



Methodists have change of heart on allowing same-sex marriage



The Marriage and Relationships Task Group's new report 'God in Love Unites Us', will be presented in the upcoming Methodist conference to be held in Birmingham between 27th June and 4th July.

A Methodist working group in GB has recommended that gay couples be allowed to marry in their churches for the first time.

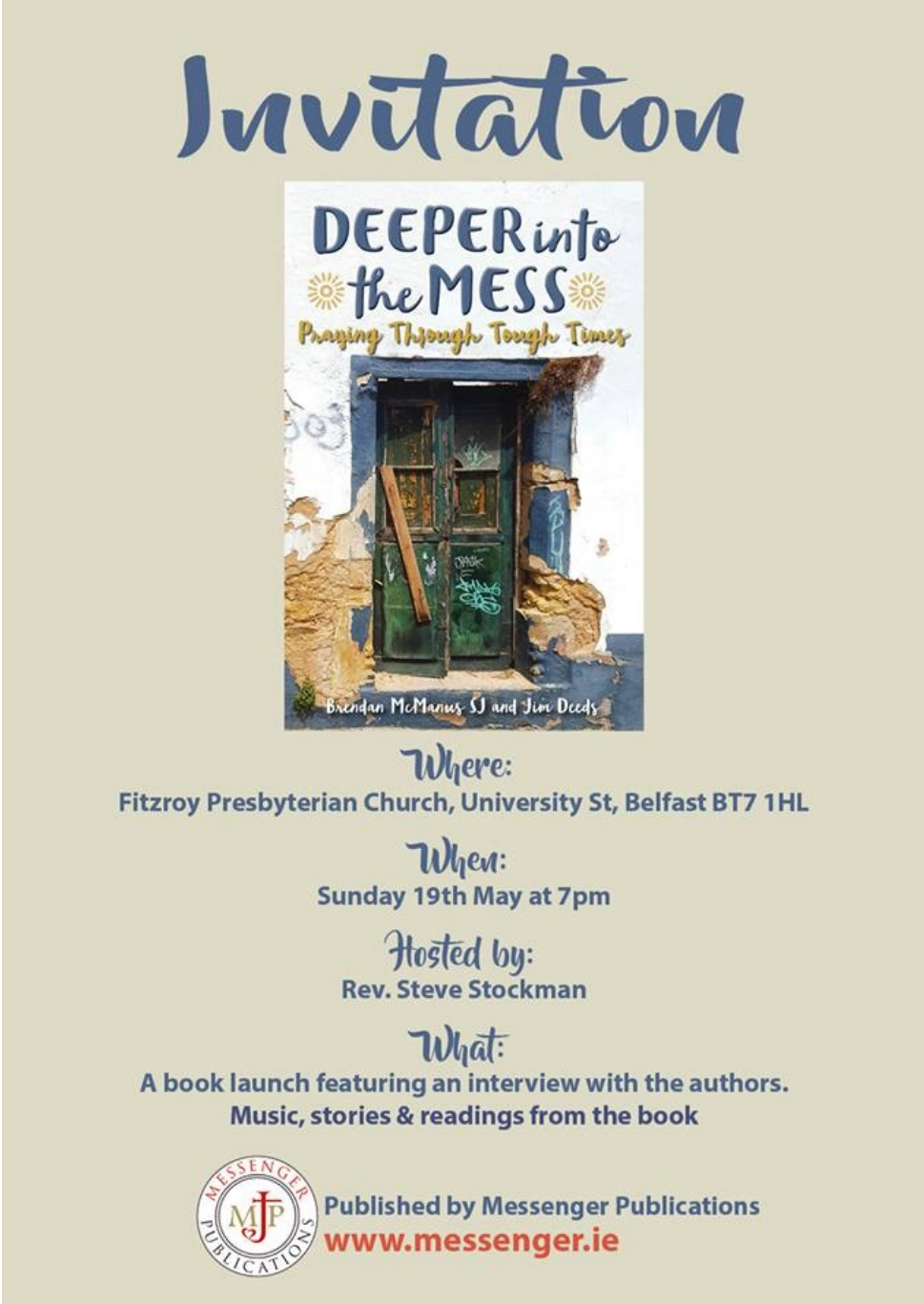
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In a document published on Tuesday in the run-up to the Methodist Conference this summer, a task force gave a series of recommendations in an effort to modernise the church.

