



Count Your Blessings inspirational Christian Aid Lent resource

Christian Aid's Lent resource, Count Your Blessings, is a great inspirational calendar with daily thought-provoking reflections. For Christians around the world, Lent is a time of reflection, thanksgiving and thinking of others who are less fortunate. Each day brings an

opportunity to celebrate and give thanks for our blessings as well as to give, act and pray for communities in need.

This year Count Your Blessings features stories from Bangladesh, one of the most densely populated nations in the world, with 160 million people. 80% of the Bangladeshi population live on less than \$2 a day. Most of the population live in rural areas, and depend largely on agriculture to make ends meet.

Efforts to fight poverty in Bangladesh are increasingly frustrated by the disastrous effects of climate change, such as rising temperatures and increasingly erratic rainfall.

The country is prone to natural disasters such as floods, cyclones and droughts, which, with poor environmental management, as well as corruption and poor governance, make life for most very hard indeed.

For communities whose homes perch precariously on the bank of the Brahmaputra – known locally as ‘the whimsical river’ – life is an ongoing battle with increased, and often catastrophic, flooding.

Year after year, they have been forced to uproot, dismantle and carry their bamboo-built homes further inland to avoid the rising waters.

Nearly five years ago, this riverside location on the Chars (sand islands in the north of Bangladesh) became home to Joynal and his family after they fled their former home on another Char, which flooded. Joynal's wife and three children arrived in the Chars with next to nothing – just their single-roomed bamboo house and a goat - and set up home on the sandy, low-lying plain. Without fertile soil, they failed to grow food to eat and survived on just 66p / €1 per day.

Without a means to earn a living in their rural neighbourhood, Joynal was forced to leave his loved ones behind for a year and undertake back-breaking work in Dhaka as a day labourer, earning £1.66 / €2.20 for 16 hours work. In one month he saved just £12 / €16. Joynal slept on the side of the road, often phoning his wife in tears and unable to send much-needed money home to buy food to feed his children.

Florence Mutesasira of Christian Aid said, “Throughout Lent, we are asking you to reflect each day on the blessings in your life through Count Your Blessings, inspired by daily opportunities to give, act and pray for communities like Joynal’s.”

Christian Aid local partner GUK is working with the people on the Chars to help transform their lives, increasing their resilience to the increasingly unpredictable weather and floods, and helping them to become self-sufficient and prosper in the toughest of environments.

With the support of GUK, Joynal and his family are now thriving.

Joynal no longer works away in Dhaka and now works on his own land with his wife. They have learned to grow new, resilient crops, providing much-needed nutritious food for their family. Their house and land has been raised, so they are no longer forced to leave when the flood waters get too high. They were given enough money so they could buy a cow and another goat, as well as training in how to care for livestock.

With new assets, home-grown vegetables from their own land and new found respect within the community, Joynal can think more positively about the future.

Visit christianaid.ie/lent to get your a count your blessings calendar or other lent resources for you, your family or church.

Threat of split at Drumcree Parish Church

Church of Ireland parishioners at Drumcree Parish Church in Portadown have claimed the situation is threatening to split the congregation.

News Letter - Parishioners at a Co Armagh church have told of their concern at development plans which they fear are going to “destroy” the character of the ancient building.

Church of Ireland parishioners at Drumcree Parish Church in Portadown have claimed the situation is threatening to split the congregation.

A spokesman for the Church of Ireland Diocese of Armagh said they were aware of the situation.

A letter purporting to represent around 100 concerned parishioners at Drumcree Parish Church claims the plans, many of which are still at an early stage, were not approved by the full Select Vestry.

One parishioner even claimed that the situation is in danger of becoming “another Knocknamuckley” – a reference to a split in that Co Down church after differences of opinion over the style of worship.

However, Rev Gary Galway has said the church cannot stand still and that the proposals have been approved by a majority vote of the Select Vestry, which represents parishioners.

He also said the details of various aspects of the plans have been on display in the church and that parishioners were welcome to raise any concerns or views they had.

In the letter the group of concerned parishioners said: “The proposals, if carried out, would destroy the character of what is a very old established parish church and members of the parish do not wish this to happen and are very distraught at what is happening with these damaging and hurtful decisions.”

The letter adds that far from the whole parish being in favour of the proposals, many people were “outraged” at them.

