



*Minister of State Malcolm Noonan, Gavan Woods Administrator St Patrick's Cathedral, Minister Darragh O'Brien and the Very Revd William Morton Dean of St Patrick's.*

## **One million thanks from St Patrick's**

€1 million has been allocated to Saint Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin, to ensure completion of repair of the main roof.

The funding was announced yesterday by Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Darragh O'Brien, TD and Minister of State for Heritage and Electoral Reform, Malcolm Noonan, TD.

Commenting on the announcement, the Dean of Saint Patrick's Cathedral, the Very Reverend Dr William Morton, said: "My gratitude to the Department is immeasurable for the kindness behind this major grant of €1million to the Roof project of Saint Patrick's Cathedral."

"This most welcome donation towards this essential work will ensure that the Cathedral is conserved and continues to serve as one of Ireland's top listed buildings in terms of heritage and culture in the widest sense - ecclesiastically, musically, architecturally, and economically - as a destination ever increasing in popularity in the higher regions of visitors' 'must see' list in Dublin,".

"Saint Patrick's Cathedral offers a rich and compelling cultural experience, and this grant strikes a chord of optimism that 2021 and beyond will augur well in terms of the return of visitors - national and international - whom we look forward to welcoming to our vibrant cathedral community. "

"I wish to offer my deepest thanks to Minister Darragh O'Brien, Minister of State in his department, Malcolm Noonan, and former Minister of Heritage, Josepha Madigan, for all their much appreciated help and support."



## **Belfast's Black Santa 2020 – the annual sit-out begins**

Flanked by two Bishops - Connor and Down & Dromore - the Dean of Belfast, the Very Rev Stephen Forde, began his annual charity sit-out on the steps of St Anne's Cathedral early yesterday, December 17.

Dean Forde is Belfast's fifth Black Santa – the tradition was started by Dean Sammy Crooks in 1976 and maintained by successive deans – Jack Shearer, Houston McKelvey and John Mann.

This year is particularly challenging for Dean Forde and his team, as the pandemic restrictions mean footfall in Donegall Street, where Black Santa stands daily with his barrel, is likely to be dramatically reduced.

