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## Image of the day - Canterbury Cathedral

### Reports

## Minister Humphreys would be proud to represent Irish Government at centenary service

**Heather Humphreys has said she would be “very proud” to represent the Irish Government at a church service commemorating partition and the foundation of Northern Ireland, Michael Staines reports on Newstalk**

The Social Protection Minister was speaking after President Michael D Higgins declined an invitation to attend a commemoration at a church in County Armagh.

The President said the title of the event was “politicised” and noted that it would be inappropriate for the head of State to attend an event that commemorates partition.

On Newstalk Breakfast yesterday morning (Sept.22), Minister Heather Humphries said she would have no issue with attending.

“Just to say, first of all, the Government has not received an invitation but the Taoiseach was very clear yesterday, he said that if we get an invitation we will certainly consider it,” she said.

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“Can I just say that if the Government decided to send a representative and they did ask me to represent them, I would be very proud to represent the Government as I have done in the past at many different events.

“So, as I said no invitation as yet and if there is one Government will decide.”

She said she has never turned down the chance to represent the Government.

“On every occasion, I have been more than proud to represent the Irish Government at whatever event I was asked to attend,” she said.

Courtesy Newstalk, 22 September 2021. See also News briefs later in this issue.

## **Armagh churches awarded funding grants**

**Acton Parish Church, Poyntzpass, and Creggan Parish Church have each been awarded grants by the National Churches Trust.**

The parishes are to receive this funding as part of the Treasure Ireland project funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the Pilgrim Trust and the Department for Communities.

Claire Walker, Chief Executive of the National Churches Trust said: “The latest funding from the National Churches

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Trust's Treasure Ireland project is a much-needed lifeline for Acton Parish Church and Creggan Parish Church."

"The grants will safeguard unique local heritage and provide a real boost to the people who look after the churches as we begin to emerge from the COVID-19 lockdowns.

"Our thanks to the funders of Treasure Ireland: the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the Pilgrim Trust and the Department for Communities."

Acton Parish Church, Poyntzpass is to receive £4,000 of funding for a project to repoint and repair sections of the south side of the church.

The building is listed category B and the tower features an interesting Memento Mori sundial by Thomas McCreash, Poyntzpass dating from 1819.

A spokesperson for Acton Parish Church stated: "The Rector, Select Vestry and Parishioners of Acton Parish Church, are most grateful to the National Churches Trust Grant Committee for awarding us this grant towards repairing and preserving our treasured church building for future generations."

Creggan Parish Church is to receive £6,500 of funding from the National Churches Trust.

The Gothic Revival style church is believed to date from between 1731 and 1758 with the tower being added in 1799. The building sits within an ancient graveyard, thought to be the traditional burial place of the descendants of the



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O'Neill dynasty. Inside the church there are beautiful windows designed by Belfast stained glass studio Douglas, Sons & Co dating from 1915.

Kenny Donaldson, Secretary of Creggan Parish Church, stated: "We are delighted as a small Parish to have been successful in our bid for funding from The National Churches Trust and the Wolfson Fabric Repair Grant scheme.

"The church, associated lands and buildings are amongst the most heritage rich of churches across Ireland, north and south."

The grant of £6,500 is augmented by a further £2,000 from the Wolfson Fabric Repair Grant from the Wolfson Foundation on the recommendation of the National Churches Trust. The money will help deliver a project to carry out essential maintenance and repoint stonework.

Treasure Ireland is a new project to support historic places of worship in Northern Ireland which will run until 2023. It offers grants for repairs, help and advice with maintenance to help keep churches or chapels in good



condition and a tourism initiative showcasing the rich church heritage of Northern Ireland. Report courtesy of Armaghi. September 22.

## **English Methodist Church releases guidance and liturgy on same sex marriage**

**The Methodist Church in England, which voted to allow same sex marriage on 30th June, has released guidance on how to conduct wedding services in a church.**

The Methodist Conference voted 256-45 in favour of extending marriage to gay couples and allowing ceremonies to take place on its premises and by its ministers, with the first weddings expected this autumn.

The marriage liturgy now states: "No one should enter into this lightly or selfishly, for marriage involves the giving of two persons wholeheartedly to each other."

The approved liturgy also says that when it comes to pronouns "the preference of the person should always be followed," although the terms "husband" and / or "wife" must still be said legally.

Guidance has also been written for a Methodist service that would bless a gay couple who have already been married outside the church. This includes vows that ask each partner to confirm their commitment, for example:

"A, you have come here as C's husband/wife/spouse seeking God's blessing upon your marriage, and desiring to live according to God's will. I ask you, therefore: will you love her/him/them, comfort and honour her/him/them, be her/his/their companion through all the joys and sorrows of

life, and be faithful to her/him/them as long as you both shall live?"

