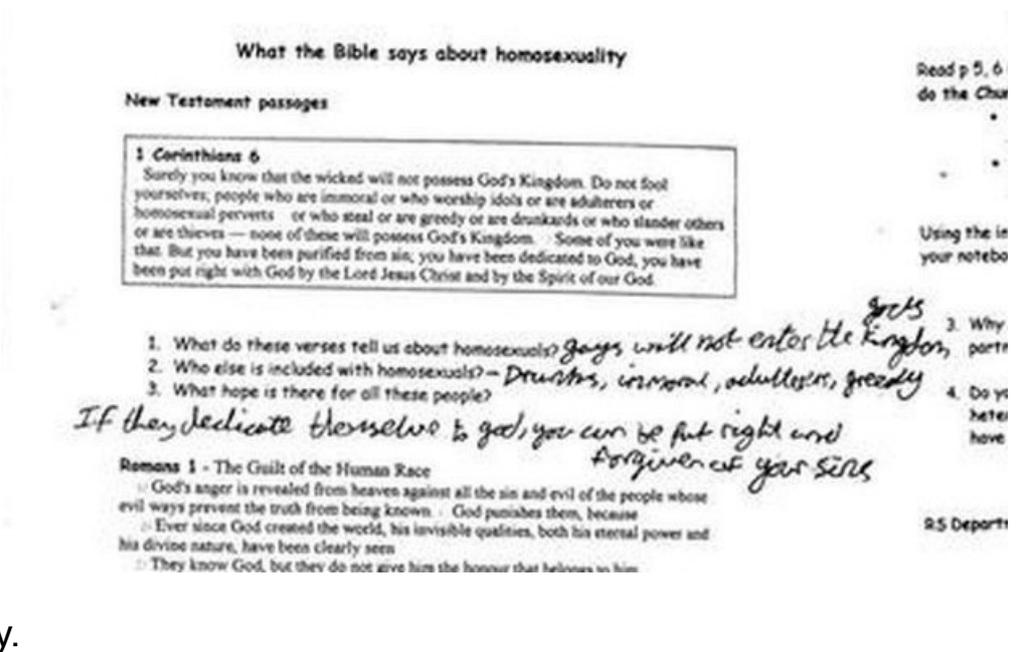




New book reveals 'strong gay scene' in Irish Catholic church

Belfast College withdraws religious worksheet that 'almost branded all homosexuals as perverts'

Belfast Telegraph - A Belfast school has apologised after parents complained about a worksheet handed out on the Bible and homosexuality.



The father of one student made a complaint to the BBC about the questions, which he considered did not allow for debate and almost branded all homosexuals as perverts.

Hunterhouse College in Belfast, a cross-community voluntary grammar school for girls, has apologised and withdrawn the worksheet from use.

The three questions were from a Religious Studies worksheet that Year 12 students were given for homework relating to 1 Corinthians 6: 9-11.

The questions were set by teaching staff and included:

- What do these verses tell us about homosexuals?
- Who else is included with homosexuals?
- What hope is there for all these people?

School Principal Andrew Gibson admitted that the school “got it wrong” by allowing the worksheet to be sent home and removed from the rest of the class’s context.

The worksheet was apparently part of a broader debate about sexuality within the teenage pupils’ religious education.

Changing Attitude Ireland welcomes school’s apology

Dr Richard O’Leary, Chair of the Church of Ireland pro-gay group Changing Attitude Ireland welcomed the school’s apology. He said: “Schools should be aware that an increasing number of Christians in Northern Ireland are affirming of persons who are gay. I was surprised at the Bible translation the school used, which is not one of the accepted translations.” He invited the school to consult the pastoral resources on being gay on the website of Changing Attitude Ireland.

See also -

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-30222550>

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/school-says-it-got-it-wrong-over-worksheet-about-the-bible-and-homosexuality>

Number of emergency food parcels handed out to needy soars in NI

News Letter - More than 11,000 people received emergency food parcels in Northern Ireland last year, it has been claimed.



As well as churches and community organisations, at least 14 food banks distributed essentials to impoverished families - a sevenfold increase on the number of people requiring help three years ago, according to a leading advice organisation.

Bob Stronge, chief executive of Advice NI, said: “This is a terrible situation which needs to be understood and addressed.”

