

Church News Ireland



Image of the day – Christingle ever popular

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The good folk of St Bartholomew's Parish Church in Stranmillis, Belfast.

News reports

Moderator congratulates Taoiseach on second term

Following Saturday's meeting of Dáil Éireann, Presbyterian Moderator Right Reverend Dr John Kirkpatrick, has written to congratulate Leo Varadkar TD on becoming Taoiseach for a second time, as part of the coalition government's 2020 agreement.

In his letter, Dr Kirkpatrick said that much had changed since the summer of 2017 when Mr Varadkar first became Taoiseach. Speaking about the agreement that led to the Taoiseach's second term, the Moderator said, "What impressed many people following the January 2020 General Election was a willingness from all parties to compromise for the common good and move forward, of which your reappointment is a part. Many of those issues remain – the outworking of Brexit, for example, and a new absence of a Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly. On this island we continue to face the ramifications of the war in Ukraine and

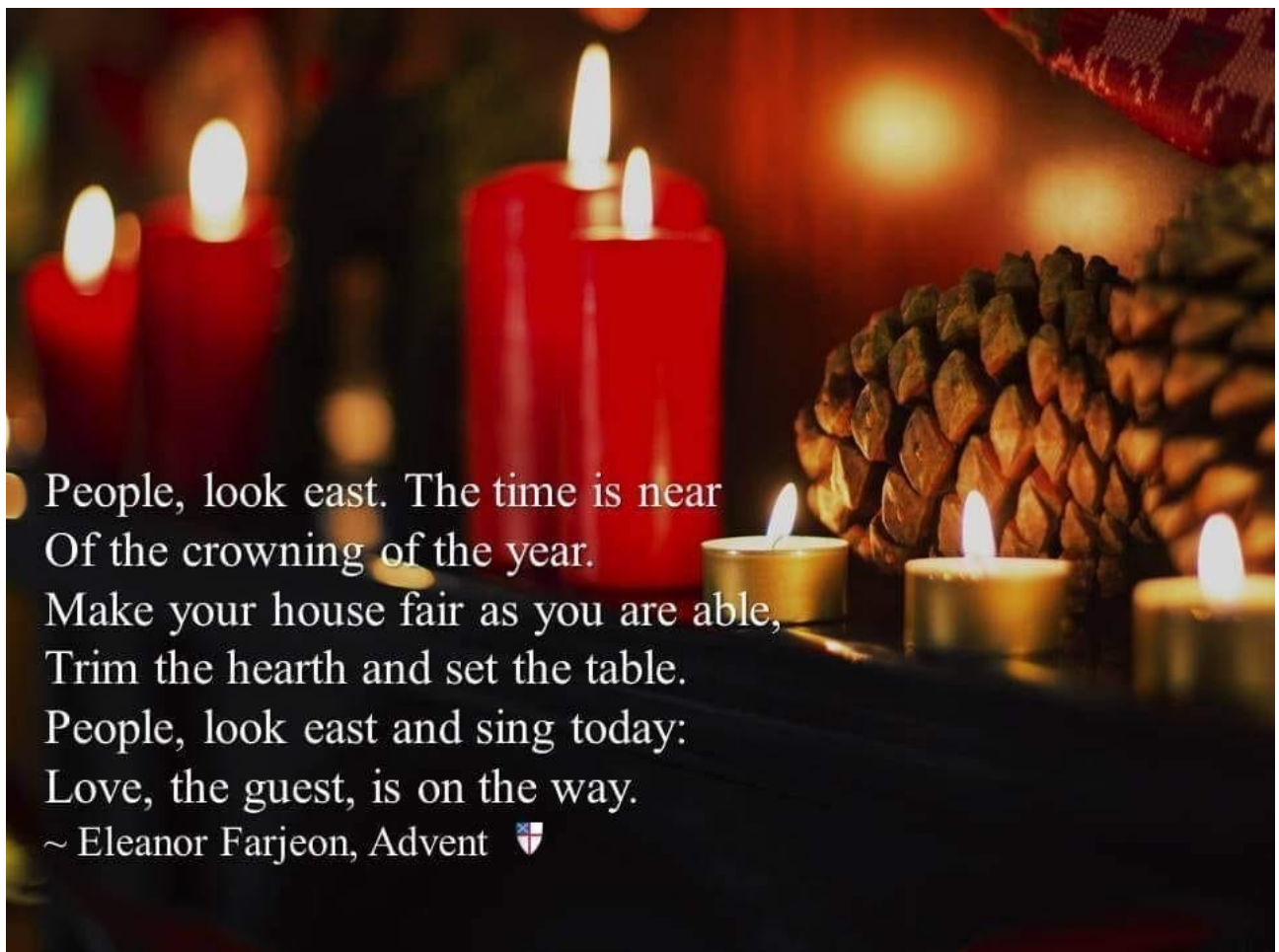
December 24, 2022

the cost of living crisis. Along with my fellow Church leaders, we spoke of these and other issues with President Higgins at Áras an Uachtaráin just last month.”

