

Church News Ireland



Image of the day – Belfast in unison

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Together at Christmas Carol Service - Belfast in unison



Last week community groups from throughout Belfast gathered in St Mary's Roman Catholic Church in Belfast city centre for a carol service which was led by church leaders.

HM Lord Lieutenant for Belfast, Dame Fionnuala O'Boyle (Photo above) expressed her thanks to "the Church leaders, the Choir directed by Mr Louis McVeigh, Irish musicians and readers, Fr Tim Bartlett and congregation of St Mary's for welcoming The Belfast Lieutenancy for the Together at Christmas Service at this beautiful and historic church."

News reports

Bishops bless S.H.A.R.E. crib in Cork



Leah Braham Regina Mundi College, Bishop Fintan Gavin, Bishop of Cork and Ross, Cllr Deirdre Forde The Lord Mayor of Cork, Bishop Paul Colton, Bishop of Cork, Cloyne and Ross and Daniel Prestwich Chair Share Executive at the lighting and blessing of Cork's Iconic SHARE Crib. Photography by Gerard McCarthy

The 53rd year of the S.H.A.R.E. Cork collection was inaugurated on Wednesday, 14th December by the Lord Mayor of Cork, Cllr Deirdre Forde, and with the annual



Oisín Wrixon Presentation Brothers College and Aryan Nesser Christian Brothers College at Cork's Iconic SHARE Crib. Photography by Gerard McCarthy

blessing of the S.H.A.R.E. Crib on St Patrick's Street, Cork by the two bishops: Dr Paul Colton and Dr Fintan Gavin.

Almost all of Cork's 5th Year Students will take part at some stage in this year's S.H.A.R.E. collection in aid of older people. The collection continues throughout the streets of the city until Christmas Eve, with many of the 5th year students fasting during that time also.

S.H.A.R.E., which stands for Students Harness Aid for the Relief of the Elderly, was founded in Cork in 1970. This year's Chairperson of the S.H.A.R.E. Executive, Daniel Prestwich, welcoming everyone, told how driving with his



Bishop Paul Colton, Bishop of Cork, Cloyne and Ross, Bishop Fintan Gavin Bishop of Cork and Ross and Daniel Prestwich Chair Share Executive. Photography by Gerard McCarthy

mother earlier in the day she said to him that 'Christmas starts in Cork when the yellow jackets of S.H.A.R.E. appear on the streets.'

S.H.A.R.E. has 140 housing units for older people throughout Cork City and also a wide range of support services for older people, and it is noted for the inter-generational nature of its work between young and old of the schools in the City.

S.H.A.R.E. are on Instagram, Facebook and Twitter: @sharecork



Hymn-writers Keith and Kristyn Getty return next June for Belfast concert

World-renowned hymn-writers Keeith and Kristyn Getty will begin their 'Sing World' global concert tour at the SSE Arena at Laganaside in Belfast on Saturday June 17 next, Billy Kennedy writes in the News Letter.



The Ulster-born couple will then head to Singapore and Sydney, Australia before heading back to their base in Nashville, Tennessee.

The Grammy-nominated hymn-writers (Keith is from Lisburn and Kristyn from Newtownabbey, plan to perform some of their best-known hymns including 'In Christ Alone' and 'Christ Our Hope in Life and Death' at the Belfast concert which is expected to sell-out.

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The Belfast show will feature an array of guest artistes and the Gettys' band of internationally recognised musicians, all accompanied by the New Irish Arts Orchestra and a mass choir.

The concert marks the couple's first performance in Northern Ireland since their Grammy nomination for their album 'Confessio – Irish American Roots' in the best roots gospel album category.

The album was penned and recorded on the Ulster north coast around Portrush and Portstewart during the Covid pandemic of 2020 and has been described by the Keith and Kristyn as their "love letter to Northern Ireland".

The tour will then take them to the Star Theatre in Singapore followed by the Sydney Opera House in Australia.

