



Nativity at Southwark Cathedral

Clergy role in search for peace revealed in State documents



Catholic Primate Cahal Daly

Clergy role in search for peace revealed in State documents

Newly released Irish State papers from 1990 detail secret contacts with the Republican movement that were eventually to lead to the peace process, and to the 1994 IRA ceasefire.

Whilst talks were being held between John Hume and Gerry Adams, the State papers posit the analysis that the Provisional IRA could impose its view on Sinn Fein, but the reverse was not the case.

Dermot Gallagher, a senior official in the Department of Foreign Affairs, noted a conversation with then designate

Catholic Primate Cahal Daly in Belfast on November 24 1990.

Mr Gallagher wrote that Bishop Daly believed direct messages from the Provisional IRA “would carry more weight”.

“If this is true, and we suspect that the Bishop’s reading of the situation in this regard is accurate, it follows that messages emanating from the IRA proper (as at present via the chaplains) probably carry more weight than anything emerging from the on-going dialogue between Adams and John Hume,” he wrote.

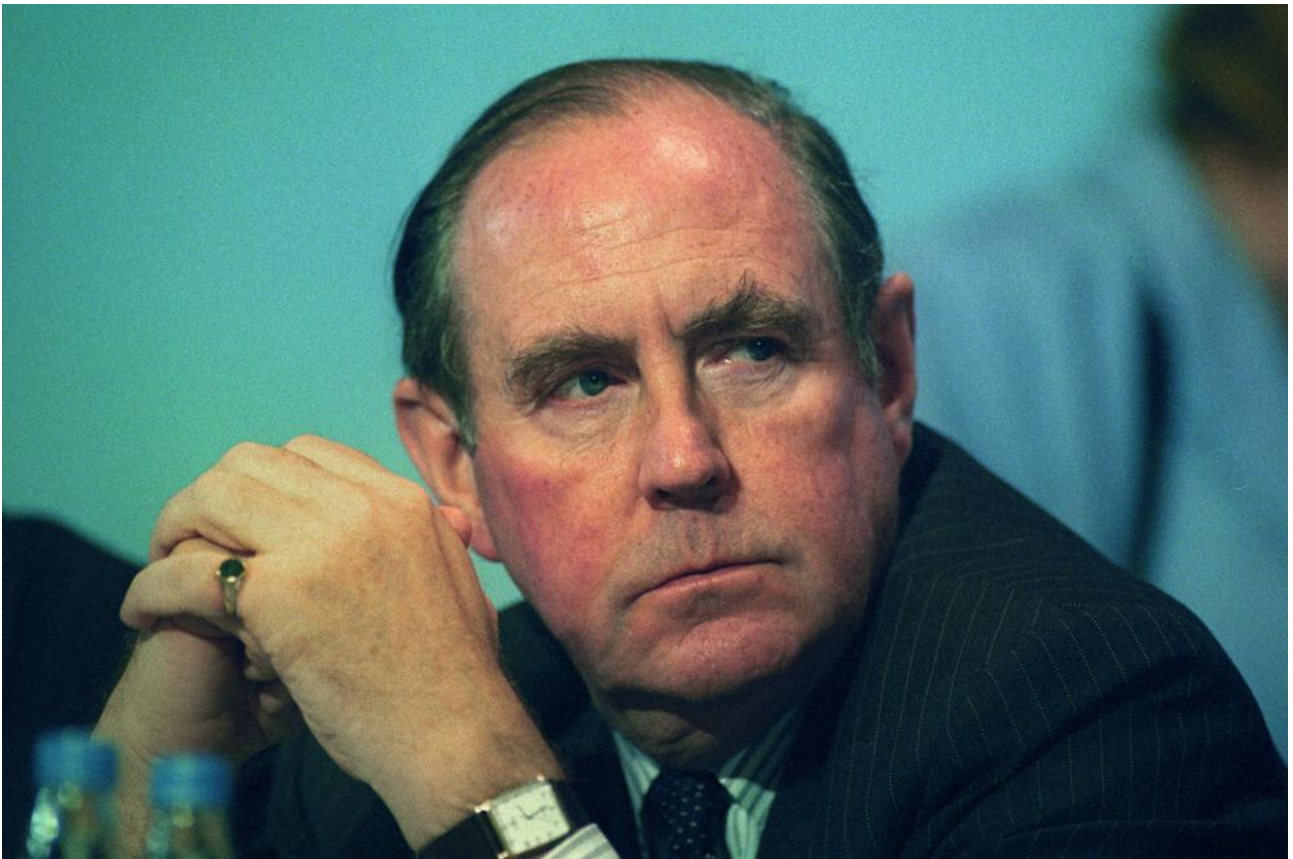
Mr Gallagher wrote that the cleric believed the Provisional IRA was serious about turning away from violence.