Churches that wish to hold same sex weddings must register by applying to the local registry office, paying a fee of £64 and attaching a copy of the marriage service they plan to use. This must also be accompanied by a letter of consent signed by the trustees of the building to affirm that the congregation agrees with the change.

Churches are not obliged to register and can still stay in the Methodist church if they do not.

Other churches may have congregations who are split on the issue, or have a building which is shared by two congregations who take different views. The checklist states: "Consent letters are required on behalf of EVERY congregation that uses the building for worship."

The denomination has produced a flow chart to help its churches make a decision about whether to register or not, encouraging them to step back from making a rash decision if there is not consensus, it reads: "You may decide to step back from decision making to focus on living with contradictory convictions, or to continue the process to explore the decision more deeply, and to agree to regather to make a decision another time."

Speaking to Premier News in June, Methodist minister Sam McBratney, chair of the LGBT+ Methodist group Dignity and Worth, said: "We will do our utmost to build a church where we live well with contradictory convictions. So, even passing this motion today does not in any way commit every

Methodist member or minister to agree with same sex marriage."

Speaking from the other point of view, Rev Dr David Hull, chair of Methodist Evangelicals Together, told Premier: "Some people have already changed churches, others are thinking about their future, others feel called by the Lord to stay no matter what and work to change."

## **Church anger at clergy involved in M25 climate change protests**

**Anglican leaders say arrested clerics who held up traffic are ‘not helping’ environmental cause**

Church leaders have expressed their anger and frustration at priests who helped blockade the M25, saying they are “not helping” tackle climate change.

Two Anglican priests were among dozens of Insulate Britain activists arrested after repeatedly stopping traffic across the London orbital motorway.

One motorist claimed his mother has been left partially paralysed from a stroke after being delayed for several hours by the protests. The man, identified only as Chris, told LBC radio: “I was caught for about six hours in traffic. I was there with my mother watching her slip away, and I could do nothing.”

Doctors told Chris that had they had arrived sooner her chances of recovering fully would have been far greater.





The Revd Tim Hewes, a 71-year-old part-time priest from Wantage, Oxfordshire, and the Revd Sue Parfitt, 79, a retired vicar from Bristol, were among protestors who glued themselves to sliproads around the M25 road last week, calling for more government action on insulating homes against heat loss.

Revd Parfitt, who has previously committed contempt of court by glueing herself to court furniture during Extinction Rebellion protests, was pictured, in her clerical collar, with protestors next to an overpass on Wednesday.

Revd Hewes had also been photographed in August outside the offices of Rupert Murdoch's News UK building after sewing his lips together in protest over what he called the "muting" of climate science.

Their actions have angered Anglican leaders, who say they are damaging the reputation of the environmental

movement. Church of England sources said: “We don’t think what Tim and Sue are doing is particularly helpful. There is an urgent need for real action to tackle climate change, but blocking roads and sewing your lips together is not the right way to go about it.

“It’s this sort of thing that alienates people and makes them think that tackling the climate crisis is not possible without extremist measures. We don’t think the protests this week led to anything other than irritated drivers and could have placed people in danger.”

A spokesman for the Diocese of Oxford said: “The world faces extreme weather events. Our society has a tiny window to make rapid decisions and take action. The actions of Revd Hewes and others, while arguably well intentioned, frustrated many people and we’re unclear how what they have done drives the urgent change required.”

Revd Hewes was also previously jailed for contempt of court after he glued himself to court furniture in March in protest at what he called the Court’s “complicity with the government’s lack of action on the climate emergency”.

However church sources said no action is likely against Revd Parfitt or Revd Hewes, as they are deemed to have been “acting in conscience” according to deeply held beliefs.

The Road Haulage Association, which represents major haulage firms responsible for transporting much of Britain’s food supplies, condemned Insulate Britain’s actions.

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A spokesman said: “We are seeing prices already going up and we have all got to work together to get through this. Having groups deliberately cause disruption is not helping what is already a very difficult situation.”

Protestors – who plan more blockades in the run up to the Cop26 climate change conference – could face conspiracy charges amid concern that low-level offences will simply result in “slap on the wrist” sentences.

Priti Patel, the Home Secretary, has demanded more action from forces after videos emerged appearing to show officers facilitating the protests.

Insulate Britain defended its actions, stating: “Our protests have been condemned as ‘completely unacceptable’ by Priti Patel. What is unacceptable is putting the future of hard-working people at risk due to climate inaction.”

## News briefs

### **Mothers' Union Annual Gathering this Saturday**

The worldwide gathering event will be on YouTube in two sessions and will include an act of worship led by the Rt Revd Dr Emma Ineson, Mothers' Union Central Chaplain. The morning session will be from 11.00am - 12:30pm and the afternoon session from 1.30pm to 2.30pm.

