

Church News Ireland



Image of the day – a Clydesdale Christmas

December 9, 2023

Image of the day



A Clydesdale Christmas

You just cant help but like them!

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People and places



Belfast Seed and Bean venue for Orthodox, C of I and Catholic

Fr Angelos from St Stephen's Orthodox Coptic Church in Belfast along with Canon Tracey McRoberts and Father Martin Magill in the lovely Seed and Bean Cafe... Still pondering their conversation about the unity of the Church.



Connor's SERVE Graduates 2023

Congratulations to the young people from Connor diocese who graduated this week from the Connor SERVE programme.

The young people came from All Saints Parish Church, Antrim, the Church of the Holy Spirit, Mossley, Lisburn Cathedral, St Brigid's Church, Glengormley and Mallusk. Rev Jacob Mercer and St Brigid's hosted the event.

THE CATHOLIC CHAPLAINCY QUB
presents
A FESTIVAL
OF
NINE LESSONS
& CAROLS
2023
with music by Canticle Sacred Music Society

Sunday 10th December 6pm
St Malachy's Church, Alfred Street, Belfast
Refreshments afterwards

*We warmly invite you to join with us as we
celebrate Christ's birth in word and song*

**Retiring collection for Holy Family
Maternity Hospital in Bethlehem**

QUB Catholic Chaplaincy Nine Lessons and Carols service on Sunday

We look forward to welcoming our students, staff alumni and friends to our ever-popular Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols this Sunday at 6pm in St Malachy's Church, Alfred Street. Come join us to celebrate Christ's birth with scripture

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and song in one of Belfast's most beautiful and historic Churches. Festive refreshments will be served afterwards, and a retiring collection for the Holy Family Maternity Hospital in Bethlehem will be taken up by Order of Malta Ireland - QUB.

Know too that if you plan to support our shoebox appeal in aid of Belfast Homeless Services, you are welcome to bring shoeboxes and/or gift bags along on Sunday night.



Bringing Bangladesh to Bangor

More than 60 supporters came along to City Church Bangor on Thursday evening to learn about Christian Aid Ireland's work in Bangladesh and make some craft items to celebrate the success of women artisans whose businesses are helping them overcome both poverty and prejudice.



CAI's Chief Executive Rosamond Bennett told the story of its work in Bangladesh through the eyes of 21-year-old Kakoli Khatun who is the focus of this year's CAI Christmas appeal.

Kakoli is reviving the centuries-old tradition of nakshi kantha – embroidering old saris to make quilts. CAI partner, Aid Comilla provided smart phones, internet access and digital skills training, enabling Kakoli and her 10-strong, all-women collective to sell their quilts online.

After hearing Kakoli's story, our supporters made Bengali-style quilted and embroidered stars to decorate their Christmas trees.



They also made beaded bracelets similar to the beadwork created by another of the women featured in this year's Christmas appeal. We're grateful to Lynsey Montgomery from Sassy Beads (Sassybeads) for leading the bracelet making.

CAI supporters also enjoyed a cookery demonstration by Mollie Cunningham of Ballytrim Pantry near Killyleagh who shared a recipe for a Bengali-inspired curry and dessert.

You can read more about Kakoli and our work in Bangladesh here:
<https://www.christianaid.ie/news/news-and-blogs/bangladeshs-material-girls>



Canon for Raphoe

Rev Mervyn Peoples has been appointed a Canon of St Eunan's Cathedral in Raphoe.

The appointment was made by Bishop Andrew Forster of Derry & Raphoe and fills the vacancy in the Cathedral Chapter following the retirement of Rev Canon Judi McGaffin.

Canon Peoples, who has served in more than a dozen parishes in Derry & Raphoe dioceses, says he was taken by surprise by the news but regards it as a great honour. "It is a real surprise - and a real blessing - to have been appointed a Canon of St Eunan's Cathedral," he said. "Ironically, the news arrived during the first week of Advent but I can



Ashfield boys in full swing getting their tree ready for the Christmas tree festival in St Mark's, Hollywood Road. Ashfield Boys High School

honestly say I didn't see it coming. It is a role I have never sought but which I am delighted to fulfil, and I am enormously grateful to Bishop Andrew for bestowing this great honour upon me.

"I have tremendous affection for parishioners throughout the Diocese of Raphoe, many of whom I have had the privilege of serving during vacancies and at other times. I am mindful of the significance of St Eunan's Cathedral in their lives and worship, and I pray I can be a blessing to them as much as they have blessed me.

"I am enormously grateful to my wife and family for their unstinting support throughout my ministry. And I pray, too, that God will guide me in this new, exciting and unexpected phase in my ministry."