Bishop Daly is said to have assessed the Provisional IRA had the capacity to go on almost indefinitely at the present or increased level of activity, but “seemed to realise that their objective was now not achievable through military means”.

The cleric was also said to have described a speech by former secretary of state Peter Brooke on November 9 1990, declaring that Britain had “no selfish strategic or economic interest” in Northern Ireland as “historic”.

The two Murphys - Prison chaplains - provided a more direct channel

There was a more secret and more direct channel of communication between the British government and the IRA Army Council, involving the Catholic and Church of Ireland



Northern Secretary Peter Brooke

chaplains at the Maze Prison, Fr John Murphy and Reverend Will Murphy.

The two Murphys were in direct contact with two members of the Army Council, and with the IRA Chief of Staff, who according to Fr Murphy showed "a particular anxiety to get talks under way at an early date."

The newly appointed Catholic Primate, Cahal Daly, believed that Sinn Féin and the IRA were separate organisations, but he had no doubt which was in charge: "while the IRA was in a position to impose its view on Sinn Féin, the reverse was not the case".

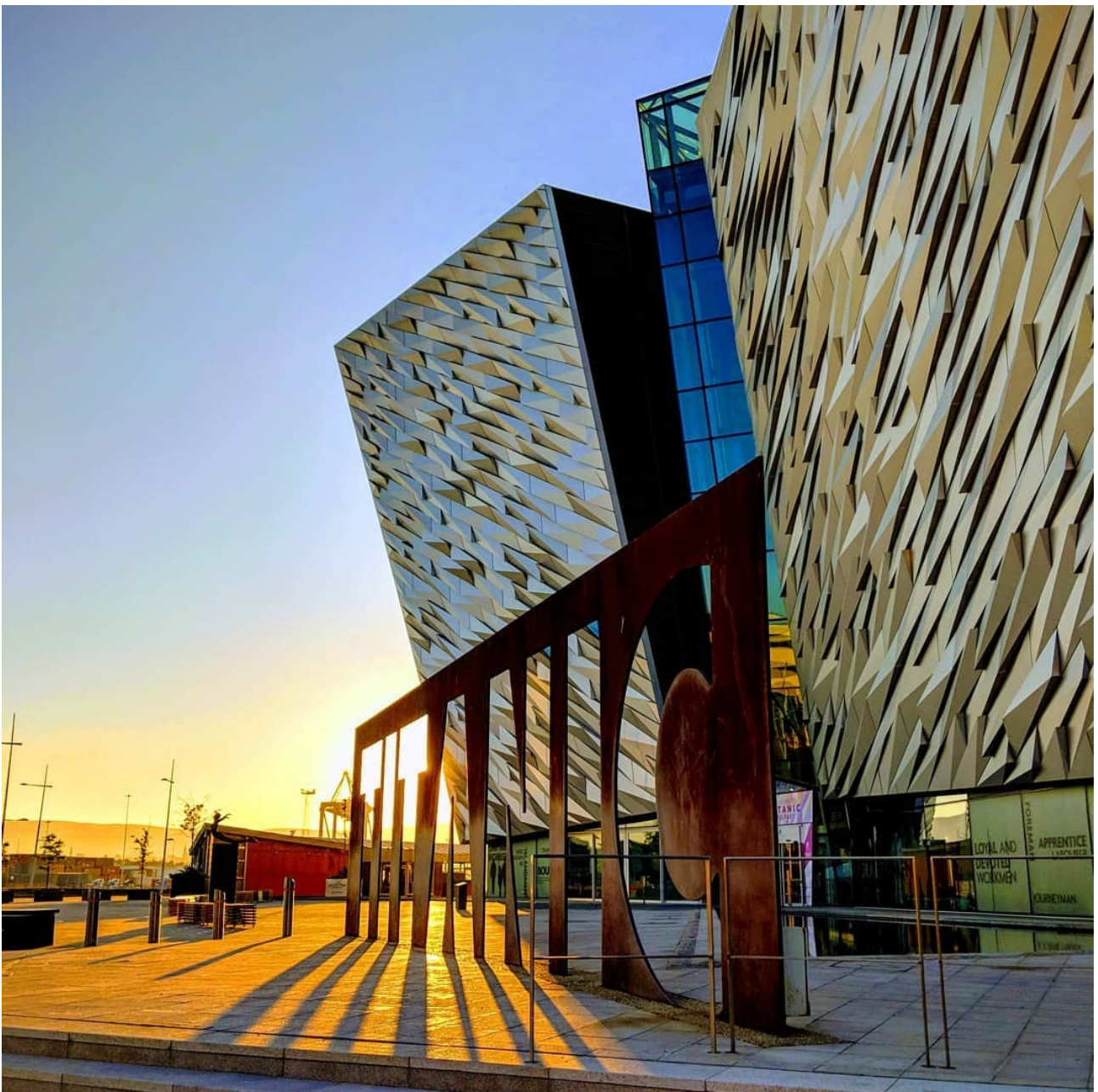
The Department of Foreign Affairs agreed with this assessment, which led it to believe that the link to the IRA

