



Cathedral choir brings Christmas cheer to people of Cork

Photo above - The first stop for the mobile carol service was on Anglesea St for staff of Cork City Council and members of Cork City Fire Brigade and gardaí. Photo: Larry Cummins

They normally raise the roof of their landmark cathedral this time of year, but the famous St Fin Barre's

Cathedral choir is going mobile and virtual this weekend to bring Christmas carols to the people of Cork, Eoin English reports in the Irish Examiner.

The cathedral unveiled its Christmas Carols for Cork City initiative today at the historic cathedral, in association with the St Fin Barre's Quarter project, which will see its choir's carol service broadcast on a giant screen on the back of a truck which will visit key locations around the city over the coming days.

The choir's traditional carol service, a highlight of Christmas in Cork for many, has like many other events, been cancelled this year.

However the Dean of Cork, the Very Rev Nigel Dunne, said they decided instead to use technology to turn the cathedral "inside out" and to bring the service to the people in the safest way possible.

In order to adhere to Covid-19 restrictions, they gathered a much-reduced choir in the cathedral in recent days and recorded a performance featuring traditional and uplifting Christmas carols.

Now using the latest mobile LED screen technology and sound projection, their performance is about to hit the road.

The mobile Christmas carol service called to City Hall and Anglesea Street Fire Station and Garda Station yesterday.

Dean Dunne said the truck will call to several city hospitals and nursing homes over the coming days to spread Cork Christmas cheer with frontline workers, patients, and residents.

“We were devastated to have to cancel the hugely popular carol services especially in this our 150th anniversary year,” Dean Dunne said.

“However thanks to some very creative thinking by St Fin Barre's Quarter committee and the generous support of the city council, we can now bring some of our wonderful music, sung by reduced socially distanced choir, onto the streets of the city.

“While it is not the same as gathering as a community in the cathedral, I hope it will bring some Christmas cheer to the streets of our city and our frontline workers in these difficult times.”

Chair of St Fin Barre's Quarter development committee, Eoin Murphy, said he was delighted to help launch the initiative.

“The cathedral is at the heart of the historic St Fin Barre's Quarter and this initiative shows what a significant contribution it makes to Cork City especially at Christmas time,” he said.

“For me the carol service has always symbolised the start of Christmas and I am thrilled that the tradition continues albeit in a different way.”

This programme is sponsored by Cork City Council through the Reimagine GLOW Programme.

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At home for Christmas?

Photo above - Presbyterian Moderator, Rt Rev Dr David Bruce, is pictured at PCI's Op Shop at Carlisle Circus in Belfast with two of the shop's volunteers from Iran, Fahimeh Akhlaghi (left) and Zorhre Ghandooch (right).

On a recent visit to a charity shop run by the Church, the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, Right Reverend Dr David Bruce, met two volunteers from Iran, who won't be home for Christmas.

In his Christmas Message, Dr Bruce writes about what home is – a place of acceptance, a place of love, and a place of hospitality. He also reflects on the fact that

sometimes it is a place that we cannot be. He shares the experience of Mary and Joseph, who were not at home in Nazareth that first Christmas. Like the shepherds, who were out in the fields, the three wise men were not at home. They had left their homeland to follow a star, looking for a promised king.

The Moderator concludes his Christmas Message by saying, “As we prepare to welcome family and friends to our homes - ‘bubbling’ safely within the necessary restrictions - let us be open-handed so that the blessings we have received can be generously shared. As we also remember those who can’t be with us this year, let us remember and celebrate, even in these dark, yet hope-filled days, the birth of the one who is the light of the world.”

Full text of the Moderator’s 2020 Christmas Message:

At home for Christmas?

