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IRELAND



At the launch of “Deeper into the mess: Praying through tough times” by Brendan McManus SJ and Jim Deeds in Fitzroy Presbyterian Church (See report in this issue)

Presbyterians prepare for General Assembly 2019

This year’s General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI) will open on Monday evening (3 June) with the churchnewsireland@gmail.org

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formal election of the denomination's youngest Moderator in living memory. The 50-year-old Minister of Maze Presbyterian Church in County Antrim, Rev Dr William Henry, will preside over the 180th meeting of the Church's principal decision-making body.

Around 1,000 ministers and elders from the Church's 500-plus congregations across Ireland will come together for a week of fellowship, worship, prayer, Bible study, celebration, debate and decision-making. Across the 26 sessions scheduled throughout the week – the vast majority of which are open to the public - members of Assembly will have the opportunity to discuss around 110 reports from PCI's Councils, Commissions, Task Groups and Committees and be asked to consider over 100 resolutions on a diverse range of public issues and church-related matters.

For Rev Trevor Gribben, Clerk of the General Assembly and General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, this will be his fifth Assembly as Clerk, having first attended the 1987 General Assembly as an Assistant Minister. Setting the scene for the 2019 meeting he said, "Presbyterians from across Ireland, ministers who have been called by their congregations, elders who have been elected by their brothers and sisters in Christ, meeting in General Assembly together, will join with other representatives, to listen, question, debate, often robustly and take decisions jointly.

"The discussions that we have, and the decisions that we take, will set the direction for the life and ministry of the Church for the coming year and beyond. It is not only a collective and prayerful process, but a democratic one in the best sense of Presbyterianism," he said.

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**Rev Trevor
Gribben, Clerk of
the Assembly**

“At the heart of the Church is our central calling to proclaim and live out the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ in a constantly changing world, and that witness and service is happening day in and day out in our congregations up and down the land. Along with this primary focus, the General Assembly is also

a time where the pressing social, moral, denominational and public issues of the day are also discussed throughout the week.”

Monday evening’s Opening Night will see civic dignitaries and corresponding church representatives from Greece, Romania, Malawi and Indonesia – as well as those closer to home – witness the formal nomination, election and installation of Dr Henry as Moderator for the coming year.

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His predecessor, Dr Charles McMullen will also address the Assembly and report on his year in office.

In a packed week of business, this year's General Assembly will receive a report on Human Rights, which seeks to establish a framework, based on biblical principles that will assist the denomination as it seeks to respond to rights-based issues in the public square.

During the week the General Assembly will have an opportunity to discuss PCI's submission to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland's legacy public consultation, they will also receive an update on a major 3-year project. The Dealing with the Past Task Group was asked by the 2016 General Assembly to explore how Presbyterians responded to the Troubles. The aim of this significant undertaking is to tell a wider story than has been available to date. The stories of ordinary Presbyterians that have emerged from the 100-plus interviews will be published in a book towards the end of the year, and the Church will be seeking to learn from this significant project.

“Much of what the General Assembly does is quite often routine, reporting on amalgamations of congregations, the number of congregations that have been given leave to call a new minister, for example, straightforward church business. Other areas, such as the report on guidelines for church planting and the launch of congregational resources have an internal focus that will support PCI's growth in different ways. There are, however, occasions when substantial pieces of work, like that of the Dealing with the Past Task Group, can have positive impact beyond the doors of the denomination itself,” Trevor Gribben said.

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Mr Gribben also felt that Thursday's Alternative Presentation by the Council for Public Affairs, entitled *Life Always Matters*, could have a similar effect, as it seeks to speak into the professional world and public square on the dignity of human life. Through specially commissioned video, a presentation and an informal panel discussion involving three Presbyterian elected representatives, the General Assembly will be looking at dementia care, end of life care and child and adolescent mental health services.

In the Council's report, it makes the point that as an all-Ireland church 'Presbyterians may be a small minority in the Republic of Ireland but our distinctive witness and influence continues to be recognised in the public square, not least through the participation of former Moderator Very Rev Dr Ivan Patterson in the inauguration of Michael D Higgins as President of Ireland in November 2018...' and other significant national events and discussions.

In a resolution before the General Assembly, it will be asked to welcome opportunities for the Church to participate and seek to influence policy for the good of all in society, while acknowledging the increasing secularisation of the public square in the Republic of Ireland.

"Like most years, much of the work reported stems from decisions taken at previous Assemblies. Last year was no exception and Task Groups have been looking at a number of areas, which also generated intense reporting and considerable public discussion. These included decision making and dissent within the Church and guidance for congregations around membership," Mr Gribben said.

