



**Image of the day - Origami angels at Hexham Abbey**  
remembering communities and people affected by Covid

## Reports

### Pope thanks God that Ireland has such a wise man as President

**Pope Francis has showered the President of Ireland, Michael D Higgins, with praise after the pair met at The Vatican last week.**

The Irish President and the Head of the Roman Catholic Church had their fourth-ever meeting, The Irish Times reported, and if the Pontiff's comments are anything to go by, it went exceptionally well.

The outlet reports that, following the formal photocall between the two leaders, Pope Francis described President Higgins as a "wise man" who Ireland was lucky to have as its Head of State.

"Today, I did not just meet a man, a President, I met a wise man of today," Pope Francis said. "I thank God that Ireland has such a wise man as its Head of State"

In a statement seen by The Irish Times, the Vatican said that President Higgins, accompanied by Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher, Secretary for Relations with States, met with Pope Francis and the Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin to discuss "various matters of mutual interest" including "such as migration and the protection of the environment".



"There was also a joint reflection on the consequences of the coronavirus pandemic and the future of Europe, focusing finally on the theme of the strengthening of the peace process in the country."

President Higgins gifted a Bata lascaire, or 'Fisherman's Stick' to the Pope, created from a local blackthorn stick taken from Inis Mór, the largest of Ireland's Aran Islands.

Pope Francis's praise of President Higgins comes after the Galway native was forced to defend his decision to decline an invitation to an event alongside Queen Elizabeth in Northern Ireland to mark 100 years since its creation.

Speaking to reporters in Rome, where he was attending a meeting of the 'Arraiolos Group' of EU Presidents, President Higgins said the event had been supposed to be a religious service but had become "a political statement".



## THE CHURCH LEADERS GROUP (IRELAND)

The Archbishop of Armagh  
Primate of All Ireland  
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46 Abbey Street  
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Most Rev John McDowell

The Archbishop of Armagh  
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Most Rev Eamon Martin

The Moderator of the General Assembly  
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Rev Dr Tom McKnight

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Very Rev Dr Ivan Patterson

The President of Ireland  
Áras an Uachtaráin  
Phoenix Park  
Dublin 8  
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Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> May 2021

Dear President Higgins,

We trust that this letter finds you well in these challenging times. We are writing on behalf of the Church Leaders Group (Ireland) to extend an invitation to you as President of Ireland to attend a *Service of Reflection and Hope, to mark the Centenary of the partition of Ireland and the formation of Northern Ireland*. The proposed date is *Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> October* at an appropriate time in the late afternoon. The service will take place in *St Patrick's (Church of Ireland) Cathedral in Armagh*.

This will be a service of Christian worship hosted, organised and led by the leaders of the Church of Ireland, Roman Catholic, Presbyterian and Methodist Churches and the Irish Council of Churches. All of these churches extend across both jurisdictions on the island of Ireland. The service will provide the opportunity for honest reflection on the past one hundred years, with the acknowledgement of failures and hurts, but also with a clear affirmation of our shared commitment to building a future marked by peace, reconciliation and a commitment to the common good. The overriding theme will be that of 'Hope'.

A similar invitation is being extended to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth. The congregation will include representatives from; the political leadership of Northern Ireland, the United Kingdom and Ireland, a cross section of the local population including some of our young people, and family members of those impacted during the difficult years of 'the troubles'.

We look forward to your reply.

Yours Sincerely (and on behalf of the Church Leaders),



Rev Trevor D Gribben  
Joint Secretary



Rev Dr Heather Morris  
Joint Secretary

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See also -

[churchnewsireland@gmail.org](mailto:churchnewsireland@gmail.org)

[\[https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/im-president-of-ireland-michael-d-higgins-hits-out-at-dup-and-denies-snubbing-ni-centenary-event-40859068.html\]](https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/im-president-of-ireland-michael-d-higgins-hits-out-at-dup-and-denies-snubbing-ni-centenary-event-40859068.html)

## **Presbyterian Church marks historic moment in time**

**The Presbyterian Church in Ireland has marked the centenary of the creation of Northern Ireland and the partition of Ireland in 1921 with a special event on Friday last (17 September) at its Union Theological College in south Belfast, which 100 years ago, became the first home of the Parliament of Northern Ireland.**

In holding ‘On these steps’, the all-Ireland denomination wanted to mark the centenaries by acknowledging the role that its College played in the momentous events of 100 years ago. The Church also had a broader aim beyond the commemorative, in that it sought to create space to hear different perspectives and build relationships, by bringing people together to reflect on the island’s past, while looking in hope to a shared future.

