



The Manger at Southwark Cathedral

**Wishing you a blessed and peaceful
Christmas**

Moderator welcomes agreement on UK/EU trade deal



The Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, Right Reverend Dr David Bruce, has

welcomed news that an agreement between the United Kingdom and the European Union on trade has been reached.

Speaking following the announcement, Dr Bruce said, “As we inch towards the close of what has been a very difficult year, and with the end of the United Kingdom’s transition period in sight, I welcome the news that agreement has now been reached between the UK and EU on trade.

“For Northern Ireland, a new relationship between the UK and the EU has introduced a set of specific regulatory arrangements, unique in these islands. Northern Ireland’s relationship, and interconnectedness, with both the rest of Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom will require significant commitment from us all, to identify ways that will continue to build trust and support the onward pursuit of reconciliation.

“While a hard border will not exist on the island of Ireland, there is the new challenge to be faced regarding the regulation of goods moving between Great Britain and

Northern Ireland. While the practicalities of this are as yet unknown in detail, the trade agreement between the UK and the EU can only be seen a helpful and positive development.”

Dr Bruce continued by saying, “Moving forward in the days, weeks and months ahead, we commit to pray for those in authority who are tasked with implementing this agreement, those involved with logistics, and for businesses as they begin to trade in this new environment and for our neighbours across these islands.”

Archbishop Martin to seek meeting over worship restrictions

The Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland has said a meeting will be sought with the Taoiseach and health authorities after Christmas to discuss worship during Covid-19 restrictions, Ailbhe Conneely reported yesterday.

Speaking on RTÉ's News at One, Archbishop Eamon Martin said gathering for worship is intrinsic to people's faiths.

The Archbishop said church leaders were eager to know what more can be done to keep congregations "as safe as possible in cavernous churches".

From tomorrow, under Level 5, religious services will move online and places of worship may remain open for private prayer.

Archbishop Martin pointed out that Christmas is about the saviour being born and suggestions that Christmas was cancelled was not the case.

He said throughout the pandemic, the Catholic Church has been trying to play its part in protecting the most vulnerable.

In recent days the bishops of Ireland have been issuing Christmas messages over in the lead up to the Feast of the Nativity and many of them refer to the challenges presented by Covid-19. However, they express hope for 2021.

Archbishop of Canterbury joins Kent's Anglican leaders urging government to resolve Dover crisis

Archbishop Justin Welby has joined with other Anglican leaders in Kent to call for decisive government action to support those stranded in Dover, as well local communities affected by the crisis.

In a joint statement on December 23, the Archbishop and the Bishops of Rochester, Dover and Tonbridge said:

"As Anglican leaders in Kent, we are dismayed by the situation in Dover. We recognise the need to take urgent precautions to slow the spread of the new strain of coronavirus. But to leave seasonal workers, families and some truck drivers without adequate food and sanitary facilities is unacceptable - both for those stranded and for the people of Dover.

"For those now unable to return to their families in mainland Europe for Christmas - at the end of this year of such great suffering - the heartbreak and frustration is immense. Local



councils in Kent are stretched to the limit trying to support all those who are stuck. We applaud council workers,

churches, other faith groups and volunteers who are providing hot meals and other kinds of support.

"These efforts are heroic. Kent's local authorities are doing everything they can with the resources they have. But this is a national issue and the government needs to intervene decisively. The necessary provisions must be given for people to endure this ordeal with their dignity intact, making sure enough Covid tests are available so drivers and workers can return home as soon as possible.

"As we reflect on the coming of the Christ-child born in a manger, we are reminded of our responsibility to respect the God-given dignity and value of every human being. May that be the case for the people of Kent, for all those in Dover, in France and everywhere this Christmas."

Archbishop Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury ; Bishop James Langstaff, Bishop of Rochester ; Bishop Rose Hudson-Wilkin, Bishop of Dover; Bishop Simon Burton-Jones, Bishop of Tonbridge

President Higgins commends ‘self-sacrifice’ shown during pandemic

President Michael D Higgins has commended the “great expression of generosity” and self-sacrifice shown during the coronavirus pandemic this year.

