

Church News Ireland



Image of the day – Christmas in Kilkenny

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Christmas in Kilkenny

A daughter of the Deanery at the nativity scene in St Canice's Cathedral

People and places



Dean Stephen Forde had interesting visitors on Christmas Eve at the Belfast Cathedral Sitout

Church News Ireland



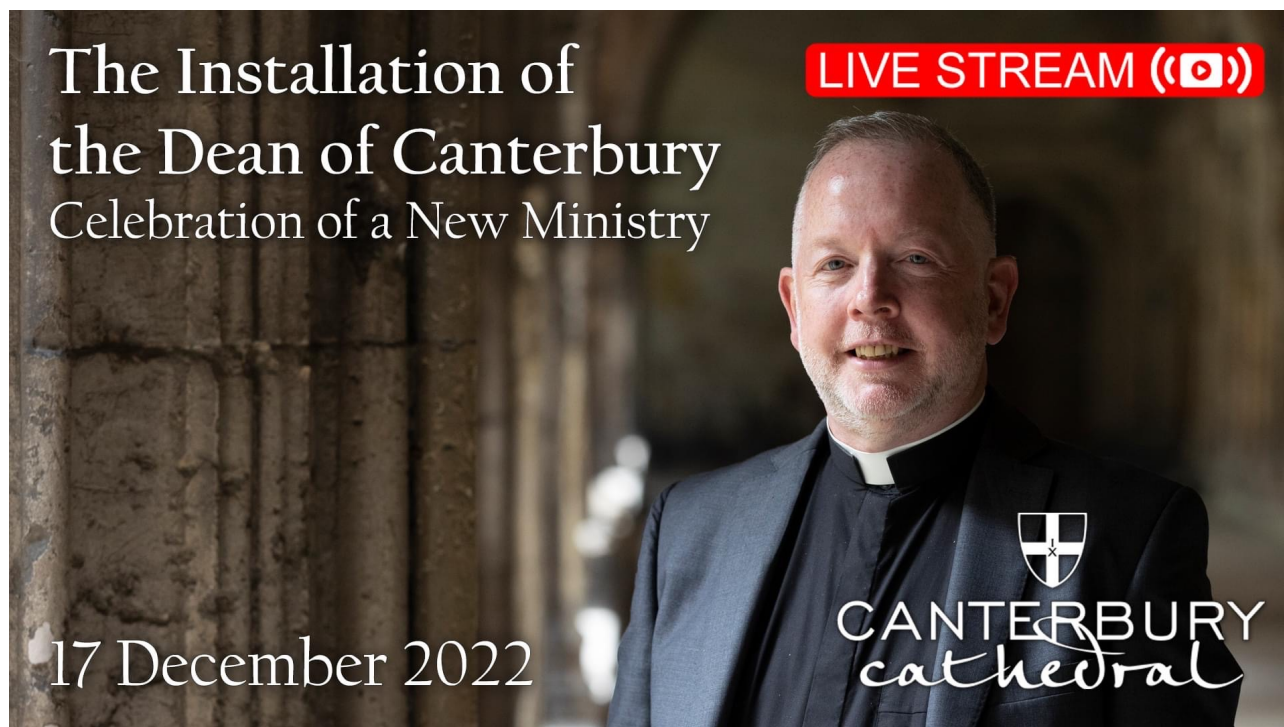
Derriaghy parishioners and rector carol singing in their festive Christmas Jumpers



The new Dean of Canterbury is from Clogher Diocese. The Very Revd Dr David Monteith, formerly Dean of Leicester,

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was elected Dean of Canterbury and his appointment was announced on 11 October.



A civic carol service in St Ann's Church, Dawson St., Dublin took place during the annual Black Santa Sitout







News reports

King Charles praises ‘wonderfully kind’ people helping the needy in his first Christmas broadcast

The King has used his first Christmas broadcast to sympathise with families struggling with the cost-of-living crisis and praise individuals, charities and faith groups supporting those in need.

Charles spoke about the “great anxiety and hardship” experienced by many trying to “pay their bills and keep their



families fed and warm” during his televised message, which featured footage of a food bank and other scenes of meals being distributed to the homeless.

The country is grappling with an economic crisis due in part to the war in Ukraine and the monarch also praised volunteers, paying tribute to the “wonderfully kind people” who donated food or their time.

