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St Iberius Christmas Fast has raised €32,000, with online donations still being accepted

The annual St Iberius Christmas Fast is expected to realise in the region of €32,000 this year, which is significantly down on previous years as the coronavirus pandemic entered its second festive season. Maria Pepper writes.

The ecumenical four-day fast which was also affected by rain on Christmas Eve, was undertaken by Church of Ireland rector Canon Arthur Minion and Wexford parish administrator Fr Billy Swan who stood behind a screen on the steps of St Iberius Church on the Main Street.

Among those who arrived to show their support were the Catholic Bishop of Ferns, Ger Nash and the Bishop of Ossory, Ferns and Cashel, Michael Burrows.

Ballindaggin parish priest Fr Jim Fegan who completed the fast for several years when he was Wexford administrator - with its founder, the late Reverend Norman Ruddock and later with Reverends Maria Jansson and Arthur Minion - also turned up to wish the fasting clergymen well, while the saxophonists' group Saxology, supported the event by entertaining passers-by.

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Canon Arthur Minion, Bishop Michael Burrows and Wexford parish administrator Fr Billy Swan

Established 30 years ago, the fast has raised upwards of €800,000 for charity with more than €40,000 to €50,000 raised each year over recent years and the highest amount in 2019 with €54,600.

This year, the beneficiaries are the Wexford branch of the St Vincent de Paul Society, Wexford Women's Refuge, Wexford Rape Crisis, Wexford Hospice Homecare, Ozanam House Men's Hostel, the Hope Cancer Support Centre in Enniscorthy and Wexford Meals on Wheels.

People can still donate on - www.idonate.ie/stlberiusChristmasfast. The final figure won't be announced until the last day of Christmas on January 6 but as the fast came to an end on Christmas Eve, the organisers expected that it would reach about €32,000 at that stage.

Reverend Minion thanked people for their donations and also expressed appreciation of the work of Ciarán Kelly of

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CKRC Construction in Bridgetown “who for no charge whatsoever, made the screen and partition which kept us and the people safe on the steps of the church in the face of Covid-19 and the Omicron variant”.

Courtesy the Irish Independent. 28/12/2021

Evangelist of the street corner, Rev Karen is a minister on a mission

The Reverend Karen Sethuraman isn't your ordinary, everyday minister.

For starters, she's the first and only female Baptist minister in Ireland. How so? Well, the Baptist Church in Ireland believe women just can't cut it as clergy. Heretofore, women who felt called to the Baptist ministry on this island of saints (and sinners) just bit their lips and got on with playing second fiddle to the male ministers, Joe McCann writes.

However, that's not the Rev Karen's m.o..

Undeterred by the rebuttal, she went to England to link up with the Baptist Union of Great Britain — who promptly ordained her and sent her packing back to Ireland to spread the good news.

The newly-ordained cleric found herself fundamentally disagreeing with many of the Church's practices and moved instead to reach out to people "who didn't fit" with traditional religion and feel let down by religious institutions.



The Reverend Karen Sethuraman - photo courtesy Thomas McMullan

But the difference with other clergy, Catholic or Protestant, doesn't stop there for the Rev Karen believes strongly that her mission is to serve on the streets where the least of these gather.

Growing up a single child in Hyndford Street (the same street as Van Morrison) in East Belfast and cared for by a devoted mum who worked in Tesco, the young Karen Lancashire says she sensed a chasm between the way in which her faith was taught in church and her personal beliefs.

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“From a young age I felt a call, as they say, to join the church but I felt a real disconnect between my theology and my reality,” she recalls. “The Irish Baptist Church doesn’t ordain women so I felt it was a barrier to what I wanted to do. The Irish Baptist Church is quite conservative so I was ordained by the Baptist Union of Great Britain, now called Baptists Together. They baptise women, and have ministers in Scotland, Wales, and England. I was the first one from Ireland.”

The newly-ordained cleric found herself fundamentally disagreeing with many of the Church’s practices and moved instead to reach out to people “who didn't fit” with traditional religion and feel let down by religious institutions.

