



Image of the day - Dublin's Black Santa

Laura Hutton, Deputy Picture Editor of The Irish Times, selected the photo above by Gareth Chaney Collins for the Images of the Day feature in the newspaper.

It is of Canon David Gillespie, Vicar of St Ann's Church on Dawson Street, Dublin, at the launch of the 2020 Black
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Santa Sit-out. This year marks the 20th anniversary of the annual event which was commenced by the then Vicar, Canon Tom Haskins. Over that time the annual appeal has raised over €700,000 for charities including the Salvation Army, Simon Community and Peter McVerry Trust.

This year's Black Santa Christmas charity appeal at St Ann's was launched on Monday afternoon by Lord Mayor Hazel Chu and Church of Ireland Archbishop Michael Jackson. Normally St Ann's vicar Canon David Gillespie and caretaker Fred Deane would be outside the city centre church accompanied by many volunteers with buckets and several choirs.

Not in 2020. This year there can be no choirs and many who make that special annual trip to St Ann's to make their donation cannot do so. Canon Gillespie and his team, however, will be there, on the street collecting until Christmas Eve.

In addition this year, and for the first time, there is an option to donate online at the St Ann's website

[www.stann.dublin.anglican.org]

Catholics have no obligation to attend Christmas Mass, says Irish priest and Dublin archbishop

Catholics aren't expected to attend religious ceremonies in person this Christmas, according to an Irish priest.

December 23

The Irish Post reports that Fr Paddy Byrne, from Co. Laois, insists that precautions should be taken due to the fact that many parishioners fall into the 'vulnerable' category.



Archbishop of Dublin Diarmuid Martin

"In my experience, since the 29th of June when we were allowed to resume public liturgy, by and large it is people from the vulnerable category who come to church," he said.

"No way would I want any elderly grandparent or friend to put themselves at any risk over Christmas by coming to church.

Due to Covid-19, public health measures state that only 50 people are allowed to attend mass.

This has caused concern for many parishes which typically see large numbers of people attend, particularly over the Christmas period.

Churches around the country have offered alternatives to traditional religious events by hosting their services online to accommodate as many people as possible in a safe manner.

As per yesterday's announcement that Ireland will be moving back into Level Five, from December 26, religious services will be moved online until January 12 at the earliest.

Vulnerable people should be strongly encouraged not to attend church at Christmas Archbishop Martin

The Irish Times reported that Catholic Archbishop of Dublin Diarmuid Martin has said vulnerable people should be strongly encouraged not to attend church at Christmas.

“It may well be more appropriate for them to follow Mass online as a family and perhaps at some stage in the day make a brief prayerful visit to the crib, to permit children to experience the mystery of the birth of Jesus. Churches should provide the ample possibility for people to attend Mass at some time within the 12 days of Christmas,” he said in a message to priests and parishes in the archdiocese.

He advised people not to take risks, that numbers wishing to attend Mass, especially on Christmas night and Christmas Day, will be well above the capacity of many churches. “We should encourage people not to gather in numbers beyond what is approved,” he cautioned.

Reports courtesy The Irish Post and The Irish Times

The Archbishop of Canterbury's Ecumenical Christmas Letter 2020

'And the Word became flesh and lived among us' (John 1.14)

As we approach once again the commemoration of the nativity of the Lord Jesus Christ we do so against the backdrop of a year dominated by a global pandemic. Coronavirus infections have caused widespread sickness, many thousands of deaths and an economic crisis around the world. The situation of our world was already fragile, with other public health emergencies, continuing conflicts and climate change affecting the lives of God's world and God's people. The pandemic has exacerbated the inequalities in the world, with the poorest and most vulnerable most deeply affected.

In recent correspondence I have been asked on more than one occasion whether Christmas should be postponed this year as it cannot be celebrated with all the liturgical and social customs and traditions that the people of God value so much. However, as I look around the world and through the world's history it is clear that the celebration of the incarnation is always grounded in our acknowledgement that the world is fragile and suffering. Our Lord was born in our fallen world and it is in his birth, death and resurrection that we find hope. People face sickness, war, displacement and poverty every day and, in joy and suffering alike, the birth of Christ is marked and celebrated as a constant reminder of our salvation.

As the early teacher of our faith Justin Martyr wrote:



The Most Reverend and Right Honourable Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury

He became a human being for our sakes, that becoming a partaker of our sufferings, He might also bring us healing. (Second Apology, Chapter XIII)

Christ came to a suffering world to bring healing, reconciliation and hope. As I hear stories of the response of the Church to human suffering in different parts of the world I see that hope made real. Churches and individual Christians are reaching out in love to those in need: most often not from a position of power, but in vulnerability. That is exactly the sort of love that we celebrate at Christmas. Love that gets its hands dirty. Love that is open and generous. Love that, without great ceremony, makes a difference. Jesus Christ, the light of the world, shines even in the darkest times: for that we are thankful and in that we rejoice.

