

C of I bishop to succeed chair of governors of the Anglican Centre in Rome

Bishop Stephen Platten chair of governors of the Anglican Centre in Rome who has been awarded the Lambeth Cross for



Ecumenism by the Archbishop of Canterbury. His successor is Bishop Michael Burrows of the Church of Ireland

Bishop Stephen Platten received the award in recognition of his three decades of service to the Centre and to the wider

November 24, 2018

ecumenical movement. The Centre is home to the Archbishop's personal representative to the Holy See.

Bishop Stephen has been chair of governors there for 15 years. He steps down at the end of 2018. His successor is Bishop Michael Burrows – the Bishop of Cashel, Ferns and Ossory in the Church of Ireland.

In its citation, Lambeth Palace said: "Bishop Stephen Platten has been involved at a deep level with ecumenical relations during his long ministry alongside his significant and important ministry within the Church of England."

The Archbishop of Canterbury concluded: "there can be no doubt that Stephen Platten is a worthy recipient of this award."

Bishop Stephen spoke of his surprise at the decision.

"I was absolutely delighted and honoured to receive the award," he said. "I have been committed to the unity of our churches throughout my life and I am utterly committed to the work of the Centre. I am very grateful for the honour and my hope is that it might further raise the profile of the Centre as it develops and prospers in the future."

The Lambeth Cross for Ecumenism is awarded for outstanding contributions to ecumenical work in support of the Church of England. Bishop Stephen, a former Bishop of Wakefield in northern England, has worked as the Archbishop of Canterbury's Secretary for Ecumenical Affairs as well as the Co-Secretary of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission.

November 24, 2018

Theresa May opposes abortion decriminalisation

Prime Minister Theresa May has opposed an attempt to decriminalise abortion, saying the proposal “offers no safeguards for women”.

In a letter to a constituent, the Prime Minister strongly criticised measures outlined in a Ten Minute Rule Bill, introduced to parliament earlier this month by Labour MP Diana Johnson. The bill would impose radical changes to Northern Ireland’s abortion laws as well as decriminalising the procedure in England and Wales.

“I do have concerns about the points raised in Diana Johnson’s Ten Minute Rule Bill,” Mrs May wrote. “I do not support the repealing of sections 58 and 59 of the Offences Against the Person Act 1861 for several reasons.

“Primarily, repealing those two sections does not solve the issue of abortion in Northern Ireland, as without any new provisions it offers no safeguards for women and would impact on England and Wales, as well as Northern Ireland.”

She added that if the bill became law, it would effectively create a legal vacuum: “The 1967

November 24, 2018

Abortion Act provides defences against the criminal law offences in the 1861 Act.

“If these offences were removed then abortion would in effect be decriminalised and no legal framework would be in place, including no gestational time limits.

“A new legal framework would be needed to replace those provisions, which is rightly a devolved matter which locally accountable politicians in Northern Ireland should have the opportunity to debate and consider.”

She continued: “The measures in the Bill also go a lot further than the current debate in Northern Ireland, so it is important legislation is not imposed on Northern Ireland and we allow local politicians the opportunity to represent the views of the people of Northern Ireland.”

Her comments were made public after Diana Johnson published a new bill to repeal sections of the 1861 Offences Against the Person Act under which abortion remains a criminal offence. The 1967 Abortion Act added exceptions where a doctor would not be prosecuted for performing an abortion.

November 24, 2018

Antonia Tully, Campaigns Director for the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children, welcomed the Prime Minister's intervention.

“Mrs May has highlighted the key issue of women's health. Decriminalising abortion would leave women at greater risk.

“If abortion is no longer governed by the criminal law we could easily develop a ‘backstreet abortion’ culture.

“Decriminalising abortion would leave every unborn baby and expectant mother in England, Wales and Northern Ireland with no legal protection against abortion and utterly at the mercy of the unscrupulous abortion industry.”

Bishop Treanor acknowledges Christian values of the European project

Representatives from the Christian Churches across the Island of Ireland met to discuss how they will respond to the challenges posed by Brexit. The meeting took place in the Presbyterian Assembly Buildings, Belfast, and was attended by representatives from the Catholic Church, the Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church and Church of Ireland.

Following the meeting, a joint statement was released by the leaders of the four main Churches

November 24, 2018

Speaking at the meeting in Belfast, Bishop Noel Treanor of Down & Connor, stressed the irreplaceable contribution of Christianity and of political leaders rooted in Christian



thinking to the making of post-war Europe. In his address he outlined societal phenomena which have given rise to disillusionment with institutions including political institutions, euro-scepticism, fears and uncertainty about the future, and that Brexit may be considered a surface manifestation of these phenomena.

Bishop Treanor stated that: “Churches share a responsibility with society to recognise and to promote an appreciation of the public good that is the European project.

“They can help build a grass-roots understanding and appreciation of its historic and new quality as a communitarian method of politics which aims to promote the common good, is inspired by a value system and which in its primary law provides and recognises the right of Churches and faith communities to contribute to the elaboration of its policy-making.”

Prior to his appointment to the northern diocese, Bishop Trainor represented the Catholic Church to the EU. He attended the recent meeting of COMECE at Ypres and Bruxelles.

November 24, 2018

Flu fear temporarily halts 'sign of peace' handshakes at Mass in Northern Ireland

The flu season is affecting Sunday Masses across Northern Ireland, with some parishes suspending the practice of exchanging a 'sign of peace'.

One priest said his congregation will not be exchanging a handshake with those around them on a temporary basis.

Fr Jimmy McPhillips, the parish priest of Aghlurcher in Co Fermanagh, said it will be reintroduced "once the coughing has stopped".

