

Angel delight: Children transform Belfast church railings with festive decorations



Community effort: the railings of St Michael's Church, off Belfast's Shankill Road, have been transformed by the appearance of a host of angels

April 3, 2018

The railings of two Belfast churches have been transformed by the appearance of a host of angels - over 100 in fact and just in time for Christmas.

The colourful and eye-catching Angels of Faith, Hope and Love exhibition has appeared outside St Michael's Church of Ireland off the Shankill Road.

It follows a cross-community partnership involving children from St Michael's Afterschool Club, the Church Lads' and Church Girls' Brigade, Malvern Primary School and the Sunday School members from St Stephen's Parish Church, Millfield.

Children from nearby Small Wonders Nursery and residents in Hemsworth Court care home were also invited to take part in the project, along with members of the congregations from both St Michael's and St Stephen's.

The decorated angels have also been hung on the railings of St Stephen's.

Staff in local businesses also took part and were given decorated angels to put their loved ones names on.

Each angel has the name of someone precious to the child or adult who decorated it on the back.

Members of the Neighbourhood Police Team helped to deliver angels and it's hoped that (weather-permitting) they will stay in place over Christmas.



Rector of St Michael's and St Stephen's, the Rev Canon James Carson has praised those behind the community effort.

"The idea was that each angel would remember a loved one who has been lost or is being remembered at this particular time of year," Canon Carson told the Belfast Telegraph.

"We were trying to be creative at a time when you can't have people meeting in the parish hall for obvious reasons.

"We wanted people to be included and to be able to see something that offers a bit of light and hope. This is a lovely, visible sign of faith, hope and love at this difficult time."

The angels have already been attracting attention since they made their debut on Tuesday when those involved in the project gathered to say prayers of thanks at the church for all the loved ones named on the angels.

Prayers were also said for everyone in the local community.

"We hope people will take the opportunity to stop and see the angels which have been so beautifully decorated and the lovely banner designed by Leah Batchelor," Canon Carson added.

Courtesy The Belfast Telegraph. Report by Lauren Harte

Churches waiting for further clarity on post-Christmas lockdown restrictions

Churches in Northern Ireland can remain open during the post-Christmas lockdown but many are still waiting for clarification on what impact the restrictions will have.

The executive announced that during six-week lockdown, beginning on St Stephen's Day, churches can remain open for public worship.

It is understood that tighter restrictions may be imposed on funerals and weddings, although these details have not yet been announced.

The move to keep churches open came as a surprise to many church-goers, given that places of worship had been forced to close during the first lockdown beginning in March.

Ahead of the two-week circuit breaker, which ended on Friday of last week, the Catholic and Presbyterian churches



made representations to the Executive and the Irish Government to highlight the importance of public worship.

The Free Presbyterian Church, which counts senior DUP representatives including North Antrim MLA Mervyn Storey amongst its members, recently contacted all MLAs to ask that church services be allowed to continue during any further lockdowns.

"As mental health is a pressing issue in the current circumstances, we maintain that the right of religious worship accumulates positive mental well-being benefits for our community," the church's general presbytery said.

"By contrast, a blanket closure of churches can have a detrimental effect on those accustomed to benefitting the

April 3, 2018

mental well-being advantages of regular church attendance."

Several churches, including Whitewell Metropolitan Tabernacle in north Belfast and Free Presbyterian churches in Ballymoney, Co Antrim, and Hillsborough and Moneyslane in Co Down, had to close temporarily following Covid outbreaks in the autumn.

In August, St Agnes' Catholic Church in west Belfast closed for several days as a "precautionary measure" after a parishioner tested positive for Covid-19.

In July, St Mary's Church in Ardmore, Co Derry, also closed temporarily after two parishioners tested positive for coronavirus.

Stormont's chief scientific adviser, Dr Ian Young, told the Nolan show on BBC's Radio Ulster yesterday that the executive had several issues to consider before making Thursday's announcement.

"The virus spreads just as easily in churches as it does in other locations where people gather together," he said.

"In terms of making decisions as to what should be permitted or not, as we've said before the executive need to weigh up a range of other considerations and I guess the spiritual health of the population is an important consideration."

April 3, 2018

A spokesman for **the Catholic diocese of Down and Connor** said it was awaiting more information about the new lockdown.

"Following clarification on the consequences of these new regulations we will be issuing guidance to our parishes," he said.