The report was drawn up as the church looks to reflect changes in society regarding same-sex relationships, cohabitation and the declining marriage rate.

It also comes after the UK Government's revelation last year that civil partnerships would be rolled out to heterosexual couples.

The recommendation to change the rules to allow same-sex weddings in its chapels was revealed in the publication



The poster features the word 'Invitation' in a large, blue, cursive font at the top. Below it is a book cover for 'DEEPER into the MESS: Praying Through Tough Times' by Brendan McManus SJ and Jim Deeds. The cover art depicts a weathered, green door set in a rough, peeling wall. Below the book cover, the text 'Where: Fitzroy Presbyterian Church, University St, Belfast BT7 1HL' is written in a blue, cursive font. This is followed by 'When: Sunday 19th May at 7pm' and 'Hosted by: Rev. Steve Stockman', both in the same cursive font. The word 'What:' is also in cursive, followed by 'A book launch featuring an interview with the authors. Music, stories & readings from the book' in a smaller, blue, sans-serif font. At the bottom left is the Messenger Publications logo, a circular emblem with 'MJP' in the center and 'MESSENGER PUBLICATIONS' around the perimeter. To the right of the logo, it says 'Published by Messenger Publications' and 'www.messenger.ie' in a red, sans-serif font.

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Pictured following a licensing of Readers were (l-r) the Very Reverend Nigel Dunne (Dean of Cork), Michael Kenning (Reader), the Bishop, Lynn McAdam O'Connell (reader), the Ven Adrian Wilkinson (Archdeacon of Cork), and the Very Reverend Tom Gordon (Dean of Leighlin and Preacher)

entitled *God in Love Unites Us*, and was drawn up by the Methodist Church's marriage and relationships task group.

The report's authors said that there was a need to address the "hurt" felt by those who believe that the church's current definition of marriage implies that gay people are "lesser persons".

However, the report also contains a clause which ensures that ministers who object to same-sex marriage will not have to officiate the ceremony.

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Revd Ken Howcroft, chair of the task group, said:

“Methodists have no problem with having ministers or members who are in a same-sex marriage, but we have not been allowed – up until now – to bless those relationships in a church. So this is the next step on the journey.”

Emma Meehan, assistant director of public affairs at the LGBT Foundation, said of the report: “Despite progress in recent years, it is still the case that many LGBT people of faith are unable to seek formal blessings from their place of worship on the one of the most significant days of their lives.

“It’s therefore fantastic to see religious institutions taking steps to better include and support people to celebrate all parts of their identity.”

The Methodist Conference will be held from June 27 to July 4.

Brass eagle lectern wanted for typhoon hit Hong Kong church with Irish links

An Anglican church in Hong Kong is appealing to parishes in the Church of Ireland who might have a brass eagle lectern they could donate. St Philip’s Church was severely damaged in September 2018 when Super Typhoon Mangkhut swept through Hong Kong. The parish has launched an appeal for HK\$4 million for the extensive renovations needed but has turned to the Church of Ireland in search of a lectern.

The Church of Ireland has strong links with the Anglican Church in Hong Kong, strengthened in recent years by the work of the Dublin University Far Eastern Mission (DUFEM).

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Some of the damage at St Philip's Church.

DUFEM organises an exchange programme between the Church of Ireland Theological Institute and Ming Hua Theological College in Hong Kong among other partnerships.

Vicar of St Philip's, the Revd Cindy Kwok, has outlined the damage to the church which remains closed while renovations continue. Windows were broken during the typhoon which meant that wind and rain poured into the church. The altar area took the brunt of the storm with carpets and furniture destroyed. The church's pastoral centre was also damaged. The church is situated in a relatively poor area of Hong Kong near the Chinese border.

“The renovation is ongoing at the moment and the furniture in the altar area will need to be made again. We have raised funds for the large renovation work and we still need donation for a brass eagle as the lectern. We will put a plate engraved with the donor's name, especially for our good linkage with Anglican Church of Ireland,” she explained.

