



***Worshippers at a megachurch near Lagos. Some Nigerian megachurches can hold more than 20,000 worshippers and employ thousands of people. See report below - World's largest churches are getting bigger***

## **Former Westminster MP keynote speaker at Down and Connor Faith and Life Convention**

For the third time the Down and Connor Faith and Life Convention will take place in Our Lady and St. Patrick's College, Knock, Belfast on Saturday September 24.

The convention is a gathering of young and old interested in exploring and debating the significance of faith for the realities of everyday life and living.

Former Westminster MP Sarah Teather is this year's keynote speaker. She is now director of the Director of Jesuit Refugee Service in the UK. At age 29 she was the youngest MP in Westminster and served as Minister of State for Children and Families in the Coalition Government between 2010 and 2012. Then, in the context of doing a silent 30 day Retreat Sarah decided to leave Parliament with the conviction that working with refugees through the Jesuit Refugee Service is how she wanted to serve God and society

Sarah will share her experience of being a person of faith trying to respond to the Gospel imperative to create what Pope Francis refers to as an 'oasis or a culture of care'.

After lunch over 20 workshops will explore themes such as faith and film, the realities of living as a Muslim in Belfast, ecology, faith and our divided society, what it is like to be a young Catholic in today's world, exploring the spirituality of Patrick Kavanagh's poetry, the intriguing life of Fr. John Sullivan SJ the pastoral response to drugs and alcohol and how a culture of welcome can be created for migrants and people seeking refuge.

Workshops will be led by contributors including: Breda O' Brien columnist with The Irish Times and The Irish Catholic; Rev. Ruth Patterson OBE, a Presbyterian Minister and director of the charity, Restoration Ministries; Ben Conroy, former researcher with the Iona Institute; Sheikh Anwar Mady, leader of the Islamic community, Wellington Park Belfast; Dr. John Kyle GP and local councillor; Sr. Una Agnew SSL Associate Professor Emerita of the Faculty of Theology at Milltown-Institute.

- The Down and Connor annual Faith and Life Convention on Saturday September 24 in Our Lady and St. Patrick's College, Knock, Belfast BT5 7DL. To book tickets visit [www.faithandlifeconvention.org](http://www.faithandlifeconvention.org)

## Positive report on C of I and TCD degree link

A recent external review of the Master in Theology programme delivered by the Church of Ireland Theological Institute (CITI) and Trinity College Dublin has found it to be ‘a successful partnership’ which is delivering on the aims and objectives of the MTh, with the reviewers offering ‘strong approval and commendation of what is being achieved each year’. In particular, Dr Clare Amos (World Council of Churches) and Professor David Fergusson (University of Edinburgh) commended ‘high academic quality attested by dissertation and degree results’; clear provision of ‘integrated learning and formation’; evident pastoral support and the development of a ‘broad range of subject-specific and transferable skills’.

The review found that the facilities – including the Library, IT, accommodation and catering – are of a high standard, with a strongly committed support staff. Moreover, the commitment, input and quality of the academic staff was found to be ‘of the highest standard’. Student participation, achievement and satisfaction rates are ‘high’, ‘particularly by comparison with the previous BTh

degree', with students becoming 'equipped both academically and professionally to a higher standard than was the case prior to 2008'. The evolution of the MTh since 2008 to include 'creative use of the ministry portfolio to allow for assessment of practical elements of the course' as well as 'fresh approaches to teaching methods' were applauded.

Strikingly, the review praised the combination of professional training and academic education offered by CITI and Trinity as a model which 'compares favourably with best practice in the sector', noting that 'this partnership of church and academy appears to be one of the more successful by comparison with other forms of ministerial training in the UK and Europe'. The reviewers also made a number of constructive recommendations. These included a restructuring which could allow part-time students to complete the course in four years rather than six, and provision of further teaching in Biblical Studies as well as an additional course in Doctrine. The full text of the report is available online at [www.tcd.ie/teaching-learning/quality/reviewers\\_reports\\_5.php](http://www.tcd.ie/teaching-learning/quality/reviewers_reports_5.php)

In response to the publication of the review, the Director of CITI, Canon Dr Maurice Elliott, said: 'CITI is delighted to have received such a significant and constructive endorsement of the MTh programme. Since the inception of the course much energy has been invested by a great number of staff, students and those with responsibility for governance over many years to ensure that it adheres to a standard of excellence across its many facets. This report, comprehensively assessed and externally validated, represents a strong seal of approval on all of that endeavour. Its conclusions are deeply encouraging for the whole Church and its recommendations for further improvement are greatly welcomed.'

