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## Presbyterians set to mark Reformation with key events in Derry, Dublin and Belfast



### New Irish Arts Youth Choir

As the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation approaches next month, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, the largest Protestant denomination in Northern Ireland, is to hold a

special celebration of this pivotal moment in European and church history on three consecutive nights in three different locations across Ireland.

Entitled 'Faith at the Crossroads: Rediscovering the Reformation' the public events will take place in Dublin, Londonderry and Belfast. Presbyterian Moderator, Rt. Rev. Dr. Noble McNeely explained that each of the special worship services were open to all and will celebrate the Reformation's impact, legacy and enduring importance, both locally and globally. Musicians from New Irish Arts, and an international speaker will also take part.

"As a Church and as Presbyterians, we have a rich heritage that comes directly out of the Reformation and the reformed, or Protestant tradition. While this in itself is one significant reason to mark what Martin Luther did in 1517, there are also deeper and more profound reasons to give thanks," Dr. McNeely said.

"For at the heart of what we know today as the Reformation is Luther's momentous discovery that a person's salvation, that is being made right with God as if we had never sinned, was secured by simply believing in Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. Salvation wasn't achieved by doing

good works, or by any other means, but trusting in Jesus' death and God's grace alone. As a result, this enabled men, women and children to know their sins had actually been forgiven - wonderful reasons to celebrate.”

On 31st October 1517, Martin Luther, an Augustinian friar, nailed a list of 95 short theological statements to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany, to be debated within the local university. Known as his ‘95 Theses’, this simple act, which was critical of the religious order of the day, was to change the course of world history.

The three celebratory events being held by the Church are free to attend. They will take place on October 17 in Abbey Presbyterian Church in Dublin, Waterside Theatre in Londonderry on October 18 and in Assembly Buildings, Belfast on October 19, each starting at 7.30pm.

Rev. David Johnston, minister of Hamilton Road Presbyterian Church in Bangor, County Down, who is leading the team organising the events, said that all would be very welcome, “Faith at the Crossroads isn’t a lecture, but a celebratory event that combines worship, reflection and discussion. With its emphasis on freedom of conscience, the Reformation also sowed the

seeds of democracy and religious freedom in Western Europe.

“We will be reflecting on this and the overall impact of the Reformation in a panel discussion. Each panel will include a former Moderator from the area in which the celebration is being held along with a church historian and a social commentator.

“At each venue we are also looking forward to having New Irish Arts lead worship for us, which will include a new arrangement of one of Luther’s hymns. We also look forward to welcoming Dr. Conrad Mbewe, pastor of Kabwata Baptist Church in Zambia, who will bring us a global perspective of the Reformation,” Rev. Johnston said.

During the celebration those attending will also get a flavour of some of the key moments in Martin Luther’s life from a 1983 film starring Jonathan Pryce as Luther.

New Irish Arts exists to present Christianity, resource the church and support Christians in the Arts. The group consists of singers, players, actors and visual artists from a mixture of professional, teaching and student

backgrounds. With a network of several hundred participants, the group facilitates and promotes an active and varied programme each year.

The New Irish Choir and Orchestra is a vibrant group of Christian musicians. Founded in 1994 by composer and hymn-writer Keith Getty, the group is now led by Artistic Director Jonathan Rea. The group is passionate about sharing Christianity through the Arts and working in partnership with the church.

Dr. Conrad Mbewe has served as pastor of Kabwata Baptist Church since 1987 and as principal of the Lusaka Ministerial College. He holds an MA in Pastoral Theology and a PhD in Missions. Among other roles Dr. Mbewe is the chancellor of the African Christian University in Lusaka and a board member of Covenant College in the eastern province of Zambia. He is also the editor of a theological journal called *Reformation Zambia* which is published three times a year. Dr. Mbewe has been a speaker at the Bangor Worldwide Missionary Convention.

## **Former Drumcree priest reinvents himself as successful entrepreneur**

A former Catholic priest at the centre of the Drumcree dispute in the 1990s has spoken about his rise as an entrepreneur to run the largest IT consultancy charity in Europe, the Irish News reports

Kerry native Eamon Stack was a key figure in the dispute while serving as a Jesuit priest on the Garvaghy Road in Portadown.

In 1997 the former cleric helped to say open air Mass in the middle of the road after the British army refused to allow local people to walk to a nearby church.

The image of a lines of armoured military vehicles and British soldiers blocking the path of parishioners were beamed around the world.

During the Mass the priest shook hands with some of the troops who had formed the blockade.

He was also a leading member of the Garvaghy Road Residents' Coalition, which opposed Orange Order marches along the mainly nationalist Garvaghy Road.

The dispute, which began in 1995, sparked violent scenes across the north in subsequent years after the RUC forcefully removed protesting nationalists from the road to facilitate the Orange Order march from Drumcree Church to Portadown town centre.

Orangemen have been holding regular protests at Drumcree since they were banned from walking along the road in 1998.

“So, you had this extraordinary, ironic situation: in order to facilitate the Orangemen to go to a church service at the end of our estate, and walk through the middle of it, they had banned us from going to Mass,” Mr Stack said.