In his Christmas message Mr Higgins said the “compassion, care and empathy” extended to vulnerable groups would in particular “define how history will recall these times” and he asked that the nation would continue to move forward in a spirit of solidarity next year.

“What a year we have had, a year in which we have lost so many to this pandemic and during which the lives of so many of our people have been changed utterly as we made our shared efforts to protect each other,” he said.

“In 2020, as we came together to meet the challenge of a global pandemic, we were called on to undertake a demanding adjustment to our way of life, one that has required considerable resilience, self-sacrifice and compassion from us all.”

It was “gratifying”, he said, to see the “great expression of generosity that has been demonstrated throughout this difficult time”.

He highlighted the “self-sacrifice on the part of essential workers, neighbours and family members, all doing their utmost to lessen the isolation and disruption that this year has brought”.

Redoubling the effort to suppress the virus was an act of citizenship, he said.



“When we reflect on our recent experiences this Christmas, this spirit of solidarity can be our guiding light as we proceed onwards towards a new year that will offer us our challenges but which we can approach with hope as a result of what we have been doing together.

“Working together on this project of controlling Covid-19, as it impinges on our lives, requires the best of us all. We need not only to speak the language of citizenship, but to deliver it and to share it, as we encourage each other to have a vision of the light that will surely come if we work as one, renewing and redoubling our efforts to suppress the coronavirus.”

Good citizens

The impact of Covid-19 has been greatly magnified for vulnerable groups and “kindness is a precious commodity” he said.

“May I suggest that the compassion, care and empathy we extend to such groups will define how history will recall these times.”

Throughout the year there had been “so many examples of good citizens” placing the common good above their own wants, making sacrifices as they think beyond the self in the protection of others, he said.

“The Christmas story of a journey to Bethlehem is a founding story of a long and difficult journey, and is invoked as the source of a new dawn and the birth of a new and better world for all. Christmas has always signified a moment of hope, and the revival of hope, a moment to find encouragement, even in the most difficult and trying of circumstances.”

Mr Higgins also reflected on the loss of life and the pain of those whose lives had been changed, and those who had experienced isolation.

‘Hope and solidarity’

“We also remember, this year, in a special way, the many who have been unable to travel to be with loved ones but who, I know, will be connected in spirit during the festive season.”

Ireland could have a brighter future through reflection on what was of value, he said.

“Let us, however, continue to journey forward in a spirit of hope and solidarity. As we stand at a defining moment in our nation’s history, let us choose together how we wish to write this next chapter; how we wish to shape a new Ireland waiting to be born.

“It is an Ireland which can be the better for our reflection on what it is that we wish to value, an Ireland that can better

address our shared existence, our shared vulnerability and our interdependence, all of our relationships.”

Just one school divested from the Church in 2020

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The Programme for Government commits to achieving a target of at least 400 multi-denominational primary schools by 2030 to improve parental choice, Elaine Loughlin write in the Irish Examiner, December 23, 2020.

Covid has impacted on the transfer of schools from the Church with only one divested this year, Education Minister Norma Foley has said.

The Programme for Government commits to achieving a target of at least 400 multi-denominational primary schools by 2030 to improve parental choice.

However, more than 90% of primary schools across the country remain in the hands of the Church despite attempts to give parents alternatives in how children are educated.

Norma Foley said: “It is fair to say that the challenges of Covid 19 have had a direct impact on the pace of the delivery of divestment, notwithstanding that the department and I are fully committed to achieving the targets set out in the Programme for Government.”

Since 2016, just eight schools have been transferred from either the Catholic Church or the Church of Ireland to a multi-denominational patron.



One primary school was divested from the Church of Ireland to Dublin and Dún Laoghaire ETB in June of this year.

The Government has promised to increase the diversity of the school system through a combination of divestment and construction of new schools to meet an increasing school-going population.

