

Church News Ireland



**Image of the day – Antrim parish scouts visit
Belfast Synagogue**

March 22, 2025

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Image of the day



Antrim scouts visit Belfast Synagogue

Scouts from All Saints Parish, Antrim, had a great welcome from the Belfast Hebrew Congregation when





they visited the Synagogue as part of earning their Scouts World Faith Badge.

“It was such an interesting visit and Neville was a perfect host and guide” said a scout leader, who added, “Well done to all of those who went and gave such a good impression of 5th Antrim (All Saints) Scouts Group”

News

Your church could host the ECI Climate Justice Candle

Would your church or faith community like to host the ECI Climate Justice Candle? You can use the candle in worship to raise awareness of climate justice and caring for our common home.



Just drop a line to info@ecocongregationireland.com and we will arrange to get the candle to you. You can read lots of stories of how faith communities have used the candle in worship here <https://www.ecocongregationireland.com/shine-a-light-on-climate-justice>.

Bear Grylls tells Flame 2025: 'You guys are unstoppable!'

Flame 2025 saw more than 10,400 young people from every part of England and Wales, as well as a group from Gibraltar and the Ukrainian national Chaplaincy, join chaplains, teachers, priests, bishops, and youth leaders, in selling out the OVO Arena Wembley in a huge explosion of faith and hope. This was the largest-ever Flame gathering.

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Inspirational speakers included adventurer and television presenter Bear Grylls, who spoke about his book *The Greatest Story Ever Told* based on the Gospel - every attendee received a copy.

In conversation with Catholic speaker David Wells, Mr Grylls shed light on his Christian faith: "Faith is in your heart, faith is in relationships, faith is a constant connection to the Almighty. I have many struggles, many doubts, I really don't have it all together, but I know that I am loved and held, and the light shines.

"Faith is part of the adventure, faith is the adventure. It's a journey... It's a backbone, a streak of steel, the presence of Jesus besides us in the highs and the lows. It's fire and life and water, all in one. It's a journey."

To a packed out and loud crowd, he added: "I hope you have an amazing rest of Flame. You guys are unstoppable!"

Flame's theme of "Unstoppable: Fan the flame of hope" echoed what Pope Francis calls us to be in this year of Jubilee: "Pilgrims of Hope."

Diocese of Carlisle to create 90 'new Christian communities' across Cumbria

SMMI grant of £6.8 million will help to train 200 church leaders over next five years

The diocese of Carlisle has been awarded £6.8 million by the Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment (SMMI) Board



for plans that include the creation of almost 90 “new Christian communities” across Cumbria over the next five years.

A press release issued on Monday said that there would be “a particular focus on helping local established churches to plant new Christian congregations in Barrow, Carlisle and in rural Derwent Deanery”, and investment in training more than 200 new leaders. Extra support would be offered to help under-25s to “spiritually flourish, grow in faith and become adult disciples”.

The latest award follows a grant of almost £600,000 agreed by the SMMI Board last year, some of which will be used to fund a new church-planting lead post in the diocese. Church-plants were “in the preparatory phase”, a diocesan spokesman said.

There are plans to support the growth of the church-plant St Aidan's, Cumbria, which meets at St Bridget's, Bridekirk. Part of the Binsey Benefice, it launched at the end of last year to serving the towns and rural communities around the A66 corridor in the northern Lake District, with a particular focus on those not currently engaging with the Church. It currently has a 3 p.m. Sunday service and has a children and families minister funded by the Norwegian Mission Society, a diocesan partner.

The almost 90 new Christian communities comprise five church-plants or revitalisations, 55 youth-, children-, and family-focused new worshipping communities (NWCs), and 29 other NWCs. The diocese's reference to "new Christian communities" rather than Fresh Expressions follows a broader shift in language documented in a report by Cranmer Hall last year, *New Things*.

Only one of the 11 dioceses studied used "fresh expressions" or "pioneering" to describe what was happening, adopting instead language that allowed for "maximum breadth", the report said. Under the Archbishop of York's Faith in the North programme, there is a goal of 3000 new worshipping communities in the Northern Province by 2030.