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through the Maze chaplains was probably more significant than the ongoing Hume-Adams process.

A similar point was made by Belfast solicitor Paddy McGrory, who had close contacts with Republicans.

He told Foreign Affairs that while Gerry Adams was "one of the few people in the movement with a long-term view and with a capacity to think in an imaginative way", he was "unable to make any significant move without the approval of the IRA".



In practice, though, the two routes worked in tandem.

This finally bore fruit on 9 November 1990, when Northern Secretary Peter Brooke said in a speech: "The British government has no selfish strategic or economic interest in Northern Ireland."

A few weeks later Danny McNeill - just back from a briefing in London - asked to see Fr Murphy. He went through Brooke's speech in detail, and "was anxious in particular that the Army Council should realise that this speech had been addressed to them".

He also told Fr Murphy that Brooke "was generally supportive of the initiative", and that new prime minister John Major "was aware of the initiative but not in a way which would require him to consider taking a decision one way or the other at this time."

In Dublin, the Department of Foreign Affairs believed there was scope for progress, through either or both route of communication between the British and the Republican movement. *Sourced from RTE and Belfast Telegraph*

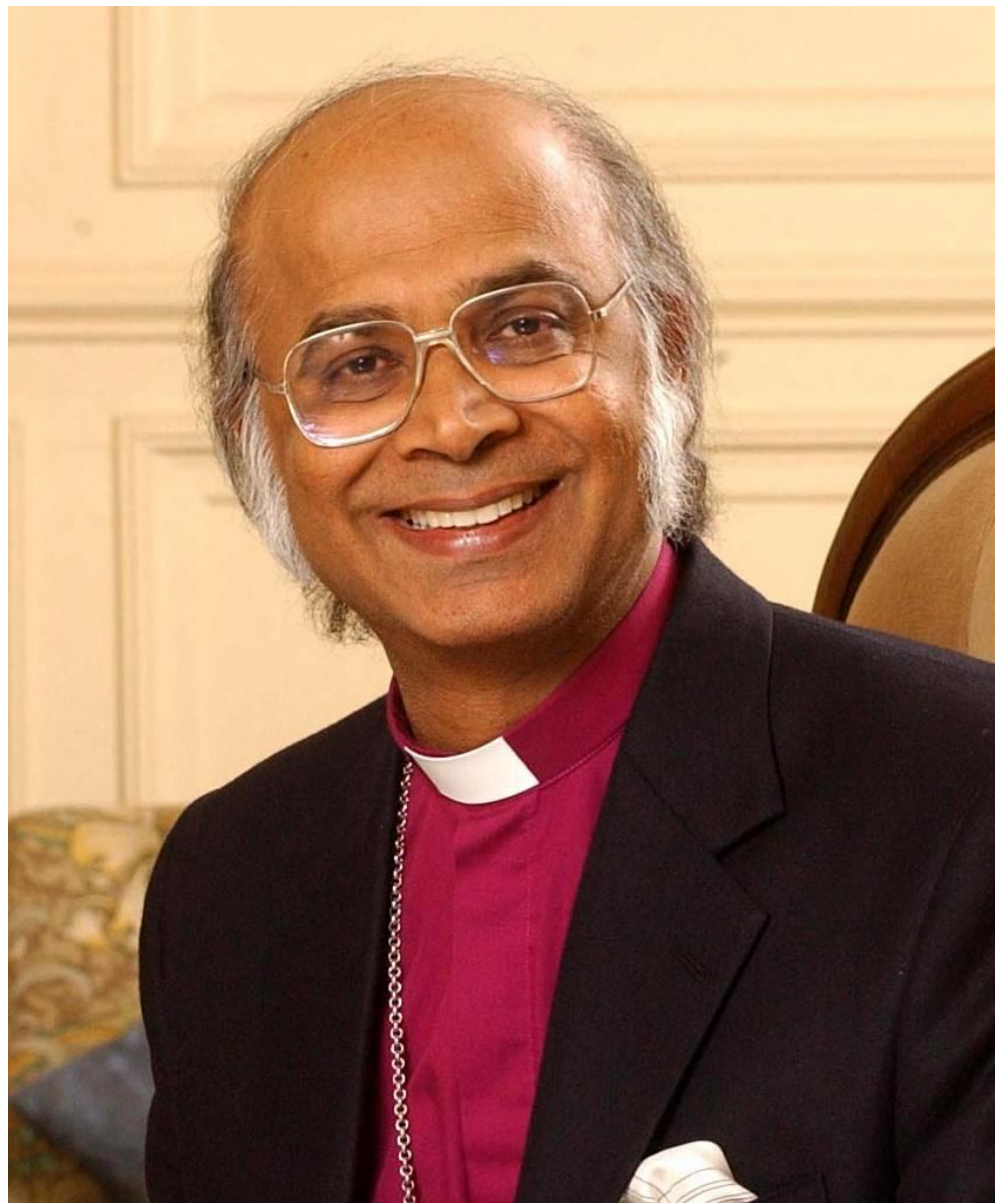
Bishop attacks C of E clergy cuts idea amid Covid cash crisis

A bishop has criticised proposals to heavily reduce clergy numbers and redraw parish boundaries in an effort to recoup £150 million in pandemic losses, Gabriella Swerling writes in the Daily Telegraph

Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali believes the focus of the reported plans is wrong

**Bishop
Michael
Nazir-Ali**

(right)
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Restrictions
to curb the
virus's
spread have
plunged the
Church of
England
into a
financial
crisis as
collection
plates at

services went unused and the usual fees for special services such as weddings, funerals and christenings dried up, according to the Daily Mail.

It is also feared that the ultimate figure may in fact be higher than £150 million, prompting plans for money-saving reforms.

Among the proposals reported to have been discussed are a cut in the number of bishops from more than 100 to as few as 10, and a redrawing of parish boundaries to reduce their number from 12,500 to 9,000.

It is believed the plans could be made public in February before the General Synod votes on them in July.

Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali, formerly Bishop of Rochester, criticised the reported plans yesterday, saying: “I think the last thing that they should cut are the pastors, bishops or clergy.

