



Image of the day
Rainbow off Fair Head, County Antrim on Tuesday

Reports

Northern Ireland court hears challenge against abortion powers

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland exceeded his powers by issuing directives to radically expand abortion provision in the province, a pro-life group has claimed.

The Society for the Protection of Unborn Children (SPUC) made the argument at the High Court in Belfast this week, where it is seeking a judicial review into powers given to Brandon Lewis earlier this year to direct Stormont on bringing in full abortion services.

Laws passed by Westminster when Stormont was suspended radically alter abortion provision in Northern Ireland, allowing for the first time abortion up to birth on the grounds of disability.

Lewis used his new powers in July by directing Northern Ireland's First and Deputy Ministers and the health department to implement the abortion laws.

They have been given until March 2022 to ensure the services are in place.

Representing SPUC at the two-day hearing this week, John Larkin QC argued that the powers effectively turn Lewis into a "super legislator" capable of side-stepping Stormont and the devolved institutions.



During his recent visit to Rome, The Archbishop of Canterbury visited the Sant'Edigio community in Rome which combines spiritual life with a profound care for the poorest. Archbishop Welby said, 'Their ministry vaccinating hundreds of refugees and other vulnerable people every day was deeply moving to see today. An example for us all of the love of Christ'.

The powers, he said, allow Lewis to "make whatever laws he wished and transform the Northern Ireland constitution in ways that the Assembly could not".

"That cannot be right," said Mr Larkin.

A judgment is not expected for several weeks.

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Liam Gibson, SPUC's Policy and Legal Officer, called it "a gross abuse of political power" that is incompatible with the terms of the Good Friday Agreement.

"We believe that we've shown the court that the Secretary of State has acted unlawfully by ignoring the legislative process and attempting to impose his own will on the people of Northern Ireland," he said.

"There is a real danger that if Brandon Lewis is allowed to get away with this power grab then it will permanently damage the credibility of accountable government in Northern Ireland.

"The principles of self-government are central to the Belfast Agreement. If London decides to abandon those principles then it has abandoned the Good Friday Agreement."

The court also heard a legal challenge from the mother of a 15-year-old with Down's syndrome.

Rosaleen McElhinney says it is "discriminatory" to allow abortion up to birth for disabled babies while limiting it to 24 weeks for non-disabled babies.

Legal papers submitted to the Belfast High Court by Ms McElhinney's lawyers state that the new abortion regime "operates to perpetuate stereotypes towards persons with disabilities".

A similar legal challenge against disability discrimination has been brought to England's High Court by campaigner Heidi

Crowter, who has Down's syndrome. She lost her case but plans to appeal to the Supreme Court.

Nola Leach, CEO of CARE, which is supporting Ms McElhinney, said: "In allowing abortion up to birth for disabled babies – far beyond the 24-week limit for other preborn babies – it implies that disabled lives have less value.

"This regressive and discriminatory policy should have no place in Northern Ireland or any other part of the UK.

"Like other NI citizens, Rosaleen is also alarmed by diktats from UK government ministers seeking to bypass the NI devolution settlement. Abortion was imposed on Northern Ireland from afar when its government was in crisis.

"This contempt for devolution would never be shown towards the governments of Scotland or Wales. Legislators in other parts of the UK should be concerned by the precedent set by this kind of intervention."

Tenebrae, Chanticleer and new commissions for 9th City of Derry International Choir Festival

Festival will feature new works by Elaine Agnew and Eoghan Desmond.

The City of Derry International Choir Festival is taking place this year from 20 to 24 October. The festival, which is now in



St. Columb's Cathedral, Derry

its ninth year, will present a series of live and online St. Columb's Cathedral, Derry

concerts, performances, panel discussions, workshops and podcast recordings.

The festival will launch on 20 October with the opening concert in the Millennium Forum Theatre, featuring local choirs and singers, performing with members of the Ulster Orchestra, and British composer Bob Chilcott's *The Voyage*, conducted by the composer. The concert will also present the premiere of a new work by composer Elaine Agnew, *Remarkable* – a commission by Brian Irvine and John McIllduff's company *Dumbworld* – performed by the Arts

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Care Choir from Armagh, Derry chamber choir Codetta and the Ulster Orchestra.

On 21 October, Codetta will perform again with cellist Kim Vaughan in St Columba's Church Long Tower, presenting the festival's second world premiere – a newly commissioned work by Eoghan Desmond, chosen in partnership with the Contemporary Music Centre, as part of the Colmcille 1500 celebratory programme.

