

Church News Ireland



**Image of the day – Jesus and the children
St Margaret's Westminster**

Image for today - Jesus and the children, St Margaret's Westminster

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Dove of peace in Bunclody

Carmoney Parish 'The Pedant's Guide to the Nativity'

Dove of peace in Bunclody

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Speaking to the soul -

Short reading and a prayer daily on this site

Image of the day – Jesus and the children

A mosaic in St Margaret's Church, Westminster, depicting Jesus with children.

Houston McKelvey writes - “St Margaret's Church at Westminster Abbey has a particular warmth in our family's story. Both our grandsons were born abroad and in different countries. London was the most suitable city for families and friends. I had the privilege of conducting their baptisms in St Margaret's thanks to a friendship with the then dean from the times when we were both ministering in Christian education which is basically about commending the generosity of Christ's welcome in baptism.

“As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all,



clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful.” Colossians 3:12-15

News

Church serves up a free Christmas Day meal for newcomers to Northern Ireland

Newcomers to Northern Ireland were served up a Christmas Day lunch by a church in south Belfast.

The free meal was put on on December 25 in the church hall of St Patrick’s Church of Ireland, Drumbeg.

The organiser, Nigel Quinn, said: “There were folks from Syria, Sudan, Eritrea, and Iran as well as Pakistan, Hong Kong and Ukraine. Most of the guests came to Northern Ireland fleeing conflict in their places of birth.

“Our initiative was intended to demonstrate that the majority of folks in Northern Ireland welcome newcomers, and especially no Christmas Day wanted to show them that as a faith community at Drumbeg Church we believe everyone has a place at the table.”

Among other places to serve free meals on Christmas Day, an Indian restaurant in Belfast, Bengal Brasserie on the city’s Ormeau Road, throws open its doors every December 25.



*In our Family Service in **Carmoney Parish Church** the Faith Factory performed "The Pedant's Guide to the Nativity" which was absolutely brilliant! Well done to all the children but also to Jayne, Linda and Madi for all their hard work in organising it. Danielle and Rachel too for making all the costumes.*

It's generous owner and staff cooking up a free feast for people unable to celebrate the day with family or friends.

The owner Naz Rahman: "I wanted to give something back to the community, as Ormeau Road has given me so much."

He knows only too well what being alone is like. Naz's parents died when he was very young; adopted, he arrived

in Belfast from Bangladesh at the age of 13, unable to speak a word of English.

“This was the early 1990s, before schools might sort out translators,” he says. “It was very isolating. But the Ormeau Road took me in and really helped me out. The entire community was incredibly welcoming and I’ve been here ever since.”