For many in different parts of the world this will be a different Christmas. I pray that wherever Christians are they may find that hope, comfort and joy that comes from Jesus Christ.

In that light and hope I convey my greetings to you and to the faithful throughout the world, praying that, in the strength of God we all may continue to be the ministers of Christ to the world he came to save.

In the peace and hope of Jesus, our incarnate Lord.

International Taizé meeting online

The international Taizé meeting will take place online from December 27, 2020 to January 1, 2021.

For the first time the European Meeting of Young Adults will be held it is in Taizé at the end of 2020, a year marked by the Covid-19 pandemic. Already in June, it was announced that the scheduled meeting in Turin, in northern Italy, would have to be postponed for a year. The programme will be broadcast entirely online to allow young people from all over the world to take part and will include common prayers, workshops and Bible meditations.

Young people between the ages of 18 and 30 who wish to participate in the online small groups and ask questions of the speakers must register online on the site by December 20: [https://www.taize.fr/en_article29342.html]

The theme of this 43rd European Meeting will be the title of the text that Brother Alois has written for the occasion: "Hoping in season and out of season - A message for 2021".



Killowen Parish Church, Coleraine

The introduction to this text and the titles of the five parts are available to the press on the Taizé website: [www.taize.fr/en_article29337.html .] The message will be made public on December 21.

The full programme is available online on the Taizé website [www.taize.fr/en_article29837.html] and includes a workshop led by global health expert Dr Christoph Benn on the subject "Moving from competition to cooperation: the challenges to public health in the time of COVID-19."

All those who wish will be able to follow the highlights of the programme, in particular the common prayers and the workshops.

Local initiatives will take place in Europe from Russia, Belarus and Ukraine to Portugal and Spain, from Finland to Italy and further afield in Mexico, El Salvador and the Philippines.

TAIZE LINKS

Website: [www.taize.fr]

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/taize]

Twitter: [<https://twitter.com/taize>]

Vatican: ‘100 Nativity Scenes’ in Saint Peter’s Square

From last Sunday, December 13, 2020, to January 10, 2021, the traditional exhibition can be visited of the “Vatican’s 100 Nativity Scenes” in Saint Peter’s Square, the decision taken as a measure given the spread of COVID-19.”

“In the drama of the pandemic, the Nativity Scene gives consolation and hope,” writes the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization, in an informative note. “The complications of the coronavirus must not impede Christmas being a “moment of joy,” or Jesus Christ’s birth as “hope to look at the future with serenity.”

Christmas Gives Meaning

The press release states “it wouldn’t make sense to look the other way, with indifference, as if the dramatic moment the whole world is living didn’t exist,” as faith “requires looking at the reality and giving meaning to what is happening in personal and human history” and “to live Christmas as a parenthesis would not give a reason for the meaning it has for faith.”



Exhibition Of The 100 Nativity Scenes in the Open Air as An Anti-COVID Measure

The Pontifical Council also adds that all “will be able to pause to admire the beauty of the many Nativity Scenes of different parts of the world, and understand how much love and imagination went into the making of the Nativity Scenes.”

