
Services of lamentation planned after Florida school shooting as church leaders call for action



Carmen Schentrup, the 16-year-old youth group leader at St Mary Magdalene Episcopal Church in Coral Springs, was one of 17 people killed when a gunman opened fire with an AR-15 automatic rifle at the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland,

Florida, where she was a student. Her funeral will take place today

Bishops from the US-based Episcopal Church are arranging for services of lamentation at churches around the country in the wake of the shooting at a Florida high school that left 17 students and faculty members dead, and the bishops and other church leaders are calling for political action against gun violence to end “these lethal spasm of violence in our country.”

“The heart of our nation has been broken yet again by another mass shooting at an American school,” Bishops United Against Gun Violence, a coalition of more than 70 Episcopal bishops, said in a statement released on Friday (16 February) following the Ash Wednesday massacre at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida.

A former student, 19-year-old Nikolas Cruz, has been charged with 17 counts of murder after authorities say he opened fire with an AR-15 rifle in hallways and classrooms before ditching his gun and ammunition and blending in with students to escape. He was found and arrested on a city street later in the day.

Fourteen of the fatal victims were students. A football coach, athletic director and geography teacher were also killed.

Bishops United offered condolences to the families, singling out by name Carmen Schentrup, a 16-year-old student who was a youth group leader at St Mary Magdalene Episcopal Church in Coral Springs.

The Coral Springs church posted news of Schentrup's death on Facebook on Thursday.

"Please keep our entire church family in your prayers," the Facebook post said while asking the public to respect the family's privacy.

The Diocese of Southeast Florida, which includes Parkland and Coral Springs, released a statement on Thursday expressing grief at the "horrific massacre of innocents."

"There are no words that can adequately give voice to the madness and the violence done to those gunned down, and to their families and friends so cruelly robbed of those they loved," the statement says. "There are no words to describe the pain of loss and grief, of shock and horror, of outrage and anger, only the anguished cries that well up from the very depths of our being. There are no words to make sense of what makes no

sense, and in the face of such senseless killing we are numbed and rendered speechless.”

Bishop Peter Eaton followed up on Friday by saying Christians’ faith will help guide their response to this tragedy, and “we bring more than our prayers.”

“We bring our longings and convictions for a different future,” he said in his written statement on the shooting. “What happened at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School is not the world as it ought to be, or as it needs to be, and we who follow Jesus accept the responsibility for being partners with God to bridge that gap between what is and what could and ought to be.”

Also on Thursday, Washington National Cathedral Dean Randy Hollerith released a written prayer asking God to comfort those affected by the shooting spree while alluding to the political debates that typically are ignited by such killings.

“Forgive us, Lord, when our leaders fail to take action to protect the most vulnerable from the dangers of gun violence,” Hollerith says. “Forgive us, Lord, for the times when we lack the courage and political will to work together. Open our eyes

and our hearts to work across our divisions to end the plague of gun violence.”

Those sentiments were echoed by Bishops United Against Gun Violence.

“We must reflect on and acknowledge our own complicity in the unjust systems that facilitate so many deaths, and, in accordance with the keeping of a holy Lent, repent and make reparations,” Bishops United’s statement says before calling for political engagement by Episcopalians.

The bishops specifically call for legislation banning the AR-15 and similar weapons, as well as high-capacity magazines and so-called “bump stocks,” the device used by the shooter who killed 58 people at an outdoor music concert in Las Vegas in October.

“We understand that mass shootings account for a small percentage of the victims of gun violence; that far more people are killed by handguns than by any kind of rifle; that poverty, misogyny and racism contribute mightily to the violence in our society and that soaring rates of suicide remain a great unaddressed social challenge,” Bishops United’s statement says.

“And yet, the problem of gun violence is complex, and we must sometimes address it in small pieces if it is not to overwhelm us. So, please, call your members of Congress and insist that your voice be heard above those of the National Rifle Association’s lobbyists.”

The group of bishops also plans to announce a schedule of services of lamentation, with details to be released on [its Facebook page](#).

And Bishops United invited Episcopalians to join in a period of discernment, including in July at General Convention in Austin, where the bishops will gather for prayer outside the convention hall each morning.