Of course we all expect to be at home for Christmas. But what if we can’t be? I visited our International Meeting Point Op Shop at Carlisle Circus in Belfast recently, an amazing place that is more than a charity shop – although it is an excellent place for young parents to find quality nearly new children and baby clothes, plus essential equipment and toys. There I met Zorhreh and Fahimeh, two shop volunteers, who are from Iran. For obvious reasons, they won’t be at home for Christmas. So for them, the Op Shop is more than a shop – it is a kind of home from home.

Home is a place of acceptance. The church always needs to have this to the forefront of its outreach. People come to us from every conceivable background. If we cannot welcome them in sincerity, then we have missed out on something central which Jesus himself said. “Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me.” (Matthew 11:28 – The Message.)

Home is a place of love. Love means saying sorry when we mess up, so that relationships can be repaired. Love means laughter and tears, in equal measure. Love means saying “no” as well as “yes”. Love means putting the defenceless at the top of the pile. “So, no matter what I say, what I believe, and what I do, I’m bankrupt without love.” (1 Corinthians 13:7 – The Message.)

Home is a place of hospitality. Through my adult life I have visited in homes in some of the poorest countries of the world, and experienced the most astonishing levels of welcome. It is humbling and even discomforting to receive much from those who have so little. But how powerful it is to discover that it is more of a blessing to give than to receive. “Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.” (Hebrews 13:2 – NIV.)

Sometimes, home is a place we cannot be. That first Christmas Mary and Joseph were not at home. They were told there was no room in the inn, until one innkeeper offered them temporary shelter with his animals. Out in the fields the shepherds watching their sheep weren’t at home – possibly they were homeless. And neither were the wise men, who had left their home to follow a star, looking for a promised king. “On coming to the house, they saw the child

with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.” (Mathew 2:11 – NIV).

As we prepare to welcome family and friends to our homes - ‘bubbling’ safely within the necessary restrictions - let us be open-handed so that the blessings we have received can be generously shared. As we also remember those who can’t be with us this year, let us remember and celebrate, even in these dark, yet hope-filled days, the birth of the one who is the light of the world.

News Briefs

Next Bishop of Chelmsford - Downing Street has announced that the Rt Rev Guli Francis-Dehqani will be the next Bishop of Chelmsford. She succeeds Most Rev Stephen Cottrell, now Archbishop of York. Bishop Francis-Dehqani came to the UK as a thirteen year old when her family fled persecution. Find out more and meet the new Bishop - chelmsford.anglican.org

Video reflections for Advent - Archbishop Michael Jackson continues his video reflections for Advent this Sunday, December 20.

On the Fourth Sunday in Advent his theme is ‘Magnificence’ focussing on Mary and based on the reading from St Luke 1: 26–38. This passage is read by Lisa O’Brien Corry, a Diocesan Reader based in Blessington Union in Glendalough.



The video will be available to watch on the diocesan website (Link below) or on the Dublin and Glendalough YouTube Channel here on Sunday morning as well as on our Facebook and Twitter feeds.

The reflections continue each Sunday in Advent and conclude on Christmas Day. Subscribe to the Dublin & Glendalough YouTube channel so as not to miss them.

Links at -

[\[https://dublin.anglican.org/news/2020/12/18/archbishops-advent-reflections-continue-this\]](https://dublin.anglican.org/news/2020/12/18/archbishops-advent-reflections-continue-this)

St Patrick's Cathedral Choir - Tune in to hear the Cathedral Choir performing live from the National Concert Hall The concert lasts about an hour and is available to

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watch for free on the NCH's youtube and facebook pages for 48hrs.

