

Equality over terror 'real test' for new SF leadership, C of I cleric



Sinn Féin northern leader Michelle O'Neill has declared herself for the position of party vice-president following Mary Lou McDonald's elevation to leader

The treatment of Troubles victims says more about Sinn Féin's commitment to equality than having a female-dominated leadership, the son

of an IRA victim has said, the Belfast News Letter reports.

Rev Alan Irwin was speaking after it emerged that Michelle O'Neill, the republican party's current "leader in the north", is now a candidate to become vice-president of the party.

If successful, she would be deputy to Mary Lou McDonald (the current vice-president), who will soon take over from Gerry Adams as president.

Some commentators suggested having Ms McDonald as leader may represent something of a break with the past, both because of her sex and political background.

For example The Guardian reported at the weekend – in an article headlined 'Sinn Fein to be led by a woman for the first time in its modern history' – that because Ms McDonald has "no direct association" with Troubles-era republicanism, it might be "easier for other parties in the Irish Republic to enter a coalition" with Sinn Fein.

Rev Irwin, a Church of Ireland minister whose father and uncle were both shot dead by the IRA in Co Tyrone in separate incidents, spoke out publicly against Michelle O'Neill's participation in a commemoration for Tyrone IRA members last

spring, calling it “another glorification of those who had deliberately set out to murder”.

Yesterday, he said that he “can’t see [them] moving away from the past if she’s going to put her name in the hat”.

He said: “You often wonder: is Gerry Adams going to move away completely or is he still going to be in the background dictating what should or should not be done.

“I wouldn’t have very much faith in the fact they’re moving away from the past with the new change in leadership.”

He said perhaps having women in the two top leadership positions is the “image they want to portray”. But he suggested the more significant equality issue is “whether or not they’re prepared to come out and denounce all terrorism and all terrorist atrocities across the board irrespective of who carried them out ... that’s the real test”.

Nominations for vice-president of Sinn Fein opened yesterday and close this coming Monday. The successful nominee needs a majority of votes from delegates at a Sinn Fein ard fheis gathering.

Ms O'Neill's candidacy comes as the main Stormont parties get set to reconvene talks tomorrow aimed at resurrecting Northern Ireland's moribund government.

Bishop Donal McKeown welcomes Óglaigh na hÉireann ceasefire announcement

Bishop Donal McKeown has welcomed yesterday's "announcement of a ceasefire from the body which calls itself Óglaigh na hÉireann".

In a statement he said: "It is a recognition that the people of Ireland, North and South, decided 20 years ago this year to seek a way forward through exclusively political means.

"This announcement also puts the onus on our elected representatives to show that politics can deliver for the people, especially for those who are most in need. There are many decisions that need to be taken urgently."

The Bishop of Derry said at this time he asked "people to remember those for whom this decision has come too late".



"Too many people in our community will continue to bear the scars of violence for the rest of their lives," he added.

"I commend the quiet and courageous work of all who have worked to make this announcement possible."

Protestant churches meet Dublin government on abortion

A number of church leaders have expressed their opposition to allowing unrestricted abortions up to 12 weeks. Representatives from the Church of Ireland, Presbyterian and

Methodist Churches met Taoiseach Leo Varadkar and Ministers on Monday night last. It is understood they are invited by the Taoiseach and they outlined their reservations to the proposals made by the Oireachtas committee.

The delegation from the three Churches was as follows: for the Church of Ireland, The Most Revd Dr Richard Clarke (Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland), The Most Revd Dr Michael Jackson (Archbishop of Dublin), the Revd Canon Gillian Wharton and Mr Ken Gibson (both Honorary Secretaries of the General Synod); for the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, The Right Revd Dr Noble McNeely (Moderator), the Very Revd Dr Trevor Morrow (former Moderator and Convenor of the Church's Republic of Ireland Panel) and the Revd Trevor Gribben (Clerk of Assembly and General Secretary); and for the Methodist Church in Ireland, Dr Fergus O'Ferrall (Lay Leader of the Methodist Conference), the Revd Andrew Dougherty (District Superintendent, Dublin District) and Ms Liz Parkin (Secretary, Council for Social Responsibility, Southern Executive).