Bishops United Against Gun Violence was formed as a response to an earlier school shooting, the December 2012 slaughter of 20 students and six adults at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut.

Since then, Bishops United has released statements with increased frequency responding to deadly mass shootings, including the 1 October massacre of 58 people in Las Vegas and the 5 November shooting that left 26 dead at First Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs, Texas.



Presbyterian Church to showcase Mission at Home

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland has announced the dates for its annual series of Mission in Ireland Information Evenings, which will take place in March. The seven events will showcase mission work at home on the island and will be opened by the Moderator, Rt. Rev. Dr. Noble McNeely, who will speak at the first evening, which takes place in Belfast.

Run by the Church's [Council for Mission in Ireland](#) (CMI), the information evenings are also

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an opportunity to discover more about the work of the Council and hear from guest speakers who will highlight their work and witness in the places that God has placed them.



Looking forward to the first evening in Belmont Presbyterian Church in Belfast, Dr. McNeely said, “When people think of ‘mission’ we probably think of the work of the great missionaries of the 19th and 20th centuries, or

the amazing work that our global mission workers are doing overseas today.

“In Matthew we read how Jesus calls each of us to mission and the making of disciples as part of the Great Commission. Later in the Book of Acts Jesus instructs His followers to start locally, being His witnesses at home in Jerusalem first.

“The work at home here in Ireland is not finished. Travelling across the island encouraging our Church and discovering its unique contribution to local life, I see the amazing work that is being done in the name of Christ by those engaged in Home Mission. The Information Evenings that are coming up are great opportunities to find out more about this invaluable work and the work of the Council for Mission in Ireland.”

The Council for Mission in Ireland provides support and strategic direction for the Church, in relation to Home and Urban Mission congregations – those supported directly by the Church through the Council. It also has an important role in considering new church development, church planting and the oversight of a number of special projects. The Church’s 23 Deaconesses, 5 Irish Mission Workers and 7 Community Outreach Workers are also an important part of its responsibilities along with

overseeing and supporting the provision of various healthcare, prison, armed forces and university chaplaincies across Ireland.

“The role of the Council is amazingly diverse and includes overseeing the huge variety of work in Home Mission and Irish Mission,” Very Rev. Dr. Frank Sellar, convener of the Council for Mission in Ireland, said.

Encouraging people to attend the evenings, Dr. Sellar continued, “The annual information evenings are an opportunity to hear first hand what the Council for Mission in Ireland is currently doing. They also provide an opportunity for members of our congregations to get a glimpse into mission work in Ireland, where the guest speakers highlight stories of God at work. Everyone is warmly invited.”

The Mission in Ireland Information Evenings take place on:

11th March: [Belmont Presbyterian Church, Belfast](#)

11th March: [Drumquin Presbyterian Church, Omagh](#)

14th March: [Killymurriss Presbyterian Church, near Ballymena](#)



14th March: [First Cookstown Presbyterian Church](#)

18th March: [Muckamore Presbyterian Church](#)

21st March: [Newtowncunningham Presbyterian Church, County Donegal](#)

25th March: [First Larne Presbyterian Church.](#)

You can discover more about the work of the Church's Deaconesses, Irish Mission and Community Outreach Workers in the [Mission People section here](#).

‘Come and Sing’ with Northern Ireland Opera in Lurgan for 65+ age group

The Jethro Centre, Flush Place, Lurgan, will host a special event encouraging singers of all abilities aged 65+ to *Come and Sing* with Northern Ireland Opera.

This is open to all voice types and all abilities and forms part of the ‘Get Creative Festival’ which is an initiative run by the BBC.

The event is on Friday 23 March from 11.30 am – 3.00 pm.

Co-ordinated by Mark Irwin-Watson, Northern Ireland Opera’s Outreach Manager (who is originally from the Lurgan), the *Come and Sing* event will be a morning of song and music but will also serve as a recruitment drive for the formation of a community choir in the town, the *Lurgan Lyric Weavers*. The choir will commence in September and run for a total of 12 weeks.

The makeup of the choir will have a particular focus on people who are 65+, who live alone or in social isolation and its aim is to encourage and promote social engagement and participation through the arts by making it more

accessible to local people. The project is assisted by a grant from the Lord and Lady Lurgan Trust and supported by Age NI.