Recognising the diversity of views around this significant anniversary, the Church invited civic and political representatives from across the UK and Ireland, including Ireland’s church leaders, who heard the Moderator, Rt Rev Dr Bruce, give a reflective address that spoke to all traditions represented at the event. Ian McBride, the Foster Professor of Irish History at the University of Oxford, brought a historical perspective. The Principal of Union Theological



College, Rev Professor Gordon Campbell, welcomed guests to the event and acted as MC.

Political reflection also played a key part in proceedings, with a panel discussion hosted by the journalist and broadcaster Judith Hill. Panellists included Northern Ireland's First Minister, Paul Givan MLA and Junior Minister, Declan Kearney MLA, representing the deputy First Minister Michelle O'Neill, who was unable to attend. Newly appointed Minister of State for Northern Ireland, Conor Burns MP, also took part along with Ireland's Minister for Foreign Affairs, Simon Coveney TD.

In his wide-ranging and thought-provoking address, that was both challenging and hope filled, Dr Bruce drew on his own personal experiences of growing up in Lurgan, both through division and friendship. He also painted a prophetic picture of what he thought it would take to build something new, the

creativity that is required in reworking and reshaping ‘the clay of this place’, which he said is a ‘unique mix’. It was, however, a future that he said was undeniably in the hands of everyone on the island of Ireland, especially those who were prepared ‘to get their hands dirty’. At the heart of that future, is reconciliation.

During his address the Moderator spoke of the different journeys travelled when it comes to the centenaries, and how like many of the communities across Ireland, these journeys often meet at a crossroads. “There are those who lament the creation of the border on this island, seeing it as an act of political compromise undermining the cause of Irish unity, and condemning this island to a further century of violence and sectarian polarisation. There are others who will wish to celebrate the partition of Ireland as a triumph of statecraft; a necessary act of political expedience to honour the democratic wishes of the majority in these six counties,” he said.

Recognising the reality of mistrust, division and the violence once endured, Dr Bruce asked the question that goes to the heart of the matter “... does the gospel provide a basis for hope for the future as we stand at this crossroads, regarding each other across the way, 100 years on? There are some things we will never be able to forget, and indeed which we must try not to forget. Victims of violence who have lost loved ones still seek justice, however unlikely such recourse through the courts might be. To remove that from them is to remove hope, and is antithetical to the gospel, which unites both love and justice in the person of Jesus Christ.”





Dr Bruce explained that the Christian understanding of reconciliation rests upon the coming together of both love and justice: love sent Christ to be with us and justice sent Christ to the cross – both were needed to reconcile us to God.”

“Reconciliation is not soft or forgetful. Setting the past aside as if it didn’t happen is no basis or foundation for healing. Reconciliation that has the grit and grip to re-write a life is that which names a wrong as the wrong that it is, whether perpetrated by the state or by an agent of terror. Such naming and then acknowledgement of a wrong presents a choice to those at the table. If they have the courage and good sense and moral backbone to repent of it, to lament that it ever took place, to say so and face the guilt that lies at its heart, then a door is opened to a new future....” he said.



“...God’s vision for us is that we, friends and enemies alike, can sit together and eat together at the table. The people who get this are deeply impressive and unforgettable when we encounter them, and we on this island have a disproportionately large number of them to celebrate...”

Speaking of another table, Dr Bruce said, “The power-sharing arrangements which exist here [in Northern Ireland], while not by any means perfect, are precious. They are a table around which we will find political friends and foes, and that in itself is a prophetic instrument which we need to protect...”