A spokesperson for the Department of Education said a schools reconfiguration for diversity process has been developed to accelerate the delivery of multi-/non-denominational schools across the country.

School discriminated against Catholic girl on religious grounds, rules WRC

Successive education ministers, from Ruairí Quinn to Jan O'Sullivan, Richard Bruton and Joe McHugh have tried to increase the number of schools divested from the Church to provide more options to parents, but the pace of change has been slow.

The department said that in parallel with the reconfiguration process, officials are continuing to work with stakeholders to progress delivery of diversity in areas already identified as part of the 2012 and 2013 patronage divesting process surveys.

A total of 12 schools have been established under this process, all of which have a multi-denominational ethos.

"The department anticipates that further multi-denominational provision will arise with the opening of new schools to cater for areas of demographic growth by 2030."

While multi-denominational and Gaelscoileanna have been provided through the construction of new schools, there are still 2,800 Catholic primary schools around the country.

"New schools are established in areas of strong demographic growth. Where there is pressure for school places in an area, additional multi-denominational places may also be provided in response to such demand by increasing enrolments in existing multi-denominational schools," the department spokesperson said.

News briefs

Broadcast Service on Christmas Day - The Rector of Ballyholme, Canon Simon Doogan, will lead the Christmas Day Morning Service on BBC Radio Ulster.

Entitled 'Asleep on the Hay', Canon Simon will reflect on the many different ways in which the Child in the Manger relates to many of the challenges we face during the Coronavirus crisis. Listen at 09.03 on BBC Radio Ulster and again on Sunday 27 December at 10.03.



BCM NI - We were overwhelmed by the support & generosity of those that contributed, donated and volunteered for this year's appeal, raising more than £15,000 and helping us distribute over 3,500 toy and gift packages to families all over Northern Ireland in time for Christmas. Thank you!

Support for Belfast Black Santa - Northern Ireland's leading energy supplier, Power NI has donated £500 funding to the Annual Black Santa collection in Belfast.

The choir, **Cappella Caeciliana**, who helped present the funding were joined by a string quartet also funded by Power NI. The choir comprised of Northern Ireland's most successful young musicians who are all at various stages of their music careers. The singers and players were conducted by Sheelagh Greer.

December 25, 2020

The socially distanced carol singing provided “hope” at a time when the charity and music sectors have been impacted by the restrictions of COVID.

Cappella Caeciliana, one of Northern Ireland's leading chamber choirs which was founded 25 years ago by award winning singing trio: “The Priests”, performed a selection of carols at the Annual Black Santa Charity sit-out.



CUMHRemembers will be broadcast on
RTE 1 TV at 11:00 on Sunday 27
December

RTE ONE

Pregnancy Loss UCC - The 2020 Service of Remembrance will be broadcast at 11:00 (please note revised time) on Sunday 27 December on RTE 1 TV

Bishop thanks schools - Bishop Colton of Cork is involved either as Patron or in other ways in 20 primary schools and 3 second-level schools in County Cork. As schools have reached the end of a challenging and demanding academic term before Christmas the Church of Ireland Bishop has singled out the education work of the Diocese and everyone involved in it, for special mention, praise and thanks.

He said - Everyone involved in running our schools in these extraordinarily demanding times is truly a frontline worker' he said. 'I am thinking not only of principals and teachers, but also of special needs assistants, secretarial, maintenance and cleaning staff, local clergy, as well as the voluntary support given by members of Boards of Management and Parents' Associations. Without the huge extra effort being put in by all these people our schools would not be open. I have seen it first hand in my own home and in my on-going regular contacts with our schools.'

Bishop Colton said that he wanted to single out the children and young people for special mention, "I want to make special mention of the children in our primary schools and students in our second level schools and to thank them for the way they have adapted and entered into an education process that has been far from normal."