[ <https://youtu.be/LMU-yzYwUPI> ]




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## **Cromwell? Come all ye!**

Local historian, author and all round Cromwellophile Tom Reilly is holding a special talk in Drogheda on his theory on what happened when the English General came to town. “On Sunday October 3rd at 3pm in St Mary's Church of Ireland (otherwise St Gerrard's) on Mary Street I will be giving a talk on why I believe no innocent civilians were deliberately killed by Cromwell at Drawda. Come or don't come,” says Tom with a rye smile. “This is the site of the breach in the walls. Bring your best arguments. Bring a historian. I don't care. Just be prepared to lose!” He says donations to cover the cost of renting the church. “Michael

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has given it to me for nothing, but I can't agree to that. We must support local businesses". Drogheda Independent

## **Armagh schools liturgy**

A special liturgy was held in St. Patrick's Cathedral, Armagh on the 14th of September to celebrate the start of the new school year. The liturgy was celebrated by Bishop Michael Router, Auxiliary Bishop of Armagh. Pupils representing schools in the Archdiocese of Armagh and the Diocese of Dromore were in attendance and hundreds of children from across the dioceses joined in online.

## **Organ recital fundraiser for Enniskillen Cathedral Roof Appeal**

An Organ Recital featuring one of the most promising young pianists and organists in Northern Ireland - Orly Watson, Director of Music at Dromore Cathedral, and Official Accompanist at Queen's University. A graduate of Oxford University and of the Royal Academy of Music in London, Orly has performed extensively in Ireland and England and has worked for the Royal Irish Academy of Music and for Northern Ireland Opera. He will perform a programme of favourite organ works framed by congregational hymns. Suggested donation of minimum of eight pounds. Wednesday 29th September at 7.30pm

## **Vacancies for organists/directors of music in the Dublin area**

Church Music Dublin reports that there are three vacancies for organists/directors of music in the Dublin area. The



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organist position in a fourth Church of Ireland parish is vacant but not yet advertised. For vacancies see -  
[[ <https://www.churchmusicdublin.org/vacancies/> ]

## **Christians attend Cookstown gay pride**

Christians attended Cookstown gay pride parade event — both for and against.

More than one minister was seen standing in support of the second ever Rural LGBTQI+ event in the Co Tyrone town on Saturday, as were marchers sporting ‘Christians at Pride’ signs or logos.

## **Former taoiseach concerned about President’s decision**

Former taoiseach John Bruton says Michael D Higgins’ decision to decline an invitation from church leaders to a service marking partition and the formation of NI “opens serious questions” about Dublin’s acceptance of the Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement. And church leaders organising the event said that although they were crafting details of the event since before March this year to suit all parties concerned, Mr Higgins only told them last week he would not be attending - something Mr Higgins firmly denied. See also -

[[ <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/higgins-s-decision-questions-commitment-to-belfast-agreement-bruton-says-1.4678347> ]

## **Unionists relations with Republic’s government at their lowest ebb**

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Leading Orangeman Rev. Mervyn Gibson has said that relations between unionists and the Republic's government are at their lowest ebb for "many years".

He said the true cause of this is the NI Protocol, and that whilst he does not believe Michael D Higgins is genuinely interested in cross-community outreach, he is "indifferent" as to whether he visits NI or not.

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

### **Transformation Project courses**

Belfast Bible College's new Transformation Project courses are starting soon but there's still time to register!

As Christians, we know that we are encouraged to be 'transformed by the renewing of our mind,' (Romans 12:2). Yet we also know that this can be hard. How do we think in a way that demonstrates to ourselves, and the world around us, that we are 'transformed individuals?'

Join us as we launch year two of our Transformation Project, with an exciting new set of courses including: What can we learn from the Early Church, Journey Through the Bible, and Theology and Abuse.

Click the link to register -

<https://www.belfastbiblecollege.com/transformation-courses>

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## **Church Music Dublin video - Introduction to Organ Registration**

A new series of videos is available in which David O'Shea presents an introduction to organ stops. We released them earlier in the summer and they have received very positive feedback. You will find the videos on the CMD website by following this link:

[[] <https://www.churchmusicdublin.org/introduction-to-organ-registration/> ]

## **Church Music Dublin video - Registrations for Repertoire**

A second set of videos from CMD on the use of organ stops aims to enhance your playing in a variety of circumstances. The videos include specific advice for playing both hymns and repertoire and for accompanying small groups and soloists. They can be found here:

[[] <https://www.churchmusicdublin.org/registrations-for-repertoire/> ]



## Perspective by Ruth Dudley Edwards

### The new Northern Ireland Office minister is a Gay Catholic Tory who will listen to unionist fears

Before I get on to two subjects with which I hope to cheer up at least some of my readers, just a few words about something else.

The media's seemed to me to show extraordinary lack of compassion about the unexpected death of the prime minister's mother.