“North, south, east and west on these islands present us with a web of opportunities to grow – economically, culturally, spiritually, if we have the vision for it. In a post-Brexit, Protocol environment some of this has been made more complicated, but if anything it has been made more urgent. We must work tirelessly to sort out the new configurations of our cultural, commercial and spiritual connections. No shortcuts. No quick fixes. No buck-passing. Just gritty determination to get the detail done.”

In conclusion, Dr Bruce said, “A multi-cultural Ireland, north and south is a blessing to us, and we need not be fearful of it. The stories of those who have left everything behind in their homelands to be part of our story in this, their new homeland, need to be heard, and they will enrich us, just as we will bless them...Whatever a new Ireland resembles, it will not be because someone was victorious, while another was defeated. If it looks like that, it won’t be a new Ireland...”

During the event, which was livestreamed, guests were treated to the premier of a specially commissioned song for the event by the Belfast-based indie singer-songwriter, Ferna. They also heard King George V's address to the opening of the Parliament, spoken by local actor Jim Allen. In his wide-ranging address, which included historical assessment alongside contemporary reflective and observations, Professor McBride suggested that those who had gone before were not motivated only by inherited prejudices, but their beliefs and values were shaped by the Great War, which found many parallels in the Europe of the day.

"One useful function of historians is to remind us that our predicaments are rarely as unique as we think. The unprecedented strains created by the Great War not only split apart the union of Britain and Ireland; they also brought about the collapse of the great continental empires...

"The new states of Poland and Czechoslovakia were established, Romania was enlarged...and the area around Smyrna (modern Izmir) was awarded to the Greeks. In all these cases, as in Ireland, the wishes of the inhabitants collided with strategic interests and with local political and economic circumstances," he said.

Quoting the European historian Mark Mazower, Professor McBride said that that "...the Paris peace settlement of 1919-1923 gave sixty million people a state of their own; but it also turned 25 million people into 'minorities'."

From the outset Professor McBride said that there was no easy answer to the question 'How can we find constructive

ways of commemorating the creation of Northern Ireland 100 years ago?’ He told those gathered in the Gamble Library, the seat of the old House of Commons from 1921 to 1932, that, “The partition of Ireland was a flawed attempt to reconcile the aspirations of Unionists and Nationalists. The responsibility for its failures lies with decision-makers in Belfast, in London and, to some extent, in Dublin also.

“In many respects the constitutional settlement of 1920-22 was the antithesis of the peace process of the 1990s...A century ago, neither Unionists nor Nationalists were capable of recognising the legitimacy of each other’s political allegiances. Each regarded the historical and cultural traditions of the other as invalid, or at least as misguided,” he said.

At the same time Professor McBride observed that, “The political and social forces working in favour of partition were very powerful. Nobody had a coherent or obviously workable alternative...Over the decades the mechanisms of denial and evasion became habitual, the rationalisations more practiced, and ‘whataboutery’ became a competitive sport.

“My hope is that, in this centenary year, we can collectively interrogate some of these self-serving reflexes...The challenge for historians, among others, is to ensure that the complex realities of the Irish situation a century ago are not ironed out for political, ideological or therapeutic reasons.”

Having spoken about the ‘challenge for historians’, Professor McBride concluded his address by quoting the renowned Irish historian, David Fitzpatrick, when he said



that task of the historian is to 'raise awkward issues and, above all, seek to broaden the terms of debate'.

"We should bear in mind Fitzpatrick's advice as we contemplate the centenary of Northern Ireland. 'Far from avoiding all forms of judgement', he suggested, historians should try 'to add moral intensity to the ways in which we commemorate and comprehend the past'," Professor McBride said.

The full address given by Dr Bruce and Professor McBride can be read at [www.presbyterianireland.org/news](http://www.presbyterianireland.org/news) The event was supported by the Department of Foreign Affairs Reconciliation Fund and will be followed by a series of webinars. The four-part series will seek to unpack 'On these steps' and its themes to the wider Irish Presbyterian community.

## **Clerics' birthday target for charity is smashed on first day**

### **New goal set for charity donations in lieu of presents to help refugees**

The Belfast clerics who asked for charitable donations in lieu of birthday presents have admitted that they underestimated the generosity of the Northern Ireland people, Claire McNeilly writes in the Belfast Telegraph.

