

## Ireland to hold abortion referendum in May



**(Left to right) Minister for Children and Youth Affairs Katherine Zappone, Taoiseach Leo Varadkar and Minister for Health Simon Harris brief the media on the government's plans for a referendum on Ireland's restrictive abortion laws, following a specially convened cabinet meeting at Government Buildings in Dublin.**

Ireland will hold a referendum in May on whether to lift a constitutional ban on abortion, Prime Minister Leo Varadkar has confirmed. Voters in Ireland will be going to the polls in May to cast their vote on liberalising the country's restrictive abortion laws.

The Irish Government has formally backed proposals to hold a referendum on the state's constitutional amendment on abortion by the end of May.

Varadkar spoke after meeting with his cabinet to discuss details of the referendum on the Eighth Amendment, which guarantees the right to life of the unborn child. Taoiseach Leo Varadkar said Ireland already had abortion, but it was unsafe, unregulated and unlawful.

Currently, abortion is only permitted when the mother's life is in danger.

Varadkar said he will campaign to repeal the amendment, and his government will prepare legislation to allow unrestricted abortions up to 12 weeks if the referendum passes.

“My own views have evolved over time,” he said. “Life experience does that.”

"In my opinion we cannot continue to export our problems and import our solutions," Mr Varadkar said.

He outlined the Government's approach after a specially convened cabinet meeting in Government Buildings, Dublin, on Monday evening.

Voters will be asked whether they want to repeal the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution, which gives equal right to life to the mother and the unborn, and replace it with new wording to allow parliament to legislate on abortion in the future.

"It is a matter for people to make their own decision based on the evidence they hear, compassion and empathy and I want the debate to be respectful on all sides and it should never be personalized," he added.

The Taoiseach said if people voted to repeal, the Government would then table draft legislation that would allow for unrestricted abortion up to 12 weeks into pregnancy.

Terminations are currently only allowed in the Irish Republic when the life of the mother is at risk and the maximum penalty for accessing an illegal abortion is 14 years in prison.

Last December, a report by a specially convened parliamentary committee found the Eighth Amendment was not fit for purpose and should be repealed.

That followed recommendations from members of Ireland's Citizens' Assembly to liberalise the law on terminations.

The committee also recommended abortion be available up to 12 weeks of pregnancy without a woman having to explain her decision.

"I know this will be a difficult decision for the Irish people to make," said Mr Varadkar.

"I know it is a very personal and private issue and for most of us it is not a black and white issue, it is one that is grey - the balance between the rights of a pregnant woman and the foetus or unborn.



**In Dublin City, this billboard is making its debut.**

"It is a matter for people to make their own decision based on the evidence they hear, compassion and empathy and I want the debate to be respectful on all sides and it should never be personalised."

Mr Varadkar said: "The saddest and loneliest journey is made by Irish women who travel to foreign countries to end their pregnancies. That doesn't have to happen."

He said: "I don't believe the constitution is the place for making absolute statements about medical, moral and legal issues, an issue which is not black and white and can never be explained in black and white."

His comments came after he announced on Saturday that he would be campaigning for more liberal abortion laws.

Mr Varadkar said he had thought "long and hard" before deciding to support abortion without restriction in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy.

He said he came to that view after listening to medical experts, the public, his own Fine Gael party, ministers and friends.

"Above all I have listened to women," he said.

Mr Varadkar added: "The question has to be a yes or no one - do we reform our abortion laws or do we leave them as they are?"

"For my part I will advocate a yes vote. My own views have evolved over time - life experience does that."

While the cabinet has adopted a collective position on the issue, Mr Varadkar said ministers will be free to oppose the Government and take different positions on the contentious matter.

The referendum will focus on the fate of the Eighth Amendment, not on the specifics on how the law would change if the constitution was altered.

In the course of the four-hour meeting, Ministers were briefed on the matter by the Attorney General, who advised against a straightforward repeal of the amendment.

Health Minister Simon Harris was given permission to draft a bill to be put before the

Dail in the event of the Eighth Amendment being repealed.

He has been working with officials in his department and the Attorney General on the wording of the referendum, which is expected to be formally published at the beginning of March.

Mr Harris said: "Just because an issue is complex or sensitive it does not mean it can be ignored.

"I welcome the decision the government has made. It is very important to stress any legislation to amend constitution would remain subject to review.

"The government does not intend to, or wish to, limit the power of our courts to interpret law.

"Anyone who wants any change to our regime it is necessary to repeal the Eighth.

