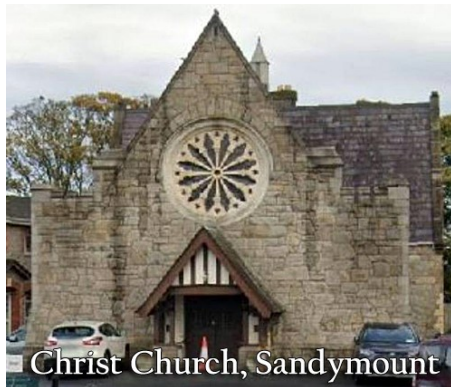




14th Sunday Ordinary Time 03 July 2022

CHURCH'S HANDLING OF SAME-SEX ISSUE LEFT 'LEGACY OF DISQUIET'



Christ Church, Sandymount

The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI) meets this week in Belfast. For the first time since 1858, members of the Presbyterian congregation in Sandymount will not be entitled to representation. Why? Because the Presbyterian-Methodist Alternating Ministry Scheme has been dissolved (because it has proved incompatible with requirements set by the Charities Regulator according to the church), and Christ Church Sandymount has been placed under exclusively Methodist governance. For the congregation, the severing of links with its Presbyterian heritage (which also led to the early retirement of its incumbent Presbyterian minister) is a matter of much regret. No doubt some will be relieved that this year's general assembly may pass without need to confront the controversy over same-sex marriage which has been such a live issue over the past three years, particularly in the Dublin and Munster Presbyteries. But it would be a great mistake to think that, having rid itself of its most "troublesome" congregation, this controversy is now gone. The church's handling of this case has caused it enormous reputational damage and has left a legacy of widespread disquiet. Some members have left in disgust; many who remain are deeply embarrassed and disillusioned. There are many facets which need to be examined and reflected upon humbly and honestly, ranging across church doctrine, pastoral care, human rights, constitutional law, privacy, fair process, transparency and accountability. The issue of same-sex relationships came to the fore in the PCI in 2018 when the assembly adopted a report from the Doctrine Committee which stated baldly: "In light of our understanding of Scripture and the Church's understanding of a credible profession of faith it is clear that same-sex couples are not eligible for communicant membership . . . We believe that their outward conduct and lifestyle is at variance with a life of obedience to Christ." Such a far-reaching and sensitive report would normally have been first noted by the assembly, sent out to local presbyteries for consultation and feedback, and a revised version returned to the assembly a year later for further discussion or final approval. But in 2018, with little notice or opportunity for informed debate, the assembly was forced into an immediate open vote. Acceptance was of course a fait accompli. A significant minority registered formal dissent from the decision, and shortly afterwards over 200 ministers and elders signed an open letter titled "A cry from the heart", publicly expressing their "profound sense of hurt, dismay and anger" - among them the minister and elders of Christ Church Sandymount. The church soon set about putting its newly adopted policy into action and, although the Doctrine Committee's report stated that "these decisions are to be made with charity", in practice a heavy-handed and oppressive line was followed. I have bitter personal experience of this as, although I have never been a member of PCI, my husband Steven Smyrl was an elder in Sandymount and was ultimately dismissed because of our same-sex marriage - the policy's first "test case". The Doctrine Committee never specifically defined the phrase "outward conduct and lifestyle", although elsewhere they stated that "homosexual activity is not consistent with Christian discipleship". But, short of installing cameras in bedrooms, how can such a judgment be safely and definitively made? The minister who instigated proceedings against Steven submitted as evidence screenshots taken surreptitiously from our social media accounts, but these were essentially nothing more than holiday snaps - hardly definitive evidence of "homosexual activity". Church authorities later castigated the minister and church council of Christ Church Sandymount for failing to "challenge" us about our relationship. But to do so would have directly breached our legal right to privacy in family life under both the Irish Constitution (as confirmed by the Supreme Court ruling in the 1973 McGee case) and the European Convention on Human Rights. The reality is that there are numerous reasons why people (particularly those in middle age), gay or straight, enter into civil marriages. Beyond the most obvious - companionship - these include: mutual support and caring, security, inheritance, and next-of-kin rights and responsibilities. Sexual activity of any kind cannot be assumed. When challenged again on this recently, church authorities issued an extraordinary statement: "such [same-sex] relationships, whether or not they involve sexual relations, are not compatible with

ordained leadership within the Presbyterian Church in Ireland." If "sexual relations" are irrelevant, what precisely are the characteristics and behaviours that disqualify gay people from positions of leadership? No matter how hard PCI might try to dress it up in supposed scriptural authority, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that with this statement the mask has finally slipped, revealing that policy on this issue is rooted in straightforward homophobic prejudice. As its leaders meet this week, PCI would do well to reflect on the many lessons to be learned from the Smyrl/Sandymount controversy - not least, that in all its actions the church must pay due attention to human rights and privacy laws, and above all must treat all its members equally, with appropriate dignity and respect.