Dove of peace in Bunclody

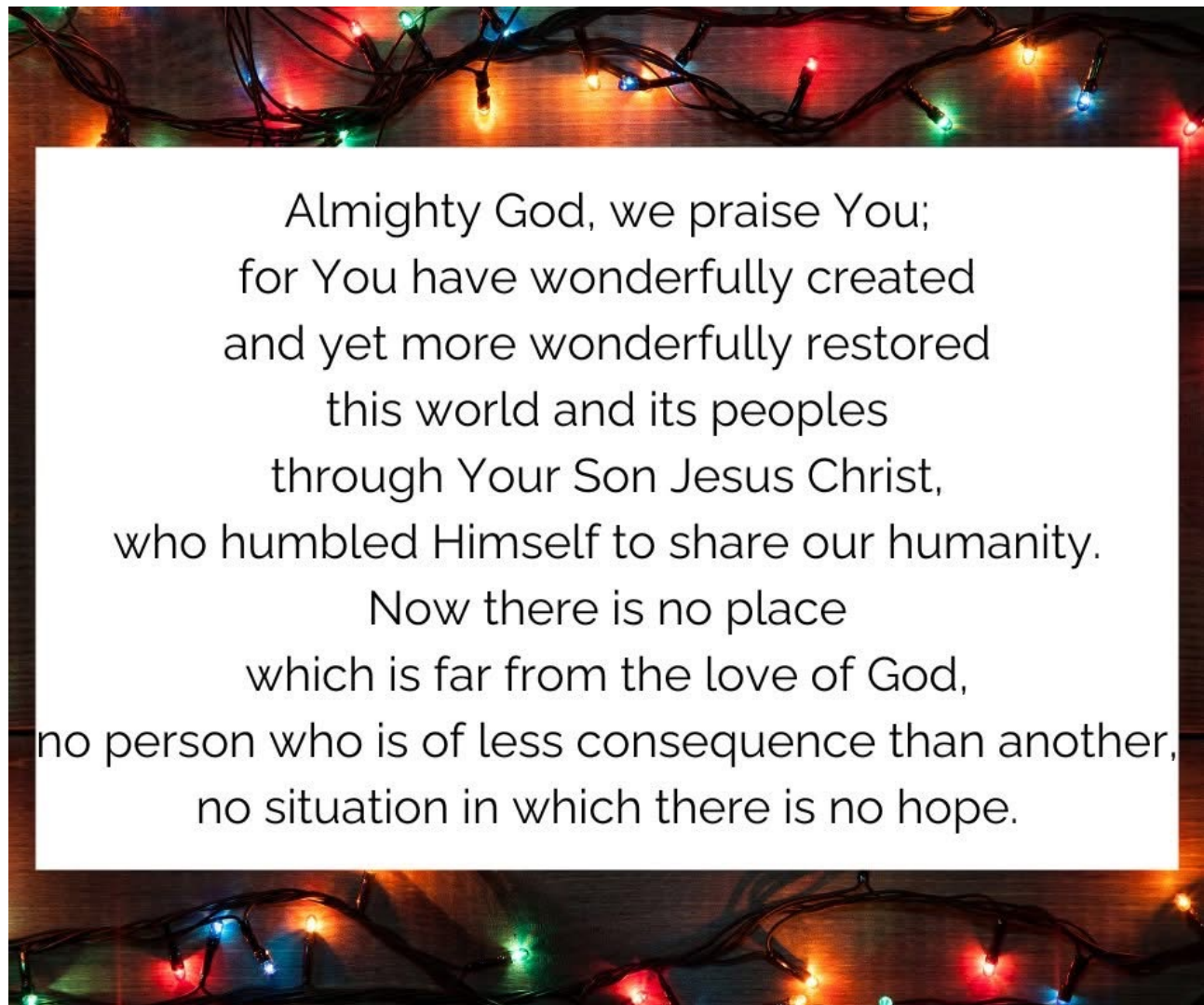
A Christian Aid supporter from County Wexford is hanging a ‘dove of peace’ on her church Christmas tree this festive season to draw attention to the humanitarian crises caused by conflicts around the world.

Valerie Power, a parishioner at St Mary's Church, Bunclody is hanging the peace symbol on the tree 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.



As the Christian Aid representative at St Mary's, Valerie organises coffee mornings and church collections to raise funds for our work. Buncloody is in the Diocese of Cashel, Ferns and Ossory

Christian Aid supports people impacted by conflict in Gaza, Lebanon and Syria. We also supports 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



Almighty God, we praise You;
for You have wonderfully created
and yet more wonderfully restored
this world and its peoples
through Your Son Jesus Christ,
who humbled Himself to share our humanity.

Now there is no place
which is far from the love of God,
no person who is of less consequence than another,
no situation in which there is no hope.

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 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 our 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 our Christmas appeal, please visit caid.ie/Christmas

Society will fail future generations unless it acts now on poverty, church leaders warn

Church leaders have urged politicians to be mindful of those less well-off in their New Year message, Adrian Rutherford writes.

They warned society will have failed future generations if it does not work strenuously to address issues such as rising child poverty.

The clerics also reflected on political developments in 2024, as well as the “pain and sorrow” caused by war and conflict as 2025 dawns.

The joint message comes from Catholic Archbishop Eamon Martin; Church of Ireland Archbishop John McDowell; Presbyterian Moderator Dr Richard Murray; Methodist President Dr John Alderdice and Rev Sarah Groves, President of the Irish Council of Churches.

The message reflects on the 25 years that have passed since the new millennium.

“The dawn of a new year gives us cause to reflect on the past 12 months and to look forward, with a little trepidation and excitement, to what lies ahead,” they said.

“It is hard to believe that in 2025 we will mark a quarter of a century since the new millennium began. At that time there was much fear that on the stroke of midnight on New Year's Eve 1999 all computer technology, and indeed the world, would grind to a halt and everything as we knew it, would end.

