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Fighting the good fight

The past few months have been extraordinarily busy in Northern Ireland.

Significantly, Alliance MLA Éoin Tennyson's Bill to criminalise innocent conversations as part of his proposed 'conversion practices' ban is currently being considered by the Assembly. It is imperative that Christians keep speaking out against this serious threat to gospel freedom.

There has also been the disturbing news that praying or carrying a Bible in a hospital could fall foul of abortion censorship zones law. Our legal case assisting Pastor Clive Johnston argues this was never what the legislation intended to cover.

Education changes to undermine Christian RE are another concern. Please pray for us as we work hard on these and many other issues.

'Conversion practices' legislation passes as MLAs ignore warnings



📍 Éoin Tennyson MLA

Controversial plans to ban so-called conversion practices have passed the first hurdle in Stormont despite major concerns being raised.

Alliance MLA Éoin Tennyson's Member's Bill would make it a criminal offence to provide "conversion therapy" and engage in "coercive conversion behaviour". Under the proposals, any person found guilty of an offence could face up to two years in prison.

While the proposals claim to target abuse, existing legislation already provides robust protections against abuse, coercion and exploitation. Instead, the plans could see parents, professionals and pastors having to answer to the police for innocent conversations. This could include refusing a child's request for puberty blockers.

Several MLAs spoke out against the Bill during the three

"jellyfish legislation"

Aidan O'Neill KC

days of debate, with Paul Givan calling it "profoundly illiberal" and "designed to have a chilling effect".

However, these concerns were ignored and MLAs voted in favour by 46 to 29. The Bill will now proceed to scrutiny

by the Committee for Communities.

We commissioned independent legal advice on Tennyson's proposals from expert human rights lawyer Aidan O'Neill KC.

He described them as "jellyfish legislation", with "impossible to grasp" concepts, "wholly undefined" limits, and a "sting in the tail" of up to two years in prison and steep fines.

NI Civil Service halts participation in 'political' Pride parades

The Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) has imposed restrictions on staff participation in 'Pride'.

Its head, Jayne Brady, told staff that given "the current legal and case law context" they would not be allowed to take part in Pride 2026 "in an official capacity". However, she added, the decision did not reflect any wider change in NICS "commitment to LGBTQ+ workplace inclusion".

Last year's Pride event received financial

support from the PSNI and Translink, as well as NICS, while campaigning for puberty-blocking drugs to be given to teenagers.

The Institute is currently pursuing a legal action against the Civil Service in

Great Britain over its decision to 'permit and/or authorise' the participation of civil servants in Pride marches under the banner of the Civil Service.

Under the Civil Service Code, all employees are

expected to carry out their roles with "integrity, honesty, objectivity and impartiality". They must also "ensure individual personal and political views do not, and are not perceived to, influence" their advice or actions.



'Not fit for purpose': MPs reject Westminster assisted suicide Bill

MPs have voted to reject Lauren Edwards' assisted suicide Bill by 286 votes to 270.

Near identical legislation had been narrowly approved in the House of Commons last year, but it failed to progress in the House of Lords due to an unprecedented number of amendments tabled in response to its many flaws.

Supporters of that Bill claim it

had been unfairly blocked, and had intended to use the Parliament Acts to force through the legislation, should it receive support in the Commons again.

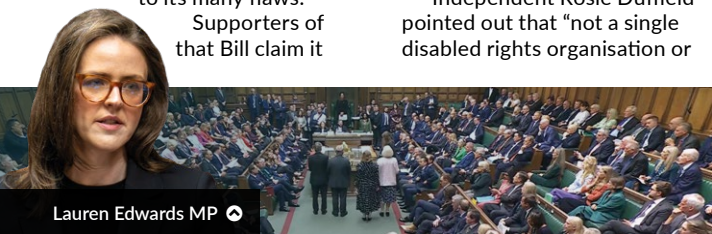
But MPs, recognising the dangers that legalisation would bring, rejected it, with Conservative Mims Davies calling it "not fit for purpose".

Independent Rosie Duffield pointed out that "not a single disabled rights organisation or

professional body supports this legislation".

And Labour's Sarah Smith noted that, for the less privileged or vulnerable in society, "the suggestion made by a doctor" to consider assisted suicide "may easily sound like a decision for what is best for them".