[https://youtu.be/fmH_Rgs6zAQ] https://youtu.be/fmH_Rgs6zAQ

Carols from Canterbury - Christmas may be looking very different this year but we are delighted to be able to spread #ComfortandJoy by sharing three virtual carol concerts on the Canterbury Cathedral website over the next week

 [bit.ly/CantChristmas]

20 Dec

15.00 A Canterbury Celebration of Christmas: Carols and Readings for all the family

24 Dec

11.00 A Children's Crib Service at Canterbury - Starring the Deanery Guinea Pigs

15.00 The Canterbury Cathedral Carol Service: Our Traditional Christmas Carol Service

The York Chapter House Choir - Virtual Carols by Candlelight -

Join the concert here: [youtu.be/atvh6RMeses]

The annual Maynooth Carol Service - For those who missed the live stream, it can still be viewed on YouTube via the link: [youtu.be/khPNS3Um0JE]

NICVA mental wellbeing support - Has partnered with Inspire WB Group to launch their mental wellbeing support programme for community and voluntary sector staff and volunteers. The online webinars, programmes and resources are free to all, thanks to funding from Communities NI [bit.ly/2KB9zX0]

A year which we will never forget, C of I bishops

A Pastoral Letter from the Archbishops and Bishops of the Church of Ireland

2020 is a year which we will never forget. It is a year in which the gathering darkness sometimes seemed as though it might overcome the way we live. Darkened and deserted streets, shuttered up shops and businesses, even closed places of worship. Fears that our health services might be overwhelmed or that we might not have the resolve or the resilience to organise ourselves against a deadly enemy. But the darkness has not overcome us and the brightness of the incarnation of the Son of God shines more brilliantly still against a dark background. Now we can begin to see the darkness scattering. God's coming into the world at Christmas time is the sure witness and foundation of his love for us, and the redemption of the whole creation.

Covid-19 has stripped away the layers of what is impermanent in our lives and revealed just how fundamental the central messages of the Gospel are for the good of our world. To love God and to express that love in the love for our neighbour. All over this island, our parishes and our

people have worked to be lights set on a hill, in solidarity with all people of goodwill. And we will continue in his strength to do so as this shared time of hardship continues.

And we have experienced those hopeful acts of service as the privileges of our calling as disciples of the incarnate Lord. Sometimes it has been difficult to be with those who needed us in the way we would have wished to be; in the way that God came to be with us. The frustration of being apart has been keenly felt across our countryside, towns and cities. But we have prayed, and persevered and hoped and loved, and trusting and following him has seen us through. Many of us had little to endure. Some have had much. We are all in the debt of those who kept us well, or who cared for the sick, or who comforted the fearful, bereaved, and those whom we have lost to death in these months.

We have had to learn again the lessons of our dependence on one another and of the interdependence of the whole world. The frontline kept expanding and we found that there were simple things – even washing our hands, maintaining our distance, and covering our faces – that each of us could do for the benefit of others.

The star of Bethlehem attracted people of wisdom to the infant Jesus. The star symbolised the bright moment when God became part of his own creation and inseparable from it in his fatherly love. Through the presence of his Holy Spirit in our world today, the brightness of the star remains, illuminating the work of scientists and researchers, and providing inspiration still for many who find their motivation in working for the good of others.

We hope and pray that you will be able to make this a Christmas you will never forget, in deepening commitment to the Lord of the Church, joyful in the warmth of his presence, and with those who can safely be with you.

The letter was signed by all serving Archbishops and bishops of the Church of Ireland.

How Irish churches are celebrating Christmas during a pandemic

Analysis: over-flowing churches will not be part of an Irish Christmas this year, but virtual forms of religion have proved hugely popular, Gladys Ganiel, Queen's University Belfast, writes on RTE's website this week.

The evening before the first Sunday in Advent, Fr James O'Reilly stood in an empty St Joseph's Church in Antrim recording a video message for the parish Facebook page. O'Reilly lamented the two-week closure of church buildings for worship, which had taken effect the previous day under new lockdown restrictions. He reminded viewers: "please do tune in and join us".

The parish of Antrim is one of many churches that had no online services before the Covid-19 pandemic. It now has a vibrant parish community based around Facebook, with daily mass livestreamed and other meetings, like a recent five-week Facebook Live study of John's Apocalypse. During events, people use Facebook's comment facility to greet each other, pray and thank the priests.