Charles delivered his historic Christmas broadcast standing in the quire of St George’s Chapel, mirroring the late Queen’s 1999 festive address, and it followed his mother’s well-established template, a personal reflection on the year, touching on current issues and with a Christian framework.

But the King also recognised other faiths, highlighting how religious communities were helping those in financial

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difficulties and, like Christians, believed in the “power of light overcoming darkness”.

The central theme was a celebration of “selfless dedication”, a value embodied by Queen Elizabeth and reflected in the actions of many, from the emergency services to public spirited individuals, which helped to build and strengthen communities.

The pre-recorded message began with Charles reflecting on how he was standing “so close to where my beloved mother, the late Queen, is laid to rest with my dear father” in the King George VI Memorial Chapel, and he thanked the public for the “love and sympathy” expressed in cards and messages of condolence.

He also described how the festive period was a “poignant time” for bereaved families, adding “We feel their absence at



every familiar turn of the season and remember them in each cherished tradition”.

Charles said he shared the late Queen’s “faith in people” who can touch the lives of others with “goodness and compassion”, something he described as the “essence of our community and the very foundation of our society”.

These qualities were reflected in the “selfless dedication” of the armed forces, health and social care professionals, teachers and all those who work in public service.

His words come as the nation faces a series of strikes by public sector workers, including nurses, ambulance workers and Border Force staff.

Charles added: “And at this time of great anxiety and hardship, be it for those around the world facing conflict, famine or natural disaster, or for those at home finding ways to pay their bills and keep their families fed and warm, we see it in the humanity of people throughout our nations and the Commonwealth who so readily respond to the plight of others.

“I particularly want to pay tribute to all those wonderfully kind people who so generously give food or donations, or that most precious commodity of all, their time, to support those around them in greatest need, together with the many charitable organizations which do such extraordinary work in the most difficult circumstances.”

Footage was shown of the armed forces and emergency services at work, from soldiers carrying sandbags to a



speeding ambulance, followed by doctors and nurses on a ward and care workers in a home.

The King's son and daughter-in-law were shown during a visit to St Thomas Church in Swansea in September, and he said: "The Prince and Princess of Wales recently visited Wales, shining a light on practical examples of this community spirit."

William and Kate's trip to Swansea, and earlier that day to Anglesey, was their first visit to Wales since receiving their titles and the prince helped pack a family food parcel for a foodbank based at the St Thomas, while the princess chatted to community nursery nurses who refer mothers to the church's on-site baby bank.

Other members of the royal family were shown at official events from the Queen's 2018 visit to the RAF Club in London to the Queen Consort handing children Paddington bears left in memory of the late monarch.

The Earl and Countess of Wessex and Princess Royal were also featured but there were no images of the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, who stepped down as working royals in 2020.

A few days before the late Queen's funeral on October 19, Charles told faith leaders gathered at Buckingham Palace, as monarch he had an important role to discharge "...the duty to protect the diversity of our country, including by protecting the space for faith itself and its practise through the religions, cultures, traditions and beliefs to which our hearts and minds direct us as individuals."

He recognised those other faiths when he said in his Christmas message: "Our churches, synagogues, mosques, temples and gurdwaras, have once again united in feeding the hungry, providing love and support throughout the year.

"Such heartfelt solidarity is the most inspiring expression of loving our neighbour as our self."

Among the collection of video clips showing the King at official events, Charles was seen wearing a Sikh rumal, or handkerchief, on his head as a mark of respect during a visit to the Guru Nanak Gurdwara in Luton earlier this month, and receiving condolences from the public during a walkabout outside Buckingham Palace in September.

His own faith was another central theme and he spoke about fulfilling a “life-long wish” to visit Bethlehem in 2020 and stand close to the sacred site in the Church of the Nativity that marks the spot where Christians believe Jesus Christ was born.

Charles, who in the past has described himself as a “committed Anglican Christian”, said in the address: “It meant more to me than I can possibly express to stand on that spot where, as the Bible tells us, ‘The light that has come into the world’ was born.”

The Christmas broadcast, written by the King and lasting eight minutes, ended with a message for the religious and those with no beliefs: “While Christmas is, of course, a Christian celebration, the power of light overcoming darkness is celebrated across the boundaries of faith and belief.

“So, whatever faith you have, or whether you have none, it is in this life-giving light, and with the true humility that lies in our service to others, that I believe we can find hope for the future.

“Let us therefore celebrate it together, and cherish it always.”

