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## Pray for those in authority

Christians in Ireland enjoy remarkable freedom that many elsewhere in the world do not. Importantly, living in a democracy includes the right to vote. Ireland's governing authorities and elected representatives are put in place by God to encourage good and discourage evil.

Having voted, it is now important to pray for the new and returning members of the 34th Dáil, and the Taoiseach and Tánaiste once they are confirmed (1 Timothy 2:1-2).

Many Christians will be gravely concerned at the prospect of new laws being presented to introduce assisted suicide, decriminalise illegal drugs and ban so-called conversion practices.

It will also be important to ensure the new 'hate' law does not endanger free speech and religious liberty, and that the new SPHE curriculum is not used to undermine parental freedoms.

We remain vigilant on these issues and many more, whilst taking reassurance from the fact that God remains fully in control.

# McEntee's controversial 'hate speech' Bill signed into law

Helen McEntee's controversial hate crime Bill became law in October, despite worries over its vague definitions.

Following widespread criticism, the Minister removed language on 'incitement to hatred' from her Criminal Justice (Hate Offences) Bill, but retained tougher sentences for crimes deemed to be motivated by hostility towards a 'protected group'. This includes people who think they are transgender or "a gender other than those of male and female".



TDs and Senators said the failure to define hatred is "not acceptable", and criticised the Bill for pushing an "ideological" definition of gender into law.

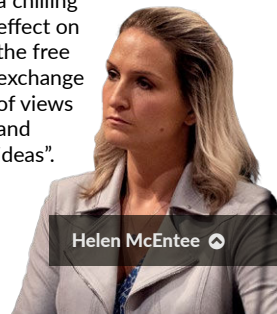
Senator Rónán Mullen warned that the wording goes well beyond protecting

people from assault. He stated: "It is about mainstreaming an idea that people are not born male or female, but rather as a combination of genders".

An earlier version of the Bill risked impacting the ordinary work of churches and was strongly criticised by

The Christian Institute. Director Ciarán Kelly noted that simply reading aloud from Romans 1 could have led to accusations that a person was using the Bible to stir up hatred against gay people.

He called on Christians to "guard against laws that have a chilling effect on the free exchange of views and ideas".



Helen McEntee

# Abortion censorship zones now in effect countrywide

Censorship zones banning offers of help to pregnant women outside abortion centres are now in force across the country.

The Health (Termination of Pregnancy Services) (Safe Access Zones) Act 2024 came into effect in October. Under the Act, people risk being fined or imprisoned for handing out pro-life literature, speaking to anyone about abortion, or praying silently within 100m of buildings where abortions are carried



out, including GP surgeries.

The restrictions include banning pro-life activities from the gardens, doorways and windows of houses and churches within the zones.

The Seanad rejected proposals for freedom of speech protections to be included within

the new law.

The Christian Institute's Head of Policy and Research, David Greatorex, branded the regulations "an attack on free speech and religious liberty".

"There are people who are only alive today because their mothers met someone

ready to give them an alternative to abortion."

In 2023, a man and a woman became the first to be arrested under Northern Ireland's 'buffer zones' law. The pair were detained while praying and holding pro-life signs outside Causeway Hospital in Coleraine.

The number of abortions in Ireland reached a record high last year. The Department of Health reported that 10,033 abortions were carried out in 2023, 23 per cent more than the previous year.

# Fears 'explicit materials' among sex education resource options

Calls for a review of the new Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum have been made amid concerns that sexually explicit materials were included as resource options for 12 to 15-year-olds.

The leader of Independent Ireland, Michael Collins, said revelations of explicit resources being promoted to teachers on a Dublin City University course were "deeply concerning for both parents and teachers". Danny Healey-Rae TD urged Education Minister Norma Foley to "carry out an urgent review".

## "carry out an urgent review"

DANNY HEALEY-RAE TD

In response to the concerns, Foley said the materials were only for teachers and would never be used in the classroom.

From 2027, SPHE will be mandatory for 15 to 18-year-olds for the first time. It is set to cover gender, pornography, relationships and sexual consent. The curriculum says LGBTQ+ relationships and identities should be "fully integrated" into the teaching.

In Northern Ireland, a Relationship and Sexuality Education consultation has been amended after it was criticised by The Christian Institute. In the original version, parents had been unable to challenge the Education Committee's assumption that 'LGBTQIA+' issues should be taught in primary schools.