Wishing the Taoiseach a Happy Christmas, he concluded by offering his prayers for the future saying, “As followers of the Lord Jesus Christ we are called to pray for those in authority, so you, and the coalition government that you lead, can be assured of my prayers and those in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.”

Taize meeting in Germany

The 45th European Meeting of Young Adults will take place in Germany, in the city of Rostock, from 28



People, look east. The time is near
Of the crowning of the year.
Make your house fair as you are able,
Trim the hearth and set the table.
People, look east and sing today:
Love, the guest, is on the way.
~ Eleanor Farjeon, Advent 🏹

December to 1 January 2023, prepared by the Taizé Community together with the local Churches. Around 5,000 young people from all over Europe and beyond will seek together a renewed momentum of hope.

Common prayers at HanseMesse and workshops on various spiritual, social, artistic, political and economic themes will shape the meeting, which will take place for the first time in this part of Germany - one of the most secularised areas in Europe. The civil authorities have actively supported this meeting. The former President of the Federal Republic of Germany, Joachim Gauck, will speak at the 1pm prayer on 30 December.

On arrival, the young people will receive a message from Brother Alois entitled 'Inner life and solidarity', which will serve as a common thread for the morning small group sharing and during the meetings in Taizé throughout 2023.

Brother Alois is currently on a five day visit to Ukraine. He is meeting Church leaders and young people in Kyiv and Lviv, where he will stay until 25 December .

He said: "So many young people have come from Ukraine in recent years to Taizé and the European meetings. There will be nearly 300 of them at the meeting in Rostock, but many will not be able to come because of the war. I wanted to come and meet them to tell them of our solidarity during this terrible ordeal."

Links - copy and paste-

Rostock meeting programme:

www.taize.fr/IMG/pdf/livretfrfinal.pdf

Taize: www.taize.fr

Ballinamallard ministers raise funds for charity with sit out

Two Ballinamallard ministers braved sub-zero temperatures as they completed their annual Christmas charity sit out in the village recently.

It was -10°C at 8am on Wednesday, December 14 as Reverend John Beacom of Ballinamallard and Trillick Methodist Church and Archdeacon Brian Harper of Magheracross Parish Church began their 12-hour sit out supporting Tearfund humanitarian aid for Ukraine and water projects in South East Kenya suffering severe drought, Jessica Campbell writes in the Impartial Reporter.

A total of £5,144.75 was collected on the day which will be divided between the two charities.

Speaking to The Impartial Reporter, Rev. Beacom noted that despite the freezing temperatures, he and Archdeacon Harper couldn't have asked for a warmer reception from businesses and members of the local community who showed their support of the day.

"Whenever we set up at 8am in the morning, the temperature was -10°C and whenever we were finishing in the evening at 8pm, it was still -7°C.

"It was challenging weather-wise but the businesses in the village and the people, they were constantly bringing us coffee and items to sustain us.



The Dear of St Patrick's Cathedral, Very Rev Dr William Morton (Centre) visited the Black Santa at St Ann's Dawson Street Dublin, Canon Paul Arbuthnot

"Considering the weather, the generosity of the the local community was just so humbling. They took on the weather as well to come out and support us and took time to talk to us," he said.

Archdeacon Harper seconded this: "It was cold but it was very enjoyable and we had very good company. People were calling all the time."

Talking about the two charities that will benefit from the funds raised during the sit out, Archdeacon Harper said: "Some of the funds will go towards Tearfund, which is a charity that supports humanitarian relief all around the world but we're specifically directing ours towards Ukrainian humanitarian relief and then the other charity is called Water Drops.

"Water Drops is a small charity involved in building water reservoirs in eastern Africa where there's a lot of drought at the minute, the rains have failed for about three years."