Canon Peoples has served God's people in All Saints' Clooney, Templemore (St Columb's Cathedral), Conwal, Dunfanaghy, Merville, Inver and Stranorlar, to mention just a few of his parishes.

Catholic Bishops in Ireland gather to debate the Dublin riots, war and assisted suicide

Leaders of the Catholic Church in Ireland have encouraged families to return to church this Christmas after debating issues from the Dublin riots, war in the Middle East and assisted suicide.

The Irish Catholic Bishop's Conference was held this week in Saint Patrick's College, Maynooth, headed by Archbishop Eamon Martin of Armagh.

During the winter meeting, the bishops celebrated Mass in the college chapel and offered prayers for "peace, respect for the dignity of human life, and for climate justice throughout the world".

The topics for discussion included the "meagre state income facing asylum seekers in Ireland," efforts to address the

climate crisis at COP28 and the churches opposition to assisted suicide.

It follows meetings of the Oireachtas Committee on Assisted Dying earlier this year, where it was debated if Ireland should introduce legislation for voluntary assisted dying – something which the main churches across Ireland strongly opposed.

Another main theme from this week's Bishop's conference was encouraging Catholics to return to Mass this Christmas.

The bishops stated: "The Sunday Mass is at the very heartbeat of the Church and of our personal faith.

"While some may have drifted away from regular attendance of Mass, and others may have developed the habit of continuing to watch online instead of joining the community in person, we encourage families and individuals who are able to do so, to return to Mass for Christmas and the New Year, knowing the importance of the Sunday gathering in the life of our parishes."

On the loss of life in Israel and Palestine since the Hamas attacks on October 7 and ongoing Israeli retaliation in Gaza, the bishops prayed for those who "have suffered immensely due to conflict, displacement and destruction."

While welcoming the release of some hostages, they also expressed disappointment at the end of the truce in recent days.

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Discussing the recent riots in Dublin and a rise of anti-immigrant sentiment in Ireland, the Bishops called on people of faith “to stand up against all forms of racism, violence division, hatred, misinformation and fear.”

They also said it was important to create a “culture of encounter” between immigrant communities and Irish society.

“The riots in Dublin highlight a need to redouble efforts towards a responsible management of the current situation,” they said, calling for more efforts to plan adequate accommodation and services across all of society, so no one would feel disadvantaged.

Courtesy The Irish News. By Allan Preston

News reports

King attends Coptic Orthodox Advent service

The King was given a handwritten Christmas letter by a young girl during a visit to an orthodox church.

Charles attended an Advent service and Christmas reception at the Coptic Orthodox Church Centre UK in Stevenage, Hertfordshire, on Tuesday.



His visit was part of continued efforts to encourage inter-faith dialogue and a greater understanding of different religions in Britain and abroad.

Six-year-old Taormina approached the King through the crowd and handed him the letter, which included love hearts and the words “Happy Holidays!” and “To: King Charls”.

The Coptic Orthodox community, an indigenous Egyptian Christian community, has grown with the establishment of a diocese in London, with approximately 40,000 Coptic Orthodox Christians now in the UK.

They make up around 15% of the population in Egypt, the largest presence of Christians in the Middle East, but those of Christian faith face widespread persecution in the region.

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Charles last visited the centre almost exactly 10 years ago, when Prince of Wales, in December 2013, and photographs of the occasion were displayed at the entrance.

The King was greeted on arrival by the Lord Lieutenant of Hertfordshire, Robert Voss, local councillors and the Bishop of St Albans, Alan Smith.

A 15-minute service including prayers, gospel readings and the Orthodox Creed, was held in the Cathedral of St George, with Charles sitting in the front row of pews.

At the conclusion of the service, sisters Sarah and Laura Ayouba gave a cello and violin performance for the royal visitor.

Charles was then led to the church hall, where he stopped to speak with individuals at four stalls showcasing different services held across the diocese.

He then shook hands and exchanged laughs as he moved through the congregation of around 500 people in the packed hall, eventually coming across Taormina and receiving her letter.

Speaking to the congregation after the unveiling, Charles said he has the “greatest admiration for the Coptic community”, before adding: “If I may say so, this has been a very special occasion and I want to wish you nothing but a very happy Christmas indeed.”

The King concluded his visit by planting a plum tree at the front of the centre, and waved to attendees as he left.

Royal wedding preacher Bishop Michael Curry in hospital after brain bleed

The American bishop who spoke at Harry and Meghan's wedding, Rt Rev Michael Curry is recovering in hospital, after needing brain surgery following a fall.

