

Church News Ireland



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Image of the day – Nativity llamas



Two llamas were given roles as the wise men's camels in Exeter Cathedral's nativity play.

Half brothers Harry and George were given the parts for the Exeter Nativity in Exeter Cathedral on the Sunday before Christmas.

Maggie Jee, founder of Llamas4Good, said: "They absolutely love it and the cathedral love them. They always say they're the stars of the show."

Harry and George are therapy llamas and often get involved in the community.

'Centre of attention'

"Harry and George are the camels or, as the cathedral like to call them, the llamels," said Miss Jee.

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They were both equipped with pack saddles adapted with cushions to create their humps and were led by the three wise men around the cathedral.

"They absolutely love it," said Miss Jee. "They love being the centre of attention."

Harry first took part in the Nativity in 2021 and George joined him in 2022.

The pair were taken to the cathedral before the event so that they would be familiar with the space before the Nativity.

"I mean obviously, for us, the most important thing is that they are happy with everything," said Miss Jee who added that the brothers were just as popular with the adults as the children.

"At the end the children usually come up and meet them and stroke them," she said.

"They have a sort of calming aura." Thanks to BBC and Exeter Cathedral

News

Blaze at Co Antrim church on Christmas Day caused 'colossal smoke damage'

Blaze at Co Antrim church on Christmas Day caused 'colossal smoke damage'



Assessing the fire damage at All Saints' Parish Church, Antrim, are, from left: Archdeacon Stephen McBride, Vicar of Antrim; the Rt Rev George Davison, Bishop of Connor; the Mayor of Antrim and Newtownabbey, Councillor Neil Kelly; Mrs Christine Kelly; the Rev Claire Thompson, Curate Assistant; and Cecil Barton, Church Sexton.

A fire which broke out in All Saints' Parish Church in Antrim following the Christmas morning service has left the 16th century building in a "terrible state", Garrett Hargan reports in the Belfast Telegraph.

It is hoped the blaze has not caused any major structural damage.

Smoke damage to the interior of the church, however, is 'colossal,' the vicar of Antrim, Archdeacon Stephen McBride, has said.

A GoFundMe page has been set up to raise funds to repair the historic church.

The fire was discovered on Friday December 27 when one of the parish flower arrangers went into the building to put in some flowers for the Sunday services.

Archdeacon McBride said: "When she opened the door she was met with the smell of smoke. On opening the inner doors, she discovered that the church was filled with dense smoke.

"Thankfully she did not attempt to enter the building, but phoned for the Fire Service who were at the church within minutes."

Archdeacon McBride said it is thought that one of the candles at the Massereene Chapel reignited after the Christmas morning service, although the church is awaiting a report from the Fire Service to verify this.

Due to the doors being closed, the fire was starved of oxygen and burned itself out.

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“The damage is very localised and we are hopeful there is no major structural damage, but will await an architect’s closer inspection,” Archdeacon McBride said.

“However, the smoke damage is colossal. The smoke even managed to get inside cupboards that were shut.

“Having just celebrated Christmas with some very uplifting services and also being featured recently on UTV’s Hidden Places Northern Ireland, it is so sad to now look at our church building in such a terrible state.”

The Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev George Davison, has visited All Saints’, and was joined by the Mayor and Mayoress of Antrim and Newtownabbey, Councillor Neill Kelly and his wife Christine. Archbishop John McDowell, who served his curacy in Antrim Parish, hopes to visit later in the week.

The archdeacon said the parish had also been delighted to welcome local MP Robin Swann to the service held in the Parish Centre on the Sunday after the fire.

Archdeacon McBride commented: “When Robin came in through the door on Sunday morning and hugged me, it is a moment I will never forget.”

He added: “The messages of support have been so encouraging and uplifting and help ease our pain.”

All Saints Parish Church, Antrim - Fire Damage Repair Fund -

Go Fund Me account

Short write up and link for donors at -

<https://www.gofundme.com/f/all-saints-parish-church-antrim-repair-fund>



Dublin Airport aircraft blessing: New chaplain continues 77-year Irish Catholic custom

Dublin Airport's tradition of blessing aircraft entered a new chapter in 2024 with the appointment of a Nigerian-born priest as chaplain, ensuring the continuation of a custom that dates back 77 years, Patrick J Passmore of Catholic News Agency writes.

