

Church News Ireland



Image of the day – Ministry with children

News reports

Magheralin Graveyard Bioblitz



A recent event by Magheralin Parish attracted many families to explore nature and learn about caring for creation.

The bioblitz in Magheralin Old Graveyard on Saturday 24 September was a huge success with around 50 parents and children counting all the plants, trees, insects, birds and fungi they could find. The project was an initiative of Magheralin Parish Church assisted by Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Council.

Children used the free gift of a bug box to explore the undergrowth for mini beasts finding millipedes, ants, wood louse, earwigs, snails and slugs. Red admiral and common tortoiseshell butterflies fluttered amongst the gravestones

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and hover flies buzzed near the bushes. Plenty of fungi were found in dark corners.

The yew trees in the graveyard offered perfect cover for wrens and robins while jackdaws called from the tall plane and witch elm trees. Many children filled their pockets with conkers from the horse chestnuts.

Delighted parents commented that it was a wonderful idea to explore nature in a site they often pass by but never have visited.

Staff from the Council Biodiversity Education team – James and Sandra – provided expertise on minibeasts, and Maeve Foley, the council’s Natural Heritage Officer, identified trees and plants. Sorrel Lyall, the British Trust for Ornithology Engagement Officer shared her excellent knowledge of bird identification.

Stephen Trew, the project organiser from Magheralin Parish said, “It was wonderful to see families caring so much about nature. The Old Graveyard church goes back to 1307 and it reminds us that the world around us has been passed down by the generations before us. We need to look after and restore nature that is groaning because of our harmful actions. Thankfully, churches are starting to treasure biodiversity and act on climate change. Counting nature in this tranquil and beautiful site is a fine example of how churches can engage families to learn about local habitats and care for creation.”

Service marking the formation of the Royal Ulster Constabulary



RUC standard bearers with the Rev Campbell Dixon, the Mayor of Antrim and Newtownabbey, Alderman Stephen Ross and the rector of Kilbride, the Rev Canon David Humphries. (Photo: David Holmes)

A service to commemorate the formation of the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) which replaced the Royal Irish Constabulary in 1922 was held in Kilbride Parish Church on October 2.

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The formation of the RUC, on June 1 1922, followed the partition of Ireland. In the wake of the Patten Report, the police force was reformed and renamed as the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) on November 4 2001.

The special service in Kilbride recognised the contribution and sacrifice made by police officers in Northern Ireland over 100 years.

The special service in Kilbride recognised the contribution and sacrifice made by police officers in Northern Ireland over 100 years. This was the main service for the Borough of Antrim and Newtownabbey and the Worshipful the Mayor of Antrim and Newtownabbey, Alderman Stephen Ross, was in attendance, together with other councillors and local MLA, Dr Steve Aiken OBE.

St Bride's was honoured to host this event, and the service was well attended by many past members of the RUC. The lessons were read by former officers and the praise was led by the PSNI Ladies' Choir.

The preacher was the Rev Campbell Dixon MBE, a former officer in the RUC and later the PSNI. After serving for 33 years, Campbell retired in 2004. He was ordained in 2007 and has served in St Patrick's, Jordanstown, St Anne's Cathedral, Belfast, and St Mark's, Ballysillan.

In his sermon, he spoke of the strong sense of duty held by officers in the police force and of the great losses and suffering endured throughout its long existence in Northern Ireland with more than 300 members making the supreme sacrifice.

Tercentenary Saint Anne, Shandon



Clergy and guests after the service outside Saint Anne's Church, Shandon.

The Tercentenary Celebrations of the Parish Church of Saint Anne, Shandon, culminated in a Service of Thanksgiving on Sunday, 2nd October 2022.

The Bishop of Cork, Cloyne and Ross, the Right Rev. Dr Paul Colton presided over the service, which was led by the Priest-in-Charge, the Rev. Meghan Farr. Dr Paula Gooder, Canon Chancellor of Saint Paul's Cathedral, London and renowned preacher and New Testament scholar, preached at the service.

