

Celebrities set for pilgrimage on BBC TV show



Ex-Men Behaving Badly star Neil Morrissey and Paul Daniels' widow Debbie McGee have signed up to "live as pilgrims" for a new BBC show.

The Pilgrimage, a three-part series, will track famous faces - some religious and others atheists - as they swap the comforts and trappings of fame for 15 days to take part in Spain's Camino de Santiago.

"Living as simple pilgrims", they will stay in traditional hostels and "carry everything they need on their backs" while embarking on their "own spiritual journey" on BBC2.

Comedian Ed Byrne, ex-Gogglebox star the Rev Kate Bottley, M People singer Heather Small, journalist Raphael Rowe and JJ Chalmers, a former Royal Marines Commando who was wounded in Afghanistan, are also taking part in the medieval pilgrim route.

The series will combine "religious and spiritual debate" with "personal stories of self-discovery," the BBC said, with the physical challenge proving too much for some.

The series will "show how a group of well-known faces, taken out of their comfort zone, discover what their faith means to them as they walk in the footsteps of ancient pilgrims," BBC religion commissioning editor Fatima Salaria said.

The Pilgrimage is among several new programmes on religion and ethics announced for BBC1 and its sister channel.

Historian Dr David Starkey will reveal "how the Protestant Reformation unleashed fundamentalist beliefs, terror and holy war



across Europe in a way that is all too familiar to us today", the BBC said.

His one-hour, BBC2 documentary, filmed in Rome, Germany and the UK, will chart the spread of Martin Luther's ideas across Europe and into Britain.

The historian argues that Henry VIII's break with Rome was a "Tudor Brexit" that laid the foundations for conflicted attitudes to Europe today.

"There was the same literalism, the same passionate intensity, the same apocalyptic violence as now," he said.

On BBC1, Earth's Sacred Wonders will feature some of the greatest spiritual buildings and religious sites, while a strand of five films a year will explore faith and ethical issues in

Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism.

They include The Hotel For Refugees, a film about a small Irish Catholic community grappling with the impact of the arrival of Syrian refugees, and The Jews Of Canvey Island, which follows the North London Hasidic Jewish community as they relocate from urban Hackney to Canvey Island in Essex.

The BBC said Christian programming will remain the cornerstone of its religious output, citing live worship as well as Songs of Praise, Sunday Morning Live and The Big Questions.

Presbyterian Minister leaves Tyrone post for personal reasons

The sudden resignation of a Presbyterian Minister in Co Tyrone has shocked his congregation, it has been reported by the Belfast Telegraph.

Rev Barry Reid, of the Caledon and Minterburn Presbyterian Churches, announced his immediate resignation in early July "for personal reasons".

He had held the position for less than five years, having previously served as an Assistant Minister in Newcastle, Co Down.

It's understood the Presbytery in Armagh has installed a temporary minister, with plans to appoint a permanent post later this year.

Rev Reid graduated from Belfast Bible College in 2000, the same year he married his wife Ashley, with whom he has two children. In 2005, he furthered his religious training, graduating from Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia with a Master of Arts in religion.

Commenting on his sudden departure from his role, a spokesperson for the Presbyterian Church in Ireland stated: "I understand that the minister of Caledon and Minterburn Presbyterian Churches resigned at the start of July for personal reasons.

"The Armagh Presbytery has appointed one of its ministers to look after the congregations and will be giving further consideration to the matter, including putting more permanent arrangements in place when it meets in the autumn."

It is the second time in recent weeks the Presbyterian Church in Co Tyrone has suffered major upset.

In June, the Presbyterian Church in Co Tyrone suffered the sudden death of the Rev Roy Campbell of Clogher and Glenhoy Presbyterian Church, who died suddenly at the age of 47.

He is survived by his wife and their two young children, and his cause of death remains unknown.

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland has more than 225,000 members with 539 congregations in 19 Presbyteries.

“Priests are terrified” of being falsely accused of abuse

Fr Tim Hazelwood joined the Association of Catholic Priests after he was falsely accused of child abuse and got no support from church officials.

The parish priest of Killeagh in Co. Cork has said priests in Ireland today are “living in fear” of false accusations of abuse.

In an interview with Independent.ie, Fr Tim Hazelwood explained that he joined the Association of Catholic Priests (ACP) after he was falsely accused of child abuse and got no support from church officials.

