

Church News Ireland



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December 20, 2024

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Image of the day



Archbishops star gaze for Christmas Day message

Above - *Archbishops Eamon Martin and John McDowell at the filming of this year's RTÉ Christmas Day message in Armagh Observatory.*

Front page - *Archbishops Eamon Martin and John McDowell with children from Armstrong Primary School and St Patrick's Primary School enjoying an interactive display at Armagh Planetarium.*

Next page - *Professor Michael Burton looks to the skies at Armagh Observatory, the setting for this year's RTÉ Christmas*



Day broadcast with the Archbishops of Armagh. Photos: Tony Hudson (RTÉ).

This year's Christmas message from the Archbishops of Armagh, which was filmed in Armagh Observatory and Planetarium and draws on the theme of the Christmas Star, will be broadcast on Christmas Day at 12.10pm on RTÉ One television and 1.05pm on RTÉ Radio One.

The programme will also be available after broadcast on the RTÉ Player.

The message will be accompanied by carol signing by a choir from Armstrong Primary School and St Patrick's Primary School and interviews with Professor Michael Burton (Director of the Observatory and Planetarium) and other astronomers who are based in the ecclesiastical capital.

Armagh Observatory, one of Ireland's leading centres for astronomical research and education, was founded in 1790 by Archbishop Richard Robinson, and its outreach work to schools and the wider community was greatly enabled by the opening of the Planetarium in 1968 under the leadership of then Director, Dr Eric Lindsay. Three of the oldest Observatories in the world are to be found in Ireland – in Armagh, at Dunsink and in Birr, and they are part of a unique North-South partnership of Astronomical Observatories.

To find out more about the Observatory and Planetarium, please visit its website – www.armagh.space

News

Christian Aid Ireland's favourite Welshman

“Huge thanks to our favourite Welshman, Rev Meurig Williams who held a service of carols and readings by candlelight on Sunday evening which raised €600 for our Christmas appeal”- CAI.

Rev Meurig, the Rector of Mallow in County Cork, tells us that the service held in St James' Church in Mallow has become a popular date on the town's Christmas calendar:

“There's always a good atmosphere in the church, where we sing as we tell the Christmas story, with lots of wonderful organ music and plenty of festive refreshments afterwards,” he said. As in recent years, there were contributions from



the Syrian Orthodox community in the Mallow area who are based at St James’.

L-R, Rev Meurig Williams, Rector of Mallow; Rev Eileen Cremin; Eoghan Kenny TD; and Christian Aid Ireland’s Cork-based Church and Community Officer Rev Andrew Coleman.

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As in recent years, there were contributions from the Syrian Orthodox community in the Mallow area who are based at St James’.

“The church enjoys offering hospitality to a wide range of people. We think of it as our Christmas gift to the town of Mallow,” Rev Meurig added.

Also in attendance was Eoghan Kenny TD from Mallow, Labour representative for Cork North-Central. At 24, he is the youngest TD, the Baby of the Dáil, to have been successful in the recent election.

“We’re grateful to all the organisers and to everyone who supported the event so generously”.

Twin sisters at St Benedict’s College, Randalstown fund raise for Antrim SVdP

The College posted, “We are exceptionally proud of twin sisters, Caitlin and Erin-Rose McNeilly, who again this year raised money for SVdP by



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selling delicious home baked goods at our Christmas Fayre. In total they raised an incredible £700 and can be seen below presenting their check to members of Antrim SVdP.

“The girls are the epitome of kind, caring and charitable individuals. They truly are a credit to themselves, school, community and family”.

Muslim sisters of Eire thank Clontarf Parish

“A huge thank you to Clontarf Parish, Church of Saint John the Baptist, for their generous donation of bags filled with chocolates, biscuits, and treats!



“Your kindness and support mean so much to us, and these wonderful goodies will bring smiles to families in need this season. Together, we’re spreading love and joy in our community”.



Black Santas from the Shankill and the Falls

Canon Tracey of St Matthew's Shankill Rd., Belfast and Fr Martin of St John's, Falls Rd., Belfast will be among the Black Santas at St Anne's Cathedral this week.

Government needs to 'do better' for the homeless, says Vicar at Dublin's annual Black Santa Sit Out

The Vicar of St Ann's Church on Dublin's Dawson Street has said the incoming government needs to "do better" for the homeless and those in poverty in light of the country's "abundant wealth". Sarah McDonald writes in the Irish Independent.

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Canon Paul Arbuthnot was speaking outside the historic church in the centre of the capital after the launch of the annual Black Santa appeal.

The primary focus of the fundraising effort are charities that support people in homelessness including the St Vincent de Paul, Simon, the Samaritans, Salvation Army, Protestant Aid, Alice Leahy Trust, Laura Lynn Foundation, Focus Ireland and the Solas Project.

Speaking to the Irish Independent, decked out in the traditional long black cape of the 'Black Santa', Rev Arbuthnot said: "Once again, here we are standing outside St Ann's fundraising for those in our society who are less fortunate, especially the homeless. It was heart-breaking last week to see people queuing outside the Capuchin Day Centre for basic provisions.

**FRIDAY NIGHT
LIVE 2025**

**WHAT'S THE
DIFFERENCE?**

Friday 31st January 2025
7.30pm
Annaghmore Church Hall

SAMS
IRELAND
South American Mission Society

“That this is happening at a time of Apple taxes and budget surpluses is really a shame on us as a society because the mark of a decent society is how we treat the most vulnerable.”