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Sod cutting ceremony for new Presbyterian meetinghouse in Buckna



The foundations for a new era in the life and ministry of Buckna Presbyterian Church took place on Saturday (1

October) when the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, Right Reverend Dr John Kirkpatrick, cut the first sod at a special Ground Breaking Service for the congregation's new meetinghouse, which he described as "a very special moment."

During Saturday afternoon's service, which involved the singing of the hymns 'Behold our God' and 'To God be the glory', Dr Kirkpatrick was supported in the ceremonial sod-cutting by one of the oldest members of the congregation, Buckna's Clerk of Session, John Robinson and one of its youngest, Eva Kennedy the daughter of the congregation's minister, Reverend Stephen Kennedy (Photo page above).

Speaking after the service, Dr Kirkpatrick said, "This was a very special moment. As Gospel hearted people, we are always seeking ways to demonstrate our faith and confidence in the promises of God. The building of a new meetinghouse here in Buckna, especially in these difficult economic times, is a clear expression of this.

"This afternoon we sang 'To the Glory of God, words 'which will one day feature on a plaque placed somewhere in the final building on its official opening. To step out now is a clear way of glorifying Him as the one who will provide for His people. It is a very powerful way of saying that no present hardships diminish His great goodness and grace, as they are real and invite us all to trust Him in our own difficult times," the Moderator said. Presbyterians have worshipped in this part of County Antrim from before the current meetinghouse was built in 1756. But as Rev Stephen Kennedy explained, the churchbuilding is now too

small. “We’re a growing congregation and very



blessed to have a large number of young families connected to us, and while holding a significant place the heart of many, our old meetinghouse no longer meets our needs for mission and ministry.”

Mr Kennedy continued, “This is obviously a very exciting time for all of us. The congregation has been on a long journey with the project, but to see it finally starting is an answer to prayer. We are a vibrant evangelical church family that has a heart to reach those who don’t know the Lord Jesus.”

One example of this outreach involved Dr Kirkpatrick in the late 1990s, when he was asked to preach during a weeklong outreach mission organised under the ministry of Rev Leslie Addis. Sometime later Dr Kirkpatrick heard of one man coming to faith in Jesus as a result. That person,



Andy Hamilton, was present on Saturday, and is a member of Buckna's Building Project Sub-Committee.

Set in the heart of the Braid Valley, with Slemish Mountain just over a mile away from the current meeting house, the congregation with its 250 families, is four miles from Broughshane and around eight miles from Ballymena. Mr Kennedy, who was called to the congregation as its minister in 2018, explained that the current church hall, which was built in 1960, is also a quarter of a mile up the road from the meetinghouse, which was not ideal. The new church building will be opposite the hall on a greenfield site, which will also be close to the Manse.

Mr Kennedy said that plans were initially drawn up, and the project moved forward, during the ministry of his predecessor, Rev Mark Neilly, around the turn of the last

decade, with the congregation raising in excess of £1 million for the Building Fund over the past 10 years. Having appointed Michael Whitley Architects in 2014, the church was in a position to tender for a contractor in March 2020. The Covid pandemic however delayed the project for nearly a year and half, when Martin and Hamilton were finally appointed in May of this year.

“We are delighted that we have been able to reach this point, and would like to thank the Moderator for cutting the first sod. Our new meetinghouse and halls complex will be built in two phases, opening, we hope in time for Christmas 2024, but no later than early 2025. By moving forward with this project we will be securing Gospel work in this area for generations to come,” Mr Kennedy said.

Reflecting on the day, he continued, “It has been a joy to see God’s hand at various points throughout the planning of the project to get us to this day. When thinking about it, one verse that we have returned to again and again has been is 2 Corinthians 8:9. It says ‘For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.’

“It reminds us, that Jesus has given His all for us and no sacrifice that He calls us to can be too great. As we have looked at the project, humanly speaking it seems completely impossible - especially in light of current economic difficulties. However, we firmly believe that the Lord will provide,” concluded Mr Kennedy.

Return sacred Ethiopian tablet, Lord Carey tells abbey

A former archbishop of Canterbury has urged Westminster Abbey to return a sacred tablet to Ethiopia.

