

Church News Ireland



Image of the day – Blessing of wreaths with RNLI

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Blessing of wreaths with RNLI



Fr Aquinas Duffy and Rev Jack Kinkead with the members of the Wicklow RNLI crews and staff at the Annual Laying of Wreath Ceremony at Wicklow Harbour this week.

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People and places



Bandon Grammar School Service of Carols and Readings

The students and staff of Bandon Grammar School gathered together at St Peter's Church, Bandon for their annual Service of Carols and Readings for Advent and Christmas.

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The service was led by the School Chaplain, the Rev. Anne Skuse and the school choir was directed by Ms Power, accompanied by Mr Colin Nichols, organist at St Peter's Church. In her address the Rev. Skuse spoke about darkness and its many forms in the world today, but of how 'holy incarnation happens over and over again when we open our hearts to God's love and light, which is his gift to us at Christmas'.

During the service food hampers were presented by Transition Year students to representatives of Bandon Family Resource Services. The principal, Ms Niamh McShane, together with representatives from the Bandon Family Resource Centre thanked the students and their families for their generous donations.

Help with Christmas Salvation Army appeal from St Columba's Portadown

A 'mountain' of toys and gifts were donated during Family Service at St.Columba's Parish in Portadown on Sunday 3rd December.

The donations were made in response to Captain Lisa Cunningham's appeal for help for some 100 needy families over the Christmas season . Sunday School classes initiated the appeal , supported by teachers , parents and friends .

It is a major task for the Salvation Army , to check each gift , and allocate to each family , as appropriate. A similar load of items was delivered for The Food Bank Appeal ; this was

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given by Parishioners , and from members of Slimming World who use the Parish Hall for their meetings.



The Ballyseedy Stitchers

“We are delighted and very thankful to receive numerous red hearts from the Ballyseedy Stitchers in Carrigaline. The red hearts will join many others created by Mothers Union members and friends for a CUH staff event”.

News reports

'Postcode lottery' means poor miss out on climate investment says Christian Aid

A new study by Christian Aid has revealed that the economic impact of disasters is stacked against the poor.

Its report Counting the Cost 2023 identifies the year's 20 costliest extreme climate disasters by per capita cost – and the organisation is calling for more climate finance to be invested in early warning and early action.

The study's top 20 list of the costliest extreme disasters of 2023 across a range of 14 countries shows that some countries – through size, geography or other factors – are more prone to experience disasters.

The charity found the highest per capita cost of natural disasters was the wildfires which affected Hawaii in August. The cost of these wildfires averages over \$4,000 per person. This is far beyond the second costliest per capita, Guam's storms in May, which cost almost \$1,500 per head of population. Peru had the lowest sum spent - \$9 per person after floods.

Pointing to the “global postcode lottery”, Christian Aid explains disasters are worse for those countries which are unable to withstand them because of less resilient homes, where many people are employed in agriculture vulnerable

to extreme weather, and places which lack government investment in prevention or rebuilding.

Cyclone Freddy, which features on the list, hit the population of Malawi in 2023. Mofolo Chikaonda, a widow aged 69 who comes from southern Malawi, explained “the worst negative impact of Cyclone Freddy that I shall never forget in my entire life is the destruction of the only house that we struggled to construct”



Prayer by Cameron Bellm
Icon by Kelly Latimore

Every Family Is a Holy Family

Every family is a holy family,
if you look closely enough,
Because every person
bears the breath of God.
Isn't that the wonder of the incarnation?
It's Joseph who waits in a cold parking lot,
Hoping for a day's work to feed his family.
It's Mary who cradles a crying Jesus
Under the blue tarp of a refugee camp.
It's Joseph, too, who changes your oil,
Mary who scrubs your toilet,
Jesus who plays hide and seek
In the crowded aisles of your laundromat.
Just as the holy family sought
admittance to an inn,
So these holy families seek
admittance to our hearts.
May we not only gather them in,
But may we accept their welcome, too.
And as we dine together,
at their table, at ours,
May we know that the bread we break is
sacrament,
The communion between us—
something sacred.
Amen.



