

## **Dublin Street Pastors reach out to vulnerable in night time economy**



**Newly commissioned Dublin Street Pastors with Archbishop Michael Jackson and representatives of An Garda Síochána.**

**May 22, 2019**

The official launch and first commissioning service for Dublin Street Pastors took place on Wednesday last in Christ Church Cathedral.

Dublin Street Pastors is a local initiative of the global Street Pastor movement. It seeks to mobilise Christian volunteers from different churches to engage relevantly with issues of social vulnerability and substance misuse, by training volunteers to effectively care, listen to and offer help to those who may be at risk in the context of the Dublin's night time economy.

The first group of Dublin Street Pastors represents a range of churches across Dublin including Roman Catholic, Church of Ireland, Methodist, Baptist and Pentecostal congregations. St Ann's Church on Dawson Street is providing space in their parish centre for the base of operations on Saturday nights.

Dean's Vicar at Christ Church Cathedral, the Revd Abigail Sines, who was commissioned as a Street Pastor last week, explains that Street Pastors offer practical assistance which may include minor first aid, offering flip flops when high heels have become too uncomfortable, giving out bottled water, helping someone who has become separated from friends so that they don't become vulnerable, or chatting with people who are having a rough night and need someone to listen.

"This may open up questions or curiosity about faith or why individuals have chosen to volunteer as Street Pastors—or it may not! Prayerful presence is central to this ministry," she said.

May 22, 2019



## Mothers' Union in strength at the General Synod in Derry last week

She added: "It is wonderful to be part of this initiative drawing together participants from so many different churches. As our diverse team comes together, we hope to be of service to our city and in that service to bear witness to the presence of Christ among us".

Archbishop Michael Jackson, who is one of the Street Pastors license agreement signatories, presided at the service. He spoke of the ways in which they connected the work of God in church and the work of God on the street. Commending them for their willingness to put themselves in the front line of care and compassion he said he was mindful that the Street Pastors Movement had come out of a response to drugs, gangs and guns.

The address was given by Paul Rothwell of Trinity Church Network who said that God was a God of peace and order.



May 22, 2019

He suggested that peace could be brought about through governance and grace and that Christians, as ambassadors of Jesus in the Kingdom of God, could be both the custodians and dispensers of that.

He said that in today's world there was much fragmentation and many were concerned about what 'tribe' people belonged to adding that his tribe was humanity.

Referring to Jeremiah 29 he said that the people in exile were told that they were to own the city spiritually. He suggested that a church that could not be seen impoverished Irish society. Street Pastors enabled volunteers to show God's love on the city streets and told the newly commissioned volunteers that when they went out to meet those on the streets at night they were representing Jesus, who himself pastored on the streets.

Mr Rothwell said that a sanctimonious church could look down its nose at the people who Street Pastors would engage with. Again, this was reflected in Jesus's own experience. He would reach out with relevance and would not break or snuff out the fragility of humanity that lies behind the bravado, the drink or the dope, he stated. Jesus's servanthood was carried out with grace, truth and blessing.

Street Pastors was founded by the Revd Les Isaac OBE who pioneered the organisation in 2003. On the first night 18 volunteers took to the streets in Brixton, London. Since then Ascension Trust has trained over 14,000 volunteers and has about 280 initiatives in the UK and around the world. Over six years volunteers have collected 37,000

**May 22, 2019**

weapons as part of their work. In recognition of his contribution to society he has been awarded an OBE and was recently appointed an honorary Ecumenical Canon at Southward Cathedral.

Speaking in Christ Church Cathedral, he said Street Pastors was synonymous with the church. He suggested that God is dynamic and touches people where they are. He spoke about the need to have a vision for the city and the need for incarnational ministry.

The charge given to the newly commissioned volunteers was: "Street Pastors are called to show the love of Jesus to those whom they meet. They are called to be a listening ear, a practical help, a ready friend and a prayerful presence on the streets of Dublin. Street Pastors are called to be open and approachable, and to take responsibility as citizens of integrity to make our streets a better and a safer place to be."

