

# Church News Ireland



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January 20, 2025

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# Image of the day

2025

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

*“Do you believe this?”*  
(John 11:26)

1700th anniversary  
of the Council of Nicaea

18 - 25 January 2025

## Week of Prayer for Christian Unity theme

**The theme for this year, the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, is “Do you believe this?” (John 11:26)**

As we unite with Christians around the world for the Week of Prayer we are invited to reflect on the story of Martha’s confession of faith in Jesus as narrated in John 11:17-27.

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Each is called to sit with Jesus' provocative question to Martha: "Do you believe this?"

## Icons in Derry for Week of Prayer



**An audience comprising members of Londonderry's four main churches were treated to a fascinating insight into the art of iconography, this afternoon, at the launch of an 'Exhibition of Icons' in St Eugene's Cathedral Hall which marked the beginning of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.**

The event was hosted by artist Colette Clarke and tutor Dick Sinclair, both of whom belong to The Association of Iconographers, Ireland. Mr Sinclair explained to the audience the composition of these remarkable artworks which, he said, worked "on so many levels – the technical, the poetic and the theological".



Fellow iconographer, Colette Clarke, described the inspiration and process of composition that led to the creation of one of her featured pieces, 'St Colmcille'.

This afternoon's launch was addressed by the Bishop of Derry, Most Rev Dr Donal McKeown (above), and the Archdeacon of Derry, Ven. Robert Miller (below).



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The exhibition will be open to the public from Monday 20th to Wednesday 22nd January, from 10.30am until 8.30pm

Christ Church and St Eugene's will be linking up for a series of events throughout this week, including practical workshops in Christ Church and guided prayer in St Eugene's. There'll be a painting demonstration in Christ Church on Monday evening, beginning at 7pm.



## Service at St Brendan's. Loughrea

**On Friday 17th January a service at St Brendan's. Loughrea, marked the Week of Prayer for Christianity Unity at which the Rt Revd Michael Burrows preached.**



Fr Ray Sweeney, Ven John Godfrey, Monsignor Cathal Geraghty, Revd John McGinty, Bishop Michael Burrows, Bishop Michael Duignan and Rev Alistair Doyle. Photos kindly provided by the Sacristan of the Cathedral, Ms Rhona Horgan

## **Rome and Canterbury pilgrimage recalled at St Canice's Cathedral in Kilkenny**

**Bishop Adrian of Cashel writes - "In January last year, Bishop Niall Coll and I were part of an international gathering of Anglican and Roman Catholic bishops on pilgrimage between Rome and Canterbury.**

"This year, as part of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, we will be continuing a local tradition of worshipping together, this time in St Canice's Cathedral in Kilkenny. On Sunday Bishop Niall was the preacher and I was the celebrant at the 11.30 Eucharist".



**Bishop Adrian and Bishop Niall**

## **Video - Archbishops reflect on this year's theme**

**A brief video has been recorded wherein both Archbishops reflect on this year's theme, Do you believe this?**

The Archbishops of Armagh discuss the vital role faith plays in sustaining hope amidst personal and societal challenges today. Archbishops Martin and McDowell also reflect on the 1,700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, sharing insights into their own work as Archbishops of Armagh.

<https://www.facebook.com/churchofireland/videos/613596701158913>



## News

### Franklin Graham to speak at Trump's inauguration

**Franklin Graham, the son of the late evangelist Billy Graham, is to lead prayer at Donald Trump's inauguration today Monday, according to reports.**

Franklin has appeared alongside Trump several times, including during his 2024 election campaign.

Graham, who is CEO of disaster relief organisation Samaritan's Purse, led prayer during Trump's visit to the aftermath of hurricane Helene in Georgia.



In October 2024, Graham told Premier's Anna Rees that he believed Trump's presidential rival, Kamala Harris, to be “almost anti-Christ in her perspectives”.

The evangelist also told Religion Media Centre that whilst he does not consider Trump to be a living example of Christian values, he believes him to be a defender of them.

Graham led prayer at the 2024 Republican Convention, when Donald Trump was confirmed as the party's presidential nominee.

Trump will be inaugurated for the second time, as the 47th President of the United States, today Monday 20th January.