Bessbrook keeps cherished tradition of early morning carols

In a cherished old tradition, early morning carols are sung in Bessbrook village

Upwards of 40 people took part in an early Christmas morning carol call through the streets of Bessbrook village in Co Armagh today.

The seasonal trek has been a tradition in existence for well over 100 years, with participants drawn from the various church denominations in the Quaker-founded village.

The carollers meet at 5.30am and walk through the streets singing the old favourite and well known carols.

Following this, they attend a Christmas morning service in Bessbrook Methodist church.

Among those taking part yesterday was former Ulster Unionist Stormont Executive minister Danny Kennedy, a life-long resident of Bessbrook.

“This is a cherished Bessbrook tradition which we try to maintain every Christmas morning,” said Danny.

Institutions in Clogher

Institutions of new Rectors in Cleenish and Mullaghduin, and Carrickmacross Union, Magheracloone and Ardragh will be held in February

The Institution of the Revd Canon Jennifer McWhirter as Rector of Cleenish and Mullaghduin will take place on Thursday 16th February at 7.30pm in Cleenish Parish Church.

The Institution of the Revd Canon Ian Cruickshank as Rector of Carrickmacross Union, Magheracloone and Ardragh will take place on Thursday 23rd February at 7.30pm in St Finbarr's Church, Carrickmacross.

540 children in Northern Ireland seeking help from gender identity teams

More than 500 children have been formally referred to doctors for gender identity issues, Noel McAdam reports in the Belfast Telegraph

Of the 540 total, less than 10 percent, or 45 children, were entered onto a programme that in the past used puberty blockers.

The statistics were given to TUV leader Jim Allister, who has previously raised concerns about the matter.

The North Antrim MLA, who believes sex is determined at birth, referred to the controversy over the Tavistock Clinic in England, which is to close next year and be replaced by two regional centres.

That decision was taken after a review found the model used by the clinic could leave young people “at considerable risk” of poor mental health and distress.

Mr Allister said: “There are many people who have serious and legitimate concerns about the issue of transgenderism.

“The whole experience of the Tavistock Clinic should act as an alarm bell to all.

“Puberty is a confusing time for young people, and they have many challenges to deal with.

“The potential of life-altering drugs being given to young people is concerning.

“Regardless of one's take on the issue, and my own is quite clear — I believe that sex is determined at birth — we all need to protect young people, and I am not at all convinced that this matter is being addressed in the correct way.”

Locally, the Knowing Our Identity team, which is part of the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, deals with children up to the age of 18.

Concerns have previously been raised about what has been described as the “endocrine pathway” — a form of treatment focused on the body's endocrine system.

But the Department of Health said that was no longer available as an option for new referrals.

Former health minister Robin Swann told Mr Allister: “The decision to close the pathway was clinically driven, following advice sought from the clinical ethics committee of the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust.”

However, young people who have already been entered onto the programme can continue with it.

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The Department of Health said: “Knowing Our Identity have a cohort of children and young people who were in the service prior to March 2020 who remain eligible for consideration of the provision of physical interventions after that date.

“While Knowing Our Identity is a commissioned service and has access to specific endocrine sessions, there is no commissioned service for adults.

“It was therefore considered unethical to begin blockers and hormone treatment that could not be adequately continued or monitored after the person's 18th birthday.”

Two years ago, the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust sought and received High Court backing to continue endocrine pathway treatments for a 16-year-old.

Almost 1,000 people have accessed specialist transgender services in Northern Ireland in the last few years, around a quarter of them children and young people. Report courtesy of Belfast Telegraph.

In the media

Core values endure with King Charles

Editorial comment in today's Daily Telegraph

Charles III delivered his first Christmas speech from St George's Chapel at Windsor, a place of profound

emotional resonance. This was where Elizabeth II sat alone during the funeral of her husband, the Duke of Edinburgh; it was where the late Queen was herself laid to rest only a few months ago.

Our new King began by paying tribute to “my beloved mother” and acknowledging the nation’s grief, adding that Christmas is a “poignant time” for those who have lost loved ones. “We feel their absence at every familiar turn of the season and remember them in each cherished tradition.”

His Majesty has a deep appreciation of the importance of tradition – the military, the arts, constitution and Church – and for its ability to provide ballast in times of trouble. Just knowing such things are there is a comfort.

Religion is a case in point. The census recently revealed that Christianity is now a minority religion in England and Wales, but we remain a culturally and constitutionally Christian country – and faith provides a language to articulate our fears and ideals, especially at Christmas when, say believers, hope is made flesh through birth.