Participants will be guided and supported throughout the process by Northern Ireland Opera and some of the country's finest young artists including Music Director, Ryan Greer. The project will culminate with the *Lurgan Lyric Weavers* performing at Brownlow House.

If you would like to know more about the project, how to take part or get involved then please contact Mark Irwin-Watson on 028 9027 7734 or m.irwin-watson@niopera.com.

Safe Church training in East Belfast

The *Safe Church* initiative empowers churches to safeguard children and adults.

Thanks to funding from East Belfast PCSP, churches are invited to attend the following Safe Church training:

- Safe Church Session 1 – Domestic Violence & Abuse Awareness Raising
Thursday 1st March 2018, 6.00 pm–8.00 pm
- Safe Church Session 2 – A Church Response to Domestic Violence & Abuse

Thursday 8th March 2018, 6.00 pm–8.00 pm



Both sessions will be held at McQuiston Memorial Church, 83 Castlereagh Road, Belfast, BT5 5FE.

The training is CPD accredited, and thanks to the East Belfast PCSP funding can be delivered free of charge, along with a supply of Safe Place Resources.

A maximum of 3 attendees can attend per Church and it is mandatory that Clergy or an individual responsible for Safeguarding/Pastoral Care are in attendance.

Attendees must attend both sessions of training to entitle your Church to receive the Safe Church Award.

Places are limited and will be allocated on a first-come, first-served basis. To register your attendance at this training session, please contact Josephine Flynn on (028) 2568 9450 or email: info@onustraining.co.uk as soon as possible.

New roof on north Donegal church dedicated

The congregation at Rossnakill Parish Church in north Donegal had triple cause for celebration on Sunday: their Bishop, the Rt Rev Ken Good, was preaching there; the Sunday service was rescheduled for 4pm rather than usual 10.30am (giving them option of a lie-on); and the usual Sunday collection was cancelled.

It was the Bishop's first Sunday service since returning from a visit to the United States. He travelled to the Fanad Peninsula, and the

Clondevaddock Group of Parishes, principally to dedicate the new roof on The Church of Christ the Redeemer in Rossnakill. During the service, Bishop Good also dedicated the local Mothers' Union's new banner, drapes for Rossnakill chancel and communion linen for Rossnakill and Portsalon churches.

The Rector of the Grouped Parishes of Clondevaddock, the Rev David Griscome, revealed to the congregation that a 'slate collection' to help pay for the new roof had raised more than €11,000. He congratulated all who had helped bring the project to fruition, including the building workers, the Diocesan architect, and all who contributed to the cost of the roof.

Bishop Good – who was the preacher at the Service of Dedication – said 'procrastination' could be a dangerous word, and he thanked the congregation for doing now what needed to be done to maintain their local church. He, also, thanked all who had worked on the roof and the gifts which were dedicated. "All sorts of things were put into action because you said now is the time for this to be done," the Bishop said, "and I want to celebrate that with you. This is good news."



Christian group calls for free tuition as Theresa May says fees are most expensive in the world

The Student Christian Movement (SCM) has urged the government to scrap university tuition fees after Prime Minister Theresa May announced a review into university finance.

Mrs May admitted there serious concerns about a system that leaves the poorest students in England with the highest debt.

The Prime Minister acknowledged the current system of university tuition fees of up to £9,250 a year had not resulted in the "competitive" market that had been expected and instead "we



now have one of the most expensive systems" in the world.

In a speech she said the goal of making university accessible to teenagers from all backgrounds "is not made easier by a funding system which leaves students from the lowest-income households bearing the highest levels of debt, with many graduates left questioning the return they get for their investment".

Adam Spears from SCM told Premier's News Hour he hopes the review leads to free higher education, not just reduced interest or lowering the tuition fee cap. There's currently 6.1 per cent interest on student loans.

"They should be taking into consideration the preferential option for the poor," Spears said. "Over £9,000 a year is not good for poor and working class people."

"It [student debt] looms over you. You're always terrified of what you have and haven't paid what you should or should not be paying. It's such a huge number.