For the Belfast concert tickets went on sale yesterday (December 16) and can be purchased via Ticketmaster or directly from the SSE Arena website.

Speaking ahead of the tour, Keith Getty OBE said: "It is always a tremendous honour to play in front of any audience, but there is something incredibly special about performing in front of a home crowd, especially following our Grammy nomination for an album dedicated to our home.

"Kristyn and I are both extremely fortunate to be able to travel the world and share our music and passion for hymn-writing with amazing audiences, but Northern Ireland has a special place in our heart."



Keith added: "It is where Kristyn and I met and where we return to with our four children each year. So we are thrilled to kick off the 'Sing! World' tour at the SSE arena in Belfast.

"We hope the concert will be a memorable evening where people can come together to sing their faith. As 2023 shapes up to be a great year for Kristyn and I, our return to Belfast is central to our excitement".

Keith and Kristyn Getty are pre-eminent modern hymn writers in the world today with Keith being the first church musician of the modern era to be awarded the OBE from the late Queen. for services to music and hymn-writing. The couple live between Nashville and Northern Ireland with their four daughters.

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Their hymns such as 'In Christ Alone', written with Stuart Townend, uniquely cross musical genres and teach traditional Christian doctrine. It is one of the most-sung hymns in the world, estimated to be sung more than 100 million people each year.

As celebrated ambassadors of hymn-writing, the Gettys have performed for United States presidents and prime ministers and a musical highlight is their annual American national hymn tour, and Christmas tour including sell-out concerts each year at Kennedy Centre, Washington and Carnegie Hall, New York..

Kathryn Scott: NI singer and husband at centre of \$62m battle for control of US church

Couple who relocated to the States accused of fraud after split from Vineyard Movement, Ian Little reports in Belfast Telegraph and Sunday Life.

A Coleraine couple who co-founded one of the town's biggest churches 23 years ago are facing a \$62 million fraud lawsuit in California.

Alan and Kathryn Scott, who moved to the States five years ago after leaving the Causeway Coast Vineyard church, deny any wrongdoing and say they have always 'tried to do God's will'.



Friends in Northern Ireland also dismissed the allegations against the couple. They said the husband and wife and their two daughters moved to America so Mrs Scott could pursue a career as a gospel singer and songwriter and had no initial intention of getting re-involved with Vineyard.

But in 2018 they applied for, and were chosen, to take up leadership roles as pastors in Vineyard Anaheim, which is seen as the mother church of the influential movement.

Vineyard has a network of 2,500 congregations worldwide, 545 of them in the States and 120 in the UK and Ireland.

A report in the American Religious News Service (RNS) said the Scotts claimed earlier this year that God told them to lead their church out of Vineyard and break from the group.

“We’re simply doing what we’ve been taught to do, which is to listen to the Lord and respond when He speaks,” the Scotts said in a recent message to their church, which was re-named ‘The Dwelling Place’ in April.

However, nine former church members, including the widow of the late founder of the Vineyard movement, John Wimber, have filed a lawsuit alleging that the Scotts took control of the Anaheim church and its assets, valued at \$62million, under false pretences.

In a complaint filed on November 10 in the Superior Court for Orange County in California, the ex-members alleged that the Scotts misled the church board during their interview and made a promise to keep the church in the movement.

The RNS report added that the board members, including former pastor Lance Pittluck, said in the lawsuit they would never have hired the Scotts if they had known about their plans for the church, which has a \$55m, mortgage-free building and \$7m in the bank.

The plaintiffs have asked the Superior Court to return control of the church to board members.

The Scotts did not respond to requests for a comment, but they released a video in which they informed their congregation about the lawsuit.

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They did not address specific allegations but said the church would respond in a “respectful manner”.

The Scotts’ video recounted how they left Northern Ireland for the US and told of their love for Vineyard.

Alan Scott insisted the idea of leaving the movement had not crossed their minds until ‘God spoke to them’.