After the meeting, Archbishop Richard Clarke, on behalf of the three Churches, said, 'We welcomed the opportunity to meet the Taoiseach and his ministers today as part of the Church–



State dialogue, which we were assured will be a continuing and constructive two-way conversation. Our wide-ranging discussion included many of the most important and pressing social and ethical matters relating to contemporary Irish society.'

The agenda for the meeting included: migration, direct provision and overseas aid; the impact of Brexit on Ireland and Northern Ireland; abortion and the 8th Amendment to the Constitution; homelessness, social housing and wider economic issues; and Education issues.

The delegation representing the Government included the Taoiseach, Mr Leo Varadkar TD; Mr Richard Bruton, Minister for Education & Skills; Mr Charlie Flanagan, Minister for Justice and

Equality; Ms Heather Humphries, Minister for Business, Enterprise & Innovation; Mr Simon Harris, Minister for Health; Mr Shane Ross, Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport; Mr Ciaran Cannon, Minister for State at the Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade; Mr Martin Fraser, Secretary General, Department of the Taoiseach; Mr Brian Murphy, Chief of Staff, Department of the Taoiseach; Mr Andrew Munro, Assistant Secretary, Department of the Taoiseach and Ms Miriam Dollard, Protocol & General Division, Department of the Taoiseach.

St Patrick's C of I Ballymacarrett wrecked by vandals who threw bibles around building

Vandals have broken into an East Belfast church before hurling bibles around the building and spraying them with a fire extinguisher.

Flowers were also strewn across the floor, an organ damaged and a plaque remembering former parishioners battered by the extinguisher.

Damage to St Patrick's Church of Ireland at [Ballymacarrett](#) , which happened sometime over the weekend, is expected to cost somewhere between £500 and £1,000 to repair.



Vandals who smashed their way into a church before throwing Bibles around and attacking a war memorial with fire extinguishers were probably looking for money, a Church of Ireland minister believes.

Reverend John Cunningham, rector at the church, said it was “very disappointing” anyone would intentionally damage it.

He added: “I arrived at the church on Sunday morning, at around 10 o’clock, and saw a bowl containing flowers was on the flower and immediately thought there’s something not right here. When I went on in then, there were bibles, prayer books, all over the floor and they’d been sprayed with a fire extinguisher.

“Obviously there was damage to the window and the grills where they got in. There’s a plaque on the wall with the names of former parishioners and they took the fire extinguisher to it and there’s dents on it now.

"An organ was also damaged. It’s just disappointing. We’ve distributed 11,000 food parcels from here over the last few years, we’re part of this community so it’s sad that some people would do this.

“The damage could be £500 to £1,000 to repair, but this is not a parish with a lot of people with jobs. If there is one positive, though, it is that the last time there was any significant damage to the church it’s when the Luftwaffe were bombing the area in 1942.”

The church, which was built in 1827, before being replaced by a new-build in 1892, sits at the bottom of the [Newtownards Road](#) .

Rev Cunningham, who has been rector there for seven years, says he does not know why the church was targeted, but does not believe it was sectarian.

A [PSNI](#) spokesman said: “Police in East Belfast are currently investigating a burglary which

occurred between 2100 on Friday 19th January and 1000 on Sunday 22nd January at the St Patrick's Church on the Newtownards Road, Belfast. During this time unknown persons have entered the Church causing substantial damage throughout.

“Police are appealing for information from anyone who may have seen or heard anything suspicious during this time. If you believe that you may have information relevant to this investigation please phone 101 quoting reference number 459 21/01/18.”

Connor organist to feature in BBC's Burns' Night TV show

Emma Colgan took on the role of organist at St Saviour's Parish Church, Connor, 26 years ago, when she was just 11-years-old!

And this Thursday, January 25, Emma will be demonstrating a different type of musical talent when she appears in 'Burns an' Mair,' a Burns' Night concert being broadcast on BBC2 at 9pm.

Emma plays the piano accordion in this concert presented by singer Sylvia Burnside and Waringstown man Mark Wilson, who was also the Musical Director.



This is not the first time Emma has been invited to take part in television shows and other major musical events

She first met Mark Wilson in 2004, when they were both in the cast of 'On Eagle's Wing', a powerful story of emigration, separation, love and loyalty written by award-winning Northern Irish composer John Anderson.

The stage show explores the historic story of the Scots people forced to make a new life for themselves first in Ireland and then the New World.

Emma took part in the show in the Odyssey and was also on the American tour, playing both the piano accordion and the harp.