He also spoke about the toll the episode took on his mental health.

“I’d seven years of hell and some of the policies that exist aren’t very priest-friendly; you’re presumed guilty and priests are terrified,” he said.

“I got no support, nobody official from the Church came to see me or to ask how I was getting on; in some ways I felt they actually put stumbling blocks in my way,” he chided.

He said he got involved with the ACP because it is vital for a priest to have a support network, otherwise “you’re on your own, you’re isolated, and because we don’t have immediate families with us it’s much worse.”

In 2009 he was informed that an anonymous complaint about child abuse had been made against him to his diocese. Even though the claimant never came forward, the complaint was forwarded to the HSE and the Gardaí.

According to Fr Hazelwood, his accuser proceeded to send anonymous letters and make threatening phone calls to him. When Fr Hazelwood discovered who the complainant was, he made a complaint to the Gardaí.

A criminal case against the man was not pursued and the priest opted to take a civil case in the High Court. In 2016 his accuser admitted making the false accusation and made a contribution to charity.

The Cork priest, who is in his late 50s, said that as a trained psychotherapist he understood the value of getting help, but that many priests don't.

"I couldn't sleep and was on sleeping tablets. It wasn't easy, though, it was the worst few years of my life."

He is now on the leadership team for the ACP and warned that many of the organisation's members are worried about their mental health.

Even though the average age of a priest is now 70, their workload is increasing.

"For example, I'm in a parish where there used to be two priests and now I'm on my own. So you have an ageing group of men and their workload is pretty big; we are all looking to the future."

He also said that he feels that members of the public, including women, should be given a greater role in the Church.

“I think the reality is that God is leading us in a different direction but I think as a church we are resisting. We have to accept that the old way is gone,” Fr Hazelwood said.

“We have to be open and allow lay people to take over some of the roles and functions that priests do. Also, if it wasn’t for the women in my parish it would probably close down.

“Pope Francis is looking into ordaining women as deacons and in today’s world I think women should be given a strong, leadership role, which they are denied – it’s giving off a very bad message.”

Mothers’ Union celebrate founder Mary Sumner at Derry See House

Members of Mothers’ Union branches from across the Diocese of Derry and Raphoe gathered at the See House in Londonderry yesterday afternoon for a prayer service to mark Mary Sumner Day, when the organisation remembers the woman who founded it 140 years ago this year. Diocesan President, Mary Good, reminded those present that 2017 was also the 130th anniversary of Mothers’ Union in Ireland.

Mrs Good had hoped that the 'Called by Name' service would take place in the picturesque Quiet Garden at the See House, but an unpromising weather forecast put paid to that ambition. Instead a marquee was erected on the lawn and the service took place there, led by the Bishop of Derry and Raphoe, Rt Rev Ken Good.

Around one hundred people took part, with music provided by the Northern Lights Choir.

The address was given by the Bishop's Curate in charge of the Moville Group of Parishes, Rev Suzanne Cousins. It ranged from the thoughts of biblical scholars to lyrics by the American rap group, the Black Eyed Peas. Rev Cousins told the congregation that in the Kingdom of God, barriers of gender and ethnicity were demolished. "God's grace is for all," she said. "Jesus then calls us all. He builds not walls but bridges and we have the privilege of being co-workers with him in this great building project."

Rev Cousins said Jesus cared for the care-givers, and that same recognition was, she suggested, what kick-started Mothers' Union all those years ago – Mary Sumner's Christ-like compassion and recognition that family care-givers also needed healing and nurturing in faith

and love. “That’s what Mothers Union today, as a ministry of the church, is about: bridge-building and care-giving for the Kingdom of God. And so are we. Healing, wholeness and salvation are what Jesus Christ came to bring, and they’re what Mothers’ Union is about, they’re what the mission of the Church is all about.”

During the service, members of the congregation were invited to fix their names – written on pieces of paper – to a tree at the front of the marquee, symbolising that they themselves had been ‘called by name’ to serve the Lord.

As the service drew to a close, Kay Clarke, a former President of the Diocesan Mothers’ Union, presented Mrs Good and Bishop Ken with a ruby rose to mark the couple’s 40th wedding anniversary, which they celebrated recently.

