

Church News Ireland



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Christian Aid Ireland**

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Image of the day

Paddington Bear supports Christian Aid Ireland

Christian Aid Ireland writes - Our supporters in Newtownards, County Down just can't 'bear' to see their global neighbours living in poverty and crisis.

That's why they're collecting donations to support our work and enlisting the help of everyone's favourite bear to launch their 3-day sit-out in the town's Conway Square.

They have been collecting donations from shoppers and passers-by each day from Thursday 19 until today Saturday 21 December.

The statue of Paddington in Conway Square is one of 20 such installations fitted to benches around the UK by the promoters of the new Paddington movie.

Paddington's marmalade sandwich is hiding behind his Christian Aid vest.

The Newtownards and District Christian Aid Committee is made up of representatives drawn from 10 local churches.

They began holding their annual pre-Christmas sit-out in 1988. It's just one of the fundraising activities they hold throughout the year. Since the committee was formed in 1985, they have raised well over £500,000 to support our work.

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CAI is hugely grateful to John Doherty (back right) and to each of the members for their dedication to the cause of ending extreme poverty around the world.

News



Black Santa Sitout is helping Belfast lead way against slavery

The Very Reverend Stephen Forde, Dean of Belfast, writes a daily comment for the Belfast Telegraph. In one he highlighted modern slavery in a city which was a

beacon against the original Slave Trade. Black Santa writes -

We are helping Belfast lead way against slavery, as it did way back in the 18th century

Belfast is built around the trading activities of its great sea port. However, there was one trade that never, ever passed through here — the slave trade, where fortunes were made and other cities financed.

In large part this was due to the courageous stand of one man and the circle of abolitionists around him.

Thomas McCabe was a goldsmith in North Street. He was also a staunch member of the Rosemary Street Presbyterian congregation and a founder member of the Belfast Charitable Society, which is 250 years old this year. However, it was the opposition of McCabe to the formation of any slave trading company in Belfast at a meeting in the historic Assembly Rooms in 1786 which ensured no such trade was ever permitted through the city.

Famously, McCabe wrote “may God eternally damn the soul of the man who subscribes the first guinea” to such a venture.

But why is such a piece of history relevant to the 2024 Black Santa appeal? Because although no slave trade was established through Belfast in 1786, modern day slavery IS a reality in the lives of too many.

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From across the world people have been misled and trafficked here, to live an existence of enslavement.

Some have been trafficked for the sex trade, others are in domestic servitude, others endure industrial scale exploitation, often at the hands of criminals.

Flourish NI is a local charity which courageously supports those who have been freed from modern day slavery, and Flourish NI is one of the 120 local charities supported this year by your donations to the Black Santa Appeal.

The staff work intensively through trauma therapy programmes to help those whose lives and freedom was stolen from them to begin to rebuild their lives and their trust in humanity.

Your support for Black Santa, standing in the rain in Donegall Street, is support for those who have experienced the destructive reality of enslavement.

The work and principles of Thomas McCabe and his fellow abolitionists at the end of the 18th century is a work still needed for our world and in our day — work that is facilitated by the 2024 Black Santa Appeal.



Changing Attitude Ireland welcomes C of I Parish

Changing Attitude Ireland has welcomed the Church of Ireland, United Parishes of Malahide, Portmarnock & St. Doulagh's (Dioceses of Dublin and Glendalough) to the growing community of Open and Welcoming Congregations, welcoming and including LGBTQIA+ people and their families fully in every part of our Church life.

The United Parishes of Malahide, Portmarnock and St Doulagh's will now be added to our online directory of Open and Welcoming Congregations <https://changingattitudeireland.com/welcoming-and-open-congregations-in-ireland/>

Parishes that register as Open and Welcoming agree to the following:

We promote trust and understanding amongst heterosexual and LGBTQIA+ parishioners.

We seek to include LGBTQIA+ people and their families at every level of parish life, welcoming not only their presence but all they have to offer.

We do not make the assumption that everyone is heterosexual, whether in conversation, preaching, or in the prayers of the church.

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We are upfront in our welcome for LGBTQIA+ people and same-sex couples.

We recognise committed same-sex unions at social events, in church services and other aspects of Church life.



