



Almost 100 wedding dresses were on display at St Michael's Parish Church in Linlithgow last Saturday at an event showcasing generations of couples who have been married in the 13th century Kirk. Report on page 10.

New C of I resource on supporting asylum seekers and refugees

The Church of Ireland's Refugee Working Groups have launched a new resource on

churchnewsireland@gmail.com



At the launch of the resource were (left to right) The Rt Revd Ken Good, Chairman of the Refugee Working Group (Northern Ireland); The Most Revd Dr Richard Clarke, Archbishop of Armagh; The Most Revd Dr Michael Jackson, Archbishop of Dublin; and The Rt Revd Patrick Rooke, Chairman of the Refugee Working Group (Republic of Ireland).

supporting asylum seekers and refugees in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. The 14-page document summarises how the Church of Ireland has supported asylum seekers and refugees in recent years and highlights opportunities for members of the Church to become more involved in this area of ministry and service.

The Rt Revd Patrick Rooke, Chairman of the Republic of Ireland Working Group, said: 'This is an excellent resource for all those who want to be informed about the refugee crises and what the response of the two Governments and the Church of Ireland has been. The many statistics and other factual points it contains are testament to the research and information gathering involved.'

The Rt Revd Ken Good, Chairman of the Northern Ireland Working Group, said: 'It is clear that public awareness of the plight of asylum seekers and refugees fluctuates considerably depending on the emotional impact of media coverage. This resource seeks to provide helpful information to keep before us the scale of the human need while also acknowledging people's fears and concerns. Being informed about the facts is important. It is also encouraging to read some good news stories about the practical ways in which Christian Churches and other agencies are responding to this crisis.'

The resource is available online from www.ireland.anglican.org/resources<<http://www.ireland.anglican.org/resources>>

Presbyterian Church reaffirms peacebuilding as key to witness by members

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI) is encouraging its members across the island to 'live out' its Vision for Society Statement, as the first in a series of new blogs on the Statement goes live.

Yesterday the first of five blogs went live (one on each of the Statement's paragraphs) as the planned roll out and promotion of the Statement to PCI's 539 congregations – north and south - continues.

Rev. Stephen Johnston, minister of Kilkeel Presbyterian Church, convener of PCI's Good Relations Panel, which is responsible for promoting the Statement, has written the first, which reflects on its opening paragraph.

“The Prince of Peace, our Lord Jesus Christ, calls us to be peacebuilders. He was unequivocal when He gave us the Great Commandment to ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your mind.’ Jesus then went further and introduced a radical counter cultural second element, and that is to ‘Love your neighbour as yourself,’ (Mark 12:30-31), the heart of peacebuilding.

“As I have written in the first blog, the Statement is a ‘declaration of belief, confession, affirmation and aspiration for our members across Ireland as disciples of Jesus Christ and as peacebuilders’.

“Peacebuilding, however, will look different in my own community of Kilkeel, County Down as it will in Belfast, Dublin, Galway, or Cork, but its centrality to Christian discipleship remains the same wherever we are. It is my prayer that our Vision for Society Statement and our continued

commitment to peacebuilding will bear much fruit,” he said.

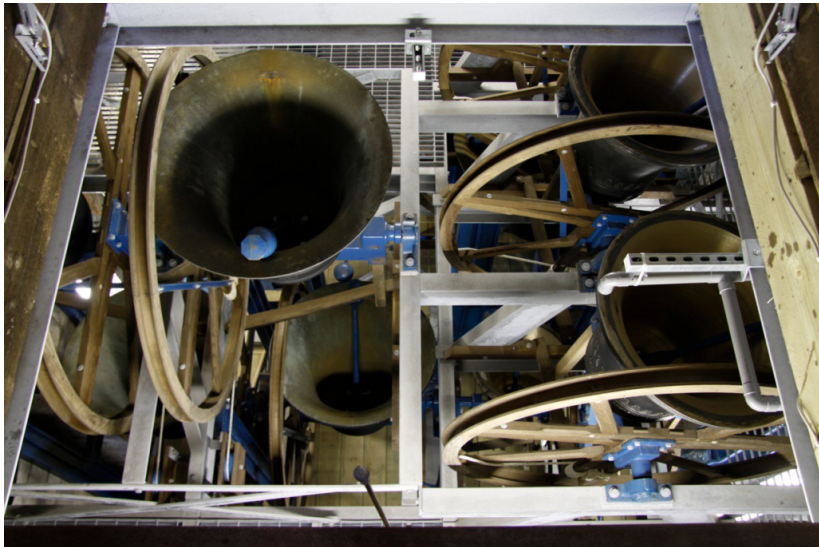
The blogs are one part of a promotional programme that began with a front cover story this month in the main denominational publication, the *Presbyterian Herald*. Over the weeks three short films, a specially written hymn based on the words of the Statement and printed material will support congregations in living out the Statement.