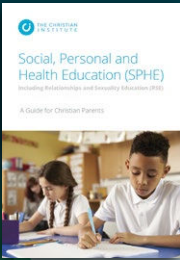
## Ask us to visit your church

If you would like us to speak at your church on key issues for Christians, email us at:

[roi@christian.org.uk](mailto:roi@christian.org.uk)

## Coming soon...

Look out for our new briefing on Social, Personal and Health Education



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# Betting industry fails to stop landmark gambling legislation

New gambling restrictions became law in October, despite a high pressure campaign by the betting industry.

James Browne TD, who first introduced the Gambling Regulation Bill in 2022, said it would provide a coherent licensing framework and tackle the “proliferation of digital gambling activities and advertising”.

He said that during its passage, he had to resist “endless” pressure to weaken restrictions on advertising and stake limits for slot machines.

The legislation establishes a national regulator, creates a social impact fund to address problem gambling, and bans advertising across on-demand

services, television and radio between 5:30am and 9pm.

Welcoming the new law, Browne said: “At its core, this legislation is a public health measure aimed at protecting our citizens from gambling harm, including younger people and those more vulnerable in our communities.”

Anne Marie Caulfield, CEO-designate of the Gambling Regulatory Authority of Ireland, said the new watchdog had a key role to play in “protecting the public from gambling harms”.

But Bernard Long of University College Cork questioned whether the regulator would be able to “tame the harmful and incorrigible gambling industry”.



# John Burn OBE 1938-2024

The Christian Institute's founder and first Chairman, John Burn OBE, has died aged 86.

Born in Newcastle upon Tyne in March 1938, John was a committed believer who sought to be a Christian influence in wider society, especially in the world of education.

He met a young Colin Hart in the late 1980s, and together they set up The Christian Institute. John served as Chairman until 2021, and later remained closely involved as a trustee.



The Institute's current Chairman, Revd Dr Richard Turnbull, said: “With John, one always felt you were in the presence of a Christian disciple, to whom the Lord would one day say, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant.’”

**READ** A tribute from Stephen Grant [the.ci/JBtribute](https://the.ci/JBtribute)



# Big issues for the new coalition

Fianna Fáil (FF) and Fine Gael (FG) are on the brink of confirming their return to coalition government.

The two parties amassed 86 seats, just short of a majority.

So how might a new government impact key issues of concern?

## Conversion therapy

FF's manifesto promised to "Enact legislation to ban conversion practices that violate individual rights". FG pledged to "Support the National LGBT+ Inclusion Strategy to 2028", which supports a ban.



## Drugs

FF has committed to "Decriminalise drug possession for personal use". FG leader Simon Harris opposes decriminalisation but the party manifesto promises to continue a 'health-led' rather than criminal justice approach to drug possession. It also says the party will consider

'shooting galleries' for drug users to legally inject themselves.

## Assisted suicide

Neither party mentioned assisted suicide in their manifestos, and both pledged to invest in palliative care services and to reduce suicide rates. FF leader Micheál Martin has previously warned against

removing end-of-life safeguards.

## Embryology

Both parties have committed to taking forward the new Assisted Human Reproduction Regulatory Authority to regulate embryo 'research'.

## Hate speech

The Criminal Justice (Hate Offences) Act 2024 became law in October. Micheál Martin has said no extra laws on hate speech are needed, but this view is not shared by Simon Harris.

# Dáil notes recommendation to cross assisted suicide Rubicon

Before the General Election, TDs voted 76 to 53 to "take note" of recommendations that terminally ill adults should be allowed to get help to kill themselves.

The Joint Oireachtas Committee on Assisted Dying called for assisted suicide to be introduced for adult Irish citizens deemed to be suffering 'intolerably' from a terminal illness and with less than six months to live – or twelve

months for neurodegenerative conditions.

But before standing down as a TD, Fianna Fáil's Éamon Ó Cuív highlighted that wherever assisted suicide has been introduced "it has grown and grown". Aontú leader Peadar Tóibín emphasised that changing the law "confuses the message around suicide in general". Independent Carol Nolan warned that assisted suicide crosses

a "Rubicon that is almost too terrifying to even contemplate".

On 29 November, the British Parliament voted by 330 to 275 to axe end-of-life protections.



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