



President Michael D Higgins says Ireland can empathise with the suffering of displaced people

1916 rebellion ideals should inspire understanding of others' pain, says President of Ireland

President Michael D Higgins has urged people to be inspired by the ideals of the 1916 rebellion

In his Christmas message, Mr Higgins said it is heartening to see countless numbers of Irish people dedicating themselves at home and

abroad to offer help, shelter and food to others in need.

And he said Ireland, as a migrant nation, is uniquely placed to understand the agony which has left 60 million people displaced around the world in the last year.

"Together, we can strengthen that web of solidarity that binds us as a people and as a global community next year," he said.

"As we prepare to commemorate the momentous events of a century ago that shaped the birth of our Republic, we are encouraged not only to recall those events, but also to re-imagine and take inspiration from the Republican ideals proclaimed almost a century ago.

"It is my sincere hope that those ideals can inspire each and every one of us on our shared journey where each step made by each citizen, in every generation, matters; a journey that we all make together, never alone."

Mr Higgins recalled the United Nations' figures which show one in every 122 people on the planet is a refugee, displaced or had been forced to leave their homes.

"Wars, conflict and persecution have forced more people to flee than at any other time since records began," he said.

President Higgins also praised the work of Irish NGOs, medics and the Defence Forces.

"How we treat the weakest among us is the finest test of us as a nation," he said.

Mr Higgins also said both he and his wife Sabina experienced and valued the warmth and friendship of people at home and abroad over the last year.

"And it is something we deeply appreciate. In villages and towns around the country and on working visits abroad we have had the privilege of witnessing the contribution to community and the public world made by Irish people in so many different ways," he said.

Extending wishes for a peaceful and happy Christmas and New Year, President Higgins said people could draw further inspiration for our own lives and times from the story of the nativity and a homeless Joseph and Mary.

"More than anything, the Christmas story gives us guidance on how to shape our own shared humanity with a regard for future generations.

"This year in particular, we welcome the acceptance of new obligations by nation states in relation to global poverty and climate change," he said.

How we remember the Easter Rising and the Somme will affect our future - Bishop McKeown

Yesterday on Facebook, Bishop Donal McKeown of Derry posted the following pre-Christmas reflection. He writes -

The story we tell about our past influences how we imagine the future will be. If I recall the past as being full of conflict or stress, I tend to assume that next year will be similar. Healing our memories means learning to tell a new story about our life thus far – so that we can dream of a better future.

2016 is a year when we will remember crucial events from 100 years ago. How we remember the Easter Rising and the Somme can

sometimes say more about how we see the future than about the facts of historical events. The challenge is to learn from the past and not to abuse it, to honour the memory of people and not to dishonour them for our purposes. If we plunder their memory for selfish ends, we demean the best in ourselves. Only the truth will set us free.

The Christmas story is not just a nice tale about distant events, a story that the child in each of us still loves. It is a carefully crafted adult story. It says that healing in society is possible. And it says that healing will not come from a God of guts and guns but from a defenceless child. Peace will come, not from the victory of the righteous heroes but from those who love and give. Peace involves the defence of the other and not the success of me.

Our main choice at Christmas is not what presents to give. It is about the story that we tell our children so that they can hope and not just party. In the Year of Mercy, we will try to tell the Christ Child's story about the past that speaks of forgiveness and reconciliation, hope and healing. I still believe that these are tidings of great joy for all the world in 2016.

Go to the root of your faith – Archbishop Jackson tells Dublin’s international community

Dublin’s diverse culture was represented at the annual Discovery Carol Service for the International Community in St George and St Thomas’s Church, Cathal Brugha Street, last weekend. The service was led by the Rector and Chaplain to the International Community, the Revd Obinna Ulogwara, and Archbishop Michael Jackson delivered his Christmas message to the international community.

The service featured music from the Zamar Ecumenical Choir and St George’s Brass Band and the lessons were read in Irish, French, Malawian, Igbo, Ukrainian, Malayalam (India), Italian, Filipino and English.

In his Christmas message, the Archbishop observed that young people are motivated by friendship, ecology and justice and suggested that adults could find motivation in the same three areas.

He said that the Son of God and the Son of Man came to be a friend to strangers and to make



Zamar Ecumenical Choir performing at the Discovery Carol Service for the International Community in St George and St Thomas's Church.

friends of enemies. Creation mattered to Him and he came to bring Good News to the poor.

The Archbishop said Christmas would not be complete without Mary. He described her as being radical – a woman who went to the root of human life as understood theologically from the perspective of God's engagement with earth and its inhabitants.

“The word: *radical* has become almost unusable in 2015. What word will be next? The real challenge for Christmas 2015 and the New Year

2016 is surely this: How do people of good faith and people of World Faiths recognise hope and reject hatred; replace hatred with hope in a world of darkness and light? The answer is: be *radical*, go to the root of the faith you receive as did Mary,” he concluded.