Revd Canon David Gillespie, Rector of the United Parishes, with some of the Select Vestry members Linda Daly, Stephen Moffatt and Lucy Michael, at St. Andrew's Church, Malahide

We welcome clergy regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. If you would like to become an Open and Welcoming Congregation, we would be delighted to support you to do so. Please get in touch at - openandwelcomingcai@gmail.com



Moderator's Christmas Message

In his Christmas Message, the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, Right Reverend Dr Richard Murray, writes of two ancient cities, the City of David, known as Bethlehem, and Kraków in Poland, where he visited this month.

He laments how unlike the famous Christmas carol; Bethlehem, and the Middle East, do not lie 'still' and at peace today. Yet in Kraków, Dr Murray found the light of Christ and the hope of salvation that came from Bethlehem, burning brightly in a new fledgling denomination he visited, contrasting this with the utter darkness he found on a tour of Auschwitz.

Dr Murray, who is the minister of Drumreagh Presbyterian Church near Ballymoney, said, “the message of Christmas is about hope, and the arrival of the Light of the World, The Prince of Peace Himself, who came and preached peace to those who were far off and peace to those who were near. In an uncertain world, where so many are at war with each other, and so many are at war with God, the gracious invitation of God is to take refuge in Jesus Christ and trust Him to be the Saviour of our soul...In a world full of trouble and sorrow, we give thanks that “the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it”, for if you rest in the finished work of Christ, you too will know the peace of God that passes understanding.”

Dr Murray concludes by saying, “My prayer is that the God of peace will bless you with that peace over Christmas, and that His ‘Shalom’, peace in its deepest wholeness and entirety, will be your shalom today and forevermore.”

[Full text of the Moderator’s 2024 Christmas Message](#)

[Bethlehem...and other places](#)

‘O Little Town of Bethlehem’ is one of our best loved Christmas carols and will be sung many times over the festive season. The author was Reverend Phillips Brooks, who in 1865 spent Christmas in Bethlehem, where Jesus was born. Three years later, reflecting back on that visit, he wrote the carol with the opening lines ‘O Little Town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie.’

Thinking of Bethlehem where our Saviour was born, and the whole of the Middle East today, we find a place that can by no means be described as 'still'. For the town that saw the arrival of the 'Light of the world' (John 8:12) is still in darkness, in a region that still doesn't know peace.

Earlier this month I had the privilege of visiting Poland to encourage and support a fledgling Presbyterian denomination, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Poland. I spent time with my brothers and sisters in Christ and preached in one of their four congregations, Christ the Saviour in the ancient city of Kraków.

How encouraging to see a growing congregation of believers in a country not noted for reformed truth. Truly, the Lord is mighty to save and many are discovering that salvation is not to be found in church rituals and traditions, but salvation is to be found in grace alone, through Christ alone, and by faith alone.

On the Monday before I returned home, I had the opportunity of visiting the nearby Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp and learning something of the local unsettling history around it. Before the Second World War, the city of Kraków had a thriving Jewish community of some 64,000 people. After the war, between 3,000/4,000 remained – many rescued by Oskar Schindler through his factory in Kraków - as told in the film 'Schindler's List'.

As I walked solemnly around the complex in the freezing cold, I pondered the harrowing treatment of over a million Jewish men and women, young people and children, on this very site in what the Nazi's called 'The Final Solution'. The

ugliness of human sin was on full display as I contemplated the deep and dark hatred that drove so many to war, torture and mass murder. It was an awful and hopeless place.

By contrast, the message of Christmas is about hope, and the arrival of the Light of the World, The Prince of Peace Himself, who came and preached peace to those who were far off and peace to those who were near.

In an uncertain world, where so many are at war with each other, and so many are at war with God, the gracious invitation of God is to take refuge in Jesus Christ and trust Him to be the Saviour of our soul. In John 14:27 Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

In a world full of trouble and sorrow, we give thanks that "the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:5), for if you rest in the finished work of Christ, you too will know the peace of God that passes understanding (Philippians 4:7).

My prayer is that the God of peace will bless you with that peace over Christmas, and that His 'Shalom', peace in its deepest wholeness and entirety, will be your shalom today and forevermore.

Rt Rev Dr Richard Murray, Ballymoney, County Antrim

Roscrea's Walk to Bethlehem - Midland Tribune



The unique procession winds through the Franciscan Friary and continued through historic Roscrea. Photo: PJ Wright

The much anticipated annual live nativity event 'The Walk to Bethlehem' took place in Roscrea on Saturday (Dec 14) bringing the Christmas story to life for the local community. Report courtesy of the Midland Tribune and photos by P j Wright.

