

Church News Ireland



Image of the day – Christmas from Clogher via RTE

January 6, 2024

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News -

Mary and Joseph walk the Causeway coast

Bishop guest speaker at annual 'Christmas Craicer' gathering for youth workers

Catholic charity warns of Christian exodus amid Syria's humanitarian crisis

C of I supported Al-Ahli Hospital continues to serve Gazans

Cathedral Calls -

Letterkenny set to celebrate its Annual Carol Trail

Galway Cathedral's Live Crib

Clergy and ministry -

Don't burn out this Christmas bishops urge very busy priests

Sister Clare Crockett, the beloved 'All or Nothing' Irish nun, up for sainthood

Webinars, music, resources, broadcasts, and books -

'Take a Minute' for daily prayer

Marine Singers Choir Festive concert in Galway

In the media -

BBC faith coverage to focus on Britain's diversity

Poem for today -

Hope by Peter Skaller

Speaking to the Soul -

Short reading and a prayer daily on this site

January 6, 2024

Image of the day – Christmas from Clogher via RTE



The Rector, organist, choir and parishioners of Lisbellaw Parish Church in Clogher Diocese recorded the Christmas Day service on television for RTE One.

The Rector, Revd William Jeffrey; organist, Lynda Lindsay; choir and parishioners kept their commitment to RTE despite Ireland being afflicted with a major storm on Saturday, December 7. They highlighted their indebtedness to their coach driver.



A group of 33 people travelled to the RTE studios to record the special service which will be broadcast on television at 11am on Christmas morning.



Another Clogher parish will be broadcasting on Christmas Day. St. Mark's Parish Church, Aghadrumsee, will feature on Northern Sound/ Shannonside Radio. The service will be led by Captain David Hamilton

with musical director, Marina Elliott and will be broadcast at 5.15pm.



Mary and Joseph walk the Causeway coast

Mary and Joseph have been journeying around the north coast – and even further afield – in recent days as part of an initiative by the rector of Dunluce, the Rev Brian Harper, to take the seasonal message of the church into the wider community.

Mary, Joseph and their donkey, beautifully knit by Doris Johnston, began their travels on Advent Sunday, December 1, and will be on the road until they return to Dunluce Parish Church on Christmas Day.

January 6, 2024

And to date they have had a series of adventures – from their visit to the Lighthouse Club on that first day, they have been to a number of different schools, shopping at stores big and little, helped out preparing for the Christmas Fair, travelled on the train



to Carrickfergus Castle, attended the bowls club and Slimming World, enjoyed the views and hospitality at local eating establishments, and observed as the Mothers' Union crafted table centres!

Brian said he had been using knitted nativity figures for some time as a means of taking the church into the wider community.

January 6, 2024

“It is, of course, very light-hearted, but nevertheless allows children to bring Mary and Joseph to school and let everyone know that they are involved in church activities. It is also particularly important in involving the wider community in the Christian message, especially shop workers etc who don't always have the opportunity to be involved on Sundays.”

Brian added: “When I have accompanied the trio on their travels, it has opened up both light-hearted chats and some deeper questions. It is an ‘all-inclusive’ trip in that it is reaching out across perceived boundaries and embracing many different people.

“On Christmas night, Mary and Joseph will return to church and hopefully there will be an addition to the family.”