“Those fears were thankfully unfounded yet the world we had hoped to see emerging in this new era, with people living at peace with their neighbours, and with more kindness and respect, has sadly not been realised.

“Instead, we are now living on a planet that is shrouded in the darkness, pain and sorrow of war and violence in so many different places.

“Calls for peace, reconciliation and love for our neighbours have been ignored or unheard.”

There is also a political theme to the church leaders' message, as they reflected on developments in Irish and British politics.

However, there is also a stark warning to politicians around the need to tackle poverty in modern Ireland.

“In Northern Ireland, we are grateful to have witnessed the restoration of devolved government in the last year, with the Executive and the Assembly sitting once more at Stormont,” they said.

“In coming weeks, it is hoped that a new Irish Government will be formed, following the November Irish General Election.

“The new UK Government is also slowly bedding in and nearing the completion of its first six months in power.

“To govern means making decisions and often difficult choices.

“We continue to pray for all who hold positions of responsibility in this land and throughout the world, that they may be acutely aware of the needs of all people and especially of the poor, neglected and underprivileged, mindful particularly of the high rates of child poverty.

“We will have failed our children and grandchildren if we do not work strenuously to help and support the needs of the

next generation, which may mean being prepared to have less for ourselves so that they may have something.

“May we all, in our call to serve one another, provide a voice for the voiceless and work tirelessly for healing and peace locally and internationally, offering help, hope and encouragement to those who will come after us.”

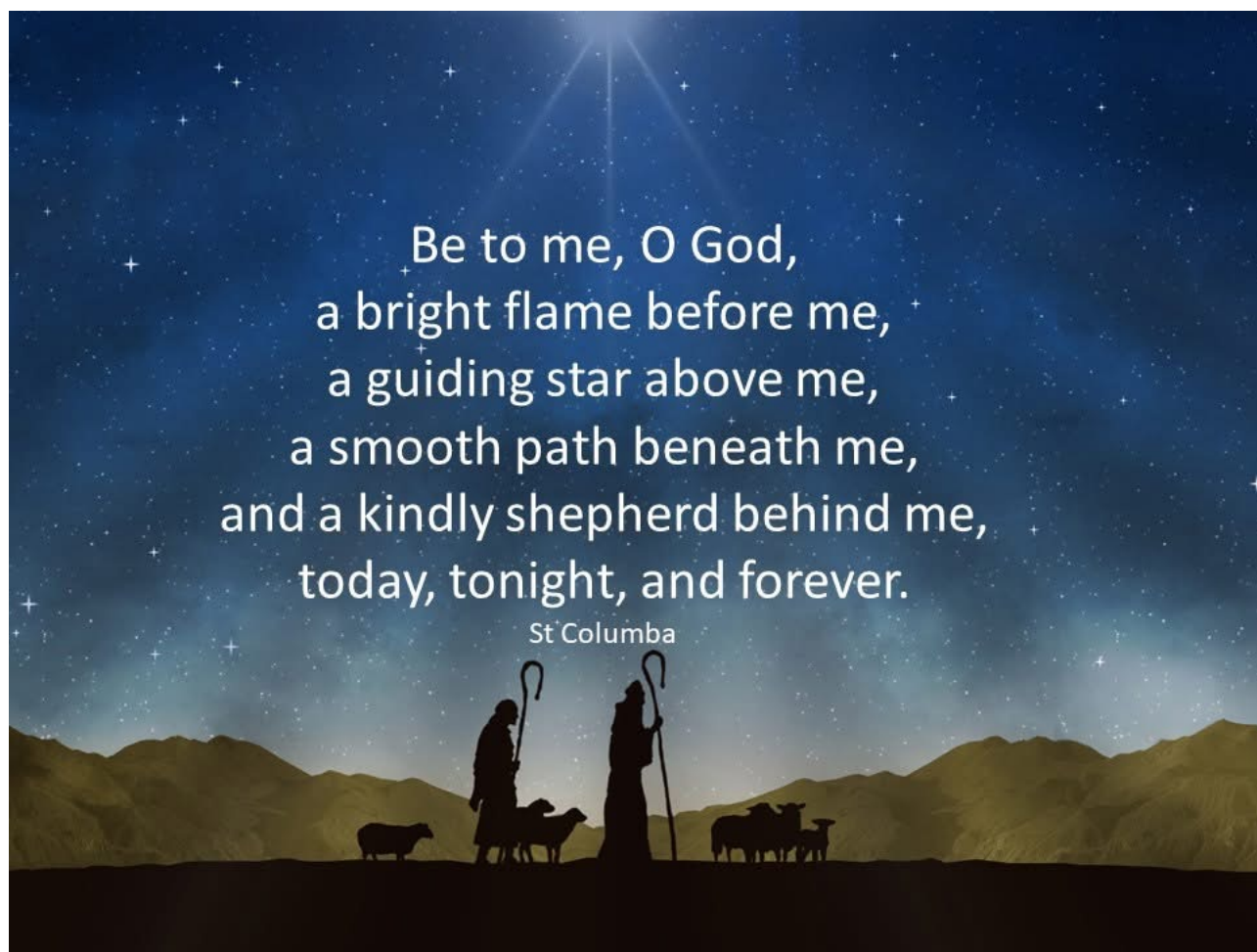
The church leaders also called for the language of hurt and division “to be confined to the past so that the words we use, and the actions we undertake, may be focused on love rather than hate, peace rather than war, light rather than darkness.”