“My heart was outside the church,” she says. “My heart was always for the people in the community and this is why I felt I needed to step outside the traditional church and do my work on the streets. I disagree with much of the church’s ethos, particularly in how they treat the LGBTQ+ community.”

Stepping outside the traditional confines of the church, Rev. Karen helped establish SoulSpace as a peace and reconciliation hub that welcomes believers from all sides of the local traditional divide and focuses on racial injustice, gender injustice and poverty.

“We don’t seek to be a church per se. We don’t go out with the agenda of trying to save people. Rather, it’s about living my faith with the community. It’s a community chaplaincy which reaches out to people who still feel spiritual but who don’t fit in with the traditional forms of the church or who

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have been let down by some of the traditional beliefs of the church.

"We marry people, bury people, and bless people. It's a church outside of the church walls."

Working as a chaplain to two Lord Mayors of Belfast, Sinn Féin's Deirdre Hargey and Danny Baker also helped the Rev Karen see life from a different perspective.

"It opened up a window into our city and helped me see all the unsung heroes out there who are doing great things such as tackling poverty and loneliness," she explains. "It was an honour to work with the first citizens and to be invited onto their teams especially considering that I am from a totally different background."

More recently Rev. Karen has been involved with Ireland's Future which is advocating for a shared and united Ireland – a far cry from her own East Belfast political firmament.

"Growing up in East Belfast, I saw a lot of 'us and them' and 'in and out' mentalities," she says. "But those divisions really didn't sit right with me and I felt obliged to question what the whole issue was about. I was never personally wedded to the Union and in the past was always quite ambivalent or centred on the issue but I believe Brexit in particular has catapulted us towards this new situation. Now we need to start asking ourselves, 'Is there something better than what we have now?' and I think there is."

Rev. Karen believes it's crucial to ensure any future poll is properly prepared for. "Am I for Irish Unity? Absolutely. I

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think we deserve something better and I want to help create a vision for that. But the date of the poll isn't as important as the preparation. We need to create and cast a vision which will inspire people. When the issue of Irish Unity is raised, people always say, 'What about healthcare or education?' but I don't think it has to be one or the other. I think the conversation on Irish Unity also needs to include our health and our education."

The belfastmedia.com columnist believes there is an onus on unionist leaders to fight their own corner in the evolving discussions around a New Ireland. "I think the onus is also on the Unionist community to create and advocate for their vision so that people can decide. I want to see a Citizen's Assembly, North and South, for the governments to convene and for everyone to have their say, not just people from the traditional religious divide, but also people from other faiths, and those of no faith."

Looking forward to 2022, Rev. Karen says she hopes to develop her new base in ForthSpring on the Springfield Road in West Belfast. "I will be marrying three couples in the upcoming year which I am very much looking forward to," she says.

And she also plans to walk a lot. "I am inspired by St. Augustine of Hippo whose motto 'Solvitur Ambulando' means 'It is solved by walking'," explains the Rev. Karen. "There is something so powerful about walking, just about putting one foot in front of the other. Keep walking, seasons will change, and we will get through."

Courtesy Belfast Media.com

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Webinars, music, resources, broadcasts and books

Facing the future with Hope and Confidence in Belfast South and Dun Laoghaire

Belfast South continues its collaboration with Dun Laoghaire Methodist in a threefold series of public seminars January - March 2022: Facing the future with Hope and Confidence



Johnston McMaster, “our prime educator and public intellectual,” will launch the series on 25 January with a presentation on Grieving Political, Cultural and Religious Losses: Pathways to a Healthy Future .



Then on 22 February the **President of the Methodist Church in Ireland, Dr. Sahr Yambasu** will introduce the topic: **The Cry of Lament: A Cry for Justice and Impassioned Hope.**

Marie Cross, Irish Diplomat and Dun Laoghaire Methodist will lead us in a concluding seminar on 22 March, with the theme: **Looking to the Future for the Whole of Ireland.**



The series suggests that taking to heart our shortcomings, as ‘church’ and ‘society’, is the basis of hope for what we can contribute to our society’s health. The series will be a meditation (reflection, discussion) on what the Bible calls

‘lament’. A prayer, so to speak, for a new reality.