This beloved tradition, organised by the four churches in Roscrea – St. Cronan's Catholic Church, The Church of Ireland, The Methodist Church, and Oasis Elim Church – attracted a large crowd who journeyed through the scenes of the nativity.



Pictured above are Diana Istrati (Mary) sitting on Rodney the donkey, James Kelly (Joseph), Nkosi, Joel, Jonathan, Micheal as the Shepherds. Photo: PJ Wright

The walk began at St. Cronan's Catholic Church, where Transition Year students from Coláiste Phobal took centre stage. The scene featured Mary and Joseph receiving the Good News from the angels about the birth of Jesus.

Visitors were given goodie bags containing information about the full Christmas story and what to expect during the walk. Outside, Rodney, the donkey, awaited, ready to accompany the group on their journey to the next scene.

The second stop was at The Church of Ireland, where the innkeepers greeted the crowd.

@ @ Pictured above are Diana Istrati (Mary) sitting on Rodney the donkey, James Kelly (Joseph), Nkosi, Joel, Jonathan, Micheal as the Shepherds. Photo: PJ Wright



Pictured above are the Shepherds (back l to r) Joel, Micheal Nkosi and Jonathan and front are Hadassah, Deborah and Candice enjoying the unique event in Roscrea

There, children participated in crafting activities, while adults engaged in a prayer walk, reflecting on the Christmas season.

An opportunity for visitors to leave prayer requests was provided, with the promise that each church would pray over them.

At the Methodist Church, the third scene, attendees were greeted by a warm fire and shepherds gathered around it. The community choir filled the air with beautiful Christmas carols, bringing a sense of joy and unity to the event.

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The walk culminated at Oasis Elim Church, where Mary, Joseph, and the baby Jesus were waiting. Rodney the donkey and some sheep completed the nativity scene.

The church choir led the audience in a heartfelt rendition of Christmas carols, with everyone joining in song to celebrate the season. Following the performance, attendees gathered at the Oasis Centre for refreshments, enjoying a well-earned rest after their journey through Bethlehem.

This successful event was made possible by the collaboration of the four churches and their dedicated congregations. A special thanks goes to the clergy of St. Cronan's Catholic Church, Rev. Jane of the Church of Ireland, Rev. Denis of the Methodist Church, and Pastor Pam of Oasis Elim Church. The event would not have been possible without their leadership and support.

Pictured above are the Shepherds (back l to r) Joel, Micheal Nkosi and Jonathan and front are Hadassah, Deborah and Candice enjoying the unique event in Roscrea

Thanks also go to the Community Choir for providing the wonderful music that added to the festive atmosphere.

Lastly, a heartfelt thank you to Ann Marie Mulrooney and the Transition Year students from Coláiste Phobal, as well as the youth from the churches for providing the cast and making the event truly memorable.

The Walk to Bethlehem continues to be a meaningful and cherished tradition in Roscrea, bringing the true spirit of Christmas to the heart of the community.

Cathedral Calls

Llandaff is first cathedral in Wales to win Silver Eco Church award

Llandaff Cathedral, Church in Wales, has been named as the first cathedral in Wales to be awarded the A Rocha Silver Eco Church Award. This award reflects the dedication and commitment of the cathedral community to sustainability and environmental stewardship.

The A Rocha Eco Church Award recognizes churches that demonstrate exceptional care for God's creation across areas such as worship, teaching, management of church buildings, engagement with the local community, and individual lifestyles. Achieving silver status reflects significant progress in these areas and highlights Llandaff Cathedral's leadership in the movement toward a more sustainable future.

The cathedral has undertaken numerous initiatives to reduce its environmental impact, including improving energy efficiency, enhancing biodiversity within its grounds, and embedding sustainability into its worship and educational programs. These efforts have been underpinned by the support and participation of the cathedral's congregation, staff and wider community.

The Rev. Jan van der Lely, chancellor canon of Llandaff Cathedral, said, "The dean and chapter are delighted to

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have achieved a Silver Eco Church Award for Llandaff Cathedral and want to thank everyone who has supported this project, from the Friends of the Cathedral providing funds to help us reduce our carbon footprint, through installing new gas boilers (and preparing for air source heat pumps at the next stage of our Eco journey), to all the community volunteers helping to plant our native species hedge and the children who raised over £360 [\$458 U.S.] to twin all our toilets (promoting safe sanitation in developing countries).