God Becomes Man

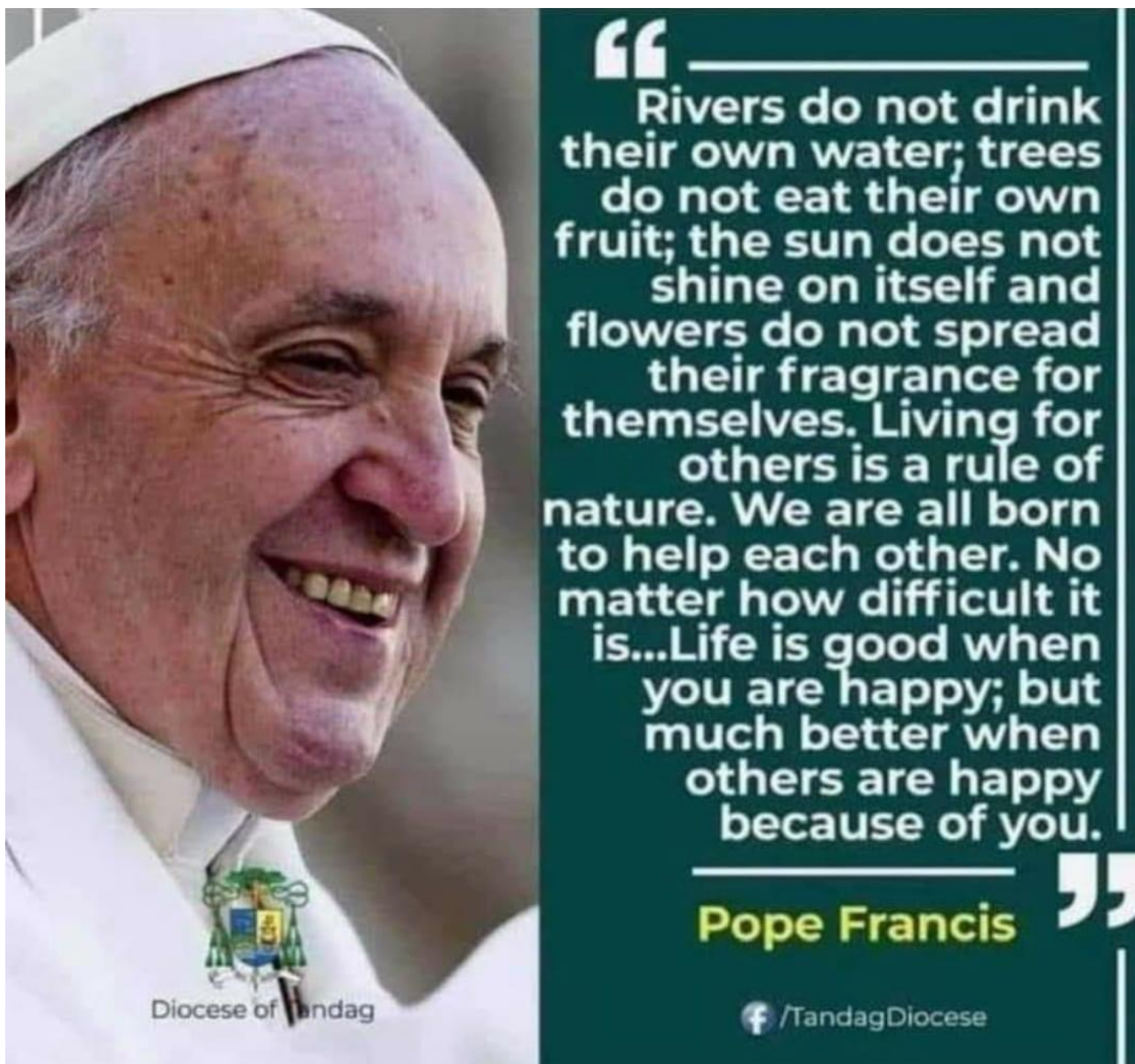
The Pontifical Council highlights that the “simplicity of the scene described” can help people to reflect further on the mystery that implies that God became man and that closeness to their families because of the suffering of the pandemic will include “the faces” of the health personnel and chaplains that assist the sick every day and “give them relief.”

Not forgotten are “the men and women of science who give no respite to their experiments to obtain results that can finally reverse the pandemic curve and conquer it.”

The Family at the Centre

The note points out how the Church has had the intention to “live this same journey with the liturgy, celebrating the Sacred Eucharist” during the night: the secular traditions, the representation of the Nativity Scene in churches, and Christmas as “family celebration.”

However, it continues, many families will live the liturgical celebrations “with sadness” for having lost those closest to them, “that the pandemic has snatched dramatically and



often in violent and inhuman ways, without even allowing them to be close to them for a final farewell.”

Other families “will have their thoughts fixed on the members of the family in hospital being as they are obliged to be alone in these days. The worry and anxiety over their fate will be at the center of their thoughts while they try to send a sign of love and affection,” it adds.

Therefore, “the setting up of a small Nativity Scene in our homes (. . .) will be a sign to support in this juncture the joy of transmitting a family tradition to the younger generations,” it concludes.



Winning shot

Harry Teggarty, Kilhorne Parish (Down and Dromore) was the winner of the C of I the Central Communications Board’s recent photography competition – on the theme of ‘Anything but Covid’.

Mr Teggarty’s photograph pictures the Silent Valley Reservoir, in the Mourne Mountains.

The competition judge remarked: “This is a place of peaceful retreat for many and it’s not hard to see why. In a year marked by turmoil and uncertainty, isn’t it great to know that God remains steadfast and unchanging? This photograph for me is a timely reminder of the things we can still enjoy yesterday, today and that will still be the same tomorrow. Important too is the opportunity to reflect amid the busyness of life and maybe that’s something the last number of months has afforded us.”

A virtual Nativity Play

One of the traditions of Christmas is the children’s Nativity Play; telling the story of the birth of Jesus. Schools in Cork, Cloyne and Ross have been putting on their plays during the current pandemic with children performing within their classroom bubbles.

Parishes present a different dilemma as the children are not necessarily all at school together. A number of parishes have been finding ways around this.

In West Cork, Ross Union of Parishes is one such parish, and you are invited to view their Virtual Nativity. The children recorded it in their homes and it was put together by Play it by Ear.