The grant represents further national support for the ecumenical "God for All" strategy launched in Carlisle in 2015 as a "covenanted partnership" with the Methodist and United Reformed Churches. This involved establishing new ecumenical "mission communities", which now number 34, incorporating 235 C of E parishes. The strategy was supported by a Strategic Development Funding (SDF) grant

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of £850,000, and sought to include the establishment of at least one new Fresh Expression in each community, leading to 1500 new churchgoers.

Between 2015 and 2019, more than 110 Fresh Expressions were established, and, in 2019, a Church Army study reported that they accounted for one in four people attending church in the diocese: 3100 people (News, 6 September 2019). In 2019, the diocese secured a £1.6-million SDF grant for its “Reaching Deeper” strategy, set to conclude next year, which sought to further the work of Fresh Expressions, particularly in deprived areas, including Barrow and Carlisle, and supporting the Northern Pioneer Centre: a collaboration between the diocese and Church Mission Society. The grant has helped to fund four “pioneer practitioner enablers”.

The statement of needs produced by the diocese, which is currently in vacancy, states that, “although impacted by the pandemic, new Christian communities continue to emerge and our latest report shows around 2600 people attend a Fresh Expression across 120 groups.” About 1300 young Christians are reported to be involved in Network Youth Church, which operates local groups that occasionally join in larger celebrations.

The document notes that numbers worshipping on Sunday in the diocese fell by 27 per cent, to 9500, between 2010 and 2019; the decline disproportionately affects churches of between 100 and 200. The total stood at 7000 in 2023: 1.4 per cent of the population.

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The decline in parish share over the years has led to a substantial fall in the number of stipendiary ordained posts, from 115 to 75, between 2007 and 2021. Recruitment is a challenge, including finding people to lead and develop mission communities, who are expected to take on an oversight position. It also describes “a clear challenge in trying to implement a far-reaching vision and strategy with limited resources in a large and sparsely populated Diocese”.

About half of the 500,000 people in Cumbria live in rural locations. The new SMMI project includes a three-year pilot to support parish growth and leadership development in three “deeply rural” mission communities as yet to be named. Duncan Poundbury, a church-planting specialist, has advised the diocese on the bid.

Irish Church in Rome to celebrate 400 years

St Isidore’s College, founded in 1625, is marking its 400th anniversary this year.

Located in Rome, the College has long been the heart of the Irish Franciscans in Rome and will celebrate the milestone with a series of events throughout 2025, including a symposium scheduled for May.

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Education



Ballymoney Schools meet their MLAs

Last week, Dalriada School, Ballymoney, were delighted to attend a Q+A panel made up of MLAs Sian Mulholland, Emma Sheerin, Paul Frew and Timothy Gaston, and local councillor Darryl Wilson, in Our Lady Of Lourdes as part of our Year 10 Shared Education project.

“This is our third in a series of events, working alongside Our Lady of Lourdes and Ballymoney High School.

Pupils enjoyed listening to the different perspectives and backgrounds shared by our guests, their vision for the future and many were hopefully inspired by their words of wisdom.



Many thanks to all of those who took part for taking the time to meet with our Year 10 pupils, and thanks to Our Lady of Lourdes for hosting us.



Debate in Parliament Buildings Senate Chamber

The Edgar Graham Memorial Public Speaking Competition was held in The Senate

Chamber, Parliament Buildings, Stormont on Tuesday 11th March.

Congratulations to Kirk Wilson (Year 13) from Ballymena Academy who was placed 2nd in the competition out of a

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total of 15 speakers from across the province. This was a fantastic achievement.

Sign Language new video relay service to Police Service of Northern Ireland



From today, the deaf community will be able to talk to the Police Service of Northern Ireland using a new video relay service.

The new video conferencing facility, which is hosted by SignVideo, will offer both Irish Sign Language (ISL) or British Sign Language (BSL) interpreting at the touch of a button and is being launched during National Sign Language Week (March 17th-23rd).