Over the last 12 months the Trussell Trust, which operates the majority of food banks in Northern Ireland, provided more than 11,000 adults and children with three days' emergency food and support - up 489% per cent on the number of people helped during the previous financial year.

Storehouse, another food bank which has been operating in the region since 2008, also handed out supplies from two locations in Belfast and North Down.

Advice NI said it was aware that a number of other independent food banks had been set up to help people in crisis in Belfast, Greater Belfast and Ballynahinch.

Mr Stronge added: "We don't have exact figures yet, but it is clear that there are a significant number of community organisations and churches who are providing food to those in need.

"At least 16 organisations across Northern Ireland distribute emergency food and other goods on a regular basis. Fourteen of these identify themselves specifically as food banks although they may also be engaged in distributing other goods such as clothes, toiletries and furniture.

"We believe that one organisation, the Trussell Trust, has supplied as many as 11,000 people across Northern Ireland who have no alternative but to seek food parcels for both themselves and their families."

More at -

<http://www.newsletter.co.uk/news/business/number-of-emergency-food-parcels-handed-out-to-needy-soars-1-6444441>

Ballymena church development will benefit disadvantaged and create 1,000 jobs

News Letter - The driving force behind a new development scheme – the Gateway Project – on a 97-acre site on the outskirts of Ballymena has played down fears that it will take trade from the town centre.

Pastor Jeff Wright from Green Pastures Church and former director of Wrightbus in Ballymena said: "We are not faceless developers, we are not a bunch of guys who have come in to make money.

"We are here for the benefit of the town and for all its people. This is a not-for-profit legacy project which delivers spiritual, social and economic transformation for people that have been socially disadvantaged."

He added: “The project delivers 1,000 jobs for this town.

“There is a sovereign opportunity to create something very special for this town and it is a legacy for not just this generation but for the next and it would be terrible if we failed.”

He added that the development would “bring millions into the Ballymena economy”,

The Gateway project bills itself as “a ground-breaking public private partnership” adjacent to the Seven Tower’s roundabout in the north Antrim town “providing training, social intervention services, social housing, a church, a motor village and food retail”.

Plans for the site include: a family entertainment centre; a motor village; an hotel; restaurants; a park and ride car park; a health and wellbeing centre; ‘Compassion Care Housing’; ‘Connect Care Elderly village’; and a ‘Connect Care Nursing Home’.

It has grown out of the collective vision of the five project partners: Green Pastures Church, Gateway Social Investments, Compassion Ministries, Connect Ministries and The Wright Group. Subject to planning approval, construction will begin in mid-2015 and phase one will last 18 months.

<http://www.newsletter.co.uk/news/regional/video-development-scheme-to-benefit-disadvantaged-1-6444457>

Blue Plaque to recall Dean Crooks - the first Black Santa

Dean Samuel Crooks, Belfast’s first Black Santa and a man ‘who touched the heart of Belfast,’ is to be honoured by a Blue Plaque at St Anne’s Cathedral, Belfast.

Dean Crooks staged his first Christmas Sit-out for charities in 1976, establishing a tradition continued by all his successors.

The Blue Plaque, to be erected by the Ulster History Circle, will be unveiled at the West front of the Cathedral in Donegall Street, Belfast, on Friday 12 December, when the present Dean, the Very Revd John Mann, will begin the 38th annual Sit-out.

Dean Crooks' son Sam Crooks will unveil the plaque, which commemorates a man who had the Cathedral and the City of Belfast in his heart. It is funded by Belfast City Council.

In 1975, after severe flooding in Bangladesh resulted in many thousands of deaths, the Dean decided to stand on Donegall Street outside his Cathedral to collect money for the disaster appeal. This impromptu collection was so successful that he was persuaded to repeat it the following Christmas, using the slogan: 'Give and let live. Save the children, feed the hungry, heal the sick. Please don't pass them by.'

He realised that those in Northern Ireland had given generously to his building fund over the years, and it was now time for the Cathedral to be seen to support local charities.

And so began the 'Dean's Sit-out' which has become a major part of the Christmas tradition in Northern Ireland. Dean Sammy was dubbed Black Santa by the media and community.

