



**Harding Memorial Primary School Choir won the day one competition**

## **Schools Choir of the Year a success at Belfast Cathedral**

The inaugural St Anne Trust Belfast Primary School Choir of the Year competition was an overwhelming success with pupils from 14 schools doing themselves and their schools proud.

The competition was organised by the Trust, which was established in 2016 to advance education, arts, culture and heritage by promoting good relations, particularly in communities significantly affected by conflict, diversity or deprivation.

Controlled (mainly Protestant), Catholic and integrated schools were all represented in the competition which took place in the impressive surroundings of St Anne's Cathedral on Wednesday May 10, with special schools taking part on Thursday May 11.

In a close contest on the first day, Harding Memorial Primary School picked up the title, with Victoria College Prep in second place and St Anne's Primary School in third.

But this was a day when everyone was a winner, and when every face wore a smile. Certainly no one envied adjudicator Donal McCrisken his task!

The schools were welcomed by Dean's Vicar, the Rev Canon Mark Niblock, and Mr Joe Watson of the St Anne Trust. "It is my hope that the children shall enjoy the day and cherish the memory for many years to come," Mr Watson said.



**The choirs from Harberton and Jordanstown schools sing together at the end of the second day.**

The choirs all sang two songs and finished with a communal singsong led by St Anne’s Assistant Master of the Choristers Thérèse Woodfield. The awards were presented by Michelle McCutcheon representing Abbey Insurance, major sponsor of the competition, and Ciaran Scullion, Head of Music at the Arts Council NI.

Ms McCutcheon told the children, teachers and families: “It is an absolute treat to be here. I have been blown away by the music I have heard, and the hard work you have put into this is very evident. As far as I am concerned, each and every one of you is a winner.”

Mr Scullion congratulated the St Anne Trust on a ‘fantastic competition.’ He said: “Competitions like this are very important. They are a reminder of the great work going on in our schools and provide a platform for the children to perform.”

Announcing the winners, Mr McCrisken gave a short critique of each school’s performance – critiques that were full of praise, along with some good advice from an expert.

“What a wonderful morning we have had. It has been uplifting, entertaining, spiritual and refreshing. Not just the quality of the pieces, but the very fact that you are here and paying tribute to the wonderful act of singing,” Mr McCrisken said.

“Being in a choir is a wonderful experience. It makes you feel good and helps with getting on with other people. It enhances every aspect of our lives.”

Before the pupils returned to their schools, each with a badge stating that they had sung in St Anne’s Cathedral, the Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev Alan Abernethy, sang a blessing.

A former pupil of the winning Harding Memorial Primary School himself, the Bishop said he chose to sing the Blessing in tribute to his old

primary school teacher Ms Griffin and in recognition of the wonderful singing he had heard that day.

It was the turn of pupils from two special schools, Jordanstown School and Harberton School, to show their singing talents on day two of the competition.

Cliona Donnelly, general manager of Northern Ireland Opera and a Director of the St Anne Trust, had arranged a workshop which was energetically led by three young singers from NI Opera, Laura McFall, Elaine Pelan and Kristine Donnan.

Every child had the opportunity to shake, rattle and bang a variety of musical instruments as they joined in singing and dancing. They paraded around a cleared 'stage' at the front of the Cathedral, they had great fun stretching, and hiding under, colourful pieces of fabric, and singing *Somewhere Over the Rainbow* waving colourful scarves which had many an observer (and even one of the children) dabbing their eyes!

After all the fun and games, there was a break for refreshments before the serious section of the day began – the competition!

The children from Jordanstown School were up first and performed the songs *World in Union* and *Sing*. As many have hearing difficulties, the children also signed the words to the song.

Harberton School also rose to the challenge, singing *I Love My Life* and *Change the World*, with fantastic hand actions to accompany the singing.

Among those watching the competition over the two days was Bishop Alan Harper, former Archbishop of Armagh, who said it had been a 'brilliant' event. "This is cross community and totally inclusive, not least because a special place has been made for children with special needs, and that is very important."

He said the Cathedral was a place of 'hope, joy and everything that is good,' adding: "I don't see anyone without a smile on their face."

Mr Sam Murray, conductor of the Jordanstown School choir, said: "The children are loving it. It is great even just to get out, although coming into the Cathedral was a little daunting at the start."

The performance of both choirs was critiqued by Walter Sutcliffe of NI Opera who thanked the

children and their teachers for making it such an 'enriching morning.'

"You make a beautiful sound and may you always keep enjoying it," he said.