The Lady Chapel in the London abbey contains a Tabot, an object held by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church to be a sacred likeness of the tablets bearing the Ten Commandments, and which the Ethiopian state has insisted should be repatriated.

Lord Carey, the former archbishop of Canterbury, is understood to be pushing for the sacred object to be returned to Ethiopia, which may only take place if the repatriation is signed off by King Charles III.

Lord Carey of Clifton, having already called on the British Museum to relinquish its Ethiopian treasures, has urged the abbey to engage in talks with Ethiopia over the repatriation of the Tabot, which was initially seized by British forces following the 1868 Battle of Magdala.

However, Westminster Abbey is a “Royal Peculiar”, a religious site under the direct jurisdiction of the monarch rather than local Church of England authorities, meaning the final assent of the King may be required in order for the Tabot to be returned.

The abbey has said that it has no current plans to remove the Tabot from its current position in a cavity behind the altar

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of the Lady Chapel, where it is hidden from the view of the laity in accordance with Ethiopian Orthodox beliefs.

An abbey spokesman said: “Westminster Abbey is very aware of the importance and significance of the Ethiopian Tabot which we have in our care.

“It is kept in a very sacred place within the church, properly covered and hidden from view. We have no current plans to change these arrangements.”

Lord Carey’s support for the return of the object comes after the former archbishop, who led the Church of England from 1991 to 2002, demanded that the British Museum repatriate its collection of 11 Tabots “as a matter of faith”.

Campaigners have argued that the Tabots are unlike other cultural artefacts because Orthodox belief stipulates they cannot be seen by anyone other than priests, and while this is respected by UK institutions, the objects are of no use for display.

Supporters of repatriation, including Lord Carey, have also argued that returning the objects secured after the Battle of Magdala would benefit Christian worshippers in Ethiopia. The V&A museum also holds Magdala artefacts, but national museums are legally barred from removing items from their collection.

The Church of England is not bound by the same rules, and can remove artefacts if this is signed off by the relevant Church authorities, however, Westminster Abbey is under

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the jurisdiction of the monarch which could complicate any repatriation claim.

Perspective

Archbishop of York's sermon at service before Labour Party Conference

Each year Christians on the Left host a church service at the beginning of the Labour Party Conference. This year Archbishop Stephen Cottrell was invited to preach at St James in the City, Liverpool. His sermon follows in full...

Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called... take hold of the life that is truly life. (1 Timothy 6. 12 & 19)

First of all, it's a real joy to be with you. Yes, indeed, any invitation from Liverpool is always welcomed. My eldest son came to University here in Liverpool, twelve or thirteen years ago, and basically stayed. He was a member of this church for some years and I've worshipped here quite a number of times. And my daughter in law, his wife was ordained Deacon this year. They serve in Norris Green, which those of you who know Liverpool know, it's a pretty challenging bit of Liverpool. And well, that's what we need to talk about. We need to talk much more about the huge discrepancies of wealth and opportunity in our nation. The way that we're not a very United Kingdom, and the way that

we need a new vision, a new home for everybody, but particularly, for the so many left behind communities.

Perhaps I should start by saying that today's readings are those set by the Church for today, not ones we've chosen for ourselves. And they are very challenging for everyone in public and political life whether you are on the right or the left.

But actually, I'm not going to go for the obvious and preach on the text, 'Those who want to get rich fall into temptation... (1 Timothy 6. 9), or 'The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil' (1 Timothy 6. 10), or 'Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth' (1 Timothy 6. 17), though all these texts are important and very relevant to what is happening in our nation and our world at the moment, especially for those who believe that wealth trickles down, when all of those without much wealth, and especially the poor, know it gathers and expands in the aquifers and coffers of the wealthy and is carefully guarded.

No, I want to preach on Paul's final words, almost the last words in this whole letter to Timothy: 'Be rich in good deeds... be generous and willing to share... in this way you will take hold of the life that is truly life!' (1 Timothy 6. 18 & 19)

Let us build a coalition of hopefulness and goodwill around what we know to be true and good and right. Let us invest in what we know to be true and good and right. Or as Jesus says, Seek first the kingdom of God. And then everything

else will be added to you. For in Christ we are shown what our humanity can be.