He appealed to any politicians who venture around the corner from the Dáil to do some Christmas shopping to support the appeal, and the choirs who will daily sing their hearts out, between now and Christmas Eve.

But he also had a message for them. “In this country of abundant wealth, the next government really must focus for the next four or five years on looking after those who have fallen by the wayside. We must do better for them because it can be done,” he said.



FRIDAY NIGHT LIVE 2025

SAMS
IRELAND
South American Mission Society

- Engaging videos describing faith and growth stories
- Inspirational Bible teaching
- Insightful interviews with church leaders from the South American church community
- Fellowship, networking, and refreshments

Annaghmore Parish, 53 Moss Rd BT62 1NT

Travelling on the M1 - take the road marked 'Peatlands Park, The Argory - B131' at Junction 13. Follow the sign for 'Loughgall B131' south for 1.5 miles. At the first junction, watch out for a sign marked 'Annaghmore Church of Ireland' which leads you straight ahead. Further along turn onto the Moss road where you will see the Church on your right.

He continues to see people in tents outside his church doors in the mornings and said nothing had changed since last year's appeal as far as the "urgency of the housing crisis and the homelessness crisis" was concerned.

He was also meeting many young people for whom the "goal of home ownership is a distant dream for them. We need to be able to do something to help that."

The launch was attended by children from Kildare Place School in Dublin, who merrily sang popular Christmas carols, as well as Archbishop Michael Jackson and the Deputy Lord Mayor of Dublin, Cllr Donna Cooney.

"Great fundraising has been done for various charities over the years. That is what Christmas is all about – giving and making sure that everybody has enough at Christmas time," Cllr Cooney said.

She admitted she was disappointed that homelessness in the city was still a major issue.

King Charles III attends Advent service at Farm Street

The King was at a special Advent service on Tuesday at the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Farm Street in Mayfair, London, co-hosted by Aid to the Church in Need.

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The service celebrated the courage and perseverance of Christian communities and reflected on the 10th anniversary of the invasion of Mosul and the Nineveh Plains in northern Iraq by Daesh or ISIS. The King was introduced to representatives of the London-based Iraqi Christian diaspora, including individuals who suffered persecution and forced displacement, and he also met members of the Jesuit parish – including those involved in supporting the homeless and others in need.

Vatican's Holy Year calendar includes event for LGBT Catholics

The Vatican has included an event organised by LGBT Catholics on its official online calendar for the upcoming 2025 Roman Catholic Holy Year, in an unusual sign of openness by the global Church toward the gay community.

A pilgrimage by the Italian group "La Tenda di Gionata" (Jonathan's Tent), set for next September, is listed among the hundreds of events planned for the Jubilee, which is expected to bring some 32 million tourists to Rome next year.

The group, which describes its goal as to promote the welcoming of LGBT people within the Church, is expected to host a prayer vigil at a local Rome parish before making a trip to St. Peter's Basilica.

A Vatican official told Reuters the inclusion of the group on the calendar did not imply support of its events.

"They are not sponsored activities," said Agnese Palmucci, a spokesperson for the Vatican's evangelization office, which is organising the Jubilee.

Rome is the global centre of the Catholic Holy Year, which opens on Dec. 24, Christmas Eve, and runs through Jan. 6, 2026. Jubilees like this normally occur once every 25 years.

Catholic pilgrims who come to Rome during the Jubilee can pass through special "Holy Doors" that will be open at St. Peter's and three other basilicas in Rome.

The Vatican is primarily concerned about ensuring all pilgrims have a chance to pass through the "Holy Doors", said Palmucci.

"Once it is ascertained that there is space, we insert the pilgrimage into the general calendar," she said.

Pope Francis has been credited with leading the Catholic Church into taking a more welcoming approach towards the LGBT community, and has allowed priests to bless same-sex couples on a case-by-case basis.

Perspective

England Rugby star credits faith for 'keeping calm and grounded'

Marcus Smith, the England rugby star, recently opened up about the role his Catholic faith plays in helping him stay calm under pressure and maintain balance in the competitive world of professional sports.

In an interview with The Telegraph, Smith explained that his faith has been central to his life, especially during his upbringing in Manila and Singapore, where his mother's Filipino Catholic roots shaped his early years.

“My mum’s family are very religious,” Smith said. “I still pray with her [his mother] regularly, I continue to read my Bible. It makes me feel grounded, makes me believe that everything’s going to be all right. In the ups and downs of professional sport, you need the ability to stay as neutral and level as possible.”

For Smith, the key lesson learned from his faith is to avoid extremes. “Don’t think you’re world-class if you win one game, and don’t think you’re the worst player on earth if you lose one,” he said. “It’s the biggest thing I’ve learnt these past couple of years.”

At 25, Smith’s journey to success has not always been smooth. He admitted to straying from faith between the ages of 14 and 19, focusing on other interests. But when his career hit a rough patch at 21, as he struggled to break into the England squad, his mother encouraged him to return to his faith.

“I was struggling for form a bit, trying to get in the England mix. So my mum suggested bringing it back,” he recalled.

“Now I take Holy Communion, I pray every night and every morning. I haven’t stopped. It gives me peace.”

Smith’s rugby journey began at the age of seven when his family moved to Singapore, where he played for Centaurs RFC. After relocating to the UK at thirteen, he earned a sports scholarship to Brighton College, where he captained the 1st XV. His talent quickly became apparent, and by 2015, he was representing England at Under-16 level. In 2017, at just 18 years old, he became the second-youngest player to debut in the Premiership.

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Church News Ireland

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