## **Franciscans criticise ‘illegal occupation’ of friary**

**The decision to close the friary church in Clonmel is due to a lack of vocations and the aging profile of the friars.**

The Franciscan Order has criticised those who have “illegally occupied the friary church” in the Irish town of Clonmel following its closure on 31 December, Sarah Mac Donald writes in The Tablet.

In a statement, the Franciscans warned that the occupation “constitutes trespass” and is a serious health and safety concern.

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However, Pat O’Gorman of the Abbey House of Prayer in Clonmel, members of which are staging the sit-in, told the Tablet that they were frustrated that the Franciscans had so far failed to meet with them to discuss the impasse and an alternative plan to closure.

“We felt we had no choice [but] to have a sit in. The Franciscans are refusing to communicate directly with us, despite several emails from our committee, politicians, the Vincent de Paul and several members of the community. We tried several times before, during and after Christmas [to meet with them].”

The decision to close the friary church in Clonmel is due to a lack of vocations and the aging profile of the friars. It was announced in January 2023, ending the Franciscan’s 750-year history in the County Tipperary town.

The Abbey Prayer Group was set up in response to the announcement and has kept the church open for prayer and two Masses per week since June 2023. Members of the



prayer group would like to see the arrangement continue and have staged a sit-in at the church in support of their demand.

The order said a claim that all costs, including insurance, relating to the property have been covered by the Prayer Group, is incorrect.

“Since the Franciscans withdrew from Clonmel in January 2023 they have provided €160,000 for the insurance and maintenance of the building,” the statement said.

But according to Pat O’Gorman, the prayer group offered to fund the running costs, including insurance, and that “money is pouring in”.

“We are self-financing and can run the church at no cost to the Franciscans. We have been running the church very successfully over the last 18 months with huge support from the public in terms of mass attendances and financial support from devout worshippers.”

The Franciscans said there is no truth in the claim that they intend to convert the listed church into accommodation for rental purposes.

“No decision regarding the future use of the building has been made at this time.” Nor would it be allowed to “fall into decay,” the statement said.

They have offered to cover the cost of the transfer of the popular shrine to St Anthony to a nearby parish.

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According to Pat O’Gorman of the Abbey Prayer Group, “The church is over 700 years old. It is important to the people of Clonmel in terms of its spiritual, historical, and cultural significance.”

## **Dioceses desert X for new horizons**

**Many Church of England dioceses are deserting the social media platform X, which was formerly known as Twitter.**

The exodus follows concerns over the direction of the platform and its content since Elon Musk took over as owner in 2022.

Musk has hailed the site as a bastion of freedom of expression but it has become increasingly more polarised



with content of an extremist nature being shared. He's also published several posts supporting the far-right activist Tommy Robinson.

During the riots which followed the stabbing of three children in Southport, the platform was strongly criticised for posts that were said to have incited violence.

Social media is a valuable way for churches and dioceses to engage with parishioners and over the years Twitter became a go-to way of connecting Christians. But now, dioceses such as Winchester, Salisbury, and Bristol are among those no longer active on the platform.

In a statement on its website, the Diocese of Salisbury said: "This decision has arisen from growing discomfort about the current direction of the platform, and also from the negative effect that some debate has had on social cohesion and church unity. We believe that, on balance, it serves polarisation and profit rather than connection and understanding.

"We aren't leaving because we shy away from difficult discussion, but because we believe that these should be conducted in ways that honour human dignity and build up our common life.

"The number of our followers on X will seem small to many organisations, though we value each one. We look forward to staying in touch through other channels and connecting with all those interesting in our work of Making Jesus Known."

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A spokesperson for the Diocese of Truro said while it hasn't left X, it isn't posting material because "the content and tone of X is quite toxic a lot of the time and with limited resources we are focusing on those platforms that help us connect best with our key audiences and provide a more positive space for us and our users."

Many Christians and dioceses are switching to a presence on the social app site BlueSky which was initially set up in 2019 by Jack Dorsey a former Twitter CEO. It is now mainly owned by CEO Jay Graber who says its ethos is "social media as it should be". It invites users to find their community among millions of users and to "unleash" their creativity and "have some fun again".