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THE PRIESTS

**St. Bernadette's Church
Rosetta Road, Belfast**



Friday 21st June at 8pm

Tickets £25, under 19s free.

**Credit/debit card sales - stbernadettesparish.org
Cash sales - Matchetts Music (Wellington Place) &
Bread and Banjo Bakery (353 Ormeau Road).**

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“At the time we made the point of stressing that people were free to debate in public, but it was the nature of the discourse that was important. It was also indicated that discussions would take place within the structures of the church on these matters, and this has happened with reports coming to the Assembly this year.

“For instance, the Church’s General Council accepted that clarification was necessary regarding the issues of decision making and dissent within the Church and established a Task Group to draw up a report. The General Assembly will be asked to consider the report and send it down to the Church’s 19 presbyteries for discussion at regional level, with focused questions on decision making and dissent.”

The Clerk also said that a Task Group had been appointed and directed to put together a resource with a clear pastoral tone to be used by kirk sessions on the issue of a credible profession of faith. It will report on its work to date and is proposing to present a resource and draft pastoral guidelines for consideration at the 2020 General Assembly to be sent subsequently to presbyteries for comment.

Last year’s decision to end exchange of Moderators with the Church of Scotland will also be discussed. The General Assembly will be asked on Tuesday to receive a *Notice of Motion* from the Presbytery of South Belfast to reconsider the decision. If the *Notice of Motion* is received this year, a full debate will take place in 2020.

Another internal Church matter concerns PCI’s site at Guysmere, Castlerock in County Londonderry. For many years it was used as the denomination’s youth centre but,

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largely due to Health and Safety concerns, the Centre has been mothballed. At the request of last year's General Assembly the local Presbytery of Coleraine and Limavady was asked to draw up a feasibility study and bring it – along with definitive recommendations – to this year's General Assembly for a decision.

Speaking of Union Theological College (UTC), Mr Gribben said that the past year had brought significant change for the College in relation to its relationship with Queen's University, Belfast, with Queen's deciding to break the link with the College after some 90 years. "The Assembly will be taking time to reflect on that change, but will also be looking forward to hearing of the emerging plans for a new and potentially exciting future for the College," he said.

On pressing public matters, for the second year in succession, the General Assembly will be asked to 'express its deep concern and frustration about the prolonged absence of an Executive in Northern Ireland, the resulting stagnation in public policy and the negative effects on the most vulnerable in society...' The General Assembly will be asked to repeat its call for all involved in the political process 'to find a resolution that establishes good and stable government based on good working relationships.'

In a similar vein, the Council for Social Witness, which as a service provider manages PCI's nursing and residential care homes, along with supported housing schemes for people with a learning disability/intellectual disability and those with addictions and former offenders, will be asking the General Assembly 'to express real concern that in the absence of the Northern Ireland Assembly vital legislation and appropriate

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funding is being denied to essential Health and Social Care Services.'

Book launch: 'Deeper into the mess'

Brendan McManus SJ and Jim Deeds, with the help of Presbyterian Minister Reverend Steve Stockman, launched their book "Deeper into the mess: Praying through tough times" in Belfast's Fitzroy Presbyterian Church on 19 May 2019.

The event, which featured faith sharing and live music, attracted a packed audience consisting of people across all denominations and none.

The follow up to their best-selling first book, "Finding God in the Mess: Meditations for Mindful Living" (<https://www.messenger.ie/product/finding-god-in-the-mess-meditations-for-mindful-living/>), this collaboration was based on a Facebook survey of what people reported were the 'messes' in their lives.

Accordingly the book offers practical meditations for dealing with depression, anger, suicide, breakdown etc., as well as celebrating hope and optimism. Loosely based around the / Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius Loyola/, each chapter has a quote from the saint and an imaginary 'conversation with God' which voices doubts and fears as a two way conversation.

Fitzroy Presbyterian Church was the ideal venue for a book based in Belfast that sought to reach people of all

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denominations united in their human solidarity and desire to find God.

Hosted by Rev Steve Stockman, the evening comprised live interviews with Brendan and Jim about their faith journeys, friendship and writing method.

This was interspersed with music from Jim and Brendan aided by the Christian singer Beki Hemmingway. Midway through was a dramatised 'conversation with God' from the book (played by Sharon Arnold from Fitzroy) and a meditation called 'All will be well' from the book read by Caren Collins of Living Church. Finally, Donal Neary SJ, editor of Messenger Publications (the book's publisher) spoke a few words of encouragement. The hospitality was provided by the Fitzroy team and over 120 people attended.