The Archbishop of Dublin, the Most Revd Dr Michael Jackson, commented: 'As chairperson of the Council of CITI I welcome the report and the interaction it has enabled CITI to have in a very professional manner with the University of Dublin. I also welcome the fresh and critical input of the external reviewers. They have highlighted both the significant strides that the degree of Master of Theology has enabled us to make in the training offered to clergy in the Church of Ireland and future directions and pathways we

might undertake. Warm and appropriate mention has been made of the staff of CITI. The report is overwhelmingly positive and greatly to be welcomed.'

## **C of E bishops urged to unequivocally welcome gay Christians**



Almost one in three clergy and lay members of the Church of England's ruling body have signed a letter to bishops urging them to unequivocally welcome lesbian and gay Christians into the church, Harriet Sherwood writes in The Guardian.

Bishops are meeting on Monday to discuss what the church should do following two years of internal debate about sexuality, an issue that has caused deep divisions and threats of splits. The College of Bishops' meeting comes days after Nicholas Chamberlain became the [first bishop to publicly declare he was gay](#) and in a relationship. Meanwhile, an [increasing number of clergy are marrying same-sex partners](#) in defiance of church rules.

Conservatives within the C of E fear a de facto change of attitude by the church to people in same-sex relationships, in what they see as an unacceptable dilution of traditional teaching.

Last month, [72 conservatives signed a letter](#) to bishops warning against any proposals that could leave the church “adrift from her apostolic inheritance” and lead to an “unwanted fracture” within the C of E and global Anglican church.

This week's pro-LGBTI open letter, which gathered 131 signatures, is cautiously worded but urges bishops to “help lead us forward” with a “sense of urgency and sensitivity”.



<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/sep/08/c-of-e-bishops-urged-to-unequivocally-welcome-gay-christians>  
<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/support-gay-christians-synod-members-urge-bishops-fpv6ksw0t>

## **C of E parish finances show record level of giving**

The generosity of churchgoers from across the country is highlighted in the latest parish finance statistics. The figures - covering the year 2014 - demonstrate a record level of giving with total planned giving up £6 million at £329 million and total direct giving up £71 million at £481 million.

The figures also show that Church of England parishes donated £46 million to supporting other charities working around the world, from foodbanks and local children's charities to international aid appeals.

Parishes raised these important funds from a combination of regular and one-off donations as well as investments and legacies. Total parish income from giving, investments and other income sources was £989 million - an increase of £36 million on the previous year. Expenditure

levels also rose by £28 million to £948 million in 2014, leaving the 12,000 parishes a surplus of £41 million over expenditure.

Dr John Preston, the Church of England's national stewardship adviser, said:

"These financial statistics reveal an underlying financial health in the church which is encouraging. As a result of the commitment and generosity of hundreds of thousands of churchgoers, we have seen record levels of giving - with the average weekly gift from all planned givers exceeding £11 for the first time, and the average gift from those able to give through Gift Aid exceeding £15 including the tax recovered. Parishes were able to claim record levels of Gift Aid, with a significant part of this increase arising from use of the Gift Aid Small Donations scheme. It is also pleasing to note that legacy giving was the highest yet."

Average weekly giving per tax-efficient givers has continued to rise year on year with members giving on average £12.01 in 2014. Average weekly giving per electoral roll member rose to £8.85 in 2014, an increase of £1.60 a week and the highest level recorded. Total planned giving

rose by slightly less than inflation, while total income grew by more than inflation.

## **Church growth: World's largest churches are getting bigger**

More than 1.6 million people now attend America's largest churches each weekend, according to the latest research on church growth.

America's 100 largest churches start at an average weekend attendance of 9,000 people. The largest 200 begin with an average attendance of 6,000. Six out of 10 of the largest churches are still growing.

Weekend attendance at large churches has grown at five times the rate compared to the year 2000, according to Dr John Vaughan of [Church Growth Today](#).

But they are still small compared to countries such as Korea and Nigeria. In Africa as a whole there are already more than 15 churches reporting more than 20,000 attendance.

Nine out of 10 US churches are small, more traditional congregations. A church was defined by Vaughan as a megachurch if it has 2,000 worshippers or more.

When Vaughan wrote his 1985 book *The World's 20 Largest Churches*, there were known to be 27 non-Catholic churches with more than 6,000 worshippers at the weekend, with more than half of these in the US. Today, more than 200 in the US alone have more than 6,000 worshippers.

