

October 11, 2018



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## **Ashers judgement: Protestant churches unite to hail protection for Christians**



**Ashers bakery owners Daniel and Amy McArthur**

**October 11, 2018**

**There has been a warm welcome from across the spectrum of Protestant churches in the Province to the Supreme Court's Ashers decision.**

The trio of main churches – Presbyterian, Anglican and Methodist – all issued statements supportive of the protection which the judgement appears to offer to people with religious convictions, joined by other, smaller denominations.

At time of writing the Catholic Church appeared not to have issued any statement on the matter, and its spokespeople could not be reached.

**The Presbyterian Church in Ireland** said the court “made clear that business owners can in conscience refuse to promote messages that run contrary to their personal beliefs”.

Its statement from its central press office said: “For businesspeople and private citizens alike, people of faith and no faith at all who want to live in a genuinely pluralist society, today’s landmark decision should be welcomed.

“We believe that the unanimous decision of the Supreme Court is an important milestone in helping to strike a proper and much needed balance in law between the legitimate expression of conscience in all aspects of society and protection from unjust discrimination.”

It said the law is not a “licence to discriminate” against anyone.

**October 11, 2018**

Rather, it said the case had been all about “discrimination against ideas, not people” adding that “forcing someone to promote a view that they fundamentally disagree with, runs contrary to how a free and fair society should operate”.



**The Church of Ireland’s Bishop Kenneth Kearon, the chairman of its Church and Society Commission, said:** ‘We welcome the affirmation of religious freedom and expression in this particular case.

“This is a complex issue which does involve the balancing of rights.

“The decision by the Supreme Court in this case affirms the rights of the business and does not significantly impact on the freedom of choice for the customer.”

The Methodist Church in Ireland’s said it does “welcome the protection that this gives to those who now cannot be forced to provide a service that conflicts with their own religious or moral convictions”.

**October 11, 2018**

However, it added: “At the same time we are concerned that minorities are not discriminated against and we are sorry that Mr Lee says he feels like a second-class citizen.

“When competing rights and freedoms conflict, it is hard to satisfy all sides, but we welcome the clarity that this judgement brings.”

Between them, the Methodists, Church of Ireland and Presbyterians account for the great lion’s share of Protestants in Northern Ireland; in the last census in 2011, about 345,000 people said they were Presbyterian, about 249,000 said they were Church of Ireland, and about 54,000



**Feeling peckish? Team East Belfast Mission have been hard at work crafting their showstoppers for the very first Great East Belfast Mission Bake Off! If you are about Skainos from 12-2pm be sure to pop in for a taste and cast your vote for Star Baker! On your marks, get set, BAKE!**

**October 11, 2018**

Methodist – with other denominations being much smaller

The Free Presbyterian Church said it will “rejoice” in what it said it a victory for “the right to the exercise of Christian conscience”.

The Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland hailed the judgement and what it dubbed the “patient endurance” of the Ashers family, although it added this note of caution: “On this occasion the right to the exercise of Christian conscience in business has been protected, but in other cases it has not.”

Whilst no comment had been received from the Catholic Church, the Iona Institute – a Catholic campaign group – said: “The rights to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion are the hallmark of any genuinely pluralist and democratic society.No one should ever be forced to express a political opinion they disagree with.

“We hope this incredibly important ruling will not only send a clear message regarding the misuse of equality law but importantly help to protect against the spectre of compelled speech in NI and throughout the UK”.

Meanwhile Peter Lynas, the head of the Evangelical Alliance in Northern Ireland, said: “This is a win for everyone, no one should be forced to say something they disagree with.”

Northern Ireland’s two largest parties have reacted very differently to theruling at the Supreme Court in the ‘gay cake’ case.

**October 11, 2018**

Sinn Féin MLA Megan Fearon said: “we are obviously disappointed by today’s ruling. “I know this ruling is also met with disappointment within the LGBT community and I again want to express my continued solidarity and support to them.” ....continued



**All Saints Evergreens in Antrim had a guest speaker Grace from Air Ambulance N I Charity. The Evergreens presented a cheque for £450 which was gratefully received. In the photo we have Venerable Dr Stephen McBride, Elizabeth Kennedy, donate, Grace from Air Ambulance & Nelson Scott. Archdeacon Stephen also showed a film of his holiday in Sri Lanka. A great morning attended by 46 members which ended with a lovely lunch.**

**October 11, 2018**

She added: “Equality must be paramount and all forms of discrimination must be challenged so we will take time to study this judgment to understand fully its implications for to access goods, facilities and services without discrimination.”