The series of blogs is at - www.presbyterianireland.org/blogs.

The 146-word Vision for Society Statement was welcomed and adopted by the Church at its General Assembly in June last year. It seeks to continue to place peacebuilding firmly at the heart of Christian discipleship and the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

At the time, the convener of the Council for Church in Society, Very Rev. Dr. Norman

Hamilton said, “This is a symbol of our desire that this statement will both be a stimulus for our engagement with wider society, as well as a powerful symbol that this is a calling of the whole Church to a highly important aspect of Christian and biblical witness.”



Cork Church Bells to ring out against racism

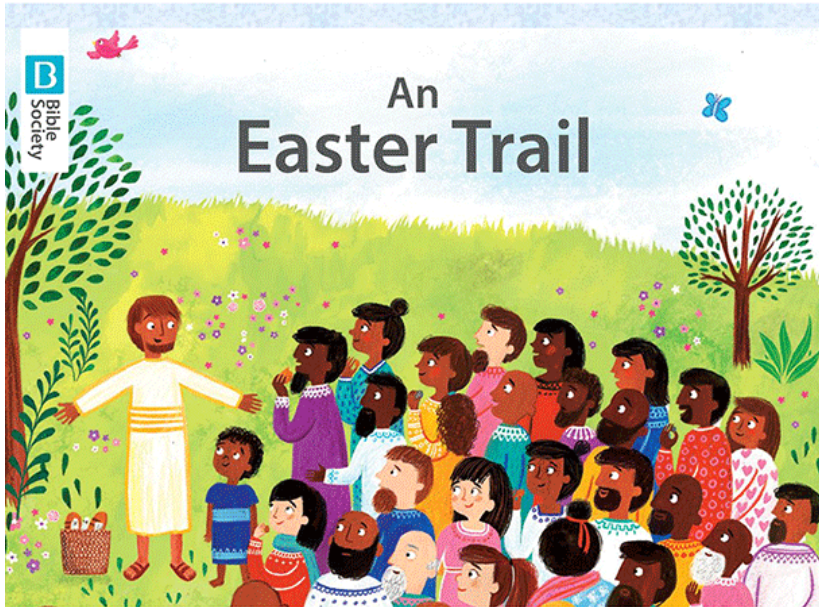
On Sunday 19th March church bells in a number of churches in the United Dioceses of Cork,

Cloyne and Ross will ring out around the globe in solidarity with immigrants and refugees who are facing increasing racism and xenophobia throughout the world. The 'Joy Bells' initiative started in Christ Church Cathedral, Waterford, and is the brainchild of Dean Maria Jansson. The wave of empathy has spread and the 'Joy Bells' will now be sounded on five continents on Sunday next.

St Fin Barre's Cathedral (Cork), St Anne's, Shandon (Cork), St Mary's Church (Carrigaline), Abbeystrewry Parish Church (Skibbereen), St John the Baptist (Midleton), the Chapel of Kingston College (Mitchelstown), and Saint Anne (Castlemartyr) all in the United Dioceses of Cork, Cloyne and Ross, will be among the many Christian Churches across the world ringing their bells at 11am on March 19. The ringing will continue for 15 minutes while the gathered congregations pray in solidarity with all who are terrified by the growing acceptance of hatred and racism,.

Easter trail activity for local churches from Bible Society

The perfect activity for your church this Easter to introduce children to the amazing story of Jesus.



A great, interactive Easter Trail guides children through the major events in Jesus' life using a quiz sheet and beautiful images from *The Super Cool Story* of Jesus. It's an Easter hunt with a difference - but you can still include some eggs along the way!

[CLICK HERE](#) for all you need to run your Easter Trail - instructions, images and quiz sheets.

Three Mena 'wide men' raise £500

Reverends Mark McConnell, John McClure and Dennis Christie of Ballymena Parish (Church of



Ireland) have reached their target of each losing a stone in weight after their M.O.T. Health Check on board Action Cancer's Big Bus last November.

