

Church News Ireland



Image of the day – Shining stars on the Shankill

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Lives celebrated in ‘Shining Stars’ in Mid Belfast churches

The railings of the churches at St Michael’s, St Matthew’s, Immanuel, St Andrew’s, and Whiterock (Connect Base) are adorned with ‘Shining Stars’ this Christmas, thanks to a Mid Belfast Rural Deanery project.

Staff and pupils from Malvern Primary School, the Rev Alan Conly and Emmajayne from Shankill and Woodvale Methodist and Keeva and Ben from ROC NI helped the staff team at Church of Ireland Lower Shankill (COILS) celebrate the lives of everyone represented by this project.

A special star above the banner was designed by staff in Small Wonders Afterschool Care in remembrance of little Stella-Lily McCorkindale.

COILS Development Officer Heather Carson said: “It was a privilege for our Community Chaplain, Frank, to lead a service of remembrance at the Afterschool Centre recently and for Rev Janet to pray at our ‘Shining Stars’ Celebration for Stella-Lily’s family and all who knew her at this very sad and difficult time.

December 28, 2022

“Thank you to everyone in Malvern Primary School, Hemsworth Court, Small Wonders Nursery and Afterschool Care, St Michael’s Afterschool Clubs and St Stephen’s Sunday School, who designed our beautiful stars.”

News reports

Dean of Clogher raises over £16,500 in sit-out



The Dean with the Bishop of Clogher and supporters at the sit-out.

The Dean of Clogher, the Very Revd Kenneth Hall has expressed his sincere thanks to everyone from across

Enniskillen Parish and the wider community who joined him and contributed to his fundraising efforts at the gates of St Macartin's Cathedral, Enniskillen on Thursday from 9am to 9pm.

Over £16,500 was raised for three charitable causes; Water Drops which helps people in Kajiado Diocese, Kenya with access to clean drinking water; Northern Ireland Air Ambulance and St. Macartin's Outreach Fund.

During the 12-hour sit-out the Dean was joined by Bishop Ian Ellis and by members of St. Macartin's Cathedral and at times throughout the day, members of the choir sang to passers-by.

Bishop Paul Colton thanks church and community for generous charity work

The Bishop of Cork, Dr Paul Colton, took the opportunity during his Christmas Day sermon in Saint Fin Barre's Cathedral, Cork to express his thanks to everyone – in both the Diocese and in society in general – for their generous, charitable support in response to the needs of our time in 2022.

Bishop Colton was preaching on the words in the Christmas story 'there was no room for them in the inn' and he thanked people who, today, are generously and wholeheartedly making room.

Referring to the complexity of many of the seemingly intractable issues facing society, he said:



Complexity, of course, doesn't let us off the hook. The Christmas Gospel prompts us, each of us, to do what is in our own power and capacity to do, and to engage practically, reflectively and thoughtfully about these challenges. That is why I am so thankful for the track record in this tiny Diocese of ours of the engagement of our charities, for many centuries now, in healthcare, older person and dementia care, addressing the needs of orphans and widows, addressing poverty and economic necessity, our own housing charities – Kingston Charity, the Clergy Widows and Orphans and LappsCharity , by parishes engaging with asylum seekers seeking international protection, and now this year, in response also to the war in Ukraine. Today gives me the opportunity to thank everyone who has helped.

In addition to these practical ways of 'making room', Bishop Colton said there are other ways also of 'making room':

Those are all practical things. But there are other ways in which these words from the Christmas story also challenge our minds, our hearts and souls: conceptually and in terms of our outlook – our worldview – how we think about others – the exclusion that comes from marginalising by speech, stereotyping and caricature, fear, suspicion, othering, misinformation, hatred, demonising others simply because we ourselves do not understand or have got the wrong end of the stick. ... And there's an uncomfortable challenge for churches too. Who, sometimes, even purportedly in God's name, do we leave outside and exclude still?

‘Christmas – the keyhole view to the love of God’ - a joint message from the Bishops of Limerick

It might seem unusual to be talking about Rome at Christmas but there's a particular image from that city that speaks to us at this time.