Meanwhile, DUP PM Paul Girvan described the ruling as “a victory for freedom of expression” and “for common sense”.

His party leader, Arlene Foster, had earlier Tweeted: “The Ashers ruling is an historic and seminal judgement. This has been a long journey for everyone involved in the case. I commend Amy and Daniel McArthur for their grace and perseverance. This now provides clarity for people of all faiths and none.”

She later Tweeted: “A fundamental freedom was on trial. It is dangerous for society if our laws force people to say things they don’t believe. Delighted the Supreme Court has found against compelled speech. Nobody should be forced to have or express a political opinion in which they do not believe.” Based on News Letter reports.

## **North Connor parish group to visit link diocese in Sudan**

Ballyrashane and Kildollagh Parishes are preparing for the latest step in their CMSI Partnership with Ibba Diocese, South Sudan.

The Rev Amanda Adams, Diocesan Lay reader, Allan Bond, and parishioner, Olivia Clarke, have completed their training  
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October 11, 2018



**Olivia, Allan and Amanda from Ballyrashane and Kildollagh Parishes, will leave for Arua, northern Uganda, on October 15.**

and orientation with CMSI and look forward to travelling to Uganda on October 15.

South Sudan, which became independent in 2011, is currently in a state of civil unrest. The UNHCR estimates that over four million South Sudanese are presently displaced from their homes. Connor Diocese has been linked with Yei Diocese for more than 10 years.

Ballyrashane and Kildollagh's partnership with Ibba Diocese was established more than seven years ago and so far the parishes have provided bicycles for the diocese and Mothers' Union, paid for the training of a teacher and helped to put windows and complete the roof of the new Cathedral in Ibba.

In 2014, the parishes hosted the Rt Rev Wilson Kamani, Bishop of Ibba.



**October 11, 2018**

During the current crisis, Ballyrashane and Kildollagh have supported and prayed for the internally displaced people who have come to settle in Ibba and provided practical help by raising funds to buy seeds and agricultural tools. The parishes are presently raising funds to support the Mothers' Union literacy programme which is so vital to the development of family security.

The current level of insecurity in South Sudan means that it will not be possible for the team to visit Ibba. CMSI, however, has been preparing a team 13 people to visit Arua, northern Uganda where all of CMSI's partner Bishops and representatives from South Sudan will join the team for a Peace and Reconciliation Conference for two weeks.

This is a follow up to the Stormont Crossing Bridges Event which CMSI held last year, with Archbishop Justin Badi as keynote speaker, and an extension of the visit paid to Yei Diocese in exile in Arua in April this year.

The parishioners of Ballyrashane and Kildollagh have been fully engaged with this partnership visit since the outset. In addition to fundraising and making a generous contribution towards the cost of the visit, the Parish Crafters' group has prepared several gifts and resources to be taken by their representatives. The Mothers' Union has also provided a Photo Book and gifts and young people in the parishes have provided pictures which will be exchanged with pictures produced by the young people of Ibba.

Amanda, Allan and Olivia will spend their time in Arua listening to their partners' experiences of conflict and learning first hand of the difficulties which the people of South Sudan face.

**October 11, 2018**

They will seek to support their partners through discussion, prayer, bible teaching and youth training, and will also spend some time visiting South Sudanese refugees temporarily accommodated in northern Uganda

On Sunday September 30 the parishes formally commissioned Amanda, Allan and Olivia to represent them on the visit which marks an important milestone in their partnership journey and enables the parishes to honour a promise made to Bishop Kamani that they would send representatives to reciprocate his visit to them and count it a privilege to do so.

## **Thanksgiving plaque for 130 years of Mothers Union in Ireland**

Mothers' Union members from all over Ireland travelled to Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin, on Saturday afternoon (October 6) for the All-Ireland Triennial Thanksgiving Service. The eucharist was celebrated by the Archbishop of Dublin, the Most Revd Dr Michael Jackson and the preacher was the Archbishop of Armagh, the Most Revd Dr Richard Clarke.

During the service a new piece of stained glass was dedicated by Archbishop Jackson. The plaque was commissioned by Mothers' Union to mark the 130th anniversary of the organisation in Ireland last year.