The ceremony, which was moved from its traditional Christmas Day timing to earlier in December this year, maintains its role as a significant moment in the airport's calendar. The arrival of Father Justin Obijuru made this possible after a six-month vacancy following the departure of longtime chaplain Father Des Doyle.

"I'm quite excited to take up this particular role as chaplain," said Obijuru, who is currently pursuing a master's degree at Maynooth Pontifical University.

"When the appointment came, I was really happy; it gave me a sense of belonging."

Earlier concerns about new aviation security protocols threatening the ceremony's future were resolved in April when the Dublin Airport Authority (DAA) confirmed its continuation. The DAA emphasized the inclusive nature of this year's ceremony by inviting representatives from various faiths.

Doyle, who served as chaplain for 16 years, recalled conducting the blessings each year after the final Christmas Mass.

"It always had a tremendous positive reaction," he said. He noted how the ceremony has adapted to reflect changes in modern Irish society while maintaining its core purpose.

The blessing's rich history is documented in Ireland's national archives.

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RTÉ, the national broadcaster, preserves notable footage from May 1967 showing a guard of honor formed by Aer Lingus flight and ground crews lining the tarmac. The silent newsreel captures the local parish priest, Father Daniel Barrett, performing the blessing alongside Father John Fenelon, the airport chaplain. A choir appears, singing as a litany of Irish saints is recited. The depicted May ceremony would be the last of its kind, as the blessing would move to Christmas Day later that year.

The Irish Film Institute's archives include additional historical documentation, notably a 1962 Radharc Series documentary about Catholic saints and the Aer Lingus fleet.

Obijuru's appointment and the ceremony's adaptation to current airport operations demonstrate the continued evolution of this distinctive Dublin Airport tradition, which began in 1947 with the blessing of a single Aer Lingus aircraft.

Patrick J Passmore lives on the north coast of Ireland. He has worked with St Brigid Media on a range of projects as a consultant and writer.

Bishop of Down & Dromore's song for the year ahead

Bishop David McClay writes : Every so often, Christian songwriters or hymnwriters pen a powerful song that articulates what the Church needs to be saying to the world in that hour.

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I believe that the song 'I Speak Jesus', is one of these and a song for our diocese in 2025. Based on biblical truths, it captures how the Church should position itself to speak clearly and powerfully the name of Jesus over all situations.

We have always been tasked to speak the powerful and beautiful name of Jesus. To speak his name over darkness in our communities, over strongholds in our world; to speak his name over fear in our streets, over anxiety in our homes and over sadness in our lives.

It is a privilege tells others about Jesus, proclaiming Him as the source of internal peace, broken chains, freedom from fear, and healing.

As the year turns, I am asking every parish in 2025 to purposefully reconnect with every home within their parish boundaries and to declare hope, healing and freedom to every corner of their community. I invite all of us to 'Speak Jesus' without hesitation.

This song has been on my heart for a while. I warmly commend it to you, both as a rallying cry and as a source of encouragement.

I pray that in the year ahead, you too will discover peace in the presence of Jesus and power in His name.

Have a happy and blessed 2025.

Google - Lyrics I Speak Jesus' or try -
https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=i+speak+jesus

Cathedral Calls



Christmas trees at Westminster Abbey

Service of Lessons and Carols from Westminster Abbey on You Tube Already viewed by 114K

Service from Monday 23rd December 2024 is on You Tube at -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6aelL5TPmuQ&t=205s>

Clergy and ministry

Donaghadee Parish Church bereavement communication

The parish communication - It is with sadness that Donaghadee Parish Church announce the death of Deborah Jane Gamble, wife of our Rector the Revd Ian R Gamble.

After several months of illness Debbie was called home in the early hours of St Stephen's Day. It has been a difficult time for her family, but they have been aware of God's ever prevailing grace.

Revd Gamble said, "Debbie was a loving and supportive wife and an amazing mother to our two sons. To our congregation, a huge thank you for the care shown to us as a family during Debbie's illness, especially since going into hospital in September and over these final weeks in palliative care.

"For Debbie, Donaghadee Parish was a wonderful church family, with amazing friends. She always counted it a privilege to live in the beautiful Rectory and share in using her gifts of piano, flute and voice in leading worship to honour her Lord.