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The series as always is open to all. By Zoom, 7:30-9:00pm. Please contact thinkingaloudseminar@icloud.com for info and login details.

Barenboim and the Vienna Philharmonic



Coming up on December 30-January 1: Daniel Barenboim leads the Vienna Philharmonic / Wiener

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Philharmoniker in the 2022 New Year's Concert, broadcast worldwide on television, radio, and medici.tv.

A recording of the concert will be available from Sony Classical beginning January 7:
viennaphilharmonic.lnk.to/NewYear2022

News Reports

Arrangements for Archbishop Tutu's funeral

Cathedral bells will toll and Table Mountain will turn episcopal purple each day this week as South Africa mourns the loss of Dr Desmond Tutu, Archbishop Emeritus of Cape Town, who died early on Boxing Day.

The funeral will take place on New Year's Day in St George's Cathedral, Cape Town. Until then, the cathedral's bells will toll at noon each day, and from eight o'clock each evening, Table Mountain will be lit with purple lights in his honour.

The present Archbishop, Dr Thabo Makgoba, announced the funeral arrangements on Monday. There will be a requiem mass, followed by cremation. Dr Tutu's ashes will later be interred in the cathedral mausoleum.

Before the funeral, the city of Cape Town, where the Tutus made their home after retirement, will hold an interfaith memorial service on Wednesday. Streets around the Cathedral have been closed off to allow people to leave



flowers, and books of condolence have been set up all over town.

Dr Tutu's body will lie in state in the cathedral on Friday, giving members of the public the opportunity to file past his coffin before the funeral the following mourning. Numbers at the funeral will be restricted to 100 because of Covid rules in force since October, though memorial services are permitted to accommodate up to 750.

The preacher at the service will be Bishop Michael Nuttall. Now aged 87, he served as "Number Two to Tutu" while Bishop of Natal until 2000.

On Monday afternoon, the prominent politician Dr Mamphela Ramphele, while on a visit to the Tutu family home, confirmed President Cyril Ramaphosa will deliver the

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eulogy at the funeral. She told a local TV network that Dr Tutu's wishes for the funeral "will be followed to the letter". He will have a simple coffin, and "there will be no military parades, only love — and that is enough."

Dr Ramphele is also acting co-chair of the Archbishop Desmond Tutu Intellectual Property Trust, and a family friend. On Sunday, she said that the Archbishop was a courageous prophet "who spoke truth to power during the most brutal time of apartheid. . .

"I believe that the greatest tribute we can pay to the Archbishop would be for us to mark today, this Boxing Day, as a day on which each one of us are going to start a journey of healing."

Another co-chair, Dr Barney Pityana, a friend of many decades, said of Dr Tutu: "He never lost his common touch. He became a global figure with his feet firmly on the ground — in South Africa, in the townships where suffering was taking place, and in the Church that he was so fond of and so committed to."

The Holy Land's Forgotten Few

Archbishop Justin Welby worries about Christians in the Holy Land, but seems mainly concerned with those in Israel, Peter Hitchens writes in the Mail on Sunday

No doubt they face problems, but these are tiny compared with what they would endure if they lived under the Palestinian Authority (PA).

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Some years ago I visited Christian Arabs living in and near Bethlehem. There, for public relations reasons, the PA gives the impression of tolerance towards Christianity, which was established in the region long before Islam.

It is misleading. Christians are powerless and without protection. One young man, lamenting the refusal of Muslim-dominated courts to help in a property dispute, burst out: 'We are so alone! All of us Christians feel so lonely in this country.'

I was told, in whispers, of the unprintable desecration of the Church of the Nativity by Palestinian gunmen in 2002.

Now Christians are emigrating, and towns that have been Christian for more than 1,000 years are becoming Muslim.

The Archbishop should both pray and act for this unhappy, forgotten and unfashionable minority.

India: Mother Teresa's sisters face delayed approval of foreign funding

The Indian government has announced that it has not renewed the licence allowing the Missionaries of Charity (MoC) to receive funding from overseas. According to a statement released by the Indian Union Home Ministry on Monday, the MoC does not meet conditions under local laws.

