

Church News Ireland



Image of the day – Clogher Black Santas

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Clogher Black Santas sit-outs for charities

It was an early start for a couple of Clogher clergy when they faced a 12-hour sit-out in the damp, cold and windy weather conditions.

At 6.30am at Lisbellaw Parish Church, the Revd William Jeffrey (Photo above) was already sitting at the door with collection buckets at hand as he began a 12-hour Black Santa sit-out to support Fermanagh Women's Aid and parish funds.

Sustained by donations of hot meals and drinks, Revd William welcomed everyone who met him, offering them the peace and quiet of the church if they needed it. By lunch-



time there had been a steady stream of people representing both his own parish and from other denominations.

In Ballinamallard, slightly later at 8am, Revd Alison Irvine (Photo above) who is temporarily taking services during the vacancy at Magheracross Parish Church, joined her Ballinamallard

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Methodist Church colleague, Revd John Beacom, by continuing the charity sit-out started by former rector, Revd. Brian Harper.

The 12-hour sit-out continued until this evening as they collected funds for SWELL (Supported We Live Life) cancer support charity and the Mallard Community Hub opening in early 2024.

The following day Dean Kenneth Hall was sitting outside St Macartin's Cathedral, Enniskillen for his 12-hour charity sit-out from 9am to 9pm and a day later Revd Johnny McLoughlin, Rector of Aghavea Parish Church, led his charity sit-out also from 9am to 9pm

People and places

Busy season for QUB Catholic Chaplaincy choir

A recent comment from the Chaplaincy - “The source and summit of chaplaincy life is the encounter with our Eucharistic Lord at Mass.

“We are blessed to have our liturgies animated by Canticle Sacred Music Society, the Chaplaincy Choir, who week-in and week-out raise our hearts and minds to God with their wonderful music and song”.



They have been particularly busy this Christmas season, contributing to the University's Annual Carol Service in the historic Lanyon Building's Great Hall, the Catholic Chaplaincy's Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols in St Malachy's Church in city centre Belfast, and most recently at the Banagher Parish Co. Derry Carol Service.

The success of Canticle is due, in large part, to the inspiration, hard work and dedication of former 'Queen's Student of the Year' and celebrated soprano, Marcella Walsh. Marcella, together with accompanist and QUB postgrad in education, Fiona Donnelly, will lead our choir later this academic year on a tour of Italy, collaborating with internationally renowned Christian music group, Gen Verde, a ministry of the Focolare Movement committed to encounter, dialogue and transformation.



The week-long residential based in Florence will support students to reflect on how their music and song can be put to the service of peace and reconciliation in conflict areas. Canticle Director, Marcella Walsh, is engaged in postgraduate research with the University's Senator George J Mitchell Institute for Global Peace, Security and Justice in musicology and contribution of the performing arts' to peace building and societal transformation.

New man on the block

As part of his new role as Archdeacon of Down, Jim Cheshire is also connected to St Annes Cathedral, where he is doing the Black Santa sit out this afternoon and Saturday



afternoon. “Stop by and say hello! Come out and see me at St Anne’s on Saturday from 12:30-3:30pm!”

'Let us not forget those struggling in countryside' - Belfast Black Santa

Dean Stephen Forde is writing a daily comment in the Belfast Telegraph during the annual Sit Out or charities. He said -

When you are the person who is Belfast's Black Santa, you take a very keen interest in the weather forecast for the 10 days leading up to Christmas.



Staff from the Diocese of Connor, the Diocese of Down and Dromore and central church came together in the Chapel of Unity at Belfast Cathedral for their annual Carol Service, stopping on the Cathedral steps to show their support for the Dean of Belfast, the Very Rev Stephen Forde, currently in the middle of his sixth Black Santa Sit-out.

When the rain falls and a fierce wind blows down Donegall Street, then the task of being Belfast's Black Santa becomes particularly challenging.

The weather forecast for today predicts strong winds and heavy rain.

And Black Santa predicts that in just such weather, the cold winter rain will leave Black Santa very soggy and very wet.

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This is when I remind myself why it is that I am standing in Donegall Street.

I and my helpers do this because across Northern Ireland there are far too many people who know what it is to be cold and wet, and to be outside in the winter weather — not because they choose to be, but because they have no choice.

Some will be homeless. Some will have a home, but they cannot afford to heat it. Some will use the kettle only once a day, and then fill a thermos to save in electricity. And it is not just in the cities where people are struggling.

Rural poverty is a reality across this province. Farming is always a hard life, out of doors in all weathers. But when farming doesn't pay, it can be intolerable.

In the countryside, every journey to the nearest town or supermarket is a car journey when fuel is expensive.