"This issue is not going away. It is time for the people of Ireland to have their say on that."



Children's Minister Katherine Zappone said:  
"As an independent woman sitting at the cabinet table I believe we have reached a significant moment and I am full of emotion at this time.

"As we continue our preparation for a referendum it is my firm hope we will have a respectful debate based on the facts.

"I hope we will live together in an Ireland someday soon where abortion is safe, legal and rare."

If the electorate vote to repeal the Eighth Amendment, any draft legislation would only become law if the Dail voted for it, and that is not a foregone conclusion given the Fine Gael coalition is a minority administration and TDs will vote on conscience.

The outcome of the referendum could also prompt a Supreme Court challenge over whether the Constitution as a whole contains an implied fundamental right for the unborn, on top of the specific terms of the Eighth Amendment.

The exact date for the referendum has not been formally agreed, but the Taoiseach said it would be before the end of May.

The polling date can only be set after both the Dail and the Seanad have passed a referendum bill.

Dr Ruth Cullen of the Irish Pro Life Campaign said the vote was “a very sad and serious moment for our country.”

“Tonight, the Government brought forward a proposal that for the first time in our history would withdraw basic human rights from a group of vulnerable defenceless individuals instead of strengthening their constitutional protections,” she said.

“They can’t disguise the fact that what’s being proposed is solely about stripping unborn babies of all meaningful legal protections.”

“In the coming weeks, it will become clear that the Government’s proposal would lead to abortion on demand if voted for in the referendum. As people come to realise this, I have every confidence they will vote to retain the Eighth Amendment with a renewed commitment

to building a more welcoming society for expectant mothers and their unborn babies.”

## **C of I *Fuel* seeks to help young people to read the Bible regularly over Lent**

The Church of Ireland Youth Department’s new resource, *Fuel*, seeks to help young people to read the Bible regularly over Lent. The booklet includes a reading plan for John’s Gospel and a 50–page journal. *Fuel* is free and copies are available from the CIYD offices in Belfast (028 9082 8890) and Dublin (01 497 8422), and from diocesan youth officers and youth council representatives. Orders can also be placed by email at [admin@ciyd.org](mailto:admin@ciyd.org)

*Fuel* contains questions to help young people engage with what they are reading, and to think about what the Bible is saying and teaching. Space is also provided for writing down notes, prayers and thoughts. The journal runs to 50 days to encourage readers to continue with the habits which they have started over Lent. National Youth Officer Simon Henry said: “From my own experience as a former youth worker in a parish for 10 years, I have seen the impact of

encouraging regular Bible reading habits. I often said to young people: 'If you want to hear from God, open your Bible because he speaks to us on every page.'"

## **Chaplain commissioned for University College Cork**

On Sunday, 28th January, Canon Alan Marley was commissioned to serve as Church of Ireland Chaplain at University College Cork. The Commissioning was held in Saint Fin Barre's Cathedral, Cork at the start of Choral Evensong, after which Canon Marley was installed as Prebendary of Dromdaleague and Kilnaglory in the Cathedral Chapter.

The Commissioning was done by the Bishop, the Right Reverend Dr Paul Colton, and, on foot of the Bishop's mandate, the Very Reverend Nigel Dunne, installed Canon Marley in his prebendal stall. Clergy and people from throughout Cork, Cloyne and Ross, were joined by the President of University College Cork, Professor Patrick O'Shea, who led a group of academic and university staff, as well as students. The lessons were read by the President and Father Gerard Dunne, UCC Chaplain.



**Fr. Gerard Dunne, O.P. Chaplain UCC, Professor Patrick O'Shea, President UCC, The Bishop of Cork, Cloyne and Ross, The Right Reverend Dr Paul Colton, the Reverend Canon Alan Marley, and the Very Reverend Nigel Dunne, Dean of Cork, following the Commissioning.**

As part of the Commissioning, symbols of the ministry of a chaplain were presented to Canon Marley by representatives of the Diocese and the University: a Bible, the water of baptism, the bread and wine for celebrating the Eucharist, the oil of healing, a Book of Common Prayer, and a towel of Service. A book from the Boole Library was presented to represent study, and a hockey jersey from UCC Men's Hockey Club was

presented to denote sport and leisure. Of particular note, was a Muslim prayer mat (to represent the diversity of religious faiths in the University, and for the use of Muslim students) was presented as a gift by Dr Amanullah de Soudy, Senior Lecturer in Contemporary Islam, and Acting Head of the School of Asian Studies at the University.