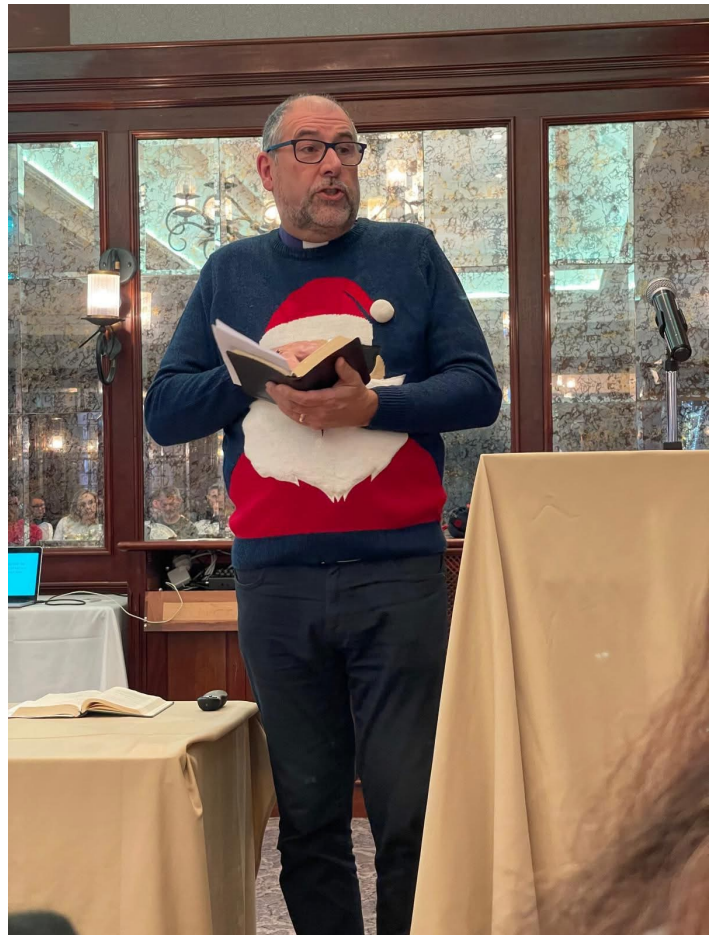
Mary and Joseph's adventures continue – on Thursday night they were joining the Sunday School to try out some bouncy castles, and a trip to the gym was planned over the weekend!

You can follow the rest of Mary and Joseph's travels on the Dunluce Parish Facebook Page -
[<https://www.facebook.com/DunluceParish>]

Bishop guest speaker at annual 'Christmas Craicer' gathering for youth workers

January 6, 2024

The Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev George Davison, was the guest speaker at the annual CIYD/IMYC Connect Day ‘Christmas Craicer’ gathering for youth workers and key volunteers from across the Church of Ireland and the Methodist Church in Ireland, held in Canal Court Hotel, Newry.



The Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev George Davison, was the guest speaker at the annual CIYD/IMYC Connect Day ‘Christmas Craicer’ gathering for youth workers and key volunteers from across the Church of Ireland and the Methodist Church in Ireland, held in Canal Court Hotel, Newry.

CIYD National Youth Officer Simon Henry, said: “Huge thanks to Bishop George for inspiring us with his words and to Emma Fawcett, Dublin & Glendalough Diocesan Youth Officer, for leading such uplifting worship.

“As we celebrated together and paused for Holy Communion, we were reminded by Bishop George of the power of relationships in making a real difference in the lives of young people across this land in lasting youth ministry.”



During his talk, Bishop George told the gathering reminding that he first met a nine-year-old Simon, when the Bishop was serving a curacy in St Mark's, Portadown...

Catholic charity warns of Christian exodus amid Syria's humanitarian crisis

Aid to the Church in Need has raised alarms over the potential disappearance of Syria's Christian population as the country faces escalating conflict and a worsening humanitarian crisis.

John Pontifex, Head of Press at Aid to the Church in Need, commented "Religious freedom violations and human rights

January 6, 2024

abuses often worsen after the fall of a long-standing regime.”

The situation is compounded by Israeli airstrikes targeting alleged chemical weapons and missile sites, while unconfirmed reports claim Israeli tanks are near Damascus. Israel denies these claims, stating its forces remain within the UN buffer zone in the Golan Heights.

The UN Special Envoy for Syria described the reports as “troubling”, and the UN has highlighted that 16 million Syrians urgently need aid.

Aid to the Church in Need has launched an emergency appeal, scaling up efforts with local partners to provide essentials, particularly as winter sets in.

“Bishops, priests, sisters, and laypeople are supporting vulnerable communities through targeted projects,” Pontifex explained.