As bishops of Limerick, one of our shared loves - when we are not happily Shannonside! - is opportunities to visit the Eternal City, Rome. For both of us, this is one of the joys of our episcopal and ecumenical work.

There is something wonderful about walking literally in the footsteps of Peter and Paul, or contemplating those places where early Christian martyrs witnessed with such extraordinary courage. Nowadays, a visit to the magnificent crib in St Peter's Square is a particular seasonal delight.



Bishop of Limerick, Brendan Leahy and Michael Burrows
the Church of Ireland Bishop of Tuam, Limerick and Killaloe

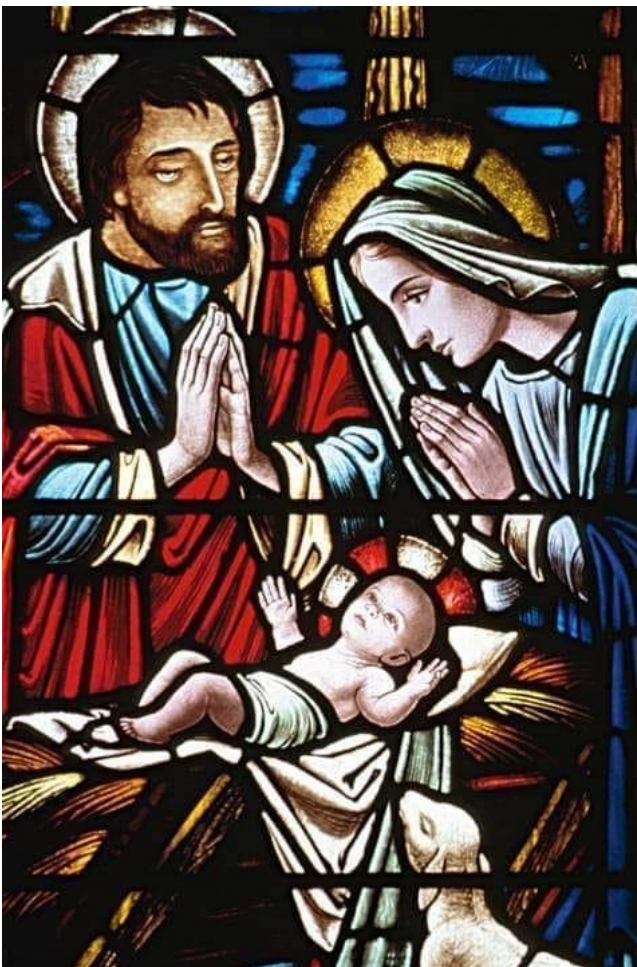
Rome is a city built across several hills and walking around it especially in the heat of summer can be an exhausting business. However, climbing one particular hill is rewarded by one of the more remarkable ‘hidden sights’ of the city.

One walks along a road bordered by high walls and comes to large and ornate locked gates behind which lies a grove of orange trees in the grounds of a religious house. Normally one can walk no further, but putting one’s eye to the keyhole of the gates gives an absolutely perfect framed vista of the city skyline looking towards St. Peter’s. The beauty and grandeur of the city are almost miraculously reduced to what a single eye can glimpse through a keyhole.

In a similar way, contemplating the Nativity, the crib, the scene of the Incarnation, is like having a momentary keyhole view of the whole gamut of the loving purposes of

God. It stays in the mind; it textures one's perspective on supposedly much grander sights. For as one looks through the keyhole of history and imagination at the manger of Bethlehem, somehow one sees it all - the love and humility of God, the dignity thereby bestowed on all humanity even in the midst of poverty, the inestimable value of childhood, the sense of the Peace that comes ultimately from above. It's all there eternity is 'shut in a span'....one simply needs to make the effort to seek the keyhole and not only to enjoy the vista but to respond to it in our hearts and minds.