The 'Three Wide Men' have raised over £500 for the charity with generous donations from both within and outside the parish. Money will go towards bringing the Big Bus back to the church grounds for another appointment later this year, and the remainder directly to the charity.

Both the clergy team and Action Cancer would like to say a big thank you to all who donated. The Action Cancer Big Bus is now scheduled to return on Saturday 24th June and will again

provide a number of free appointments, including 42 breast screenings and 13 MOT men's health checks, throughout the day. - Ballymena Times

Train for the ministry of divine healing

Training for those who would like to be involved in the ministry of divine healing will take place in St Anne's Cathedral Hall on five consecutive Thursday evenings at 8pm – April 20 and 27, and May 4, 11 and 18.

This training will be taken by Brother David Jardine and experienced members of the team of Divine Healing Ministries. It will be suitable for those who would like to use the skills learnt in their own congregational setting or to work with Divine Healing Ministries.

Training will take place in a safe and sensitive environment, and will teach people the principles of Divine Healing as well as equip them to pray with others.

There will be no charge for the course, but on the final evening there will be an opportunity to make a freewill offering.

Parking in the Cathedral grounds is good and safe. Further information about Divine Healing Ministries or about this course:- Telephone: 028 90 311 532 Email: divinehealing@live.co.uk

100-dress display showcases generations of weddings at St Michael's Linlithgo

Dresses dating from the 1950s to the present day charted the evolution of bridal fashion attracting dozens of visitors to the church.

Stephanie Thomson, who became the fourth generation of her family to marry in St Michael's in 2015, said her mother Margaret Johnston, the Church fellowship team leader, came up with the idea last October. She says:

“I think our minister was quite amazed at the response. Right from the get-go people wanted to put their dresses on display. It was great. Absolutely everyone in the church got involved.

“There was a lovely buzz about the church over the weekend as we welcomed members, brides and people from the community.”



“On the day the display looked really beautiful. We had dresses from generations of families, mothers and daughters, sisters and more. When we didn’t have all the dresses from previous generations, we put up photographs so it really told a story.

“The church felt like such a welcoming place and a very happy place.

“To begin with, people didn’t think we could fit 100 dresses into the church, but we were determined to do it even if meant moving pews. Everyone was chipping in.

“We made our own mannequins with Church members gathering on Sunday afternoons for a Mannequin Workshops, the flower team made beautiful displays and posies, and the organists played throughout the event.”

“Everyone was sharing their stories and it brought us all together. It was lovely to see the Church so busy.”

Pope: Conversion doesn't happen through magic, but concrete actions

Conversion doesn't come from the wave of a magic wand, but from learning to do good through concrete actions every day, Pope Francis has said.

While even “the saintliest person sins seven times a day,” conversion happens through humility and trying to become “better than the day before,” the Pope said today during the Mass in the chapel of the Domus Sanctae Marthae.

“Converting doesn't mean going to a fairy with a magic wand,” he said. “No, it is a path, a path of turning away (from evil) and of learning.”



Pope Francis said that conversion was not like magic

Reflecting on the day's first reading from the prophet Isaiah (1:10, 16-20), the Pope said, "You learn to do good through concrete things. Not with words, but with actions."

The reading from Isaiah gives three examples: "Help the oppressed, hear the orphan's plea and defend the widow."

In the day's Gospel reading from Matthew (23:1-12), the Pope continued, Jesus also reproaches the scribes and Pharisees because they do not practice what they preach.

“They do not know concreteness. If there is no concreteness, there can be no conversion,” he said.

Pope Francis said Christians are called to embark on “the path of Lenten conversion,” knowing that God “is a father who speaks, he is a father who loves us.”

“He accompanies us on this path of conversion. He only asks of us to be humble,” he said. “Then our sins all will be forgiven.”

Syria, six years of brutal war: World leaders must bring an end to suffering in Syria

With ongoing bombardment in and around Damascus and countless people trapped in besieged areas throughout Syria, Christian Aid asks world leaders to act now to end the horrors, and reaffirms its call for an immediate and lasting ceasefire.

Frances Guy, Head of Middle East at Christian Aid, said: “Today, six years on we owe Syrians under siege and under fire, the respect of remembering their daily horrors and urging world

leaders to put in that extra effort to bring an end to this suffering.”