So, though you may – or may not – be pleased about this week's tax cuts, if you are a beneficiary what you choose to do with your additional money, is an uncomfortable question only you can answer, and no politician or economist can make it for you. It is about each of us asking what is right, what is best in us rising to the surface and shaping who we are. Kevin's quote, I mean, I wrote it down. 'When people treat you like a person, you become a person'. So what can we do to let what is best in us, rise to the surface so that we acquire our full humanity, generous instincts of goodness and grace, that come from a life shaped by the gospel and imitating Christ. Because brothers and sisters, isn't that the message of the Gospel? That God in Jesus Christ has treated us so well has lavished His blessings upon us has forgiven us again, how many times as many as 70 times? No, seventy times seven. God goes on giving us a second chance, walking the second mile, turning the other cheek, why? Even dying for us so that we could become fully the people that we are meant to be. Generous instincts of goodness and grace that come from a life shaped by the gospel and imitating Christ. This life is often hidden and neglected, sometimes not known about at all, but it is the image of God within us.

If you walk around virtually any major city almost anywhere in the world, without knowing it you will be stepping over hidden, subterranean rivers and streams.

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There are many lost rivers here in Liverpool – the Alt, the Garston and the Pool, all tributaries of the Mersey, but now built over.

Sometimes in extraordinary weather conditions these underground streams break the surface, and for a moment we see them again.

Following the death of Her Late Majesty the Queen, I think something extraordinary happened in our nation, of which the most obvious outward sign was the great queue of people, thousands and thousands of people, stretching along the Thames from the east end of London in Southwark park to Westminster.

As you may know, I was in London quite a bit during the past fortnight. I stayed at Lambeth Place and every time I stepped out of the front door, I encountered this astonishing queue. I chatted – and indeed sung hymns – with many people.

And although a few selected folks had pushing in rights (I'm afraid I was one of them) for most people, whoever you were and whatever your wealth or position, you had to stand in line; David Beckham alongside a pensioner from Crewe or the unemployed job seeker from Hull.

To coin a phrase, the queue levelled us up.

But it also represented something breaking out.

Something that was always there, but hidden from view, broke the surface: not just an outpouring of grief, but a

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reaffirmation of some of the things and the deep-seated values that are the best of us. Sometimes these values are considered old fashioned values, or British values. These are Christian values.

For a while we were one humanity. We felt united. It wasn't that our differences had disappeared, but they were re-configured within a wider and deeper belonging.

And it felt good, like life itself as it is meant to be, because there has been so much in our nation in recent years that has torn us apart. It has been ugly.

Just this week, alongside that mini-budget, one of the great misnomers wasn't nothing mini about this budget, we have heard that the child poverty gap between the Northeast, where I serve, and the rest of the country has reached a 20-year high.

Consequently, but sadly not surprisingly, we have also heard in this week's report from the Children's Society that children are becoming more unhappy with their lives, prospects, schooling and appearance.

It also tells us that 85% of parents are deeply worried about the cost-of-living crisis. And that is before winter has arrived.

A child growing up in Blackpool or Hartlepool now finds that their life expectancy has gone down, and the gap between their healthy life expectancy and other parts of the country grows wider and wider.

Yes, I'm sure we need a new approach to policy, but most of all we need a hopeful vision. And the hopeful vision given us by Christ, whether we reckon ourselves left or right, or even Christian, begins with the recognition that, left or right, black or white, male or female, gay or straight - or for that matter any other of the categories and groupings that we are put in or confined by or constrained by - we belong to each other; we have responsibilities to each other. We are one humanity inhabiting one world.

But this also means that we are very unlikely to share with one another (let alone care for one another!) until we have a sense that we first belong to one other and have a commitment to each other. We are sisters and brothers to each other. How do we Christians know this? Because every time we say the Lord's Prayer, we declare it. The very first two words of the Lord's Prayer are a radical statement about what it means to be human.

We say Our Father, now I know the word father can be problematic, but there isn't time here. God is the motherly father, you know, God is not male or female. But what those words say is, if you say Our Father, what you're also saying is that everybody else who says this prayer with me is my sister and my brother, to whom I have responsibilities, and in whom I am called to enter into relationships of giving and receiving love.

