

Priest and vicars all over Ireland going country to bring gospel of music and dance to masses



The Rev David Macbeth, left, with the Reverend Jason Kernohan

The religious anthem, One Day At A Time, by country artist Gloria Sherry, remains the biggest Irish hit of all time.

Priest and vicars are going God and country with their congregations. Men of the cloth all over Ireland are going country to bring the gospel of music and dance to the masses, the Irish Mirror reports.

The religious anthem, One Day At A Time, by country artist Gloria Sherry, remains the biggest Irish hit of all time – the 1978 song with its Sweet Jesus tagline spent 90 consecutive weeks in the charts.

So, it's not surprising that priests and ministers are getting evangelical about bringing country music to their parishioners.

RTE's hit series, Stetsons and Stilettos, is set to feature a dancing priest and two singing vicars making a communion of the holy and the hooley in their parishes.

Jiving Irish priest Fr. Brian Kavanagh from Co. Laois is famous among his parishioners for the being the last man on the dance floor.

“He's like an excel battery, he never stops day or night”, said one parishioner. The Laois priest said he believes the energetic American country dance moves bring joy to his congregation.

“I couldn’t dance at all. I used to hear my sister saying to me, ‘let the music into your feet’.

“Dancing created a marvellous atmosphere and a marvellous joyfulness among people. People need joy and happiness and fun.”

And Fr. Brian, who has recently become a chaplain in the university town of Maynooth has introduced his love of all things country to the students.

“It’s my desire to bring country music and the country jive to the life of the students in Maynooth.

“You are starting off something totally new from scratch”, he said.

The cameras follow the cleric as he converts the student masses to jiving even managing to transfer some students from hip hop to his jiving classes.

“The vibe is absolutely brilliant”, said hip-hop dancer Jordan, “Everyone is having a great time.”

He even took to Snapchat to encourage students to go country by taking up country dance classes.

Meanwhile Church of Ireland minister, David Macbeth, has combined his passions for God and country to make his own album to celebrate the 150th anniversary of his Derry church.

He said: “The country music brings a real energy. I believe it’s a gift God has given me and it’s a gift I want to use.

“I listen to country music as I write the sermon for Sunday morning.

“Susan McCann, Ray Lynam and Philomena Begley, I remember in my bedroom at night sitting listening to Big Tom.

“Look at Philomena’s songs, Why Me Lord, How Great Thou Art, Oh Lord my God.”

And former country star Jason Kernohan told how he ditched his Stetson and shiny suits for a clerical collar when he became a minister in Eglantine outside Belfast.

“I think I’ve always had music in my heart right back to my parents and grandparents who instilled that.

“My parishioners are always used to surprises form me. Anything from Ring of Fire to Horse It

Into You Cynthia will go down OK”, joked the minister.

The Ballymena country star gave up his promising career as a country singer to take to the pulpit, but he still goes behind the microphone on special occasions.

And he still has his stage outfits hanging in his wardrobes.

“I have many wardrobes in my house. Some of the stuff is from singing. In country music I think you have to be a wee bit glam sometimes.

“I still wear a sparkly shirt today if I’m asked to perform in concerts. I absolutely love it and it’s black so it suits me very well.”

Stetson and Stiletto will be shown on RTE One on Tuesday 20th March at 7.00pm

Mainstream Protestants left alienated by Hibernian politicisation of St Patrick’s Day

St Patrick is credited as the man who brought Christianity to Ireland, yet, regrettably, his March 17 anniversary is used by some Irish republicans

as an occasion to pursue a narrow political agenda, Billy Kennedy writes in the News Letter.

Mainstream Protestants identify with Patrick as their patron saint - note the large number of Church of Ireland churches bearing his name across this country. They identify Patrick's fifth century Christian witness on these shores as a manifestation of the early Apostolic church and are alienated from the overt Hibernian politicisation of a day that should be shared by all creeds and classes.