“So, we held mass in front of the British personnel carriers – and it was a good moment of protest, of simple protest.

“And all the residents were sitting there, on their own chairs that they had carried in, to say Mass in front of it.

“And we came to the sign of peace in the Mass.

He said that five priests took part in the Mass that day.

“And there was a choice - and I chose to go back, and shake hands with the soldiers.

“And I’ve never been forgiven for that, by that community, or by a lot of members of that community.

“And yet, that was the action – one of the actions in my life – I’m proudest to have done.”

Since the height of the Drumcree dispute Mr Stack has left the priesthood and married.

He has also made his mark on the world of business after helping to set up the Enclude, an organisation which works with 2,000 charities in Ireland providing cost savings estimated at €55 million. It also has presence in twenty two countries and is particularly active in streamlining services for addiction services.

## **Census figures ‘legitimise’ faith-based school network, says cleric**

A senior [Church of Ireland](#) figure has defended State funded faith-based schools, saying the fact that over 91.2 per cent of the population proclaims to practise a religion legitimises the current system, Patsy McGarry reports in the Irish Times.





**‘If over 90 per cent of our population claims religious affiliation then that is important to the people in our society,’ says Church of Ireland Dean of Waterford Maria Jansson.**

The church’s Dean of [Waterford Maria Jansson](#) said the situation in [Ireland](#) was “in stark contrast to the UK, and to much of Western Europe”.

It was true, she said, that the 2016 census “showed that people from 180 different countries registered as non-Irish immigrants; 612,018 Irish residents spoke a foreign language at home, 30 per cent of those who spoke a foreign language at home were born in Ireland, and 57.4 per cent of these were children”.

This meant Irish society “has become pluralist, but I contend it most definitely is not post-Christian, nor is it secular. That over 90 per cent of the population claim religious affiliation gives legitimacy to the existence of faith schools, albeit working and responding to a changed and pluralist culture,” she said.

Dean Jansson was speaking at a Joint Managerial Body (JMB) Education Conference in Dublin’s Croke [Park](#) on “Faith in our Schools: Creideamh – Culture – Curriculum”. The JMB represents over 375 voluntary secondary schools in Ireland run in line with a religious ethos.

“If over 90 per cent of our population claims religious affiliation then that is important to the people in our society,” Dean Jansson said.

In Ireland there remained “a fundamental sense of the holy in life, people still hold a deep affection for community ties and there are often displays of openness to neighbour that can be profoundly noble”.

The “challenge and the opportunity for people of faith is not to run away from the ambiguity and confusion of our age, but delve deep and see what within our faith traditions provides a

perspective, moral compass and spiritual resource for the future”.

Among “very strong reasons for educating young people in a faith context” is that it offers them a way “in which to make sense of what is going on in the world,” she said. Even for those who want no part of a faith tradition, “an educated person should be culturally literate” and “Western culture is imbued with Judaeo-Christian metaphor”.

It was the case that “faith-based education functions on an ethical premise, namely that each of us is responsible and accountable for how we act and speak”.

Increasingly, she saw “children who need that structure to help them come to terms with the maelstrom within, chaos at home or the complexities of peer relationships”. School “may be the only environment where boundaries of behaviour and attitude are established and maintained”.

And a faith-based education worked on the premise that “the individual is of intrinsic value by virtue of his or her humanity”.

## Installation of President of Methodist Women Ireland

Members and friends from all over Ireland recently gathered in Finaghy Methodist church, Belfast, to welcome Elizabeth McWatters (pictured) as the new MWI All-Ireland President.

Born in Dublin, Elizabeth later moved to Belfast and had a career as an academic bookseller before taking early retirement to focus on mission work and theological studies.

An intrepid traveller, her theme for her two years of office (2017-2019) is 'Journey with Jesus' and she encouraged all present to join her in that journey and to step out in faith, seizing opportunities to witness and to serve in the days ahead.

Following a time of praise led by Cairnshill Praise Group, the act of installation was led by the President of the Methodist Church in Ireland, the Rev Dr Laurence Graham, who said how much the Church valued the work of Methodist Women in Ireland.

The scope and vitality of this work came through in the 2016-2017 report brought by Linda McGuffin, Elizabeth's predecessor, who was

thanked most warmly for the lead she had given over the past two years.

Amongst other contributors to the service were Dr Fergus O’Ferrall, the Lay Leader of Conference; the Rev Dr Livingstone Thompson of the Moravian church; the Rev Colin Gracie, the minister of Finaghy Methodist; and Louise Wilson, World Federation of Methodist & Uniting Church Women Area President.

As her President’s project, Elizabeth will be raising funds in support of the Joint European Area Seminar of the WFM&UCW to be held in Belfast in June 2018.

The uplifting service was followed by a festive spread in the church hall organised by Finaghy Methodist church catering team.

## **New rector of Stormont**

Bishop Harold Miller of Down & Dromore, has instituted Revd Emma Rutherford as rector of Stormont. Emma is only the third rector in the parish’s 55 year history and the first woman to be appointed. The service took place on Monday 18 September 2017 in the striking St Molua’s Church which was designed by the late Dennis O’D Hanna.