“It is better to reduce the bureaucracy rather than the number of bishops, because people tend to identify with bishops as the face of a place. But there is a lot of scope for amalgamating dioceses and offices, financial services, pension arrangements, that kind of thing – and this is all within the hands of Church commissioners.”

C of E has been reviewing size and number of dioceses over past ten years

A Church of England spokesman added: “For at least the past 10 years the Church of England has been regularly reviewing the size and number of dioceses so as to most efficiently and effectively share the gospel and serve the whole of our nation.

“Along with other communities and organisations, the current pandemic has brought this discussion further up the agenda. But at the moment it is no more than that: a discussion. There are no specific proposals under discussion.”

The report comes after The Telegraph reported in October that village churches are struggling to draw the same congregations and funds as their urban counterparts, with the pandemic exacerbating the pre-existing problems.

Pope: Small acts of love can change the course of history

During the Angelus on the feast of St Stephen, Pope Francis urged Christians to witness to faith in Christ, by repaying evil with good and breaking the cycle of hatred with love.

Speaking from the Library of the Apostolic Palace, the Pope said St Stephen was the first person to witness to Jesus with his life, making him the first Christian martyr, which means "witness."

Stephen was "the first of a host of brothers and sisters who continue even today to bring the light into the darkness.." These men and women do not succumb to violence but break the chains of hatred with meekness and love. "In the world's nights, these witnesses bring God's dawn," he said.

Pope Francis said St Stephen shows the path for all other Christians, which is "imitating Jesus." Yet, added the Pope, one might ask: "are these witnesses to goodness really necessary when the world is rampant with wickedness?" The day's First Reading (Acts 6:8-10; 7:54-59) offers the answer in a tiny detail, he said.

As Stephen lay dying from his wounds, he prayed that God might forgive his murderers. "The text says that among those for whom Stephen prayed and whom he forgave there was 'a young man named Saul', who 'was consenting to his death.'"

Saul, noted the Pope, would become Paul, the greatest missionary in history. "Paul was born by God's grace, but through Stephen's forgiveness, his witness. That was the



seed of his conversion. This is the proof that loving actions change history."

Even small acts of love can change the course of history, said the Pope, because God "guides history through the humble courage of those who pray, love, and forgive."

Pope Francis said we too can make a difference through the ordinary events of daily life.

"We are called to bear witness to Jesus right where we live, in our families, at work, everywhere," he said, "even just by giving the light of a smile and fleeing the shadow of gossip and tattle-telling."

He also offered a piece of advice. Rather than complaining when we see something wrong, we should pray for the person who made the mistake.

"Saint Stephen, while he was on the receiving end of the stones of hatred, reciprocated with words of forgiveness. He thus changed history."

Each of us, said Pope Francis, can turn evil into good when we return love for hatred.

He went on to ask everyone to pray for the many Christians who are facing persecution for their faith in Jesus: "Let us entrust these brothers and sisters to the Virgin Mary, that they might respond with meekness to oppression and that, as true witnesses to Jesus, they might conquer evil with good."

Opinion - Lady Tebbit's life laid bare the IRA's iniquities by Simon Heffer

If, at this season of goodwill, you seek a lesson in good and evil, consider the late Lady Tebbit, who died last week. She was paralysed in the Brighton bombing of October 1984, which killed five people and injured over 30 others, including her husband Norman, then Trade Secretary.

The bombing was an act of utter criminality, undertaken by a Provisional IRA operative who whined, preposterously, that he was fed up with the government describing the IRA as simply a criminal organisation. For what he believed to be the terrorists' elevated principles, Margaret Tebbit spent the rest of her life in a wheelchair.

If that was the evil, then the abundant good was the way that her devoted husband and children spent the rest of her life showing the strength of family and love in such appalling circumstances.

By supporting her enormous spirit, will, determination and, above all, heroic bravery, this ensured she triumphed over



Lady Margaret Tebbit, a former nurse and wife of ex-Conservative minister Norman Tebbit, has died, aged 86.

not just disability, but over evil. But the wickedness that lay behind her afflicted state said something profound about the mindlessness of terrorism and the desire to impose someone else's will in the face of democratic opposition.