Ms. Guy added: “Six years of brutal civil war, that has left millions of people stranded in hard to reach areas. Six years during which the world has watched the medieval tactics of siege and starvation.

“Six years where children have not been to school, where neighbouring countries have strained to match the demands on their hospitality that the rest of the world tries to ignore. And still there are new stories to tell and still the daily hardships continue.

“The current ceasefire is clearly not working. Syria and the world needs a real ceasefire to help all Syrians breathe a little”

According to the United Nations 13.5 million people require humanitarian assistance, including 4.6 million people in need trapped in besieged and hard-to-reach areas.

Just in the last few weeks an intensification of bombing and military campaigns to towns north east of Damascus has forced tens of thousands of people to flee under heavy bombardment.

A Christian Aid partner described the events in one town in rural Damascus:

“Around 20,000 people fled in two weeks. After five years’ they have moved a lot, those who fled in these last weeks have already moved three times before. You become a nomad, you flee for your life. But it is not like you go to a safer place – you flee, come back home if it is safe, and if not you keep on moving. At the end of the day, there is nothing bright on the horizon.”

For next month’s conference in Brussels, [Supporting The Future Of Syria And The Region](#), Christian Aid hopes that this will bring solid action to guarantee an end to sieges, an end to attacks on civilians, unhindered humanitarian access and keeps humanitarian protection at the heart of decision making about the future of Syria.

To donate or find out more about Christian Aid’s Syria appeal please visit the website:

<http://www.christianaid.org.uk/emergencies/syria-crisis-appeal>

News briefs & Upcoming events

+++ Radio Ulster School Choir Of The Year

2017 - Following on from the success of the last two years, 60 choirs from across Northern Ireland will be singing to impress as they battle it out for a place in the final of the BBC Radio Ulster School Choir Of The Year 2017. Two Fermanagh primary schools are taking part in the BBC Radio Ulster School Choir Of The Year. Both Jones Memorial Primary School and Lisbellaw Primary Schools are competing and their singing could be heard in a broadcast at the weekend. Presented by John Toal and Kerry McLean, and recorded at seven venues across Northern Ireland, the second programme was on Sunday 12 March on BBC Radio Ulster at 2pm, culminating in a live final from the Ulster Hall, Belfast, on Sunday 30 April. The second programme, hosted by John Toal from The Share Discovery Village, Lisnaskea, features 10 choirs all vying for a place in the grand final. Competing in the Junior category are: Lisbellaw Primary School and Jones Memorial Primary School, Enniskillen together with St Mary's Primary School, Strabane; St Lawrence's Primary School, Fintona, and Omagh Integrated Primary School. In the Senior category, the following schools will be competing for a place in the final:

St Mary's College, Londonderry; Royal School, Dungannon; Wellington College, Belfast; Drumragh Integrated College, Omagh, and Our Lady's Grammar School, Newry. They will be performing for judges Richard Yarr, Senior Classical Music Producer with BBC Northern Ireland; Ciaran Scullion, Head of Music with The Arts Council of Northern Ireland and Rebekah Coffey, Soprano and Ulster Youth Choir coach.

+++ Galgorm seminar on key safety issue for churches - The Control of Substances

Hazardous to Health (COSHH) is a legal obligation on those who are responsible for the use of public buildings and the employees who work there - this includes churches. COSHH covers the storage and use of chemicals which might be used e.g. in the cleaning and maintenance of the church buildings - including risk assessment, the use of Safety Data Sheets, taking appropriate safety measures and keeping records. If your church is not up-to-speed with the requirements in this area of Health & Safety, reserve a free place now for a church representative to attend.

[CLICK HERE](#) to reserve seats and for full details of the *Galgorm Church Showroom Day* on Thursday 23 March at the premises of *Galgorm Group*. The day offers an opportunity to view

catering equipment, consumable supplies and furniture for the church buildings - as well as attending presentations which this year include:

- * Ideas and Resources for Celebrating Easter in your Community
- * Control of Substances Hazardous to Health - A Legal Obligation for Churches
- * Floorcare - Because First Impressions Matter!
- * Catering Equipment and Furniture Ideas for Your Church

For further information, contact: Paul Scott on 0799 078 0453 or by [email](#)

Upcoming events - Put Upcoming events in message bar and send in text form to churchnewsireland@gmail.com

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