He said he expected people to be upset and angry but added: “What we never expected for a moment was that people would question our motivations or intentions, or assign some kind of evil and sinister motive to what we were doing. It grieves us, it saddens us. This is not honouring to the Lord at all, but it is where we find ourselves.”

The Scotts announced in March 2017 that they were leaving Causeway Coast Vineyard.



According to reports, when the church was founded in 1999, it had six members. When the Scotts left, it had around 2,000.

In a 2019 interview for a magazine called Charisma News, Alan Scott said he had never imagined leaving the Causeway Coast Vineyard, but his wife “sensed God speaking to us about living in the US at some time and building an altar there”.

Local friends of the Scotts have voiced their support for the couple. A man who declined to be named said their journey was inspirational.

Sinn Fein-organised event in Presbyterian Church switch of venue after criticism on social media

A Sinn Féin-organised event at a Presbyterian Church was moved at the 11th hour after objections were raised on social media, John Breslin reports in the Irish News.

The information on cost of living event was due to be held at the Presbyterian Church in Hilltown, Co Down. It was still being advertised as being held there on the day of the event, December 6. But the Presbyterian Church of Ireland in Iveagh told the organisers, including local Sinn Fein Councillor Gerry O’Hare, they needed to find a change of venue.

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In a statement to the Rathfriland Outlook, the church stated: “It was...recognised that holding the particular event...could have been incredibly difficult for many in the Presbyterian family, and others in the wider community, especially for those who have experienced unimaginable suffering during the Troubles.

“The church is very aware of that sense of pain, grief and loss.”

Mr O’Hare said he was “disappointed” at having to making the late venue switch and blamed “internet trolls”. Previous Sinn Féin-organised events have been held in the church, he added.

While some posters on social media objected to the event being held in the church, including one describing it as a “sick joke”, many others were supportive, noting times have changed since Sinn Féin was the political wing of the Provisional IRA.

The church, in making the decision, said that while it recognised the impact of the crisis on many people, its regulations state that no event organised and promoted by any political party should be held on its premises.

The Housing Executive, St Vincent de Paul, Community Advice, along with Chris Hazzard MP and Sinead Ennis MLA, were among those giving advice at the event, which was switched to Clonduff Youth Club.

Courtesy Irish News, December 15.2022

Church leaders call on UK government to reconsider Cumbrian coal mine

In an open letter, 20+ Anglican and Catholic bishops, as well as heads of eight UK Churches, challenge UK Government's decision to approve a new coal mine near Whitehaven, Cumbria

Over 450 Church leaders and Christian environmental campaigners have signed an open letter to UK Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak, and Secretary of State, Michael Gove, calling for a rethink on the approval of a new coal mine in Cumbria.

The letter, coordinated by Young Christian Climate Network and supported by Operation Noah and Christian Aid, has been endorsed, among others, by the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, by the lead environmental bishops for the Church of England and Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales (Rt Revd Graham Usher and Rt Revd John Arnold) and by the heads of the the Baptist Union of Great Britain, Church in Wales, the Methodist Church of Great Britain, Quakers in Britain, the Salvation Army, the Scottish Episcopal Church, the United Reformed Church and Undeb yr Annibynwyr/Union of Welsh Independent Churches.

The letter states:

“We acknowledge that this region needs investment, but the Government is supporting a dying industry, instead of securing sustainable green jobs for the long term. We know that every pound of investment in renewables creates three



times more jobs than in the fossil fuel industry. Coal from this mine will continue to heat up the planet, pollute the atmosphere, and most severely impact those in the worldpoorest countries who have done the least to cause the climate crisis. We lament this great injustice. As Pope Francis says in his encyclical *Laudato Si*, we must listen to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor, instead of covering our ears.'

Perspective

The transforming power of love was the Queen's theme - Archbishop of York

Writing in yesterday's *Sunday Express*. Archbishop Cotterall's article follows in full:

How will you celebrate Christmas?