Magee, the bomber, subsequently did a PhD on fictional representations of the IRA. His life sentence was supposed to mean life, but he was released after just 14 years under the Good Friday Agreement.

The Tebbit family had to endure not just that monstrous injustice, but the sight of another IRA murderer, Martin McGuinness, posturing as a leader of the Northern Ireland government. The IRA promoted a myth of oppression and of Northern Ireland's "occupation". There were democratic remedies to the sundering of six counties from the Republic

of Ireland, and one day they will probably prevail. But because a minority of gangsters would not accept them, they chose criminality instead.

Some relations and friends of Magee's victims have chosen to forgive him; Lady Tebbit said she would forgive him if she thought he had genuinely repented of his wickedness. Lord Tebbit has asked, quite rightly, why Magee, if remorseful, has not provided information on his co-conspirators, so they, too, can be brought to justice. Of course he hasn't, because once a gangster, always a gangster.

It was daringly fashionable in the 1980s to argue that the IRA had a point. Pop stars did it. Student radicals did it. Some journalists did it. The prime minister recently appointed another apologist, Claire Fox, to the House of Lords.

But anyone who ever thought the IRA were morally justified in its behaviour should have spent five minutes with Margaret Tebbit – not because she would have denounced them, or sought sympathy, but to see in human terms what suffering these criminals inflicted upon an innocent woman.

Lady Tebbit inspired all who knew her; and the family who loved her are a towering example of decency in an ugly world. However noble her feelings were towards those who would have happily killed her, she will always be a reminder that some acts, and some people, are entirely unforgiveable.

Courtesy Simon Heffer and the Daily Telegraph

Up to half of Samaritans volunteers isolating during Covid-19 pandemic

Up to half of crisis charity the Samaritans' volunteers were off self-isolating during the pandemic in Northern Ireland, a branch director has said.

Some people were coming in two or three times a week to fill the gaps.

Someone calls the charity every seven seconds across the UK.

Wesley Wilson said: "We lost about 30 per cent of volunteers who had to self-isolate."

The director of Samaritans' branch in Bangor said that was for medical or other reasons.

That rose up to nearly 50 per cent by the height of the first lockdown."

Normally, volunteers do one day a week.

By the height of the pandemic they were doing maybe two or three a week to fill the gaps left by others self-isolating.

Mr Wilson added: "We were able to manage the service."

The Samaritans received a £50,000 donation from Electric Ireland following its resolution of an official investigation into its business practices.

The money was spread across its branches in Northern Ireland.

The Bangor branch costs £30,000 a year to run.



That pays for telephone bills, heating and lighting.

All the workers are volunteers, but some expenses can be paid.

Mr Wilson said there had been significant demand for services during the pandemic.

"The majority of calls would have anxiety somewhere about Covid.

"They are people who are afraid of catching it.

"Those people with mental health issues normally do things to distract from the anxious thoughts, like taking exercise and engaging with others, groups or social events, ways they can distract themselves from thinking about anxiety.

"With lockdown they could not do that, and they were ruminating with the anxiety that they have.

"Covid has taken away things they can do."

He said someone across the UK calls Samaritans every seven seconds.

"We do not have to look for callers."

Experts say that mental ill-health remains the "biggest contributor to overall population ill-health in the UK".

The Samaritans are open 24/7 by phone on 116 123, by email and in person.

News briefs

Good news funding - St Peter's Parish Church in Antrim Road, Belfast, is one of seven Northern Ireland churches to share £30,000 of funding from the National Churches Trust. Read more at <http://www.connor.anglican.org/>.

St Patrick's Dublin Nine lessons still online - The annual 9 Lessons and Carols broadcast on RTÉ radio 1 as well as the Christmas Day Eucharist and Evensong (3.15pm) on the day itself will be available here on the cathedral's facebook pages and www.stpatrickscathedral.ie/christmas

Recruitment for new Youth Panel Members - NI Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY). - The

NI Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) is seeking new members for her NICCY Youth Panel. This is a group of young people who advise the Commissioner on key issues and assist her in the work of safeguarding and promoting the rights and best interests of children and young people.