He also warned that Syria’s uncertain political future could lead to either a more democratic coalition or an authoritarian Islamist regime. Under the wrong leadership, he said we could see the “disappearance of Christian communities that have existed since apostolic times,” noting that fewer than 3,000 Christians remain in Syria.

Speaking in an interview with ACI MENA, Bishop Hanna Jallouf, the head of the Latin Church in Syria said they received guarantees that churches and properties would remain untouched by the HTS.

January 6, 2024

C of I supported Al-Ahli Hospital continues to serve Gazans

The C of I Bishops' Appeal is pleased to share the news that al-Ahli Arab Hospital, which is administered by the Anglican Diocese of Jerusalem, is continuing to provide essential care and support for people in urgent humanitarian need in Gaza City.

Canon Don Binder, the Archbishop of Jerusalem's Chaplain, recently remarked: "Although our Ahli Hospital in Gaza City is overrun with the influx of hundreds of sorely wounded patients from the besieged north, there is today a singular sign of renewed dignity and hope: literally a new sign at the hospital entrance, replacing the one destroyed in earlier attacks.





“Please continue to pray and advocate on behalf of Ahli, the only remaining functional hospital in the north, whose overwhelmed staff is under-supplied and facing starvation, even as they work around the clock to save lives.”

In an interview with the Melbourne Anglican, the hospital’s director, Suhaila Tarazi, added: “We don’t discriminate. We are not part of this conflict ... Our humanitarian mission is to show the love of Jesus.” She also explained the extreme pressures on staff: “On certain days, we have no anaesthesia, so the doctors have to do surgeries and amputate parts of the legs of children and injured without it.

January 6, 2024

We suffer from a shortage of sterilisation solutions, so we sometimes use vinegar to clean some equipment.”

Al-Ahli receives around 750 patients daily and is seeking to maintain the services offered before the conflict, such as the early detection and treatment of diseases, as well as caring for the injured. The hospital recently re-opened a chemotherapy centre and, in co-operation with the Princess Basma Centre in Jerusalem, has also opened a small unit to provide physical therapy for children with cerebral palsy and their families. A clinic has also been opened in the Khan Yunis refugee camp where staff care for approximately 200 patients each day.

Bishops' Appeal is running an appeal through Advent and Christmas, supporting the ministry of the diocese and Tearfund partners. Donations can be made through bank transfer, cheque or parish collections, and details on how to give are available here on the Bishops' Appeal website: <https://bishopsappeal.ireland.anglican.org/give>

The full interview with the Melbourne Anglican, sponsored by Australian charity Anglican Overseas Aid, is available at <https://tma.melbourneanglican.org.au/2024/12/a-beacon-of-hope-still-stands-sponsored>



January 6, 2024

Cathedral Calls



Letterkenny set to celebrate its Annual Carol Trail

The heart of Letterkenny is set to embrace the festive spirit as it hosts the 11th annual Christmas Carol Trail on Friday, December 20.

This cherished event, organised collaboratively by the Letterkenny Chamber of Commerce, Letterkenny Cathedral Quarter, and Letterkenny CDP along with the respective churches brings together the community in celebration of the holiday season.

The evening will commence at 7:30pm with carols and readings at Trinity Presbyterian Church on Main Street.

January 6, 2024

Galway Cathedral's Live Crib



The final preparations at Galway Cathedral for the 2024 Live Crib, which took place on Saturday past from 11:30am to 4:30pm.

A wonderful tradition featuring a life-size nativity scene, live animals, and carols. There was a welcome for all.

Clergy and ministry

Don't burn out this Christmas bishops urge very busy priests

January 6, 2024

Priests should reach out for support if they are feeling stressed as Christmas approaches, the Auxiliary Bishops of Dublin and Armagh have urged.

Having served for a long time as parish priest in Wicklow, Bishop Donal Roche expressed concern for priests who are busy all year round and particularly the increased pressure they face in the run up to Christmas.

Youth Ministry



See pages 7 - 9 above. C of I and Methodist Church youth ministry trainers.

