 1990s onwards.

“I don’t know where we are going in the 21st century. It is a very complex reality we are trying to deal with now.”

The Pioneer Total Abstinence Association of the Sacred Heart was founded in St Francis Xavier Church, Gardiner Street, Dublin on 28th December 1898 by Fr James Cullen.

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While the number of problem drinkers has declined in Ireland, according to Fr McGuckian, the big growth area is Africa.

“The problem of alcohol in Kenya has been described as a state of emergency, so we are dealing with a massive worldwide problem. The Pioneers ask people who have no problem with alcohol to give it up in solidarity with someone who has a problem.

“It is a high ideal but in Ireland thousands of people have risen to it. The Pioneers worked a miracle in Irish life between 1898 and 1918 when 200,000 of the so-called drunken Irish sobered up.”

Among the Association’s high-profile members are the horse racing trainers Aidan O’Brien and Jim Bolger.

Olive and Seamus McRory from Co. Longford are lifelong Pioneers. They were married by Fr McGuckian in 1976.

Mr McRory told CatholicIreland.net that he made the decision to become a Pioneer because he thought life was “grand” without drink. “I could never understand people who would go out and enjoy themselves for two hours and then would have too much drink and the next day would be complaining how unwell they felt.”

Mrs McRory said she didn’t drink when she was young, but didn’t think deeply about it. “At that time people didn’t take that much and as I was drinking from a very young age – when I was 17 – it just never occurred to me when I socialised with my friends to drink. I kept the pledge.”

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Mr McRory said he “totally disagreed with sponsorship by alcohol companies of any products that involve young people”.

Mrs McRory said she regretted that “everything nowadays centres around alcohol”.

She added, “We would encourage people not to drink, but I think it would be falling on deaf ears.”

She lamented the Government’s decision to introduce pub opening on Good Friday, describing it as “a bad decision”.

QUB seeks meeting with DUP to clarify freeze on Presbyterian links

The News Letter reports that Queen’s University Belfast is seeking to meeting the DUP to explain why it has suspended links with a Presbyterian college, after the party highlighted the “concern, anger and confusion” caused by the decision.

QUB said last month that it was putting on hold an arrangement of over 100 years standing, whereby it sends undergraduate theology students to be trained by the Presbyterian Church’s ministry training college in Belfast,

The university said this was due to “concerns regarding the breadth and diversity of the teaching and curriculum being delivered” at Union Theological College (UTC). The findings were made as part of a surprise review, announced in June, only days after Presbyterian elders from across the island voted overwhelmingly to adopt a highly controversial policy which excludes anyone in a same sex relationship from full membership.

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Union Theological College

However the DUP has now stepped into the row. “The decision by Queen’s University to suspend undergraduate programmes in Theology, which were delivered through Union Theological College, has resulted in concern, anger and confusion,” DUP MLAs Christopher Stalford and Gordon Lyons told the News Letter.

The MLAs said school leavers will now no longer be able to study a non-vocational theology degree anywhere in NI and that QUB’s motivations “are vague, unsubstantiated and strongly disputed by the college”.

In response QUB said only that it has now “requested a meeting with Mr Stalford to clarify the university’s position”.

The proactive response by QUB marks an apparently significant departure in its transparency on the matter, having refused to answer any News Letter questions since

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the decision emerged on 18 December - and having also refused to release the critical report to the college itself.

The MLAs added: “Union scores well by any academic benchmarks. Reports from external examiners, Union’s place in league tables, and high student satisfaction are all indicative of the solid education that the college provides and one that any educational institution would be proud of.

“It begs the question as to why the University has made this decision. It is even more puzzling considering that a Review of Theology at Queen’s had already taken place in 2016. As a result of that, the College developed a new undergraduate degree programme...however, this was in place no time at all till the University announced another review in July 2018. Why was this the case? What was the catalyst for it? What happened in the weeks leading up to that decision? It seems highly irregular that another review would be initiated before the new curriculum was given time to be evaluated.”