"Some people just give up on it. They just bury their heads in the sand because it's so huge they just don't want to think about it." Spears advised treating post-18 education funding like the NHS. He said: "Look at things like our NHS... that is free at the point of need but we pay for it later through our taxation system and I don't see why the same system shouldn't be applied to higher education."

Conservative groups merging is 'Biggest thing to happen to Anglican Evangelical world here for 25 years'

Three conservative evangelical groups within the Church of England are combining strengths to



show unity amidst the fragmentation of the denomination.

Church Society, Reform UK and the Fellowship of the Word & Spirit (FWS) will join forces in 'evangelical unity'.

In a statement Church Society's Director, Rev Dr Lee Gatiss, said: "It is in the light of our shared Biblical, Reformed, Anglican faith and common goals that we have decided that the challenges of the present time require us to unite our efforts so that we are better placed to harness the energies of evangelicals in contending for the gospel."

All three groups aim to encourage people through biblical ministry and want to contend for the gospel through a reformed Church of

England. They make suggestions for bishops when appointments are available, try to promote the evangelical foundations of the Church of England and steer it away from increased liberalism.

Practically, they will merge into a new Church Society, with Reform UK and FWS encouraging their members to join together.

Rev Dr Lee Gatiss said on twitter: "This is the biggest thing to happen in the Anglican Evangelical world here for 25 years".

"I rejoice greatly and am so grateful to God that Anglican Evangelicals are at last beginning to combine their strength to stand firm and contend together in the Church of England."

Rev Dr Rob Munro, Chair of Fellowship of Word and Spirit said: "the Church of England is in a crisis about its convictions and influence, there has never been a greater need for those committed to biblical truth to unite together, enabling our message to be heard with greater clarity and power."

Cannon David Banting from Reform UK added: "At a time when even our best Bishops talk of the debate about gender and human sexuality as

a tsunami, our divisions and separateness from fellow conservative evangelicals are little short of scandalous or irresponsible."

Pope accepts resignation of Nigerian bishop rejected by priests

Pope Francis backed down Monday and accepted the resignation of Nigerian bishop who had been rejected for years by the priests of his diocese, setting a precedent that could have repercussions in Chile and elsewhere when papal authority is challenged.

The announcement came after Francis in June issued a harsh ultimatum to the priests of Nigeria's southern Ahiara diocese, warning they would lose their jobs if they didn't obey him and accept Monsignor Peter Okpaleke as their bishop. Francis gave each priest 30 days to pledge their obedience.

The Vatican said Monday that 200 priests obeyed, but some still expressed problems in working with Okpaleke.

Pope Benedict XVI had appointed Okpaleke to Ahiara in 2012, but the local clergy rejected him. Ahiara is in the Mbaise region, and its faithful



objected to the appointment of an outsider from the Anambra region to lead them. In protest, the Mbaise blocked access to the cathedral when Okpaleke was to be formally installed, and he was installed outside the diocese.

The Vatican's mission office said Monday the pope took the priests' "repentance" into account in deciding not to sanction them for "the grave damage" they had inflicted on the church by rejecting Okpaleke.

But the Vatican said it hoped "in the future they will never again repeat such unreasonable actions opposing a bishop legitimately appointed by the Supreme Pontiff."

The case could affect another divisive bishop appointment, Chilean Bishop Juan Barros.

Ever since Francis appointed him bishop of Osorno, Chile, in 2015, Barros has been rejected by many faithful and priests. His opponents cite accusations by sexual abuse victims who say Barros witnessed and ignored their abuse by Chile's most notorious predator priest.

After Francis sparked an outcry during his recent trip to Chile by defending Barros, the pope did an about-face and sent in a Vatican investigator to take testimony about Barros' behaviour. The investigator, Archbishop Charles Scicluna, met with Barros' main accuser on Saturday.

Many Vatican watchers had cited the Nigerian conflict in explaining Francis' refusal to remove Barros. Barros had been named a bishop by St. John Paul II and confirmed by Benedict, making it difficult for Francis to sack him without compelling reason.

But Francis' decision to accept the resignation of the Benedict-appointed Okpaleke due to popular opposition suggests he could do the same for Barros, who has already offered his resignation twice and had it rejected by Francis.

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