The new Chaplain, Canon Alan Marley says: ‘... it has been an exciting, and slightly bewildering, time. The move from Midleton was an enormous upheaval and Anne and I are grateful for all the help and kindness we have received in making it. The welcome of the Chaplaincy team, led by Fr. Gerard Dunne, has been one of great warmth, encouragement and openness. It has been exciting to see the ministry that exists within the University and that it is appreciated and respected. It was wonderful that the President of UCC, Professor Patrick O’Shea, and many of his colleagues from the academic staff, were able to attend and participate in the commissioning service. I hope I will be able to find my feet in the coming weeks and months, and look forward to the challenges ahead.’

In welcoming everyone to the Service, Bishop Colton referred to John Henry Cardinal Newman’s *The Idea of a University*: ‘The

University is a community of thinkers, engaging in intellectual pursuits not for any external or utilitarian purpose, but as an end in itself: knowledge for knowledge's sake. Envisaging a broad, liberal education, which teaches students 'to think and to reason and to compare and to discriminate and to analyse', Newman believed that narrow minds were to be avoided by exploring all areas of study. Surprisingly, some might say, Newman, once an Anglican but who became a Roman Catholic, said that the University should be a secular place, but that does not mean "no religion".

'We value this partnership between the Diocese and University College Cork which I first negotiated 17 years ago with the then President, Professor Wrixon. We offer chaplains to the University not to change its secular status but to journey with the community that is the University, those who are religious of many outlooks, and those who are not. We believe that Alan Marley will bring many gifts and much experience, not least his own humanity to this position.'

Professor Patrick O'Shea, President of University College Cork, welcoming Canon Marley's appointment said: 'We are delighted to have Canon Alan Marley as a chaplain in our

University College Cork family. The Chaplaincy service at UCC is our oldest student service, and also supports our staff in a community totalling over 23,000.

‘Along with his broad community experience he brings to UCC a vision of love, peace, and respect for all who seek support on their spiritual journey. My colleagues and I were honoured to participate in his commissioning service at St Fin Barre’s Cathedral.’

## **C of I appointments to boards and inter-church bodies**

The following appointments were confirmed at the January meeting of the C of I General Synod Standing Committee:

The Very Revd Niall Sloane was appointed as a member of the Bishops’ Appeal Advisory Committee.

The Revd Dr William Olhausen was elected as a Church of Ireland representative to the Methodist Church in Ireland’s Working Party on Human Sexuality.



The Revd Canon Ian Berry was appointed to a committee exploring the potential for a merger between the Children's Ministry Network and the Sunday School Society for Ireland.

The following persons were appointed to attend the Irish Council of Churches (ICC) AGM to be held in Drogheda, on 22nd March 2018: the Bishop of Connor; the Bishop of Down and Dromore; the Revd Canon Dr Daniel Nuzum; the Revd Canon Ian Ellis; the Revd Canon Shane Forster; the Very Revd Katherine Poulton; the Revd Canon Gillian Wharton; the Revd Ken Rue; the Very Revd Niall Sloane; the Revd Dr Peter Thompson; Dr Catherine Smith; Mrs Ethne Harkness; Mr Philip McKinley; Ms Georgina Copt; Ms Cate Turner and two ordinands (to be appointed by the Director of the Church of Ireland Theological Institute). The Bishop of Clogher, the Bishop of Tuam, Killala and Achonry, and Dr Kenneth Milne will be entitled to attend as members of the ICC.

## **Derry bishops address reconciliation event in Omagh**

Two North West bishops were praised at a reconciliation event in Omagh on Monday evening for the inspiration they were providing to

the community in their own dioceses and beyond.

Bishop Ken Good and Bishop Donal McKeown were the main guests at 'Stepping Out in Faith: two bishops in conversation about their shared work and witness in the North West.'

Around fifty people from various faith backgrounds attended the discussion, in the Tara Centre. It was organised by Omagh Churches' Forum in partnership with Fermanagh and Omagh District Council's Good Relations Department.

During the evening, the two main guests talked in detail about the close friendship that had evolved between them during their time as neighbouring bishops, and their conscious commitment to work together publicly as often as possible.

Last year the pair walked from St Columba's birthplace in Gartan to Derry, and went on pilgrimage together to the saint's resting place in Iona. They also undertook joint walks from Claudy to Strabane and from Limavady to Glenullin.