The central image of the piece is a tree with 13 branches, representing the 13 decades of MU in Ireland. During the 2017 celebrations, 12 trees were planted across Ireland,

**October 11, 2018**

one in each diocese. The new piece which has been placed in the Laurence O'Toole/Mothers' Union Chapel in Christ Church Cathedral, represents the 13th tree.

In his sermon, Archbishop Clarke noted that a lot had happened in Ireland since the last Triennial Thanksgiving Service. The people of the Republic of Ireland had decided that marriage was to be viewed in a wider context and the unborn were to be viewed in a different way. The people of Northern Ireland have had to come to understand that the peace process was not going to run itself and there was the "dreaded 'b' word". Whatever, the outcome of Brexit, the Archbishop said that already politicians, different generations, communities and even families were divided by it.



**The Reverend Canon Ruth Elmes is now also  
Archdeacon of Ossory and Leighlin - Diocese of Cashel,  
Ferns and Ossory**

October 11, 2018



**Mothers' Union All Ireland President, Phyllis Grothier, Archbishop Michael Jackson, Archbishop Richard Clarke and Mothers' Union All Ireland Chaplain, Dean Raymond Ferguson with the newly commissioned stained glass marking the 130 years of Mothers' Union in Ireland.**

“So if the Church as a whole does not understand what is going on around us, then we must sink into irrelevance. And the same applies to us here today,” he said.

He said that giving thanks for the companionship and Christian witness that Mothers' Union provided could not be taken for granted and pointed to the MU's foundation in prayer. However, he said that Mothers' Union also had a vital role to play in ensuring that people in Ireland did not become complacent about systemic injustice. This included

**October 11, 2018**

the organisation's campaigns against gender based violence and against the exploitation of women and children.

“Mothers’ Union has reminded all of us that gender based violence is always in our midst... Mothers’ Union has worked to make us more aware, more conscious and more alert and for this we give thanks... Mothers’ Union has much to offer in this chaotic world. To you it may seem insignificant but nothing is insignificant when it is touched by Christ,” Archbishop Clarke said.

He added: “Mothers’ Union cares about families. Mothers’ Union cares about justice for women and children and you help the church to explore these moral issues... You bring a different perspective which can enable the wider church to act with compassion and give a wider dimension to thinking. Mothers’ Union is about the totality of the family and the family in joy but equally the family in pain, the family in need, the family faced with the pain of letting someone go. Please be ready to help the rest of us make good judgements about complex issues”. He concluded saying MU founder Mary Sumner’s personal prayer: All this day, O Lord, let me touch as many lives as possible for thee; and every life I touch, do thou by thy spirit quicken, whether through the word I speak, the prayer I breathe, or the life I live.

## **Spanish Flu and the First World War remembered in West Cork parish**

On Sunday, 7th October, the centenaries of both the second wave of the ‘Spanish’ Flu and the approach of the

**October 11, 2018**

end of the First World War were remembered in a remote and fairly neglected graveyard on a hillside, at Maulinward (Meall an Bhaird), in the Parish of Kilmocomogue, near Durrus in West Cork. The road is narrow with a strong stretch of grass up the middle of it.

It all started when the local rector, Canon Paul Willoughby, told the Bishop, Dr Paul Colton, the very moving and sad local story about Private Michael O'Neill. Private O'Neill came up in conversation between the rector and the Bishop because he was the uncle of a mutual friend: local man Tommy Mullins. In the distant days of the 1960s and 1970s, and childhood holidays spent in that parish, Tommy Mullins was a fisherman who taught the Bishop how to fish and to row a boat where he was fishing in Ballylickey at the mouth of the Ouvane River. Canon Willoughby, intends, later this month, to mark the centenary of the end of the First World War by walking the route taken home by Private O'Neill in 1918.

Tommy's uncle, Private Michael O'Neill, survived the First World War as a private in the 5th Reserve Battalion of the Grenadier Guards. Towards the end of October 1918 Michael headed home to his mother's place at Ballycomane, Durrus. That's where he was born. He alighted from the train at the Durrus Road Railway Halt (on the former Cork, Bandon and South Coast Railway's main line between Cork and Bantry), and walked home to his mother.

Five days later he died of the 'Spanish' Flu. He was 35 years old.

**October 11, 2018**

After the morning Eucharist marking the bicentenary of St Brendan's Church, Bantry, on Sunday 7th October, Canon Paul and Mrs Amanda Willoughby, were joined on a visit to Maulinward, by Bishop Paul and Mrs Susan Colton, where the Bishop laid a wreath and silence was observed.