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Nushrat Chowdhury, Christian Aid's Climate Justice Policy Advisor in Bangladesh, said: "Cyclone Freddy was a reminder that communities who have contributed the least to the climate crisis are suffering the worst. Loss and damage costs are in the hundreds of billions of dollars annually in developing countries alone. Wealthy nations must commit the new and additional money required to ensure the Loss and Damage Fund agreed at COP28 can be quickly get help to those that need it most."

No corner of the globe was spared in 2023 with all six populated continents represented in the list. Even large countries with big populations feature. USA, China and Mexico all have populations of more than 100 million, yet experienced disasters which cost tens of dollars per head of population, meaning billions of dollars at the national level.

Chief Executive of Christian Aid, Patrick Watt, said:

"With 2023 the hottest year on record, the effects of climate change are more obvious than ever before.

"The human cost of the climate crisis is seen increasingly in homes washed away and lives ended by floods and storms, and crops and livestock lost to drought. This year was once again devastating if you happened to live in a climate vulnerable country.

"While some disasters make the headlines, like the wildfires in Hawaii, in many cases devastating climate-related disasters pass unnoticed by the wider world.

“When it comes to the climate crisis, there is a global postcode lottery that is stacked against the poor. In poorer countries, people are often less prepared for climate-related disasters and have fewer resources with which to bounce back. The upshot is that more people die, and recovery is slower and more unequal. There is a double injustice in the fact that the communities worst affected by global warming have contributed little to the problem.

“Governments urgently need to take further action at home and internationally, to cut emissions, and adapt to the effects of climate change. And where the impacts go beyond what people can adapt to, the loss and damage fund must be resourced to compensate the poorest countries for the effects of a crisis that isn’t of their making.”

More details can be found at <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-12/counting-the-cost-2022.pdf>

In the media

Irish-born Los Angeles bishop among 20 ‘missionaries’ who died violently in 2023 - Catholic Herald

A total of 20 missionaries – including an Irish-born American bishop – died violently in the service of the faith during 2023, according to new figures released from the Vatican, Simon Caldwell writes

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Eight of the dead were priests, one was a seminarian, one a Benedictine novice, seven laypeople, including women, and two described as “non-religious men”.

The tally, released by Fides, the Vatican-based information service of the Pontifical Mission Societies, represents an increase of two deaths on the previous year.

The most dangerous continent for missionary work in 2023 was Africa, for the fifth year in succession, where nine missionaries were killed, including five priests and the seminarian.

Four of these died in Nigeria. They included was Fr Isaac Achi, 61, who was burned alive during an attack by an armed group in his parish in the diocese of Minna.

Two missionaries were also murdered in Burkina Faso, a priest was killed in an attack in his parish in Tanzania, while a religious brother was stabbed in Cameroon and a parish priest knifed to death in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The Americas also proved to be comparatively dangerous territory for missionaries, with four killed in Mexico – two priests and two women.

The fatalities in the neighbouring United States included Auxiliary Bishop David O’Connell of Los Angeles (pictured second from left), who was born in Cork, the Irish Republic, and who moved to the United States in 1979. The 69-year-old was shot dead in his home at Hacienda Heights and his

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housekeeper's husband, Carlos Medina, was later charged with his murder.

In December Fr Stephen Gutsell, a priest at St. John the Baptist Catholic Church in Fort Calhoun, Nebraska, also lost his life when he was stabbed by an intruder.

Four lay men and women died violently in Asia because of their faith and a layman was killed in Europe.

The Asian dead include Junrey Barbante and Janine Arenas, Filipino Catholic students, murdered during a bomb attack on a Mass at Mindanao State University in Marawi City.

It also includes Nahida Khalil Anton and daughter Samar Kamal Anton, two active parishioners of the Holy Family Church in Gaza, were killed by sniper fire as they walked to the adjacent convent of the Missionaries of Charity. They both belonged to a group of Catholic and Orthodox women working with poor and disabled people.