Bishop Monahan launches Ireland's Jubilee 2025 webpage

In preparation for the Jubilee Year 2025, themed Pilgrims of Hope, which officially began on Christmas Eve at 7pm with the opening of the Holy Door at Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome, the Catholic Bishops of Ireland have launched an official Jubilee page on CatholicBishops.ie.

This dedicated page will serve as a central hub for all Jubilee-related updates, ensuring the faithful remain informed about events and activities taking place both in Ireland and around the world.

Welcoming this new resource, Bishop Fintan Monahan, the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference designate for Jubilee 2025, said: "I am delighted to introduce this Jubilee 2025



Be to me, O God,
a bright flame before me,
a guiding star above me,
a smooth path beneath me,
and a kindly shepherd behind me,
today, tonight, and forever.

St Columba

resources page! It is a comprehensive hub for all things Jubilee - offering downloadable resources, an event calendar for the year to promote and feature activities across Ireland and Rome, as well as hosting inspiring videos highlighting people and events from across the island.

"As we embark on this Jubilee Year of Hope, I encourage everyone to take part in Jubilee 2025 celebrations in whatever way possible - whether locally on the island or in Rome. The first of these events will be the celebration of Mass this weekend by Bishops in cathedrals across Ireland."

The Jubilee has its origins in an ancient biblical tradition (Leviticus). Every 50th year was celebrated as a time for

setting slaves free, for forgiving debts, and for allowing the land to rest. In our Christian tradition the Jubilee has a strong focus on reconciliation and renewal, including reaching out to people on the margins.

It is normally celebrated every 25 years, so that more people can celebrate it at least once in a lifetime. Already in Ireland, many different groups: clergy, religious various ministries and lay apostolates, are preparing to celebrate specific jubilee occasions locally and in Rome over the year ahead.

At the same time, during Jubilee 2025, the Irish Synodal Pathway will also journey with the theme of 'Hope' at its many meetings and prayerful discernment gatherings which will lead to a national assembly in Ireland in 2025.

Diocese of Down and Connor begins Jubilee Year of Hope

The Jubilee Year of Hope began on Christmas Eve, when the Holy Father officially opened the Holy Door of Saint Peter's Basilica, Rome.

Bishop Alan McGuckian SJ, launched the Jubilee year in the Diocese of Down and Connor by celebrating Mass in St Peter's Cathedral on Sunday 29th December at 3pm.

The service was also shared at -
<https://www.churchservices.tv/stpeterscathedral>



Pope Francis inspires Radio 4 listeners with a message of hope and kindness

Listeners of BBC Radio 4's Today programme heard a special message from Pope Francis on Saturday as he delivered a Thought for the Day reflecting on themes of hope, kindness, and humility.

His address marked the start of the Catholic Church's Jubilee year, which began on Christmas Eve.

Recorded in Italian and translated into English, the Pope's message included a heartfelt reflection: "A world full of hope and kindness is a more beautiful world. A society that looks to the future with confidence and treats people with respect and empathy is more humane." He also quoted British writer G.K. Chesterton, urging listeners to "take the elements of life with gratitude and not for granted".