## **Irish Church Leaders' release 'dialogue' report**

The leaders of Ireland's main Churches have released a report on the dialogue that they engaged in following their initial meetings with Northern Ireland's five party leaders.

Entitled *A time for courageous and compassionate leadership: Report on the Church Leaders' Civil Society Dialogue Initiative*, the senior churchmen presented the report and its main findings to Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP, An Tánaiste,

May 22, 2019



**Fr. Peter Burns (Left) was officially installed as Rector of Clonard, Belfast. Fr Peter asked that we pray for him.**

Simon Coveney TD and the party leaders attending the inter-party talks on Tuesday 14 May.

The initiative began in September 2018 when the Church Leaders invited the leaders of Northern

Ireland's main political parties to discuss the consequences of the political impasse. This was then followed by separate meetings in October between the Church Leaders, Secretary of State and Tánaiste.

Those involved in each of the autumn meetings agreed that it would be helpful if the Church Leaders' dialogue between them could be opened up to the party's locally-based MLAs along with some from wider Northern Ireland society.

Between December 2018 and February 2019 approximately 120 people attended facilitated discussions in Newry, Belfast, Ballymena and Derry-Londonderry. This included

May 22, 2019



## **Richard Godsil and the Reverend Anne Skuseform Cork diocese with their 'General Synod bags' in The Diamond, Londonderry**

locally-based representatives from health and social care, policing, business, farming and agriculture, youth work, family support, women's groups, those engaged in anti-poverty work and community development. Like many other similar gatherings, these meetings focused on the consequences of the political impasse and ways in which political leaders and civil society could work together for the common good. Two Church Leaders attended each regional meeting along with local church representatives and locally-based MLA's.

Releasing the Report, Rev Trevor Gribben, Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church and





### **Ian Knox in the Irish News**

Secretary to the Church Leaders' Group (Ireland) said. "The Church Leaders welcomed the opportunity last week to meet with the Secretary of State, An Tánaiste and the party leaders during the inter-party talks last week. The Church Leaders wanted to encourage those involved in this fresh initiative, which they hope will lead to substantive progress over the next number of weeks. During the meeting they also shared with them the report's key findings.

"In the report the Church Leaders say, 'There is great value in people from different backgrounds, and different sectors, coming together to support each other recognising our collective responsibility for the common good. We have heard a strong message coming from our local communities



**May 22, 2019**

that this is the kind of leadership people want, and need, to see at the present time,” Mr Gribben said.

“Acknowledging that the timing for the talks was not perfect, the Church Leaders said that they were aware of a growing sense of despair in communities at the lack of political movement on restoring devolution. Together, they hoped that this fresh initiative would lead to substantive progress and the establishment of a sustainable power-sharing executive that is built on balanced accommodation and focused on the common good. They added that this would require leadership that is courageous and compassionate.

“Having discussed the report with the inter-party talks participants and referenced the initiative in their various public statements following their meeting, the Church Leaders felt that it would be helpful if the report was shared more widely,” Mr Gribben said.

## **One of the three C of I maintained schools in NI to close**

ONE of the north's last remaining Church of Ireland schools has been earmarked for closure - spelling doom for plans to create a joint-faith primary.

It had been hoped Desertmartin PS and the Catholic Knocknagin PS in Co Derry would merge to become the north's first jointly-managed Church school.

The two have enjoyed a significant link for several years, which even saw a shared teacher employed.

**May 22, 2019**

Low pupil numbers, however, have prompted the Derry Diocesan Board of Education to recommend that Desertmartin shut.

In September 2018, it welcomed just one new P1 pupil and there are no first preferences for September this year.

At one time there was a thriving network of schools under control of Protestant Churches but gradually from the 1920s until the 1960s ownership of almost all were transferred to government.

The Catholic Church kept hold of its schools at the price of less financial support from the state, although equal funding was eventually negotiated decades later.

Just three schools are managed by the Church of Ireland - Drelincourt Infants' in Armagh, Seagoe PS in Portadown and Desertmartin.

Kilcoan PS in Islandmagee, a Presbyterian-maintained school, closed in 2016.

The plan to shut Desertmartin, which has just 13 pupils, will soon be put out to consultation.