A spokesman for **the Church of Ireland** said: "The Church of Ireland continues to encourage parishes to follow all public health guidance provided by state authorities for the good of the whole community. For situations in which it is not possible, for the time being, to gather to worship Jesus, online services are often provided by local parishes and listings of broadcast services are published twice-weekly at www.ireland.anglican.org/news."

Presbyterian moderator Rev David Bruce said his church, along with others, continued to encourage people to stick to regulations on both sides of the border.

"The new six-week restrictions announced by the Northern Ireland Executive, brought in to protect our entire society, will no doubt have a major impact on all of our lives, as individuals and families," he said.

"It is important that during this period we continue to support one another, and seek the wellbeing of all, especially the most vulnerable. Local congregations will be seeking to offer such support in a variety of ways within the restrictions laid down by government."

Courtesy The Irish News. Report by Claire Simpson

churchnewsireland@gmail.org

Cork student represents C of I Youth Department in Taoiseach's 'Shared Island Initiative'

On 22 October, An Taoiseach, Micheál Martin TD, announced the Shared Island Dialogue series, as part of the Government's Shared Island initiative.

The first Shared Island Dialogue took place online on 26 November 2020, on "New Generations and New Voices on the Good Friday Agreement".

This Dialogue listened to the views of young people, North and South on the island, on a shared future underpinned by the Good Friday Agreement.

The Dialogue consisted of two plenary panel discussions followed by breakout sessions.

To shape the event, participants were asked to suggest two issues or themes they would like to see discussed.

The Church of Ireland Youth Department (CIYD) was invited to nominate ONE youth representative to take part in this Dialogue, reflecting the theme "New Generations and New Voices on the Good Friday Agreement"

CIYD contacted the Cork, Cloyne and Ross Diocesan Youth Officer, Hilda Connolly, to see if she might like to put a name forward from the United Dioceses of Cork, Cloyne and Ross.



Keelan Shorten, from Ross Union (Castleventry Parish),

Keelan Shorten was contacted as he has often expressed a keen interest in this area. He was very eager to be considered.

Keelan was delighted to be

selected to go forward to be the youth representative for the Church of Ireland Youth Department

Read what Keelan had to say about the event:

“On Thursday 26th November I had the opportunity to be the CIYD representative in an online discussion forum as part of the Shared Island Initiative.

“The event had young people from across the island of Ireland representing many diverse backgrounds. The day began with a message from An Taoiseach Micheál Martin and then we heard from some speakers reflecting on their own experiences before some smaller discussion groups. It

April 3, 2018

was a great opportunity as many interesting points from different viewpoints around our island were raised.

“We talked about the legacy of the Good Friday Agreement, which for us - the generation who were born after the Agreement was signed and grew up in Ireland after the Troubles - was a very important discussion to have. We do not remember the Troubles first-hand, and while the legacy of history is passed onto us the traditional lines dividing us may not always apply.

“We talked about how the Ireland we grew up in is a changed Ireland from that of previous generations. What really came across for me though was that although this event showed the variety of cultural identities and experiences across Ireland, we all share in the ideal of having a Shared Island for the benefit of all.

“Thanks again for the opportunity!”

Bishops & Buildings, new book on Armagh

Those in search of a last minute present might be attracted to the recently published Bishops & Buildings. A Pictorial Celebration of Armagh's Architecture. This is a beautifully illustrated, large format, soft covered book which provides a clear and concise introduction to the many significant buildings in Ireland's ecclesiastical capital. The two cathedrals, each dedicated to St Patrick, feature largely as also do the Palace and Ara Coeli, Armagh Robinson Library, the Observatory and Planetarium. the Royal School



and St Mark's parish church among others. The book is a collaborative project by Armagh County Museum, Armagh Observatory and Planetarium, the Cardinal Ó Fiaich Library and Archive and Armagh Robinson Library and is on sale from all of the institutions at €15.

Bishop of Down & Dromore visits the retired clergy

Throughout the month of December Bishop David McClay has been visiting all of the retired clergy and clergy widows living in the diocese – 120 visits in total!

On Friday 18 December he paid a visit to (it is believed) the oldest clergy couple in the diocese.

Canon Eric Kingston is a sprightly 96 years old (and still driving) while his wife Kathleen is 90. They worship in Magherahamlet and Eric will be one of the readers at the parish carol service. He and Kathleen also plan to be there



on Christmas Day before heading to Dromore for lunch with their daughter. They were delighted to have a visit from the bishop.

Sadly, in these unusual times, Bishop David hasn't been able to stand on the doorstep but instead delivered a small gift before standing back a couple of metres to chat and finally to pray.