Waterford Christian Brother School first 'School of Sanctuary' - Mount Sion CBS has become Ireland's first 'School of Sanctuary' following an assessment process undertaken by the Places of Sanctuary Ireland charity in



recent weeks, after years of welcoming students from many different nationalities to the school.

A School of Sanctuary is “committed to creating a safe, welcoming and inclusive environment that benefits everybody, including anyone in its community who is seeking sanctuary”.

Mount Sion was founded in 1802 by Edmund Rice as an educational institution for boys from Waterford. Its designation as a School of Sanctuary is symbolic of the school’s widespread appeal to those from many different nations.

The school’s founder, Edmund Rice, is considered ‘Blessed’ by the Church, famed for his efforts in education around the country.



Christmas is a gift of love wrapped in human flesh and tied securely with the strong promises of God. It is more than words can tell, for it is a matter for the heart to receive, believe and understand - Mothers' Union

Pointers for prayer

Almighty God, you make us glad with the yearly remembrance of the birth of your Son Jesus Christ. Grant that, as we joyfully receive him as our redeemer, we may with sure confidence behold him when he comes to be our judge. Amen.

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.

Today we pray for those facing redundancy this Christmas. This year, record numbers of people were made redundant during lockdowns and waves of the coronavirus, as Government support changed.

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, 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



Bringing Comfort this Christmas by the Archbishop of York

Most Reverend Stephen Cottrell, the new Archbishop of York's first Christmas message - how this Christmas sheds light on the greener and fairer future we desire for all...

The chorus of the well-known Christmas Carol, God rest you Merry Gentlemen, promises tidings of comfort and joy.

I think we all know what the word joy means. Even though it's been sadly lacking this year!

Most of us will have had significant birthdays, weddings, or the birth of a new family member and not been able to celebrate in the ways we would wish. This has been hard. At least at Christmas we may be able to get together with some of our family members in person or online, and hopefully these will be joyful occasions. But we still need to be careful. The vaccine is being rolled out. But Covid19 has not yet gone away.

Which brings me to the word comfort. It is a slightly trickier word than joy, and easier to misunderstand. Comfort is rather more than tea and sympathy. The literal meaning of the word is 'to strengthen greatly.' It is about building resilience and persevering through difficult times even when there is no joy, and even when there is little of the comfort that we think this word might mean. Here in York this year people have been remarkably positive, sensible and courageous in the way that they have faced coronavirus and looked out for one another. Although Covid19 has been horrific, some good has come out of it in the way we have cared for one another and learned a greater appreciation of one another, especially those who work in our health, emergency and other essential services. At the same time, we must recognise the way our poorer communities suffer more than others and make sure we look out for them. Especially at Christmas. Supporting your local food bank or homelessness shelter has never been more important.

And we need this spirit to continue. We are going to need this sort of strengthening comfort for the months to come. We need to give comfort to each other, by encouraging each other to persevere, by not letting our guard down, by keeping our masks on until we really are the other side of Covid19.

But we will need it in other ways as well. As I write this, it appears that we may get to the end of the year without the trade deal with the European Union that we were told would be so easy to deliver. It no longer really matters which way any of us voted about Brexit, or what we thought about the different versions of the UK in or out of Europe. We are all in the same boat. However, I think very few of us voted for what seems is about to be unfolding. I really hope I'm wrong. And I really hope by the time you read this, things will have changed. But even so, we need to comfort each other because there are even bigger challenges ahead.

On the first Christmas night, the angels sang of peace on earth. We usually think of this peace in human terms: peace between each other, an absence of war. But beyond Covid and beyond Brexit we need to find a way of living in peace with the planet itself. This is going to require a whole different way of living, a different, greener economy, and a greater determination to make painful and difficult lifestyle changes. We are going to need to comfort each other.

So let's have a safe, happy Christmas. Let's be especially aware of our neighbours who may be isolated and who are in need. But this Christmas, let's expand our definition of peace to include peace with all created things and especially with our fragile and beautiful earth. This might bring lasting joy and considerable comfort.



December 25, 2020