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The leaders of the Church of Ireland, Methodist Church in Ireland, Roman Catholic Church, Presbyterian Church in Ireland and the Irish Council of Churches, at Stormont House in Belfast on Tuesday afternoon to meet and encourage those taking part in the inter-party talks.

Archbishop Michael Jackson is supporting the quest for a lectern. “We have now a long standing relationship with Hong Kong through DUFEM and a number of friendships and exchanges.

“To be able to give a lectern would be a great way to express our links across the Anglican Communion and between parishes,” he said.

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Dr Kerry Houston is DUFEM's Hong Kong liaison officer. He described the close links between DUFEM and Cindy's parish.

“The first exchange student from Hong Kong was Cindy Kwok. She is now rector of St Philip's parish in the Diocese of Western Kowloon. DUFEM was delighted to facilitate a visit to Ireland from her parish and choir in 2018 when they sang in Christ Church Cathedral and St Finbarre's Cathedral Cork. DUFEM sends teachers to Hong Kong to work on a summer English programme in her parish which is mainly focussed on recent immigrants from mainland China,” he explained.

“If we could offer a lectern to the church as part of the refurbishment programme it would be a tangible way of expressing our solidarity with the work of this rapidly developing parish. An Irish eagle could find new wings,” Dr Houston added.

Any parish with a lectern that they could offer to help St Philip's should contact Dr Houston at kerry.houston@dit.ie. It is envisaged that DUFEM will coordinate and cover the cost of shipping the lectern to Hong Kong.

C of I General Synod starts today

This year's General Synod of the Church of Ireland begins today, May 16, in the Millennium Forum, Derry/Londonderry, and will run to Saturday 18. It will be presided over by the Primate of All Ireland, Archbishop Richard Clarke.

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Business will be preceded by The General Synod Service of Holy Communion in St Columb's Cathedral at 10.30am today where the preacher will be Bishop Ferran Glenfield.

Bills

By the closing date for circulation, the Honorary Secretaries had received three Bills for consideration by the General Synod:

* Bill No. 1/ – to make provision for Holy Communion by Extension for persons unable to be present at the public celebration;

* Bill No. 2/ – to make provision for the Service of Prayer and Naming and the Funeral Service in cases of miscarriage, stillbirth and neonatal death; and

* Bill No. 3/ – to transfer a portion of the Diocese of Achonry to the Diocese of Elphin, to transfer the United Dioceses of Tuam, Killala and Achonry from the Province of Armagh to the Province of Dublin, to unite under one bishop the two United Dioceses of Tuam, Killala and Achonry, and Limerick and Killaloe, in the event of a future vacancy, and for associated matters.

Motions

Among the motions will be a proposal from the Standing Committee in relation to synodical representation, and a joint proposal from the Standing Committee and the Representative Body to affirm the Church's commitment to meeting its obligations under data protection legislation.

Following a review, the Board of Education (NI) has identified a new way forward for meeting the current and

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future needs of education and the Church. To this end, a motion to update the Board's definition and remit in the Constitution will be brought before General Synod.

Reports

The Representative Church Body report will note that during 2018, the total funds available to the RCB decreased by 7.5% to €179.3 million (from €193.9 million). Total expenditure from the General Funds and other central funds decreased from €7.2 million to €7.0 million.

Significant matters dealt with by the Standing Committee included the establishment of a Working Group on Synodical Representation and a special all-day meeting of the Standing Committee to discuss its work, the establishment of a Consultative Group on Disability, and the approval of a conflict of interest policy for parishes and Church of Ireland bodies and committees.

The Board of Education (RI) has liaised with government in relation to a wide range of issues, including school admissions, leadership and management, and special education teaching supports.

The Bishops' Appeal and the Council for Mission will present the findings of a scoping study, approved at last year's General Synod, to identify the gaps and overlaps in the Church's response to justice issues.

There will be an audio broadcast during General Synod whilst the hashtag #coigs will be used for Facebook and Twitter as well as other social media outlets. Further details are on the General Synod website at

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<https://synod.ireland.anglican.org/>

Gordon Brown launching Christian Aid Week makes moral and ethical case for aid and development

Gordon Brown launched Christian Aid Week 2019 at an event in London in which he spoke powerfully about the moral and ethical need for aid and international development, made the case against nationalism and isolation and praised the charity's work across the world.