Sister Clare Crockett, the beloved 'All or Nothing' Irish nun, up for sainthood

The beatification cause is being opened for Sister Clare Crockett, the young Irish nun who turned her back on a promising acting career for a religious life that ultimately led to her tragic death during an earthquake in South America, the Catholic Herald reports.

Along with Blessed Carlo Acutis, the Derry-born native, who was only 33 years old when she died in a 2016 earthquake in Ecuador, joins a growing number of millennials on the road to sainthood, reports Aleteia. (Blessed Carlo is due to be canonised some time in 2025.) It means Irish Catholics may soon have another canonised saint among their ranks.

“The people of Derry and beyond are overwhelmed by the possibility that one day, they will have their own saint,” Father Gerard Mongan, the parish priest of Sister Clare’s native parish of St. Columba’s in Derry, has said.

<https://catholicherald.co.uk/sister-clare-crockett-the-beloved-all-or-nothing-irish-nun-up-for-sainthood/>

Webinars, music, resources, broadcasts, and books



‘Take a Minute’ for daily prayer

The Liturgical Advisory Committee (LAC) of the Church of Ireland has produced a new resource for simple daily prayer.

Called Take a Minute, the resource is contained in a prayer card which can be kept in a pocket or inside a prayer book or Bible. It is intended to be a way into prayer even in the midst of a busy lifestyle.

Speaking about the resource, the Revd Abigail Sines from the LAC said: “We hope these cards will be a gentle, and accessible reminder, in the midst of busy day-to-day life, to Take a Minute for prayer. In preparing and designing these cards, we had in mind city and town centre churches, cathedrals and parish halls that are in use throughout the week, as well as university chaplaincies – all places where a chance encounter, especially in moments of stress or uncertainty, can create an opportunity for a quiet moment of prayer.

January 6, 2024

“A simple structure is offered, with prompts for the morning to help commit the day’s activities to God, and in the evening to reflect on the day that has gone. The intention is to quiet the mind and create space for a sense of personal connection with God, and nurture open heartedness to experience God’s guidance, whatever the day or night may bring.”

In due course, the PDF version of this resource will be available on the newly refurbished worship section of the Church of Ireland website. In the interim, you can access it through the Church of Ireland’s social media pages.

Marine Singers Choir Festive concert in Galway

This Christmas season, the Marine Singers Choir invites you to experience the beauty of the holidays with their festive concert, “For Unto Us a Child Is Born,” in the historic St. Joseph’s Church, Presentation Road, Galway, on Thursday December 19 at 7:30pm.

This uplifting evening of music celebrates the joy and spirit of Christmas, and brings a truly global touch to the festive season.

Highlighting the programme is the iconic “For Unto Us a Child Is Born” chorus from Handel’s Messiah. George Frederic Handel, one of history’s greatest composers, has a unique link to Ireland: the Messiah premiered in Dublin in 1742, and its timeless music continues to resonate throughout the world. The Marine Singers honour this rich

January 6, 2024

tradition by featuring this masterpiece alongside other well-loved Christmas songs.

The Marine Singers will perform a diverse repertoire of Christmas songs in Estonian, Swedish, Latin, Catalan, Spanish, and traditional English and Irish carols, ensuring a vibrant and memorable evening. Adding a fresh dimension to the evening, the choir will be joined by special guest performers from Coláiste Éinde, whose youthful energy and talent promise to enrich the festive atmosphere.

“Our goal is to bring the magic of Christmas to life for Galway,” says Carmel Dooley, musical director of the Marine Singers. “By including Handel’s masterpiece, we celebrate Ireland’s connection to one of history’s most influential composers, and by performing songs in a variety of languages, we honour the universal spirit of Christmas.”

Tickets: €10, (5€ Concession), Family Tickets 2 Adults & 2 Children €25 – all tickets available on the door only.