They added: “Many people will come to the conclusion that the University would simply prefer not to have any links with the College because it is a Presbyterian college, regardless of the quality of the courses, its teaching or the education it provides. This is despite the fact that QUB is by no means unique, as other Russell Group universities work in partnership with denominational colleges, as do Oxford and Cambridge.”

A source close to QUB said: “It could be that QUB has been so quick to seek a meeting with the DUP because the party has traditionally held the university’s purse strings by controlling the Department for the Economy at Stormont.”

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Queen's University

Students go public

Meanwhile, two students of UTC have gone public to praise their institution.

Just before Christmas, the university has put on hold an arrangement whereby it sends its undergraduates to the college for theological degrees, after a surprise review announced in June.

After the news broke, theology undergraduate Anna Cubitt contacted the News Letter, saying she was “extremely saddened by the University’s decision concerning Union Theological College”.

She added: “As a current student I believe that Queens university has completely ignored any positive influences the college has upon the students it comes into contact with.

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It deals with all types of students, from all walks of life and faith backgrounds, being totally inclusive to all.

“As a student with mental health issues I can honestly say that union college has been extremely good to me and encouraged me academically, in order to achieve my best.

“It seems to me that the only problem here in the endeavours of liberal students union, which seems to give everyone a voice except the Christian.

“By taking this action QUB are in fact not being inclusive to all, certainly least the Christians in attendance. The staff at Union are of the highest calibre and you would be foolish to dismiss them.”

Postgraduate UTC student N James O'Neill contacted the News Letter to take issue with “misinformation”.

He noted that last month it was reported that an external watchdog had found that academic standards at UTC were “at risk”. However UTC responded that the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) report only applied to non-degree courses and that the feedback was part of a voluntary process by the college to gain independent accreditation for the courses.

Mr O'Neill said he found that the QAA report “has possibly not been interpreted as it ought” by the media.

He added: “Standards within the undergraduate programme, which is awarded by QUB and taught by Union, were found to be of satisfactory standard.” The non-degree courses run

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by the college were “found to lack the paper trail required for their department meetings” but this was “a minor issue” which can be easily improved, he said.

“I also find it strange that the college has been accused of not fostering a supportive and open environment. Student satisfaction rates in the college have been found to be far higher than average. The student community is made up of a whole range of backgrounds, including Roman Catholic and atheist. I know that these students feel very much at home there. They feel that they can openly share their beliefs and interact with others. It’s a helpful environment for students to encounter other beliefs.

“Overall, I find that the reporting of this situation has been filled with a lot of misinformation.”

Egyptian policeman dies trying to defuse bomb outside church

Egypt's Interior Ministry says a policeman was killed as he was trying to defuse a homemade explosive device near a church in a residential Cairo district.

The ministry said the blast, which occurred late on Saturday in the Egyptian capital, also wounded the commander of the bomb squad.

It came just two days before the Orthodox Coptic Church, the dominant denomination among Egypt's estimated 10 million Christians, celebrates Christmas.

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The incident is likely to force authorities to further tighten security around churches.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the blast, which bore the hallmarks of the Islamic State group.

IS has targeted Christians in Egypt over the past years, killing more than a hundred of them in attacks on churches and buses carrying pilgrims to remote desert monasteries.

Inter-church suicide-prevention initiative

Flourish! is a suicide-prevention initiative organised in partnership between Lighthouse Ireland and clergy from Churches throughout Northern Ireland.

The project has the backing of Ireland's four main Church leaders and is supported by the Public Health Agency.

The next training day will take place on Tuesday 26th February 2019 at NICVA, (61 Duncairn Gardens, Belfast, BT15 2GB) from 9.30am-4.30pm.

The aim of these training modules is to explore the relationship between the theological understanding of suicide and how this translates into pastoral action.