In the media

**‘The crib does not distract us from the relevant issues of today. It exposes them’
– Bishop Dempsey**

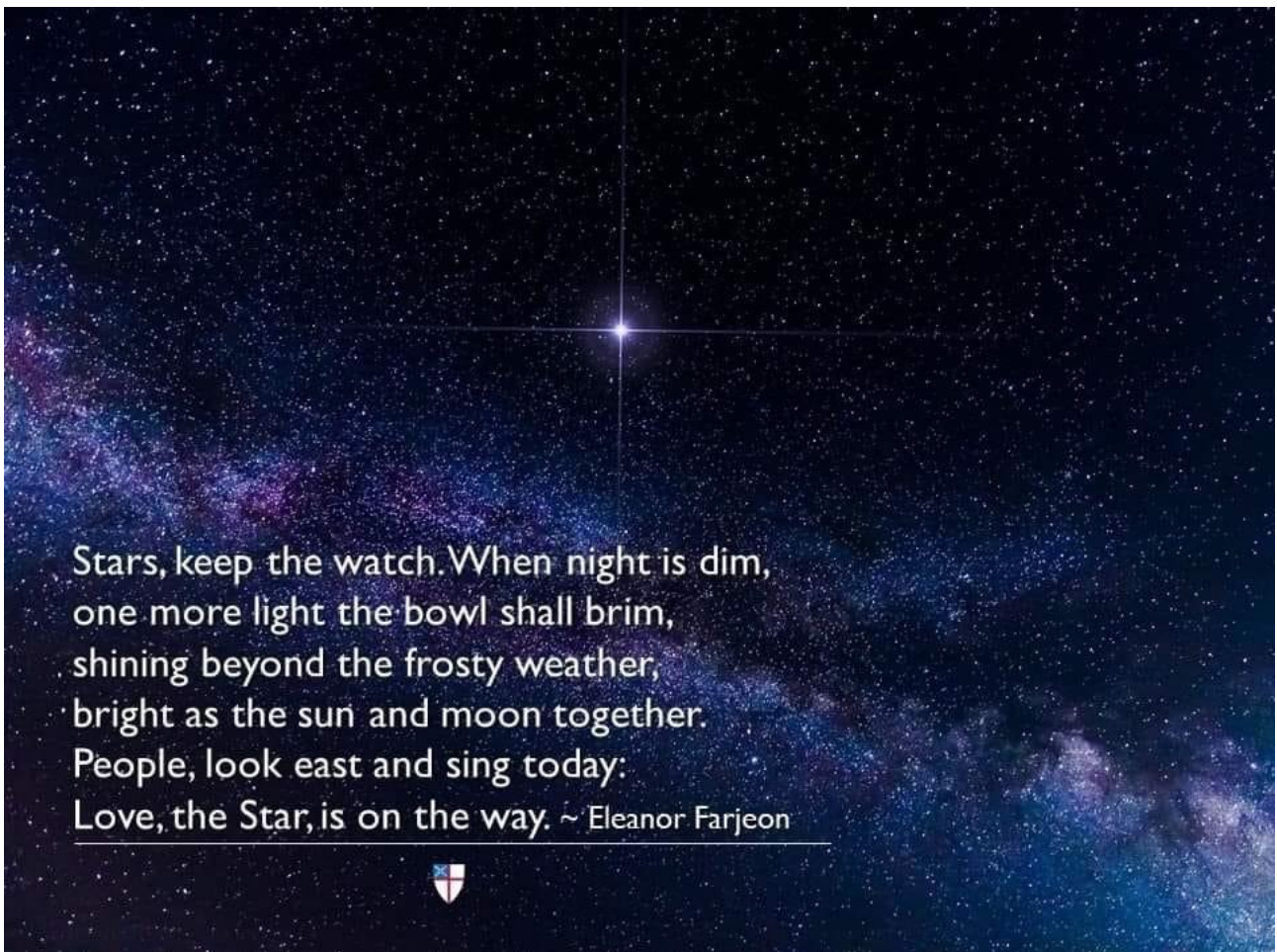
As we reach this the final week of Advent, Bishop Paul Dempsey, Bishop of Achonry and chair of the Catholic Bishops’ Council for Emigrants, had an opinion article published in The Irish Times reflecting on the real issues that underpin the season of Christmas.

Bishop Dempsey said, “The cancellation of the ‘live crib’ outside the Mansion House caused quite a stir in recent weeks. Much debate ensued ranging from those criticising

the politicisation of the situation to animal rights groups condemning the use of animals for live entertainment.

“Though the interest in the crib is welcome, we are constantly reminded that we live in a postmodern, secular society, therefore, I suspect the debate to maintain the tradition of the live crib was motivated by a certain sentimentality, rather than any widely held religious beliefs. One comment that caught my attention was made by a group highlighting the point that the controversy around the live crib ‘took away from far more relevant issues’ in our society today, such as homelessness. I would argue the contrary.”

