

Church News Ireland



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Image of the day

Rathmichael Nativity Express brings families on Christmas journey



The cast of Rathmichael Nativity Express.

Rathmichael Church once again held a new Christmas Trail for people of all ages. This year had a railway theme, with each stop on the trail designed to be a stop on the longer journey towards Christmas, and the birth of Christ the Messiah.

Visitors were invited to 'hop aboard' the Nativity Express and journey back in time to meet the prophets of old, Isaiah & Micah, at 'Prophets' Haven', where the prophets set the scene for the most famous birth of all time. The journey continued forwards to the time when B.C. meets A.D. as



people arrived into the middle of the Roman Census at 'Census Central' and had their documents checked by our centurions and sealed with wax for the onward journey.

Arriving in Bethlehem

The next stop on the journey was

'Carpenter's Square' where the angel Gabriel, who took people by surprise, told them of the recent events that had been happening. The time—tourists then met the shepherds (and their real sheep!) at 'Flockside Station' where the news had also been recently told. Then it was onwards to the ancient city of Bethlehem where Mr & Mrs Innkeeper were at 'No Room Junction'. As our visitors moved on past Bethlehem, the next stop was 'Magi Waypoint', where three mysterious wise men had heard the news and were making a journey also. The journey finished at 'Manger Halt' where

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people met the baby that they had all been talking about, and could take a moment to reflect with joy and thankfulness on all they had heard on the journey.

After this interactive trip through time, visitors moved to the adjoining hall where the fun continued with themed activities and crafts to complete; and refreshments for all to enjoy. Paper bags were available for the children to take their crafts home in – Christmas cards, snow globes and various Christmas tree decorations – all portraying verses of scripture from the Christmas story.

Massive thanks are due to all involved in this event – actors, crafts leaders, caterers, and all those involved in making the



Manger halt

sets, props, costumes and overall planning. Around 50 volunteers were involved with the delivery of the trail, from the preparation through to the day itself. It was truly incredible day that will be long remembered in the life of our church and wider community, as our church community came together to provide this outreach event to the whole community.

The trails in Rathmichael came about during the covid restrictions three years ago, when we decided to use our beautiful church grounds to 'go out' in order to invite people 'in'. The trails have now become a major part of Rathmichael's outreach into our wider and fast-growing community. At each trail, at least half of the people who come through are unknown to us when they arrive. Typically, some of the attendees come back to join us for a church service and join our church family.

And for others – they experience our welcome and know that Rathmichael is a place where they and their families are welcome and loved in the name of Christ. This has led to a rejuvenated sense of belonging for all, and they go home and spread the good news of what they experienced – just as each of us are charged to spread The Good News in our lives each day.

As a result, we have found that each trail is now attended by more and more people who come to us to hear the Gospel message in a fun and interactive way. Ultimately, this ministry is about planting seeds of faith and we pray on an ongoing basis that those seeds would indeed bear fruit into the future.

News

Collon's historic Church of Ireland landmark celebrates final restoration

Collon's Church of Ireland, a historic landmark dating back to the early 19th century, recently hosted a successful concert to celebrate Christmas and the final restoration after 12 years of extensive repairs, Lauren Ross writes in Drogheda Independent

John Rowntree, a member of the restoration committee, spoke about the incredible community effort that drove the restoration of the iconic building which was in a dire state of repairs back in 2012.

The event on December 19, was attended by over 200 people and featured a local choir, singers and an organist from Dublin, along with a violinist, making for a memorable evening in the proudly restored church. "It all went very well, everyone enjoyed it," said John.

The restoration journey began after the church was forced to close in 2012 because of severe structural issues. "Electricity went off, water was getting in and the church nearly fell down," he explained.

Recognising the cultural and historical significance of the church, the local community got together to form a committee to preserve it. The first fundraising event was a

garden party hosted by Collon House in 2014, setting the tone for what would become years of dedicated effort. Over the next few years, community garden parties featuring performances by the Ardee and Lourdes Brass Bands helped to garner attention and support for the preservation of the church. Local councillor Dolores Minogue connected with MEP Mairead McGuinness, whose involvement led to a grant that enable the roof repairs.