The former prime minister spoke passionately about the need for Britain to be outward-looking, saying: "There is one vision of Britain that derives from people's misunderstanding of the Dunkirk spirit - this idea that we are better off when we stand alone, aloof and apart, sufficient unto ourselves, isolated if necessary, supposedly this independent spirit that means we are better off when we are disengaged from the world... There is a second vision of Britain - a Britain that is open, outward-looking, engaged and not disengaged with the rest of the world, a Britain that is internationalist in its outlook, a Britain that sees it has responsibilities not just to itself."

And within the context of the need for Britain to be internationalist in its outlook, Mr Brown posed the "ethical" and "moral" question of "what it means to be British" and warned that divisions among the British people over Brexit could last for "a generation".

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Brexit, he said, “does now raise a fundamental issue. And I’ll be honest, my worry is that the divisions in our country are now so deep and so pervasive that it could take a generation for us to reconcile these differences, bring people together and find a unifying vision of our country and a sense of purpose and direction that takes us forward into the modern world.

Mr Brown continued: ‘Let us be honest, there are two visions of Britain that are competing with each other.... It’s not just that parliament is deadlocked and can’t agree - it’s more than that: it’s that there is a fundamental disagreement about what kind of Britain we are trying to be. And unless that is resolved it’s going to be difficult to move forward.

The former prime minister, who has a long and distinguished record tackling global poverty, spoke of how he was inspired

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by his father who was a Church of Scotland minister and his mother who collected for Christian Aid.

He said: "Christian Aid is now one of the great national institutions that is acknowledged throughout the country," adding: "Christian Aid has achieved a reputation and acknowledgement by the British public that is a great achievement indeed...and it shows that social movements that bring about change are built on moral foundations."

Recalling that Christian Aid Week started in 1957 by raising £26,000 "and now could raise nearly 10 million this year," Mr Brown added: "I've got a very personal interest in Christian Aid because I will always remember the mountain of red envelopes that my mother was responsible for."

Referring to the theme of Christian Aid Week – maternal health in Sierra Leone – Mr Brown said: "Hope is found in the ten thousand churches involved with Christian Aid Week, the fifty thousand collecting red envelopes, in the many doctors and nurses in Sierra Leone saving lives. One circle of empathy binds us all."

The debate, he said, was "essentially between globalists and nationalists," adding that here needed to be a more effective counter-argument to the rise of nationalism, protectionism and populism. "If you have America first, India first, Japan first, Russia first, Turkey first, Britain first, then you have a world where it's impossible to get agreements to do the things we need to do.

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We have to find a way of defeating the argument that the best way of running the world is every nation for themselves.”

Mr Brown dismissed arguments that the UK should cut back on its international aid budget. “We’ve got to argue back against people who say that aid is unproductive, aid is wasteful, aid is money going to the wrong people, aid is somehow inefficient - when all the evidence is that aid is well-used and even more necessary if we’re going to deal with fundamental problems that no decent citizen in Britain would tolerate if they saw what was happening first hand.”

Today in Christian history

May 16, 583 (traditional date): Brendan the Navigator, founder of a Celtic monastery in Clonfert, Ireland, dies. Some Irish scholars have asserted that Brendan was among the first Europeans to reach America, nine centuries before Columbus.

May 16, 1805: Henry Martyn, a well-educated Englishman, arrives in India to aid William Carey with translation work

News briefs

+++ Belfast Community Gospel Choir in concert - If you want to catch BCGC before our summer break then this is your last opportunity! The choir is delighted to be performing in the beautiful Belfast Cathedral on 16th June. They have been polishing a few new songs but also revisiting classics for what is set to be a joy filled celebration with around 60

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choir members. The sound is going to be incredible! Tickets are available at the following link:
<https://www.ticketsource.co.uk/whats-on/belfast/belfast-cathedral-the-cathedral-church-of-st-anne/belfast-community-gospel-choir/e-ydxepo>

+++ Kildare schools diocesan service - Over 300 children and their teachers came together in St Brigid's Cathedral, Kildare, for the annual Diocesan National Schools Service on Tuesday 14th May.