Fr Ray Kelly releases new album for Christmas

Singing priest sensation Fr Ray Kelly has said that he really enjoyed making his new album entitled ‘An Irish Christmas Blessing’.

The 62-year-old native of Tyrellspass in Co Westmeath shot to global fame in 2014 after a video of him singing the Leonard Cohen classic ‘Hallelujah’ at the church wedding of Chris and Leah O’Kane went viral, with nearly 50 million views to date.

The video catapulted Fr Kelly to overnight stardom and now he juggles life as a singer with his church duties in Oldcastle, Co Meath where he has been parish priest since 2006.

Speaking to the Sunday World newspaper, Fr Kelly said that while he has a very busy life he is really enjoying his work.



“Personally I’ve enjoyed my priesthood. It’s a privileged position because as a priest we are thrown into the deep end of life with people, their joys and their sorrows.”

Fr Kelly said that he was a late entrant to the priesthood, something he would recommend to anyone thinking of joining.

He added, “I grew up in the village of Tyrrellspass and got a job in the civil service when I was 17 or 18. As time went on, I put down roots. I had my own house in Dublin, a car and I was quiet secure.”

However he said, “I was constantly grappling with the idea of becoming a priest.”

He added, “Eventually I went to talk to somebody and I got direction from there. When I announced it at home, it was a bit surprising for my parents and family but they just accepted it and said ‘if it’s what you want to do, go ahead and do it.’ But I do think it was good to have the experience of life first.”

Fr Ray released his debut album where I belong in November 2014.

Now his second album entitled ‘An Irish Christmas Blessing’ also comes under the auspices of Universal Music Label and is produced by Andrew Lloyd Webber’s long-time collaborator Nigel Wright.

Among the songs featured on the album are ‘Little Drummer Boy’, ‘When A Child Is Born’, ‘I’ll Be Home For Christmas’ and ‘Silent Night’.

St Colman’s at heart of Dunmurry switch-on

St Colman’s Parish was at the heart of the Christmas Lights switch-on in Dunmurry with the rector providing the festive tree and the parish

offering carols and refreshments after the switch-on.



The Rev Adrian McLaughlin (rector of Dunmurry Parish) pictured with his wife Christine and local television and radio presenter Frank Mitchell (UTV & U105).

The switch was flicked by local television and radio presenter Frank Mitchell (UTV & U105) on December 14. The tree was provided by the Rev

Adrian McLaughlin with sponsorship from Dunmurry businesses and shopkeepers.

Following the switch-on, people enjoyed carol singing before tucking into hot chocolate, mulled wine and mince pies at St Colman's Church Hall.

Speaking afterwards, Adrian said: "A special thanks to the whole Ryan family, especially Karen who baked and provided all the yummy mince pies and refreshments, and all who helped me put up the tree and last but not least Mr Frank Mitchell for being such a star and good sport. God bless you all Dunmurry."

Commissioning of Down & Dromore MU Diocesan president

June Butler MBE, will be commissioned as Diocesan President of Down and Dromore Mothers' Union on Sunday 10 January 2016 at 4.00 pm in her home parish of Saintfield.

June will be known to many as Diocesan Secretary of Down and Dromore and Connor, a post to which she was appointed in October 2009. Previously she was Assistant Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland.

Church of Scotland welcomes steps to improve end of life care

The Church of Scotland has welcomed the publication of a new framework which seeks to improve palliative and end of life care over the next five years.

The Rev Sally Foster-Fulton, convener of the Church and Society Council, said good quality support was "essential" and urged the Scottish Government to increase the resources available.

The Church of Scotland provides palliative care through its social care arm CrossReach, which is one of the biggest organisations of its kind.

The government is investing £3.5 million in a [Framework for Action on Palliative and End of Life Care](#) which will be used to drive improvement across the sector and support targeted action on training and education.

It aims to ensure that everyone has good quality care regardless of their age, diagnosis, socio-economic background or where they live. The framework also addresses the need for greater

openness about death, dying and bereavement in Scotland.

Ms Foster-Fulton said: "We welcome this report and its commitment to consistent, quality palliative care for everyone in Scotland who needs it. In recognising the need for care for the whole person – physical, psychological, spiritual, and social – palliative care helps to enhance the final days and weeks of not only the patient, but also their relatives and carers.

"Through our 800 parish ministers, located in every part of Scotland, as well as through specialist healthcare chaplains and thousands of our members involved in pastoral care, the Church has a unique insight into the care of those struggling with deteriorating health and striving for dignity in life.