UK vocal ensemble Tenebrae are performing in St Columb's Cathedral on 22 October, and, on 21 October, Chanticleer, the all-male a cappella ensemble from San Francisco, will present an online concert and a live Zoom workshop.

Also taking place throughout the festival is community singing event Let's Just Sing! where singers of all experience levels are invited to join a singing session led by local choir leaders (23 October); an online concert featuring previous winners of the competition's Oak Tree of Derry Trophy, including choirs from Estonia, Indonesia, Ireland, Slovenia and Wales (22 October); a Primary School Big Sing event of singing and workshops for primary school singers (21 October); and a Big Sing workshop for post-primary school singers, featuring a newly composed song for youth choirs by Catalan composer and conductor, Josep Vila i Casañas (22 October).

Panel discussions on the topic of community singing will also take place, as well as a Virtual Choral Trail, a series of podcast recordings and the festival's Words and Music Symposium – an online panel discussion on the theme of

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words, music and composition, featuring composers and poets from the 2021 programme.

Commenting on this year's programme of events, Artistic Director Dónal Doherty said:

There is a real sense of hope among singers everywhere that we will soon be able to return to regular rehearsals and performances. Singing together is our life-blood and this shared experience has been sorely missed over the past 18 months. We cannot wait to perform together again, or to enjoy the performance of other groups, whether outdoors or in one of the beautiful indoor venues that we'll be using for this year's festival.

For further information and tickets, visit:

[www.derrychoirfest.com/2021-festival/programme-of-events.php]

Scotland: Catholic Church establishes new Safeguarding agency

The Catholic Church in Scotland has announced the creation of a new independent Safeguarding agency. Speaking at the end of a national Safeguarding webinar which attracted 450 participants from across Scotland.

Bishop Hugh Gilbert, President of the Bishops' Conference of Scotland, announced the establishment of a new body - the Scottish Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency (SCSSA) as an independent private company.



Speaking to the webinar participants, Bishop Hugh Gilbert said: "The SCSSA will operate entirely independently of the Church and will have its own staff and Board of Management who will work in close collaboration with dioceses and religious communities to ensure that they are able to meet national safeguarding standards. It will also develop a process that will provide an independent review of complaints about safeguarding practice and crucially, establish a forum in which those who have experienced abuse can contribute their own perspectives to the development of safeguarding."

Bishop Hugh added: "We will shortly commence the recruitment process for the Chair and members of the Board of Management, followed by the recruitment of a Director and a Head of Safeguarding Training. It will take some time to establish the new agency and we ask for your patience and support while that process is underway."

Bishop Hugh concluded: "The Bishops ask for your prayers that the Holy Spirit will guide us in the selection of suitable candidates who will bring authority and credibility to the work of this new agency that will promote consistency, transparency and accountability across Catholic Church institutions in Scotland."

Praise for the education sector at General Assembly

Meeting in Belfast yesterday for its third and final day of business (6 October) the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland expressed its 'sincere appreciation to all those involved in education across the island of for the many ways in which they have responded to the challenges experienced through the Covid-19 pandemic.'

The resolution was passed on a morning which saw education feature heavily in its deliberations, when Members of Assembly from the all-Ireland denomination's 500-plus congregations discussed the Report of the Council for Public Affairs.

Speaking on the subject, Dr Andrew Brown, chair of PCI's State Education Committee, said, "To say that the last two academic years have been hard is an understatement! Never before in education have we experienced such uncertainty, anxiety and constant change than during Covid-19. March 2020 seems such a short time ago, yet, looking back, it seems and has felt like an eternity. So much

has happened with so many twists and turns that it seems almost incomprehensible now.”

Dr Brown spoke of the impact off the upheaval of the pandemic which saw schools in Northern Ireland, for example, shut, reopen, shut again, then re-open once more. He said that across Ireland, “A generation of pupils have missed out on key elements of learning...school teachers and governors worked blind, getting information in a constant stream...worried, sick and stressed out about whether they were doing their best for their staff and pupils and communities...Support staff who took on additional roles, who stepped up, who minded the children of key workers...[and] parents who in the midst of their own fears... also had to worry about their children’s education...”

Dr Brown continued, “And the result? An education service which rose to the challenge, met the needs of our children, young people and communities. An education service that merits - that demands - our thanks.

“Let us thank God for the work of our educationalists, at every level. What they have done in the last two years has been Herculean. They have ensured, in spite of their fears and exhaustion, in a self-sacrificial way that some kind of normality reigned. Let us continue to pray for them as they navigate the difficult and uncertain days ahead,” said.