“We are indebted also to the Woodland Trust who gave our hedging trees, and Keep Wales Tidy who have given us plants and materials for the ‘butterfly garden’ area.

“We are thrilled to be the first cathedral in Wales to achieve this award and we are looking forward to the next stage of our Eco journey towards Gold!”

Webinars, music, resources, broadcasts, and books

Methodist Church’s Safe Place registration

Conference 2024 directed that all churches should register to become a Safe Place.

To do this, it is recommended that a minimum of three people from each church attend the 90-minute session,

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which is open to anyone interested in learning more about domestic abuse and how being a Safe Place can raise awareness and benefit victims.

The dates for upcoming sessions this March are as follows for ROI and NI together:

Tuesday 4th
March 2025,
7:30pm

Thursday 6th March 2025, 10:30am

Tuesday 11th March 2025, 7:30pm

Thursday 13th March 2025, 10:30am

To register and find out more, visit:

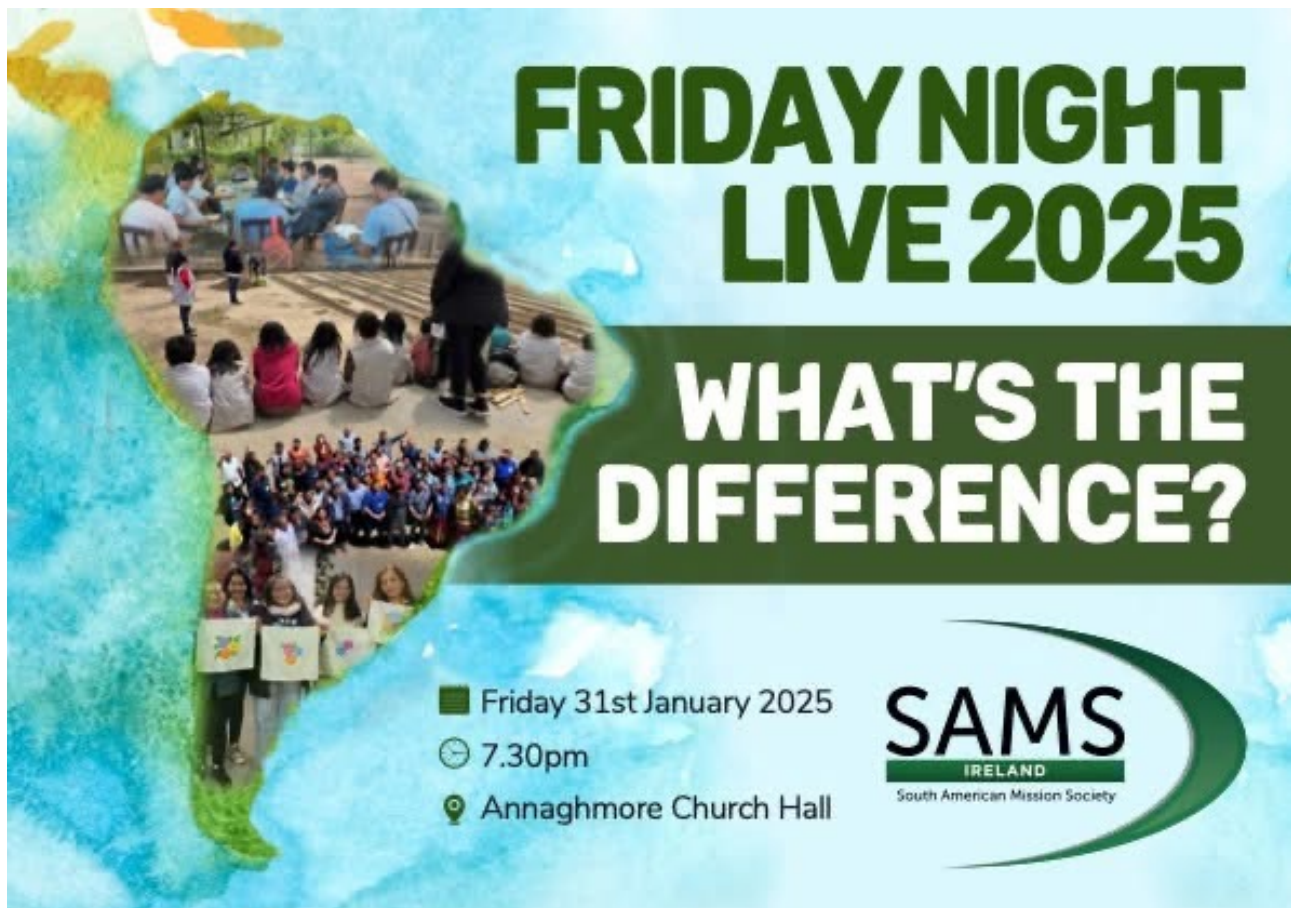
irishmethodist.org/ministries-learning-development