Join them at St. Joseph’s Church for an unforgettable evening that heralds the arrival of Christmas in Galway.
Report courtesy The Galway Advertiser

In the media

BBC faith coverage to focus on Britain’s diversity

BBC coverage of faith is to increase its focus on reflecting the diversity of Britain, its heads of religion and ethics have promised. Catherine Pepinster writes in Religious Media Centre

Television and radio programmes in the years to come are to explore more fully the diversity of religions, ethnicity and other aspects of life, they said during a showcase session on their output at New Broadcasting House in London on Friday. They will continue to work with the broadcaster's creative diversity teams to enhance their coverage, they said.

According to Daisy Scalchi, head of religion and ethics on BBC TV: "We are having a conversation with the diversity team to look at where that representation can be stronger and be broadened."

And Tim Pemberton, head of religion and ethics on BBC radio, said: "We deal with the stuff of life and death and everything in between. If you can understand what people believe you go a long way to understanding how they act."

Jessica Shibley, head of creative diversity, said religion and ethics was a key part of the BBC's diversity remit. "The 2021 Census shows that more than half of people have a faith. It is still at the heart of many people's identity.

"Religious broadcasting has changed in the past 10 years. We want young audiences to develop confidence in their identity," she said.

January 6, 2024

That interest in diversity is reflected in a new series on prayer and reflection planned for autumn 2025. The BBC has just invited production companies based in Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland to pitch to make programmes for a new series depicting as-live religious services from six of the UK's main faiths. ("As-live" performances on the BBC are broadcast as though live but after a short delay to allow for editorial and technical checks.)

Three or four half-hour services will be filmed in the three nations to appeal to both viewers of faith or none and they will then be broadcast on BBC One and Northern Ireland.

Among programmes on religion that will be broadcast in the coming weeks are Christian worship to mark Christmas, including a Salvation Army concert recorded at the Royal Albert Hall, as well as live church services.

Then in January, BBC One and BBC Northern Ireland will show a one-off documentary, *First Communion*, which will explore the impact on Roman Catholic children and their families of making their first holy communion — the mass where children first receive the eucharist. It follows four families in Northern Ireland to discover what it means to contemporary Catholics.

"It is underpinned by a very strong connection to faith. It looks at why it matters to them," Ms Scalchi said.

Other programmes that have long been the mainstay of religious programming on the BBC will continue in the coming year, including *Songs of Praise* on BBC One. The Rev Kate Bottley, who is one of its presenters and chaired

the showcase panel, said: “Songs of Praise keys into something very deep in people. We can quietly move people and nourish their souls.”

Among the highlights of radio’s religion and ethics output will be a special programme from Auschwitz to mark the 80th anniversary of the camp’s liberation, with Rabbi Jonathan Wittenberg, and several programmes on the theme of the Nicene Creed, the doctrinal statement of Christian belief that was first adopted at the Council of Nicaea in 325. It is likely to be the focus of next year’s Lent talks, Sunday Worship at Easter, and some programmes devoted to the creed itself.

Poem for today

Hope

by Peter Skaller

As the apple of red was tasted
A veil spread across the soul’s eyes.
Overcome by the sweetness
The world beyond was viewed
As through a cloud.

More sweetness, more colour craved,
Until cloud so thickened
Only wafting shadows were seen,
Leading mind to conclude
Nothing more was there.

Only delights and sufferings
And shadows seemed sure.

January 6, 2024

Faith ebbing, love too, till
Truth-hunger's madness brought violence,
Life-threatening wounds to the World.

But within cloud-gazer-souls'
Abyssal dark depths
A last living ember
Flickers for those able
To feel into deep stillness.

Once sensed, this soft Hope,
This final force for future,
Itself enlivens, begins musing anew.
By mystery Mary rises opening as pure pod,
Enclosing mystery-conceived seed-Word.

“Hope is last to die,”
Says a Russian proverb.
In those where its embers still glow
Life-support, gentle fanning, tending are needed
That germ of Word leaf out and up.

Tending it ever so carefully
Till born Word rends cloud-veil
And world, now known Abode of God
Swings doors open welcoming home
All who in hope knock, and knock and knock.
Rev. Peter Skaller December 11, 2011

Speaking to the soul

Short reading and a prayer - daily on this site

Church News Ireland

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**Link in Monday through Saturday from
early morning**

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