



Living Advent Calendar is a hit with village



Advent calendars come with all sorts of fillings nowadays, not just chocolate.

But the village of Redbourn in Hertfordshire has taken the idea of marking each day of Advent by opening a new

door to a new level. The doors are real ones, and behind each one there are people waiting to spring a different surprise.

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2018 is the second time Redbourne's Living Advent Calendar has run. It's organised by a committee involving the village's Anglican, Catholic, Methodist and independent churches and other local representatives.

Each evening at 6.15 pm anything up to a hundred people will gather outside a different door in the village to see what's inside – and it might be a nativity scene, a ukelele band, a primary school choir, a poetry reading or a magician – even a performance of Cinderella. Fifteen minutes later it's all over until the next day. Every performance is suitable for both children and adults, and a guide to the events – printed and distributed beforehand, and available online – tells people where to go.

It's a brilliantly simple idea that has caught the imagination of Redbourn's 6,000 inhabitants.

'It's brought the whole community together,' says Penny McAdam, one of the organising team. She instances a special needs school which put on a simple nativity performance, which many local people had never been inside, and an over-60s exercise class.

'Lots of people come and chat before it starts,' she says, adding that most tend to walk to the venue even though the village is quite spread out. Even last night's rain didn't put the audience off – around 50 turned out for a handbell performance.

And for those worried about the insurance implications of an event like this – it's fully covered by Ecclesiastical, the UK's leading insurer of church premises.

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Click [here](#) for more information about Redbourn's Living Advent Calendar.

Hymn writers Keith and Kristyn Getty to perform at SSE Arena

Award-winning modern hymn writers, Keith and Kristyn Getty will be coming home to Belfast next year.

Sing! Belfast will take place at **the SSE Arena** on June 15 as part of a worldwide tour of major US and European cities.

This one-off concert follows previous sold-out gigs in the Waterfront Hall in 2012 and 2016.

The duo are known globally for revolutionizing modern hymn development.

The special night will feature a 1,000 voice choir in partnership with New Irish Arts, along with special guests.

Keith, who was awarded an OBE last year, will join Kristyn to perform some of their best-known music.

The set will include 'In Christ Alone', which was the number one most-frequently-sung hymn in UK churches for nine consecutive years.

Keith Getty said: "It is always an honour to play for any audience, but there is something deeply special about coming back home.

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"Northern Ireland is where we met and where we come back to every year. It has an important place in our lives and we cannot wait to play for a Northern Irish audience.

“Kristyn and I are both extremely fortunate to be able to travel the world and share our music and our passion with amazing audiences. Our last two concerts in Belfast were truly memorable evenings and we want to see even more people next year come together to sing their faith.”

During their time in Belfast they plan to host a conference focusing on equipping, educating and encouraging church leaders towards a deeper and more dynamic congregational worship.

Keith added: “The Conference, taking place the Friday before the concert, is designed to help church leaders and pastors develop a deeper and more dynamic view of theology, artistry and the importance of congregational singing. Tickets for Sing! are now on sale and can be purchased via the [**SSE website.**](#)

Cross - community involvement highlighted in Archbishops of Armagh televised Christmas Message

The Archbishops of Armagh have completed filming for their 2018 Christmas message, to be broadcast on Christmas Day at 12.10pm on RTÉ One television and RTÉ Radio 1. This year, the message was filmed in Dungannon, County Tyrone, on the theme of the family.

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Music was provided by cross–community choirs from schools in the town. The Archbishops met with families from local and migrant backgrounds at the Family Learning Centre at St Patrick’s Primary School and visited the BCM food bank which serves families in need living in Dungannon and neighbouring rural communities.

The message will be available after broadcast on the RTÉ Player

Presiding Bishop named religious newsmaker of the year

The Episcopal Church has heard Presiding Bishop Michael Curry herald the message of God’s unconditional love ever since he was elected in July 2015. In May, his message went global and viral when he preached at the royal wedding of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle, and now it



has earned him the title of “religious newsmaker of the year.”

The Religion News Association said that Curry’s sermon had “raised his profile as a progressive religious voice.”

That could be an understatement. Curry’s profile beyond the Episcopal Church began to take off the moment his part in the May 19 wedding was announced. Stories attempting to answer the question “who is Michael Curry” abounded.