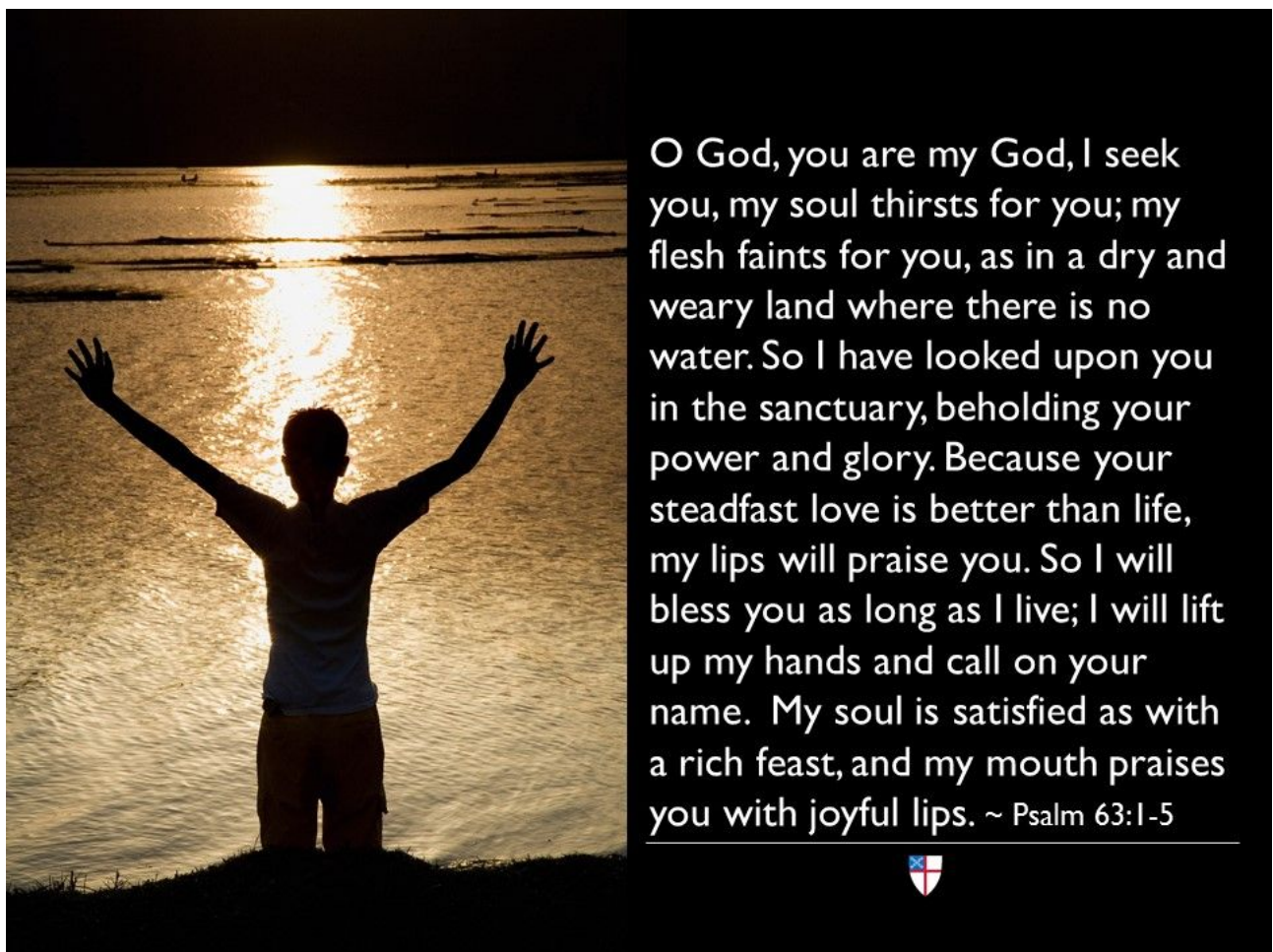


However, a much improved [online presence](#), generously supported by PWC, means that Black Santa can be seen, in a virtual sense, in every home via his dedicated [website](#).

Dean Forde was joined on the morning of day one of the sit-out by the Rt Rev George Davison, Bishop of Connor, and the Rt Rev David McClay, Bishop of Down and Dromore. Cathedral Canons and staff will keep Black Santa company on the steps until the 2020 sit-out finishes on Christmas Eve.

Spirits were high on the first day and plenty of people made donations as they walked or drove by. There was coffee and shortbread, photographs and interviews.

Around 200 charities are set to benefit from the annual appeal. This year, Dean Forde has chosen to focus on



O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. So I will bless you as long as I live; I will lift up my hands and call on your name. My soul is satisfied as with a rich feast, and my mouth praises you with joyful lips. ~ Psalm 63:1-5



charities supporting people with mental health issues in the face of the current pandemic, in addition to a wide range of other needs.

If you are in the city centre, please consider stopping by Belfast Cathedral – or pay a visit to the [Black Santa website](#) – and support the Dean and his team as they raise funds for those in need across Northern Ireland. You can also donate by text – text SANTA to 70660 to donate £10!

## **Greystones volunteers bring Christmas Dinner to city centre homeless**

St Patrick's Parish and National School in Greystones joined forces to bring the spirit of Christmas to Dublin's city centre yesterday, Sunday December 13. They served a hot Christmas dinner to about 300 homeless people in partnership with Dublin City Mission at The Light House centre on Pearse Street.

The parish has had a connection with the Light House since the beginning of lockdown when school principal Rachel Harper volunteered there to ensure that those experiencing homelessness could receive hot meals at a time when footfall in the city had decreased dramatically.