Although the bishop has put many miles on the clock, he says it's been a real joy to meet our retired clergy and clergy widows whom as a diocese we value very much.

Carols by Runway Lights is a soaring success

One of the largest outdoor events to mark the Christmas season in Clogher Diocese was hosted by Trory Parish Church this evening with an innovative drive-in event, Carols by Runway Lights at St Angelo Airport. Scores of vehicles arrived at the Airport where they parked in front of a 'big stage' where the singers and readers performed. Those



attending tuned their car radios to a specific frequency to hear the words and music or alternatively turned down their car windows to pick up the sound from speakers. Those attending had a panoramic view of Trory Church floodlit on the hill above complete with Advent Star and the runway lights fully lit on the other side.

Soloists included the Rector, the Revd Mark Gallagher and Jane McKinlay, accompanied by Joan Nelson, organist; readers, Alison and Diana and members of Ballinamallard Silver Band. Fermanagh Choral Society closed the programme with the singing of a virtual Christmas Blessing.

Following a prayer from Revd Gallagher, the programme began with the Wexford Carol and continued with popular carols and readings.

The programme ended with a fireworks display from the grounds around Trory Church, lighting up the clear night sky. Instead of applause, car horns were tooted in appreciation of the performers. In the programme, Revd Gallagher said he was overwhelmed with the support he had received.

YMCA, Scouts & Guides face funding crisis

The Scouts, Girl Guides and YMCA in NI have warned they may have to close their outdoor learning centres because of a cash crisis triggered by Covid.

Venues are waiting on £1million from the Department of Finance to help them weather the storm, but the funds have yet to be released, leaving some groups weeks away from they describe as “decimation”.

YMCA Ireland director John Peacock said the National Outdoor Centre at Greenhill in Newcastle was facing the worst crisis in its 100-year history.

He added that unless the Executive stepped in, difficult decision around job losses may have to be made.

The organisations affected, which welcome 40,000 young people through their doors annually, have banded together to form the Group of Outdoor Learning and Residential Centres in Northern Ireland.

Mr Peacock said Greenhill's position was similar to other centres, with income down 95 percent because of Covid.

“While we have been able to reduce our cost base significantly since March and avail of government support through the furlough scheme, we are now looking at the possibility of losing staff as we are rapidly running out of cash,” he added.

“With around 80 percent of our annual income coming between April and September, we need clarity and certainty around our finances and staffing urgently, so that we can

April 3, 2018

reassure groups that we are open for business and in a position to secure bookings for 2021.

“We, like many in the sector, receive bookings for spring and summer around now. As we stand today, we have virtually nothing booked for next year.

“We are fearful that unless we can provide reassurance around bookings and have our staff in place from spring, schools, youth groups and other potential users may simply choose to do nothing in 2021.

“If that ends up being the case, our centre, which caters for more than 10,000 children and young people every year, will find itself in serious difficulties. I am sure that will also be the case for our colleagues who run their centres at Lisnaskea, Lorne, Culcavy and Crawfordsburn.”

St Albans Cathedral Dean set to leave after 17 years

The Dean of St Albans Cathedral has announced his departure after 17 years of service.

The Very Revd Dr Jeffrey John has accepted a post in Paris where he and his partner Grant will relocate.

He said: “Seventeen years is a long time for a priest to be in one place, but the years in St Albans have been good and fruitful. Grant and I will always be profoundly thankful for the welcome we have received here, and we shall miss the place and the people enormously.



“The prospect of life in Paris and a new ministry in two languages is exciting, and I think a change is important before I retire - but then we intend to come back to St Albans. So this is au revoir, not adieu.”

Colleagues have paid tribute to his achievements.

Sub Dean The Revd Canon Abi Thompson said: “It has been an honour and a pleasure to work alongside Jeffrey. He has been the most wonderful Dean for St Albans Cathedral – honest, thoughtful, intelligent and deeply holy. He is very much loved in this place and we will all miss him terribly.”

St Albans Cathedral’s chief operating officer Tim Fleming said: “I know all of the staff and volunteers at the Cathedral are hugely thankful for all that they have learned and gained under Jeffrey’s leadership.

“He has been both a friend, colleague and wise counsel to many of us. Always encouraging, always knowledgeable and deeply caring. As we look forward to the celebration of

April 3, 2018

Christmas, we also celebrate and give thanks for the many gifts and joys Jeffrey has brought to the Cathedral and its people during his time with us.”

His new role will be Associate Chaplain at St George’s, the Anglican Chaplaincy in Paris.