SAMS Friday Night Live 2025

At Annaghmore Parish on 31st January 2025 @ 7.30pm

SAMS - We are delighted to invite you to our annual Friday Night Live event. A chance to hear of some of the exciting



things happening in the life of SAMS Ireland. For more information please contact us at office@samsireland.com.

Laudato Si invites all to Mallow for a biodiversity conference

The Laudato Si Working Group of the Bishops' Conference invites everyone to join them in Mallow, Springfort Hall Hotel, Co Cork on Saturday, 25 January 2025, from 10.00am to 4.00pm for a conference entitled: Seeds of Hope; Returning Biodiversity to our Parishes.

Participants have an opportunity to equip themselves and their parish community to walk more gently on the earth,

with dynamic speakers, practical workshops and a “marketplace” of support.

Key speakers at the conference include, Bishop Martin Hayes of Kilmore and the Irish Catholic Bishops’ Conference Laudato Si’ coordinator; Nellie McLaughlin RSM, an environmental activist, author and founding member of Green Sod Land Trust Ireland; and, Kate Chandler, Communities and Engagement Pollinator Officer for the National Biodiversity Data Centre.

The speakers have been actively involved in supporting communities around Ireland engage with the call in Laudato Si’ to care for creation.

Afternoon workshops include ‘Cultivating an Eco-Spirituality’ with Sister Betty Baker, ‘Returning to Nature in Killaloe Diocese’ with the biodiversity officer Barry O’Loughlin and ‘Mapping your church grounds’ with Niamh Ní Dhúill from Oideachas an Dúlra.

A practical focus in many of the workshops aims to equip participants with tools to make a difference in their parish setting, whatever the setting and context. Whether it’s a first step into ecological activity in church or community, or a seasoned activist, this is an opportunity to be inspired and connect with others with similar interests in the community.

The presence of varied groups active in the sector can encourage participants in the building up of their parish as a hub of support for biodiversity and cultivator of earth-friendly practices that can then inspire others with seeds of hope.

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Laudato Si' is the 2015 encyclical by Pope Francis on care for our common home. In 2015, Pope Francis published Laudato Si' – On Care for Our Common Home, the first papal encyclical on care for creation. It became a best seller in Ireland and in many countries. Laudato Si' is a blueprint which encourages “every person living on this planet” (LS, 3) to listen to the signs of the times, to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor, to listen to the science and to the call of our faith

To register for this conference, please email: maria.murphy@trocaire.org. There is a suggested donation of €10 on the day.

Poem for today

4 different Christmas Eves

Christmas Eve is here at last, and Santa comes tonight.
A pile of presents six feet high, all glittering and bright.
Mum and dad, the dog and me,
One big happy family,
Everyone is full of glee,
Can't wait for morning light.

Christmas Eve is here again hope Dad comes home tonight.
Since he's been gone, all me and mum have ever done is
fight.
Says I'm the reason she's alone,
And looks at pictures on her phone,
Then she'll cry and rock and moan,
Please Jesus, put things right.

Christmas Eve has come again, I hope I sleep tonight.
Since the bank took back my house, I'm in a sorry plight.
My sleeping bag is soaking wet,
I'm hungry homeless cold and yet,
On Christmas Day the cops might let,
Me in the cells, oh what delight!

Long ago in David's town upon a winters night
A gift came down from heaven with the power to put things
right
The Son of God, a soul so pure
No sin or ill He could not cure
'Cept hearts where sin felt so secure
They worshipped wealth, and missed Gods light.

By Tony Wager

Speaking to the soul

Short reading and a prayer - daily on this site

Church News Ireland

The publication of Church News Ireland is overseen by Very Rev Dr Houston McKelvey OBE, QVRM, TD. He may be contacted at houstonmckelvey@mac.com

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Church News Ireland

www.churchnewsireland.org

**Link in Monday through Saturday from
early morning**

Please recommend to your friends