The Fermanagh Rural Network Community is one of the charities working far from Belfast, which the Black Santa Appeal supports.

This is an organisation which advocates for the rural communities that can be forgotten by the policy-makers at the centre of power.

The Fermanagh Rural Community Network makes connections and works to reduce isolation.

As the wind blows stronger, and the rain trickles down Black Santa's neck, you might be tempted to stay indoors and avoid giving a donation in one of Belfast's windiest streets.

Well, if you do, you can always make your donation online, while the wind blows and the rain falls in Belfast and in Fermanagh.

Rev Karen Campbell to be ICC/ICM Good Relations Officer

The Irish Council of Churches and Irish Inter–Church Meeting have announced the appointment of Rev Karen Campbell to the position of Good Relations Officer.

This a joint initiative of the ICC and the Irish Episcopal Conference, with funding support from Churches Together in Britain and Ireland and Benefact Trust.

Rev Campbell was ordained as a Minister of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland in 2007, and served as Minister in congregations in Islandmagee and Kilbride. In 2018 she moved to the United States with her family to co–pastor the Church of the Servant in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Karen is currently finishing her doctoral thesis on the virtue of intellectual humility in multicultural worshipping communities.

Throughout her ministry, having lived and worked on three continents, she has pursued reconciliation in spaces where there have been cultural, political and social divides to bridge. She believes it is important to articulate a theology of



shalom that ensures peace is a priority, and not simply a secondary issue.

In this role she will lead inter–church engagement in peace–building and reconciliation, through implementation of the Unfinished Work of Peace strategy that underpins this aspect of ICC and IICM’s work.

Looking forward to this opportunity, Rev Campbell said “I am grateful to ICC and IICM for this opportunity. Since the gospel centres on resurrection, I am looking forward to engaging with key issues that will encourage full resurrection flourishing on this island. I will eagerly find connection points with migrant–led churches and see how they are invigorating expressions of faith that will disciple and encourage us, and connect with local inter–church groups to support them in their work building reconciliation and peace in their communities.

. As someone who loves to preach and communicate the fullness of the good news, I welcome opportunities to preach and help lead worship in a variety of contexts.”

Welcoming Rev Campbell’s appointment, General Secretary Dr Damian Jackson said “This role represents a significant commitment by the churches in Ireland to building their capacity, at local and national level, to serve the cause of reconciliation and peace today. There are many polarising and fracturing dynamics in our society, each of which brings a need for peacemaking and reconciliation, and this broad sense of the concept of reconciliation underpins a vision of a society in which all can fully participate and be included.”

A Joint Christmas Message from the Archbishops of Armagh

Christmas is traditionally a time of joy and happiness as we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world.

We decorate our homes and Christmas trees with bright shining lights to welcome the Prince of Peace. Yet this year our world has been overshadowed by the darkness of war in the very land where Jesus was born, and also in Ukraine,

Sudan and so many other places. The news images we have witnessed from troubled places around the world have reminded us of just how fragile and precious peace really is. This Christmas we keep all those who are suffering in our thoughts and prayers.

In the Christmas story the angels announcing the birth of Jesus proclaimed, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward all people'. People of faith are not just called to be peacekeepers, but to be peacemakers – to be instruments of Christ's peace; to pray and to work constantly for peace, healing and reconciliation between nations, communities, families, and individuals. Jesus said, 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God'. Peace is much more than simply the absence of war and fighting. Peace is about recognising that we are all made in the image of God, that we are all God's children – to be respected, listened to, and cared for, even though we may have very different opinions, aspirations, and dreams.

In 2023 we marked twenty–five years since the historic Belfast/Good Friday Agreement was signed and delivered.

This year, people from different parts of the community have been reflecting on this significant anniversary, often with mixed emotions. The signing of the Agreement was not the end of the journey to peace on this island but marked simply the first faltering steps down a very long road to a new, brighter, and shared future. Further progress along that road can be made if we show patience and a willingness to listen to one another when we differ and also recognise the need for greater understanding and reconciliation. The transformation that our peace process has helped to achieve on this island is talked about the world over and is often held up as an example of peacebuilding. Yet there is still much work to be done.

May we all continue to work for healing, reconciliation, mutual respect and understanding, as the basis of a lasting

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peace, here and in our troubled world. May the light of Christ shine in the darkness and may the peace of God which passes all understanding rest upon us all.

+Eamon

Roman Catholic Archbishop of Armagh

+John

Church of Ireland Archbishop of Armagh

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In the media

Judge dismisses \$62m US fraud lawsuit against ex-Coleraine pastor - Belfast Telegraph

A \$62m (£49m) fraud lawsuit against a former NI pastor and his wife has been dismissed by a California court, Liam Tunney writes.

