

# Church News Ireland



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# Image of the day - Cloughfern Christingle feast







Without a doubt it was the A team at Cloughfern Parish which prepared and produced the Christingles for the church community and it looks as though they sampled the produce just to make sure it tasted as well as it looked.

The Reverend Tim Close also had a trial run with the candles knowing that candles which have been lit, re-light easier when the clients are queuing in the aisle for their particular insight on the festival.

## News

### Super BBC report on Greenisland parish

**Not far away from Cloughfern is the parish of Greenisland which was seriously impacted with arson in a very sad scenario indeed.**

The parishioners and their leadership team have been exemplary in their response.



*Parishioners gathered at the Reverend Isobel Hawthorne-Steele's home to discuss how the last few months have been*

BBC News

Ni presented the following report by Holly Fleck -

### **Greenisland: A different Christmas for church after arson attack - BBC News**

The report begins -

Parishioners of a County Antrim church which was set on fire in an arson attack earlier in the year have said

"Christmas is going to look different" but that they are trying to make the most of unexpected opportunities.

The Church of the Holy Name and its parish hall, in Greenisland, were severely damaged in the fire in September.

"Everything has changed. We have to hold services, events and clubs in different places, everything is up in the air," community chaplain the Reverend Chris Bennett said.

"We're not going to have our usual services in our usual place but like everything else there is opportunities that come with that."

[<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cp9n8jlzn3vo>]

## Whitehead's 'dove of peace'

**A Christian Aid fundraiser from Whitehead in County Antrim is hanging a 'dove of peace' on his Christmas tree this festive season to draw attention to the humanitarian crises caused by conflicts around the world.**

John Barnett is hanging the peace symbol in solidarity with all those whose lives have been devastated by war across the world, including people in Gaza and those who have fled civil war in Sudan.

John is a member of Whitehead and Islandmagee Methodist Churches. As our Whitehead organiser, he coordinates the fundraising efforts of a number of churches in the area.





Christian Aid supports people impacted by conflict in Gaza, Lebanon and Syria. We also support refugees from Sudan who have fled to South Sudan to escape a civil war that has created the world's largest humanitarian crisis. Refugees living in displacement camps in South Sudan struggle to survive on the meagre rations they receive, and the support services in place are no match for the scale of the need. Christian Aid works through local partners to help some of the most vulnerable at Wedweil refugee camp in South Sudan.

Among the tens of thousands to have reached Wedweil camp are Shede, her six-year-old daughter and her granddaughter, also aged six. Although Shede and the girls have reached the relative safety of Wedweil, their fight for



December 25, 2024

survival is not over. Food shortages and sky-high inflation make food and everyday essentials unaffordable.

Thanks to funding from Irish Aid and the Scottish Government, Christian Aid and its partner Smile Again Africa Development Organisation (SAADO) made a small cash grant to Shede, helping her buy nutritious food and essentials such as cooking pots. To date, we have supported 4,550 people at Wedweil in this way.

For more information and to support Christian Aid's work this Christmas, please visit [caid.ie/Christmas](https://caid.ie/Christmas)

## Light of the World initiative across county Kildare







**This Advent, churches across Kildare, joined forces to share an important message with all the people of the county, that Jesus Christ is the ‘Light of the World’.**

The ‘Light of the World’ initiative, which was spearheaded by Crown Jesus Ministries, involved a number of events and projects across the county, in a wide variety of churches.

75,000 ‘Light of the World’ resources were posted to homes in Kildare, which contained prayer and faith resources for Christmas, as well as a QR code which linked to an Advent event guide. Primary and Secondary Schools in Kildare also received schools packs.



Special worship resource videos were also recorded in St Brigid's Cathedral, Kildare and in the surrounding town. These videos were uploaded for wider use on the [www.lightofkildare.ie](http://www.lightofkildare.ie) website.

In addition, the people of Kildare were encouraged to light a candle in their windows, as a reminder of the traditional Irish symbol of warmth, welcome, and hope.

Throughout Advent a number of events also took place across county Kildare, including children's ministry training, youth events and prayer nights. In addition, RTÉ One broadcast a special Sunday morning service, marking 'Light of the World' on the first Sunday in Advent, from Kairos Studios in Maynooth.