While there was a casual tone to the evening, there was no mistaking the Christian commitment to prayer, faith and helping those in need. One attendee remarked that everyone there was having a good time, praying, singing and chatting together and that no one knew or cared what tradition (if any) people came from. Caring about each other and especially those in trouble was enough.

What was very evident was that the book was the result of Brendan and Jim's close friendship, shared faith and complimentary style of writing and working together – they also offer a retreat/workshop around Ireland.

Jim and Brendan were deeply grateful to Steve Stockman and Fitzroy Presbyterian Church, Donal Neary SJ and Paula

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Nolan of Messenger Publications, and to all who came and helped out in many different ways.

Shame and guilt felt by survivors of child sexual abuse ‘led to their silence’

The shame and guilt felt by people who were sexually abused within religious institutions were among the main reasons preventing these survivors’ reporting the abuse at the time, new research from the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) has found.

The research, published in a report on Thursday, is based on a survey of 1697 survivors of child sexual abuse in the UK, of whom 183 said that they had been abused within religious institutions, or by clerics or church-related staff elsewhere. Most were Christian, including the C of E (28 per cent), Roman Catholic Church (25 per cent), and Jehovah’s Witnesses (11 per cent).

A small proportion were Muslim (two per cent), and Jewish (one per cent).

Two-thirds (69 per cent) of survivors of abuse in a religious context said that they had not reported the abuse at the time it was carried out. This was compared with more than half (54 per cent) of 1514 survivors of abuse within other institutions. Of the survivors in a religious context who did not report it, half said that this was due to feelings of shame (37 per cent) and guilt (18 per cent).

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The report states: “The types of sexual abuse reported by participants in religious contexts typically involved fondling [62 per cent] or other forms of sexual abuse involving non-penetrative contact, rather than penetrative abuse [32 per cent].”

The survey found that sexual abuse was perpetrated more frequently by individuals in a position of authority (specifically people with an “official” religious title, such as priest, vicar, imam, or elder) than other individuals in a religious setting. Most participants “firmly believed” that other people had been aware of the behaviour of the perpetrator — but did nothing.

The report states: “Participants described male-dominated, closed and insular religious institutions with considerable influence on the community and the lives of their congregants. They described self-governing institutions with little or no external contact or supervision.

Bishop in Europe fears for UK after European Parliament election results

The political situation in Britain looks darker and more difficult, the Bishop in Europe, Dr Robert Innes, has said, in the aftermath of the European Parliament elections.

The Brexit Party emerged as the biggest party after the elections on Thursday of last week, gaining 29 seats with 31.6 per cent of the vote. In another shock, the Liberal Democrats won 16 seats with 20.3 per cent of the vote, becoming the second most successful party.

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Speaking on Wednesday, Dr Innes said: “The British political situation is dark and more difficult all the time.” He said that he was “fearful for the future”, even if there were a second referendum on Brexit.

The Bishop of Liverpool, the Rt Revd Paul Bayes, said that “steady and calm listening” was required after the results were published.

It was a bad election for the Labour Party], and even worse for the Conservatives, who were beaten into fifth place by the Green Party; it is their worst electoral result since 1832.

The Conservatives won just four seats in the European Parliament with nine per cent of the vote, as the public expressed its disapproval of the Government’s handling of Brexit. The result came days after Theresa May had announced her intention to resign as Prime Minister.

Labour lost seven seats in Europe, and saw their vote share fall by 11 per cent. In the aftermath, many leading MPs called for the party to back a second EU referendum. Bishop Bayes suggested on Twitter that this could be a “game-changer”.

The Labour leader, Jeremy Corbyn, said that he was “listening very carefully” to both sides of the argument, and pledged to support a referendum on any Brexit deal.

He wrote to MPs: “It is clear that the deadlock in Parliament can now only be broken by the issue going back to the

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people through a General Election or a public vote. We are ready to support a public vote on any deal.”

Dr Innes said that it was now “quite likely” that there would be a second referendum, but that he did not know whether this was a hopeful thing, owing to the “stark division” in the country.

Pro-Remain parties collectively outperformed those parties calling for a hard Brexit — UKIP and the Brexit Party — as they gained 40.4 per cent of the vote, compared with 34.9 per cent for the others.

Last week, Bishop Baines warned that it would be “impossible” to interpret the results of the election, just as it has been difficult to ascertain the meaning of the original EU referendum.

The leader of the Brexit Party, Nigel Farage, said that he was the biggest winner of the election: “Never before in British politics has a new party launched just six weeks ago topped the polls in a national election.