His Majesty recalled that he once fulfilled a personal ambition to visit the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem and see the spot where tradition says Jesus was born – the earthly point where “light came into the world”.

His mother’s belief in that light, he said, expressed how she saw God, and also other people and their ability, through charity and kindness, to improve the lives of others and “shine a light in the world around them”.

We see this active compassion in aid workers, in caregivers, the emergency services, Armed Forces and in temples of all faiths “united in feeding the hungry ... Such heartfelt solidarity,” said His Majesty, “is the most inspiring expression of loving our neighbour as our self.”

Britons have seen much disruption this year, including three prime ministers at home and a war abroad, the latter destabilising the global economy and throwing families into poverty. It has all been a reminder of the fragility of our world.

We have, however, also seen some of the best of humanity, such as the courage that Ukraine has shown in defying Russia, or the willingness of Britons to throw open their doors to Ukrainian refugees.

In a world of globalisation, dictatorship, technology and overbearing impersonal forces, the individual can still choose to make a difference. Christmas is the time when millions give, share, reconcile and change things for the better.

One could argue that the late Queen embodied this “solidarity”, always putting duty before self. Those who queued patiently to see her lying-in-state often remarked that they felt this was the “least they could do” given all she had done for them.

And when people ask how she managed to give so much without complaint, year after year, one answer was undoubtedly her faith.

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Elizabeth II spoke with such confidence in her Christmas speeches because, for all her reputation for restraint, she was speaking straight from the heart. She was telling us, very straightforwardly, what she believed.

With King Charles's speech – filmed in the beautiful candlelight of St George's – we can see that her values endure strongly through her son. The guard may change, but the principles that motivate the tradition endure.

Daily Telegraph 26/12/2022

Poem for today

A visit from St. Nicholas by Clement Clarke Moore

'Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house
Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse;
The stockings were hung by the chimney with care,
In hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be there;
The children were nestled all snug in their beds;
While visions of sugar-plums danced in their heads;
And mamma in her 'kerchief, and I in my cap,
Had just settled our brains for a long winter's nap,
When out on the lawn there arose such a clatter,
I sprang from my bed to see what was the matter.
Away to the window I flew like a flash,
Tore open the shutters and threw up the sash.
The moon on the breast of the new-fallen snow,

Gave a lustre of midday to objects below,
When what to my wondering eyes did appear,
But a miniature sleigh and eight tiny rein-deer,
With a little old driver so lively and quick,
I knew in a moment he must be St. Nick.
More rapid than eagles his coursers they came,
And he whistled, and shouted, and called them by name:
"Now, Dasher! now, Dancer! now Prancer and Vixen!
On, Comet! on, Cupid! on, Donner and Blitzen!
To the top of the porch! to the top of the wall!
Now dash away! dash away! dash away all!"
As leaves that before the wild hurricane fly,
When they meet with an obstacle, mount to the sky;
So up to the housetop the coursers they flew
With the sleigh full of toys, and St. Nicholas too—
And then, in a twinkling, I heard on the roof
The prancing and pawing of each little hoof.
As I drew in my head, and was turning around,
Down the chimney St. Nicholas came with a bound.
He was dressed all in fur, from his head to his foot,
And his clothes were all tarnished with ashes and soot;
A bundle of toys he had flung on his back,
And he looked like a pedler just opening his pack.
His eyes—how they twinkled! his dimples, how merry!
His cheeks were like roses, his nose like a cherry!
His droll little mouth was drawn up like a bow,
And the beard on his chin was as white as the snow;
The stump of a pipe he held tight in his teeth,
And the smoke, it encircled his head like a wreath;
He had a broad face and a little round belly
That shook when he laughed, like a bowl full of jelly.
He was chubby and plump, a right jolly old elf,
And I laughed when I saw him, in spite of myself;

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A wink of his eye and a twist of his head
Soon gave me to know I had nothing to dread;
He spoke not a word, but went straight to his work,
And filled all the stockings; then turned with a jerk,
And laying his finger aside of his nose,
And giving a nod, up the chimney he rose;
He sprang to his sleigh, to his team gave a whistle,
And away they all flew like the down of a thistle.
But I heard him exclaim, ere he drove out of sight—
“Happy Christmas to all, and to all a good night!”

Speaking to the soul – Christmas series

Short reading and a prayer - daily on this site

Church News Ireland

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