Once the roof was secured, the committee got a grant to restore the church's interior, which has been completed in the last year with final repairs to the stained glass windows and the church's historical organ.



'Tell yonder peasant that the winter fuel allowance is cancelled.'

The church was built between 1809 and 1815 and now holds national status as a listed building. John emphasised the importance of the upgrade from regional to national status, noting that it demonstrates the church's significance both in terms of history and architecture for Collon, Louth and the wider community.

Among its many unique features is the ceiling, a masterpiece linked to the renowned 19th-century novelist Maria Edgeworth, whose brother was involved in its decoration. The church also carries fascinating stories in its history, like the connection to Russian aristocracy, who settled in the area and are buried in the churchyard, with dramatic Russian headstones marking their resting places.

Though church services are held on the fourth Sunday of every month, visitors can arrange to view the building through the neighbouring Collon House. Reflecting on the latest concert and the completion of the works, John says



people are delighted with the results. “It was well worth saving,” he adds.

Photos at Irish Independent -

<https://www.independent.ie/regionals/louth/lifestyle/historic-collon-church-brought-fully-back-to-life-after-12-years-of-repairs/a1064241428.html>

Ruan church struck by lightning and Dromore property burnt down

Ruan’s church was hit by lightning and a property in Dromore burnt down in the early hours of Sunday morning.

St Mary’s Church in Ruan saw its timber spire go on fire and crash to the ground after a lightning strike shortly before 4am on Sunday morning. It is the first time the church has been hit by lightning.

Residents in Ruan were awoken by the sound of the spire hitting the ground and soon realised they were without electricity in some parts while watching the flames from the nearby church.

Speaking to The Clare Echo, one Ruan resident commented, “the bang nearly knocked me out of the bed it was so bad, it was unbelievable”. He estimated that it was forty five years since the village witnessed lightning as extreme, “it was so bad this time that it shook the house”.

He added, “the spire saved the village really because it is the highest part of the village, lightning always hits the highest part so if it didn’t it would have hit somewhere else”.

Minor water and electrical damage was also caused within the church building. Locals remained hopeful mass would be able to proceed at the church over the festive season. Report and photos courtesy of the Clare Echo.

Trump appoints ambassador to the Holy See

US President-elect Donald Trump has appointed Brian Burch as the next US ambassador to the Holy See. Burch, the president of the political advocacy group CatholicVote, will take on the role next year.

“Brian is a devout Catholic, a father of nine, and President of CatholicVote,” Trump said in a statement. “He has received numerous awards and demonstrated exceptional leadership, helping build one of the largest Catholic advocacy groups in the country. He represented me well during the last election, having garnered more Catholic votes than any presidential candidate in history!”

“Brian loves his Church and the United States – he will make us all proud,” Trump added.

CatholicVote is a conservative political advocacy group that endorsed Trump in January and ran ads in support of the president-elect during his campaign. The group previously reported spending ten million dollars on the campaign.



In full voice at St George's Belfast

Burch expressed his gratitude on social media platform X, saying he is “deeply honoured and humbled to have been nominated” for the position.

“Words cannot express my gratitude to all those who have helped me achieve this nomination, most especially my wife Sara, my nine beautiful children, my CV team, and all those who supported me in this journey. I am especially grateful to my father, who passed to eternal life this past June, who taught me to love the Church and the blessings and responsibilities of being a citizen of the US.”

Burch is the co-author of *The America Catholic Daily Reader* and the author of *A New Catholic Moment: Donald Trump*

and the Politics of the Common Good, published in 2020. He studied political philosophy at the University of Dallas and currently resides in the Chicago suburbs with his family.