Our Director Ciarán Kelly gave thanks to God for the result. "It was a decisive shift in view from the Kim Leadbeater Bill through to this Lauren Edwards Bill. And we can be thankful that MPs have been persuaded by the arguments that have been put forward as to why this Bill should not be brought into law."



Lauren Edwards MP

Kate Forbes: 'Will you defend truth?'

Kate Forbes has defended her decision to resist the intense pressure she faced to deny her Christian beliefs during her SNP leadership bid.

Forbes was publicly ostracised for affirming biblical sexual ethics, and eventually lost the leadership contest to Humza Yousaf. But she told the Alliance for Responsible Citizenship conference it "felt like a victory" that she had "not given in".

The former Deputy First Minister of Scotland said: "The question for us is not whether conflict will come.

"The question is whether men and women will rise up like they did of old, standing firm on conviction, shaped by confidence, with the courage to defend truth or as Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it, 'daring to do what is right, not what fancy may tell you'."

Moreover, she encouraged others to defend "the biblical concepts of freedom, liberty, human dignity, the worth of life, and flourishing for all".

Eight-year-olds set for RE lessons on humanism



Children as young as eight may be required to learn about Secular Humanism, under plans for the Province's new Religious Education syllabus.

Currently, pupils only learn about world religions at post-primary level. But following the Supreme Court's ruling that religious teaching in NI schools must be

objective and pluralistic, a Religious Education Drafting Group has proposed that Key Stage 2 should also be taught about other religions and 'non-religious worldviews'.

Education Minister Paul Givan stated: "This draft syllabus responds directly to the Supreme Court judgment. It seeks to meet the requirement for

greater objectivity and recognises the central place of Christianity in Northern Ireland's history, culture and society."

But our NI Policy Officer, James Kennedy, warned that the additional focus on other religions carries the risk that "deep differences between beliefs are 'ironed out' for the sake of easy comparison".

Certificates will officially mark baby loss in Northern Ireland

Parents in Northern Ireland who have lost a child before 24 weeks can now apply for a baby loss certificate.

Following the launch of the formal recognition process in June, bereaved parents spoke of the importance of receiving a tangible record of their baby's life.

Kelly Barnes, who has lost children to

miscarriage, said: "Nothing can take away the pain of losing your baby.

"But something as simple as a baby loss certificate can help to carry some

of the emotional weight by officially commemorating our losses and providing support to bereaved parents as we navigate our grief journeys."



▲ Kate Forbes



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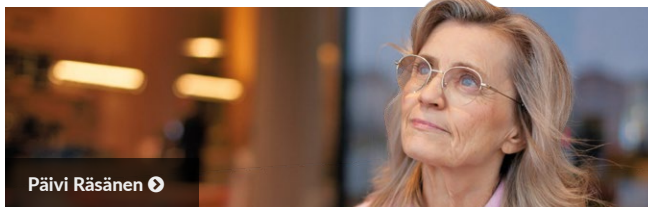
MLAs object to Christian at NI free speech event

Former Finnish MP Päivi Räsänen was unable to attend a free speech event in Stormont, to the delight of MLAs who objected to her Christian beliefs about marriage.

Räsänen was convicted of “hate speech” in March for expressing biblical sexual ethics in a pamphlet she published for her church 22 years ago. However, the court also unanimously vindicated her for sharing similar views in a 2019 social media post where she quoted from the Bible. She is appealing her conviction.

Following reports that the Finn was invited to talk at a ‘Faith in the Public Square’ event in Stormont, associated with the Bangor Worldwide Missionary Convention, Naomi Long, the Alliance Party leader, wrote that Räsänen would “bring the Assembly into disrepute” by being there, and called for her to be barred.

Räsänen’s electronic travel authorisation was cancelled, despite having initially been approved. Fortunately, she was able to speak at the event virtually instead.



Free ‘safer drugs’ testing for festival-goers blocked

Plans to test revellers’ illegal drugs at Belfast summer festivals were blocked after councillors were told there was no clear way for the pilot scheme

to be legally implemented.

Authorities told councillors there is “no legislative framework, funding mechanism or operational model” that would allow

the Council to establish testing facilities at such events.

According to latest figures from the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, there were 251 drug-related deaths registered in 2024.

The Alliance party claims that rising drug-related deaths require a wider ‘harm reduction’ strategy across the Province.