A number of Church of Ireland churches took part in the initiative. 'Light of the World' banners featured outside St John's Church, Kill Village, St Patrick's, Newbridge, St Columcille's, Rathmore, St Mary's, Maynooth, St Brigid's Cathedral, Kildare and St David's in Naas. Training and filming also took place in St Brigid's Cathedral, Kildare.  
<https://meathandkildare.org/news/light-of-the-world-initiative-across-county-kildare/>

## **Gettys join Snow Patrol record at Belfast SSE Arena**

### **Gettys join Snow Patrol as only NI artists to sell out two consecutive nights at Belfast SSE Arena**

A husband and wife team who pen Christian hymns have join Snow Patrol as the only music artists from Northern Ireland to sell out two consecutive nights at Belfast's biggest indoor venue.

Keith and Kristyn Getty, Grammy-nominated hymn writers behind global anthems like In Christ Alone, made history at the SSE Arena with their two back-to-back Home for Christmas concerts.

These events mark the largest Christian concerts that have ever been held at the venue.

Lisburn-born Keith and Kristyn, from Newtownabbey, relocated to Nashville where they have established themselves as one of the biggest artists in their genre —

last Monday they played to a sold-out Carnegie Hall in New York on what was also Keith's 50th birthday.

He told the Belfast Telegraph: "It's a special place to play. Backstage there is a big photograph of Leonard Bernstein and every time we go and say, 'There he is, hi Leonard.'

"And the Beatles famously played there too, of course. So we take it very seriously to be there and you have to do good work when you arrive. But in 10 years there it has been wonderful.

"But it will be extra special for us to be home for Christmas to finish our tour with these two concerts, it's very much a homecoming and a celebration of the season and our music.

"We've always come home and we love that but we wanted to start a family and we thought Nashville would be a good place to base ourselves, we just loved the atmosphere there with different musicians and types of music that feeds into that creative work.

"Nashville is Belfast west, it really is, if anywhere in the world is — and the Christmas show came out of moving to Nashville.

"We got more interested in the Irish heritage, and the Scots-Irish heritage, because everyone was fascinated because they all feel a sense of tie to Scotland and Ireland and the music and the history that happened there."



A roster of special guests joined them on the SSE Arena stage.

They included the renowned New Irish Orchestra and Choir, alongside acclaimed singer-songwriter Blessing Offor, Christian band We Are Messengers, renowned theologian John Lennox and beloved poet Malcolm Guite.

The audience enjoyed brand-new songs alongside cherished traditional carols, performed in a grand symphonic style with the Northern Irish duo at the peak of their powers and celebrating a decade of performing together.

## Cathedral Calls

### **Kindness of people makes standing in cold and rain worth every single minute - Dean of Belfast**

**The Very Reverend Stephen Forde, Dean of Belfast in a daily comment in the Belfast Telegraph writes -**

Why does being Belfast's fifth Black Santa matter so much to me as the Dean of St Anne's Cathedral?

This question has two answers. Firstly, the esteem with which the people of this province hold the Black Santa Appeal.



Some people carry on a tradition of giving which was begun by their late father or mother. It is a very special way of remembering.

Today parents out shopping will bring their children to give jars filled with pennies or pounds to place in the Black Santa barrel.

Belfast offices will have a “whipround” from all their staff to add to Black Santa's total.



The local MG Owners Club polished their cars to drive to the cathedral and make their donation.

And from school carol services, with the cathedral packed to the doors, the collection is given to the Black Santa Appeal.

Then there were the eight football supporters from Gent, visiting Belfast for the Europa Conference League match against Larne. “What is this for?” they asked.

The importance of this 48-year-old tradition is to be found in the question from the Gent football supporters. “What is this for?” they asked.

The Black Santa Appeal is a channel for funds to some 120 amazing local charities which are too small to have their own fundraising departments.

Charities like the Pepper John's Memorial in Downpatrick. This small charity provides a community hub for local people who live with the experience of someone close who has taken their own life.

For such families, Christmas can be the hardest of times.

But this is a charity with an ambition to “reduce suicide to zero”. A small community charity with a massive ambition.

Or in Belfast, Redeeming Our Communities, a charity that links a local church with its community, and offers a community shop selling great quality donated school uniforms.