The pandemic means that the over-flowing churches that many people associate with Christmas Day will not be part of Ireland's holiday celebrations this year. But during

lockdown, virtual forms of religion like those practised in Antrim have proved startlingly popular and are set to form the basis of many people's Christmas celebrations.

A virtual Advent

During lockdown, most of Ireland's churches have gone virtual: 87% now provide online services, compared to 56% before the pandemic. Research commissioned by the Iona Institute has found that the percentage of people in the Republic tuning in to religious services, including online and television, has held steady since the start of the pandemic, at 27% in April and 26% in November. In Northern Ireland, it's 39%.

There are other signs that virtual forms of church are flourishing. In March, RTÉ began broadcasting daily mass, provided by the webstreaming company Church Services TV. Daily viewing figures have remained at 30,000 to 40,000, comparable to a pre-pandemic Sunday mass on RTÉ One. Church Services TV also supply an additional mass or service from a local faith community on Sunday afternoons.

On the First Sunday in Advent, when churches were closed for worship, 93,800 tuned in for mass on RTÉ, nearly 20% of the available audience share. After church buildings reopened, 59,000 tuned in for mass and 43,000 for a Church of Ireland service on the Second and Third Sundays of Advent, respectively. A mass on the third Sunday of November in remembrance of those who have died from Covid-19 attracted Knock Basilica's largest-ever online audience: 110,500 across several platforms. Between 4,000

and 5,000 are accessing Knock's twice-weekly Ignatian Advent reflections.

Elsewhere, the June novena at Belfast's Clonard Monastery attracted more than 50,000 viewers per day. Clonard is offering online masses only on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, because it cannot guarantee the health and safety of the crowds expected to attend. Some priests have urged the bishops to cancel in-person Christmas masses; while the Government has advised against indoor carol singing.

People in the pews

But some people are returning to the pews during Advent. The re-opening of churches during the summer was stressful and complex, but also revealed a deep reservoir of good will as volunteers stepped forward to ensure that sanitation and social distancing protocols were followed. Some churches hold extra services or operate online booking systems. Such measures will continue over Christmas, with many churches offering a mixture of online and in-person services.

A dual online/in-person approach is necessary because some people remain fearful about returning to church: In August, the Iona Institute found that 45% of pre-pandemic massgoers had not returned to mass because of 'fear of Covid-19', with 22% saying it was due to limits on numbers in church buildings. According to another Iona Institute poll in November, 36% of Irish people plan to attend Christmas mass in-person this year, including 47% of the over 55s and 22% of 18-24-year-olds.

Driving in for Christmas

Other churches are offering drive-in options, including evening carol services and Sunday morning worship. During the summer, drive-in services were popular among Protestants in rural areas and provincial towns in Northern Ireland. They are usually conducted on the flatbed of a lorry, which is positioned in a church carpark, farmers market, or other large, open site. The Methodist Church's service at Castle Archdale caravan park, Co Fermanagh, was so in-demand that cars queued on Saturday evenings to reserve spaces for Sunday morning.

At some drive-in services, people stay inside their cars, waving at one another from behind windscreens. In others, people sit outside their cars, as envisioned in the promotional materials for a carol service at Green Pastures Church in Ballymena: 'Bring your own camping chair and hot chocolate!' Other outdoor events have continued with participants at a safe distance, like the Dublin Council of Churches' annual lantern-lit prayer walk between the churches of their various denominations.

Like and share the celebrations

Although mass attendance and other indicators of devotion have declined dramatically in Ireland in recent years, religious practice usually peaks at Christmastime and prayer and interest in spirituality have increased during the pandemic.

Yet churches have prepared for Christmas with limited resources: church plate collections have been non-existent, and annual fundraisers and other sources of income have been lost. In some dioceses, priests' wages have been cut.

But despite the challenges, Ireland's churches have adapted creatively, giving people a variety of online and in-person opportunities to 'like and share' their Christmas celebrations.