"Thank you to Bishop David for his diligent and gentle pastoral care for Debbie and our family during these months. Debbie always enjoyed his visits and prayers.

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Thank you to the Donaghadee Parish team for looking after our worship and congregational life during these difficult days.”

Bishop David said, “As a diocese we assure Ian and his two sons Luke and Jonny of our sympathy and prayers.

"Over many years Debbie contributed so much to the life of Donaghadee Parish through her love of music and leadership in the worship and music ministry in the parish where she in turn was loved.

"May the God of all grace strengthen and comfort those who loved Debbie most."

Debbie's funeral is on Thursday 2 January 2025 at 11.30am in Donaghadee Parish Church.

“Because of the tender mercy of our God,
the dawn from on high will break upon us,
to shine upon those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.” The Benedictus

Eoghan Harris on Canon George Salter's lifelong love of the Irish language

Eoghan writes - Canon George Salter's lifelong love of the Irish language suffused his funeral service at Rathmichael Parish church last Friday - all three officiating clergy, Dr Michael Jackson, Archbishop of Dublin, Rev Brian McAvoy MBE, and Rev Sean Hanily,

Rector of Rathmichael, spoke some some Irish in their tributes to George Salter.

Not surprisingly as the had drummed Irish into two of them so well as young clergy that Archbishop Jackson, from Armagh has a nice 'blas' and Reverend Brian McAvoy, even after 17 years in the RAF was still fluent in Irish today.

If I emphasise the Irish language it's because George always spoke in Irish to me when I visited him every summer in Castletownshend, his beloved village, where he had first learned Irish at his local national school attended by Catholic and Protestant alike.

What we mostly spoke about was the mixed experience of West Cork Protestants from the Ne Temere decree of 1911 which made 'mixed marriages' more difficult, from the fact that Michael Collins's neighbours and friends were Protestants so that he condemned the Dunmanway shooting of 14 local Protestants.

We spoke the large exodus fearful Protestants, the later return of most of them and the current good relations between Protestant and Catholic in West Cork, which we agreed were now the best in the Republic of Ireland. But mostly we talked about the timidity of the Church of Ireland, its cagey policy of "keeping the head down, and its reluctance until recently to commemorate the Dunmanway dead.

He was mordant about a group of southern Protestant appeasers who tried to curry favour with nationalist historians by fostering denial about the difficulties provincial

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and rural Protestants suffered both in the past and more recently during moments of crisis like Bloody Sunday and H Blocks, when some got a .303 bullet in the post just to remind they might be held hostage for unionist behavior. Instead of challenging this pernicious pressure, the church of Ireland's reaction was to keep the head down or attempt to appease.



George particularly enjoyed my recalling how after 100 Protestants, signed a letter to the Irish Times- presumably in an attempt to distance themselves from northern Unionists- saying how happy they were in the Republic.

Senator John Horgan replied with a letter wondering if they were that happy why they felt it necessary to write to the Irish Times. saying so! Against this background of keeping the head down, George's decision to go public in the film *An Tost Fada* (the Long Silence) about sectarian incidents in West Cork in 1922 was a fearless blow against the culture of silence and appeasing the majority Catholic Nationalist tradition.

His decision was welcomed by many protestants, but made others nervous of a nationalist backlash. In fact it was warmly welcomed by most Catholics, who much prefer Protestants to speak out for themselves. George lanced the boil of silence. His truth set us free. My condolences to his daughter's Bridget and Kate, son Andrew and all his extended family. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam uasal cróga.

Webinars, music, resources, broadcasts, and books

Book : Women of the Nativity

'Women of the Nativity' is a collection of nine imagined stories told from the perspective of women, recreating the events of the Nativity.

Written by Paula Gooder.

Accompanied by paintings from Ally Barrett.

Women of the Nativity is a collection of nine imagined stories told from the perspective of women, written by Paula Gooder, recreating the events of the Nativity. The stories take us on a journey through the themes of Advent into the events of Christmas and beyond.

The voices of biblical characters including Mary and her cousin Elizabeth combine with those of imagined figures to tell the ancient story. As we revisit the familiar scenes afresh through their words, the wonder of the incarnation and its consequences for good come to life in a new way.