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Callum Webster,
Northern Ireland Officer

Pray continually

1 Thessalonians 5:17

SUNDAY

PRAY For church leaders to faithfully and boldly preach the Gospel.

MONDAY

PRAY Giving thanks that the Westminster assisted suicide Bill was rejected.

TUESDAY

PRAY For greater awareness of the devastation gambling can cause.

WEDNESDAY

PRAY That MLAs would recognise restrictions a conversion therapy ban would place on Christians.

THURSDAY

PRAY That schools would remain committed to Christian teaching amid recent changes in RE.

FRIDAY

PRAY Giving thanks for the freedoms we have to share the Gospel in the UK.

SATURDAY

PRAY For the CI as we seek to equip believers to influence secular society for Christ.

Charity Commission told it needs to reaffirm value of faith-based groups

Amnesty International UK has apologised after branding The Christian Institute – along with a host of pro-life, gender-critical, and Christian groups – an ‘anti-rights’ organisation.

In its briefing ‘A growing threat’, Amnesty claimed it had identified a network of groups targeting “the rights of women and LGBT+ people”, and it accused the Institute and other groups of “fostering moral panic” and posing a threat to “human rights protections”.

The charity’s report recommended greater scrutiny of groups that oppose the Government’s draft Conversion Practices Bill and for the NHS to investigate

the activities of crisis pregnancy centres.

It even called on the Charity Commission to review the charitable status of those listed that it said “promote social and legal frameworks” based on traditional beliefs about gender, sexual ethics and family life.

Following widespread criticism, it removed the report from its website and apologised.

In a letter to the Charity Commission, the Institute and ten other organisations named in the report set the record straight on its inaccuracies.

The letter asked the regulator to reaffirm that “the advancement of religion” is a legitimate charitable aim, that Christian charities make a valued contribution to society, and are entitled to speak into contested areas of moral debate.



King elevates ‘multi-faith nation’

The King appears to have distanced himself from his coronation oath to be “Defender of the Faith”.

Last year’s Sovereign Grant Report referred to “His Majesty’s role as Head of the Church of

England and Defender of the Faith, including the protection of all faiths”. But this year’s report described the King’s role as simply protecting “the space for Faith within the multi-faith nation”.

Institute Director Ciarán Kelly commented: “Christianity, not some multi-faith mish-mash, is the bedrock of our nation’s laws and culture. God’s good design for society leads to flourishing for all, not just Christian believers.”



Carrying a Bible may be a criminal offence in Northern Irish hospitals

Routine hospital pastoral ministry may fall foul of abortion buffer zone laws, according to the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI).

Following the conviction of retired pastor Clive Johnston for preaching the Gospel within one such zone, Chief Constable Jon Boutcher indicated that prayer, Scripture reading and carrying a Bible may also be illegal in censorship zones.

He said that the legislation was not designed to prohibit such behaviour, but



that “an offence may be committed” if someone believes it may ‘influence’ someone there for the purposes of abortion.

Our Director, Ciarán Kelly, said: “This guidance confirms why Pastor Clive Johnston’s case is so important. According to this

guidance, a chaplain praying with parents mourning the loss of a child and then reading the famous words of Psalm 23 – The Lord is my shepherd – could fall foul of the law.”

He added: “The very suggestion that consensual prayer or Bible reading could ever become a criminal matter should concern everyone who values basic freedom.”

Mr Johnston, who is being supported by The Christian Institute, is appealing his conviction for holding an open-air service on the fringes of the buffer zone around Coleraine’s Causeway Hospital.

Pastor Johnston’s appeal date is set for **15 October**



Think tank: ‘Marriage is clearly the best relationship for family stability’



Poorer spouses are significantly more likely to stay together than richer cohabitantes, the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) has found – even after adjusting for education level and employment status.

In *The Stability Advantage: Marriage, Family Breakdown and Poverty in the UK*, the think tank also noted that those who stayed together for 14

years after becoming parents were twice as likely to improve their income as those who separated.

Reflecting on the findings, which analysed the Millennium Cohort Study of first-time parents, the CSJ emphasised that “family stability is not simply a reflection of economic advantage but is strongly associated with marriage itself”.

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Tel: 0191 281 5664 | Email: info@christian.org.uk | Web: christian.org.uk | Published in September 2026
Registered in England as a charity Charity No. 100 4774 Company No. 263 4440. A charity registered in Scotland Charity No. SC039220