Moreover, until we realise that our well-being is inextricably tied up with the well-being of our neighbour, we will never build a fair society. The streams of grace may appear from time to time. But they will soon be covered over.

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Oh yes, we might be prepared to give our neighbour a handout, but never a hand up. It will always be charity, never justice.

But we are one humanity, and the big issues for our nation, and the massive global issues of peace and climate justice for our world, will only ever be addressed when we take hold of the life that is life, that is the Christian vision of who we are as children of God, made in God's image, decent and precious to God and to each other.

The word economy comes from two Greek words: oikos, meaning household; and nomos, meaning law. So, the literal meaning is 'the law of the household.'

Furthermore, nomos is from another Greek word, nemein, meaning to distribute, indicating that law and justice here have something to do with fair distribution.

This seems to me to be a good place to begin thinking about a hopeful Christian perspective on the economic well-being of communities and nations.

A good economy is meant to be like a well-run household. And even though most people don't claim a great understanding of economics (and I sometimes think that economists and the politicians they advise would prefer to keep it that way) we do know what a well-run household should be like.

One of the things we take for granted in a well run household— in fact, if it wasn't there, we would hold up our hands in horror – is that everyone is catered for fairly and

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according to their need. There is no preferential treatment. We are - as it were – altogether in the queue.

In a family – a household – it would be unthinkable that at the dinner table some are fed while others go hungry.

Yet increasingly, the safety net in our nation is a foodbank, where more and more people have to go to get what our economy itself fails to provide. I was in Middlesbrough in North Ormesby, earlier this year, visiting a school.

When I send my kids off to school, we'd often send them off with their lunchbox because that's what you do, isn't it? In this school, you go with an empty one. Because there's a food bank in the school. So these kids go to the Breakfast Club first, and they receive free school meals. And then at the end of the day, there's trestle tables set out in the playground, and that's where you fill up your box so you can have some tea. What has happened to us as a nation that the children are taking an empty lunchbox to school to fill up so they can have some tea when they get home?

This is deeply shocking. And what is even more shocking is that we are not shocked anymore. We take this kind of inequality for granted.

What we need is a hopeful vision. A vision that unites all of us and a vision which recognises our common humanity. And I think we saw something of this rising to the surface last week when we stood alongside each other in the queue, levelled up, one people, one nation.

We find this vision in the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. For in Christ there is a new humanity and from Christ we

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learn of our belonging to each other and the responsibilities that flow from it – the joyful responsibilities for these other people are our sisters and brothers.

We take hold of the life that is truly life, the life of God and our lives lived in community with God and with each other.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, said, ‘He has brought down rulers from their thrones and has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty.

He has helped his servant...’ (Luke 1. 52-54)

This isn’t levelling up, but over-throwing. It is a redistribution. It is mercy and justice. And it can only come from a place of vision about who we are, where we belong, and where our mutual responsibilities lie.

Without it we perish.

We build walls and post sentries. Some get rich. Most don’t. Many are left behind altogether. Nations fragment. Dis-ease stirs. Walls are built higher. More sentries are recruited. More misery ensues. Discord ferments. Wars are started. And the most pressing issue of all – climate emergency, care for the poor, the excluded, the refugee are neglected altogether.

In the name of Jesus Christ, our brother and our Saviour, let us look for a better way, not putting our trust in wealth, but in God. Amen.

Poem for today

Among the Rocks

by Robert Browning

Oh, good gigantic smile o' the brown old earth,
This autumn morning! How he sets his bones
To bask i' the sun, and thrusts out knees and feet
For the ripple to run over in its mirth;
Listening the while, where on the heap of stones
The white breast of the sea-lark twitters sweet.

That is the doctrine, simple, ancient, true;
Such is life's trial, as old earth smiles and knows.
If you loved only what were worth your love,
Love were clear gain, and wholly well for you:
Make the low nature better by your throes!
Give earth yourself, go up for gain above!

Speaking to the soul

Short reading and a prayer - daily on this site

Church News Ireland

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