“There is a huge message here, a massive message here — the Labour and Conservative parties could learn a big lesson from tonight — though I don’t suppose that they actually will.”

Mrs May, speaking on Tuesday, said: “Of course the European election results were deeply disappointing for the party. What it shows is the importance of actually delivering Brexit.”

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Some of the Conservative MPs who are hoping to replace Mrs May as leader, including Boris Johnson, have seemingly backed the idea of a no-deal Brexit, in an attempt to reassure voters who switched to the Brexit Party from the Conservatives.

Across Europe, there were big wins for Green parties. The British version won seven seats, out of 69 across Europe.

Bas Eickhout, a Dutch MEP and the Greens' co-lead candidate for commission president, told The Guardian: "Our voters, especially the younger generation, for many of whom we are now their first choice, are deeply concerned about the climate crisis, and they are pro-European — but they feel the EU is not delivering. They want us to change the course of Europe."

Far-right parties also gained seats in multiple countries, including the Lega Nord in Italy, the National Rally (formerly National Front) in France, and Fidesz in Hungary.

Dr Innes said: "The centre of European politics has held, although it has been challenged. The results are not as worrying as I feared they would be. . .

"The centre, although it has been reduced, is still strong. I am modestly encouraged."

Today in Christian history

May 31, 1578: Italian archaeologist Antonio Bosio discovers the Christian catacombs in Rome. Some have mistaken

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them for places of refuge or worship, but Christians used them mainly as burial chambers.

May 31, 1638: Puritan pastor Thomas Hooker arrives in what is now Connecticut, after leaving Massachusetts because of a rivalry with Roger Williams. The minister also helped organize America's first federal government, the United Colonies of New England.

May 31, 1701: Alexander Cruden, whose biblical concordance is still the standard for the King James Version, is born in Aberdeen, Scotland. Prone to erratic behavior, he worked on the concordance between mental breakdowns.

News briefs

+++ Dedication of County Armagh War Memorial Wall -

On Sunday 16 June at 3pm the Service of Dedication will be held in St Mark's Parish Church, Armagh. BT61 9DT
The Co. Armagh Memorial Wall will finally be unveiled and dedicated.

This has been made possible by all your support and generous contributions and donations made by you and other supporters at many fund-raising events.

The Memorial Tablets bears the names of 345 victims. 750 family members have requested to attend and received invitations to this Service and will be accommodated inside the church. Other family members have been invited into the overflow hall where we are providing a video/audio link because the church will not hold anyone else.

The overflow hall (Armagh Orange Hall) will hold 300-400 people. A large screen will be visible to all to follow the Service. Regretfully because of the volume of people

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attending, there are no parking facilities available at St Marks, but there are parking facilities in the grounds of The Royal School Armagh a short distance away for people to use. Wheelchair drop off access is available via Victoria Street with limited parking being reserved in The Mall. Drop off closes at 1415.

As a large number are expected to attend there will be marshalls present to direct people in the right direction.

+++ Down Pentecost pilgrimage - Yesterday the Dean of Down, Very Rev Henry Hull began a pilgrimage walk. He said before leaving, "Over the next 10 days until Pentecost we will be visiting and praying in many of the churches in Lecale Today. After the Cathedral Service at 10.00am we walk to Hollymount."

+++ Archbishop on dangers of smart phones -

Archbishop Eamon Martin has warned parents against buying smartphones for their children as a Communion present, saying there are "an awful lot of people" who would exploit them, and expressed concern at the 'selfie' generation's need for instant gratification.

+++ Music in St Columb's Derry - This Sunday at 11.00 am a service of Choral Eucharist with music by William Mathias (Third Communion Service) and Samuel Sebastian Wesley (Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace). At 4.00pm the Rural Deanery Service. Music is by Charles Villiers Stanford - 'Evening Canticles in C' and 'Pray that Jerusalem'.

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+++Free App for daily use - The free Church House Publishing and CofE Daily Prayer for **ThyKingdomCome** app is now live! Download from:

- Google Play Store - bit.ly/30UV04j

- Apple's App Store - apple.co/30UV0BI

+++ North Belfast schools positive concerns - William Humpries, MLA, facilitated a meeting for some North Belfast Primary School Principals with Derek Baker, Permanent Secretary at the Department of Education, to discuss the positive outcomes from the pilot scheme which covered Counselling/Emotional Health and Wellbeing support, Literacy and Numeracy support, Nurturing and Behaviour support and Family/School support with parents in the Community. They also discussed the difficulties with SEN provision specifically in North Belfast.