In the run up to Christmas 2020 they launched an appeal and the parish and school communities responded magnificently. Donations to a recent parish gift day funded the meal and school parents donated winter essentials (socks, underwear, chocolate, tooth brushes and toothpaste) and treats to go into back packs were which given out to all who came for dinner.



*Photo -*

*St Patrick's NS principal Rachel Harper and Rector Canon David Mungavin meet a diner at the Light House on Pearse Street.*

There are two gourmet chefs in the parish who cooked up an amazing Christmas dinner to those who called into Dublin City Mission's No Bucks Café at

the Light House. Stephen Evans, executive chef at Dunnes Stores and Paul Quinn of 3Qs Restaurant formed a formidable team and used their skills and dedication to make Christmas special for so many.

There was great excitement as a group of volunteers from the school and parish along with DCM regulars and St Patrick's Music Group arrived at Pearse Street for the afternoon. The rain cleared and the musicians were able to sing carols and songs outside.



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“The volunteers delivered a memorable day that will make this Christmas very special, not just for those who were given a hot meal and provisions, but for everyone involved. It reminds us what Christmas is really about – the love of God coming down to all of his children so that not one soul is left unloved,” the Rector of St Patrick’s, Canon David Mungavin said.



## **Join Tim for a virtual Santa run**

On 17 November Tim Burns, the Youth Development Officer of Down & Dromore diocese, set out to run 400K in 40 days to raise money for The Big House.

It's now Day 29 and Tim and his fundraising partner David Dunlop are inviting you to join them on 19 December for a virtual Santa run.

Just pull on your Christmas clothes, Santa hats etc and go out and run/walk 5 or 10k. Take some pics, tag The Big House in them and donate £5 per person/£10 per family using their [give.net](#) fundraising page. Donations from non-runners are also welcome at the same page!

## Christmas funding boost for Kiltermon Church

A much-loved church in Clogher Diocese is to receive £10,000 from the National Churches Trust Cornerstone Grant.



The grant will help fund the building of an extension, installing a kitchen, toilet and meeting room at Kiltermon church, part of Fivemiletown Parish, helping it to better serve its community.

Kiltermon church was built in 1841 as a School House and a Chapel of Ease in the parish of Aghalurcher. It was under the care of the Curate of Clogher. The building was constructed using stone sourced from Alderwood Quarry. It became a Chapel of Ease under the Parish of St John's Fivemiletown when The Perpetual Curacy to Clogher was dissolved and Fivemiletown became a parish in its own right. It was extensively renovated after World War II and a new roof was added in the early 1970's.





The project will facilitate the building of an extension, which will house a new kitchen, toilet and meeting room. The church is situated in a small rural community and its congregation is trying to ensure that the church continues

in its ministry and mission into its local community.