The Dean was awarded the OBE in 1981, chiefly for his services to charity

Sadly, soon after his retirement, Dean Crooks died in a road accident on his way to a meeting at St Anne's. He was 66. A headline in a local newspaper stated: 'The Pilgrim passes on... Thousands mourn the man who touched the heart of Belfast.'

Looking ahead to the unveiling of the plaque, Dean Crooks' son Sam said: "My father would have seen this Blue Plaque as recognition of the generosity



of the people of Northern Ireland. Every year - in the worst of the Troubles - he was amazed at how much people gave to those who were less well off in our society.”

The Ulster History Circle, formed in the 1980s, is a voluntary organisation that places commemorative plaques in public places in towns and villages all over Ulster in honour of men and women who have contributed to Northern Ireland’s history.

New Diocesan Youth Worker for Cork, Cloyne and Ross

The Bishop of Cork, Cloyne and Ross, has announced the appointment of Ms Kristin Hollowell, as a Diocesan Youth Worker in the Diocese. Kristin will be based in East Cork and Cork City, and will also spend half her time as lay chaplain at Middleton College, Middleton, County Cork.



Kristin Hollowell, new Diocesan Youth Worker based in East Cork and Cork City, as well as part-time Chaplain at Middleton College.

Kristin is originally from Southern California and has been living and working in Ireland for four years. She spent two years based in Rosscarbery, County Cork, working in the Ross Union of Parishes., before moving to Middleton College as a residential youth worker for two years.

Kristin says:

I cannot wait to get started in my position, to see what new opportunities and adventures we can create for the young people in this Diocese. I am so excited to meet new people, reconnect with old friends and encourage other youth leaders.

New book reveals 'strong gay scene' in Irish Catholic church

Irish Independent - Ground-breaking new research into the sexual lives of Irish Catholic priests has revealed many of them are or have been sexually active, that the bishops are aware of the situation, and that there is a gay scene within the church.

'Thirty-Three Good Men: Celibacy, Obedience and Identity' publishes new analysis of priests' views from a series of interviews conducted by Dr John Weafer, a former seminarian who is now married with children.

The book, which has just been published by Columba Books, reveals that one parish priest interviewed confidentially by Weafer is in a long term gay relationship.

Speaking to the Irish Independent, the author said 'Fr C' was "very happy with his life as a priest and a person".

Another priest interviewed, 'Fr L' was ordained in the 1990s. It was only when he was ordained that he finally ended up 'sleeping' with another priest.

"Although we both vowed it would never happen again, it did and I was really very confused," he said.

When he ended up in bed "fumbling around" with another priest, he decided to try the gay scene.

Fr L then "discovered a strong clerical gay scene in Ireland", although it was not easy to access because of the clerics' need for secrecy.

He believes that there are "quite a lot of gay guys in the priesthood" and on one occasion when he went into a gay bar in Dublin, he recognised at least nine priests in the bar.

Dr Weafer said he did not think that the Irish hierarchy would be shocked by the revelations in the book as the interviews showed that the "hierarchy are aware" of what is going on.

"As long as priests don't go public and don't flaunt those actions that don't correspond with being a celibate priest" they turn a blind eye, he claimed.

This will shock many as the official church's attitude on homosexuality deems it as intrinsically disordered.

According to Dr Weafer: "If a priest was to say in the morning 'I am gay', he would be fired. Priests have learned to keep their heads down".

The researcher, who was the first lay director of the Irish Bishops' Council for Research and Development in Maynooth, said that while most of the priests he interviewed lived celibate lives, and some are enthusiastic about their priesthood, others have become disillusioned.

The new research shows that the majority of Irish priests are unhappy with mandatory celibacy.

Those most enthusiastic about the retention of celibacy are younger, more conservative priests, the research shows.

Many of the priests were highly critical of the fact that sexuality was a taboo when they were training to be priests in the seminary.

The majority of 33 priests interviewed by Dr Weafer for the book were heterosexual.

One former priest had married and joined the Church of Ireland while Fr L has since decided to leave the priesthood, as he found the double standards too much. Another gay priest Fr G had opted to remain in the priesthood and was not sexually active.

<http://www.independent.ie/entertainment/books/new-book-reveals-strong-gay-scene-in-irish-catholic-church-30781075.html>