Then, he stepped to the ambo at St. George’s Chapel and began to preach. According to media statisticians, 29.2 million people in the United States and 18 million in the United Kingdom viewed the wedding. And then there was Twitter, where 3.4 million social media users tweeted about

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the royal wedding. They tweeted 40,000 times a minute during Curry's sermon, more than the 27,000 tweets per minute during the declaration of Harry and Meghan as husband and wife.

That day, "Bishop Michael Curry" was a top "trending topic" on Google with a score of 100 on a scale of 0-100 for daily searches, and "episcopal" was the top lookup on Merriam-Webster

Top lookups, in order: episcopal, quire, asunder, prebendary, pomp and circumstance, duchess
#RoyalWedding

— Merriam-Webster (@MerriamWebster) May 19, 2018

There was even a spoof of the presiding bishop on "Saturday Night Live" that night, one of the few times that the show has featured a living religious leader.

Since then, Curry has combined his normal travels around the Episcopal Church with a round of media interviews to continue preaching the message of unconditional love. It has been a whirlwind, ranging from multiple appearances on "The Today Show" to "The View" to NPR and more.

They were squeezed into an already busy schedule of travel within the Episcopal Church and his more public appearances such as a prayer service and procession of public witness in Washington, D.C., participation in the Dec. 5 funeral for George H.W. Bush and the Dec. 11 commemoration of the Apollo 8 mission.

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These days, it is hard for Curry to walk down the street or through an airport without being recognized and stopped, but it is a phenomenon that he welcomes.

“I was surprised by all the attention after the royal wedding,” Curry recently told “The Today Show’s” Voices series, reflecting on what the show called “his viral moment and newfound celebrity.”

“I really didn’t expect that,” Curry said. “But what I’ve been more surprised by has been that what resonated was the message of love. It wasn’t me. I mean, I delivered it. But it was actually the message of love. That’s what people have stopped me on the street or at the airport to talk about — after we take the selfie, of course.”

Nancy Davidge, Episcopal Church public affairs officer, told Episcopal News Service that Curry was “undoubtedly one of the most powerful religious voices of 2018” who deeply touched both Christians and non-Christians. “His message of love transcended political divides and controversies and deeply moved millions,” she said.

“In a year when top religion news stories were about deep suffering and despair, Presiding Bishop Curry’s message of love motivated millions. While some know him only as ‘the wedding preacher,’ his message touched them deeply. As Bishop Curry reminds us, if it doesn’t look like love, it does not look like Christ.”

During 2018, Davidge said, the presiding bishop amassed a global potential audience reach of more than 17 billion and generated around 9,700 media mentions, including by every

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major media outlet in the United States. This generated nearly 17 billion unique visitors per month online and a print/broadcast audience reach of around 131 million, she added.

Those numbers keep growing. The presiding bishop is scheduled to be on the Christmas morning news broadcasts of ABC, CBS and NBC. He is also scheduled to be on the Dr. Oz Show on Dec. 21.

About two months after the royal wedding, Curry announced that he had prostate cancer and took about six weeks off for what was successful surgery and treatment.

In October, Avery, an imprint of Penguin Random House, published “The Power of Love: Sermons, Reflections, and Wisdom to Uplift and Inspire,” which includes the royal wedding sermon, three of Curry’s sermons from General Convention events this past summer, and the sermon he preached at his installation on Nov. 2, 2015. “The world has met Bishop Curry and has been moved by his riveting, hopeful, and deceptively simple message: love and acceptance are what we need in these strange times,” the publisher says in its online description.

Religion News Association members have voted in the annual poll for decades. RNA is an international association for journalists who write about religion in the news media. It offers training and tools to help reporters cover religion with balance, accuracy and insight.

Following Curry in a close race for second and third place for religious newsmaker of the year were famed evangelist

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Billy Graham, who died this year at age 99, and Pittsburgh Rabbi Jeffrey Myers, who emerged as a voice of lament and peace after the Tree of Life shooting.

The other four religious newsmakers were Rachael Denhollander, who emerged as an outspoken advocate for victims of sexual misconduct in churches and whose victim-impact statement — balancing justice with forgiveness — at the sentencing of pedophile doctor Larry Nassar went viral; Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò, who rocked the Catholic Church with hotly disputed contentions that Pope Francis covered up sexual abuse and should resign; Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh, who drew strong support from religious conservatives in a confirmation dominated by an explosive allegation of attempted rape as a teen, making it a signature case in the #MeToo movement; and megachurch pioneer Bill Hybels, who retired early from Willow Creek Community Church amid accusations of sexual misconduct.