"Since then I've had the pleasure of working with Mark on a few TV broadcasts. I'm always delighted when he rings as he seems to attract such talented musicians that are a pleasure to work with," she said.

"This Burns' Night programme is no different...it was great to play with Diane McCullough and Emma Nevin. Although we're all from the Ballymena area we had never worked together before. I hope it's not the last time!"

Emma has played in concerts with well-known singers including Peter Corry, and played 'Nearer my God to me' in a Songs of Praise Titanic commemoration with Brian Kennedy in 2012.

She is on the Senior Leadership Team at Ballyclare Secondary School as teacher in charge of curriculum and timetabling.

“Although I teach Geography and Travel and Tourism I still use my music in school – playing for the choir and leading worship at twice-weekly senior assemblies,” Emma said.

She started playing the piano at the age of six, and the piano accordion when she was 10.

She attended St Saviour’s with her parents David and Eva Culbert. “When I was 11 our organist left to take a job in a larger parish,” Emma said.

“At the time our church was undergoing extensive restoration work and services were being held in the church hall. Having just completed my Grade 3, my Mum volunteered my services on the piano.

Emma was selected for the Church of Ireland’s three-year Organ Scholarship Scheme under the tuition of David Drinkell and had completed this by the age of 15.

“I did enjoy the scheme and found it very useful. It was a great way of learning Church of Ireland chants and psalms and helping me to simplify

them for myself. We also did some choir training,” she said.

Emma faithfully plays in St Saviour’s every Sunday, and at the Living Faith Service in St Patrick’s, Pallymena, one Sunday a month.

“My mum tells me that when I was little I wanted to do two jobs when I grew up – I wanted to be a vet and an organist! At least I am doing one of them!” she said.

‘Burns an’ Mair’ which will be shown on Burns Night (Thursday January 25) on BBC2 at 9pm.

Tributes paid to Christian football legend Jimmy Armfield

Bishops from the Diocese of Blackburn have paid tribute to football legend and Christian, Jimmy Armfield, CBE, who died over the weekend at the age of 82.

Armfield, who was a former Blackpool footballer, England's captain, a manager and broadcaster died after a battle with cancer.



He has been remembered as an active member St Peter's Church in Blackpool where he was an organist, choirmaster and treasurer. In 2001, Armfield also became a lay Canon of Blackburn Cathedral.

Rt Rev Julian Henderson, Bishop of Blackburn, said: "He has been a great supporter of The Church of England in Lancashire and especially his local church where he played the organ for many years.

"Jimmy had an astonishing career and he was very committed as a Christian. So, at this difficult time we join with, and pray for, Jimmy's family and the congregation of Blackpool St Peter in mourning his death."



Jimmy Armfield, CBE

Rt Rev Nicholas Reade, the retired Bishop of Blackburn, knew Armfield well and remembered him as a welcoming person.

He said: "I am so sad today - Jimmy Armfield was one of the first people to welcome me to the Diocese when I arrived in 2004 and I will always remember his warm smile and warm handshake; his hospitality and generosity.

"His Christian faith was very important to him and helped him through the difficult times as well as the good times."

Aled Jones returning to Songs of Praise but 'deeply regrets' his behaviour

Songs Of Praise star Aled Jones will be returning to the BBC following an investigation into alleged inappropriate behaviour but "deeply regrets" and is very sorry "for the hurt" he has caused.

The singer and TV presenter, 47, who found fame at the age of 12 with his top five Christmas hit *Walking In The Air*, was not on air while the BBC investigated complaints about him. A statement from his spokesman said that Jones "has given his assurance" that his past behaviour "will never be repeated".

The spokesman said: "About three months ago Aled voluntarily agreed to step away from his presenting commitments whilst the organisation conducted a review.

"Aled was devastated to learn that some of his past behaviour outside the BBC had caused distress to others.



"He deeply regrets this behaviour and is very sorry for the hurt it has caused. Aled has given his assurance that it will never be repeated.

"Aled will now continue with his roles at the BBC. There will be no further comment."

A BBC spokesman said: "As Aled has previously confirmed, over recent weeks the BBC has been considering complaints about his past behaviour. During this period, Aled has not been presenting on the BBC.

"While the behaviour under review was not related to his work with the BBC, Aled recognises it was inappropriate and caused real distress to others.

"He has apologised for this and assured the BBC that there will be no repeat of this behaviour in future.