The invitation for Pope Francis to take part came from Professor Irene Tracey, Vice Chancellor of the University of Oxford, who served as guest editor of the Today programme during the festive period. Professor Tracey, a neuroscientist, centred her edition on hope and kindness, linking these themes to her research on pain and the broader societal role of universities.

This marked the Pope's second appearance on Thought for the Day, following a 2021 address where he called for urgent action to protect the planet ahead of the COP26 climate summit. Pope Francis continues a tradition set by his predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI, who contributed to the programme in 2010 after visiting the UK.

Cathedral Calls

Dean's sit-out raises over £16,000

Dean Kenneth Hall completed his charity sit-out on Thursday last, 19 December with a steady stream of people donating money to him and his team at the Cathedral gates.

This year, the chosen charities were Air Ambulance NI, Bishops' Appeal and St. Macartin's Cathedral Outreach.

The Dean has revealed that this year's total to date was £16,117 but the fund will remain open until after Christmas.



In his thanks to all those who made donations, Dean Hall also thanked the members of the Cathedral Select Vestry and Air Ambulance volunteers who took time on a rota basis to accompany him, as well as those who brought food, tea, coffee and even hot whiskeys.

He also thanked the choir members who sang periodically throughout the day and especially towards the end of the sit-out.

'A special thank you to Andy, my verger, who stood by me attending my every need and to our Honorary Treasurer, Hope, who continually counted the collection.

Christmas in Kildare concert on RTÉ Player

RTÉ broadcast a major new television and radio programme called ‘Christmas in Kildare’, from St Brigid’s Cathedral, Kildare, on Christmas Eve on RTÉ One and RTÉ Lyric FM.

The programme is now also available to a worldwide audience on RTÉ Player.

RTÉ’s annual Christmas show is presented by Marty Whelan and Kildare native Celine Byrne. This year’s broadcast also marks the 1,500th anniversary of the death of St Brigid, Ireland’s female patron saint.

This special seasonal programme features the RTÉ Concert Orchestra conducted by Gavin Maloney, with musical guests including Bell X1’s Paul Noonan, Lisa Hannigan, Rhiannon Giddens, Méav Ní Mhaolchatha with Colm Mac Con Iomaire, Kingfishr, Dulciana, and star soprano Celine Byrne.

Commenting on the programme, the Dean of Kildare, the Very Rev Isobel Jackson, said, “I am so delighted that RTÉ have chosen our wonderful Cathedral of St Brigid for their ‘Christmas in Kildare’ broadcast. As we conclude our celebrations of Brigid 1500, we hold on to the immensely positive year with people engaging with the legacy of St Brigid and the significance of her pointing towards the Light of the World – how perfectly seasonal.”

December 31, 2024

Founded by St Brigid in 480AD, her original hilltop Church of the Oak ('Cill Dara' in Irish) gave rise to the name of the town, county and diocese of Kildare. Today the 801-year old stone cathedral lies at the heart of Kildare Town.



Kilkenny College Service of Nine Lessons and Carols in the Cathedral

Wonderful to be able to join with Kilkenny College in the Cathedral for their Service of Nine Lessons and Carols.

There have been over 1.75K views of this recording so far. You can watch the service at the link below.

<https://www.youtube.com/live/Pr5MIJa3IRo?si=EilaLeCa0FpOUWMm>

Clergy and ministry

Mediation work with paramilitaries

Series 2, episode 4 of the Derry based “Inspired to Act” is out now.

It's called "Like a really well-made hot chocolate" and features **Archdeacon Robert Miller**. In this clip, Robert tells Diane and Will how he has always approached his mediation work with paramilitaries.

The Archdeacon of Derry, Robert Miller, looks after three Church of Ireland joint parishes, [Christ church, St Peter's Culmore and Muff](#). He's a peacemaker, mediator and community activist, as well as part of the team producing the [Walled City Passion](#) every Easter. But he tells Diane and Will one special secret - how the Christian life should be "like a really well-made hot chocolate"...

You will find the full episode at
<https://inspiredtoact.buzzsprout.com/>

Webinars, music, resources, broadcasts, and books

Recalling St Stephen

In recent days the church remembered St. Stephen, first martyr of the Christian faith, who preached the message

boldly and prayed God would forgive those who condemned and stoned him.

