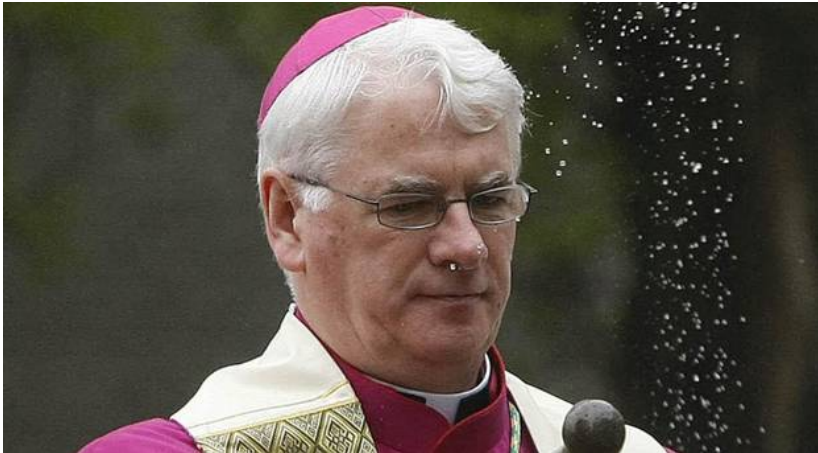


Bishop Treanor urges Northern Ireland 'to abandon crippling forces of fear and suspicion'



The Catholic bishop of Down and Connor, Noel Treanor, has called for imaginative and courageous leadership to lift Northern Ireland politics away from fear and stagnation.

Bishop Treanor said there was a "lethargic acceptance and tolerance" by people of the current state of affairs in the region.

In a homily delivered at the Church of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in Carryduff on Sunday morning, the cleric painted a bleak picture of the present political landscape.

He warned of a weak economy; a private sector bereft of dynamic support from political institutions; and a lack of creative political engagement with key issues.

"Our society in Northern Ireland, we as citizens and as a body politic, have urgent need of a renewed narrative for politics," he told the congregation.

His remarks come as the region approaches a year without a functioning powersharing executive.

The rift between the DUP and Sinn Fein looks no closer to resolution, with the real threat of a return to Westminster direct rule looming.

The bishop urged people to work together to banish the forces of fear and suspicion.

"Our times and world context require imaginative and courageous efforts in leadership to hone a vision, freed from fears and suspicions of the other, that carries us energetically as a

community of citizens working for the good of all," he said.

"Known for our care for the stranger, for our response to disaster scenarios throughout the world, we urgently need leadership in offering a renewed narrative for a radically new future which is opening before us in a dwindling and every more interdependent world and here at home.

"We need prophetic, imaginative and courageous leadership which offers a new narrative for a dawning and challenging future in which we, all citizens of whatever ethnic, cultural, confessional, religious or other background, constitute together our primary resource and human wealth base.

"To build a viable future for us all, we need urgently and creatively to put our hands together to the plough and to abandon the crippling and stagnating forces of fear and suspicion in the name of building a new future for all citizens, and especially for the weakest and the newly arrived in our society."

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C of I bishop's tribute to Paddy Harte



The death has taken place of the former Fine Gael TD, Mr Paddy Harte. He was 85

The Bishop of Derry & Raphoe, RT Rev Ken Good paid tribute to Mr Paddy Harte. Bishop Good said, “I am greatly saddened to learn of the death of the former Irish Government Minister, Paddy Harte.

“Mr Harte devoted a huge part of his life to politics, representing his party, Fine Gael, in a variety of roles: County Councillor, TD and, for a time, Minister of State at the Department of Posts and Telegraphs.

“Paddy was a dedicated servant of the public generally, and an especially good friend to Donegal’s Protestant community. He was sensitive and responsive to the needs and concerns of this minority, and used his understanding – and his impressive political skills – to further peace and reconciliation on both sides of the border.