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Read more here: <https://orlo.uk/MG920>

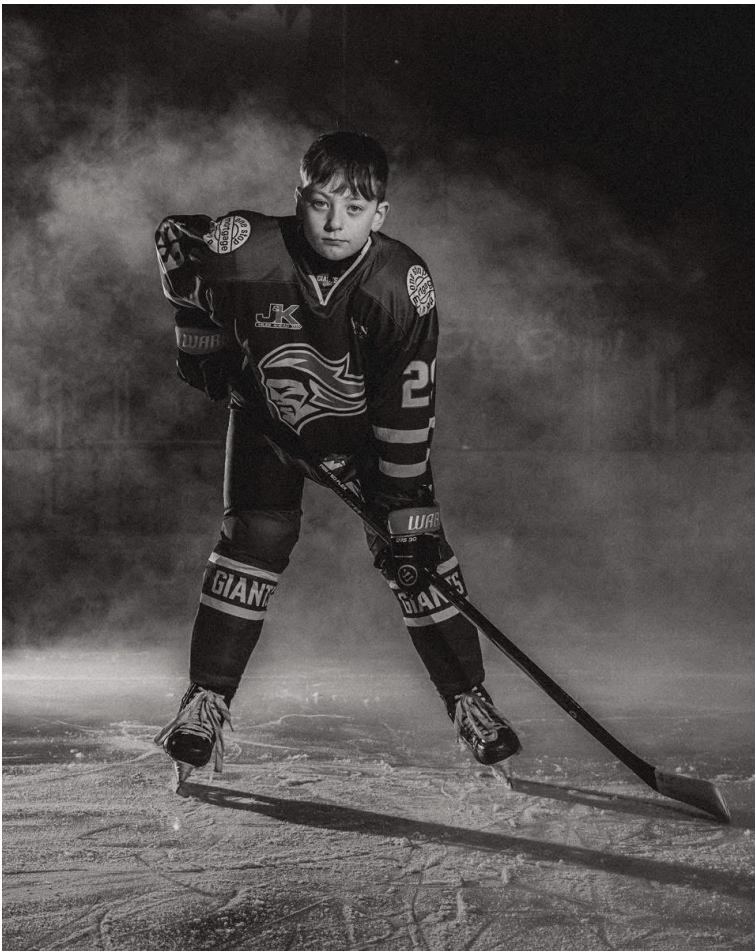
Kildare Town Community School Careers Fair



Rev Philip McKinley (Kildare Centre of Mission) and Fr Adrian Carbery (St. Brigid's Parish, Kildare Town) were both guests of Kildare Town Community School, at their Careers Fair, talking to students about life in Christian ministry.

Slemish College Ballymena student in Nova Scotia Ice hockey tournament

Year 8 student, Beau Armstrong, is taking his talents international as he heads off to represent the U13 Team



Ireland Saints Ice Hockey in the renowned SEDMHA Honda Minor Hockey Tournament in Nova Scotia, Canada.

This incredible tournament is one of the largest and most prestigious minor ice hockey events in all of North America. During his week-long adventure, Beau will stay with a local family and will compete in

rinks across Halifax, Dartmouth, Cole Harbour, Bedford, and Sackville. What an amazing opportunity to experience the culture and face off against some top-tier teams from a whole new level!

Cathedral Calls

Bach's renowned St John Passion under the iconic dome of St Paul's

The story of the crucifixion, told through music. 300 years on from its first performance in 1724, Bach's renowned St John Passion will be performed under our iconic Dome on 2nd April, combining soloists, the



Cathedral Choir, Cathedral Chorus and Baroque players for an epic retelling of the events of Holy Week.

Join us for an evening of music, drama and meditation as we approach one of the most important weeks in the Christian calendar.

Tickets cost £15 for Dome seating and £10 for the Nave and Transepts. Book now at <https://bit.ly/4iDIIon>.

National Faith + Climate Forum 2025 at San Diego Cathedral is online

St Paul's Episcopal Cathedral says it is a proud host of the upcoming National Faith + Climate Forum 2025 on March 27. This pivotal event is a call to all who are

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passionate about intertwining faith with actionable climate stewardship.

This year's forum, themed "Seven Acts of Faith for Building Thriving Congregations," offers an opportunity for us to explore impactful ways to integrate environmental stewardship and social justice into our faith practices. From innovative workshops to inspiring talks, each segment is designed to empower and uplift.

Whether you've participated in the past or are new to climate action, your presence will contribute to a collective effort to foster a sustainable and just future for all. Let's come together to learn, inspire, and act!

Dean is a native of Northern Ireland

The Very Rev. Penny Bridges answered the call to serve as the fourth Dean of St Paul's Cathedral in 2014.