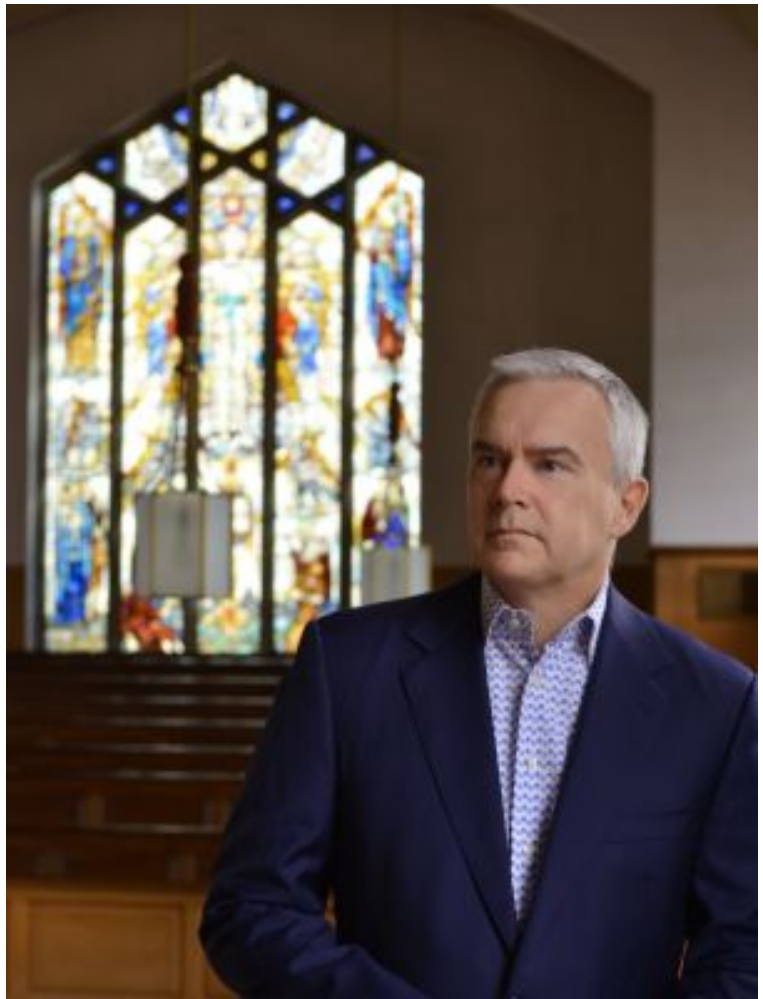
Precentor Kyle Hanlon (Photo above), Rector of Fivemiletown With Kiltermon said: “Jesus gave a commission to take the Gospel to the whole world. Here in the Clogher Valley there has been a Christian witness for 1600 years since the days of St Patrick. Both diocesan cathedrals bear the name of Patrick’s friend and fellow missionary, St Macartan. The small church building at Kiltermon stands at the west end of the valley between Fivemiletown and Clogher. The Church and parish has enjoyed growth in its worshipping congregation there in recent years making this work a necessity as we plan for a future of ongoing witness and ministry.”

“We greatly appreciate the support of the National Churches Trust which recognises the value of worship and ministry within smaller church buildings in rural settings. Kiltermon is

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a peaceful and beautiful place which deserves to be maintained and developed.”

Broadcaster and journalist Huw Edwards (Photo right), Vice President of The National Churches Trust, said: “The UK's historic churches and chapels are a vital part of our national heritage and have done so much to help local people during the



COVID-19 lockdown. But to survive, many need to carry out urgent repairs and install modern facilities. The cost of this work is far beyond what most congregations can pay for themselves.”

“So I’m delighted that Kiltermon church in Fivemiletown, County Tyrone is being helped with a £10,000 National Churches Trust Cornerstone Grant. The funding is an early Christmas present for the historic church and will help secure the future of this important community asset.”

A total of 45 churches and chapels in England, Wales and Northern Ireland will benefit from the latest grants from the National Churches Trust, the charity supporting church buildings of all Christian denominations across the UK.

In 2020 the Trust has awarded 260 grants totalling £1,723,000, including recommendations on behalf of other funders with £200,000 of the funding provided by the Wolfson Foundation.

Grants will be available in 2021 to projects at churches, chapels and meeting houses and applications can be made by Christian places of worship in the UK that are open for regular worship. From repairing a roof to helping to install an accessible toilet - and many other projects - the National Churches Trust's grants help keep churches open for worship and community activities and allow them to continue to serve local people and communities.

## **Carrickmacross inter-church Community Carol Service is online**

The annual Carrickmacross Community Carols Service which normally alternates between St Joseph's and St Finbarr's cannot go ahead this year so Monsignor Shane McCaughey and Revd Colin McConaghie have been working on an online alternative as a way of thanks to all local businesses and a celebration of the community spirit that has seen them through this most difficult of years.

Revd McConaghie says Christmas readings have been pre-recorded in a variety of shops and businesses in Carrickmacross and some wonderfully talented local musicians have provided Christmas Carols.