[Lakewood Church](#) in Houston led by Joel Osteen is America's largest megachurch with 52,000 worshippers every weekend, 7,200 more than in 2010 and five times the size it was when Osteen's father Pastor John Osteen, who founded it, died in 1999.

[Life.Church](#) in Edmond, Oklahoma tops the multi-site table with 70,000 weekend worshippers at 21 sites across seven states.

The three largest churches outside the US are in Korea, Argentina and Nigeria.

Vaughan says [in a press release](#) that he has identified the next 150 emerging megachurches

and he is confident there are many good pastors who are equipped to lead them.

## News briefs

**+++ Lisburn institution** - The Rev Lynne Gibson became only the third rector of St Mark's Church in the Parish of Ballymacash when she was instituted by the Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev Alan Abernethy, on Wednesday September 7. Lynne has been curate assistant at St. Mark's, Dundela in the Diocese of Down for the past six years. A past pupil of Omagh Academy, she studied German and Biblical Studies at the University of St Andrew's. She worked in the civil service in the Social Security Agency for 18 years, spending the first six and half of these in England before being transferred back to Northern Ireland, where she was based in Belfast. Lynne's home parish was St Finnian's, Cregagh, where she was a parish reader for a time and helped with the BB. She studied at the Church of Ireland Theological College and was ordained in 2010.

**+++ Change of cathedrals** - The Rev Denise Acheson, former Dean's Vicar at St Anne's Cathedral, Belfast, is to take up a new temporary

position with the clergy team at Lisburn Cathedral. Denise, who lives in Lisburn with her husband Terry, will begin at Christ Church Cathedral on October 16 in a part-time capacity. Denise took extended leave from St Anne's in October 2015 to care for her daughter Ruth who was terminally ill, and resigned as Dean's Vicar earlier this year. She remained nominally on the staff of St Anne's with the Bishop's licence, but without duties, until she was able to take up a new position. Speaking of her new appointment, Denise said: "In some ways I am ready to go back, in other ways I am not, but if I just wait I will never be ready." Denise added that she was looking forward to 'getting back into the swing of things.' "St Anne's was an incredible experience and was very different to what I am going to be coming back to," she said. "Lisburn would be more community parish based, so it is going to be a very different experience."

### **+++ Archbishop Tutu in good spirits after op -**

The Archbishop Emeritus of Cape Town, Dr Desmond Tutu, is recovering in hospital "in good spirits" after surgery on Tuesday. Archbishop Tutu has battled recurring infections since mid-2015 and was admitted two weeks ago for treatment to control the infection. In a statement,

his Foundation said that Tuesday's operation was designed to "address the cause of recurring infections." His wife, Leah Tutu, said that the surgery was successful and that Archbishop Tutu was in good spirits. Yesterday was the 30th anniversary of Desmond Tutu's enthronement as Archbishop of Cape Town and Primate of Southern Africa. The current Primate, Archbishop Thabo Makgoba, sent a message to the churches in the province asking them to pray for Archbishop Tutu.

## **News links to reports on faith, politics and education**

### **NI child suicide calls - one per day**

News Letter

Childline carried out almost 350 telephone suicide counselling sessions last year with children from Northern Ireland.

<http://www.newsletter.co.uk/ni-childline-gets-a-call-every-day-on-suicide-1-7566755>

### **Childline contacted by suicidal child in Northern Ireland almost every day**

Belfast Telegraph

<http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/childline-contacted-by-suicidal-child-in-northern-ireland-almost-every-day-35032581.html>

## **Banbridge Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church mark 300 years**

Banbridge Leader

Back in 1850, the church had a congregation of 960 individual members. ... The Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church of Ireland is a small but ...

<http://www.banbridgeleader.co.uk/news/your-community/banbridge-non-subscribing-presbyterian-church-mark-300-years-1-7566013>

## **Two new curates appointed in Enniskillen and Kesh**

Fermanagh Herald

The 37-year-old first visited Enniskillen two years ago along 19 other fellow students from the **Church of Ireland** Theological Institute to take part in a ...