"We can confirm that Aled Jones will be resuming his radio and television presenting roles with the BBC over the coming weeks."

The former choirboy received an MBE in 2013 for his services to music and broadcasting. He became a national radio presenter after signing up with Classic FM in 2002 and went on to present a Sunday morning show for BBC Radio 2.

Jones, a father of two, was a contestant on Strictly Come Dancing in 2004 and further TV work has included Daybreak, Escape To The Country and Cash In The Attic.

More bishops with higher theological degrees needed C of E review finds

A desire for more bishops with higher theological degrees has been expressed by the group conducting a theological review of the processes of the Crown Nominations Commission (CNC), the Church Times reports.



David Jenkins, academic theologian and bishop. Such figures have been scarce on the C of E bench since his day.

Among the recommendations of the report, due to be debated by the General Synod in February, is that meetings of the CNC start “asking themselves more insistently whether, and how well, a potential bishop has acquired a ‘theological culture’.” It notes that the Lords Spiritual are “sometimes criticised for failing to bring a theological voice to major issues”.

It asks whether, when faced with controversies, bishops will understand their roots in the Church’s history, and whether, when faced with

social questions with “strong moral overtones”, bishops will have “the depth of understanding to make a public contribution that will carry significant weight”.

While noting that the House “does not need forty University theologians”, the group writes: “We should also be glad to see more higher theological degrees in the House of Bishops, but principally for what that would indicate about the intellectual liveliness of the pool from which bishops are drawn.” It observes that there is now no diocesan bishop who has had a career in higher education, which “raises questions about a loss of intellectual depth and seriousness”.

Acknowledging concerns about valuing “transferable management skills in place of the gifts of the Spirit”, it calls for “deeper thought about the character of Christian leadership, how the life of the body of Christ shapes norms for administrative effectiveness and responsibility in its own context”. There need be no tension between spiritual and administrative qualification, it argues.

The report notes that, since 2013, 70 per cent of those nominated to diocesan sees were already bishops, and warns against a “pyramid-conception of institutional seniority”. It prefers a

“flatter” structure over the creation of a “cadre of those who cherish expectations of promotion and can think of it in only one way”. The House of Bishops should be responsible for the initial lists sent to CNC, it recommends, in a bid to make them more “broadly based”.

Observing that “internal tensions run high” in the Church, notably concerning the consecration of women bishops, the report warns of twin dangers: of the CNC’s becoming a “theatre of factional struggle”, and of choosing “the false unity offered by candidates who are merely bland and inoffensive”. The Church “must have the confidence that the nomination of a bishop is not a weapon in anyone’s armoury”, it says.

The report takes a positive view of the structure of the CNC and praises the confidentiality of the discernment process. But it also refers to “painful points of pressure on its current operations” and says that more care needs to be given with regard to representation, noting that in a diocese with a large presence of BAME ministries, there was no ethnic-minority presence on the CNC.

The Revd Professor Oliver O’Donovan, who chaired the review group, will present the report on the first day of the Synod’s next group of

sessions, 8 February, and a take-note debate till follow. Professor O'Donovan discussed the group's interim findings last year ([News, 14 July](#) and [4 August](#)).

Among the recommendations of the report are that the hymn *Veni Creator*, used at ordinations and “invoking the multiple gifts of the Spirit”, be used at the CNC's meetings; that different interview styles be considered “to explore the theological capacity” of candidates; that more preparatory work be done by diocesan members and vacancy-in-see committees; and that the chair's authority be strengthened.

The requirement for secret voting should be removed, because it “appears merely to create a veil of mystery dividing those who need to be able to cooperate more”. Open voting would promote discussion, it says, and might be a “better defence against the temptation to breach confidence”. Confidentiality, it says, “is imposed on a limited set of proceedings for a definite purpose, and . . . an excessive culture of secrecy can undermine the confidence and trust it hopes to build.”

If its conclusions are accepted, it will be the first time in recent years that the Church has proposed more involvement of the Prime

Minister. The report suggests that when, for the archbishopric of York, the CNC is chaired by a communicant lay person, the lay chair's appointment "might rest with the Prime Minister" rather than with the General Synod's appointments committee, which "has little experience to enable it to identify a figure with the appropriate profile". The PM already appoints the lay chair in the case of the archbishopric of Canterbury.

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