Father Martin Magill and Rev Steve Stockman had set a £1,000 target to coincide with their 60th birthdays.

That goal, however, was surpassed on the first day — Monday September 13, Fr Martin's birthday.

On Thursday night, Rev Steve Stockman announced a new target of £2,000 for the appeal during a visit to Fr Magill's church, St John's, on the Falls Road in west Belfast.

Rather than asking people to move heaven and earth, the fundraising duo said they were keen to set an “achievable” goal.

Fr Magill also told the Belfast Telegraph that their primary aim was “to highlight the refugee crisis”.

“We would also like to shine a light on what Embrace NI are doing to resource churches and others to help with that crisis at a local level,” he said.

“We've had night prayer since the start of lockdown.

“Steve joined me for that and as part of it we wanted to say thanks to everyone for their support so far.

“We couldn't believe we reached £1,000 so quickly; we are so thankful and humbled by that.”

The men of the cloth have chosen Embrace NI, an interdenominational Christian group which helps asylum seekers, refugees and migrant workers.

It's a timely gesture in the wake of the humanitarian catastrophe unfolding in Afghanistan.

The fundraiser was officially launched on the 60th birthday of Fr Magill, who became one of Northern Ireland's best-known priests in April 2019 after his emotional address to local politicians at the funeral of murdered journalist Lyra McKee.

It will run until October 10, which is when Rev Stockman will celebrate his own landmark birthday.

The pair are both familiar figures in Northern Ireland, not least for their pioneering work with the 4 Corners Festival.

“We have often found it so interesting that, though not meeting until we were almost 50, our birthdays are so close together,” Rev Stockman said.

“We have had an amazing decade working together and both feel that God has really blessed us in our friendship, our lives and vocations.

“We also feel that they are blessed enough with things. So, instead of gifts to celebrate our 60th birthdays we would love it if people would give a donation to Embrace NI.”

Rev Stockman said Embrace NI was their chosen charity because “it is interdenominational and helps us fulfil a clear Biblical mandate to take care of the refugee”.

“Watching the news footage from Afghanistan reminds us that all over the world people are fleeing terrible wars, oppression and poverty to find a better, safer life for their family,” he added.



“We are of course aware that Jesus was a refugee too. We see the work Embrace does, not only in its emergency response to refugees but also their role of educating and resourcing the church, as being so crucial.

“We therefore encourage you, if you have benefited in any way from our individual ministries or our work together to make a contribution to Embrace NI.”

Fr Magill added: “Both Steve and I would say we've been extremely blessed in so many ways; that's really why we're keen to do something like this.”

Courtesy The Belfast Telegraph.

## News briefs

### **Connor's big Muddy Church event for all the family is fast approaching!**

Organised by All Aboard, Connor Children's Ministry, Muddy Church will take place in Ballintoy on Sunday September 26 at 2.30pm.

Victoria Jackson, Children's Ministry Development Officer for the diocese, invites all the family to get into the great outdoors and learn more about God's incredible creation!

“Come along as a family and follow the Muddy Church Trail around the grounds to explore and learn about God's incredible creation,” Victoria said.



“Along the trail there will be opportunities to take part in crafts and even meet some special guests! We will finish up with a free ice cream van for all the family!”

Muddy Church will be hosted by the Grouped Parishes Ballintoy and Dunseverick in the grounds of Mount Druid Rectory. Parking will be available in the rectory grounds at 2 Ballinlea Road, Ballintoy, BT54 6QN, and there is no cost for attending.

Victoria added: “Just bring your little explorers, plus your wellies, and you are set to go!”

September 20, 2021

Booking is not required, but if you would like more information, including directions to the rectory, please contact Victoria at [victoriajackson@connordiocese.org](mailto:victoriajackson@connordiocese.org).

## **Fellowship of Contemplative Prayer Silent Retreat**

The annual Silent Retreat of the Fellowship of Contemplative Prayer is due to take place at Dromantine Retreat and Conference Centre outside Newry, Co Down, from Friday September 24 to Sunday September 26.