In a separate resolution regarding Northern Ireland’s schools, Assembly Members also commended ‘the non-denominational Christian ethos of controlled schools as a sound framework for developing the educational, emotional, mental and spiritual wellbeing of children and young people.’

In his speech, Dr Brown said that of late there had been a distinct 'raising of the temperature' over the role of the churches in education and the place of faith in the system. He told the General Assembly that it was more than just the Church's 'historical rights'.

"...More than this - It is based on our knowledge that the cornerstone values of the Christian faith: honesty, truthfulness, kindness, consideration, concern for others, compassion, obedience, responsibility, respect, and duty, are those which develop our young people into citizens of a society which is more selfless, tolerant and inclusive. To dismiss our role as 'inconsequential' and to undermine an ethos which is Christian, risks exacerbating a culture of individualism and self-centredness."

Dr Brown continued, "And so we need to continue to articulate this, to answer our detractors and to demonstrate clearly the positives of ensuring that our schools conduct their business under the banner of a non-denominational Christian ethos."

In light of Northern Ireland's forthcoming Indent Review of Education, PCI plans to hold a conference in early 2022 to reflect on, re-imagine, and re-envision the Churches role in education. This will not only help to inform the denomination's response to the review, but also to re-invigorate its thinking and to address the educational challenges of the 21st century.

News briefs

Fossil fuels: Presbyterians vote to a 'divest & engage' strategy

On its second full day of business (5 October), the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland voted to employ a 'divest and engage' strategy in relation to companies producing or using fossil fuels.

Read the story in full: bit.ly/2ZYaaKh

C of I General Synod to reduce size

A proposal put forward last week was accepted by the General Synod to axe about 18% of the lay and clerical representatives. The bill to do so was passed by a vote of 289 in favour and seven against. This is believed to be the first such cut to synod numbers since the current system entered existence in 1870. The number of members of the House of Representatives will remain at 648 until 2023, before a reduction to 597 members in a transitional period from 2024 to 2026 inclusive, and then finally dropping to 534 members during 2027-to-2032 inclusive. A review of synod arrangements will take place in 2030.

Clergy birthdays fundraiser for Embrace NI

Fr Martin McGill and Rev Steve Stockmans BIG 60th Birthday Fundraiser has passed its 4th target of £5000... '6000 for 60' sounds great! So instead of a card, a surprise party, a gift or the bumps... donate to Embrace NI before Steve knows what it is like to be Martin's age!



**Fr Martin and Rev Steve
are 'embracing' their
60th birthdays
13/9/21 – 10/10/21**



If you would like to support their 60th birthday fundraiser please go to embraceni.org and click on Support us at Stewardship



**Support us at
Stewardship**

Or you can donate at
[account.stewardship.org.uk/donation/oneoff/
20149864](https://account.stewardship.org.uk/donation/oneoff/20149864)

Writing on his Stockpad site, Steve commented “We chose Embrace NI for its work with refugees and asylum seekers.

“We set a target of £1000. We met the target by the time Fr Martin had eaten all of his cake. We doubled our target last week and have passed it again. So today we are doubling it again and announcing a new target .

“So forget sending us tokens and presents. Donate to Embrace NI and check out what they can do for you, your Church and your community.

“We have had an amazing decade working together. We have helped create Belfast’s 4 Corners Festival which will celebrate its 10th anniversary in February 2020.

You may donate at this link -

[[] [https://account.stewardship.org.uk/donation/oneoff/
20149864](https://account.stewardship.org.uk/donation/oneoff/20149864)]

ROBERT HILL HANNA VC

Gala Ball

The Schomberg Society is organising this prestigious event to raise funds towards the Robert Hill Hanna VC Memorial Statue that is being raised in Kilkeel.

SATURDAY 6TH NOVEMBER 2021

KILMOREY ARMS HOTEL, KILKEEL, 7PM

DRESS CODE: BLACK TIE FORMAL EVENT.



**CHAMPAGNE RECEPTION UPON ARRIVAL
FOLLOWED BY A FOUR COURSE MEAL
ENTERTAINMENT & DANCE BAND**

All proceeds from ticket sales and raised on the night will go towards the Robert Hill Hanna VC Statue Project.

GROUP BOOKINGS CAN BE MADE.

Please contact the Schomberg Society on 07753222553 to secure your tickets or for further information.