None of this happens without cost, to God and to ourselves. Responding to the demands of the Incarnation, to its call to respect human dignity, combat poverty, meet the needs of the homeless and the refugee, and build peace in our world and in our hearts is never an easy quest. The perfect vista



O God, you make us glad by the yearly festival of the birth of your only Son Jesus Christ: Grant that we, who joyfully receive him as our Redeemer, may with sure confidence behold him when he comes to be our Judge; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.



of Rome through the keyhole is also a vista of a city where the lions roared in the Coliseum and where early Christians paid the supreme price of demonstrating what belief in the Incarnation was worth to them.

There are aspects of Ireland today and its challenging social conversations which are not that far removed from the issues that faced the Holy Family in Bethlehem, or the Christians of Ancient Rome. In many ways humanity has yet to grasp all the implications of the Incarnation, of what it implies to believe that God is encountered in human flesh.

But at Christmas we can renew our vision, take heart, and see the crib as the keyhole which allows us to glimpse the loving purposes of God for humanity uniquely and comprehensively made known. That view through the divine keyhole, that scene in an apparently obscure corner of the ancient world, will frankly never lose its grip on human imagination or our search for meaning. Enjoy gazing at it and absorb its capacity truly to bring out the best in all of us.

Wales: First joint Christmas Message Anglican and Catholic Archbishops

Wales' two Archbishops came together for the first time to issue a joint message, inviting people to come back to church this Christmas.

The Anglican Archbishop of Wales, Andrew John, has joined with the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Cardiff and Bishop of Menevia, Mark O'Toole, to offer an invitation to church



this Christmas, saying despite "difficulty and despair", this year, "there have been flickers of light in the darkness". The two Archbishops offer examples such as, "The kindness of a neighbour continuing friendships that grew out of the pandemic... Millions of people honouring the memory of a self-less and dedicated Queen. Schools, churches and other community organisations welcoming refugees with open arms into their places of sanctuary."

The two Archbishops, both of whom are relatively new in their role, have struck up a good working relationship over the past year. They wanted to encourage the people of Wales, saying even though "we have met many challenges" over the year, "a warm welcome - Croeso - awaits you" at churches across the country.

Their message starts with a heart-warming tale of the writing of the well-known carol Silent Night encouraging people to remember that sometimes events which begin "tumultuously" or "in fear" can end "with a melody of peace".

Their statement ends: "The true message of Christmas can sometimes be forgotten in the lead up to the 25th December with the busyness of preparations, cooking, shopping and wrapping presents. Why not come to Church this Christmas to place the Prince of Peace at the centre once more?"

School students “Experience Christmas”

The 100+ first-year pupils at Dunoon Grammar School all had a chance to “Experience Christmas” mid-December, writes Dr Chris Brett, Mission Enabler in the Diocese of Argyll & The Isles.

A team of 11 church members, from churches of four different denominations in Dunoon, were invited into the school to run the RMPS classes for the day. They were led by Rev David Railton, Rector of Holy Trinity, Dunoon, and Rev Beki Cansdale, Curate at St John’s Cathedral, Oban, and Diocesan Youth and Children’s Officer. The leaders also included Father Roddy McAuley, Priest at St Mun’s Roman Catholic Church, and Susan Whyte, Argyll Presbytery Youth Worker and Team Leader of eXp, the Cowal Christian Youthwork SCIO.

Each class spent around 50 minutes “experiencing Christmas”. After an introduction from David Railton, groups of 5 to 6 student moved round four stations, each one showing a different aspect of Christmas.

One featured a simple kitchen in Nazareth, where Mary, probably still a teenager, accepted God’s role for her as the mother of the baby Jesus. The students were invited to



consider the challenges they face, and to face them with courage as Mary did.

The second station showed the study of the wise men, where they studied the promises that God had given about the new King, and considered the gifts they would take to him. The students thought about what gifts they might give to the baby King, and drew a picture of something they might give him.

Then the young people moved on to consider the journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem, a long and arduous one. Where would the couple stay when they got there? Would the birth go OK? What would the future bring? The pupils were given a moment to consider their own worries, write them down and take the notes to the shredder – and as they shredded, place them in God’s hands...

