



Work on C S Lewis church before major anniversary

Work is underway to complete urgent repairs to the roof of a landmark church in East Belfast with strong connections to C.S. Lewis. St Marks, Dundela, which this month celebrates 140 years since its

consecration, has suffered leaks and

internal damage to the church building over the past few years, and is delighted to have received a grant of £5,000



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from the National Churches Trust to assist in completing the repairs and keeping the building dry.

St Marks has many connections to the famous author C.S. Lewis, who was baptised in the church, and it is hoped that the roof works will be completed before a dramatic flower festival celebrating his life and faith at the end of September. His grandfather was rector, and there is a memorial window to his parents donated by CS Lewis and his brother. The boss on the door to the former rectory was in the shape of a lion's head.

The 150 feet high tower of St Marks is visible across Belfast, and the church is used by the local community for services, and as a concert venue for visiting choirs and local schools. There are regular church tours for visitors interested in C.S. Lewis, who spent his childhood in East Belfast. He visited his grandfather in the Old Rectory of St Marks, with its famous lion doorknob, said to have inspired Aslan, the lion in the Narnia series.

The repair works are due to last five weeks and will replace slates, gutters and damaged stonework, protecting the building against further damage from the elements.

The Rector, the Rev Helene T Steed, said: "It is a privilege to worship in this wonderful Grade A listed building, but it has its maintenance challenges. We are so grateful to the National Churches Trust for partnering with us and providing this grant. We hope to welcome hundreds of visitors to celebrate completion of the work and enjoy music, talks, readings, refreshments and magnificent floral displays on the theme 'A Seed is Sown: A Celebration of C.S. Lewis and Faith in Harvest-tide'."

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For more information on the Flower Festival, which runs from Friday 28th to Sunday 30th September, please visit <http://dundela.down.anglican.org>

Church must be unafraid to engage difficult questions - Bishop of Derry

Faced with daunting cultural challenges, the Church must engage in difficult discussions rather than seeking quick answers, said Bishop Donal McKeown of Derry at one of the local opening Masses for the World Meeting of Families.

The bishop offered prayers “that this week will inspire dioceses, parishes and families to build community in the face of an epidemic of loneliness.”

“I pray that faith communities will be places of God’s hope in a frightened world,” he continued. “I pray that churches will promote a gracious way of having difficult conversations in a world where harsh words often seem to dominate.”

Held every three years at a different location, the World Meeting of Families focuses on marriage and family as the foundation of society and the Church. The theme for this year’s event is “The Gospel of family, joy for the world.” Some 37,000 people from across the globe are expected to attend the Masses, discussions and services held over the next few days, with even larger crowds anticipated for Pope Francis’ arrival at the end of the week.

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St. Eugene's Cathedral in Derry

Masses to launch the World Meeting of Families were held simultaneously in the 26 Dioceses of Ireland on Aug. 21. Bishop McKeown delivered the homily at the opening Mass in Derry, at St. Eugene's Cathedral.

McKeown encouraged those attending the gathering this week to discuss major social questions, such as how to promote home environments where young people will thrive, offer healthy role models, defend the weakest in society, and develop a person-centered economy.

He said he hopes Pope Francis will ask these difficult questions when he arrives in Ireland for the final days of the World Meeting of Families.

“I hope he will ask awkward questions and speak the truth in love about how the Church needs to repent and equip itself

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if it is to be a credible witness of God's mercy and love in 2018," McKeown said.

"I hope he will encourage civil society to look beyond the gloss and the jingles if it is to cherish all the children of the country equally. I hope and pray that Church and state learn from the mistakes of the past but not be trapped by only looking backwards."

The Derry bishop warned that the Church must remember its mission of service, in imitation of Christ.

"Power corrupts and nourishes arrogance," he said, adding that "Tired, hollow mantras and self-righteous condemnations serve no-one. Young people are not inspired by angry adults."

Authentic witness is what will reach people and draw them to Christ, the bishop said. And while the "call to sanctity and to self-sacrificing heroism, to chastity and faithfulness" may not always be welcomed by society, it is the Church's duty to proclaim the truth as it "seeks to play a positive and prophetic role in civic society."