Pope urges good politics at the service of peace

“Peace be to this house!” In his greeting to the world for the 52nd World Day of Peace which is celebrated on 1 January 2019,

Pope Francis takes up the words proposed by Christ in the Gospel. The Holy Father notes that “the ‘house’ of which Jesus speaks is every family, community, country, and continent.”

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Pope Francis reflects on the role of “good politics at the service of peace.” Those who hold political office, he says, must exercise their office in service to others, basing their work on the foundation of charity and human virtues.

At the same time, Pope Francis warns of the vices that can afflict politics, including corruption, xenophobia, racism, lack of concern for the environment, and contempt for exiles.

“When the exercise of political power aims only at protecting the interests of a few privileged individuals, the future is compromised and young people can be tempted to lose confidence,” the Pope writes.

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He encourages politics to “foster the talents of young people and their aspirations” in order to promote peace, noting that “Everyone can contribute his or her stone to help build the common home.”

The Holy Father repudiates a politics of intimidation and fear, and denounces “the uncontrolled proliferation of arms.” Peace, he insists, is based on respect for each person... respect for the law and the common good, on respect for the environment” as well as “the moral tradition inherited from past generations.”

In conclusion, Pope Francis says that peace “is the fruit of a great political project grounded in the mutual responsibility and interdependence of human beings.” But, he says, “it is also a challenge that demands to be taken up ever anew” – a challenge that “entails a conversion of heart and soul.”

Follow the link to read the full text of Pope Francis’ Message for the Celebration of the 52nd World Day of Peace.

Two decades of women’s ordination celebrated in the Nippon Sei Ko Kai

The *Nippon Sei Ko Kai* (NSKK), the Anglican Church in Japan, has celebrated 20 years of women’s ordination to the priesthood with an overnight retreat and celebratory Eucharist. The retreat, at the Anglican Community of Nazareth in Tokyo, was led by Ajuko Ueda, a priest and

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theologian, before the Eucharist at St Andrew's Cathedral in Tokyo. The Primate of the NSKK, Archbishop Nathaniel Makoto Uematsu, joined several bishops in the congregation for the service, which was presided over by Atsuko Fumoto, the province's most recently ordained female priest.

More than 200 people for all over Japan took part in the Service. Atsuko Fumoto was assisted by the cathedral's Dean, Maria Grace Tazu Sasamori; and was surrounded in the sanctuary by provincial clergy and a number of visiting female priests from the Anglican Church of Korea.

The sermon was given by the Anglican Communion's Director for Women in Church and Society, Canon Terrie Robinson. Quoting Isaiah's exhortation "do not fear!", she said: "we have come from a place of exile, but we still hear

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those words echoing through the Scriptures and across the centuries.

“Do not fear!’ This was Gabriel’s greeting to a bewildered Mary, before her life was changed forever. It was also the angel’s message to the grieving women at the empty tomb, before they hurried away to become the first evangelists. . . Do not fear! Dare to sing a new song to the Lord! Dare to let go, and dance to a different tune!”

The Women’s Desk Coordinator at the NSKK, Kaoru Yoshitani, said: “Canon Terrie’s message gave us courage to proceed forward and it touched many devoted ones and their hearts. Many women clergy were standing and serving as priests in the Eucharist alongside men clergy, and everybody felt a new lively movement of the Holy Spirit.” After the Eucharist, Archbishop Uematsu spoke at a reception, and said: “I look forward to the time when we will not need to talk about ‘women clergy’ anymore; rather we can simply talk about ‘clergy’”.

The anniversary marked the milestone ordination of Margaret Yoshiko Shibukawa in December 1998, the first woman to be ordained in the NSKK.

“In these latter days, many women are actively committed to various areas of ministry”, Kaoru Yoshitani said. “However, there are problems and issues that we still have to face and prepare for, for example when women’s ordination is rejected or when women are excluded from decision-making processes.

“We stepped out towards a new day after the struggle of both joy and pain over 20 years. We look forward to building

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together more abundant partnerships and we pray for each talent lived out in diverse ministries – so that we do not fear and we hope everyone will sing a new song.”

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