These are just two examples from some among the 120 local charities supported last year, demonstrating the range and passion given by volunteers in charities across the land.

It is for them that Black Santa works passionately in the days and weeks before Christmas, collecting online and by cash or by card.

But it all depends on the generosity of those people young and old who will make their donation, all the way up to Christmas Eve.

Worth standing in the rain for!

## Clergy and ministry

### Charles Brian Handy's parents wanted him to be a bishop

**The death has taken place of Charles Brian Handy who was born on July 25 1932 to Archdeacon Brian Handy and his wife Joan, née Scott, at the vicarage of St Michael and All Angels, Clane, in rural Co Kildare, west of Dublin, where they had no electricity until 1945.**

Charles was educated at Bromsgrove School and went on to take a First in Greats at Oriel College, Oxford, before joining Shell as a graduate trainee in 1956.

His parents, he said later, were “quietly horrified” at his career choice – “They wanted me to be a bishop.” As he left

home to embark for south-east Asia, his mother said: “Never mind, dear, it’ll be great material for your books.” Handy recalled: “I said, ‘Books, mother? I’m going to be an oil executive.’ She said, ‘Yes, dear.’” From obit in Daily Telegraph 24 December 2024 -

<http://digitaleditions.telegraph.co.uk/data/1925/reader/reader.html?social#!preferred/0/package/1925/pub/1925/page/74/article/NaN>

## **Bishop Adrian Wilkinson reflects on Kilkenny’s Christmas Eve traditions**

**One of the great Christmas Eve traditions in Kilkenny is that a short prayer service is led each year by both Bishops of Ossory at the Remembrance Tree on the Parade at 11.00am. Today marks the twentieth anniversary of this tradition.**

At Christmas we remember with love those with whom we shared past Christmases and who are no longer with us. We give thanks for their positive influence in our lives.

We remember those who are celebrating Christmas in places where there is conflict, suffering and injustice. We pray for the people of the Middle East, Ukraine, Syria, Sudan and elsewhere where there is suffering and fear.







We recall the truth that Jesus is ‘the Light of the World’ and that there is nowhere too dark which is beyond the reach of his light and love.

As Christians we also remember those of all traditions and denominations who share in the hope of Jesus Christ, the child of Bethlehem. We celebrate our unity in this Good News as well as the richness of our diversity.

## **A Christmas message from Bishop Andrew Forster**

**Advent is a joyful season, a time when we look forward to Christmas and prepare to celebrate Christ’s birth – the moment when, as John writes, “the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us”.**



In many of our homes and churches we put up cribs to remind ourselves of this extraordinary moment. These captivating nativity scenes – a baby lying in a stable, watched over by his devoted mother and father, as the three Magi pay homage and the shepherds look on – enthrall children and stir something in many adults, as well. For a while, we, too, become onlookers.

And yet, how fully, I wonder, do we grasp the magnitude of what's being celebrated?

For Christians, Jesus's birth is one of the two greatest events in human history – and I use the term 'human history' quite deliberately. “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son’, Matthew writes, ‘and they will call him Immanuel (which means “God with us”).”

Jesus came among us fully human and fully divine. He experienced the human condition in its raw completeness. His life story – an infant refugee growing up in an occupied land; witnessing poverty, inequality and oppression; experiencing

injustice, persecution, bereavement, betrayal, mockery and abuse; feeling abandoned and, ultimately, suffering an unimaginably brutal death on the cross – means that Jesus endured many of the hardest trials that can befall humankind.

Whenever we feel lost or abandoned, when our world is in turmoil, when the valley is at its darkest, Jesus is the one constant we can turn to. He knows what suffering feels like. Our Lord's birth, the Incarnation, is one of God's greatest gifts to us. It allows Jesus to empathise with us, and he will never forsake us. God's second great gift is, of course, the promise of eternal life for those who believe in him and follow his way.

This Advent, if you find yourself an onlooker at the Nativity scene, open your heart to the wonder at its core and experience the joy of Christmas in all its fullness.

I wish you every blessing this Christmas, and a happy and peaceful New Year.

## In the media

### Why we owe many of our festive traditions to A Christmas Carol

**Charles Dickens Expert at Queen's University says its the book to thank for the celebrations, Rebecca Black writes in the Belfast Telegraph**

Some of the oldest Christmas carols were the pop songs of the Victorian age, an academic has said.