Courtesy: Roy Stanley-Irish Times

Notices

Remembered in Prayer

Saturday 6pm
Richard Neville (3rd A)
Fr. Eoin McCrystal (4th A)
George Graham
Teasie Dowling (14th A)
Christy Dowling (50th A)
Margaret & William Graham
& deceased family
John Kelly, Richard Dowling

Sunday 11.30am
Maria Grazia Grimaldi
(14th A)
Margaret Nugent (13th A)
Marie Mount (10th A)



Domestic Violence

Women's Aid: 1800341900
Male Domestic Abuse:
1800816588
Rape Crisis Centre: 1800778888

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY ORDINARY TIME

Penitential Rite

Our God is a God of generosity.

As we begin our celebration let us call to mind that generosity.

You make us poor in spirit. Lord have mercy

You make us merciful. Christ have mercy

You make us thirst for righteousness. Lord have mercy

May the God of generosity fill us with compassion,
forgive us our sin and bring us
to life everlasting. Amen

Isaiah 66:10-14

Rejoice, Jerusalem, be glad for her, all you who love her! Rejoice, rejoice for her all you who mourned her! That you may be suckled, filled, from her consoling breast, that you may savour with delight her glorious breasts. For thus says the Lord: Now towards her I send flowing peace, like a river, and like a stream in spate the glory of the nations. At her breast will her nurslings be carried and fondled in her lap. Like a son comforted by his mother will I comfort you. And by Jerusalem you will be comforted. At the sight your heart will rejoice, and your bones flourish like the grass. To his servants the Lord will reveal his hand.

Galatians 6:14-18

The only thing I can boast about is the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world is crucified to me, and I to the world. It does not matter if a person is circumcised or not; what matters is for him to become an altogether new creature. Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, who form the Israel of God. I want no more trouble from anybody after this; the marks on my body are those of Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, my brothers. Amen.

Alleluia, Alleluia

May the peace of Christ reign in your hearts,
because it is for this that you were called together as
parts of one body. Alleluia

Luke 10:1-9

Jesus The Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them out ahead of him, in pairs, to all the towns and places he himself was to visit. He said to them, 'The harvest is rich but the labourers are few, so ask the Lord of the harvest to send labourers to his harvest. Start off now, but remember, I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. Carry no purse, no haversack, no sandals. Salute no one on the road.

Whatever house you go into, let your first words be, "Peace to this house!" And if a man of peace lives there, your peace will go and rest on him; if not, it will come back to you. Stay in the same house, taking what food and drink they have to offer, for the labourer deserves his wages; do not move from house to house. Whenever you go into a town where they make you welcome, eat what is set before you. Cure those in it who are sick, and say, "The kingdom of God is very near to you".

Prayer of the Faithful

God our Father and Mother, we thank you for your Word. It awakens in us the desire to look beyond our own needs and live for one another. Lord hear us

May we bring the Good News of God's inclusive love to the world, by the example of our own lives. Lord hear us

Lord, help us not to close our hearts to that inner voice which speaks your truth.
Lord hear us

Help us Lord, to be open to those who are fleeing from war and oppression; to welcome them, into our society and support for as long as they need it. Lord hear us

We remember all who have died. May their memory draw us closer to the Way, the Truth and the Life. Lord hear us.

In silence let us call to mind those who need our prayer and support
Lord hear us.



Reflection

"A fight is going on inside me," said an old man to his son. "It is a terrible fight between two wolves. One wolf is evil. He is anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego. The other wolf is good. He is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion and faith. The same fight is going on inside you." The son thought about it for a minute and then asked, "Which wolf will win?" The old man replied simply, "The one you feed."

Wendy Mass