<http://fermanaghherald.com/2016/09/two-new-curates-appointed-in-enniskillen-and-kesh/>

## **Ex-pope Benedict admits he struggled to take decisions**

Irish Times

<http://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/religion-and-beliefs/ex-pope-benedict-admits-he-struggled-to-take-decisions-1.2784506>

## **Christian Today/Ind**

Further coverage of the Archbishop of Canterbury's call on the Government to speed up reuniting children living in the Calais 'Jungle' with family in the UK. Archbishop Justin warned of continual delays in bringing across 'really quite young children'. He told the House of Lords on Tuesday, 'Where children have families in this country



would ministers not agree there is no reason why they shouldn't be brought across within the day.'

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/britain-build-13ft-wall-calais-jungle-block-refugee-migrant-entering-uk-a7229386.html>

### **Lancs Guard**

Reports on the start of the four-day Crossroads Mission in Blackburn Diocese, led by the Archbishop of York (see above). Archbishop Sentamu will lead 24 bishops in hundreds of events and services across the diocese. The Mission starts this afternoon with a commissioning service at Blackburn Cathedral, before the bishops and their teams spread out across the county for a host of deanery outreach events in the evening. The Bishop of Lancaster is quoted.

<http://www.lancasterguardian.co.uk/news/archbishop-brings-his-top-team-for-four-day-mission-1-8111418>

### **Times/Guard**

Reports that more than 130 members of the C of E's General Synod have written to bishops urging them to make an "unequivocal" declaration in support of gay Christians at the College of Bishop's meeting next week. It explains, "We are keen that the College of Bishops is unequivocal in its acknowledgement that all, including those who identify as LGBTI, are essential to the health and future of our church and mission to the wider world." One of the letter's organisers, Jayne Ozanne, is quoted.

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/support-gay-christians-synod-members-urge-bishops-fpv6ksw0t>

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/sep/08/c-of-e-bishops-urged-to-unequivocally-welcome-gay-christians>

### **Business and Human Rights Centre**

Reports that 130 investors have signed a letter calling on the leaders of the G20 countries to take steps to meet Paris UN climate agreement. The signatories include the Church Commissioners and the C of E Pension Board.

<https://business-humanrights.org/zh-hant/node/141860>

### **BBC/Times/Guard**

Reports that lawyers for the relatives of 96 people who died at Hillsborough have drafted a new law to compel public officials to tell the truth at inquiries. The victims' families campaigned for 27 years for the truth. The Hillsborough Law, which includes penalties and fines, would address a "culture of denial", campaigners said. The draft legislation will be considered by Bishop James' Review, which was commissioned by the then Home Secretary Theresa May following the jurors' conclusions on 26 April, to consider what lessons could be learned from the disaster.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-merseyside-37296034>

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/call-for-a-hillsborough-law-to-criminalise-cover-ups-r8lwgm3g>

<https://www.theguardian.com/football/2016/sep/08/hillsborough-law-launched-to-ensure-officials-act-with-candour>

### **Even Stand**

As part of its Progress 1000 list, London's most influential people 2016, the paper produces a list of Faith Leaders which includes the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Bishop of London and the Revd Lucy Winkett.

<http://www.standard.co.uk/news/the1000/the-progress-1000-londons-most-influential-people-2016-faith-leaders-a3338136.html>

## **ITV**

Reports that a team from Winchester Cathedral are preparing for a Bible Marathon taking place from 7th to 10th September. Over 75 hours the team will read the Bible aloud, non-stop and cover-to-cover. Roly Riem, Acting Dean of Winchester Cathedral is quoted.

<http://www.itv.com/news/meridian/update/2016-09-07/chapter-by-chapter-marathon-for-bible-readers/>

## **Metro**

Further coverage of St Michael's church, Camden's application to its local council for a licence to host live music.

<http://metro.co.uk/2016/09/07/metal-loving-vicar-wants-to-turn-camden-church-into-live-gig-venue-6114015/>

## **Blogs**

**Beloved Spear** - The Most Evil Woman Who Ever Lived

<http://www.belovedspear.org/2016/09/the-most-evil-woman-who-ever-lived.html?m=1>

**To Your Credit** - The Church Is Stepping Up To Face Rising Demand For Debt Advice

<http://www.toyourcredit.org.uk/blog/the-church-steps-up>

**TheologyBee** - How to bless your church leader

<https://www.theologybee.com/965-2/>

**Archbishop Cranmer** - Calais Unaccompanied Refugee Children: Welby Grills And Government Blathers

<http://archbishopcranmer.com/calais-unaccompanied-refugee-children-welby-grills-and-government-blathers/>

**Bishop Nick Baines** - Science and Faith

<https://nickbaines.wordpress.com/2016/09/07/science-and-faith/>

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