

Archbishops of Armagh highlight 'fleshandblood campaign' in joint televised message



Viewing life as a gift was the central theme of the annual Christmas Day Message by the Church of Ireland and Roman Catholic Archbishops of Armagh, The Most Revd Dr Richard Clarke and

The Most Revd Eamon Martin, broadcast nationally across Ireland and Northern Ireland on RTÉ1.

“Today we want to reflect upon gifts that many of us could give and yet have probably never thought to give. The ‘fleshandblood campaign’ as it’s known, encourages people to consider becoming a blood or organ donor as a testimony of Christian charity and love for our neighbour.” shared Archbishop Clarke.

The Senior Clerics of the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches in Ireland visited a blood donation session in Carrickmore, County Tyrone, run by the Northern Ireland Blood Transfusion Service. Archbishop Martin said, “Each year on the whole island of Ireland nearly 100,000 people receive blood or blood products. Donated blood is normally used by hospitals within 5 to 7 days of collection. Your blood could help save a life. It could go to a mother during childbirth, to someone with cancer, to a person undergoing routine surgery or even be used in the traumatic aftermath of a road traffic accident.”

The Blood Transfusion Services in Ireland need to attract about 30,000 new or returning donors

each year, but at present only 3% to 6% of the eligible population actually give blood. Paul McElkerney, spokesperson for the NIBTS said, “The Northern Ireland Blood Transfusion Service is absolutely delighted with the support already given by both Archbishops. With the help of all churches we will be able to continue to meet the demand for blood and blood products to help save the lives of patients in all our hospitals.”

In addition to the need for blood donors, there are currently somewhere between 500 and 1,000 people in Ireland on an active transplant waiting list and it is hoped that the estimated 45% of the Irish population who regularly attend church could actively help to address, meet and raise awareness of these needs. Earlier Archbishop Clarke described organ donation as “a powerful expression of human solidarity and of Christian charity”, helping to build a “culture of life.”

The Christmas broadcast aired as the major Christian denominations in Ireland unite around the fleshandblood campaign, encouraging their members to consider blood and organ donation as part of their giving and build on the rich traditions of generosity and altruism

demonstrated within the Church. A concerted drive for raising awareness is planned for 2015 as Rev Peter Murray, President of the Methodist Church in Ireland explains: "We are giving a commitment to encourage more of our members to be blood donors and to register for organ donation, so that in the physical sense, we have the opportunity to give hope and help transform lives".

The fleshandblood campaign, a partnership between creative agency, Kore and NHS Blood and Transplant has already witnessed widespread support in the UK across churches, community groups and from government ministers in Westminster, with over 35,000 church leaders having been resourced and thousands of new donors registering, credited to the work of the campaign.

Sally Johnson, Director of Organ Donation and Transplantation, at NHS Blood and Transplant said: "I am delighted that the Archbishops of Ireland have chosen to speak about organ donation in their joint Christmas message. NHS Blood and Transplant welcome their help and support to get this very important message out, at a time when people will be with their loved ones."

In addition to the Irish churches who are involved, the fleshandblood campaign is run in association with denominations and organisations including the Church of England, The Salvation Army, Methodist Church, United Reformed Church, Baptist

Union, Church In Wales, Church of Scotland, Seventh Day Adventist Church, Hope Together and Evangelical Alliance.

There really aren't that many spies in the Church - Papal Nuncio to Ireland



Archbishop Charles Brown - right

Spies unhappy with the orthodoxy of Irish priests are responsible for fewer than five letters received by the Papal Nuncio every year.

Irish Independent - Archbishop Charles Brown said claims that there was a cohort of spies

frequently reporting clerics to the nunciature were "exaggerated".

"It is not the case that there is a huge cohort of spies out there ... that's a bit exaggerated, to put it charitably," the former Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith official stated.

"Every day at the nunciature I get letters of all types. From people who are upset because the candles have been moved on the altar, to letters written by people who are perhaps deeply psychologically disturbed - and we try to respond to them with compassion.