The fourth station was at an abandoned log fire, with a half-eaten meal and a shepherd’s crook left behind. What had happened to make the shepherds leave in such a hurry? The angels had given them a message of peace and joy for the whole world, a world that would never be the same again. At this station there were cards saying “Peace be with you this Christmas, Love from . . .”, for each person to write a message on for a friend or member of their family.

Finally the students all came together around a basket with a baby lying in hay, and thought about The Gift, God’s gift to us. They discussed what this means for us. As they left, they placed their gift pictures round the crib.

We received a warm welcome from the school – and were given Christmas lunch! The event forms part of the curriculum, but also gives us an opportunity to tell the real story of Christmas. We hope to be able to follow it up with “Experience Easter” next spring.

Courtesy of Scottish Episcopal Church’s Inspire newsletter.

Perspective

My time at girls' school may have saved my life'- Archbishop of York

The Most Rev Stephen Cottrell, Archbishop of York, recalls his days of truancy and the revelations of school life in Essex before he found faith as a teenager.

I was born and brought up in Leigh-on-Sea in Essex, which was then an old fishing village. Now the fishing village bit of the town is super chic, full of Pilates studios, patisseries and lovely restaurants, but it wasn't like that when I was growing up.

There were catchment areas in those days, and we lived outside it, so only people who got a high pass in their 11 plus went to the grammar school. But both my parents went to the grammar school, my cousins went to the grammar school; I've got two brothers and a sister, and they all went to the grammar school... everybody in my family went to the grammar school – except for me. God has richly blessed me in that I've never felt any sibling rivalry, but I was very conscious that my education was going in a very different direction to my family.

I went to Bellfairs High School for Boys, which was then a secondary modern school. There was no sixth form, in fact the school wasn't set up to achieve academically at all it was unheard-of for pupils to go on to higher education; it

was set up to pour people into the labour market – you left at 15 and got a job. To give you an idea of the standard of teaching I can remember a French lesson when we opened up a text book to a chapter titled, À la Piscine. There was an illustration of a swimming pool, and the idea was you'd learn the vocabulary for words associated with swimming... and the teacher just ordered us to copy the picture. So they weren't even trying to teach us, although as a normal boy that was fine by me.

The school wasn't able to see my potential, if indeed I had any; all my school reports said 'a bit of a dreamer' – and I plead guilty to still remaining a dreamer. But one of the ways I responded to the school's lack of interest was that I truanted ever such a lot, and nobody noticed or minded. I never got caught, I never got disciplined.

However one thing happened at school – on a day when I happened to be there – that was a revelation. Aged 12 or 13 we were set a task: to read a book, write a review about it, and then deliver it to the class. I can't remember what my book was called, it was a war novel of some sort. Amazingly I'd read the book, which I'd really enjoyed, and done the homework, so I had prepared a text. But when I stood up to speak in front of the class I abandoned my notes and just started talking to my peers extemporaneously about the book. And as I started talking I had this experience that I knew I had their attention, in fact I sort of had them in the palm of my hand, everybody was with me and they were listening. And it was a powerful moment. Standing up in that classroom I didn't make the connection that one day I'd become a priest, but I think I realised – and I feel embarrassed saying this to you – that God had given me

probably one of His greatest gifts – that I've got the ability to move people. I know I can make a congregation cry, but I don't turn it on, and I hope I don't abuse the gift.

A school is only as good as its teachers. And there was one teacher at the school whose praises I want to sing: Mr Stennett, who was the deputy head. He was such a good man. He eventually went on to be head, and when he did the school was transformed under his leadership. I was scared of him, but I also had huge respect for him, because when he took School Assembly he said things which related to life that touched and inspired me; he was a key figure in my growing up.

It must have been Mr Stennett who planted the seed of an idea. I was 15 and had got my three O-levels and was faced with the prospect of leaving, but next door to the boys school was Bellfairs High School for Girls, with a completely different ethos and philosophy – and a sixth form. Why don't you talk to them, he suggested – and indeed he might have been working behind the scenes, I don't know. And somehow I blagged my way into the girls' sixth form, along with two friends who were in the same boat: we all kind of thought we were capable of more than what had been ordained for us at the boys' school, although probably the bigger motivation was not yet wanting to go out to work.