A native of Northern Ireland and lifelong Anglican, Penny received her education at Wells Cathedral School and Clare College, Cambridge. She pursued a career in data processing, which took her and her husband from England to New Hampshire in 1985. There her two sons were born and she experienced a call to ordination in the Episcopal Church. In 1997 she graduated from Berkeley at Yale Divinity School with a Master of Divinity, summa cum laude and moved to Virginia.

Penny served six years as Associate Rector of Grace Episcopal Church, Alexandria, and eleven years as the third Rector of St. Francis Episcopal Church, Great Falls. St.

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Paul's magnificent music program is a good fit for Penny, who is herself an accomplished violist and singer. Since her arrival at St. Paul's, Penny has focused on leading the church into the 21st century (the "emerging church" model), updating the administrative systems, overseeing the creation of the digital "Faith to Go" curriculum, installing exterior lighting to give the cathedral more visibility, and developing strong relationships with leaders of other faith communities and of city government.

Event Details:



Date: March 27, 2025



Time: 9:00 am - 2:15 pm



Venue: St Paul's Cathedral, 2728 Sixth Avenue, San Diego or Online



Registration: <https://nationalfaithandclimateforum.org/>

Clergy and ministry

Black Santa meets The King

The Dean of Belfast, the Very Revd Stephen Forde, had the opportunity to meet His Majesty The King on Wednesday 19 March at the opening of the Sea Holly Gallery in Belfast's popular Hill Street, close to St Anne's Cathedral.

The King began his two-day visit to Northern Ireland, marking the week of St Patrick's Day, by meeting some of the 'Characters of the Cathedral Quarter', including Belfast's own Black Santa.



The Dean was one of those invited by local entrepreneur Willie Jack to have his portrait painted by Belfast artist Ciaran Gallagher. The picture was hung alongside some fifteen others in the new gallery located above The Harp Bar.

King Charles, accompanied by Queen Camilla, took some minutes to talk with Dean Stephen about the work of Black Santa and the challenges for charities in raising much-needed funding, something that the King is all too aware of through the many charities with which he is involved. He was also interested to know that the familiar Black Santa Barrel began its life as a Bushmills whiskey barrel.

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Dean Stephen said: “We were each asked to come dressed exactly as we had been painted for our portraits, which meant for me my familiar black cloak. It proved a talking point with the King, who seemed to thoroughly enjoy meeting the variety of figures who make up the life of the Cathedral Quarter.”

Methodist President Designate visiting Church in Cuba

President
Designate, the
Rev Alan
Wardlow, is on
his journey to
visit the
Methodist
Church in Cuba



Despite decades of government opposition, the Methodist Church in Cuba has been growing rapidly.

For prayer points and to read more, visit: bit.ly/41GKdv

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Introduction of new C of I priest-in-charge in Rathcoole and Whitehouse

The Rev Colin Welsh was introduced as priest-in-charge of Rathcoole and Whitehouse at a service in St John's, Whitehouse, on Wednesday March 19.



Rural Dean of Maghera and Kilrea

Bishop Andrew Forster of Derry & Raphoe has appointed the Rector of Kilcronaghan, Ballynascreen

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and Six Towns, Rev Rosie Diffin, as the new Rural Dean of the Maghera and Kilrea Rural Deanery.

Rosie succeeds Rev Canon Colin Welsh who earlier this week was introduced as the new priest-in-charge in the Parishes of Rathcoole and Whitehouse, in the Diocese of Connor.

Congratulating Rev Diffin on her new role, Bishop Andrew said he was confident she'd prove a blessing to her colleagues in the south Derry parishes. "I first got to know Rosie when I was Rector of Drumglass, in Dungannon, and she arrived as Deacon Intern. Five years ago, I had the privilege of instituting her as Rector in Tobermore and Draperstown. In all the time I have known her, Rosie has endeared herself to her parishioners and fellow clergy with her openness, warmth and sincerity. As I said at her institution, she may be small in stature, but Rosie is a dynamo. I am confident her experience in ministry will prove a great blessing to her fellow clergy and the parishioners in the south Derry rural deanery.

"I thank Colin, too, for his faithful service as Rural Dean and for his ministry among the people of Castledawson. I wish him every blessing in his new calling to Rathcoole and Whitehouse."

Speaking to the soul

Short reading and a prayer - daily on this site

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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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Link in Monday through Saturday from early morning

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