"I can say before God that people reporting priests to the nunciature are very few - maybe four or five a year. Maybe all of these spies are writing to Rome independently of the nunciature," Archbishop Brown suggested.

Asked about the Irish church's dissident priests, the Papal Nuncio responded generally suggesting that in such cases, if at all possible, the Vatican would try to overcome the situation and have the restrictions lifted.

"In general, if it is possible to overcome whatever has caused the restrictions in the ministry - the

Church is going to do it, out of love for priest and the pastoral needs of the people," he said.

The 55-year-old also defended his pivotal role in selecting so many new bishops for the Irish church, saying there is no group that is more influential in the selection process than priests.

More than 1, 200 youngsters in Ireland reached out for help on Christmas Day - Childline



Childline recieved 1,208 calls, texts and messages on Christmas Day

Childline received more than 1,200 calls, texts and messages from youngsters looking for help on Christmas Day.

Irish Independent - The charity said its 57 dedicated volunteers from across Ireland gave up their time for free to offer support to hundreds of children who needed to talk. More than 73pc of those who made contact were male.

“The season can bring unwelcome stress on families and issues such as financial pressures and alcohol misuse in the home can have a hugely negative impact on children’s experience of the day,” said Margie Roe, National Childline Manager.

“Children contacted Childline on Christmas Day for a variety of reasons but the majority of calls this year were from children who were experiencing family difficulties and mental health issues.

“While Childline will not be able to solve all of these children’s issues and concerns on Christmas Day, what we can and will continue to do is listen to, believe and empower them and most importantly of all we will show these children that we care.”

This level of contact reflects the vital importance of Childline in the lives of Ireland's children, just days after its 24 hour service was saved.

More than €400,000 was raised through an emergency appeal, with more financial support committed by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

Childline said the calls and messages it received this Christmas highlight that while for most children Christmas is a time to have fun and spend time with family, for many others it can be a difficult time. More at -

<http://www.independent.ie/irish-news/more-than-1200-youngsters-reached-out-for-help-on-christmas-day-childline-30863181.htm>

In praise of ... Chris Mould, the Trussell Trust food bank manager

Chris Mould's Trussell Trust feeds more than a million people. But the job he does so well is one that shouldn't need doing at all

Andrew Brown in The Guardian - here are very good reasons to be sceptical of food banks as a

policy solution. It is surely a basic function of any kind of welfare state to ensure that no one goes hungry, and to outsource that duty to private charity introduces a moral hazard to governments who need no longer feel responsible for the consequences of their own failures. But at the same time, people are hungry through no fault of their own. Something must be done. And Chris Mould of the Trussell Trust is one person actually doing something.



Chris Mould, the executive chair of the Trussell Trust, a food bank charity, in its food sorting area.

He's doing quite a lot, actually. The trust, when he took it over in 2007, was feeding fewer than 30,000 people a year. This year it will feed more

than a million. Most of the credit for this belongs to other Christians than Mould – if any one Christian is responsible for the food bank explosion it's Iain Duncan Smith, whose catastrophic remodelling of the social security system has left countless children of hard-working parents to go to bed cold and hungry. And the work of distribution is done by 30,000 volunteers, not all of whom are Christian or even religious, while the food is donated by people who may have been carried out of church, screaming, after their baptism, but would never dream of returning now.

That's not the point. There is an extraordinary skill to getting out of the way so that the work of an organisation goes on unhindered by the leadership and this is what Mould very clearly possesses. He's is a man doing very well a job that should not need doing at all. Those are sometimes the most urgent jobs of all.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-30462055>

The Scots couple who spent 10 years rebuilding Sri Lanka

Church of Scotland minister John Purves and his wife Patricia share their experiences of being in

Sri Lanka when the tsunami struck, and their involvement in rescue, recovery and rebuilding in the ten years since.



The devastated boats meant no fish to sell and no food for those in the villages. John and his team provided nets and fishing gear for about 40 or 50 fishermen, as well as bicycles for selling and supplying the fish.