What are your family traditions?

Gathering around the telly at 3pm is one of ours.

However, for a few fleeting moments next Sunday Christmas may feel a little unfamiliar. For the first time since most of us can remember, we'll turn on the TV for the big Christmas Day speech and Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II won't be with us. Someone else will be speaking.

Her son.

Watching his speech will become the new Christmas Day tradition. And in that moment, many of us may well say a quick heartfelt prayer of thanks for her late Majesty's incredible life and example. But then we'll get on with our celebrations - and enjoy hearing what our new King has to say.

In my home city of York, a magnificent statue has been erected in tribute to her late Majesty. I was privileged to stand with King Charles as he unveiled the monument outside York Minster on a rainy afternoon last month.

He spoke tenderly about his beloved mother and the gift and legacy she leaves behind.

"She was always vigilant for the welfare of her people," the King told the crowd; "a constant example of the duty and care for others, and for our community, which is the calling and the duty we all share."

I then offered a prayer of blessing over the statue - grateful for the copious amounts of 'holy water' being supplied by the heavens as I spoke. Though I'm not sure the crowd were as grateful, mind you!

I've been reflecting on the King's words.

Our Queen was a leader who always dreamed big for the potential of our nation and the Commonwealth she served. And being a woman of such strong Christian faith, it was a Jesus-shaped dream, one built on his foundations of loving service, faithfulness, and compassion. It's why the common theme running through so many of her Christmas Day speeches was the transforming power of love.

Her great muse was of course the Nativity story itself: the birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem

It's a story as old as the hills and as fresh as the first flower of spring.

It still has the power to move and inspire in a way that few other stories can.

This is because it is rooted in some of the harshest realities of real life, a world away from the cosy images that are sometimes presented to us at Christmas.

It's a story about a teenage pregnancy and a poll tax summons. A frightened young couple with nowhere to go.

For anyone living in hard circumstances this Christmas, it is a relatable and deeply human story. And we need to hear it now more than ever because we too live in the dark and difficult times of economic hardship and fuel poverty and of a cruel and evil war being waged against Ukraine.

There is no quick fix or easy solutions to any of this, though there is more we should be doing to help the poorest in our society and those who are misplaced because of war, conflict, and oppression.

Yet I remain full of hope.

Like her late Majesty the Queen, I have faith that goodness and light will always overcome the darkness and of the power of love.

I too find great strength and inspiration in the Christmas story. The character I find I'm always drawn to is St Joseph. He can easily get forgotten. But I am inspired by his faithfulness. I can identify with him.

Once Mary said her 'yes' to God, she at least had the very clear evidence of the baby growing inside her. But all Joseph had to go on was a dream. A dream that told him to trust God and not to fear. And, remarkably, that's what he did.

I also reckon that Joseph's response is much closer to how it is for most of us when it comes to faith. We don't have the physical evidence Mary had; but we do have dreams and visions. We have the stories that other people tell us, and we have to decide whether we're going to trust them.

Joseph trusted. Against the odds. He supported Mary. He gave Jesus a home.

Putting my trust in Jesus, inviting him into my life, has changed and transformed me. It has also compelled me to try and change the world for the better.

At Christmas we are all invited to be part of this story and part of this change. It is the time when we are asked to reflect on what we're putting our faith in and what dreams we have for our lives and for the world.

Or to put it very plainly: are we going to make room for Jesus by making room for those who are in great need? Are we going to be led by love?

And of course, another great Christmas tradition is to come to Church to a Carol service, or a Christingle or for Communion at Midnight or on Christmas morning.

This is where we can hear again the joy and challenge of the Christmas story – the story of God with us. You may even discover a Jesus-shaped dream of your own.

God bless you and happy Christmas!

Speaking to the soul – Christmas series

Follow this new series on Christmas - a short reading and a prayer - daily on this site. Give it a go!

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