The list also includes Diego Valencia, sacristan of Nuestra Señora de La Palma, in Algeciras, near Cadiz, who was murdered by Moroccan armed with a machete.

Fides uses the term "missionary" to cover baptised people, following the logic that all the baptised are "agents of evangelisation".

While it avoids the term "martyr", the annual list of fatalities is made up of those baptised who have died violently while engaged in the life of the Church.

On the December 26 Feast of St Stephen, the first martyr, Pope Francis paid tribute to the continued witness of the faith to the point of death.

The Holy Father said: “There are still those – and there are many of them – who suffer and die to bear witness to Jesus, just as there are those who are penalised at various levels for the fact of acting in a way consistent with the Gospel, and those who strive every day to be faithful, without ado, to their good duties, while the world jeers and preaches otherwise.

“These brothers and sisters may also seem to be failures, but today we see that it is not the case. Now as then, in fact, the seed of their sacrifices, which seems to die, germinates and bears fruit, because God, through them, continues to work miracles, changing hearts and saving men and women.”

Introducing the list, Fides noted that one of the distinctive traits that most of the victims have in common is the “ordinariness” of their lives and of the circumstances in which they were murdered.

It said some were on their way to celebrate Mass or to carry out pastoral activities in some distant community, offering their “simple evangelical witness” in difficult contexts marked by poverty, violence, social degradation, and oppression.

“They could have gone elsewhere, moved to safer places, or desisted from their Christian commitments, perhaps reducing them, but they did not do so, even though they

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were aware of the situation and the dangers they faced every day”, it said.

Sunak vows to defend Ulster veterans - Daily Telegraph

[Outrage at Westminster as Ireland takes UK to ECHR over Troubles immunity Bill](#)

The UK Government has vowed to fight Ireland over its “misguided” legal challenge to a flagship British law that gives immunity to hundreds of soldiers involved in the Troubles.

In an attack on Dublin’s leadership, the UK said it “profoundly regrets” the decision taken by Ireland to try to overturn Westminster legislation at the European Court of Human Rights.

Military veterans, along with senior Tory MPs, joined the chorus of outrage, accusing the Irish of meddling in British politics in trying to overturn UK statute.

In a near-unprecedented legal action, Leo Varadkar, Ireland’s prime minister, insisted he was left with “no option” but to mount an interstate lawsuit, lodged with the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. The only other time Ireland has taken such a legal course was more than 50 years ago, in 1971.

The legal action has plunged London and Dublin into a bitter diplomatic row while threatening to open up hundreds of former soldiers to historical prosecutions.

Senior Whitehall sources accused Ireland of gross hypocrisy in complaining that the UK was trying to curtail legal actions, claiming Dublin had failed to bring a single prosecution for serious crimes committed during the Troubles since the Good Friday Agreement was signed in 1998.

One senior government source said: “Ireland needs to back off. The Irish government, Sinn Féin and Joe Biden are all cut from the same cloth. But we are not going to climb down over this. We are confident we will win.”

Ireland’s decision also led to renewed calls by the Right of the Conservative Party for the UK Government to reconsider its membership of the European Convention on Human Rights, a move that Rishi Sunak has tried to stave off while he attempts to force through his Rwanda Bill.

Ireland – with the blessing of the US president – has launched its court case to try to overturn the Northern Ireland Troubles Act, which effectively prevents prosecutions for serious crimes of soldiers as well as paramilitaries on both sides. The law, promised in the Tories’ manifesto, gives an amnesty to all suspects provided they take part in an Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery.

In a statement, Chris Heaton-Harris, the Northern Ireland Secretary, said: “The UK Government profoundly regrets the

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decision taken by the Irish government today to bring this unnecessary case against the UK.”

He said the decision was particularly ill-judged because “it comes at a particularly sensitive time in Northern Ireland” while UK courts were already deciding whether the act breached human rights laws.