BBC Scotland - John Purves and his wife Patricia had been working in Sri Lanka for a year when the tsunami struck.

Since then they have been involved at every stage in the rescue, recovery and rebuilding programme over the past 10 years. Their work was only completed a year ago, when John retired from his ministry at St Andrew's Scots Kirk in Colombo.

Bringing their unique perspective on Sri Lanka's story of recovery, the couple discuss what they witnessed, the work they were involved in, and how they've seen Sri Lanka change in the decade since the tsunami.

On the morning of the tsunami, John Purves and his wife Patricia were leading a church service in Colombo - the only coastal area in Sri Lanka not hit by the tsunami.

After the service the couple set off on the six-hour drive to Nilaveli on the other side of the island, for a week's holiday.



The team built 50 new houses and rebuilt two preschools in the towns of Mawella and Hikkaduwa, using church funds until money for aid and redevelopment became available

As they approached their hotel John was told:
"There is no hotel! It's gone! There's been a big wave!"

Schools, homes and were raised to the ground, with only this single section of a school building left standing

Driving towards their beach hotel, John says it was as if "someone with a big wooden spoon had been stirring everything around".

"Nothing was where it should be," he says.
"There were boats on the road, there were cars on roofs, there were sofas and beds on tennis courts."

Patricia says they often wonder how differently things might have turned out had they not been at church that morning.

"Had our family joined us for Christmas, John would have taken that Sunday as one of his days annual leave and we would have been at the beach.

"We know now that the clue that a tsunami is about to happen is the receding wave, as the water is drawn back off the beach.

"We find ourselves thinking: 'Would we have gone out to see what was going on, or would we have realised something was wrong and taken flight from the beach front?' And we'll never be able to answer that question."

Read more:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-30462055>

www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/pa/article-2887278/Minister-recalls-tsunami-disaster.html

See also Christian Aid special feature with excellent photo display -

www.christianaid.org.uk/emergencies/past/tsunami/10-year-anniversary.html

Myth buster - The real story of the Christmas truce

It's an iconic moment – the first Christmas of World War One saw British and German soldiers come out of their trenches and fraternise, much to the horror of the top brass who feared it would damage morale. A saccharine, tear-jerking portrayal of the day's events formed easily the most controversial advert of the year.

But, 100 years to the day since it happened, are we quite sure we've got the details of the Christmas Truce right?



Myth 1. People played football.

It's one of the key images of the truce, but it has been convincingly argued by Malcolm Brown and Shirley Seaton in *Christmas Truce* that they didn't. There might have been impromptu kickabouts with old rags – the Lancashire Fusiliers used a tin of bully beef – but evidence for formal matches between opposing sides is a bit suspect and usually from several decades later.

Myth 2. Everyone took part.

The truce probably took place in about half of the line held by the British Army. Where the fighting had been heaviest and casualties most severe, there was much less incentive to stop for Christmas. Lieutenant C E M Richards, a young officer serving with the East Lancashire Regiment, [actually welcomed](#) the "return of good old sniping" late on Christmas Day. Corporal Adolf Hitler of the 16th Bavarians said: "Such things should not happen in wartime. Have you Germans no sense of honour left at all?"

Myth 3. Everyone was full of the Christmas spirit.

Not exactly. Sergeant Blackwood Jones [wrote about a comrade](#) who took some tobacco and jam to the Germans, only to be shot in the back as he returned to his trench. "He fell down and said, 'My God, I'm done'," he wrote. "They are dirty cowards, after [our] giving them tobacco." Pat Collard wrote to his parents at The Chestnut Horse pub at Easton, near Winchester, describing a horrendous Christmas under fire, concluding: "Perhaps you read of the conversation on Christmas Day between us and the Germans. It's all lies. The sniping went on

just the same; in fact, our captain was wounded, so don't believe what you see in the papers."

Myth 4. It was the first time it had happened.