And they pointed out that the plans, including underfloor heating and removal of pews, was not approved by the full vestry and “will destroy the character of an important, listed place of worship”.

Last night a spokesman for Armagh Diocese said: “While the purchase of land for a car park is a matter for the parish, all proposals concerning church property vested in the Representative Church Body (RCB) are required to be submitted for the approval of the RCB, upon a recommendation of the Diocesan Council, prior to any work commencing.

“Such approval is required for the Select Vestry’s proposals to create a linkway between the church and hall, the installation of a biomass heating system and underfloor heating, and the removal of pews in the church.

“Presently, approval has been granted only for the removal of three pews at the front of the church in order to facilitate the extension of the platform area. Approval is also required for the sale of parish land.

“In December, the Diocesan Council appointed a sub-committee which is to meet with the Select Vestry in the next few weeks to discuss in greater detail all aspects of the proposals, including the impact of these on the wider parish.”

Drumcree Parish Church, which lies around two miles outside Portadown,

<http://www.newsletter.co.uk/news/diocese-reacts-to-split-rumours-at-drumcree-church-1-7162412#ixzz3xKOqPA81>

Methodists to Make a Difference in South Africa and at Home

Would you like to make a difference in South Africa and in your local community? If you do, you can join the Methodist Missionary Society in Ireland's [MMS(I)] team travelling to South Africa in August 2016.

The team will be learning about and working with local South African churches that engage with their local communities. Time will be spent with Pinetown Methodist Church, Hillcrest Methodist Church, the Church Land Programme



(Pietermaritzberg) and the Central Methodist Mission in Johannesburg.

On return, the team will share their learning with Methodist churches throughout Ireland to help them work with their local communities.

The visit will be from 9th to 23 August 2016. The cost is estimated at £1,450/€2,000.

If you have the relevant skills and the desire to learn and share your learning then contact MMS(I) for further information and application form at mms@irishmethodist.org or +44 28 90452572. Closing date for applications is 12th February 2016.

Pope Francis' first book goes on sale in Ireland

Pope Francis' first book, *The Name of God Is Mercy*, went on sale in Ireland this week.

Published by Pan Macmillan, the book-length interview conducted by Vatican expert and La Stampa journalist Andrea Torielli expands on the Pope's vision of God's mercy.

The hardback edition is available in branches of Eason's nationwide priced €18.99. Veritas says it should have the book in stock by next week.

The Name of God is Mercy was published simultaneously in eighty-six countries on Tuesday of this week.

The cover of the Italian, Spanish, French, English and Portuguese editions, bears the signature of the Pope.

It's nine chapters begin with 'The Time of Mercy' and conclude with 'How to live the Jubilee well'.

The book arose from a forty-hour long interview the Pope gave Torielli over the summer months of 2015.



POPE FRANCIS

The name
of God
is Mercy

The journalist put forty questions to Pope Francis all linked to the theme of mercy, described by the Pope as “God’s identity card”.

In the book, Pope Francis explains his papal motto ‘Miserando atque eligendo’, (Lowly but Chosen), which he had already taken as bishop, through a story from his teenage years.

“I don’t have any particular memories of mercy as a young child. But I do as a young man. I think of Father Carlos Duarte Ibarra, the confessor I met in my parish church on September 21, 1953. I was seventeen years old.

On confessing myself to him, I felt welcomed by the mercy of God.”

In his book, Pope Francis says the Church condemns sin because “it has to relay the truth: ‘this is a sin’.”

But at the same time, he continues, it embraces the sinner who recognises himself as such, “it welcomes him, it speaks to him of the infinite mercy of God. Jesus forgave even those who crucified and scorned him.”

The Church does not exist to condemn people, he says “but to bring about an encounter with the visceral love of God’s mercy”.

For this to happen “it is necessary to go out: to go out from the churches and the parishes, to go outside and look for people where they live, where they suffer, and where they hope.”

But a yes to mercy is not a yes to corruption, says Pope Francis.

“The corrupt man tires of asking for forgiveness and ends up believing that he doesn’t need to ask for it any more. We don’t become corrupt people overnight. It is a long, slippery slope that cannot be identified simply as a series of sins.”

“One may be a great sinner and never fall into corruption if hearts feel their own weakness. That small opening allows the strength of God to enter.”

Tributes to Armagh cathedral organist Theo Saunders who has died

The death has taken place of Theo Saunders, organist at St Patrick's Church of Ireland Cathedral in Armagh.