The Episcopal Church of the United States published a brief statement on its website, saying that Bishop Michael fell while visiting Syracuse, New York. He's reported to have suffered a "subdural hematoma" – otherwise known as a brain bleed - which required an operation.

The Church said that the surgery, on 3rd December was successful, and Curry is now recovering in a hospital near his home in Raleigh, North Carolina.

In September, the 71 year old was in hospital to remove an adrenal gland and a non-cancerous mass, following treatment for episodes of internal bleeding.

The popular cleric is perhaps most widely recognised for his sermon about 'Love' at the marriage of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle at St George's Chapel in 2018.

He's approaching the end of his nine-year tenure as the lead bishop of the Episcopal Church – the USA's official province within the Anglican Communion.

The bishop suffered his first brain bleed at the start of his role in 2015, when he fell and hit his head on the morning of his installation. His symptoms then did not become apparent

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for another month, when he experienced temporary memory loss while preaching.

The statement from the denomination, which is headquartered in New York, asked for prayers for the bishop's recovery, saying: "Please pray for Bishop Curry, his family and his medical team."

It also said that updates would be provided as they become available.

Webinars, music, resources, broadcasts, and books

Sankta Lucia: Festival of Light, broadcast from York Minster

A traditional Scandinavian service celebrating the bringer of light during the long darkness of winter will take place at York Minster on Monday 11 December at 7pm.

Now in its tenth year at York Minster, the atmospheric Sankta Lucia service features a candlelit procession and carols for all the family. The service is run as a partnership between York Minster and York Anglo-Scandinavian Society (YASS). Lucia is one of the most significant traditions in the Scandinavian calendar – a powerful symbol and celebration of light and an integral part of the Advent season.



The service features the London Nordic Choir who will form the procession which enters the Nave singing the traditional Lucia song. The singers are dressed in white gowns and carry candles, with Lucia herself as the focal point, wearing a crown of candles and a red ribbon around her waist.

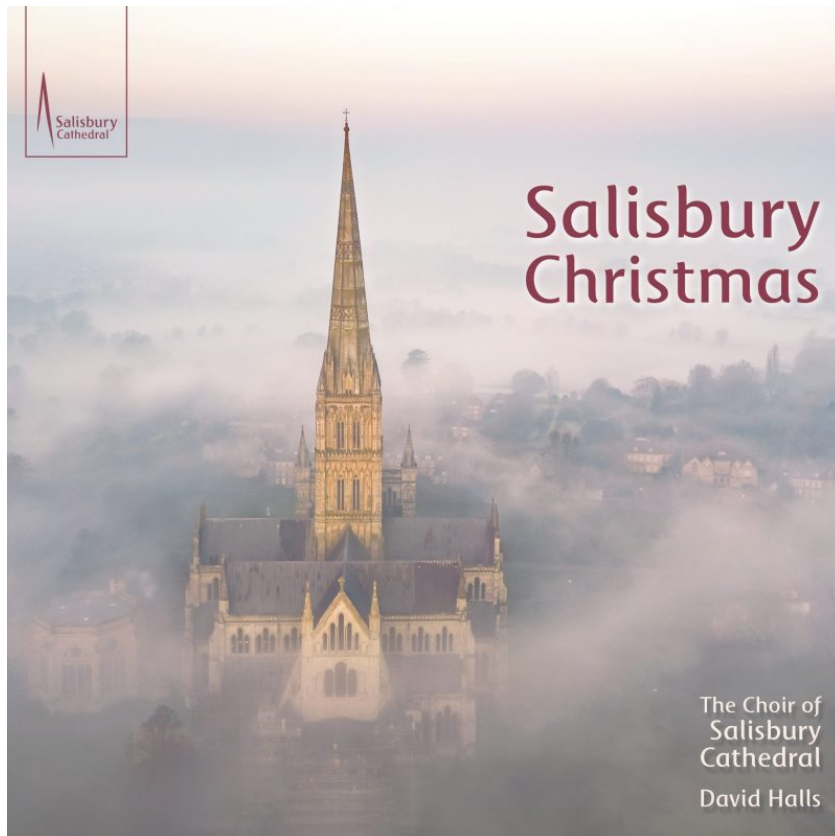
Sankta Lucia: A Festival of Light starts at 7pm on Monday 11 December. Doors open at 6pm. Admission is free; the service lasts approximately one hour. There will be a retiring collection at the end of the service with proceeds going to York Minster, YASS and the CoScan Trust Fund, which annually awards grants to young British people to travel and connect with the Nordic countries.

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The service will be livestreamed via York Minster's YouTube channel for those who are unable to attend.