Anyway for the next two years I went next door to the girls' school for all my lessons. I was certainly distracted by having girls around, I was a proper adolescent boy with a great interest in girls, but it cut both ways. On the one hand it was great to be surrounded by all these beautiful, mysterious people you could get to know, but we were three

boys in a classroom of girls – we didn't want to look like dummies – and I started working like I'd never worked before.

And it is not an exaggeration to say that the teachers in that girls' school changed – maybe saved – my life, because now for the first time I was in an environment where there was a culture of learning, and where the teachers were looking at how to develop your potential. For instance, I loved writing. In the boys' school no one had taken any interest in that, but I can still very clearly remember my English teacher in sixth form, Mrs Bareham, handing back the first assignment I wrote for her. She took me to one side and she said, 'You do know you've got a gift here?' The affirmation! I believe the most important thing one human being can give to another human being is affirmation: someone believes in you. And it gave me incredible hope.

And now that I had teachers who believed in me I quickly turned my three O-levels into three A-levels. I even retook my maths O-level. So the girls' school in those two years helped me to develop and created the foundation from which almost everything else in my life has happened.

I must now mention another teacher. Mrs Violet Rouse taught RE, and it was clear she had faith, you could tell religion wasn't a subject she was just teaching, I could see here was an adult who believed this stuff, and she had a huge influence on me as a role model of an adult for whom Christ really mattered. And the way she spoke about the person of Christ and His great ability to be present shaped me: still now I'm very committed to living joyfully and

passionately in the moment, and I tell you it is a great gift to inhabit the moment.

All the time I was at that school I never told Mrs Rouse she was saying things which resonated with me, nor the impact that had on my growing Christian faith. But then about 40 years later I was the Bishop of Reading, my first job as a bishop. I was preaching in church on the Sunday morning and in the congregation was Mrs Rouse, now an old frail lady. I recognised her instantly, but she didn't recognise me: why should she? She had taught thousands of people and I was just one oik who had passed through her hands. At the end of the service I was standing at the door shaking hands like you do, and as she came to the door with, as it turns out, her daughter, I said to her, 'It's Mrs Rouse, isn't it?' and she said, 'Yes.' 'Well,' I said, 'you won't remember me, but you taught me RE 40 years ago at Bellfairs.' And I was then able to tell her how she'd had a huge impact on me when I was just beginning to explore my Christian faith and how she had really shaped my life. And it felt like such a gift to finally thank this woman. And we kept in touch afterwards and I took her funeral.

I don't want to do the boys' school down, because in some ways I have a love for it, but equally I've got a bit of anger with it too. It was an age when corporal punishment was still commonplace, and discipline was kept in the school by violence, and it was vicious and frequent, and once or twice I saw boys retaliate against the teachers, and then it became very ugly.

However, when I became Bishop of Chelmsford, Leigh-on-Sea was in my diocese, and I reconnected with the school.

It is now a very high achieving, wonderful, mixed comprehensive school. Despite there being a grammar school in the town some parents deliberately choose to send their children to Bellfairs because it specialises in the arts and drama, and actually it's an all-round great school. They invited me to become a governor of the trust that oversees the school and that was good to do, and I love going back there to talk to today's students and tell them a bit of my story. It wasn't a good school when I was there, but in a funny kind of way it made me, and so I remain thankful for my education, although obviously critical too.

Poem for today

The Work of Christmas by Howard Thurman

When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and the princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flock,
The work of Christmas begins:
To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among brothers,
To make music in the heart.

Speaking to the soul – Christmas series

Short reading and a prayer - daily on this site

Church News Ireland

The publication of Church News Ireland is overseen by Very Rev Dr Houston McKelvey OBE, QVRM, TD. He may be contacted at houstonmckelvey@mac.com