Belfast Telegraph - Oxford-educated Mr Saunders (58) was born in Hereford and had held a series of prestigious musical appointments in England before coming to Armagh in 2002.

Dean Gregory Dunstan of St Patrick's Cathedral last night paid tribute to Mr Saunders.

He said: "Theo was a very accomplished organist, musician and teacher.

"He became organist and master of the choristers at St Patrick's Cathedral Armagh in September 2002.



"Theo made a great contribution to the music in Armagh.

"He will be remembered for the great care and time he lavished on his organ pupils.

"He would have led the cathedral choir through many major services, including the visit of Her

Majesty the Queen in 2009, when she distributed the Royal Maundy, and at least one archbishop's enthronement, and would have contributed to many others in the life of the cathedral."

Offering his condolences to Mr Saunders' family and friends, Mr Dunstan said: "Theo leaves an enormous circle of friends both in Armagh and in the musical life of Northern Ireland generally.

"He was very well-liked and admired by all who knew him.

"I want to extend my sympathies to his brother Tim and to the wider family circle."

Canon Michael Kennedy, a close friend of Mr Saunders, will preach at the funeral, which takes place in St Patrick's today (Saturday) at 1.30pm, followed by interment in St Mark's Parish churchyard.

Service of Thanksgiving in Broughshane as Dean Bond retires

The Parish of St Patrick, Broughshane, held a Farewell Service of Thanksgiving on January 10 for the ministry of The Very Rev John FA Bond, Dean of Connor and rector for almost 17 years.

Dean Bond officially retires on January 31. Ordained in 1967 for the curacy of St Paul, Lisburn, Dean Bond served as curate of Finaghy – St Polycarp’s, from 1970-1977. He became rector of the Parish of Ballynure & Ballyeaston (Ballyclare) prior to his appointment to the Parish of Skerry, Rathcavan & Newtowncrommelin (Broughshane). He was appointed Dean of Connor in 2001.

Dean Bond has been a member of General Synod since 1978 and has served on many committees and held different positions in the Church of Ireland. During his ministry an extension was added to St John’s, Ballyclare, and an extension to St Patrick’s Parish Hall in Broughshane.

In his farewell address, the Dean said it had been a privilege to minister and serve in the various parishes over the years and to visit people in their homes. He said he was ‘humbled by the dignity, resilience and sheer bravery’ of so many in ‘their own personal Calvary situation.’

Dean Bond paid tribute to the Wardens, Youth Leaders, Sunday School Teachers, Select Vestry, Organist and Choir and those behind the scenes who ‘laboured sacrificially’ and contributed so much to the Church. He asked the congregation

to remember the Curate, the Rev Adrian Halligan and the Parochial Nominators as they set about the appointment of a new rector.

The church was packed for the Service of Farewell and Thanksgiving, with an overflow of people accommodated in the Parish Hall.

Dean Bond told the congregation: “The Church is not about me or you, it is about God, the creator of Heaven and earth. Sadly, we live in a day when many people think too little of God and too much about themselves. The Church must be a place of welcome for all regardless of creed, class, colour or gender orientation. The Church must be open too, otherwise we are in danger of becoming a holy huddle or cosy clique on our terms and that has nothing to do with Christianity.”

The Dean said Jesus never gave up on anybody and was always ready to forgive, to renew, to re-shape lives and build people up in the strength of God the Father.

“I have always believed that the best evangelism is warmth and friendship and showing a genuine interest in people,” Dean Bond said.

He added: “I have been privileged to be part of your lives as your rector and Joyce and our

family thank you all for your kindness, support, prayers and Christian love.”

The Service of Holy Communion was conducted by the Rev Adrian Halligan, Curate, assisted by Dean Bond’s son, Mr Allan Bond, Diocesan Reader, and a friend from the Dean’s College days, the Rev Canon David Jardine SSF, Divine Healing Ministry. Special Anthems were sung by the Church Choir and Youth Choir.

Church of Scotland Minister who criticised welfare cuts takes on charity role

A minister who has criticised the UK Government’s welfare reforms has been appointed as the new head of Christian Aid Scotland.

In her role as convener of the Church of Scotland’s Church and Society Council, the Rev Sally Foster-Fulton said Tory benefits crackdowns were disproportionately affecting families, young people and those with mental health problems and called for the immediate suspension of sanctions.



