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Presbyterian moderator Dr Charles McMullen refuses to say if practising homosexuality is a sin

The Presbyterian moderator has refused to declare if he believes it to be a sin to practise homosexuality, in an interview with a daily newspaper.

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Dr Charles McMullen was quoted as saying he was “not going to answer” when asked the question directly as part of a wide-ranging Q&A article, published today.

The interview comes after a particularly high-profile general assembly during the summer, when the church voted to bar gay couples from full church membership (though not from attending church) and bar the children of gay couples from being baptised.

It also voted to distance itself from the Church of Scotland over its acceptance of gay marriage.

In the Belfast Telegraph interview, Dr McMullen said the church would “continue ... to reject homophobia in all its forms”.

The paper said he was asked this question: “Do you personally believe that someone who is a practising homosexual is committing sin?”

He was quoted in response: “I would pivot that question and say that all of us, everyone, has fallen short of the great glory of God and that we all receive the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

“I’m not going to answer that question specifically here. People matter to God and it’s important to me to sit down and talk to people one to one.

“I’m not going to identify one kind of sin and not another here. People matter to God and there’s the importance of sitting down and talking through all of this with them on that one-to-one pastoral level.”

The interview also covered areas including the political impasse at Stormont and Brexit, with Dr McMullen quoted as saying these pose a risk of “us drifting back into the past”. Report courtesy The News Letter

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Service to mark 400th anniversary of Enniskillen school

A special service taking place in St. Macartin's Cathedral, Enniskillen, in early November will mark an important anniversary of education in Fermanagh.

The Service of Choral Evensong on Sunday, 4th November, at 3pm in the St Macartin's Cathedral, Enniskillen will mark the 400th anniversary of the opening of the Free School of Fermanagh at Castle Balfour, Lisnaskea.



Exhibition opens to mark 25th anniversary of Shankill bomb.

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The school moved 30 years later to a site near the Cathedral and became Enniskillen Royal School and, after another 100 years, moved to Portora Hill. The Portora Board helped found Enniskillen Royal School for Girls which later became the Collegiate Grammar School.

The Service will celebrate the Royal tradition of education in Fermanagh and the potential for Enniskillen Royal Grammar School to carry forward this Royal strand, enriched by the traditions of both Portora and the Collegiate.

The Right Revd David Chillingworth, former Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church and a former pupil of Portora Royal School, will be the preacher.

Separation of Church and State debate needs structured approach

Speaking at the City Service in St Mary's Cathedral, Limerick, the Bishop of Cork, Dr Paul Colton, said there was a need, in Ireland, for a structured approach to the current informal debates about separation of Church and State.

Setting out how, in his view, 'separation of Church and State is a good thing – good for the State and good for the Church', he said:

'Facilitated by the Department of the Taoiseach, there are, as required by the Lisbon Treaty, dialogues between the government of the day and religious entities about issues of mutual interest. What is needed, I believe, and

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The Bishop of Cork, Dr Paul Colton, with two members of An Garda Síochána who attended the Limerick City Civic Service in St Mary's Cathedral, Limerick

paradoxically, in order to achieve separation of church and state, is a structured dialogue about the more fundamental question of the Church–State relationship itself: an all-embracing, intentional, formalised, multi-lateral dialogue about this very fundamental and contemporary question and the dilemmas it is constantly throwing up.'

This intentional dialogue is needed, he suggested, because too much of the 'discourse is bluntly, or simplistically driven by megaphone non-dialogue on social media. There the cry goes up 'get the churches out of it all; it's none of their business. But that is not what separation of Church and State means.'

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He continued: ‘My concern in Ireland is about how change is effected. We tend, too often, to drift reactively into it. Typically, aggrieved people identify an injustice about which they feel strongly, and they protest and pursue change: a good example is the issue of admissions to schools and religious patronage of schools. Our institutions respond by finding a partial, often interim solution, but the underlying and fundamental approach, rationale or philosophy remains undefined.’

He underlined that separation of Church and State, ‘does not, of course, mean no religion in the public space’: ... ‘It does not mean that services and encounters like this stop happening. It does not mean that religious bodies stop engaging in national debate or conversation, formal or informal, with civic authorities. It does not mean that religious entities should not be engaged politically; few religious leaders were as political as Jesus was and is.

‘We live in times of diversity, plurality and freedom. Throughout Europe, states have varieties of forms of relationship, formal and informal, with religions and religious institutions. As has been pointed out by the European Consortium for Church and State Research, in the EU “there is always some form of cooperation or constructive co-operation.” Some have formal concordats or agreement, many, such as Ireland do not, but in each one there is dialogue.’