Mr Heaton-Harris added: “The UK Government urged the Irish government, before considering action, to engage directly with the commission ... It is a matter of considerable regret that it has chosen not to do so.”

In a personal attack, he also questioned the insistence of Micheál Martin, Ireland’s deputy prime minister, that victims of the Troubles should achieve justice in the courts.

Mr Heaton-Harris said: “They have been critical about our proposed approach on the grounds that it moves away from a focus on criminal prosecutions. We believe that the Irish government’s stated position on dealing with legacy issues is inconsistent and hard to reconcile with its own record.”

He said Ireland had made no “concerted or sustained attempt” to pursue its own criminal investigations, and called on Dublin to “urgently clarify the number of criminal prosecutions brought in Ireland since 1998” when the Good Friday Agreement was signed. The UK Government, he said, will “continue robustly to defend the legislation” and accused the Irish authorities of bringing a “misguided action”.

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Mark Francois, the chairman of the ERG group of Tory MPs and who campaigned for the legislation to protect veterans, said: “Who actually runs this damn country? Is it the democratically elected Government, chosen from Parliament or an unelected, unaccountable foreign court?”

“This legislation, which took many years of campaigning to achieve and which was then exhaustively debated, for around a year between both Houses, cannot possibly be allowed to be then overturned by an appeal to an activist foreign court. If it is, this should become a real issue at the forthcoming general election.”

Hundreds of ex-British military and police officers could face prosecutions over historical crimes, including murder, if the Troubles Act is overturned. The Act provides an effective amnesty for paramilitaries as well and Whitehall sources say that few if any will be dragged through the courts because of a lack of evidence. However, military and police files leave British troops and police officers vulnerable to prosecutions despite some alleged offences having taken place as much as half a century or more ago.

Sir Jeffrey Donaldson, the leader of the DUP, which opposes any amnesty for Troubles-era killers, said the Government’s statement was “unusually strong”. He said it “calls out the double standards of the Irish Government who themselves have been operating a de facto amnesty for years and have failed to put in place any meaningful legacy process to deal with murders committed in their jurisdiction.

“These include Garda, Irish Army and Prison Officers cut down... as well as innocent victims murdered by the IRA

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using southern territory from which to launch attacks into Northern Ireland.”

‘I didn’t murder anybody’ Ex-RUC officer fears re-investigation

A former RUC officer, now in his 60s, said he was now fearful of being re-investigated if the European Court of Human Rights overturns British law.

The officer, who cannot be named, shot dead a member of the IRA in April 1991 in Downpatrick. He has been investigated a number of times – he reckoned five – and as recently as May this year was told he would not be charged with any offence.

The Public Prosecution Service in Northern Ireland said there was insufficient evidence to “provide a reasonable prospect of conviction”.

That decision is currently being challenged by the family of Colum Marks, who was 29 when he died.

The new Troubles Act, which became law in September, would have given the RUC officer certainty that the case against him was closed for good.

The officer said: “I am not looking for a form of immunity. I want to be exonerated by the commission because I didn’t murder anybody and I didn’t go out to murder anybody.”

He accepts shooting Marks but says he did so in self-defence and having shouted and fired warning shots. He