The theme of the service was 'The Bible'. The service was led by Dean Tim Wright and Rev Fran Grasham. Rev. Philip Heak led the music with a great of songs which the children joined in enthusiastically. Pupils from a variety of schools

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took part in different parts of the service. Bishop Pat Storey presented the prizes for the Bishop's Medal during the service.

Every second year schools enter a project for the Bishop's Medal. Each entry consists of a model and some written work around a theme. This year the theme was 'The Bible'. The quality and creativity of the entries is always remarkable, representing great enthusiasm and effort from schools across the dioceses. Congratulations to all those who entered, and to the prize winners.

The results for this year are:

1st place	St John's National School, Monasterevin
2nd place	Hewetson National School, Clane
3rd place	Sandylanes National School, Portarlinton
4th place	Flowerfield National School, Navan

A special commendation was given to Castlepollard National School.

The special guest speaker was Ms Jacqui Wilkinson, a member of the dioceses of Cork, Cloyne and Ross. Jacqui is a lecturer at the Church of Ireland College of Education, at DCU.

+++ Celebrating the Ascension - This practical guide from Grove Books to the biblical setting and liturgical basis of Ascension Day examines what can be done to help us celebrate this event in the life of Jesus, and asks what opportunities and challenges the story presents for us.
<https://grovebooks.co.uk/collections/worship/products/w-237-celebrating-the-ascension-reclaiming-the-missional-focus-of-ascensontide>

+++ Next Belfast Jewish Heritage tour - Wednesday 22 May, 2.15pm meet at the Jaffe Fountain, Victoria Square .

churchnewsireland@gmail.org

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The Jewish community's contribution to Belfast as a great industrial and trading city.. The tour lasts approx 1 hour and finishes near City Hall..To reserve a place please contact Steven Jaffe via FB or at belfastjewishhheritage@yahoo

+++ Archdeacon over halfway through Camino

pilgrimage - Archdeacon Brian Harper, Rector of Magheracross Parish, in a break from ministry in Clogher Diocese, is just over halfway through his six-week 500-mile pilgrimage on foot across Northern Spain on the Camino de Santiago. Today, Archdeacon Harper sent this latest report on his pilgrimage. 'As I write, I'm in the city of Leon in Spain and have now completed just over half of the Camino de Santiago. 'So far, it has been a physical and mental challenge against storm and heat. However, the company has been varied and supportive ranging from retired Irish teachers, German businessmen and many Koreans to a guy who draws the graphics on live football games! They have been people of every faith and none. 'This has been a long walk which I plan to complete by the end of May. It has been a time of thoughtfulness, prayer, blessing and testing which will take time to distill,' he said.

+++ East Belfast Mission are Hiring - "We are currently looking for a new Store Manager for our Restore shop in Antrim. If you think you could be the person for the job or if you'd like more information visit - <https://www.ebm.org.uk/job-vacancies/>

applications must be submitted by the new closing date of 27th May at 5pm"

HERITAGE - 'Whether on the land, or in the market-town, or in the Lagan valley, it was they [Ulster Presbyterians] who

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set their formidable stamp upon the quality of life. They combined for much of their history a notable liberalism in public life with a strict severity of private discipline. They were a serious people, caring for education, intent upon self-improvement and material progress, yet deeply marked by their religion. They were kindly, humorous and at the same time austere.' FSL Lyons

PLEASE PRAY FOR - James and Heather Cochrane – IPC global mission workers in Portugal. The Christian Presbyterian Church in Portugal (ICPP) is a small denomination with 150 members concentrated around Lisbon and Porto. Give thanks that on 30 May, the eight ministers of the ICPP will gather at Comunidade Pedras Vivas, for a strategic planning meeting. Pray for James and two other ministers as they prepare the programme to encourage reflection on what it means to be missional communities. Pray for good discussions as the group reflects on the challenges of significant numbers of Brazilian Presbyterians arriving in Portugal. Pray for God's leading as the ICPP seeks to define its mission more clearly.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT - "He wants them to learn to walk and must therefore take away His hand; and if only the will to walk is really there He is pleased even with their stumbles." CSLewis in The Screwtape Letters

AN INVITATION
to get Twitter leads from CNI

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the CNI home page**

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