Alan Scott and his wife, Kathryn, had been facing the action after they became lead pastors at a Vineyard church in Anaheim, before breaking away from the Vineyard Movement and rebranding the church as Dwelling Place Anaheim.

The case — taken by nine former members of what was the mother church of the Vineyard movement — had accused the Scotts of pre-meditating the move to take control of the

church's building and assets, worth a combined \$62m (£49m).

A judge at Orange County Superior Court, California, moved to tentatively dismiss the case, sustaining a 'demurrer' (a plead in a lawsuit that challenges the plea of an opposing party, admitting its truth but claiming it is not sufficient grounds to justify legal action) lodged by the defendants. In a statement posted on its website in September 2023, Dwelling Place Anaheim said the demurrer would ask the court to rule the plaintiffs did not have the “standing” to sue the Scotts.

“In this instance, we believe the courts do not have the authority to second-guess or determine ecclesiastical matters which involve, for example, what is the 'Vineyard Movement',” it said.

“This position is based on 200-plus years of courts honouring the 'Church Autonomy Doctrine'. The demurrer also asks the court to rule that the plaintiffs do not have 'standing' or the right to sue.

“This is based on both the by-laws which dictated who can file a complaint, and on common-sense rules of law which provide that tithing in any amount and at any time does not allow you to sue your church.”

It is understood church members were informed of the update on Friday, with internal communication suggesting the case had been “thrown out by the judge”.

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Under California Rules of Court, after a demurrer is sustained and a tentative dismissal granted, the opposing party has a period of ten days in which to appeal the decision.

It comes as Mr Scott finds himself facing accusations relating to his time at Causeway Coast Vineyard (CCV), Coleraine.

A report, compiled by TrustedHR, into the pastor's conduct while leading CCV was published last month, accusing Scott of narcissism, public shaming and manipulation of church members. Members also raised complaints relating to safeguarding and spiritual abuse.

One respondent claimed that if staff members were not giving the required amount, they would be spoken to by leaders, with several people indicating Scott was perceived as a “businessman and the church was his business”.

Another contributor said he employed an evangelist and gave him a daily target for the number of people who “had to be saved”.

Other respondents said “fear-inducing tactics” were employed under Scott's leadership.

“It is clear some people felt intimidated and felt they had nowhere to turn under Alan's overall leadership,” noted the report.

The Scotts deny any wrongdoing, while Dwelling Place Anaheim has previously said the report did not follow the

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“biblical prescription for understanding, forgiveness and reconciliation”.

Vineyard USA declined to comment, stating it was not part of the lawsuit. Dwelling Place Anaheim and the plaintiffs' lawyer have also been approached.

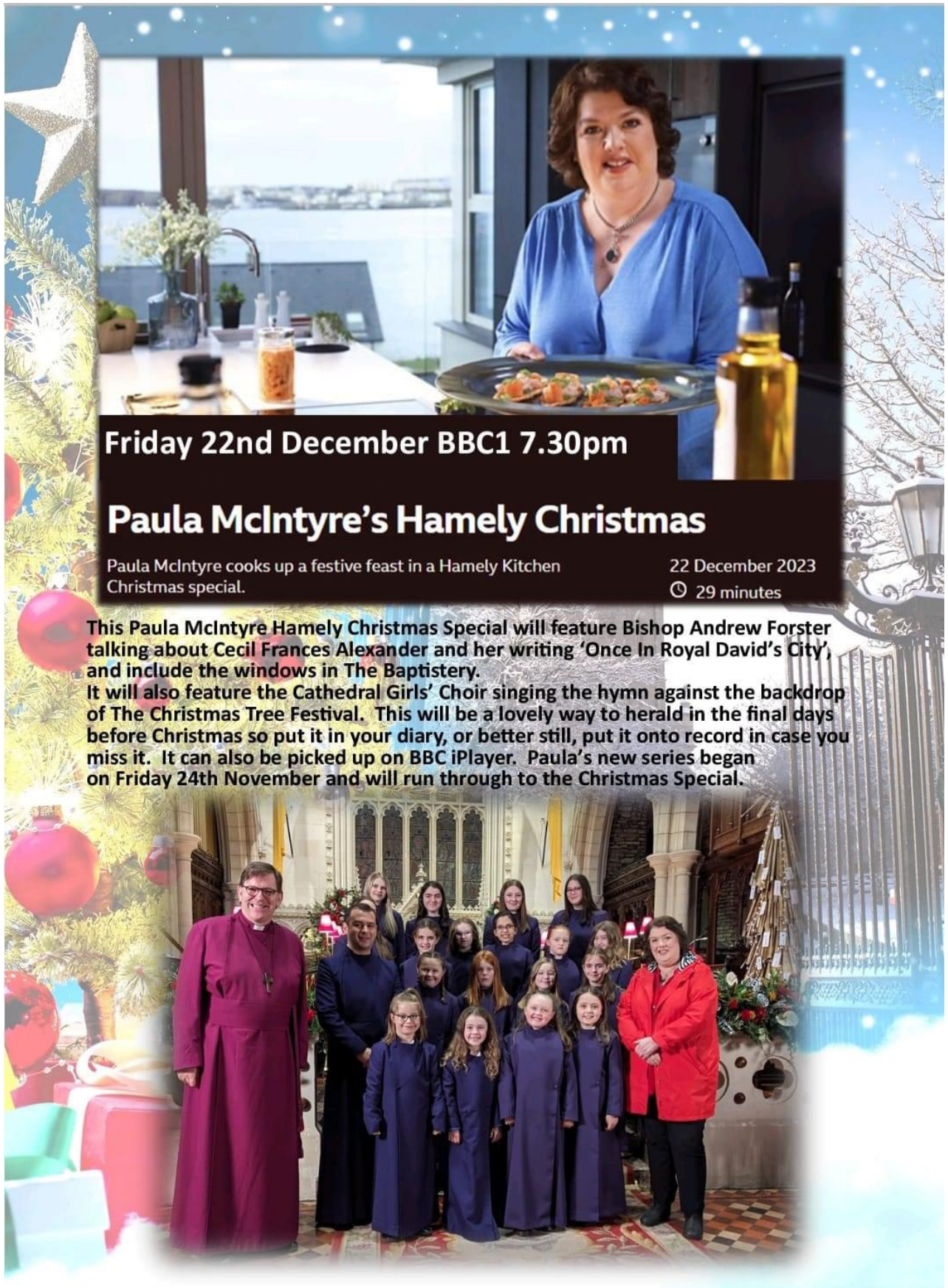
Webinars, music, resources, broadcasts, and books