“The Island of Ireland Peace Park at Messines – which he conceived and developed with the late Glen Barr – is a powerful legacy to both men and an enduring monument to their vision.

“I offer my deepest condolences to Paddy’s wife, Rosaleen, and to the whole Harte family.”

Irish Times report at

<https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/former-fine-gael-td-paddy-harte-has-died-aged-86-1.3348455>

Islamic dress code should be accommodated in schools - group

A Muslim campaign group says school uniforms should accommodate Islamic dress codes by allowing girls to wear full-length skirts, long-

sleeved shirts and headscarves, the Irish Times reports



Dr Ali Selim of the Irish Muslim Board: the group says Muslim children can feel alienated at school, particularly in activities that revolve around Christmas such as nativity plays and carol services.

The Irish Muslim Board has also called for school uniforms which have crucifix symbols or images of saints to be made optional in the interests of creating greater inclusivity.

The recommendations are contained in the board's submission to a Department of Education consultation process over school admission policies.

The group, chaired by Dr [Ali Selim](#), was formed in 2016 to encourage Muslims to become more politically active.

While there are two Muslim primary schools in Dublin, the community does not have a secondary school.

In its submission, the group says Muslim children can feel alienated at school, particularly in activities that revolve around Christmas such as nativity plays and carol services.

It recommends that schools should take greater steps to include Muslims, such as accommodating the “Islamic religiously mandated code of dressing, deemed to be an essential component of their Muslim identity”.

“Muslim girls should be allowed to wear full-length loose school skirts or loose trousers, a long-sleeved shirt and a headscarf to cover their hair.

“Schools have the right to specify the colour and the style of scarf for reasons of uniformity . . .”

It adds that school uniforms which have the crucifix symbol or other religious symbolism should be made optional.

“The school uniform should be a reflection of the school’s inclusive policy for creating a cohesive atmosphere at school where every student feels valued and contributions and suggestions of all kinds are welcome.”

In addition, the group said school assemblies in faith-based schools could be made more inclusive by recognising aspects of the Muslim faith.

For example, schools could introduce Ramadan-based themes at assembly such as a communal breaking of the fast, when pupils, teachers and community members could eat together.

Scottish Episcopal leader hits back after open letter criticises the appointment of Scotland’s first female bishop

The Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church has hit back after a group of clergy in the Diocese of Aberdeen criticised the appointment of the province’s first female bishop. The Revd Canon Anne Dyer will be consecrated as the new Bishop of Aberdeen & Orkney on 1 March. She was selected by an Episcopal Synod, in accordance with the Church’s canons, after the



Canon Anne Dyer will be consecrated Bishop of Aberdeen & Orkney on 1 March

diocese twice failed to complete the process of selection. Bishop Mark Strange says he “deplores” the publication of the Open Letter, saying, on behalf of the College of Bishops: “we are dismayed at the invidious position in which it places Canon Dyer as the Bishop elect of the diocese.”

The open letter, signed by 18 clergy and lay leaders says that Canon Dyer’s appointment “directly goes against the established wishes of the Diocese on the views it would hope that our

new Bishop would hold, and minister to us from the perspective of them.” They say: “our protest is not in any way personally directed at Canon Anne and should not be construed in that way” but ask that their concerns about the process be “discussed at the next General Synod as the action of the bishops in our case have caused unnecessary anguish and distress in a Diocese which had been largely united in its hopes and aspirations for the years ahead.”

In his response, Bishop Mark said that the process by which Canon Dyer was appointed was “entirely in accordance with the procedure set out by Canon 4.” He said that the diocese went through “two complete processes under which it had full opportunity to elect a bishop” and was “unable to produce a shortlist of the required minimum of three candidates.” He added that “There is no provision in Canon 4 for election by the Episcopal Synod to be subject to any subsequent vote on the part of the Diocese. To introduce such a vote would be at odds with the canonical procedure.”

He said that it was “not open to the bishops” to unilaterally alter the procedures of the canon, which had been adopted by the General Synod following consultation with the dioceses.