'It's just one grave of one person,' said the Bishop, 'but there were millions of others here and around the world, both because of the war and because of the flu pandemic.' He said: 'Thanks to the research of Dr Ida Milne and her excellent book about "the Spanish flu" in Ireland – Stacking the Coffins – I learnt an immense amount about the human cost of the flu pandemic in 1918–19, in its three waves of human tragedy. Until I read Ida's book I did not know that most of the flu victims were fit, healthy people in their prime (aged 25–35), that so many in Ireland died (c.23,000) and that nearly a quarter of the population was affected (800,000); and with estimates of deaths worldwide ranging between 60 million and 100 million, I wasn't as aware as I ought to have been of the scale of the disaster. that nearly a quarter of the population was affected (800,000); and with estimates of deaths worldwide ranging between 60 million and 100 million, I wasn't as aware as I ought to have been of the scale of the disaster.

'Today, I came here to lay a wreath. Yes, it is at the grave of one man, but it is, I think, also symbolic of the remembering of all the victims of the Spanish Flu in 1918 and 1919, and of the First World War. The numbers are great and almost beyond our comprehension but, at the end of the day, the suffering, repeated countless of times, is individual, personal, familial and communal.'

**October 11, 2018**

Canon Paul Willoughby said: 'This is the centenary of a very moving and tragic human story. Scattered around this rural Irish parish there are 31 such Commonwealth War Graves. As well as this one in Maulinward, there are 14 on Bere Island, 12 in Castletownbere, 1 in Rossmacowen (between Adrigole and Beara), 1 at Kealkill, and 2 at the Abbey Cemetery in Bantry.'

To mark the centenary of the end of the First World War Canon Willoughby intends to visit these 31 graves and to plant a cross of remembrance on each. The grave of Private Michael O'Neill who served in the First World War, made it home near the end of the war and died of the 'Spanish' flu.

## **News briefs**

**+++On RTE TV today** - Watch RTE Television's *Today with Maura and Daithi* programme today, Thursday, 11th October from 3.30 p.m. and you may see a face you recognize! The Rev Trevor Sargent newly-ordained priest and curate in Waterford union of parishes is expected to be a guest on the programme where he will talk about late vocations and his own particular journey to ordination.

**+++Kildare Remembrance service** - A Service of Thanksgiving and Commemoration to mark the end of the First World War will take place at St Brigids Cathedral, Kildare on Sunday 4 November at 3 pm. The preacher will be the Very Revd Nigel Crossey, Dean of Kilmore and music will be led by the Cathedral Choir. Further information can be obtained from the Very Revd Tim Wright, Dean of Kildare (045 431 352, 085 866 9357, [dean@kildare.anglican.org](mailto:dean@kildare.anglican.org)).



**October 11, 2018**

**+++Bicentenary of Bantry Church** - The foundation stone of the Church of Ireland parish Church in Bantry, County Cork, was laid two hundred years ago this month on 23rd October, 1818. To mark the millennium in 2000, the Church was dedicated afresh as the Church of St Brendan the Navigator, Bantry. A statue of Saint Brendan the Navigator stands on Wolfe Tone Square in Bantry outside the church. On Sunday 7th October, the Dedication Festival, the Bishop of Cork, the Right Reverend Dr Paul Colton, visited the parish, and presided and preached at the bicentenary festival Eucharist. To mark the bicentenary a parishioner kindly restored a beautiful altar frontal which had been in use in the Church until 1952, when it was moved temporarily to Rooska Church. Rooska Church having closed some decades ago, the restored altar frontal is in use once more in Bantry. Throughout the weekend, from 5th to 7th October, there was also a Flower Festival to mark the beginning of a month of bicentenary celebrations.

**+++Derry Remembering our Babies and Children service** - The Altnagelvin Hospital Annual Service of Remembrance for Babies and Children will take place on *Sunday 14 October 2018 at 3.00pm* in the Multi-Disciplinary Education Centre, Altnagelvin Hospital. The service is in remembrance of all babies and children who have died either through miscarriage, neonatal death, still birth or infant death. All parents, families and friends are very welcome to attend. Families are invited if they wish, to bring a flower in memory of their child to present during the service. The flowers will be taken afterwards to Ballyoan Cemetery or family may take them with them again after the service. Please allow some extra time for parking due to

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**October 11, 2018**

ongoing construction work at the hospital. The service is hosted by the Chaplaincy Team and Neonatal / Maternity Department Staff at Altnagelvin Hospital