Each story is accompanied by a painting by Ally Barrett, who also illustrated Paula Gooder's Women of Holy Week.

For a limited time, digital copies of all nine paintings can be downloaded for non-commercial use only until February 2025, via the Church House Publishing website

Explore the content below and find out more about the Women of the Nativity

Book and e-book, available now at Church House Publishing.

Listen to unabridged audio versions of all nine stories now.

Find out more at cofe.io/WomenNativity

From Magherafelt first Radio Ulster service for 2025

A service for the first Sunday of the New Year, led by the Revd Dr Andrew Campbell of St Swithin's Church, Magherafelt, will be broadcast on BBC Radio Ulster and Radio Foyle on Sunday, 5th January, just after the 10 o'clock news that morning.

The bell of St Swithin's was one of the first sounds listeners to the new Radio Ulster heard when it began fifty years ago. The broadcast will also be available for listening back afterwards here on the BBC website.

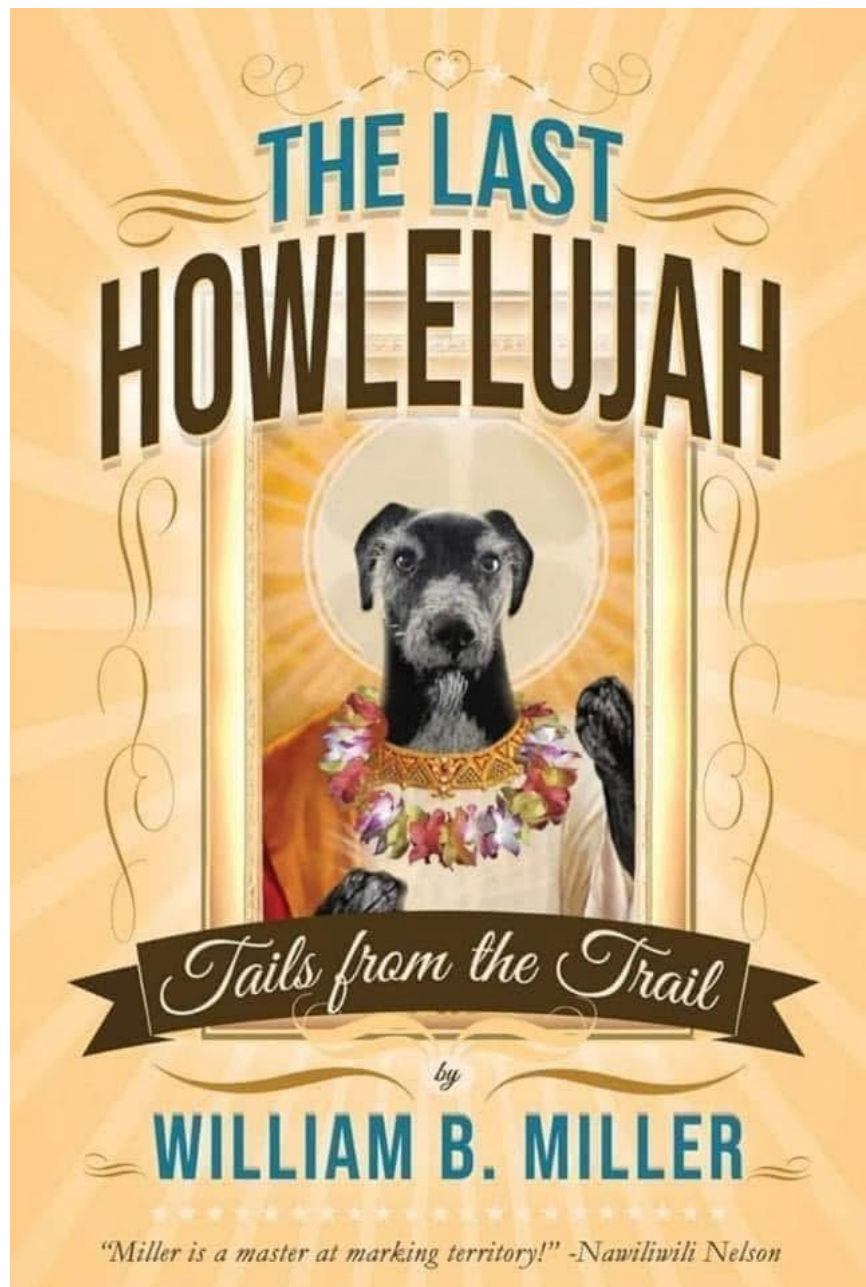
Book: The Last Howlelujah celebrates all things canine and divine

A new book by popular Episcopal priest William B. “Father Bill” Miller celebrates all things canine and divine.