The Bishop of St Albans, Dr Alan Smith, said: “I have been fortunate to have Jeffrey as my Dean. He has been outstanding in his leadership of the Cathedral community. Cathedrals are complex organizations and their leadership demands multiple skills and gifts of their Deans. Jeffrey has been much more than a skilled and gifted priest and preacher. He has been a diplomat, fund-raiser, enabler and visionary.”

Speaking to the Soul

Christmas Message from Bishop Michael Burrows

‘A gleam of glory’

At Christmas we can all feel just a little nostalgic and sentimental, perhaps this year especially so when things are not at all as they used to be.

One occasion which I shall particularly miss, which has been for me the curtain raiser on Christmas really for the whole of my life, is the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols in St Patrick’s Cathedral Dublin.

Broadcast live for many decades by RTE radio each Christmas Eve at 4 p.m., it is quite possibly the longest running public service broadcast of its kind in the history of the State. And it is so much better not televised – there is

April 3, 2018

something intimate, profound and delicate about the engagement of the radio listener with the liturgy.

I was brought there as a child; I cannot but think now of those who (as the Bidding Prayer at the Service puts it) 'once rejoiced with us here... those whose hope was in the Word made flesh'. I have brought my own children there over the years; it has been a family tradition to visit friends and relatives in Dublin that day and attend St Patrick's before returning to Kilkenny for the midnight Eucharist in St Canice's. All changed utterly this year.

The carol service, like so many others around the world, invariably opens with 'Once in Royal David's City', the words of which were written in the nineteenth century by Fanny Alexander and are sung to an incomparably majestic roof-raising tune by Henry Gauntlett.

Fanny Alexander was married to William Alexander who was bishop of Derry and subsequently archbishop of Armagh. It is a tribute to this talented Victorian woman that, long after her episcopal husband is largely forgotten, people the world over still sing her hymns!

She and William lived through turbulent times – 150 years ago in January next the Church of Ireland was disestablished, ceasing to be a State Church – and while in retrospect we today can view this event with thanksgiving as an act of liberation, people in the 1870s feared the Church might not be able to survive at all.

In the midst of turbulence and uncertainty Fanny Alexander wrote a series of hymns for children aiming to tell, in memorable verse and music, the whole timeless story of the life and work of Christ. Yet the hymns were also

theologically profound and rich in language. 'Once in Royal' tells of the Incarnation but it is but part of a series. To give another example, 'There is a green hill far away' (somewhat inspired by a familiar hillock outside Derry) tells the story of the Cross.

One lesser-known hymn by Fanny Alexander which I love is that which she composed for Ascension, celebrating the completion of the earthly work of Christ. I often think that Ascension is almost more important than Christmas – after all, as we all know, it is much easier to commence tasks than to complete them and Ascension marks the costly yet wonderful completion of all that Christ set out to do among us.

Fanny's Ascension hymn is 'The golden gates are lifted up'. It sings of Christ's return to the throne of heaven, and of the place prepared for us. At Christmas we sang in 'Once in Royal' – 'and he leads his children on, to the place where he is gone'. At Ascension we consider the earthly path along which we are led, and the hymn affirms that always on that earthly path 'a gleam of glory lies'.

A gleam of glory lies. In that phrase to me lies the heart of Christian hope. Despite the pain and confusion of the world in a year like this, despite all our doubts and legitimate questions, somehow ...perhaps just occasionally...there are moments along the journey of life when we know we glimpse glory. It may be at a mesmerising act of worship, it may be during a beautiful piece of music, it may be when we witness an act of generous and heroic service to a neighbour in need, or it may be when we hold a new-born baby and somehow see anew the beauty of humanity in

April 3, 2018

God's image. These are the moments when heaven breaks through to earth.

The shepherds at Bethlehem had their own unique glimpse of glory when heaven and earth seemed briefly to intersect in the sky above them, their life and the divine life brought together in Christ in a wonderful exchange.

This strange Christmas, even without an abundance of carols or a legion of parties, still offers us the opportunity to place ourselves with the shepherds beneath the dome of heaven and to seek a sustaining gleam of glory both in the majesty of creation and the angelic good news of the birth of a baby.

Looking back over 2020, at the heroism and dedication displayed by so many who on the frontline and in essential services have sustained our lives, there have been many powerful examples of gleams of glory. Perhaps instead of being gloomy about things that are not happening this Christmas, we should look back over the year and identify a few of them. God never leaves 'our earthly path', however bumpy, devoid of those gorgeous gleams.