## **Inter-church street by street outreach in Bangor West**

On an evening in September 2016, the Rev Fiona McCrea asked the Rev Winston Good to come and talk in Carnalea about a prayer project Seymour Street Methodist had been involved in for two years.



*(Above) The team in Bangor West*

Fiona also asked the neighbouring churches of West Church Presbyterian and St Gall's to come to the talk and the evening ended with everyone going back to their churches enthusiastic about doing something similar in the Bangor West area as a way of blessing the community and showing them they are interested in them and their concerns.

The basic idea behind the project is that, after an initial time of prayer, a team of four volunteers go out knocking on doors while a team of three to four stay behind in the church to pray for them. The team started knocking on doors in the Rathmore Road area on 24 January. Part of the running of the project is to have one or two streets that all three churches will pray for throughout a two-week period.

Volunteer church members knock on doors on a Tuesday night between 6.30 and 7.30pm, explain about the project and simply ask if there is anything they would like the team to pray for – family members, someone who is sick, something they are worried or anxious about, or whatever other concerns they have. All prayer requests are recorded on a little card and are treated with absolutely confidentiality. No names

are needed and addresses are not recorded or referred to.



## **Lisburn cathedral big breakfast fundraiser for Ugandan children**

A fundraising 'Big Breakfast' was held in Lisburn Cathedral Hall on Saturday May 13 in support of local charity Abaana for children living in poverty in Uganda.

## **Down & Dromore kids get "Powered Up" for praise party**

The Down & Dromore Youth, Children's and Families department are all powered up and

**CHILDREN'S PRAISE PARTY 2017!**

**POWERED UP!**

**MOIRA PARISH CENTRE  
SATURDAY 20TH MAY  
SPEAKER: LAURENCE BELLEW  
TIME: 2PM-5PM**

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Julie Currie (Children's officer) Tel 028 9082 8856 email julie@downanddromore.org  
See Facebook DDYC

ready to go for the sixth annual praise party in Moira Parish Centre on Saturday May 20.

A spokesperson said, "We are really excited for Sunday schools around the Diocese to get together and invite their children (primary school

age) to the biggest praise party around. Over 400 people attended last year and Moira Parish centre was bursting at the seams.

“ The kids had a fantastic time learning about God, practicing their puppetry, getting really, really fit with ‘Lifeguards’, crafting their hoovercrafts and praying. As the kids were leaving they were asking, “Can we do this all over again next Saturday?”

The speaker is Laurence Bellew, Kids Co-ordinator at Willowfield parish Church. Laurence is passionate about children’s work and is often at the praise party with his band and ‘Lifeguards’ – fitness for life programme. The children’s challenge this year is ‘Powered up’. The children will come as either their favourite Super Hero or make a Super Hero up themselves!

Details and registration at: <https://www.downanddromore.org/events/2017/04/Childrens-Praise-Party-2017-POWERED-UP#more>

## **Belfast service marks International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia**

IDAHOT was marked by a service at St George's Parish Church on Sunday evening at the beginning of LGBT Awareness Week NI 2017.

Choral Evensong with sublime singing by the Choral Scholars Training Choir conducted by Ian Keatley.

The sermon was delivered by Rev [Nigel Kirkpatrick](#), Rector of St Dorothea's Parish Church, Gilnahirk on our theme for the incoming Week, Stand by Us. He stated that no where in the Gospels is there any suggestion by Christ that anyone should not be welcomed or included. His love does not discriminate, nor should ours, one for another.

He asked the congregation to pray for those LGB&T people throughout the world at risk, especially those in Chechnya, parts of Africa and the Middle East.

Domestically, he referred to the continuing desire by LGB&T people to have their relationships recognised and affirmed by marriage, and to the failure of the Church of Ireland's General Synod to permit the Church to bless civil partnerships in Northern Ireland and same sex marriages in the Republic.

A member of the congregation commenting on the service said, “At the beginning of this Week as well as remembering those who have perished or suffered harm, I can reflect that Christ can truly be our best ally.

“The challenge for Churches is to recognise and accept that Christ as the supreme ally, welcomes everyone without exception.

“Thanks Nigel for the thoughtful words, the Choral Scholars for the ethereal singing and to [Pam Tilson](#) of St George's and Changing Attitude Ireland for organising this annual service.”

## **A quarter of ‘non-religious’ Britons admit to praying**

A quarter of people who say they have no religion admit to praying, a report has found.

Nearly one in four people in Britain who claim to be non-religious say that prayer forms a part of their life, while a similar proportion admit to attending religious services.

The study by the Benedict XVI Centre for Religion at St Mary’s University, Twickenham,



found that nearly half the British population now identifies as non-religious – however, nearly three fifths of these still profess some level of personal religiousness.