Concluding his address, Bishop Colton, referred to the linguistic origins of the word ‘minister’: ‘It is called “service” – and that, of course, is the origin of the word “minister” whether in the church or in the state – servant, even, in

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some translations – ‘inferior servant’ How far removed have we come from that?’

This, he said, is the theme of the Gospel set for today when Jesus said: ‘But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.’ (Mark 5.43–45)

The full text of Bishop Colton’s sermon is [here](#).

Connor parish buries time capsule

The parishioners of Kilbride Parish in 2068 will learn all about life in the parish in 2018 when they open a time capsule buried at St Bride’s Church as part of the parish’s 150th anniversary celebrations!

The specially crafted capsule was stowed underground on Sunday October 21. Around 100 people watched as it was put into the ground, below a marble plaque bearing the words from Hebrews 13: “Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and forever.”

The 150th anniversary of the consecration of St Bride’s was June 9, and during the course of this year the parish has organised several events to help celebrate it this milestone, including a big celebration service on June 10 at which the Primate, the Most Rev Dr Richard Clarke, preached.

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Members of the Choir of Kilbride Parish join the Rev Canon David Humphries to stow the time capsule underground on Sunday last

The rector of Kilbride, the Rev Canon David Humphries, said: “One of the things which we thought would help the children to get involved was to bury a time capsule in the church grounds, to be brought up in 50 years’ time – the year of the 200th anniversary of the consecration!

“The kids got involved in a big way, both as individuals and through their organisations. Paintings and other ‘arty’ works were included, as well as details of the uniformed organisations, their badges, etc.”

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David said the capsule also contained a project on Sterling Currency as it is used today; the original key of the church door, and many photos of parish events, Select Vestry meetings, and more.

Finally, a letter from the rector today to the rector at the time of the 200th anniversary was included.

“We found that we had to think very hard about what parish life might be like in 50 years’ time, and whether or not the people would understand everything that we put into the box,” David said.

“Also, in the light of some rather famous disasters with time capsules, we made as sure as we could that the box and its contents would survive 50 years underground.

“We created a waterproof chamber and we sealed the box professionally so that everything would remain intact. We have placed a notice in the vestry informing people of the existence of the box, and when it should be brought up.”

The box is now secure under its concrete plaque, and perhaps some of the children who contributed to its contents will be involved in its excavation in 50 years’ time!

Rome Synod groups on sexuality: Church welcomes all, calls all to conversion

No one is excluded from the love of God or from being welcomed into the Catholic Church, but God’s love and the Church’s welcome also come with a call to conversion, the

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English-language groups at the synod of bishops have said, the Catholic Herald reports.

Young people need to know “the Church’s beautiful, yet challenging, vision, teaching and anthropology of the body, sexuality, love and life, marriage and chastity,” said the English-A group.

“At the same time, we restate the Church’s opposition to discrimination against any person or group, and her insistence that God loves every young person, and so does the Church,” the group said in its report.

The reports were the result of reflections in the small groups – divided by language – on the final chapter of the synod working document, which dealt with “pastoral and missionary conversion”.

Most of the 14 working groups called for further local and national dialogue with young people on what they need from the Catholic Church and what they can offer the Church. Most also called for a greater involvement of women in the life of the Church, including in the training of priests, and many acknowledged how the sexual abuse scandal undermines the Church’s credibility.

None of the synod groups in any language used the term “LGBT”, but many of them did refer to a need to help young people who struggle with Church teaching on sexuality or, more explicitly, those who experience “same-sex attraction”.

The English-B group said that it “discussed the issue of Catholics who experience same-sex attraction or gender

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dysphoria,” which refers to believing one’s biological sex does not correspond to his or her true identity.

The group asked that the synod’s final document include “a separate section for this issue and that the main objective of this be the pastoral accompaniment of these people which follows the lines of the relevant section of the Catechism of the Catholic Church.” The catechism teaches that homosexual activity is sinful, but that homosexual people must be respected and welcomed.

The English-D group said it, too, “spent a good deal of time reflecting on the motif of the Church’s stance of welcome and inclusivity. We fully and enthusiastically acknowledge that the Church of Jesus Christ reaches out in love to absolutely everyone.”