Bishop Good spoke to the audience on Monday evening about his concerns for legacy. He said this week, Christians would be celebrating the Feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple to Simeon and Anna. Simeon had left a 'Kingdom legacy' in the words he had spoken: "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation," [Luke 2:29–30].

"My concern," Bishop Good said, "is the Kingdom legacy of faith, the legacy of inspiration, the legacy of encouragement, the legacy of example. What will people say about you in years and generations to come, after you're no longer here and I'm no longer here?"

Bishop Good said he had been wondering about the legacy he and Bishop Donal – as church leaders – would leave. "Leaders are called to have an influence and make an impact in ways that make a difference. Our lives shouldn't be preoccupied by, 'Oh, what will people think of me?' The issue is: 'Am I making an impact for Christ in these days that I am alive and living and able to do these things; is Christ being honoured by what I'm doing; is his Kingdom being advanced through what I am saying; and will people be drawn towards him or pushed away from him because of the way I live?'"

Both bishops acknowledged the work and inspiration of two of their predecessors – Bishop Edward Daly and Bishop James Mehaffey – who had been jointly-awarded the Freedom of Derry for their joint witness.

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Bishop McKeown recounted some of the things he and Bishop Good had done together “in order to give encouragement to civic society”. He said they would come to anything they had done together from their shared conviction in the importance of the Gospel but also because they were standing on the shoulders of those who had gone before them.

The two bishops were conscious of being in Omagh almost 20 years after the bomb which claimed the lives of 29 people there, and both of them spoke of the importance of forgiveness. “Everyone is blessed by forgiveness,” Bishop McKeown said, “and sometimes the challenge is for people to forgive themselves.”

Bishop Good said during a visit to an area in Africa where hundreds and maybe even thousands of people had been massacred, he had been struck by the apparent ability of Christian families and communities to forgive the horrendous things that had been perpetrated. “They were taught it was part of their duty – their Christian responsibility – to forgive,” Bishop Good said, “and I do think, maybe – this is an uncomfortable thing to say – in this part of the world, we can sometimes justify ‘unforgiveness’ and excuse it, ‘Ah, well, it doesn’t really apply in this situation’, but it does.”

Bishop McKeown spoke about the obligation on Christians to forgive others. “Archbishop Desmond Tutu has a book on the Peace and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa in which he made a point. He said, in the West we tend to work on the basis of the philosophy of Descartes: ‘I think, therefore I am’. He says there is a phrase in African culture called ‘Ubuntu’, that says ‘I belong, therefore I am’. And therefore, the rebuilding of relationships is about knitting up the wounds in our society and you are obliged to do that. The emphasis is on community, and your duty to community, to heal the wounds.’

The bishops told the Omagh Churches' Forum that if there was anything they could do together – such as another joint Walk of Witness – to help heal the wounds in the town after the 1998 bombing, they would be honoured to help.

## **New Rector Appointed to Holy Trinity, Killiney**

The appointment of the new Rector of Holy Trinity, Killiney, has been announced. The Ven Gary Hastings, who is currently Rector of Galway and Kilcummin Group and St Nicholas Collegiate Church, and Archdeacon of Tuam, will be instituted in the spring.

Prior to his ordination, Gary taught in the Irish Studies Department of the University of Ulster. He comes to Killiney after almost 25 years of active Ministry, having a wide range of experience at parochial, central church and diocesan level. Together with his wife, Caitriona, he has spent more than 20 years in the West of Ireland.

Gary has a keen interest in ecumenism and the development of interfaith contacts and has lectured extensively on faith, spirituality and tolerance. He is also well grounded in the realities of daily life and appreciates the



challenges facing communities and families in today's world.

Described as “one of the most significant Irish liturgical translators in this generation” by Bishop Michael Burrows some years ago, Gary used his skills to translate the 2004 Book of Common Prayer into Irish. He is also a respected traditional musician who has performed on TV and radio and also recorded with the Chieftains and Frankie Gavin. Among his other interests are wildlife, botany, environmental issues and cookery.

In addition to his parochial duties, Gary is currently Chaplain to four hospitals and two universities – the National University of Ireland Galway and the Galway–Mayo Institute of Technology.

Coming from Galway, where his parish includes two churches and is spread over almost 200 miles, he is very much looking forward to being “a true parish Rector” and having a lot more time to, in his own words: “be a pastor and shepherd, get to know and love the people in the parish, to hearten and befriend them, to give focus and identity to the church community, to be a leader through enabling the community to develop new structures necessary for ministry today”. He also hopes to continue to develop the ministry to younger families in the parish.

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