Episcopalians across the USA followed Fr. Bill and his inspiring canine Nawiliwili

Nelson who had been diagnosed with terminal cancer as they emBARKed on a 5,000 mile road trip from New Orleans to Las Vegas.

On a paw and a prayer, the dynamic duo raised countless funds for animal shelters and brought thousands of people together to celebrate our common bond with our canine friends.



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Funny, profound, and heartwarming, *The Last Howlelujah* offers “Tails from the Trail” that will delight and refresh your soul. Saint Wili of Woofster, a dog given up for dead, offers a powerful witness that, by God’s grace, it’s never too late for a miracle.

The Last Howlelujah is available on Amazon US

Heritage

Bram Stoker fan of Harland & Wolff

The ashes of Bram Stoker, author of *Dracula*, are kept at Golders Green cemetery in London.

He died a few days after the loss of RMS *Titanic*. He had visited the shipyard of Harland & Wolff in 1907 and was most impressed, writing an article on his favourable impressions.

By coincidence, also at Golders Green are the ashes of Alexander Montgomery Carlisle, a remarkable man who was shipyard manager at the time of Stoker's visit.

Carlisle was responsible for building RMS *Olympic* & *Titanic*. At the time of Stoker's visit to Belfast, Carlisle lived in Elmwood House, opposite Queen's College, having previously lived at 18 College Gardens, a short distance from Friar's Bush cemetery.

In the media

Zelensky says Ukrainian priests have been targeted by Russia

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has revealed the devastating toll of Russia's invasion on Ukraine's churches.

In an interview with CBN, the Ukrainian leader reported that Russian forces had killed 50 priests and destroyed approximately 700 churches since the full-scale invasion began.

The 46-year-old highlighted the brutality faced by Ukrainian clergy, describing how many were captured, tortured or killed for refusing to align with the Russian Orthodox Church under Patriarch Kirill.

"Priests are meant to serve people and God," he stated, condemning the violence inflicted on those who resisted Russian demands.

He also highlighted the systematic targeting of churches, which have been bombed, burned, or attacked with missiles wherever Russian troops advanced.

The destruction extends beyond churches.

As of late October 2024, the Ministry of Culture and Strategic Communications reported that over 2,100 cultural

infrastructure facilities across Ukraine have been damaged or destroyed due to Russia's aggression. This includes schools, libraries, and heritage sites, further underscoring the broad impact of the war on Ukraine's cultural and spiritual identity.

Zelensky's remarks come amid widespread support among Ukrainians for establishing a unified Orthodox Church independent of Moscow. Over 60% of Ukrainians favor such a move, reflecting their desire to preserve national sovereignty and religious independence amid the ongoing conflict.

The United Nations has consistently emphasized the need for peace in Ukraine while condemning the ongoing war as a violation of international law and the UN Charter.

Russian forces accuse Ukrainian religious leaders, particularly those not aligned with the Russian Orthodox Church under Patriarch Kirill, of aiding the Ukrainian government or intelligence agencies. These accusations often include unverified claims of harboring weapons or organizing resistance against Russian occupation.

Poem for today

The Forge

In The Forge, Seamus Heaney captures the blacksmith's art as a timeless symbol of creativity and resilience. A celebration of craft and transformation.



All I know is a door into the dark.
Outside, old axles and iron hoops rusting;
Inside, the hammered anvil's short-pitched ring,
The unpredictable fantail of sparks
Or hiss when a new shoe toughens in water.
The anvil must be somewhere in the centre,
Horned as a unicorn, at one end and square,
Set there immovable: an altar
Where he expends himself in shape and music.
Sometimes, leather-aproned, hairs in his nose,

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He leans out on the jamb, recalls a clatter
Of hoofs where traffic is flashing in rows;
Then grunts and goes in, with a slam and flick
To beat real iron out, to work the bellows.

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**

Please recommend to your friends