Afterwards, those present enjoyed refreshments in the marquee and, in some cases, wandered into the nearby Quiet Garden, to enjoy the serenity and beauty there. Bishop Good also led the assembly in two separate renditions of ‘Happy Birthday’, to mark

significant milestones in the lives of two of the ladies present.

Garvagh young people SPARK into life

More than 40 young people are taking part in the annual SPARK Week programme in Garvagh. The cross-community initiative, which is now in its fifth year, is based at St Paul's Church of Ireland and brings young people from across the community together to build new friendships and help communities in Garvagh and nearby Glenullin.

SPARK (Servants Pursuing a Radical Kingdom) has had to manage this year without local government assistance following the decision by Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council not to support the initiative. The Rector of Errigal and Desertoghill, Canon Paul Whittaker, says he was disappointed by the withdrawal of council support but says it has made the organisers even more appreciative of the help they have received from local businesses.

“A huge effort goes into making SPARK a success,” Canon Whittaker says. “We have 43 teenagers taking part this year and eight young adult leaders. We also have an adult team – 12 ladies and six men – who do the catering and supervise the young people as they go about their work in the community.

“It’s hard work but good work,” the Rector says. “This is our way of sharing in Derry and Raphoe’s mission, ‘Transforming Community – Radiating Christ’.”

Youth participation has trebled since SPARK was first launched in 2013. “We began with 14 young people, aged between 12 and 16. As its success has grown, we’ve had to put a cap on numbers. Forty was our limit although this year we’ve stretched that to 43 teenagers with eight young adult leaders. The whole operation is coordinated jointly by Melissa Andrews and the Diocesan Youth Officer for Derry and Raphoe, Martin Montgomery.”

Canon Whittaker explained how a typical SPARK day goes. “The young people’s day starts with breakfast together at 10am, after which it’s over to the Church for worship, teaching and prayer until 12.30pm. This helps

improve their attitudes toward each other and promotes mutual respect and understanding.

“Our young people are usually educated separately and they grow up quite segregated, so they’ve often little or no interaction with someone from a different faith denomination. Each afternoon on SPARK – through simple activities such as litter picks, painting and gardening for senior citizens – the young people get to know and trust each other in a safe, loving environment, and their acts of random kindness are much appreciated by the community.

“Being seen on the streets together in matching tee-shirts is a powerful statement to the people of Garvagh and Glenullin”, Canon Whittaker says. “But it’s not all hard work: the young people’s day finishes with dinner at 5.30pm, and afterwards there’s a programme of fun events until 9.30pm.”

SPARK (Servants Pursuing a Radical Kingdom) is part-funded by the Church of Ireland Priorities Fund. Local businesses which have sponsored the week this year include: TBF Thompson Ministries, Smyth Steel, Currie Engineering, Hugh Wade, Scott Engineering, Hans Clyde, Alison Wade and Alec Farlow.

Over 1,000 Quakers gather for Yearly Meeting

"We're people full of joy so that leads us to singing and dancing".

Not the sort of atmosphere one might expect from a gathering of Quakers, but that's what over 1,000 members are experiencing at the Yearly Meeting taking place at Warwick University this week.

"I think everyone will go home wanting a rest," London Quaker Gill Sewell told Premier.

The event is an opportunity for members to come together to set the direction of the body while being inspired to get stuck into their local communities.

Speakers this year include Labour MP Catherine West and Green MEP Molly Scott Cato who addressed how politics and faith can change the world.

Other sessions have included inter-faith dialogue, activism and international development.

Speaking about the impact of the meeting, Gill Sewell said: "When we get back - what we do in

our local communities is share the experience...and then look at what it is we can do as a community, what we're called to do in our small plot of Heaven and that will vary from meeting to meeting."

Around 23,000 people attend 480 Quaker meetings in Britain.

Christian Aid Ireland Harvest Appeal 2017

In this season of Harvest, most of us across the country are not in the fields gathering or gleaning, but with our families and friends, giving thanks for God's plentiful gifts, Tesssa Parnell of Christian Aid Ireland writes.

As we celebrate and praise God for providing all we need to eat, we also stand with our sisters and brothers in Malawi whose harvests are uncertain.