“No one, on account of gender, lifestyle or sexual orientation, should ever be made to feel unloved, uncared for,” the group said. “However, as St Thomas Aquinas specifies, love means ‘willing the good of the other.’ And this is why authentic love by no means excludes the call to conversion, to change of life.”

The group also echoed a sentiment shared by other groups that through the synod, the speeches and the contributions of the young adults present “it became eminently clear that young people crave holiness of life and desire practical training that will help them walk the path of sanctity.”

The English-C group, like many others, noted that while the synod can provide general suggestions for listening to young people and involving them in the life of the church,

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individual parishes and dioceses will need to find specific ways to put those suggestions into practice.

“We suggest that episcopal conferences be strongly invited to take up the results of the synod and engage in a similar process of reflection in their own milieus, even including non-bishops in the deliberations, as this synod has done,” the group said.

News briefs

+++Archdeacon of Glendalough installed

The new Archdeacon of Glendalough was installed in Christ Church Cathedral yesterday afternoon (Sunday October 22). Archdeacon Neal O’Raw was given his stall in the choir of the cathedral and his place and voice in the Chapter by Dean Dermot Dunne at Choral Evensong.

The service was sung by the cathedral choir and among the congregation was the Archdeacon’s wife, Síobhan, and one of their sons, along a number of his parishioners.

Archdeacon O’Raw is Rector of Donoughmore and Donard with Dunlavin and will continue to serve his parish also. He has been serving in West Glendalough since January 2016. Prior to that he served in the Killala Union where he was also Rural Dean in the United Dioceses of Tuam, Killala and Achonry.

The Archdeaconry of Glendalough spans an area from Arklow, Inch and Kilbride in the south to Kilternan in the north and reaches west to Athy and Celbridge and Straffan with Newcastle–Lyons.

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+++Moderator's diary

Last Sunday 21 October, the Moderator spoke at Trinity Presbyterian Church, Letterkenny, and Drumbo Presbyterian Church. On Friday night, he will give the opening prayer at PCI's MAD weekend.



+++1,000 to attend MAD Presbyterian weekend

MAD is a youth weekend of Bible teaching and activities for youth groups, taking place next weekend [@UlsterUni](#), Coleraine. 1,000 young people and leaders will gather for the 20th MAD Weekend. Pray that the unfolding of the theme of "ONE" would deepen young people's relationship with God. Please pray for the speakers: Sonia Mawhinney of [@YoungLife](#), [@petewright1988](#) of [@HillStChurch](#), [@MitchBelfast](#) of [@CrownJesus](#) & [@Doowaa18](#) of churchnewsireland@gmail.org

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[@SPresbyterian](https://twitter.com/SPresbyterian). [#one #unique #united](https://twitter.com/oneuniqueunited). <http://bit.ly/2cgVbSa>

+++Mothers Union mark Prisons Week

To mark [PrisonsWeek](https://www.mothersunion.org/news/demonstrating-heart-mothers-union-uk-prisons) members have been sharing how Mothers' Union is working in different ways through the Prison Service in the UK. Read more here: [https://www.mothersunion.org/news/demonstrating-heart-mothers-union-uk-prisons ...](https://www.mothersunion.org/news/demonstrating-heart-mothers-union-uk-prisons)



+++Musicians from homeless centre at Clonard

On Sunday morning musicians from the Capuchin Day Centre for Homeless people were welcomed at Clonard, Belfast. They joined the Clonard Choir at the 11am Mass.

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+++Christ Church Cathedral Kazakh concert

The Cathedral is proud to host the Kazakh Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra in concert tonight (Tuesday) evening. Visit this website to book tickets. [http://www.christchurchtickets.com/events1/kazakh-philharmonic-chamber-orchestra-in-concert/ ...](http://www.christchurchtickets.com/events1/kazakh-philharmonic-chamber-orchestra-in-concert/)



“When I told my abuser that I wasn’t comfortable and wanted him to stop, he replied that he was a priest and, therefore, nothing he did could be wrong. I came to believe that if it wasn’t his fault, it must be mine.”

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+++Kilmore John Paul II awards

Congratulations to the 75 young people presented with their Pope John Paul II Awards last week by Bishop Leo. Great inspirational talk given by Tyrone footballer, Peter Harte - see report and photos at <http://www.kilmoredpc.ie> [@JP2Award](#)

+++Armagh young adult pilgrimage

Armagh diocesan young adult pilgrimage next week will climb Croagh Patrick and visit the Knock shrine. "It'll be a great opportunity for stillness, peace, reflection and enjoyment - all so necessary in our busy and sometimes hectic world."



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