The statement said the reason was "not meeting the eligibility conditions" under the Foreign Contribution



Regulation Act (FCRA) after "adverse inputs were noticed", without giving further details. As of Monday, the Ministry of Home Affairs states that no "revision application has been received from Missionaries of Charity for review refusal of renewal".

In the meantime, the existing registration remains in place until 31 December 2021.

Mamata Banerjee, an opposition leader and vocal critic of the Modi government sparked outrage when she tweeted that the government had frozen the bank accounts of the charity - a move which would leave their 22,000 patients and employees without food and medicines. Several other news services picked up this story.

The MoC in Calcutta clarified matters in a statement saying that the government had not frozen its accounts but adding that its FCRA renewal application had not been approved. "Therefore ... we have asked our centres not to operate any of the (foreign contribution) accounts until the matter is resolved."

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This information was confirmed by a subsequent statement released the same day by Sr M Prema, Superior General of the MoC based in Rome.

Earlier this month, the MoC came under investigation in President Modi's home state of Gujarat following complaints that girls in its shelters were forced to read the Bible and recite Christian prayers. The charity denied the allegations.

Since Modi came to power in 2014, right-wing Hindu groups have consolidated their position across states and launched many hate attacks on religious minorities, saying their action is to prevent religious conversions.

A Catholic school in central India's Madhya Pradesh state was vandalized by a 500-strong mob on 6 December. (See: ICN 7 December 2021 India: Catholic school attacked by Hindu mob - www.indcatholicnews.com/news/43619)

Reporting from New Delhi, Al Jazeera's Pavni Mittal said Christmas celebrations were disrupted during the weekend and last week, including the vandalising of a life-size statue of Jesus Christ at Ambala in Haryana, a northern state governed by Modi's Hindu nationalist BJP.

"This past Christmas, a statue of Jesus Christ was vandalised in northern India and in other parts of the country too. Churches reported Hindu mobs entering and disrupting their services," she said as she covered a protest against religious attacks in the capital.

Elias Vaz, national vice president of the All India Catholic Union, condemned the latest incidents. "The strength of

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India is in its diversity and the people who have done this at Christmas are the real anti-nationals," Vaz said.

Christians represent only 2.3 percent of India's 1.37 billion people, while Hindus are the overwhelming majority.

Founded by Nobel Peace Laureate, Mother Teresa of Calcutta (now St Teresa of Calcutta) in 1950 in Calcutta, India - the Missionaries of Charity run 244 hospices, community kitchens, schools, leper colonies and homes for abandoned children in India. Worldwide they have 760 centres in 133 countries, served by 5,167 members.

LINK - Missionaries of Charity official website -
[www.missionariesofcharity.org]

Perspective

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Poem for today

Music On Christmas Morning by Anne Brontë

Music I love - but never strain
Could kindle raptures so divine,
So grief assuage, so conquer pain,
And rouse this pensive heart of mine -
As that we hear on Christmas morn,
Upon the wintry breezes borne.
Though Darkness still her empire keep,

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And hours must pass, ere morning break;
From troubled dreams, or slumbers deep,
That music kindly bids us wake:
It calls us, with an angel's voice,
To wake, and worship, and rejoice;

To greet with joy the glorious morn,
Which angels welcomed long ago,
When our redeeming Lord was born,
To bring the light of Heaven below;
The Powers of Darkness to dispel,
And rescue Earth from Death and Hell.

While listening to that sacred strain,
My raptured spirit soars on high;
I seem to hear those songs again
Resounding through the open sky,
That kindled such divine delight,
In those who watched their flocks by night.

With them, I celebrate His birth -
Glory to God, in highest Heaven,
Good-will to men, and peace on Earth,
To us a Saviour-king is given;
Our God is come to claim His own,
And Satan's power is overthrown!

A sinless God, for sinful men,
Descends to suffer and to bleed;
Hell must renounce its empire then;
The price is paid, the world is freed,
And Satan's self must now confess,
That Christ has earned a Right to bless:

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Now holy Peace may smile from heaven,
And heavenly Truth from earth shall spring:
The captive's galling bonds are riven,
For our Redeemer is our king;
And He that gave his blood for men
Will lead us home to God again.

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