St Patrick was a fifth-century Romano-British Christian missionary and bishop in Ireland. Known as the 'Apostle of Ireland', he is venerated in both the Anglican Communion (Church of Ireland) and the Roman Catholic Church. The dates of Patrick's life are not certain, but it is accepted that he was active as a missionary in Ireland during the second half of the fifth century.

Early medieval tradition credits him with being the first bishop of Armagh and Primate of Ireland, and they regard him as founder of Christianity in Ireland, converting a people practising a form of almost pagan Celtic polytheism. This is how he

has been regarded since, despite evidence of an earlier Christian presence in Ireland.

According to the confession of Patrick, when he was about 16, he was captured by Irish pirates from his home on mainland Britain and taken as a slave to Ireland, looking after animals. He lived there for six years before escaping to return home. As a cleric, he returned to north/west Ireland. Little is known of where he visited, although Slemish (Co Antrim) and Downpatrick have locational links with him. St Patrick's Day is the supposed date of his death, celebrated religiously and culturally. In church circles, it is both a solemn holy day of obligation. However, the cultural side of remembering St Patrick straying into politics is divisive, particularly in Northern Ireland. In Irish-American Catholic communities in the US, the brash 'Auld Country' cult of celebrating St Patrick has very little religious tones.

Celebrated properly, St Patrick's Christian inheritance should be free from all narrow political trappings.



Walk along Ireland's answer to the Camino this Easter

This Easter weekend, people are being encouraged to trace their ancestral heritage and Ireland's heritage on the country's pilgrim paths, the Journal.ie reports.

Pilgrim Paths Week, which will take place from March 31 – April 8, is often called Ireland's Camino – but rather than involving one long

walk, it involves a number of walks across the country.

People are being encouraged to walk one or even a few of the penitential trail paths.

Knowledgeable local guides will lead each walk, allow time for personal contemplation, outline the story of the route and explain how medieval penitents coped with their arduous journeys.

Chairman of Pilgrim Paths Ireland, John G O'Dwyer explained about the event:

“National Pilgrim Paths Week was created to raise awareness and use of Ireland’s rich inheritance of pilgrim routes. The event is targeted, not only at those who enjoy exploring Ireland’s ancient tracks, but also the growing numbers seeking to escape the daily grind of life and take time out to reflect and meditate a little while enjoying the outdoors. Pilgrim Paths Week 2018 has already attracted much local support while also appealing also to overseas pilgrims.”

O'Dwyer said that the medieval pilgrimage was originally a journey combining prayer and sacrifice – with an element of physical discomfort.

Recently, there has been a renewed interest in following the footsteps of medieval pilgrims, and over the last number of years Ireland's penitential trails have echoed to increasing footfall.

O'Dwyer previously told *TheJournal.ie* that the paths are not just for religious people.

“They are from the time before the Reformation, when everybody was Christian. We are a non-denominational organisation – we make the paths available to people of any religion, anyone can take anything from it,” he said.

Pilgrim walks are scheduled to take place at each of Ireland's Pilgrim Paths including:

- Tochar Phadraig, Co Mayo
- St Kevin's Way, Co Wicklow
- Rath/Dysert Pilgrim Path, Co Clare
- St Bridget's Path, Co Meath
- Cosán na Naomh and Cnoc na dTobar, Co Kerry
- St Finbarr's Pilgrim Path, Co Cork
- St Declan's Way, Co Tipperary.
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There's also a new pilgrim passport for Ireland that will be available during Pilgrim Paths Week events taking place on:

- St Kevin's Way, Co Wicklow
- Cosáin na Naomh, Co Kerry
- The Tochar, Co Mayo
- St Finbarr's Pilgrim Path, Co Cork.

The passport means that walkers can travel 125km of Ireland's medieval paths and then receive a teastas oilithreachta, (completion certificate) from Ballintubber Abbey, Co Mayo.