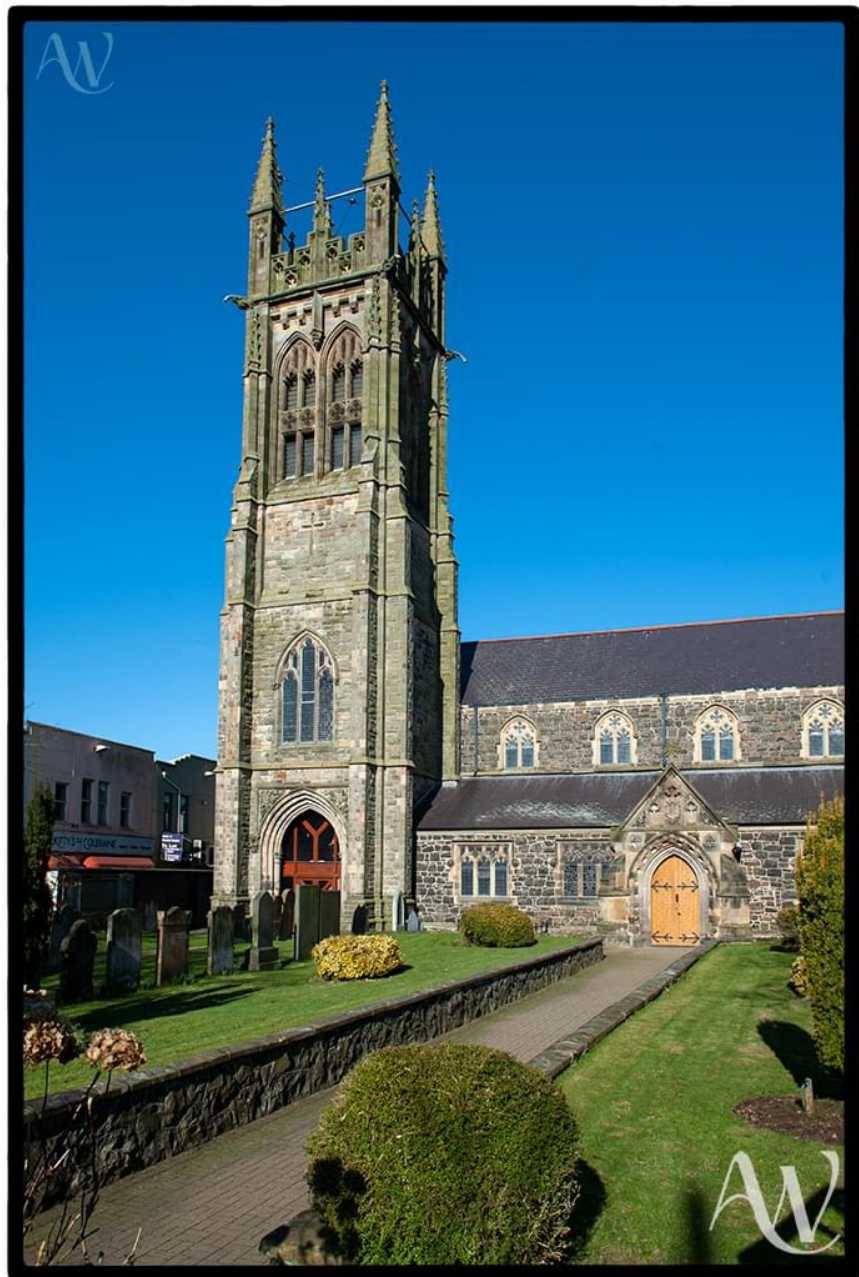
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said Marks was armed with a mark 12 mortar – an improvised weapon used by the IRA.