“The role of ambassador is to represent the government of the United States in its relations with the Holy See. The Catholic Church is the largest and most important religious institution in the world, and its relationship with the United States is of vital importance,” he added. “I am committed to working with leaders inside the Vatican and the new administration to promote the dignity of all people and the common good. I look forward to the confirmation process and the opportunity to continue to serve my country and the Church. To God be the glory.”

Cathedral Calls

St Peter's Cathedral Girls' choir fills in 'missing piece of the puzzle'

In more than a century and a half St Peter's Cathedral in west Belfast has seen its fair share of changes, Julie McCullough, BBC News NI.

But 2024 saw it celebrate a historic first.

At the end of June a new choir was formed - the first choir made up entirely of girls.

James McConnell, the Cathedral's director of music admitted the church might be "slightly behind the times" but



The newly formed Cathedral's girls' choir

it was his ambition to give girls the same opportunity afforded to the boys.

Aged between 11 and 18 the newly-formed choir has only been singing together a matter of months and now it is getting ready to perform at one of the most anticipated events - Christmas.

There has been an adult choir at St Peter's since 1866 and a younger boys' choir has been in place for almost 25 years.

Rebecca Morris said when she joined the cathedral choir several years ago the music was thriving but she felt there was a "wee something missing".

That missing piece of the puzzle, she said, were the girls.

Since they put the choir together at the end of June she has been the assistant director.

Rebecca said there was something special about a girls' choir.

"It's totally different tonality with a much lighter sound," she said.

Although it comes with different challenges, she said the girls had made everything easier.

"We're working with an amazing bunch of girls which has made it so much more special, and they've just been super from the start," she added.

The choir is made up of girls from different schools around the greater Belfast area and beyond.

Abbie was encouraged to join by her grandparents.

The 12-year-old said she loved singing and the choir had allowed her to make a lot of new friends.

"It's definitely upped my confidence because I wasn't very confident last year before I joined," she said.

Lucy's music teacher had suggested the 17-year-old joined the choir and she has not looked back.

"I was quite shocked whenever I realised it had taken so long to just get a full girls' choir," she said.

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Although she did not have a lot of experience of religious music she has enjoyed learning new things, but more so the community the choir created.

"We get to come in, different ages, different schools and things, it's just nice to have," she said.

Christmas at St Peter's will give them an opportunity to show just how far they have come in six months.

BBC NI 23/12/2024 -

[<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cx2v7nk175do>]

Enniskillen Cathedral sexton and son die just three days apart

Community suffers 'double blow' as father and son die just three days apart. An Enniskillen man described as “a County Fermanagh. Man of Faith” has been laid to rest after he passed away three days after his son, Amy Cochrane writes in the Belfast Telegraph.

John James (Jack) Watson passed away peacefully just three days after his son Jonathan Watson died suddenly at the South West Acute Hospital (SWAH) on Wednesday, December 18.

He was laid to rest on Tuesday, Christmas Eve.

Jack served for 56 years as caretaker, sexton and Dean's Verger at St Macartin's Cathedral, while Jonathan was an



Jack and Jonathan, father and son, died three days apart

accomplished local piper and described as a “devoted church member.” Jack and Jonathan, father and son, died three days apart

The Very Rev Dean Kenneth Hall said the passing of the well-known father and son, just days apart, was a “double blow”.

Speaking to the congregation at Jack's funeral at St Macartin's Cathedral, Enniskillen on Tuesday, he said it was “strange” that he spent the night in the Cathedral.

“On this day (Christmas Eve) the busiest day of the church's calendar, Jack would have been spending all of his day in this cathedral while he was verger,” he said.

In their final days, Jack and Johnathan shared a special Holy Communion at the SWAH.

Dean Hall said that he asked Jonathan if he would like Holy Communion and he said he would love it, but wanted it with his dad.

“He arranged the communion, and we had a very special service in the SWAH on Friday (December 13), when we all received communion together,” he said.

“Little did we know that would be the last we would share. This shows that you never know what opportunity you may get to meet with people, and that it could be the last.”