“The message of the service will be one of hope with Monsignor McCaughey sharing a message reminding us of the true reason for the season.”

Rev McConaghie says he is excited to see the final product.



'The service promises to be a wonderful celebration of our local community. I don't want to give too much away but you will see plenty of familiar faces and hear some beautiful singing. As churches we wanted to thank all who have worked so hard throughout the pandemic as well as giving a message of hope to all who have struggled.'

Revd Colin McConaghie, Rector of Carrickmacross Parish in Co. Monaghan, explained that 2020 has resulted in everyone having to alter the way they are used to doing things with businesses up and down the country having to adapt to Covid regulations.

“Our churches have been no different with church buildings closed for almost half of the year and clergy having to think of initiative ways to worship.

“With Christmas approaching we would normally be listening to Christmas carols with nativities and Christmas pageants. Unfortunately, with restricted numbers churches are having to adapt the celebrations this year.”

The Community Carol Service is now available on the Facebook Pages of the two churches (St Joseph's Church, Carrickmacross and Carrickmacross Group Church of Ireland).

## **Faith leaders back LGBT rights in 'landmark' pledge**

Gay conversion therapy should be banned, according to a “landmark” pledge from almost 400 religious leaders from around the world.

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The UK Government has brought together senior faith leaders to sign “a historic declaration” calling for an end to violence and criminalisation of LGBT+ people, as well as a global ban on conversion therapy.

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office has funded a conference that was held yesterday online to mark the launch of the Global Interfaith Commission on LGBT+ Lives, bringing together hundreds of religious leaders from around the world.



The declaration has been signed by leaders from 35 countries and all main religions, including Archbishop Desmond Tutu (Photo above) with eight other archbishops, Rabbi David Rosen and the former president of Ireland, Dr Mary McAleese.

The conference comes after it was announced in the summer that plans to ban controversial gay conversion therapy will be brought forward following the Government’s completion of a study on the issue.

Boris Johnson, the Prime Minister, said the practice was “absolutely abhorrent” and “has no place in this country”.

The term “conversion therapy” refers to any form of treatment or psychotherapy that aims to change a person’s sexual orientation or to suppress a person’s gender identity.

The Rt Rev Paul Bayes, Bishop of Liverpool, who co-chairs the commission, will say at the event: “Today is a landmark day in global faith and LGBT+ relations.

“For too long, religious teachings have been misused – and are still being misused – to cause deep pain and offence to those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex. This must change, which is why we have joined forces to launch the Global Interfaith Commission on LGBT+ Lives.”

See also -

[[] <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-55326461> ]

## **Church in Wales to consider blessing same-sex marriages and civil partnerships**

The Church in Wales is planning to allow services to bless same-sex couples after they are married, saying it believes the Church will also have to consider its teaching on marriage.

The Church in Wales' Governing Body has proposed a new bill which would change the Book of Commons Prayer and allow clergy to bless a same-sex couple who have already



made a legal commitment elsewhere, whether through marriage or a civil partnership.

In a note explaining their desire to introduce the service, the Bench of Bishops say: "Scriptures condemn 'porneia', unbridled lust, in which sexual activity is divorced from faithful and mutual commitment. It is true that in Scripture such faithful commitment is always portrayed as between a man and woman in covenanted union (marriage), and all other sexual activity, including references to same-sex activity, is portrayed as an expression of porneia. However, with new social, scientific and psychological understandings of sexuality in the last one and a half centuries, we believe that same-sex relationships can be understood in a radically different way, and that the teaching of Scripture should therefore be re-interrogated."

They add: "Approval of this rite would be stating that the Church in Wales accepts that the loving and faithful commitment of two persons of the same sex, aspiring to life-long fidelity and mutual comfort, and who have made a commitment in civil partnership or marriage, is worthy of acceptance by the Church by asking God's blessing upon their commitment.