To find out more about National Pilgrim Paths Week, visit the [website](#) or email info@pilgrimpath.ie

Read: [Ireland's pilgrim paths: 'They're the great leveller – you could be Bill Gates or unemployed'](#)

Patrick's message 'still relevant' - Bishop Good

St Patrick's message is still relevant, Bishop Ken Good told a cross-community ceilidh in Donemana, held to mark the saint's feast day.

The annual event - which is now in its third year - was organised by the Rector of Donagheady, Rev Dr Robin Stockitt, and attended by members of the Roman Catholic, Presbyterian and Church of Ireland congregations in Donemana.



Bishop Good was coaxed onto the dance floor briefly. Let's hope the 'Strictly' judges weren't watching. Rt Rev Ken Good was coaxed onto the dancefloor at Earlsgift Parish Hall by the Rector of Donagheady, Rev Dr Robin Stockitt, who was 'Fear an Tí' (Man of the House) for the evening. This was the third year in a row that the cross-community ceilidh was held in the parish hall to mark St Patrick's Day and the two Church of Ireland clergy were joined at the event by the minister at Donemana Presbyterian Church, Rev Stuart McCrea, and the Parish Priest of Dunamanagh (Donagheady), Fr Eamon McDevitt.

The evening's entertainment began with displays by the Sollus Highland Dancers from Bready and the Kerlin School of Irish Dancing from Donemana. Music was provided by the Glencosh Ceilidh Band.

The occasion proved revelatory in a number of ways. Rev McCrea proved himself a dab hand with the ukulele when he joined the musicians on stage, and the Rector, Dr Stockitt, was unmasked as a reasonably accomplished cook, when his chicken curry was served alongside the more traditional Irish stew. The evening's fare—which also included apple pie and ice cream—was served up by members of the Parish Team.

Bishop Good told the gathering he was grateful for the opportunity to share together - as a community - our common heritage in St Patrick, and that the saint's message was still relevant today. He said some of those present may have been concerned about what was happening in Ireland—north and south—with regard to faith and culture nowadays. The Bishop said he liked to imagine what Ireland was like before Patrick came – when it was completely secular or pagan, and the name of Christ wasn't known at all. It can't have been easy for him to come back to a

place where he had been hurt and enslaved, Bishop Good said, but Patrick came back.

“Patrick did immensely courageous things,” the Bishop said. “He was imprisoned, he was beaten up, he was given a hard time – because he was obeying God’s call – but he persevered. He persevered, I think, because he believed he had a message which needed to be heard at that time—a message about loving your neighbour, loving the Lord your God, about Christ himself, about the ten commandments, about forgiveness, about peace. He thought this island needed that message, and he had no choice but to deliver it.

“And as a result of Patrick’s work here, the whole church changed; the attitude towards slaves changed; the attitude towards the poor changed; the attitude towards women changed; laws changed. And tomorrow we are saying, ‘Thank you, Lord, for bringing that man here,’ because we still need to hear what he said.”

Belfast Community Gospel Choir gets Michiana into the St. Patrick's Day spirit

On St. Patrick's Day people around Michiana had the chance to take in some gospel music from people of the Old Sod . The Belfast Community Gospel Choir performed Friday night at the Kroc Center.

Earlier Friday, its members performed at the Basilica of the Sacred Heart at Notre Dame.

The performance schedule continued on Saturday with a performance at Warsaw's Wagon Wheel Theatre and the gospel choir was at Warsaw's New Life Christian Church at 8 a.m. On Sunday.

The choir's only been to the U.S. twice, with previous trips to Boston and New York.

NewsCenter 16 caught up with the founder of the group, Marie Lacey, who said it's not any ordinary group.

Given the history of religious division in Northern Ireland, Lacey said she wanted to put those differences aside. So, she started a choir that welcomes anyone.

The choir has around 120 members, but roughly 20 are visiting northern Indiana. And the group

that is visiting Michiana said it's a lot like Northern Ireland.

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