Dean Hall said Jonathan was “loved by everyone he came into contact with”, while his late father was a man of “great professionalism and dignity”.

He told the congregation earlier this week that Jack served at approximately 9,000 services during his 56 years devoted to the church, including 492 weddings and 1,300 funerals.

“He [Jack] served the Cathedral faithfully for a period of 56 years, that is a record in itself — I doubt it equalises anywhere in the Church of Ireland,” said Dean Hall.

“He loved his work in the church and over almost 56 years, Jack would have prepared the church for 9,000 regular services.

“That included 492 weddings when he was in the porch welcoming the nervous bride and groom to give them words of encouragement.

“He was also present at approximately 1,300 funerals to shake hands and express sympathy to the families of the bereaved.”

Jack was also a member of the Orange Order and a former member of the UDR and B-Specials.

Dean Hall added that during Jack's long service as Verger at the cathedral, he met several esteemed guests, including Queen Elizabeth II.

Similarly, as a piper, Jonathan played for the President of Ireland on behalf of the Orange Order, and at Menin Gate in Belgium.

“Jack entertained visitors, from Prime Ministers, Secretaries of State, Taoiseachs and even Her Majesty The Queen when they came through the door, standing at the front door of the cathedral,” he said.

“He was a man of faith who was very kind and modest in every way and he could not have given the quality of service to the cathedral, the community and wider church without the support of Ethel and his family.”

Jack was a devoted husband of Ethel, dearly loved father of Mae (Neville), Carol (Leslie), Ruth (Robert), and the late Jonathan; a loving grandfather of Andrea, Wayne, Felicity, Michael, Sophie, Lauren and Timothy; and great-grandfather of Thomas, Brodie and Freddie.

Webinars, music, resources, broadcasts, and books



where?

Online sessions with an in-person retreat.

when?

Beginning 10th February, 2025

what?

A Kintsugi Hope Wellbeing Group exploring themes such as anxiety, depression, shame, anger, perfectionism, self-acceptance & resilience.

Learn about self-care through journaling, discussion, sharing, laughing and praying together. Remember, you have inestimable worth in the eyes of God. Tend to the treasure you are.



Treat yourself to some time out in 2025

The MU Changing The Story

Kintsugi Hope Wellbeing Group is an online programme via zoom, run over 12 sessions based on the vision of Kintsugi Hope to discover treasures in life's scars. The programme concludes with an 'in person' retreat from 4-6 April 2025.

We invite you to join this warm welcoming space to nurture, encourage and support one another.

For further information contact
muchangingthestory@gmail.com

Northern Ireland Boys' Brigade seeking board members

The Northern Ireland Boys' Brigade (BBNI) works with around 11,500 boys and young men in 243 BBNI companies in Northern Ireland and Donegal. With over 2,700 volunteer leaders, Boys' Brigade is a ministry tool for the local church, focused on advancing Christ's Kingdom among boys.

“Our vision for The Northern Ireland Boys' Brigade (BBNI) is to ‘Raise generations of Christ-like men.’

“We are currently seeking up to 3 members to join our board for a three-year period.

“Up to two of the successful candidates will not have experience (past or present) of Boy's Brigade leadership. We are seeking applications from individuals who can demonstrate competence and experience in at least one of the following:

- Current experience in the education sector
- Experience in safeguarding practice
- Human Resources

Full details are available here: <https://lnkd.in/eDABJx4y>

In the media

The Church of England: how does it recover after its annus horribilis?

A new Anglican leader must reinvent the role if they are to restore faith in an institution mired in sexual abuse scandals - Observer editorial

Next week churches, chapels and cathedrals across England will be celebrating Christmas in traditional style. Congregations doubled, the pews will be filled for perhaps the only time of the year, the chancels and naves glittering through the darkness with lights, baubles and good cheer. There will be all the old familiar carols, Christingle services and midnight masses, the plaster baby Jesus will be inserted into his crib, the brasswork will shine and, doubtless, waves of beer fumes will waft gently skywards as worshippers re-enact the hallowed, long-remembered rituals of the ancient, astonishing nativity story.