"Through this role, offered to every person living in Scotland, we not only offer spiritual comfort to those coming towards the end of their lives (and [to}their families) but we also, with others, seek to ensure that their last days are as fulfilled as possible."

The framework includes ten commitments to support improvements in the delivery of palliative and end of life care across Scotland.

Ms Foster-Fulton said: "The provision of good quality palliative care is an essential part of the holistic approach for the care of those approaching the end of their lives and the Church of Scotland calls on the Scottish Government to increase the resources available for this important aspect of healthcare."

* Church of Scotland <http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/home>

Links to news reports on faith, politics and education

Archbishop Diarmaid Martin welcomes FG free vote on abortion amendment - Irish Times

Not just in **Ireland**, not just by me, but around the world," he said. ... the Holy Door there, marking the beginning of the **church's** Jubilee Year of Mercy.

<http://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/religion-and-beliefs/diarmuid-martin-welcomes-fg-free-vote-on-abortion-amendment-1.2474107>

We should all take a moment this Christmas to mourn children who died alone in mother and baby homes - Irish Examiner

<http://www.irishexaminer.com/viewpoints/columnists/fergus-finlay/we-should-all-take-a-moment-this-christmas-to-mourn-children-who-died-alone-in-mother-and-baby-homes-372749.html>

Minister to review four-year wait on divorce requirement - Irish Times

<http://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/minister-to-review-four-year-wait-on-divorce-requirement-1.2474339>

Paul Williams: Slab furore gives us a chilling glimpse into Sinn Féin strategy - Irish Independent

<http://www.independent.ie/opinion/comment/paul-williams-slab-furore-gives-us-a-chilling-glimpse-into-sinn-fin-strategy-34306953.html>

Tax fraudster ‘Slab’ Murphy hailed by McGuinness for peace process role - Belfast Newsletter

<http://www.newsletter.co.uk/news/northern-ireland-news/tax-fraudster-slab-murphy-hailed-by-mcguinness-for-peace-process-role-1-7126759>

Big Issue

The Archbishop of Canterbury writes, “ We all benefit from the gifts that refugees bring”.

<http://www.bigissue.com/features/columnists/6068/archbishop-of-canterbury-justin-welby-we-all-benefit-from-the-gifts-that>

Yorks Post

The Archbishop of York will lead a Christmas Day morning service for inmates at a North Yorkshire prison. Dr John Sentamu will spend time with staff and prisoners at Kirklevington Grange open prison near Yarm on December 25 as part of his six month pilgrimage walk across the Diocese of York. Archbishop Sentamu, a former Prison Chaplain, is quoted.

<http://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/news/archbishop-of-york-to-lead-christmas-day-service-for-prisoners-1-7636625>

Metro/Exp

Articles about same-sex marriage ceremonies in military chapels in England and Wales which is allowed by the Ministry of Defence, but not by the Sending Churches. The Defence Minister Penny Mordaunt has asked military chaplains from the three services how 'Parliament's sanction of same sex marriage may be fully implemented.'

<http://metro.co.uk/2015/12/21/military-chapels-ordered-to-allow-gay-marriages-after-18-month-stand-off-5579184/>
<http://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/628607/gay-marriage-military-chapels-Tory-minister-Penny-Mordaunt>

Exp

Continuing coverage of the letter written by 60 parliamentarians calling to the Prime Minister to urge the UN to class the murders of Christians by IS as genocide. The letter has been written after news of the systematic killing of Syrian Christians and Yazidis in Iraq (see letters).

<http://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/628703/ISIS-United-Nations-Genocide-MPs-David-Cameron-Islamic-State-Iraq-Syria-Yazidi-Women>

Ind

British families are on course to spend £40bn more than they earn this year, fuelling fears that the country's economic growth is based on soaring levels of debt. The forecast by the independent Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) led to warnings that the UK could be heading towards a credit crunch similar to that of 2008 because of unsustainable levels of borrowing and household spending. Five years ago UK households were in the black, as Britons saved money in the wake of the financial crash.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/fears-of-new-economic-crash-as-british-families-run-40bn-deficit-a6782221.html>

Mail

Hundreds of mourners paid their respects to the British merchandise manager who was killed when gunmen stormed the Bataclan concert hall in the Paris terror attack. Nick Alexander, was shot dead by militants who opened fire on music fans as they watched American rock band Eagles of Death Metal at the central Paris venue on November 13. The funeral took place at St Andrew's Parish church in Weeley, near Colchester, Essex.

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3369006/Hundreds-mourners-attend-funeral-Eagles-Death-Metal-merchandise-manager-murdered-Paris-terror-attacks-attack-Bataclan-Concert-hall.html>

Comment

BBC: Should buildings be a priority for the Church? – Caroline Wyatt, Religious Affairs correspondent.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-35123921>

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