## Education

### "Christ is Alive" theme of Catholic Schools Week

**The week 19 -25 January 2025 recognizes the role Catholic schools play in the students' lives, their family's and their communities.**

The theme for Catholic Schools Week 2025 is - "Christ is Alive."

"Christ is alive! He is our hope, and in a wonderful way he brings youth to our world, and everything he touches becomes young, new, full of life. The very first words, then, that I would like to say to every young Christian are these:

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Christ is alive and he wants you to be alive!” – Pope Francis, Christus Vivit, Section 1.

Reflecting on the theme, Catholic schools will explore what it means to be fully alive as a human being – living life to the full in Christ. Sensitive to the age appropriateness of the various classes and years, the

theme will explore how we exist for one another in Christ, building from the wellbeing of the individual, extending the notion of true wellbeing to others, to our families and communities, and to The Other, in God. The theme will mediate on hope, the true purpose and meaning of human life, and, in the more senior years, on true freedom.

“We pray over the coming week for all involved in Catholic education in our homes, schools, parishes and



The graphic features a light blue background with a white border. At the top left is a logo of an open book with blue and red pages. To its right, the text reads "Catholic Schools Week 2025" in black, "Catholic Schools: Alive in Christ" in red, and "19-25 January 2025" in black. Below this, the days of the week are listed in colored, all-caps text, each followed by a theme in black: Monday (blue text, "Life to the Full in Our Community of Friends"), Tuesday (red text, "Life to the Full in Our Faith Community"), Wednesday (yellow text, "Life to the Full in Our Families (Grandparents Day)"), Thursday (pink text, "Life to the Full, for and with Others"), and Friday (orange text, "Life to the Full for the Common Good of All"). At the bottom is a silhouette illustration of five people in various colors (purple, pink, blue, green, orange) jumping joyfully on a green field with a dotted pattern.

**Catholic Schools Week 2025**  
**Catholic Schools: Alive in Christ**  
19-25 January 2025

**MONDAY**  
Life to the Full in Our Community of Friends

**TUESDAY**  
Life to the Full in Our Faith Community

**WEDNESDAY**  
Life to the Full in Our Families (Grandparents Day)

**THURSDAY**  
Life to the Full, for and with Others

**FRIDAY**  
Life to the Full for the Common Good of All



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communities. We rise to the challenge to be living witnesses of the love and compassion of God in our world.”

## Methodist College’s New York reunion of 1979 to 2014



**“This has been a great opportunity to connect, network and share wonderful stories about Methody.”**

As part of the Chapel Choir trip to New York, the Chair of the Board of Governors of the Belfast College, Rev'd Niall Johnston, Principal, Mrs Lendrum, Assistant Principal Teacher, Mr Lindsay and Judith Cochrane, President of Methody Collegians hosted a dinner with Collegians ranging

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from the class of 1979 to 2014.

[https://  
www.methodycollegians.org/](https://www.methodycollegians.org/)

## Queen's University Belfast renews academic partnership with St Mary's University College



**Prof Sir Ian Greer of Queen's University writes, “ I was pleased to attend a special event today at St Mary's University College, Queen's University Belfast to officially renew Queen's University Belfast's longstanding academic partnership with the institution.**

This is an important milestone not only for Queen’s but for the broader educational landscape of Northern Ireland. The renewed partnership with St Mary’s reflects our shared commitment to academic excellence, inclusivity, and innovation.

“Together, we are paving the way for a future where higher education is accessible to all and continues to empower students, staff, and communities alike. This partnership will have a profound and lasting impact, and we are proud to be part of it”.

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# Cathedral Calls



## Armagh's Robinson Library

**Did you know that  
Armagh Robinson  
Library is Northern  
Ireland's oldest  
public library?**



It was founded in 1771 by Archbishop Richard Robinson and the Greek inscription at the entrance translates to “the healing place of the soul”



When visiting look out for Jonathan Swift's own copy of Gulliver's Travels with notes in Swift's handwriting!

The library is open for visitors Monday to Friday, 10am-1pm and 2pm-4pm.