Neither he nor any of the others appointed in Acts 6 were appointed “deacons” in the sense that bears today. Their Greek names suggest they were the leaders of the Greek-speaking community of those who believed Jesus was the Messiah in Jerusalem at that time. The only references we have to any of them after Acts 6 show them evangelising, so perhaps that is the message they have to teach us - to keep on evangelising!

St Stephen's Day - here is a further extract from BBC "Sing Carols" in 2004.

Capella Caeciliana joined 1,000 other singers in the Ulster Hall for "Good King Wenceslas" accompanied by Stephen Hamill on the Mulholland Grand Organ and Strabane Concert Brass.

The conductor and programme producer is John Anderson (1948-2024).

[<https://youtu.be/Ap6jVZXk3OA>]

Technology evokes response

**“At home recording
my Christmas Day
message for Cork's
96FM. It's all ‘home**



technology’ now”, Bishop Colton commented.

A cleric (not from Cork...) responded, “At first glance I thought you’d bought a new saddle for your bike!”

In the media

Leader of Catholic church in Ireland criticises social media stars for ‘hijacking Christianity’

The leader of Catholic church in Ireland has criticised influencers and social media stars for “hijacking Christianity” on social media to “foment discord” instead of harmony, Cian Ó Broin writes in The Irish Independent.

Eamon Martin, the Archbishop of Armagh, said negative influencers needed to be called out on their actions on social media.

"You will often find that religion is hijacked by groups for their own purposes and the message of Christianity is distorted in particular dimensions," he said.

Dr Martin was speaking at a Christmas carol service in Ardee Community School in the Parish of Ardee and Collon, Co Louth.

The Sunday Times reported that when he was asked about religious posts from celebrities like MMA star Conor McGregor and if they were affecting young men, he called for more positive role models within the Catholic faith in order to “out-influence the negative influencers”.

“Sadly, it has been the case for many, many years. We don’t have to look beyond our own country to see how sometimes religion or denominations can be used to foment discord rather than harmony,” he said.

In response to queries on Sunday by the Irish Independent, a spokesperson for Dr Martin said the archbishop was not referring to any Irish individual in his response to the question, nor did he mention anyone by name in his answer.

Earlier this month, a jury found McGregor had assaulted Nikita Hand after she took a civil case against him alleging she was raped by him on a night out, and awarded her €250,000 in damages. The jury did not find his co-accused James Lawrence had assaulted her. A judge ordered that McGregor pay his own and Ms Hand’s legal costs, which will come to more than €1 million.

Since the jury’s verdict, McGregor has written angrily several times on social media, including post in which he hit out at what he said was a “kangaroo court”, leading the judge in the case to say he was considering taking action against the fighter for contempt of court.

He has also referenced his faith in several subsequent posts, saying in one: “Fight evil with the cross” with another saying: “I am in amazing spirits! God has chosen me and I

accept! Thank you to all those who ... are supporting me in my fight ... As God as my witness.”

Dr Martin stressed that most people are able to see through the use of religious references on social media.

He said it was important that the church identifies statements to say that that is not what it teaches, adding that most people are aware of the message of Jesus Christ and the gospel.

He described this as a message promoting harmony, reconciliation, forgiveness, love and charity.

The most senior figure of the church in Ireland added that the “cult of the celebrity” has now transitioned into the world of social media.

Dr Martin called for leading Catholic thinkers out in the world of social media who are not afraid to express their faith, to influence young people.

He cited Hollywood star Mark Wahlberg as well as American bishop and YouTuber Robert Barron as two positive examples.

The archbishop added that the church is looking to create a new ‘Share the Good News’ online platform next year, which will be a digital hub for the church to spread its message.

This, he added, will “be able to in some ways compete with the sometimes very negative and dark side of the web”.

December 31, 2024

This article was updated on December 22, 2024, to reflect the response from Archbishop Martin's spokesperson.

Speaking to the soul

Short reading and a prayer - daily on this site

Church News Ireland

The publication of Church News Ireland is overseen by Very Rev Dr Houston McKelvey OBE, QVRM, TD. He may be contacted at houstonmckelvey@mac.com

Church News Ireland

www.churchnewsireland.org

Link in Monday through Saturday from early morning

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