We invite all clergy, youth workers, church lay readers, lay pastoral workers and staff representatives from churches of all denominations to attend. There is no fee for attending the training and lunch will be provided.

To register for the training, please call Lighthouse on 02890 755070 or email: emily@lighthousecharity.com

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Discover more about Flourish! by logging on to
www.wewillflourish.com

January 7 & 6 in Christian history

January 7, 367: Early church father Athanasius, famous for his battles against the Arian heresy, writes a letter containing a list of what he thinks should be considered the canon of Scripture. Over time, his list would be accepted by the church.

January 7, 1536: Catherine of Aragon, whose divorce from Henry VIII was part of the catalyst for the English Reformation, dies.

January 7, 1844: Bernadette Soubirous, whose visions of Mary led to the establishment of the Shrine of Lourdes, is born.

January 6, 548: The Jerusalem church observes Christmas on this date for the last time as the Western church moves to celebrating the birth of Jesus on December 25.

January 6, 1412 (traditional date): Joan of Arc, the French peasant mystic Christian who became a national heroine and her country's patron saint, is born.

January 6, 1832: French artist Gustave Dore, known for his drawings and lithographs for the Bible, Dante's Inferno, and other works, is born in Strasbourg, France.

January 6, 1850: Charles Spurgeon, who would become one of the greatest preachers of all time, converts to Christianity after receiving a vision, "not a vision to my eyes,

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but to my heart. I saw what a Savior Christ was," he wrote, "I can never tell you how it was, but I no sooner saw Whom I was to believe than I also understood what it was to believe, and I did believe in one moment".

January 6, 1884: Augustinian monk Gregor Mendel, founder of the science of genetics, dies.

January 6, 1494: The first Roman Catholic mass in America is celebrated on Isabella Island, Haiti.

News links

Relatives of Kingsmill massacre victims urge killers to admit actions

<https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/relatives-of-kingsmill-massacre-victims-urge-killers-to-admit-actions-37682970.html>

We need a major public inquiry into the IRA because few of its victims will get justice

<https://www.newsletter.co.uk/news/opinion/we-need-a-major-public-inquiry-into-the-ira-because-few-of-its-victims-will-get-justice-1-8725099>

Kingsmills atrocity: 'Those who killed dad 43 years ago today cannot hide from God'

<https://www.newsletter.co.uk/news/kingsmills-atrocity-those-who-killed-dad-43-years-ago-today-cannot-hide-from-god-1-8758638>

Gardaí investigating after swastika painted outside Dublin synagogue

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<https://www.irisht Examiner.com/breakingnews/ireland/gardai-investigating-after-swastika-painted-outside-dublin-synagogue-895423.html#.XC5xaFb6lzs.facebook>

Safeguarding: PCCs must report serious incidents to Charity Commission

<https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2019/4-january/news/uk/safeguarding-pccs-must-report-serious-incidents-to-charity-commission>

[I love the Presbyterian **Church in Ireland**; I am a part of it and it of me... but the decision to sever ...](#)

Belfast Telegraph

John Dunlop was born in the townland of Tormore, near Newry. His father worked in the Ministry of Agriculture and his mother was an accomplished ...

[Priest bans homeless people from sleeping in **church** after small group were 'drinking and urinating ...](#)

[Independent.ie](#)

A parish priest in Co Clare has barred homeless people from sleeping in Ennis Cathedral due to consistent problems with drinking, smoking and ...

[US President of Ulster Scots heritage who revelled in the great outdoors](#)

Belfast Newsletter

Canon Ian Ellis is a former editor of The **Church of Ireland** Gazette, which is editorially independent of the **Church of Ireland**. He is also the current ...

[Funding for a host of rural communities in Leitrim](#)

Leitrim Observer

Aughavas Parish Improvements Scheme - €3,000 Garden and safety equipment ... Kiltubrid **Church of Ireland** Restoration Fund €740 - Lawnmower

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