Emma is no stranger to Down and Dromore, nor to East Belfast having been employed for 4 years as the family and children's worker in Knocknagoney Parish.

Her previous carer was in textiles, home furnishings and interior design, however some years ago she felt God was calling her to other forms of ministry outside her local church.

The call to Knocknagoney became a call to ordination and Emma began her training in Dublin in 2009.

She served all of her placements in Down and Dromore and was ordained in 2011 to serve as deacon intern in St Jude's, Ballynafeigh, before moving on to serve her curacy in the Diocese of Connor.

Most recently Emma was serving in the Diocese of Connor as Diocesan Curate with special responsibility for Glencairn and Whiterock parishes in North Belfast. She loved her time with those two churches, and will miss the people very much, but senses a strong call to Stormont.

The preacher for the service was Revd Canon Norman Jardine, former Rector of St Jude's.

Emma first met Norman when exploring that initial call back in 2005 when she joined the fellowship of vocation and undertook the Network Course which he led. She was then fortunate to be placed with him as her training Rector during her deacon intern year.

Emma is married to Graham and they have a teenage son, William.

Speaking of the family's new adventure, Emma said: "We are so grateful for the dedicated Christian witness of the faithful people of Stormont parish over the years, and feel incredibly blessed to have been appointed. We look forward with excitement to this new stage of our journey as we walk together with the folks of St Molua's, and eagerly await what God has in store. We would appreciate your prayers, thank you."

## **Ordination in Tullamore**

Colleagues, family and friends joined the parishioners of Tullamore Union of Parishes for the ordination of the Revd Alison Irvine, to the diaconate. The service took place in St Catherine's Church in Tullamore on Sunday 17th September, at 6.30pm.

Bishop Pat Storey ordained Alison, who was presented for ordination by Archdeacon Leslie Stevenson. The preacher at the service was Canon Dr Maurice Elliott, principal of the Church of Ireland Theological Institute, where Alison undertook her training. The Revd Isaac Delamere, rector of Tullamore, assisted in the planning and leading of the service. Alison will serve in Tullamore Union of Parishes. Alison's father is a diocesan lay reader in Clogher diocese and her brother Adrian is a parish reader. Both robed for the service.

Alison brings gifts and experience gained through her previous career in the trade union movement, including some years working in Scotland. She is a native of Lisbellaw in County Fermanagh. Parishioners of Tullamore Union of Parishes were glad to be able to welcome her family and friends, especially those who travelled from a distance to support her on a special evening.

## **Priest defends funeral gatecrasher**

A funeral gatecrasher who attended every wake at her local church for the last 14 years has been





defended by its priest after being criticised by grieving relatives.

Fr Noah Connolly, from Church of the Holy Redeemer in Slough, refused to name the "poor lady".

He told The Times: "She is a Catholic and she is convinced she needs to go to as many masses as possible."

She also attended buffets held by grieving relatives who called the woman's presence intrusive, and criticised her for helping herself.

Margaret Whitehead from Warfield in Berkshire said that the woman attended her daughter Catherine's funeral in August.

She said: "She was eating from the buffet like there was no tomorrow.

"There were a lot of people at the funeral from Catherine's work so I just assumed she was a colleague.

"When I spoke to her though she told me she used to work with Catherine as a waitress. My daughter never worked as a waitress.

"There's mass every morning, she doesn't need to go to funerals. She's only going when there's a cheap lunch."

Fr Connolly said although he is aware of the complaints about the woman attending stranger's funerals, he is powerless to prevent her from attending church services.

He added: "Every funeral we have she comes and if there is a reception afterwards she makes her way to it without invitation.

"I can't exactly say, 'you can't come here'."

## **Catholic agency urges UN summit climate action**

The Catholic Agency for Overseas Development, or Cafod, has called upon world leaders to



correct a perceived poor response to the threat posed by climate change.

The call to action coincides with a meeting of the United Nation's General Assembly in New York on Tuesday where sustainable development around the world will be discussed.

Head of public policy at Cafod, Graham Gordon told Premier: "There are still significant challenges.

"I think one of the areas that isn't yet taken seriously is the fact we need to do development differently and really stop using coal, oil, gas and other fossil fuels..."

Representatives from 193 member nations are due to discuss the UN's 2030 Sustainable Development Goals which include taking "urgent



action to combat climate change and its impacts".

The 17-point strategy, which was enacted in 2015, also includes plans to eradicate poverty, hunger and gender inequality, as well as the provision of sustainable water management and sustainable energy for everyone.

Mr Gordon went on to say: "It is an ambitious target and, in many ways, it's setting a new way of looking at development over the next 15 years.

"Now, we're two years in with 13 years yet to go, and some progress has been made."

NASA reported on Monday that August 2017 was the second warmest August since modern record keeping began 137 years ago, stoking fears over global warming.

Expressing some confidence the UN action plan could help tackle climate change, Mr Gordon added: "It's right to be optimistic because I think in the last few years we've seen a slowdown in the increase in temperature. So, it is possible to avert the worst effects but it's by no means inevitable. We need to step up our action."

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