The retreat will begin at 5.45pm on the 24th and end around 2pm on the 26th. The Witness will be The Rev Jenny Hill, Chaplain of the Fellowship of Contemplative Prayer (UK).

Cost is £175. For enquiries and bookings please contact Nuala Dudley at [nualadudley@gmail.com](mailto:nualadudley@gmail.com). All are welcome.

## **Dublin deacons ordained**

Edwin Aiken and Alexander Chisnall were ordained Deacon on Sunday, September 19 2021, in Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin. Edwin will serve as Deacon Intern in the Holmpatrick Group of Parishes in the Diocese of Dublin. Alexander will serve as Deacon Intern in Wicklow and Killiskey in the Diocese of Glendalough. Archbishop Michael Jackson presided at the service

## **Commissioned in Clogher**

By the Bishop in Enniskillen Cathedral - Joan Nelson was licensed as a Diocesan Reader. Patricia Hutchinson, Viola



Bryson, Wendy Kerr and Keith Browne were commissioned as Diocesan Pastoral Assistants.

Due to ongoing covid restrictions numbers able to attend had to be restricted but the service is available as a recording on the Cathedral website [www.enniskillencathedral.com](http://www.enniskillencathedral.com)

## **Ordained as a priest in Carrick on Shannon**

On Sunday the 19th the Revd. Albert Dawson was ordained as a priest in the Church of Ireland in St Georges Church in Carrick on Shannon. For the last year following his ordination as a deacon, he has served in the Manorhamilton Group of Parishes. The Bishop has asked him to remain in the parish as the Locally Ordained Minister.

## **Archbishop enthroned**

After a delay of 18 months due it was claimed to Covid restrictions and good practice, Church of Ireland Primate and Archbishop of Armagh was enthroned in Armagh Cathedral, following the customary beating on the front door with his crozier. As he almost said in his address, he has been loitering with intent at the cathedral. About 100 guests were present. The service was available online. A new first for Armagh enthronements.

## **Exporting tried and tested talent**

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) said it “was delighted” to announce the appointment of Dr Nicola Brady as its next General Secretary. They ‘nicked’ her from the Irish Council of Churches. CTBI’s Moderator, the Revd

Graham Sparkes, commented, ‘We welcome Nicola at a time of challenge and opportunity. Across our four nations and beyond there are many fractures and divisions that threaten our shared humanity’. Obviously the lady is up for the challenge.

## **Perspective - We have this treasure in earthen vessels by Gordon Linney**

### **Despite our failings, God’s Holy Spirit still gets through to empower people**

In his writings, Canadian-born Jewish novelist and songwriter Leonard Cohen reflected on issues of human-interest, such as religion, politics, loss and death. He believed that we should not become prisoners of our failures because we cannot be perfect. In his song Anthem he argues that perfection is beyond us even in marriage, work, love of family or love of God so we should “Ring the bells that still can ring, / forget (our) perfect offering, / there is a crack, a crack in everything/ that’s how the light gets in.”

Forgetting our “perfect offering” ought to resonate with the Christian church given the tsunami of scandal it has faced in recent years involving clergy and religious. People are understandably upset, and credibility undermined. Religious scandals are not new, however, as we are shown in the scriptures where there are many examples of ideals mocked and discarded. Consider what the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah said about his religious leaders: “They have treated the wound of my people carelessly, saying, ‘Peace, peace’, when there is no peace. They acted shamefully, they

committed abomination; yet they were not ashamed, they did not know how to blush.” (Jeremiah 5). In the gospels Jesus made the same point by cleansing of the Temple. Serious problems too in the medieval church, the spiritual ancestor of all Western Christians, which led to the Reformation. Paul writing to the Corinthians offered this explanation: “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us.” Earthen vessels! Clearly on display in tomorrow’s gospel reading (St Mark chapter 9) where we read that while Jesus was speaking about his mission and forecasting his death, key followers were preoccupied with their personal leadership ambitions.