We stand with Frank, a farmer in Malawi, who was taught a planting calendar by his grandfather based on the regular seasons, but the ever-changing climate means he can't depend on this knowledge any longer. He used to rely on growing maize to feed his family, but



this crop is now unsuited to Malawi and fails easily when the rains don't come.

When the drought ruined the harvest, Frank's four-year-old son became critically ill and he had to carry him on foot for four miles to the hospital. Frank was told his son was severely malnourished.

"It is very pathetic, as a father, to feel helpless like that, to feel like you cannot provide food for your children, and that there is nothing you can do to make them better when they are crying."

Our partner, the Evangelical Association of Malawi, has been helping Frank and his family to thrive in such hostile conditions. With our

support, Frank has successfully grown a special variety of pigeon peas. This remarkable crop is high in protein and its deep roots are ideal for southern Malawi's dry soil, as it can resist the destructive flash flooding which is on the rise in the country.

Frank has already had a bumper crop of pigeon peas, but he still hasn't been able to make a profit. Many farmers like Frank work individually and often lack the space to effectively store their peas. This means they have no choice but to sell their harvests to unscrupulous middlemen, traders who buy at farm gates and drive prices down to the lowest level.

With your support, this project will bring farmers together into Farmers' Clubs, where they will learn vital business skills and work together to plan their planting to ensure a good balance of crops. They'll learn marketing techniques and new methods for production and storage of pigeon peas, and they will be trained in negotiating fair prices for their crops.

For Frank, this could mean he is able to make a profit – enough to feed his family and even send his four children to school.



Jesus tells us that he has come so that we may have life and have it abundantly. Through giving, acting, and praying this harvest, you will help Frank and farmers like him not just to survive, but to thrive.

Just £10/€11.74 could pay for a 5kg bag of seeds, enough to plant more than an acre of pigeon peas; £70/€82.20 could buy a bicycle so that an experienced farmer can reach over 100 farmers in remote areas to teach essential skills; and £500/€587 could set up a Farmers' Club, a tried and tested way to help a whole community of farmers beat the middlemen and get a fair price for their peas.

Harvest is the season to reflect upon all the good gifts that we have and how we can share them with others. By holding a soup lunch or church collection this autumn, in aid of Christian Aid Ireland, or by inviting one of its speakers to your church, you can help the charity support people like Frank, to prosper.

Christian Aid Ireland's Harvest Appeal worship resources, prayers and children's activities can be downloaded from the website. To find out more about how you can get involved this harvest, please visit christianaid.ie/harvest or contact the Dublin (01 406 5540) or Belfast offices (028 906 48133).

Family planning Hindu celebration believe it's Ireland's first

A Hindu 'Ganesh Chaturthi' celebration being planned for Westmeath is believed to be the first of its kind ever held in Ireland, the Westmeath Examiner reports.

The event honours the god Ganesha, which is represented as having an elephant head and is considered by Hindu adherents to be the lord of learning and letters

Vinnie (Vinaye) Mangal, a native of Mauritius, and his extended family are arranging the festival, which will start at his home at Kinnegad, before moving to the main location, Derrymore Water Adventure Centre in Killucan.

“It is a religious festival, but open to everybody,” says Vinny.

Events start on August 25, “Murthi Sthapana”, but the next day “Ganesh Visarjan” is the main celebration.

“We will leave the house and walk and dance to Derrymore,” he says.

With them, they will bring a clay statue of the Hindu god Ganesha that will be doused in the waters of Derrymore.

“We have made the statue in my house; we just have to paint it,” says Vinnie, explaining that part of the tradition is that homes have these clay statues in them for the start of the festival.

The art of making these statues is one that young Mauritians learn growing up, although Vinny says that most of the work on his has been done by a friend who is talented at this.

The religious ritual known as “Puja” will be performed by the religious official Pandit Hari Krishna, who is coming down from Northern Ireland for the occasion.

In preparation for the festival, which marks the deity's birthday, the community will be fasting, with total abstention from meat, fish, poultry, eggs and alcohol required. They are also required to abstain from intimate relations with their spouses.

“We think there will be 100-200 people,” says Vinny speaking of the parade from Kinnegad to Killucan.

Responsibility for feeding all of those will fall to Vinny and his wife Pamela and their extended family.

Participants so disposed will make donations which will be passed on to the family of a child in Mauritius born with severe health challenges, says Vinn

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