"The Bench believes that, in the fullness of time, the Governing Body will have to consider whether it wishes to consider a change in the Church's teaching concerning marriage."

The bishops say they want blessings to be provided as soon as convenient as the Church's Governing Body had already made an informal commitment in 2018 to provide something

for gay and lesbian couples, believing it was "pastorally unsustainable" not to.

The use of this blessing would be 'experimental' and 'temporary', lasting five years from October 2021, presumably to fill the gap before the Church in Wales hopes to bring in same-sex marriage fully.

No clergy member would be forced to do the blessing against their conscience.

One of the Liturgy options for the blessing reads:

"Beloved in Christ, we come together in the presence of God to celebrate the union of N and N and to ask his blessing on their future together.

"Jesus said, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment' (Matthew 22:37-38)."

## **Pointers for prayer**

Lord Jesus, when our Advent journey becomes hard please give us the strength we need to overcome obstacles and difficulties along the path; whether these are problems of time, relationships or other complications.

Pray for The Right Reverend Guli Francis Dehqani; Bishop of Loughborough, who has joined Church Army's Board; that she will bring her wisdom and expertise to the position.

Loving Lord, however many years we have made the journey through Advent, may we continue to find the way exciting and refreshing. Help us to be open to new

challenges and inspiration, alongside finding comfort in the familiar delights.

Lord our Messiah, as we journey once more through Advent, thank you that we are not alone – we walk together with our fellow pilgrims, enjoying your loving presence as we travel towards the wonder of the nativity.

Pray for the new government of Burundi and for President Ndayishimiye. Ask God to bless Burundi. ‘Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream’ (Amos 5:24).

Please pray for the meeting of the Church Leaders scheduled for this week as the leaders try to co-ordinate a response to the continually changing legislation as it affects churches.

## **Speaking to the soul**

### **Out of the Way by Chuck Alley**

*A Reading from the Gospel of John 3:22-30*

22 After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he spent some time there with them and baptized. 23 John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim because water was abundant there; and people kept coming and were being baptized 24— John, of course, had not yet been thrown into prison. 25 Now a discussion about purification arose between John’s disciples and a Jew. 26 They came to John and said to him, “Rabbi, the one who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you testified, here he is baptizing, and all are going to him.” 27 John answered, “No one can receive anything except what has been given from heaven. 28 You yourselves are my witnesses that I





said, ‘I am not the Messiah, but I have been sent ahead of him.’ 29He who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom’s voice. For this reason my joy has been fulfilled. 30He must increase, but I must decrease.”

### *Meditation*

Old habits are hard to break. We do not have to be imprisoned by addictions to experience the bondage to habitual ways of thinking and doing. In their milder form, we explain them as our natural reactions to certain circumstances and stimuli. For example, we tend to be competitive. Generally this is a good trait, in that it provides the energy behind what we promote, including the Church, various missions and ministries, and our faith in Jesus. It is also the fuel for our loyal support for our leaders and friends. On the negative side, it can blind us to the truth and

promote division through a “party spirit” (1 Cor. 3:1ff). Also, it is far too easy to dismiss the message of one who is not one of us or like us.

The problem with such competitive thinking is that it places the focus on us rather than the other. At its root, competition is self-promotional. Our inherent self-centeredness inhibits our ability to hear the word of transformation. We tend to live looking down into the well of water baptism and never lifting our eyes to the baptism of the Spirit. John was the transitional figure in moving baptism from ritual purification, through symbolic spiritual cleansing and rebirth, and into transformation by the Holy Spirit. That is a transition required of all Christians (the transformation with or without manifestation of the charismatic gifts, but always manifesting the fruit; Gal. 5:22-23). But in order to make the change we must take on John’s attitude: “He must become greater, I must become less.”



Chuck Alley is a retired Episcopal priest and an adjunct associate professor of anatomy on the medical faculty of Virginia Commonwealth University.