Heritage

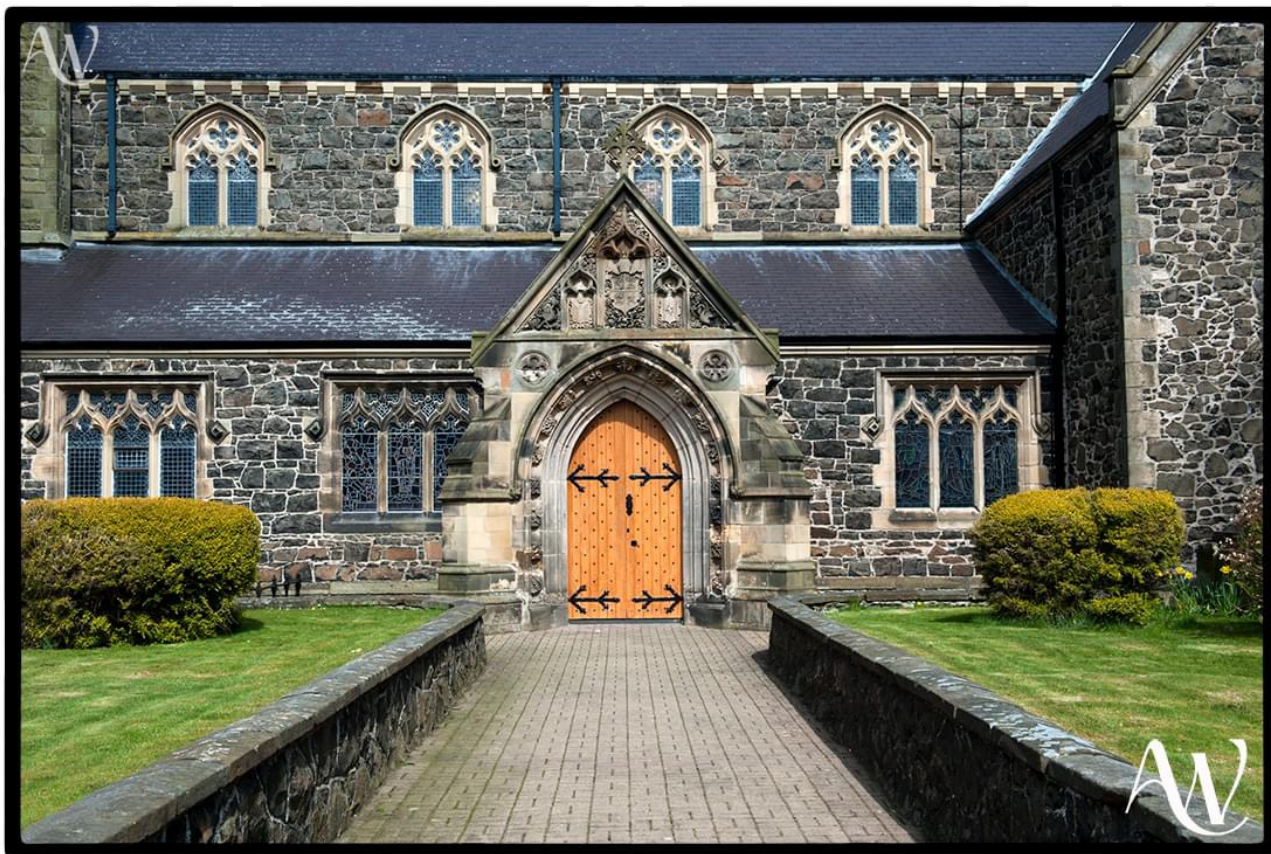
St Patrick's Church, Coleraine featured by Causeway Coastal Route

The wonderful entrance to St Patrick's Church in the centre of Coleraine which is on the Causeway Coastal Route albeit via a bypass.



Coleraine is an ancient settlement that can trace its history and heritage back to the first settlers some 9000 years ago.

The current St. Patrick' Church was completed in 1885 and design by Thomas Drew, the site is said to be one of the oldest ecclesiastical sites in Ireland having been founded



circa 456AD by Patricius (St Patrick’) on land donated to him by Nadslua, a feudal chieftain whose grandson became the first Bishop of Coleraine.

The church grounds are an oasis of peace and tranquillity in the centre of this pleasant and busy rural town which has some superb period architecture. Behind the church and forming part of Anderson Park are the last visible remains of the earthen ramparts (constructed during the plantation) these once surrounded the fortified town on all sides, the river forming one side. The two main entrances to the town were by draw-bridge, which were closed at night, one was Kings Gate (Kingsgate Street) and the other Blind Gate (Blindgate Street). The town was similar in conception to Londonderry where the fortifications are more elaborate and substantial, as well as twice the size.

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For the visitor, Coleraine is a wonderful town to walk around being fully pedestrianized, so enjoying the architecture and shopping is very relaxing.

According to the 'Triparte Life of St Patrick' the name derives from the piece of land given to him near the river which was covered in ferns - Cuil Rathain / Coleraine 'corner of the ferns'.

Speaking to the soul

Short reading and a prayer - daily on this site

Church News Ireland

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