+++St Sennan's pilgrimage, Cork - This year marks the 200th anniversary of St Senan's Church, Inniscarra, in the River Lee valley, County Cork. Recently, as part of the bicentenary celebrations the parish went on pilgrimage to Scattery Island led by the Reverend Robert Ferris. St Senan settled on Scattery Island in the sixth century. It was a lovely day trip to a very special place – a chance to learn, pray, have fun and celebrate Holy Communion together on the island.

+++Catholic tradition flourishing in C of E - The Archbishop of Canterbury commented yesterday - "It was wonderful to be back in Walsingham on Monday with people of all ages on the National Pilgrimage to England's Nazareth. The catholic tradition in the Church of England is

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flourishing – and is a great gift to all of us. It's a gift we must treasure.

“Walsingham is an extraordinary and holy place, where people have travelled for centuries to pray with Mary, the Mother of Jesus. They come to pray for personal healing, for fresh faith and new life – and for our nation and all its people.

“When we look at Mary, she points us to Jesus. It was very moving to spend time praying at the Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham. May our gaze have some of Mary's devotion – fixed on Him who looks on us with love that has no limits.

“And may all those who call Walsingham a spiritual home continue to worship the Lord Jesus Christ in the beauty of holiness, meet with him afresh and find new life in this sacred place.”

+++Please pray for - Michelle Stewart who began serving as a church and community outreach worker in Cloughey a few months ago. Give thanks to God that she has settled into the role so quickly and how faithful God has been. Pray that the church will continue to grow.

+++ Food for thought - “Lust is a poor, weak, whimpering whispering thing compared with that richness and energy of desire which will arise when lust has been killed.” C S Lewis

News Links May 31

[Abbeyleix venue for annual Farm Accident Remembrance Service Newry.ie](#)

The service will be led by local clergy from the **Church of Ireland**, Canon Harvey and Roman Catholic, Fr. Ahern. We will especially remember this year ...

[Smartphone warning from Archbishop](#)

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Belfast Telegraph

The head of the Catholic **Church** in **Ireland** has warned parents against buying smartphones for their children as a Communion present saying there ...

[I don't get the uproar over church's gay stance – don't Presbyterians know their own history?](#)

Belfast Newsletter

The General Assembly of the Presbyterian **Church** in **Ireland** (PCI) meets next week and will consider reports in the light of the public controversy ...

[Overcome your differences for murdered Lyra's sake, retiring Bishop of Derry tells politicians](#)

Belfast Telegraph

A senior figure in the **Church of Ireland** has pleaded with politicians to restore the Assembly in the wake of the murder of journalist Lyra McKee.

[Prince Charles 'very pleasant' as he toured Catholic cathedral in Armagh](#)

The Irish Catholic

... of Ireland, Prince Charles visited Armagh cathedral meeting the Catholic Archbishop of Armagh Eamon Martin and **Church of Ireland** Archbishop of ...

[Parents vow to withdraw children from sex education class](#)

Irish Times

The Educate Together national office has distanced itself from the school and said it did not agree with the use of any **religious** groups to deliver sex ...

[Killyon church work shortlisted for architecture award](#)

Meath Chronicle

Two Meath projects are included in the Royal Institute of the Architects of **Ireland** (RIAI) Public Choice vote for **Ireland's** favourite building, place or ...

[Auditions – Chamber Choir Ireland](#)

The Journal of Music

Chamber **Choir Ireland** is currently seeking to expand its deputy list on the island of **Ireland** and will hold auditions with Artistic Director Paul Hillier on ...

[Obituary: Alexander Chestnut, Church of Scotland minister and Second World veteran](#)

Infosurhoy

Native of Ballycastle. He served during the Second W War. He was ordained in 1948 by the Presbyterian **Church** of **Ireland** but served for almost 25 years in the **Church** of Scotland in Greenock. Such was his ...

[Church of England praises temporary release for prisoners](#)

Premier

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An Anglican Bishop has said the government's decision to give more working releases for prison inmates will have a positive impact on society.

[God's army Religious zeal is surging in Russia's military forces](#)

The Economist

The Russian Orthodox church claims credit for preserving the country's nuclear ... at Westminster Abbey, one of the **Church of England's** grandest temples. ... on the church's military role can be pieced together from **news** bulletins.

[Funeral of former Dean of Canterbury Very Rev John Simpson takes place at Canterbury Cathedral](#)

Kent Online

A keen artist, he retired to live in Folkestone with his wife Ruth in 2000 and was awarded an OBE for his services to the **Church of England**. He was 85 ...

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