“The election of Canon Dyer followed a period of deep prayer and reflection on the part of the bishops,” he said. “Whilst, it would not be appropriate to disclose the internal discussions which took place among the bishops, suffice it to say, that the bishops fully believe and trust that they have been led by the Holy Spirit in their election of Canon Dyer. She too shares that conviction and looks forward to becoming the new Diocesan Bishop in response to God’s call. The bishops know her to be a person who will seek, under God, to enable the diocese to move forward in its mission and ministry and in service to the people of Aberdeen and Orkney.”

The Primus concluded his letter with a plea for unity: “You have chosen the mechanism of an open letter to endeavour to undermine Canon Dyer’s election,” he said. “You give us no option but to respond similarly. However, by that same mechanism, we would appeal to the Diocese of Aberdeen and Orkney as a whole to come together now to welcome Canon Dyer as your new Bishop. We invite you to join with us in supporting her and to commit yourselves, as we do ourselves, to pray for the Diocese as a whole, and for Canon Dyer in particular, as she prepares for her consecration and future life with you.”

Church of Scotland appoints 'minister for farming'

For the first time, the Church of Scotland has chosen to have a 'farming minister' to help support the agricultural community.

Rev Chris Blackshaw, who was previously the Chaplain at the Cumbria Agricultural Chaplaincy, is a Methodist minister and has also worked hard at encouraging farmers to talk about their mental health and support each other.

His new role will see him continue to support agricultural families and provide a bridge between them and the National Union of Farmers in Scotland.

In a Church of Scotland statement they say: "The new role has been warmly welcomed by National Farmers Union Scotland and rural charity RSABI who say the perilous state of the ailing sector is taking a 'serious' toll on the health and wellbeing of many people who too often 'suffer in silence'."

Rev Chris responded to the role positively: "There are not many jobs I couldn't do



on a farm so this is the ideal job for me – showing people the love of Christ by walking alongside them.”

He said: “I go to the local market and call at farms to let people know I am there to provide support and share in celebrations and happy times as well.”

Chris added: “I have been very pleasantly surprised by the faith that exists amongst the farming community.”

Rev Chris Bradshaw will continue to visit the weekly livestock mart and attend annual agriculture shows and hopes to host a lambing thanksgiving service on a sheep farm in the future.

World peace depends on right to life, Pope tells diplomats

Because everyone has a right to life, liberty and personal security, nations must find nonviolent solutions to conflict and difficulties, Pope Francis said.

A culture of peace “calls for unremitting efforts in favour of disarmament and the reduction of recourse to the use of armed force in the handling of international affairs,” he said yesterday (January 8) in his annual address to diplomats accredited to the Vatican.

Given the urgent need to favour dialogue and diplomacy in conflict resolution and to end the stockpiling of weapons, “I would therefore like to encourage a serene and wide-ranging debate on the subject, one that avoids polarizing the international community on such a sensitive issue,” the Pope said.

At the start of a new year, the Pope dedicated his speech to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which will celebrate the 70th anniversary



of its adoption by the UN General Assembly in December.

The declaration was an attempt to help the world's nations base their relations on “truth, justice, willing cooperation and freedom” by upholding the fundamental rights of all human beings, he said. The very foundation of freedom, justice and world peace, he said, quoting the document, is built on recognising and respecting these rights.

However, in his nearly 50-minute speech to the diplomats, the pope cautioned that there has been a movement to create “new rights” that often not only conflict with each other, but can be at odds with the traditional values and cultures of

many countries, while neglecting the real needs they have to face.

“Somewhat paradoxically, there is a risk that, in the very name of human rights, we will see the rise of modern forms of ideological colonization by the stronger and the wealthier, to the detriment of the poorer and the most vulnerable,” he said.

Seven decades after the creation of the universal declaration, Pope Francis said, “it is painful to see how many fundamental rights continue to be violated today. First among all of these is the right of every human person to life, liberty and personal security.”