He said: "This is the first time I have introduced this in this parish, but in previous parishes I have been in I have done the same.

"I know a lot of our older parishioners don't particularly like it.

"From a liturgical point of view, it helped make people think before they received the Eucharist that they are at peace with people, at peace with their neighbour."

He added: "I like the practice and I will bring it back once the coughing and sneezing stop.

"It has also been the practice for our Eucharist ministers to use hand-sanitising gel before they distribute Communion, but that's something we do all-year round and not just for the flu season."

In the Derry Diocese no directive has been issued on whether the sign of peace should be suspended.

November 24, 2018

It is a decision for each individual parish priest to make.

In the Glendermott parish in the Waterside, parishioners at Sunday Mass continue to exchange a handshake.

Parish priest Fr Michael Canny said: "I wasn't aware of a particular outbreak of the flu, so it isn't something I have even thought of.

"In our parish, our Eucharist ministers wash their hands using gel disinfectant before giving out Communion, which I think is a fairly widespread practice everywhere."

A handshake exchanged as a sign of peace is also practised in the Church of Ireland ahead of the distribution of Communion.

At St Thomas' Church in Eglantine Avenue in Belfast, there are no plans to suspend the practice.

Rev Paul Jack said: "The exchange of peace is a regular feature of our life in St Thomas' and we haven't suspended the practice.

"But if there was a serious outbreak of the flu, we would respond accordingly."

Jewish groups say Bible needs anti-Semitism warnings

Page margins in Bibles should include warnings to highlight passages which have been used to encourage anti-Semitism, Jewish leaders say.

November 24, 2018

Introductions also ought to feature cautions, according to the European Jewish Congress (EJC) - an umbrella group for several Jewish organisations.

The EJC's recommendations, included in a new "catalogue of policies to combat anti-Semitism" unveiled in Vienna, also cover the Quran.

EJC president, Moshe Kantor said: "Translations of the New Testament, the Koran and other Christian or Muslim literatures need marginal glosses and introductions that emphasis continuity with Jewish heritage [and] warn readers about anti-Semitic passages in them."

Concerns have been raised that certain scriptures have been distorted or misinterpreted in the past to justify persecution against Jews.

The Archbishop of Canterbury Most Rev Justin Welby said in September 2016 that the Church was complicit in the spread of anti-Semitism.

He said: "It is a shameful truth that, through its theological teachings, the Church, which should have offered an antidote, compounded the spread of this virus.

"The fact that anti-Semitism has infected the body of the Church is something of which we as Christians must be deeply repentant. We live with the consequences of our history of denial and complicity."

Other recommendations include every country, organisation and business adopting and implementing a definition of anti-

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November 24, 2018

Semitism issued by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.

Dr Christine Joynes, a theology lecturer at Oxford University, told The Times: "The whole Bible needs a health warning to read it through the right critical lens and in historical context."

'Oldest nun', credited with sheltering Jews during Holocaust, dies aged 110



A 110-year-old woman, believed to be the world's oldest nun and a rescuer of Jews during the Holocaust, has died.

Father Pawel Rytel-Andrianik, spokesman for Poland's Roman Catholic Church, on Thursday confirmed the death of Sister Cecylia Roszak last week at a Dominican convent in Krakow.

November 24, 2018

He described her as "probably the oldest nun in the world" and someone remembered as saying that "life is so short and passes so quickly".

Born on March 25 1908, Sister Cecylia joined the convent aged 21.

During the German occupation of Poland during the Second World War, when she was in her 30s, she was one of several nuns who set up a new convent near Vilnius, today in Lithuania, sheltering Jews who had escaped the ghetto there.

CMS-Africa celebrates anniversary by opening new hub for Africa mission

CMS-Africa, the sister organisation to the Church Mission Society has celebrated its tenth anniversary by opening a new international base in Kenya as part of its vision to reach 50 million African families by the middle of the century.

CMS Africa House in Nairobi was opened by the former Archbishops of Tanzania and Rwanda, Donald Mtetemela and Onesphore Rwaje. Two hundred guests attended the ceremony including key church leaders from across Africa – among them the outgoing international director of CMS-Africa, Dennis Tongoi, and his successor, Canon Moses Bushendich.

Canon Moses described the building as a “miracle of faith, belief and trust in God.



Canon Moses Bushendich, the new international director of CMS-Africa, greets guests at a 10th anniversary celebration dinner, along with his wife Caroline

“The new building will provide a base for CMS-Africa, a place where Africans can pray for mission and the means to make CMS-Africa sustainable,” he said.

CMS-Africa’s vision is to impact 50 million families across Africa by 2050 through its transformational programme of training, focusing on women’s empowerment, families, young people, business owners and leaders.

Since it was formed in 2008, the organisation has expanded and now has a growing team of missionaries and staff in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, DR Congo, Rwanda, Burundi

November 24, 2018

and South Sudan. More than 20,000 people have been on its training courses in subjects such as Financial Freedom for Families, Business for Mission and its programme for youth development.

Dennis Tongoi said, “We believe in church on Monday . . . as I come to the end of my tenure as director of CMS-Africa, the overriding emotion I feel is joy at seeing people that God has raised up and I have had the privilege of working alongside impacting countless lives as God works through this ministry.”

Canon Philip Mounstephen, the executive leader of Church Mission Society said it was a significant step towards the fulfilment of CMS’s vision for mission in Africa.

“CMS-Africa has grown and matured and is now at the vanguard of mission, not only for Africa, but for elsewhere in the world. Through Canon Moses and his team, I believe it can be a catalyst to renew mindsets and transform communities for millions of Africans.”

