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## **MMA world champion Leah McCourt's leap of faith for Christian Aid Ireland**



**MMA world champion, Leah McCourt, and friends get ready to take a leap of faith for Christian Aid Ireland.**

Northern Ireland's MMA world champion, Leah McCourt and Megan Atcheson, Amy Meehan and Grace Skelton from Glenlola Collegiate School gear up to take a leap of faith for Christian Aid Ireland when they will abseil the 400 ft. descent down Belfast Castle on Saturday, April 14.

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**Leah McCourt with Megan Atcheson, Amy Meehan and Grace Skelton from Glenlola Collegiate School**

And they want you to take the leap with them.

Christian Aid Ireland is looking for 50 adventurous individuals to join them for this exciting abseil down one of Belfast's most historic buildings.

Leah said: "Christian Aid's abseil challenge is going to be an incredible experience and is something amazing to do for those less fortunate.

"I know and hope that people will join me to take part and donate to help people living in some of the poorest parts of the world. I am thrilled to be able to take on this challenge for such an important cause."

Chief Executive of Christian Aid Ireland, Rosamond Bennett, added: "I am challenging the people of Belfast and Northern Ireland to join

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myself, Leah and many others on Saturday the 14th of April to descend Belfast Castle.

"Together we can help vulnerable people in need, who show incredible strength and bravery through the many challenges and natural disasters they face."

To register for the abseil visit [christianaid.ie/abseil](http://christianaid.ie/abseil) , email Christian Aid's office on [belfast@christian-aid.org](mailto:belfast@christian-aid.org) or call Tim Reynolds of Christian Aid Ireland on 028 9064 8133.

Participants are asked to raise or donate a minimum of £60 for Christian Aid Ireland's work.

## **Pope Francis could still visit Northern Ireland, archbishop suggests**

Pope Francis could still visit Northern Ireland, despite a stop not being part of his scheduled itinerary in August, Irish bishops have suggested.

Archbishop Diarmuid Martin of Dublin said that although a 'political event' was impossible, if Northern Ireland bishops organised an event around the family 'that might make it easier'.

Pope Francis is scheduled to make a brief visit to Ireland on August 25-26 for the World Meeting of Families.

He will be the first pope to visit since St John Paul II in 1971, where the Troubles made a visit to Northern Ireland too sensitive and dangerous.

Before the official announcement was made last month hopes were raised that with peace in place north of the border, Francis might become the first pontiff to visit Belfast.



That seems to have been put on ice with a senior Vatican source [telling Christian Today](#) that Brexit and the issue of a hard border 'complicates things quite a bit'.

As [James Macintyre](#) explains:

Why? Because the concept of a divided Ireland is anyway controversial, especially among Catholics, and a visit by the pope at a time of political uncertainty and unrest could be seen as an endorsement, however faint, of the concept of that divisive, hard border. Prior to the Brexit vote in 2016,

the North and South were making very serious inroads towards peace, and a trip to the former by Francis would have been seen as backing nothing other than peace. Instead, it now would have much more complicated connotations in this most sensitive of former conflict zones.

Therefore, it appears that a potential papal trip to Northern Ireland has been the first major international event that has fallen victim to Brexit.

However despite the warnings a number of bishops have voiced hopes the possibility of a trip north could still get the go ahead. 'He is coming for the World Meeting of Families, that is his primary purpose. He will focus on the many difficulties and challenges families have to face,' Martin [said](#).

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'He doesn't want big shows, he wants to be just present with those who are marginalised,' Martin added amid speculation he may visit a prison, as he is prone to do in Italy.

## Church of Scotland's new man in Jerusalem



### Rev Dr John McCulloch in Jerusalem with his family

A former Head of Hispanic Studies at Glasgow University has taken up one of the Church of Scotland's most unusual roles to lead the Kirk's congregation in Jerusalem.

Rev Dr John McCulloch was ordained and introduced to St Andrew's Scots Memorial Church just outside the Old City walls of Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

### From rural Argyll to Jerusalem

In doing so he has swapped rural Argyll, where he was a probationary minister, for his role as Minister and Mission Partner,

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which will take him through armed checkpoints, back and forth from Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip on a regular basis.

He will miss living in an area that he describes as the "cradle of Christianity in Britain - where the beauty, peace and tranquillity of the natural landscape is so inspiring".



### **At St Andrew's Scots Memorial Church**

Some have joked that they will be more likely to visit him in Jerusalem than Lochgoilhead (where he lived previously), as it is easier to get there, especially in the winter when it is often cut off by snow, ice and landslides.

Born in Farnborough but brought up in Paris, Madrid, Barcelona, and Lanarkshire he says that the job "leapt out" at him "despite its complexities."

One of the reasons he was drawn to work in Jerusalem is the diversity of the congregation which includes Palestinians, Messianic Jews, expat Scots, international staff from NGOs and pilgrims; and

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the wide-ranging partners that the Church of Scotland is working with across Israel & The Palestinian Territories.

Many of these partners are engaged in issues of social justice, across the divides of this conflicted land.

Speaking about the new appointment, Dr McCulloch described it as "a huge honour" and said he is "looking forward to serving the church and the wider community."

He said: "To live out this call in the very place where Christ walked, is both humbling and a real privilege.

"Christianity is primarily a way of being in the world, and the church here is called to be a community of compassion that reaches out to those across the social and political divides, to build God's reign of peace, justice and love."

## **Coming together**

Dr McCulloch is aware that he will need to be sensitive to the complex political and religious landscape of Israel/ Palestine, whilst serving there.

"The Church offers a space where people from different backgrounds can come together and listen to each other's stories, where there are so many walls that divide", he said.