This year, however, a sense of gloom fringes the traditionally joyous celebrations. It has been truly an annus horribilis for the Church of England, experiencing what some see as the gravest institutional crisis since its foundation by Henry VIII in 1534. In the past, it has survived schisms and rows, a civil war, the moral degradation of slavery, the 19th-century battle between biblical literalism and evolution, disputes over ritualism and, most recently, the divisions over the ordination and treatment of woman and gay people.

Never before, however, has an archbishop of Canterbury been forced to resign, as Justin Welby was last month, with possibly more bishops to follow, and never has the church seemed so isolated from the society it seeks to serve.

Local congregations and parish clergy are incredulous and demoralised by the way the hierarchy has conducted itself. Church attendance, in long-term decline, is dropping ever more steeply, with an increasingly disastrous effect on church income. Many churches already find it hard, if not impossible, to pay their parish share, the money that goes to sustaining the church's funding, and encouraging more "bums on seats" – the church's own inelegant phrase for the holy grail of increasing attendances – is proving elusive. The current crisis could scarcely make it a less attractive institution to join.

Perhaps a future archbishop should seek a humbler, less imperial role: concentrating on being a spiritual, even parochial, leader

The immediate cause is the Church of England's handling of the latest round of sexual abuse scandals, especially the egregious behaviour of the child-beating conservative evangelical John Smyth, who was allowed to abuse his victims largely unchecked for decades, first in England and then in southern Africa, almost until his death in 2018. Smyth, though, was not alone; nor is Anglicanism in failing to confront sexual abuse in what is an authoritarian religious institution.

But in a state church – seeking to represent the spiritual heart of the nation, with a presence across the country – the

effect of not dealing with the scandal, or being complacent and bureaucratic when confronting it, as it has been for so long, is particularly corrosive. For decades now, the Church of England has found itself increasingly at odds with the social attitudes of the wider population: it can no longer expect deference, and the latest scandal is horrifying, undermining all the good it attempts quietly, week by week, in local parishes.

It is not true that the church has not tried to tackle issues of abuse and perhaps it has done so more urgently under Welby than his predecessors. Safeguarding regulations and protections are now in place in many parishes and clergy are more aware of what is necessary than they were. But the long legacy of abusive behaviour by individuals has not been adequately addressed and, indeed, has been covered up or overlooked by an overcentralised church bureaucracy.

There is a solution to hand. Professor Alexis Jay, whom the church appointed last year to review its procedures, produced a report calling for the setting up of independent scrutiny and regulation of abuse cases, but this has been largely shelved by the bishops. The Jay report needs to be dusted off and implemented as an immediate measure to restore trust in the hierarchy, because the church can no longer be allowed to mark its own homework. Its autonomy and lack of accountability must be challenged.

Other options are more long term and will not provide the quick fix that the church urgently needs. Episcopal resignations may follow Welby's. Even a fortnight before he is supposed temporarily to take over Welby's responsibilities, the career of the archbishop of York,

Stephen Cottrell, is hanging by a thread after last week's revelation that he allowed a priest named David Tudor to remain in ministry and to become an honorary cathedral canon even though during the 1980s he was considered a serious safeguarding risk. Tudor was finally banned by the church two months ago.

Unfortunately, after decades of choosing safe, grey, managerial men to be bishops, the Church of England lacks inspirational candidates to replace Welby – or Cottrell, if they should both go. But perhaps a future archbishop should seek a humbler, less imperial role, concentrating on being a spiritual, even parochial, leader rather than one who feels the need to govern a worldwide communion and to pronounce on every passing issue whether they can influence it or not. The world really won't mind if occasionally it does not hear from the archbishop, so long as it knows that he (or, maybe soon, she) is offering inspiration and guidance to the flock. That would be a relief all round. Who knows, perhaps it might encourage more worshippers back into church? And not just for Christmas.

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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