Make sure to check their website for any additional closures  
<https://armaghrobinsonlibrary.co.uk>

## **Irish commemoration at Westminster**

**Writer Anne Brontë was born this week in 1820.**

She is best remembered for her novel The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, but also wrote poetry published under the pen name Acton Bell.



She is remembered in the Abbey with this memorial in Poets' Corner, which is also dedicated to her literary sisters, Charlotte and Emily.

Read more: [www.westminster-abbey.org/abbey-commemorations/commemorations/charlotte-emily-and-anne-bronte/](http://www.westminster-abbey.org/abbey-commemorations/commemorations/charlotte-emily-and-anne-bronte/)

# Clergy and ministry



## Team of newly commissioned Lay Funeral Ministers

**On Wednesday evening Bishop Alan McGuckian SJ Commissioned 21 new Lay Funeral Ministers for the Diocese of Down and Connor.**

The Funeral Ministers represented 10 parishes from across the diocese. It was a joyful prayerful evening and we were joined by friends, family and Parish Priests of the new



Funeral Ministers. We wish the new Funeral Ministers every blessing as they begin their new ministry.

Some words of thanks - to Bishop Alan for being with us and for his wise and prayerful words of encouragement.

-To the Funeral Ministry Trainers, Mrs Anne McDermott and Fr Paul Byrne and for the Trainers in training Deacon James McAllister, Carole Martin and Peter McAlister for their guidance, wisdom, prayerfulness and fun during the training a deep gratitude.

-Thank you to Daniel McDonald for the beautiful music during the service. The final words of thanks to the Pathways to The Future Team for their warm welcome and hospitality.

# Webinars, music, resources, broadcasts, and books

## Winter Song in St Brendan's Church Birr

**St Brendan's Church of Ireland in Birr will host an afternoon of choral and modern classics with the fabulous Ballymore Connect Choir and their special guests, Virtuoso Ensemble, on Saturday 1 February at 4pm.**

Monies raised will go towards the Church's Roof Restoration Fund as well as local hospice services.

Founded in 2019, Ballymore Connect Choir is one of the largest community choirs in Kildare. With a current membership of close to 100 voices, over 70 will perform in Birr next month.

Under the musical direction of Owen C Lynch, the choir performs regularly in concert and enjoy fundraising for various local charities.

They are delighted to visit Birr and are very much looking forward to singing in the beautiful surroundings of St. Brendan's Church of Ireland.

Their programme of music in Birr will include Owen's special arrangements of Red Is The Rose, What A Wonderful World, Rainbow Connection, Song Sung Blue, World In Union and some familiar classics from musicals.



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They are delighted to be joined by local vocal ensemble VIRTUOSO for what promises to be a very special and memorable afternoon.

This concert is proudly supported by Birr Festival of Music, the town's annual classical musical festival.

Tickets €15 (children €5) + booking fee  
On sale now from [midlandsbooking.ie](http://midlandsbooking.ie)



## **Apply to join BBC Sing! and you could be performing in Belfast's Ulster Hall**

**If you're in a choir, group or a solo singer this is your chance to represent your patch as part of a community-choir spectacular in the Ulster Hall on 24th March.**

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We'll bring together voices from across Northern Ireland to join 6 county choirs, as they raise the roof at a huge evening of singing recorded for BBC Radio Ulster.

For more info and how to sign up visit [www.bbc.co.uk/sing](http://www.bbc.co.uk/sing)

## Lent at the Belfast Jesuit Centre

**Dr Kieran O'Mahony OSA will return to the Belfast Jesuit Centre this Lent to lead a programme entitled, Salvation in The Gospel Of John: Keys for Unlocking the Message Today.**

The programme will run at 7.00pm, on each of the Thursdays of Lent, beginning on the 6th March and concluding on the 10th April.

A suggested donation of between £80-£120 is suggested for the course but a small number of subsidised places are available for those unable to pay.

Early registration is advised as numbers are limited. To register, visit our Facebook page or website: [www.belfastjesuitcentre.co.uk](http://www.belfastjesuitcentre.co.uk)

## 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](mailto:houstonmckelvey@mac.com)

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[www.churchnewsireland.org](http://www.churchnewsireland.org)

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

**Please recommend to your friends**