Many festive traditions, from the Christmas tree to carols including Silent Night, O Little Town Of Bethlehem and Good



King Wenceslas, and even eating turkey and Christmas pudding, date back to the period.

It was also when the first Christmas card was sent (in 1843), with it now part of an exhibit at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

Dr Leon Litvack of the School of Arts, English and Languages at Queen's University Belfast believes so many of the Christmas traditions from that time have survived because of the power of nostalgia.

He said while the Victorian carols were primarily used in Christian worship, they were also sung in people's homes and in the streets.

Dr Litvack said: "Many of them obviously were written for religious observances but it was very much something that was promoted by Methodism in the 18th century through writers Samuel and Charles Wesley.

"And they were kind of the pop songs of their day, and particularly being associated with Christmas, people began to not only use them in worship but also the tradition of carolling became popular.

"There is something about Christmas and nostalgia that I think people really value. Many have Christmas traditions of their own in their families, and many of these originated in the Victorian period because people began to have more leisure time.

“It was also the period of the rise of the middle class, people had a bit more money to spend on things like presents, festivities and decorations, so these all came together to make Christmas into a holiday.

“In the 17th century and even in the 18th century, Christmas was not really a holiday, it was not necessarily a day off for workers. That only really came to the fore in the 19th century.”

The academic, who specialises in the study of Charles Dickens, said it was thanks to A Christmas Carol that the developing traditions were popularised and preserved.

“These Christmas traditions already existed, but through this very sentimental story, were brought into people's minds, people read the Carol, and it became a very popular Christmas present,” he added.

“It was originally pocket-sized and with hand-coloured illustrations in the text, which made the book fairly expensive; it sold for five shillings, which was quite a lot of money for people at that time.”

He described the message of the story as a change of heart based on looking into your own past actions and how to improve in the coming year.

He encourages the reading aloud of A Christmas Carol to bring the story to life, or seeing it performed, for example in the current run of shows at the Lyric Theatre in Belfast.

“Dickens is particularly associated with Christmas, and I think that it's because it is a heart-warming story that keeps getting retold and merits retelling because it's got such interesting and useful messages for us,” he added.

## **Archbishop calls for ‘robust defences’ to fight the dark forces threatening Irish democracy**

**Without a vibrant democracy, dark forces will emerge to “exploit grievances and turn debate between opponents into a struggle against enemies”, the leader of the Catholic Church in Dublin has said in a report in the Irish Independent**

Archbishop Dermot Farrell warned that a system of government and public administration was needed that provides “robust defences against those who target public figures for intimidation in person or on social media”.

He made his comments as churches and parishes across the country prepare for Christmas liturgies, traditionally the busiest time of the year for them.

Speaking to the Irish Independent, Dr Farrell said that our system of government “must be seen to be capable of serving the common good” and meet “the needs of the people”. It must also produce outcomes that secure the dignity of all and “provide hope for a better future”.

A flourishing democracy, he said, also requires people who are willing to put themselves forward and accept the



judgment of the electorate and “know how to live with one another and with political differences”.

Dr Farrell would not be drawn on the near-election of Gerry ‘The Monk’ Hutch in his own parish. However, he said there was much to ponder from the election results, not least the level of turnout in the electoral process itself.

“No one can be sanguine at low levels of participation and all must be attentive to indications of alienation or disillusionment, as well as disenchantment with the democratic process,” he said.

In his wide-ranging comments, Dr Farrell said homelessness is “the most obvious and disturbing aspect of the housing crisis being experienced in Dublin”.

Noting that the Commission on Housing report outlined the many factors which have contributed to this and the need for an appropriately comprehensive response from the public authorities, Dr Farrell said Dublin diocese is making its own “direct response to homelessness”.

It is generally agreed that increased housing supply of all kinds is a critical ingredient in the response to the housing crisis.

This is being done through the provision of a family accommodation hub by Crosscare, the diocesan social care agency, in the premises of the former Mater Dei Institute.

“Over the years, parishes and religious communities have made sites which were not required for mission available for housing development,” he said.

## Speaking to the soul

Short reading and a prayer - daily on this site

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## Church News Ireland

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