She died on September 13, since when he has handled several tricky subjects in Parliament, has organised a reshuffle, held a press conference, and on Sunday went to America for talks with — among others — President Biden, Vice-President Harris, senior congressional leaders, the leaders of Brazil, South Korea, Turkey and Spain, the United Nations General Secretary and Jeff Bezos, chairman of Amazon.

One journalist referred to this as “a jaunt” and I've seen little acknowledgement in the press this is a very tough time for a man who adored his mother, and who, at best, has had no more than a very few hours with his siblings to mourn and organise her funeral.

Now to politics.

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The Northern Ireland Office has a new Minister of State, and at a time of deep unionist distress over the protocol and a widespread sense of betrayal by the British government, it may have further worried some to learn that Conor Burns is a gay Catholic from Belfast.

Furthermore, last week he visited his old primary school, Our Lady of Lourdes Park Lodge, and one of his uncles, Father Peter Burns, Rector of Clonard Monastery — an establishment whose reputation with unionists was sullied by IRA sympathisers like Fathers Alec Reid and Gerry Reynolds.

However jumping to conclusions is rarely wise.

When Conor was eight, the Burns family moved to Hertfordshire, and for his whole adult life he has been as devout a unionist as he is a Catholic.

An admirer and supporter of Thatcher, he is a long-time friend and colleague of Boris Johnson, and to his old school — and, no doubt, his uncle — his message was of the importance of “co-operation and dialogue north/south, east/west” in shaping a fine future for Northern Ireland.

Though some Christians will be concerned that Burns voted for single sex marriage, he insisted it was only on condition that there should be “guarantees that... churches would not ultimately be forced under human rights legislation to conduct such ceremonies”.

The only time I’ve met him was online when with Kate Hoey and Mervyn Gibson of the Orange Order we were on a



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panel organised by the Queen's University Orange Society, and I can assure unionists that nobody could have been in doubt about his views on keeping the United Kingdom together.

Unionists now have someone in the Northern Ireland Office who is more likely than most to understand their fears.

The second subject is Michael D. Higgins, whom I've never liked because of his obvious deep admiration for himself.

In 2018, when he was running for a second term, I wrote that as president he had "been conscientious and mostly didn't embarrass us with the neighbours, but there are serious drawbacks to re-electing him. His personality, which causes him sometimes to ignore the boundaries of his job, has had him accused of meddling in politics, and his knee-jerk hard-leftery has occasionally besmirched his office". His job, however, "had gone to his head".

So there he was last week, on his state visit to Italy, posing at the grave of the Marxist ideologue Antonio Gramsci whom he seems to love even more than Castro, and creating an almighty row back home because he is so pig-headed.

He wrongly thought that he had been called President of the Irish Republic (which is what he is) rather than President of Ireland (which is what technically but misleadingly protocol requires him to be called) and being affronted, rejected an invitation to a religiously ecumenical "Service of Reflection and Hope, to mark the Centenary of the partition of Ireland and the formation of Northern Ireland" in Armagh — which

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had been patiently crafted and agreed by a cross-section of clergy including Roman Catholic Archbishop Eamon Martin, who spent months devising an event that would be graced by queen and president and mark a hundred years of Northern Ireland without offending or excluding anybody. Higgins had to admit he had not been wrongly addressed, but said he couldn't go anyway because it would validate partition.

As more than one furious commentator has asked, is he implying that when the Queen laid a wreath at the garden of remembrance in Dublin in 2011 which celebrates “those who gave their lives in the cause of Irish freedom”, she was “endorsing rather than respectfully marking events”?

As “saddened and troubled” ex Presbyterian moderator Norman Hamilton put it, it was “utterly baffling” that Higgins was unable to understand the difference between “marking something and commemorating it”.

Of all the criticisms I've read from north and south, the one I found most affecting was from the UUP's Steve Aiken. “For



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many years I've seen part of my role to explain to my fellow unionists that, despite our differences, our neighbours are willing to show us mutual respect and understanding. Right now, regrettably, I am no longer sure."

Courtesy News Letter, 21 September 2021

## Poem for today

### Epic by Patrick Kavanagh, 1938

I have lived in important places, times  
When great events were decided : who owned  
That half a rood of rock, a no-man's land  
Surrounded by our pitchfork-armed claims.

I heard the Duffys shouting "Damn your soul"  
And old McCabe stripped to the waist, seen  
Step the plot defying blue cast-steel -  
"Here is the march along these iron stones."

That was the year of the Munich bother. Which  
Was most important ? I inclined  
To lose my faith in Ballyrush and Gortin  
Till Homer's ghost came whispering to my mind.  
He said : I made the Iliad from such  
A local row. Gods make their own importance.

## Speaking to the Soul

See post for today on site

