

Eastern Daily Press

SERVING THE COMMUNITY
SINCE 1870

Time for the Church to get it right over women bishops

Today is an absolutely crucial day for the Church of England.

It is an opportunity for the church to demonstrate that it is in touch with the modern world – by voting to allow women bishops.

It's a golden opportunity to put right the 2012 vote which left many within and outside the church incredulous.

On that occasion, the house of bishops and clergy both passed the measure, only for the House of Laity to reject it by six votes.

To the outside world, it was baffling, how, in the 21st century, the church could still seem so trapped in a time-war which made no concession to the modern age.

Yet that was how many in the church felt as well, especially given that such strides had been made since 1994, when women priests were first ordained.

Among those left disillusioned two years ago was the Ven Jan McFarlane, one of Norfolk's most senior priests and one of the first women ordained some 20 years ago.

She was so hurt by the rejection in 2012 that she removed her clerical collar and seriously considered leaving the church. But today, she will head to York hoping for a landmark yes vote.

That she does this while undergoing chemotherapy for breast cancer, demonstrates just what an important issue this is.

Mrs McFarlane says she cannot afford to not go, in case her vote makes a difference.

Let's hope that this time Mrs McFarlane will have no reason to cast off her collar.

Festivals to be proud of

The finale of Festival Too, the bright and breezy free music event set up in 1985 to complement the King's Lynn Festival, drew 16,000 people to the town's Tuesday Market Place.

From small beginnings and a budget of just £5,000, Festival Too has grown, so much so that every hotel bed in the town was taken last night and shops and restaurants have seen extra trade.

Every penny raised by Festival Too is put directly back into the event, which is a credit to the businesses and the council who have worked together to make it such a big draw.

And it's not over: for the King's Lynn Festival itself is now under way bringing its annual cultural feast to the county.

It's a double musical extravaganza of which west Norfolk can be truly proud.

A light in the darkness

The realisation that a beloved baby will not survive beyond her fragile first weeks is an unimaginable pain for any parent.

But in their darkest hours, the support and solace needed so desperately by the family of little Beatrice Smith was readily offered by East Anglia's Children's Hospices at Quidenham. It proves the extraordinary value of this special place, and how lucky we are to have it.

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To everything there is a season,
A time for every purpose under
heaven.
Ecclesiastes 3:1

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READER'S PICTURE OF THE DAY

iwitness24



■ A golden sun set into a stormy sky over Mattishall, as photographed by David Paul. If you would like to submit a picture for possible publication in the EDP, visit www.iwitness24.co.uk

How do you tell the difference between men and women?

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I was recently reading Donna Tartt's novel *The Goldfinch*. I can't have been reading it very carefully, because it took me a couple of chapters before I realised that the narrator – the "I" – was a man and not a woman.

If the book had been written in Polish – not that I can actually read Polish – I would have twigged much sooner. The first phrase in the whole book is "While I was...". In Polish, a female narrator would have written "I was" as *byłam*, while a man would have written *byłem*. In Polish, past-tense verbs – even for first-person "I" forms – differ according to whether they refer to males or females.

In English we mark the gender difference for third-person pronouns – he is for males and she for females. How else, you might ask, could it possibly be? But it doesn't have to be like that. In Finnish, there's no distinction at all between he and she – "se" means both. The same is true of Turkish, where the word for s/he is "o".

How do they manage? How do people understand what a Finnish speaker means? Well, maybe French-speaking people would like to know how we manage without their two different words for they – "ils" for males, "elles" for females. And



■ Polish speakers use different past-tense verbs according to whether they refer to males or females. This picture shows a demonstration taking place in Warsaw, the capital of Poland.

Spanish speakers might like to know how English speakers manage without two different words for plural you: they have "vosotros" (male) and "vosotras" (female). They even have different words for we – "nosotros" and "nosotras" – and they probably find it rather odd that we don't.

And Polish speakers would certainly want to know how we can tell what sex a fictional first-person narrator is supposed to be (clearly, some of us can't!).

But to go back to the question: if a Finnish speaker says "se", how do listeners know if they're talking about a man or

a woman? Well, sometimes they don't. But usually it's rather obvious, because pronouns like he, she and they refer to people who've already been mentioned, or whose identity is clear.

When my Norwich schoolmates and I had summer jobs fruit-picking out in the country, we sometimes noticed how local women, arriving first thing in the morning, might address their fellow villagers by saying things like: "Know what he say to me last night?"

They didn't have to specify who "he" was. Even we could work that out.