A case for change document said a school with such low numbers was "unsustainable both from an educational and financial perspective".

It noted that the governors' and principal's preferred option remained a jointly-managed faith school but said this was not achievable within a timescale that would improve the school's sustainability.

**May 22, 2019**

"There is no indication that this pattern of enrolment will change in the near future or that Desertmartin PS can avail of effective jointly managed shared education or partnership working arrangements that will increase sustainability," the case for change said.

"Given the declining enrolment the financial position can only deteriorate further."

## **IDAHOT Service at Saint Anne's Church, Shandon, Cork**



### **Choral ConFusion sang again this year at the IDAHOT Service.**

On Sunday, 12th May, a Service was held in St Anne's Church, Shandon, in Cork to mark International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia. This year's service took its theme from Cork City LGBT Awareness week – 'Allies for Inclusion'.

The Reverend Sarah Marry, in introducing the Service, commented that 'our connectedness as those who are created in the image of God, as those who share a common



May 22, 2019

**Sara-Jane Cromwell spoke about the importance to her of faith.**

identity in Christ leads us to value and respect one another. God in his relating to us invites us to follow this pattern in our relationships with one another. So if our individual stories are known intimately by God then we are invited to know something of one



another's stories. We don't then value or respect those whose stories are just like our own but in hearing those stories and finding moments of compassion, empathy and connection we create relationship. And from this we have only two choices; to be an ally or not, to stand alongside one another or to reject, to welcome or exclude.'

The speaker at the Service, Sara-Jane Cromwell, spoke from her experience of gender identity disorder reflected on this and drew on Psalm 139 to speak of a God who doesn't make mistakes but who is able fulfil his purposes through every life, a God who invites each person to know his love through the particular circumstances and challenges of their own story. She spoke of the pain of

**May 22, 2019**

being unable to attend church and feeling isolated and excluded. She reflected on what it was like to be without allies and the difference it makes to have them. Sara-Jane expressed a deep faith that has endured through her life and she expressed the joy then of finding places and people of welcome and encouragement.

Choir Choral ConFusion, directed by Joanne Murphy and accompanied by Brenda Griffin, lifted their voices in song to give thanks for allies in Cork city.

Sara-Jane's moving words served as a reminder that while there is much to celebrate, the need for this day and this mark of solidarity sadly persists. St Anne's is proud to be the home for this while the need exists and continues to enjoy the friendships and fellowship the occasion affords with members of the LGBT+ community in the parish and across our city.

## **Scots General Assembly approves radical action plan**

A three-year radical action plan to reform the Church of Scotland has been approved by the General Assembly.

Dr Sally Bonnar, convener of the Council of Assembly, described the decisions as “far reaching” and a demonstration that the Kirk is listening and facing up to reality.

May 22, 2019

But she said the message sent out by the General Assembly was also one of “we are not content to manage decline” and open to change.

Dr Bonnar said the 17 actions of reform agreed represented a strong commitment to grow the Kingdom of God on earth in a more effective way.

The most significant proposal approved by commissioners is to establish a Growth Fund of £20 million to £25 million for the period 2020-2027.

### *Equipping and resourcing*

The money will be taken from reserves and allocated around criteria focused on growth, impact and sustainability with clearly agreed targets.

Applications will primarily come from individual congregations, groups of churches and presbyteries to fund church planting and projects working with children, young people and families.

The Growth Fund will replace the Go For It Fund which has spent millions on supporting community projects the length and breadth of the country.

On Monday, the General Assembly approved plans to reduce the number of presbyteries from 45 to around 12.

Addressing commissioners, Dr Bonnar said: “In terms of the values which underpin this plan, first and foremost it is





## **Dr Sally Bonnar addresses the General Assembly in Edinburgh**

intended to be about equipping, supporting and resourcing the local church.

“This has to be the core outcome of whatever we do. This change cannot happen overnight but we can and should make a start.

“The Growth Fund will allow substantial funding to be made locally to enable congregations and presbyteries to take forward their ambitions in mission, community engagement, church planting and working with young people.

“Equipping new models of church is about being flexible to local circumstances, needs and opportunities.”