Although Dr McCulloch was brought up in a Christian home, his faith was challenged during his university years, when he struggled to find answers for the atrocities in Rwanda and the Balkans.

After nearly losing his faith through some difficult years, he was drawn back through the preaching of a prominent Church of Scotland Minister, who showed him real grace and friendship.

Whilst it's a big change from his life as an academic at Glasgow University, there are many aspects of his formation and profession that will be helpful in shaping his ministry.

Having lived in Bolivia, and spent time in Nicaragua, Honduras & El Salvador where he came into contact with Latin American Liberation

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Theology, he is interested to explore its role in the context of Israel/Palestine.

He was drawn to Liberation Theology because of the focus on the poor, the politically oppressed and the marginalised.

## **Crossing divides**

Dr McCulloch said: "The church has a very important role in The Holy Land, not just in terms of supporting those working towards a just peace, but because our Christian faith invites us to always hear the human stories behind from across the socio-political and religious divides.

"History shows us that real societal change seldom comes from the top down, but usually from grassroots communities, which is where the church belongs. In the 20th century it was the suffragettes, Gandhi and Martin Luther King who effected the most positive changes through their unrelenting fight for justice."

The Scots Memorial Church in Jerusalem began to be built in 1927, during the era of the British Mandate, and Dr McCulloch will work with an associate minister, Rev Kate McDonald of the Scottish Episcopal Church, who is based at St Andrew's Galilee Church in Tiberias.

Dr McCulloch is joined by his wife Annette, a GP, and his three younger children aged between 3 and 11, with his eldest daughter finishing her studies in the UK during term-time and travelling out to Jerusalem in the holidays.

The family began learning Arabic as they prepared to move out.

Rev Iain Cunningham, convener of the World Mission Council of the Church of Scotland, said: "It was a great privilege to be in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday morning to participate in a truly special and unique occasion when John McCulloch was ordained as the new minister at St Andrews, Jerusalem with St Andrews, Tiberias.

"The new ministry began appropriately with John and his family, together with representatives of the World Mission Council and the



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Council of Assembly, joining the joyous Palm Sunday Procession from the Mount of Olives into the Old City in which Christians from all around the world join with local Palestinian Christians to mark the start of Holy Week.”

## **Ordinations in Dublin and Rome**

Best wishes to Brother Matthew Farrell and Br Jesse Maingot, members of the Dominicans who were ordained deacons in St Saviour’s church, Dublin, on 2 April, by Bishop Denis Nulty

Yesterday in the Basilica of Saint Prassede, Rome, Bishop Alan McGuckian SJ, Bishop of Raphoe, ordained two seminarians to the diaconate, Reverend Anthony Briody, from the Diocese of Raphoe, and Reverend Declan McGeehan, from the Diocese of Derry. The two new deacons are resident in the Pontifical Irish College in Rome, from where they are perusing their studies for the priesthood.

Monsignor Ciarán O’Carroll, Rector of the Pontifical Irish College said, "It is with great joy that we celebrate the ordination to the diaconate today of Anthony and Declan. On behalf of everyone at the Pontifical Irish College I congratulate our two new deacons on their ordination. I wish them every happiness and blessing as they commence their diaconal ministries of service, of charity and of leadership in prayer and liturgy. May they experience God's grace anew in their lives so that they may courageously proclaim the Gospel in word and deed, generously serving the people of God in their dioceses with care and compassion."

## **Anglican leaders pay tribute following the death of Winnie Madikizela-Mandela**

Tributes have been paid to Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, the former wife of the late South African anti-apartheid leader and President Nelson Mandela, who died on Monday at the age of 81. The Archbishop of Cape Town, Thabo Makgoba, Primate of the Anglican



## **Winnie Madikizela-Mandela at a reception to mark her 80th birthday in September 2016**

Church of Southern Africa, is currently in London for a meeting of the Lambeth Conference 2020 Design Group. He told ACNS: “I send my condolences to the family. I am humbled to have known her. I admired and respected her. May she rest in peace and rise in glory.”

He added: “She certainly played her part with great courage. Yes she made some mistakes – but let us forgive her and honour her for what she did. She served her country and her people. When she

spoke at rallies, she was so articulate, so articulate. She wasn’t scared at all.”

Abp Thabo got to know her over many years. In his book “Madiba. Faith and Courage: Praying with Mandela” he recalls an early occasion with the Release Mandela campaign when he travelled to see her in Bradford in Free State where she had been banished by

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the apartheid government. He was taking food and clothes, including track suits to be passed on to Nelson Mandela in jail.

“She was living alone in this tiny council house with no electricity. She could have been attacked at any time. She was so courageous.”

The last time they met was on the day of Nelson Mandela’s funeral. Archbishop Thabo first led a small service with relatives at the family home. Winnie Mandela was there – so too was the former president’s second wife, Graca Machal. Archbishop Thabo remembers the two women sitting peacefully beside each other.

“It was as if they were accepting that they had both played a significant part in his life and they both belonged to him.”

Abp Thabo has remained in contact while Mrs Mandela was in hospital, regularly sending her SMS messages. “She was grateful. She used to say every time she got an SMS from me, she got out of hospital.”

The Archbishop Emeritus of Cape Town, Desmond Tutu, also paid tribute, saying that “Winnie Madikizela-Mandela was for many years a defining symbol of the struggle against apartheid. She refused to be bowed by the imprisonment of her husband, the perpetual harassment of her family by security forces, detentions, bannings and banishment. Her courageous defiance was deeply inspirational to me, and to generations of activists.”

## **See also**

**[Speaking to the Soul - today’s contributor is Archbishop Fred Hiltz of the Anglican Church in Canada and](#)**

**[Media Review - The witness of Martin Luther King - links to three articles](#)**

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