Around four per cent of people who claim to be non-religious even admit to praying daily, with over a quarter of non-religious over-75s praying at least monthly.

Although only 20 per cent of the population say they were brought up without a religion, nearly half now describe themselves this way.

Three in five non-religious people said they were raised as Christians, while fewer than five per cent of people raised non-religious now identify

as Christians. This means that for every person raised with no religion who has become Christian, 26 people have gone the other way.

Professor Stephen Bullivant, Director of the Benedict XVI Centre and author of the report, said: “Those identifying with ‘No religion’ make up almost half of the population of Great Britain and this is the first detailed profile we have of this hugely significant group.

“The growth of the non-religious is the topic in the religious history of Britain – as elsewhere – over the past several decades, and this data highlights the complexity of what that actually means in practice.

“Equally interesting, however, is the fact that in recent years – since 2009 – ‘No religion’ has stopped growing as a share of the population. It’s by no means in decline, of course, but we’re no longer seeing year-on-year increases. Meanwhile, in the last few years, the Anglican share of the population has finally stabilised, after a long period of gradual decline.

“What is certain, is that the challenge for the churches is twofold: 1) improve the “retention” of those brought up as Christians so that a much higher proportion remain as Christians in adult

life, and 2) seek new ways to reach and attract people raised outside of Christianity.

“As things stand, for every one cradle None who has become some kind of Christian, there are twenty-six cradle Christians who have become Nones later in life. So there’s a lot to be done.”

## **Seafarer mental health branded 'a serious concern'**

As part of Mental Health Awareness Week, taking place currently in the UK, The Mission to Seafarers is highlighting the mental health challenges faced by seafarers and calling on the industry to offer wider services that could help safeguard their welfare. Much of the work undertaken by the Mission to Seafarers globally involves mental health support, from offering the ability to contact families, to being on-hand to support seafarers struggling with depression and fatigue, and even providing support after cases of attempted suicide.

It’s not uncommon for merchant seafarers and cadets to spend between six months and a year working away from home, unable to see their families. During this time the majority of seafarers are unable to rely on access to the internet to use platforms such as Skype or



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WhatsApp to maintain contact with loved ones. A recent survey by the Seafarers Trust reported that as many as 77 per cent of seafarers have their internet access limited to email or text, or have no access to internet on board at all.

Tim Tunley, a port chaplain covering Scotland, who spends a considerable proportion of his welfare visits dealing with mental health issues commented: “The mental health of seafarers is a

serious ongoing concern. In recent years, the merchant shipping industry has undeniably become more pressurised, with increasing amounts of paperwork and shorter turnaround time in ports. While many owners and operators do look to offer suitable support to their seafarers, incidents of fatigue, poor internet connectivity and a lack of shore time are still prevalent, placing a huge strain on the mental welfare of seafarers.”

As well as workplace pressures and loneliness, it is not uncommon to see crew members suffering from cultural isolation. “The workforce of merchant seafarers is very multinational. While this has its advantages, there are occasions during which seafarers can suffer from cultural isolation. The happiness and mental welfare of a crew often depends on how well that crew gets on and works together, and if there are language barriers and a lack of shared cultural references, it can be very difficult for crews to form a strong bond...An example of this is an English-speaking captain taking the opportunity to discuss football, motorbikes and other hobbies when we visit his ship. Although his crew is English-speaking and can organise the running of the vessel, they struggle with conversational English, and lack a shared cultural background” he said.

“Our main role is to act as a companion when the seafarer leaves the vessel, and provide somebody for the individuals to talk to. We also signpost them towards help from online resources such as the Big White Wall, or ISWAN. Importantly, we worry about individuals. That it falls to us to do this demonstrates that more needs to be done to raise awareness of this issue, and more fundamentally, to tackle it.”

Ben Bailey, Assistant Director of Advocacy at the Mission to Seafarers added: “This Mental Health Awareness Week we call on owners and operators to review the pressure put on crews and to ensure that suitable support mechanisms are in place. All of our chaplains are trained to respond to a range of mental health issues and help seafarers deal with the stresses and strains of life at sea. We urge any seafarer to contact one of our chaplains in port who will be able to provide a listening ear and support.”

## Today in Christian History, May 16

**May 16, 583** (traditional date): Brendan the Navigator, founder of a Celtic monastery in Clonfert, Ireland, dies. Some Irish scholars have asserted that Brendan was among the first

Europeans to reach America, nine centuries before Columbus.

**May 16, 1805:** Henry Martyn, a well-educated Englishman, arrives in India to aid William Carey with translation work

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