No. At the beginning of the war, most soldiers on both sides were not the battle-hardened professionals they were to become. They were tired, fed up, cold and a long way from home. There were similar incidents of "peace breaking out" in the Napoleonic Wars, the American Civil War, the American Revolution and the Crimean War.

Myth 5. It was [all about selling groceries](#).

No, Sainsbury's, it wasn't – and trying to turn a profit out of such a beautiful moment is truly tacky.

Even with all these reservations, though, there is something magnificent about the truce. It was the last time in that war that enemies were able to overcome their fears and hostility. It did not take long before too much blood had been shed for anything like it to happen again. But just for a few hours, soldiers – mentally and spiritually, at least – took off their uniforms and became simply men. The generals on both sides were right to fear what had happened, and to take steps to stop it

happening again; wars depend on people being able to see uniforms rather than human beings. The Christmas Truce was a moment of clear sight before the fog of war descended again.

Media Digest

Times

Leader article and news report that Christians are facing ferocious repression in the Middle East, which formed the cradle of all three Abrahamic faiths.

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/opinion/leaders/article4305898.ece>

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/world/article4305894.ece>

Ind

Christmas editorial on Christianity's relevance today praising the work of both the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Archbishop of Westminster saying they are "two men whose instinct for social justice is as strong as their faith, and who are not shy of speaking out and risking controversy."

<http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/editorials/spiritual--and-political-for-those-who-question-the-churchs-relevance-to-society-a-resounding-answer-is-provided-this-christmas-9943448.html>

Ind/Mail

Reports that David Cameron has stressed his commitment to "Christian values" in his Christmas message saying "among the joyous celebrations we will reflect on those very Christian values of giving, sharing and taking care of others."

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/david-cameron-stresses-his-commitment-to-christian-values-in-christmas-message-9943495.html>

[http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/pa/article-2885719/Leaders-deliver-Christmas-messages.html?](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/pa/article-2885719/Leaders-deliver-Christmas-messages.html?ITO=1490&ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490)

[ITO=1490&ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/pa/article-2885719/Leaders-deliver-Christmas-messages.html?ITO=1490&ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490)

Mail

Feature on an atheist who finds solace in the pews each week despite 'agonising doubts'. The article is set against the backdrop that millions will pay their annual visit to church over Christmas.

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2885809/Secret-scared-tell-mother-Millions-pay-annual-visit-church-tomorrow-daughter-zealous-atheist-reveals-finds-solace-pews-week-despite-agonising-doubts.html#ixzz3MngKJZiN>

Mail

Report that the Islamic State has released a list of rules dictating how Christians living in the Syrian city of Raqqa should behave, including the instruction to never pray in public or within earshot of a Muslim

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2885506/How-live-Christian-Raqqa-ISIS-release-seven-rules-followers-rival-faith-including-praying-earshot-Muslims-never-mocking-Islam.html#ixzz3MnjpOurT>

Ind

Christmas feature on the boys cathedral choir at St Alban's Abbey

<http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/christmas/choristers-at-christmas-midnight-mass-and-the-end-of-an-era-9943048.html>

Tel

Report that some archaeologists believe Jesus was born in the small village of Bethlehem in the Galilee, located in northern Israel, which later became known for its Nazi-sympathiser German Templar community

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/israel/11310856/Israels-other-Bethlehem-have-Christians-celebrated-Jesus-birth-in-the-wrong-place-all-these-years.html>

Mail

News report headlined "after the war a bittersweet Christmas in Gaza"

http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/afp/article-2885499/After-war-bittersweet-Christmas-Gaza.html?ITO=1490&ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490

Mail

Report that Hindu groups have demanded that the Uttar Pradesh government in India should ban 'changai sabhas', meetings organised by churches where ailing people are allegedly lured to convert to Christianity.

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/indiahome/indianews/article-2885690/Hindu-groups-demand-ban-church-meetings-luring-sick-Christians.html#ixzz3MndPLa6B>

BBC

Feature on the business of cathedrals headlined "mixing finance with worship" focusing on Lincoln.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-30513600>

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