**Tickets
£40.00
Each**

**with concessions
for children.**

Above - The Schomberg Society is looking forward to its Robert Hill Hanna VC Gala Ball on Saturday 6th November 2021 in the Kilmorey Arms Hotel, Kilkeel. All funds raised from the event are in aid of the Robert Hill Hanna VC Statue being raised in Kilkeel

New Minister installed at Cullybackey

Rev. Noel Mulholland has been installed as Minister of Cuningham Memorial Presbyterian Church in Cullybackey. Noel, his wife, Nichola and their teenage daughters, Zara and Ella arrive in Cullybackey having previously served at Glenwherry Presbyterian Church for the last nine-and-a-half years. However, the family are certainly no strangers to 'The Cuningham' as that is where Noel served his Assistantship between 2010-12 as well as several Summer Assistantships while he attended Union Theological College. Native to Maghera, Noel spent '15 very happy years' teaching French, RE and Boys' Games at Magherafelt High School before enrolling at Union Theological College in 2007.

Heritage

Situated a little to the north east of the Principal or great East Window of the ruins of St. Patrick's Church in Stamullen Graveyard, there may be seen, what is called, a Table-Top Tombstone and it covers the burial resting place of the Reverened George Magrane . George Magrane was born in Gormanston in the year 1825. He began his priesthood training at Navan and Maynooth and completed his Ecclesiastical Studies at the College of Salamanca in Spain. When he returned to Ireland, he Officiated as Church Curate in the Diocese of Down & Connor where, it was

recorded that, "his health, hitherto delicate, was shattered in the faithful discharge of his duties". Whatever the health problems that Father George Magrane may have been suffering from, he was to sadly pass away on Wednesday, May 14th in the year 1856; he was aged just 30 years old. The Parish Priest of Stamullen and Julianstown, the Reverend Patrick Nowlan Officiated at the graveside. The Inscription on his table-Top Tombstone, although much faded and weathered now, reads: "To the Memory of the Rev. George Magrane of Gormanstown who departed this life 14th day of May 1856 aged 30 years. Requiescat in Pace. Amen" Courtesy Irish Independent - Louth

Books, Broadcasts, Resources and Webinars

American Memorial Chapel Clergy Travel Grant

All UK-based ministers (of any denomination) are invited to apply for the American Memorial Chapel Travel Grant. The grant is provided by the English-Speaking Union and supplies funds up to £2000 for a UK-based minister, priest, deacon or pastor to visit the USA. The application process is overseen by the Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education.

The purpose of your trip should be to develop mutual understanding between British and American clergy/ministers. It is entirely up to you what you focus on. In the past, support has been given to a wide range of projects: from parish nursing to the use of outdoor recreational pastimes in Evangelism. Queen's would this year especially



want to encourage study visits which contribute to better understandings of diversity and the promotion of inclusion in churches and society. So if you've got an idea for a project, see the Queen's website - link below - for further details on how to apply.

Please note: The grant covers travel costs up to £2000, at the Judging Panel's discretion. You would be responsible for arranging your own itinerary. Further terms and conditions are available on the website.

Applications for the 2022 grants are now open. The deadline for submission of applications is 31st October 2021. Shortlisted candidates will be interviewed during November.

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Theological Education | The Queen's Foundation
Birmingham (queens.ac.uk)

[[] <https://www.queens.ac.uk/what/global/the-american-memorial-chapel-travel-grant>]

Does the Church need revival?

Westminster Presbyterian Seminary in site you to join Iain H. Murray, Ian Hamilton, Jeremy Walker, Geoff Thomas and others from 14-16 October for their conference on 'Revival'. Find out more: <http://reformedconferences.org>

Poem for today

October by Edward Thomas

The green elm with the one great bough of gold
Lets leaves into the grass slip, one by one,
The short hill grass, the mushrooms small milk-white,
Harebell and scabious and tormentil,
That blackberry and gorse, in dew and sun,
Bow down to; and the wind travels too light
To shake the fallen birch leaves from the fern;
The gossamers wander at their own will.
At heavier steps than birds' the squirrels scold.
The rich scene has grown fresh again and new
As Spring and to the touch is not more cool
Than it is warm to the gaze; and now I might
As happy be as earth is beautiful,
Were I some other or with earth could turn

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In alternation of violet and rose,
Harebell and snowdrop, at their season due,
And gorse that has no time not to be gay.
But if this be not happiness, -- who knows?
Some day I shall think this a happy day,
And this mood by the name of melancholy
Shall no more blackened and obscured be.



Speaking to the Soul

Bible verse, thought for the day and prayers - on site daily