“An example of a relevant issue that has prompted protests on our streets recently is that of migrants and refugees. I



believe the presence of the crib challenges us to reflect upon this issue in a profound way. In the second chapter of Matthew's Gospel, the story of the 'Flight into Egypt' is told. After the birth of Jesus, Joseph is prompted in a dream to leave Bethlehem for Egypt (Mt 2:12-15). This is because King Herod saw the new born child as a threat and was planning to kill him. Mary and Joseph leave along with Jesus and make their way into Egypt. Afterwards, King Herod kills all the male children in Bethlehem under two years of age. From this we see that Jesus, Mary and Joseph are forced to flee their homeland for fear of persecution."

Bishop Dempsey continued, "The crib reminds us, not of some sentimental story from the past, but of the plight of refugees in our midst today. Pope Francis has shown great passion for this issue during his pontificate. His first apostolic visit a few months after his election was to Lampedusa, to highlight the plight of refugees. His encyclical, Fratelli Tutti outlines the concept of social friendship, where he urges us to respect the difference of the other and not see it as a threat, but rather something that can enrich our lives. I experienced this when I served as a priest in Newbridge, Co. Kildare. There was a Direct Provision Centre which housed many people from various parts of the world. A group in the parish wanted to reach out in some real way to support those who found themselves in this system.

"During these encounters, I heard stories of people who had to leave their homeland because of violence, persecution, and war. I met people from many different cultures, who were different from me in many ways, and yet were like me, in that they sought the same basic things in life that I

suspect most of us do. Like us all, they sought a home, security for themselves and their families, a job so that they could provide for their loved ones and contribute to society. Over time, friendships were formed and our lives were enriched by the experience of getting to know one another.”

In his article Bishop Dempsey stated, “The Direct Provision system I encountered was one where people, including children, were crammed into small hotel rooms in an undignified, demeaning manner. Many who tried to work out their residency status were met by red tape leading to frustration and in some cases despair. However, the people I journeyed with displayed great dignity in the way they continued to do their best within a cumbersome system without overt criticism of it.

“Over the past couple of decades, we have been exposed to stories of Irish people, including children, who were abused in many ways. Some of those who were aware of the painful suffering in the Church and society turned the other way. This is something that we are rightly deeply critical of today. It would be sad and frightening to think that at some point in the future, our own shortfalls in the care of migrants and those in need might be brought into question.”

Bishop Dempsey concluded, “I suspect the debate around the presence of the crib in the public square will continue in our society for some time. In this, we must remember that behind the figures gathered around the child in the manger is the story of a family who are about to be displaced. This reflects the reality of life for many who have come to our shores in recent times. The crib does not distract us from the relevant issues of today. It exposes them.”

Courtesy Bishop Dempsey and the Irish Times

Webinars, music, resources, broadcasts, and books

Updated time for Songs Of Praise this Sunday

Don't miss Songs Of Praise this Sunday for a special, family performance of "Do You Hear What I Hear" from Andrea, Matteo and Virginia Bocelli. That's this Sunday 18th December on Songs Of Praise at the updated time of 12.50pm, on BBC One and afterwards on iPlayer: bbc.in/3uYrNpi

Poem for today

Noel: Christmas Eve 1913 by Robert Bridges, 1844 - 1930

Pax hominibus bonae voluntatis

A frosty Christmas Eve
when the stars were shining
Fared I forth alone
where westward falls the hill,
And from many a village
in the water'd valley
Distant music reach'd me
peals of bells aringing:

December 24, 2022

The constellated sounds
ran sprinkling on earth's floor
As the dark vault above
with stars was spangled o'er.
Then sped my thoughts to keep
that first Christmas of all
When the shepherds watching
by their folds ere the dawn
Heard music in the fields
and marveling could not tell
Whether it were angels
or the bright stars singing.

Now blessed be the tow'rs
that crown England so fair
That stand up strong in prayer
unto God for our souls
Blessed be their founders
(said I) an' our country folk
Who are ringing for Christ
in the belfries to-night
With arms lifted to clutch
the rattling ropes that race
Into the dark above
and the mad romping din.

But to me heard afar
it was starry music
Angels' song, comforting
as the comfort of Christ
When he spake tenderly
to his sorrowful flock:
The old words came to me

December 24, 2022

by the riches of time
Mellow'd and transfigured
as I stood on the hill
Heark'ning in the aspect
of th' eternal.

Speaking to the soul – Christmas series

Short reading and a prayer - daily on this site

Church News Ireland

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