The Rev Sally Foster-Fulton

The 51-year-old will leave her role as associate minister at Dunblane Cathedral to lead the ecumenical charity.

The mother-of-two, who succeeds the Rev Kathy Galloway, steps down from that post at the end of next month and ends her convenership at the General Assembly in May.

She said her biggest challenge will be linking local issues in Scotland with international issues, stating: “Christian Aid is all about relationships and works on behalf of partner churches in Scotland and wider afield in an attempt to eradicate poverty – that is what we consistently work for and it resonates in my bones.

“Climate justice, gender justice and tax justice are three of the big aims of Christian Aid and Kathy Galloway has done a remarkable job building the team and connections. I hope I can fill those huge shoes and make a different mark.”

The Church and Society Council is in the process of analysing more than 10,000 responses to the Speak Out: 10,000 Voices for Change campaign which asked people to identify the core issues which will enable Scotland – and the world – to become fairer and more just.

News links to reports on faith, politics and education

Two English exam boards will no longer offer GCSE courses in Northern Ireland

Irish News

Education minister John O'Dowd said he is "very disappointed" after two English exam boards decided they will no longer offer GCSE courses in the north.
[http://www.irishnews.com/news/2016/01/15/news/two-english-exam-boards-to-end-gcse-courses-in-north-383087/?](http://www.irishnews.com/news/2016/01/15/news/two-english-exam-boards-to-end-gcse-courses-in-north-383087/?mc_cid=5ec22cea7d&mc_eid=23f2f80c40)

[mc_cid=5ec22cea7d&mc_eid=23f2f80c40](http://www.irishnews.com/news/2016/01/15/news/two-english-exam-boards-to-end-gcse-courses-in-north-383087/?mc_cid=5ec22cea7d&mc_eid=23f2f80c40)

England's two largest GCSE exam boards to pull out of Northern Ireland

News Letter

The decision of England's two largest GCSE exam boards to pull out of Northern Ireland is a result of the education minister's "inflexibility," Peter Weir has said.

<http://www.newsletter.co.uk/english-gcse-exam-bodies-to-quit-northern-ireland-1-7162048>

English GCSE boards stop Northern Ireland courses

BBC

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-35313881>

Two Fianna Fail school plan favours proximity over religion

Irish Times

In the case of minority faith schools - such as **Church of Ireland** - these catchment areas would be much larger, allowing schools to protect their ...

<http://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/fianna-f%C3%A1il-school-plan-favours-proximity-over-religion-1.2497232>

Children's minister James Reilly calls for end of baptism links to schools

Irish Examiner

<http://www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/childrens-minister-james-reilly-calls-for-end-of-baptism-links-to-schools-376355.html>

Religious discrimination by schools may face referendum

Irish Times

<http://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/religious-discrimination-by-schools-may-face-referendum-1.2497356>

Ireland to face questions on children's rights record

Irish Times

Ireland to face questions on children's rights record ...

Among the ongoing issues are discrimination against non-**Christian** children access ing ...

<http://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/ireland-challenged-on-children-s-rights-record-1.2496558>

Irish Cancer Society to stop hardship payments

Belfast Telegraph

<http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/republic-of-ireland/irish-cancer-society-to-stop-hardship-payments-34357419.html>

Rugby star Ruan Pienaar's Christian faith persuaded him to stay with Ulster

Belfast Telegraph

<http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/rugby-star-ruan-pienaars-christian-faith-persuaded-him-to-stay-with-ulster-34359541.html>

Guardian

Response to the *Open Doors* report released earlier in the week that Nigeria is the most dangerous country to live in if you are a Christian. The author acknowledges that religious persecution is growing, but not just for Christians, and the report may be oversimplifying the issue.

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jan/14/nigeria-christian-boko-haram-terror>

Times

Philip Collins, in an opinion piece, examines the recent church attendance figures and argues that as societies become richer, they become more secular.

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/opinion/columnists/article4665762.ece>

Times

The Lumiere festival in London over the next four nights will include Westminster Abbey. Various landmarks in the city will be bathed in light by the French digital artist Patrice Warrener.

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/arts/visualarts/article4665974.ece>

BBC

A group of people have been shown round a Liverpool church which is undergoing a £150,000 renovation. St Luke's was damaged during the blitz.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-merseyside-35313148>

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