[https://www.youtube.com/channel/](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCm0Hm8YfHkPjN2EwZEb64mg)

[UCm0Hm8YfHkPjN2EwZEb64mg](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCm0Hm8YfHkPjN2EwZEb64mg) Photo: Credit Charlotte Graham



New carols and seasonal songs from Salisbury Cathedral Choir, Christmas 2023

Released in November 2023, this is a new collection of carols, seasonal songs and music, performed by Salisbury Cathedral Choir, with Director of Music, David Halls and Assistant Director of Music, John Challenger (organ).

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Music includes God rest you merry (Willcocks), Candlelight Carol (Rutter), Sing Lullaby (Howells) and Tomorrow shall be my dancing day (Gardner). The album also includes the first recording of Errollyn Wallen's Salisbury Carol, commissioned by Salisbury Cathedral in 2022.

[<https://www.salisburycathedral.org.uk/worship-and-music/choirs-and-music/recordings/>]



First phase of the Synodal Pathway of the Catholic Church in Ireland

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The first phase of the Synodal Pathway of the Catholic Church in Ireland is now complete. This two-year stage, interwoven with Synod.va's universal process, concluded with two significant and complementary reports from the National Steering Committee. These two reports have now been published and are available online. You'll find both documents here <https://synod.ie/>

Naxos celebrates Music on Christmas Morning

Naxos celebrates Christmas with a new album of festive recordings by Vasari Singers featuring Roderick Williams and organist Martin Ford. A mix of fresh and favourite carols, including a world premiere recording of 'Music on Christmas Morning' by young British composer Helena Paish.

Buy / Stream / Download:

<https://naxos.lnk.to/8574542UK!FA>

Perspective

A Season of Hope? Reflections for Advent by Richard Sewel

Advent is a season of hope. Today it seems to be in short supply in the Holy Land, but being the birthplace of Christian hope, Christians here are not about to give up on hope.

However, we must distinguish between Christian hope and optimism. After the brief truce in Gaza came to an end, it is hard to be optimistic about the prospects for peace. But Christian hope is rooted in the oracles of the Old Testament prophets who reflected on the suffering of the people of Judah during their exile in Babylon. From refugee suffering came the idea of a Messiah who would save the people and lead them into a place of restoration, renewal and reconciliation. Christians believe the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem centuries later fulfilled that hope.

The Judean and Jordanian deserts are located between Babylon (in modern day Iraq) and Jerusalem. Eventually the Israelites' suffering in their distant exile came to an end and they returned to Jerusalem and rebuilt the city and the kingdom.

The desert is still today only a few miles from Jerusalem and Bethlehem. It is a part of the landscape of the lives of Christians, Muslims and Jews who live in the Land. We respect the desert but we do not fear it. The desert is where the softly spoken words of God are heard. Jesus went there after his baptism, not to suffer deprivation, but to understand God's calling upon him.

This year, more than before, Advent will have something of the desert about it for us living in the Holy Land. But we are not the only ones who suffer. Anyone grieving, desperately lonely or lost in their life will identify with that desert experience. Yet, in the desert, God makes 'a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert' (Is 43:20). Advent hope, unlike optimism, does not promise that everything is getting

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better, but promises that God is with us. Do not ask us to be optimistic, but we are staying hopeful.

The Very Rev'd Canon Richard Sewell is the Dean of St George's College in Jerusalem, the Anglican centre for pilgrimage in the Holy Land.

Poem for today

Advent

by Patrick Kavanagh

We have tested and tasted too much, lover-
Through a chink too wide there comes in no wonder.
But here in the Advent-darkened room
Where the dry black bread and the sugarless tea
Of penance will charm back the luxury
Of a child's soul, we'll return to Doom
The knowledge we stole but could not use.

And the newness that was in every stale thing
When we looked at it as children: the spirit-shocking
Wonder in a black slanting Ulster hill
Or the prophetic astonishment in the tedious talking
Of an old fool will awake for us and bring
You and me to the yard gate to watch the whins
And the bog-holes, cart-tracks, old stables where Time
begins.

O after Christmas we'll have no need to go searching

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For the difference that sets an old phrase burning-
We'll hear it in the whispered argument of a churning
Or in the streets where the village boys are lurching.
And we'll hear it among decent men too
Who barrow dung in gardens under trees,
Wherever life pours ordinary plenty.
Won't we be rich, my love and I, and
God we shall not ask for reason's payment,
The why of heart-breaking strangeness in dreeping hedges
Nor analyse God's breath in common statement.
We have thrown into the dust-bin the clay-minted wages
Of pleasure, knowledge and the conscious hour-
And Christ comes with a January flower.

Speaking to the soul

Short reading and a prayer - daily on this site

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