Leonard Cohen tells us that even though there is a crack in everything light can still get in, which is consistent with what St Paul said: “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us”. In other words, despite our failings God’s Holy Spirit still gets through to empower people, lay and ordained, to do extraordinary things. We see this for example in the ministry of 84-year-old Indian priest Fr Stan Swamy who devoted his life to the untouchables of the Hindu caste system. He was arrested last year, accused of links with rebels, imprisoned and denied bail, even though he was so ill with Parkinson’s disease that he could scarcely hold a cup to drink. He died in July, still a prisoner. His was ministry at its best and typical of thousands of clergy who despite the failures of colleagues and poor leadership, faithfully continue to walk with people in good times and bad often unknown and increasingly unsung.



These are challenging times for the ordained ministry, and some may feel downhearted like Elijah, one of the great prophets, who once had celebrity status until he found himself in the wilderness of the disillusioned and with a mood to match. We call it burnout today. He felt that all his work had been in vain, declaring “and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.” But God tells him he’s wrong; that the work continues and during these September Ember Days of prayer for those already ordained and those preparing for ordination we are reminded of that. In the Church of Ireland, for example, we give thanks for the women and men newly ordained this year, nine to the diaconate and nine to the priesthood. They remind us that despite all the failings of the churches the Holy Spirit always finds ways to engage and do something special with what Paul called earthen vessels. Leonard Cohen got it right: “Ring the bells that still can ring, / forget your perfect offering, / there is a crack, a crack in everything/ that’s how the light gets in.”

Courtesy - The Irish Times

## **Books, Broadcasts, Resources and Webinars**

### **CPAS Leadership Webinar**

September 22. 10:00 am - 11:00 am Free

What: Our popular free webinar to resource leaders through the pandemic and beyond. Topic will be decided closer to

the time in order to enable us to be responsive to the ever-changing context we find ourselves in.

Book your place at [www.cpas.org.uk/webinars](http://www.cpas.org.uk/webinars)

## **Back to Church with C of I Children's Ministry**

Every parish across the Church of Ireland has a fresh opportunity to welcome children and families back into their activities as this new school year begins.

The Children's Ministry Network has shared Back to Church packs which provide practical resources for supporting the return of families to church buildings, including postcards, top tips for welcome teams, sample backpack blessing tags, and photocopiable Together@Home sheets to aid with planning and to engage with children through worship services in parishes where a Sunday school or club is not yet up and running.

Over 40 Muddy Church Trails have also been sent out through the network's diocesan representatives, to encourage people to get outside and wonder afresh about the majesty of God's Creation. The 'Great Big Muddy World' resource comes with trails, wondering sheets and activity pages. This is an ideal way for you to invite local families to come along and have fun and fellowship even if your parish doesn't have a children's ministry at present. You never know what a kind word of welcome can begin!

To receive both resources, contact your diocesan representative or download and print the materials that will work best in your setting from the following links:

## Back to Church packs

[www.cm.ireland.anglican.org/back-to-church-pack](http://www.cm.ireland.anglican.org/back-to-church-pack)

## Muddy Church resources

[www.cm.ireland.anglican.org/great-big-muddy-world-trails-wondering-pages-and-activity-sheets](http://www.cm.ireland.anglican.org/great-big-muddy-world-trails-wondering-pages-and-activity-sheets)

To check out the latest resources from the network, as the year develops, check in at [www.cm.ireland.anglican.org](http://www.cm.ireland.anglican.org) or follow CM on Facebook:

[www.facebook.com/churchofirelandchildrensministry](http://www.facebook.com/churchofirelandchildrensministry)

## Poem for today

### In September by Edward Dowden

Spring scarce had greener fields to show than these  
Of mid September; through the still warm noon  
The rivulets ripple forth a gladder tune  
Than ever in the summer; from the trees  
Dusk-green, and murmuring inward melodies,  
No leaf drops yet; only our evenings swoon  
In pallid skies more suddenly, and the moon  
Finds motionless white mists out on the leas.  
Dear chance it were in some rough wood-god's lair  
A month hence, gazing on the last bright field,  
To sink o'er-drowsed, and dream that wild-flowers blew  
Around my head and feet silently there,  
Till Spring's glad choir adown the valley pealed,  
And violets trembled in the morning dew.



## Speaking to the Soul

See post for today on site