War, violence and abortion all infringe on these rights, he said.

Not only are innocent unborn children discarded because they are “ill or malformed, or as a result of the selfishness of adults,” the elderly are often cast aside especially when they are infirm, he said.

Ultimately, the right to life entails working for peace, he said, because “without peace, integral human development becomes unattainable.”

Integral development, in fact, is intertwined with the need for disarmament, he said. “The proliferation of weapons clearly aggravates situations of conflict and entails enormous human and material costs that undermine development and the search for lasting peace.”

The adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons last year shows how the desire for peace continues to be alive in the world, he said.

“The stockpiles of armaments which have been built up in various countries must be reduced” and “nuclear weapons must be banned,” particularly given the risk that a nuclear conflagration could be started by accident, Pope Francis said, quoting St John XXIII’s encyclical on peace, “Pacem in Terris.”

“In this regard, it is of paramount importance to support every effort at dialogue on the Korean peninsula, in order to find new ways of overcoming the current disputes, increasing mutual trust and ensuring a peaceful future for the Korean people and the entire world,” Pope Francis said.

Fostering dialogue is also of primary importance for Israelis and Palestinians “in the wake of the tensions of recent weeks,” he said, apparently referring to demonstrations that took place after U.S. President Donald Trump announced he was recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. Pope Francis had said such a move would further destabilize the Middle East.

In his speech to diplomats, the Pope repeated the Vatican’s longstanding position that any policy change in the Holy Land must “be carefully weighed so as to avoid exacerbating hostilities” and should respect the “the status quo of Jerusalem, a city sacred to Christians, Jews and Muslims.”

“Seventy years of confrontation make more urgent than ever the need for a political solution that allows the presence in the region of two independent states within internationally recognized borders,” the Pope said. “Despite the difficulties, a willingness to engage in dialogue and to resume negotiations remains the clearest way to achieving at last a peaceful coexistence between the two peoples.”

In a list of world conflicts of concern, the Pope also pointed to the need to support “the various peace initiatives aimed at helping Syria.”

“The time for rebuilding has now come,” he said, which includes, not just rebuilding destroyed cities, but rebuilding hearts and “the fabric of mutual trust, which is the essential prerequisite for the flourishing of any society.”

“There is a need, then, to promote the legal, political and security conditions” for each citizen and to protect all religious minorities, including Christians, he said.

“The right to freedom of thought, conscience and of religion, including the freedom to change religion,” must be upheld around the globe, the Pope said.

Instead, “it is well-known that the right to religious freedom is often disregarded, and not infrequently religion becomes either an occasion for the ideological justification of new forms of extremism or a pretext for the social marginalization of believers, if not their downright persecution,” he said.

Turning from events unfolding on the world stage, the Pope drew attention to the daily reality of families, urging countries to support the bedrock of all stable, creative societies: “that faithful and indissoluble communion of love that joins man and woman” in marriage.

“I consider it urgent, then, that genuine policies be adopted to support the family, on which the future and the development of states depend,” he said, adding that “without this, it is not possible to create societies capable of meeting the challenges of the future.”

Neglecting families has led to sharply declining birth rates in some countries, which is a sign of a nation that is struggling to face the challenges of the present and fearful of the future.

The Pope also warned against talking about migrants and migration “only for the sake of stirring up primal fears.” The movements of peoples have always existed and the freedom of movement — to leave one’s homeland and to return — is a fundamental human right, he said.

“There is a need, then, to abandon the familiar rhetoric and start from the essential consideration

that we are dealing, above all, with persons,” he said.

Another urgent task before humanity, the Pope said, is caring for the earth.

“One must not downplay the importance of our own responsibility in interaction with nature. Climate changes, with the global rise in temperatures and their devastating effects, are also a consequence of human activity,” he said.

Therefore, people must work together, he said, including by upholding commitments agreed upon in the 2015 Paris Accord, and leave “to coming generations a more beautiful and livable world,” he said.

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