In a world where so many families are broken by damaged relationships, illness, poverty, and violence, McKeown said, the World Meeting of Families is a chance for reflection.

"It is not a time for quick, smart answers but for thoughtful listening. It is a moment of divine grace where we can together seek the truth that alone can set us free."

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Church Lads' and Church Girls' Brigade lead Superheros week for Lisburn children

Around 70 children tried their hand at being superheroes at the Christ Church Parish, Lisburn, Bible Week, which ran each evening from August 6-10.

'The Incredibles' themed week was led by Victoria Jackson, Development Officer with the Church Lads' and Church Girls' Brigade (CLCGB), who was also involved in the superhero training academy in St Michael's, Belfast, earlier each day.

And Victoria proved herself to be quite the Mrs Incredible (her role in the clubs) during the course of a busy week!

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“We were really pleased with the turnout,” said Victoria. “We had an average of 70 children each evening, and the team worked well together. All the leaders rose to the occasion. It gave everybody a real boost.”

Leaders in the Parish were supported by leaders from the Christ Church branch of the Boys’ Brigade.

Through superhero training, puppetry, verses, team challenges, stories and crafts, the young people came to know the Incredible Jesus. Winning teams each evening had the opportunity to ‘gunge’ the leaders!

Victoria said: “It was a very busy week but I really enjoyed it.”

East Belfast CAP course will enable students to manage their money



CAP (Christians Against Poverty) Centre Manager, James Myles, introduces the CAP Money Student Course which will run in East Belfast in early September. This will be the third time it has run in the diocese.

The transition from school to university can be one of the most challenging any young person will face in their lives, especially when it comes to them realising that they now

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have financial independence. Shifting from managing weekly 'pocket money' to handling lump sums in their thousands would be a challenge for anyone, never mind a student. The CAP Money Student Course is designed to help with that transition.

The CAP Money Course is a money management course that teaches budgeting skills and a simple, cash-based money system that really works. Students face one of the biggest budgeting challenges out there: an irregular income of termly loans/grants, long summer holidays with no guaranteed income, house and bills sharing, negotiating student loans and overdrafts. There are also a lot of temptations vying to help part them from their money.

The CAP Money Student Course is a short and practical course that will help students keep control of their finances while they are at university. It teaches the CAP Money Management System alongside vital information about student debt. It also provides information on choosing the best student bank account, how to work out and live on a budget, reducing expenditure, cost-saving tips and planning for the future. Those who attend the course also get access to the invaluable online CAP budgeting system, which will enable them to manage their finances and flag up any potential dangers for the

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duration of their student lives.

Here are some comments following the first two courses:

“The nicest part of learning the CAP Money course is that I finally feel like I am in control of the money rather than it being in control of me. The three account system made it so much easier to work out what was going on, and because of it, I have been able to half my student loan!” – (N)

“The best thing about the CAP Money Course is the ease of which it will help me to keep track of where my money is going; this will enable me to manage my money which is vital when you are a student!” (L)

“The course has encouraged me to assess my finances more honestly. The CAP budgeting system will be invaluable in the years to come.” (P)

From a parent: “It was the best thing my daughter did before going to Uni. She even has money left after her first year!” (E)

The CAP Money Student Course is being facilitated by East & South Belfast churches. It is being held on 4–5 September at Willowfield Parish Church Halls, 290 Woodstock Road, Belfast. It begins at 7.30pm and ends at 9.00pm.

To register for a place, log on to capmoney.org, select ‘UK’ and enter the postcode BT6 8FE.

There is no charge for attending the course but participants need to be available for both evenings.

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For further details please email jamesmyles@capuk.org or phone 07599 379839.

Village of Knock gets ready for Pope's visit

Bedecked in bunting, flags and tens of thousands of flowers, the small village of Knock in the west of Ireland is quickly preparing for the arrival of Pope Francis.

The excitement has been sweeping across the Co Mayo village since the Pontiff's visit was confirmed in June - and with more than 45,000 people expected to line the streets, the locals have been working around the clock.