Booklet explains the story of Disestablishment

1st January 2021 will mark the 150th anniversary of the Irish Church Act 1869, which ended the Church of Ireland’s established status and its union with the Church of England, taking effect.

A leaflet from APCK – available online – outlines the story of Disestablishment and covers how the Church of Ireland became Anglican and Established, why Disestablishment happened when it did, what happened at Disestablishment, and how the Church prepared for self-government.

More information on the Church of Ireland's National Programme of events to mark the 150th anniversary of Disestablishment can be found at www.ireland.anglican.org/d150

Book Spot

Jack by Marilynne Robinson

(Virago, £18.99 (£17.09); 978-0-349-01181-3).

Marilynne Robinson, winner of the Pulitzer Prize and the American National Humanities Medal, returns to the world of Gilead with Jack, the final in one of the great works of contemporary American fiction.

Jack tells the story of John Ames Boughton, the loved and grieved-over prodigal son of a Presbyterian minister in Gilead, Iowa, a drunkard and a ne'er-do-well.

In segregated St Louis sometime after World War II, Jack falls in love with Della Miles, an African-American high school teacher, also a preacher's child, with a discriminating mind, a generous spirit and an independent will.

Their fraught, beautiful story is one of Robinson's greatest achievements."

Pointers for prayer

We pray for all for whom the celebration of Christmas is difficult; those who are ill, at home or in hospital, for the bereaved, the lost and the lonely. May they know the light of Christ in their lives at this time.

As we make our journey through 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.

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.

Thank God for the support of CMSI links in standing with Maridi Diocese in South Sudan in their aim to provide solar panels for the cathedral compound. This improves lighting in church and also water provision for the community from the new water tank.

As well as those now facing Christmas alone, please spare a thought and prayer today for the many, Health workers,
churchnewsireland@gmail.com

police, clergy and others, who are working Christmas Day, for the benefit of others, and have planned their Christmas bubbles for some other day.

God of shadows and echoes, darkness and light, help us to be still in our dark moments, our waiting times, our uncertainties. And when morning comes, show us how to greet the dawn without trying to make sense of the amazing light. — Anonymous

Speaking to the soul

by Bishop Andrew Forster of Derry & Raphoe

Christmas will soon be upon us and then, just as quickly, it'll be gone and we'll be into the New Year, with all its uncertainty.

For as long as I can remember, Christmas has been an exciting time: a time for gathering as family, exchanging gifts and celebrating the birth of Jesus. There was a sameness to our celebrations – what we call ‘tradition’ – which made it all very comforting and reassuring and uplifting.

This year, though, and certainly for the first time in my lifetime, things are going to be different. They have to be different.

The coronavirus has made 2020 a harrowing year for so many people, especially those who lost loved ones during the year and were unable to grieve for them or bury them in the customary way. Those were particularly hard crosses to bear.

The virus is still with us, spreading fear in the community, and leaving anguish and heartache in its wake. So,



Christmas 2020 is going to be quite unlike any other Christmas in living memory.

We can look at this two ways. We can decide that this is going to be the worst Christmas ever – after all, what is there to celebrate? Or we can decide to make this one of the most memorable Christmases ever – certainly in our lifetimes.

If 2020 has taught us anything, it is to recognise and appreciate what really matters in life: being with those we love, looking out for one another; caring for each other; worshipping together. Things that we once took for granted are now, we realise, the most precious things.

So, this Christmas – if we're able to gather in our small groups – we should be extra thankful for the company of those around us. Thankful for what we have. Thankful for those who have provided the food we're going to enjoy.

Thankful for those working in our shops, or who've delivered cards and parcels to our doors. Thankful for those wonderful people in our health services – doctors, nurses, porters, ambulance drivers, carers, ancillary staff; staff in our pharmacy shops. Thankful for our scientists who are pitting their wits against the coronavirus. Thankful for our emergency services workers. Thankful for our teachers. We should be thankful, too, for those who will be giving up their Christmas so that we can enjoy ours. And we should pray God's discernment for our leaders who have complex problems to deal with and difficult decisions to make.

Last weekend, the headline in one of the Sunday papers proclaimed, 'Christmas cancelled for millions'. Christmas has not been cancelled. Yes, it will be very different this year, but it hasn't been cancelled. The name given to Jesus at his birth, Emmanuel, means 'God with us'. In 2020, the significance of that name became obvious to many people. My prayer is that the truth of God's presence may become evident to each and every one of us.

So, this Christmas and in the New Year, we can be thankful to God. As we celebrate the coming of Jesus into the world, we remember that humble stable where he was born. A place of isolation, vulnerability and uncertainty became a place of hope, hope that can become the foundation stone for a better future for each one of us.

I wish you all the peace of Christ this Christmas.