May 22, 2019

The debate, which had devolution of power at its core, lasted most of the day.

### *Excitement*

Speaking afterwards, Dr Bonnar said she hoped commissioners would return to their parishes with a sense of excitement for the future.

“The Church has made some far reaching decisions, not all those actions will be put into place straight away obviously and a lot of work is needed to flesh out what was decided.

“The General Assembly this year has really got the bit between its teeth in terms of moving the Church forward and modernising.

“I hope they have a clear message to take back that we are a Church that is not content to manage decline.

“The decisions made over the last two days tells us that this is a Church that is listening, facing up to realities and is ready to change.

“We are a Church that wants to grow the Kingdom of God and take the messages of the Gospel out to people of Scotland in a more effective way.

“I hope people will go away from this General Assembly with a sense they have achieved something and made a difference.”

**May 22, 2019**

[The Council of Assembly will soon be replaced with a new trustee body which will appoint a new chief officer.](#)

## **Today in Christian history**

**May 22, 337:** Constantine, the first Christian emperor of Rome, dies. Though known for calling the Council of Nicaea (which condemned the Arian heresy) and for beginning the process of Christianizing the empire, he waited until just before his death before he finally accepted baptism into the church.

**May 22, 452:** Leo, bishop of Rome, sends three angry letters to protest the Council of Chalcedon's recent elevation of Constantinople to the preeminent see in Christendom. The two cities had been placed on equal footing by a 381 ecumenical council in Constantinople, but Chalcedon tipped the scale, saying that since the imperial capital had moved to "New Rome" (Constantinople), that city deserved the benefits Rome once enjoyed. This event was one of many leading up to the East-West schism of 1054.

**May 22, 1883:** Billy Sunday, who would become the greatest American tent revivalist after a career in professional baseball, has his first at bat playing for the Chicago White Stockings. He struck out his first 14 attempts.

## **News Links May 22**

[Education crisis could lead to four-day week in Northern Ireland schools: principal](#)

Belfast Telegraph

He was speaking after the call from **Church of Ireland** Bishop of Derry and Raphoe Ken Good for a political intervention to tackle the crisis. Addressing ...

[churchnewsireland@gmail.org](mailto:churchnewsireland@gmail.org)



**May 22, 2019**

## [More than 7000 Irish schoolkids will get free hot meals from September](#)

Irish Mirror

... option that caters for students' **religious** and cultural dietary requirements. ... which brings you all your Irish and UK sports **news** - can be found here.

[More than 7000 primary school children to receive hot dinners under new initiative - Independent.ie](#)

## ['Shocking, shocking:' Justice Sean Ryan on the abuses of children uncovered in his report](#)

Irish Times

It investigated 215 residential institutions for children, run by 18 **religious** ..... institutions, and considering that period of time in **Ireland**, up to the 1970s? .... After the report was published and it was on all the **news** and everything else, ...

## [Irvinestown thieves steal communion plates from church](#)

BBC News

It happened at Irvinestown Presbyterian **Church** on Mill Street sometime ... Treasurer Harold McKee told BBC **News** NI that the burglary has caused ...

## [Thieves steal communion plates with 'immense personal value' from NI church](#)

Belfast Telegraph

"The communion plates are of immense personal value to the **church** and we're appealing to anyone with information to get in touch. We would also ...

## [Carlow has the highest divorce rate in Ireland, courts data reveals](#)

Irish Mirror

Carlow is the county with the highest divorce rate in **Ireland**, it has been revealed ... which brings you all your Irish and UK sports **news** - can be found here. ... column: 'It's difficult to understand Catholic **Church's** opposition to divorce'.

## [Lough Erne Cots Complete St Ninnidh Voyage from Knockninny to Inishmacsaint](#)

Afloat

... for our onward journey, he passed on apologies for Reverent Alastair Donaldson who was attending the **Church of Ireland** General Synod.

## ['Peaceful haven' opened in Nenagh](#)

Nenagh Guardian

... the west, St Mary of the Rosary to the north, and the **Church of Ireland** to the east. ... "Nenagh is the gateway to Ireland's Hidden Heartlands and the ...

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