Dr Gladys Ganiel is a Research Fellow in the Senator George J Mitchell Institute for Global Peace, Security and Justice at Queen's University Belfast

Publication: The far-reaching legacy of John Hume

The death this summer of John Hume provides the context in which reflections on the themes of reconciliation, hope and the importance of place comprise many of the essays in the Winter 2020 issue of *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*. Testament is paid to Hume's immense impact on the political focus and discourse in Northern Ireland over a period of forty years; the scale of his achievements and the global reach of his inspiration also provide a framework for surveying the synergetic relationship between Britain and Ireland through a literary lens.

Reconciliation is central to the Gospel message and work in its cause defined Hume's political life, says Michael Lillis in his essay on John Hume's legacy. Complementing this account is Sir Jonathan Phillips's review of a recently-published book of personal accounts by distinguished public servants of the search for peace in the decades leading to the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. Phillips observes that 'John Hume's creative presence...ripples throughout' the book.

Studies

Winter 2020/2021

No. 436



Irish Writing: Moments in the Tradition

Plus: John Hume's Legacy

A series of essays on moments in Irish literary tradition over the past 250 years demonstrate the impact that historic relations between Britain and Ireland can bring to a creative perspective. Dr David Clare, Dr Eamon Maher, Dylan Thursfield and Professor Thomas

O'Grady variously consider the importance of place and 'the geography of the imagination' in writers from different cultural backgrounds in their respective contributions on Sheridan, George Moore & John McGahern, Yeats and Behan. The section concludes with two essays on Hume's immediate contemporary and fellow Nobel laureate, Seamus Heaney. Professor Jeffrey Meyers recalls Heaney's friendship with the American poet Robert Lowell and Paul Corcoran's essay examines the theme of hope in Heaney's

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The Cure at Troy, hope being the bedrock of Hume's vision for reconciliation between peoples.

Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review Winter 2020, Irish Writing: Moments in the Tradition plus John Hume's Legacy is published by Messenger Publications. Priced at €10.

For more information see: [www.studiesirishreview.ie/product-category/default-category/current-issue/]



Pointers for prayer

As we make our journey though Advent may we straighten out the pathways which lead us to the glory of the Lord. As we travel to worship our newborn King may we take each step with hope and joy.

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).

Speaking to the soul

The Day of the Lord by Michael Smith

A Reading from the Gospel of Luke 21:20-28

20 "When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. 21 Then those in Judea must flee to the mountains, and those inside the city must leave it, and those out in the country must not enter it; 22 for these are days of vengeance, as a fulfilment of all that is written. 23 Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing infants in those days! For there will be great distress on the earth and wrath against this people; 24 they will fall by the edge of the sword and be taken away as captives among all nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled

on by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

25 “There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. 26 People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 27 Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in a cloud’ with power and great glory. 28 Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

Meditation

The “day of the Lord” is a familiar theme in the Hebrew Scriptures. It was prophesied as a day both dreadful and wonderful, equally terrifying and liberating. The notion of the Day of the Lord carries this dual response, because it is both a day of God’s wrath and judgment when evil will be defeated, as well as a time of God’s vindication and justice when all things will be put to rights. In today’s gospel reading, Jesus continues this double teaching by both warning and comforting us about the coming Day of the Lord.

There are times in life when our world seems to fall apart. Disease, death, betrayal, desperate loneliness, and financial insecurity may not cause us to literally flee to the mountains, but they can trigger a response that makes us want to run away in panic or immobilizes us in fear. Jesus is telling us beforehand that times like these will come and when they do, hang on, and be assured that these dreadful days will not have the last say.

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“Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near,” Jesus says. In other words, when all hell breaks loose around you, stand your ground and hold your head high. Know that help is on the way!



Michael G. Smith served as bishop of North Dakota for fifteen years and is currently the Assistant Bishop of Dallas.