Midweek reminder as the Choir of King's College, Cambridge prepares for their busiest time of year:

Listen to the broadcast of 'A Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols' on Christmas Eve at 3pm GMT on BBC Radio 4. The service is also broadcast at 1pm GMT on BBC Radio 3 on Christmas Day, and at various times on the BBC World Service. In the United States the service is broadcast by around 450 radio stations, including American Public Media and its affiliates such as Minnesota Public Radio and WNYC.

The televised 'Carols from King's' service will be shown on BBC Two on Christmas Eve at 6.40pm and will be available to download shortly afterwards from kingscollegerecordings.com.

Image by A Cambridge Diary taken during a rehearsal of 'Carols from King's' with the BBC crew.



Friday 22nd December BBC1 7.30pm

Paula McIntyre's Hamely Christmas

Paula McIntyre cooks up a festive feast in a Hamely Kitchen Christmas special.

22 December 2023
🕒 29 minutes

This Paula McIntyre Hamely Christmas Special will feature Bishop Andrew Forster talking about Cecil Frances Alexander and her writing 'Once In Royal David's City', and include the windows in The Baptistery. It will also feature the Cathedral Girls' Choir singing the hymn against the backdrop of The Christmas Tree Festival. This will be a lovely way to herald in the final days before Christmas so put it in your diary, or better still, put it onto record in case you miss it. It can also be picked up on BBC iPlayer. Paula's new series began on Friday 24th November and will run through to the Christmas Special.

Poem for today

Noel: Christmas Eve 1913 Robert Bridges

Pax hominibus bonae voluntatis

A frosty Christmas Eve
when the stars were shining
Fared I forth alone
where westward falls the hill,
And from many a village
in the water'd valley
Distant music reach'd me
peals of bells aringing:
The constellated sounds
ran sprinkling on earth's floor
As the dark vault above
with stars was spangled o'er.
Then sped my thoughts to keep
that first Christmas of all
When the shepherds watching
by their folds ere the dawn
Heard music in the fields
and marveling could not tell
Whether it were angels
or the bright stars singing.

Now blessed be the tow'rs
that crown England so fair

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That stand up strong in prayer
unto God for our souls
Blessed be their founders
(said I) an' our country folk
Who are ringing for Christ
in the belfries to-night
With arms lifted to clutch
the rattling ropes that race
Into the dark above
and the mad romping din.

But to me heard afar
it was starry music
Angels' song, comforting
as the comfort of Christ
When he spake tenderly
to his sorrowful flock:
The old words came to me
by the riches of time
Mellow'd and transfigured
as I stood on the hill
Heark'ning in the aspect
of th' eternal.

Speaking to the soul

Short reading and a prayer - daily on this site

Church News Ireland

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