Around one-and-a-half million pilgrims visit Knock Shrine every year to see the site where some 15 people witnessed an apparition of the Virgin Mary, St Joseph and St John the Evangelist in August 1879.

With just days to go before the Papal visit, Knock is bedecked in the Vatican colours and Pope Francis' head appears on flags, posters, coffee mugs and fridge magnets.

The Pope's visit will last around 80 minutes and will include a tour around the village and a visit to the Apparition Chapel before he addresses the crowd from a stage.

Fr Richard Gibbons, who has been the parish priest of Knock and rector of Knock Shrine for six years, has been instrumental in the huge planning operation.

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From tree cutting, to painting and deciding on water locations, Fr Gibbons described the practicalities of preparing for a Pope visit.

"It has been absolutely hectic since we got notification officially in June," he said.

"Everyone has put in 110% and wanted to help in any way they can.

"We're pretty much ready, there are a few bits and pieces to put in place - but we are getting down to signing off on a lot of things.

"It goes from tree cutting to how many people you have to put in place, to bringing in the pilgrims to water locations, grass cutting and medical locations, security, painting and food, accommodation and parking - there's a plethora of stuff to do.

"Before the Pope arrives there will be music, song and prayer. Then when he gets to Knock, he will go inside the

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Apparition Chapel for a private prayer where he will light a candle for families and then he will present gold rosary beads to Our Lady and he will come out and go to the staged area where he will address the crowd.

"After he leaves, we will have the open air mass at the Shrine.

"The excitement is palpable and everyone is getting their place ready and cleaned.

"People are just excited in anticipation of this visit as it means so much to them.

"There's a sense of joyfulness as well.

"No one ever imagines they will be lucky enough to welcome a Pope to the place where they are in charge of.

"I'm honoured and excited myself about it. It's a tremendous honour for anyone to welcome the Holy Father as it recognises the work of the Shrine and we've done a lot of work over the years in terms of renewing the Shrine and refurbishing the Basilica."

Their annual Novena - devotional praying in public and private - ends this week before Knock goes into lockdown while a team spends three days putting the infrastructure in place.

Anne Lavin, head of grounds horticulture department, said that more than 50,000 flowers have been planted around the village ahead of the Pontiff's visit on Sunday.

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Dahlias, begonias, lobelias and lavender are among the colourful display of flowers that spill across the church grounds.

Ms Lavin has worked in the Knock Shrine's horticultural team for almost 40 years and was there for the last Papal visit in 1979.

A team of 20 staff have been working around the clock battling the hot sun and heavy rain over the last few weeks.

She said: "The gardening team are a jack of all trades, we pick up the litter, sweeping, tend to the candles, clean the toilets, cut the grass and hedges, we are the dream team.

"The team have all been doing their bit and everyone is putting in extra time.

"We've had crazy heat and now belting rain over the last couple so that takes its own toll.

"It will be amazing to know Pope Francis will see our work."

In August 1879, around 15 people from the village saw a light coming from the parish church and saw the apparition which lasted around two hours.

Each of the witnesses were asked to give a testimony to a commission of enquiry that was set in the months after the apparition.

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Maria Casey, head of marketing and communications at the pilgrimage site, said that the witnesses' testimonies will be read out as part of the Papal visit.

She added: "Behind the scenes there is a huge amount of work - from the Liturgy team, gardening team and the choir. Everyone is working really hard.

"It's a huge logistical operation and the pressure is really on."

Tickets for the Pope visit went on sale at 5am and sold out in less than two hours.

The Pontiff will travel through the crowd of 45,000 people in the Popemobile while local parishioners will get first preference of where they will stand.

John Prendergast, a business owner in Knock, has lived in the village all his life.

He proudly shows off a large statue of Pope Francis among his religious merchandise.

He said: "We are all really looking forward to the Pope coming, I'm told he's a man of great, great faith.

"The whole community is very excited about his visit.

"For the past three weeks it's been lots of decorating and flags going up. It's been marvellous.

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"There will be lots of security and a number of the roads are closing too.

"There will be tens of thousands of people coming to Knock to see the Pope, it will be extraordinary."