The panel are involved in a range of key functions within the organisation including involvement in projects; recruiting staff; media engagement; designing the website and publications and hosting conferences and presentations. Additionally, the youth panel members also have the opportunity to meet directly with government Ministers and officials, enabling them to challenge key decision makers and ensure their voice is heard. Panel members receive training and support to enable this to happen.

For additional information and an online form for the NICCY Youth Panel, go to NYP Recruitment on the NICCY website. www.niccy.org/JoinTheYouthPanel

The closing date for applications is Friday 29th January 2021.

NI International Organ Competition - “We are so saddened to hear of the passing of the British organist Catherine Ennis: an exceptional musician and encourager, who was so proud of her Irish roots. She chaired our competition in 2018, awarding Laura Schlappa (this year’s Senior winner) first place in the intermediate category. Requiescat in pace, our dear friend.”

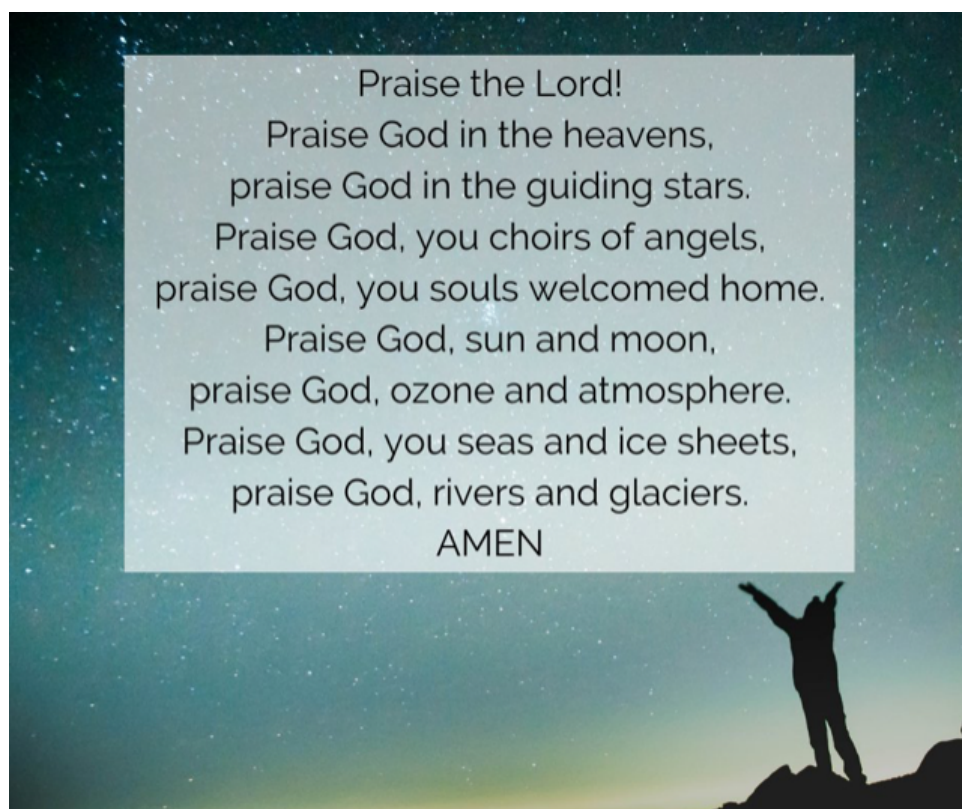
Ulster Farmers Union is frustrated - following the Northern Ireland Office’s reply at the eleventh-hour regarding sheep movements from GB to NI under the NI Protocol... “sheep entering NI cannot meet the new rules

that are being applied as there is currently very few scrapie monitored flocks in Scotland and under current arrangements, it takes seven years for a flock to become fully scrapie monitored. <https://ufuni.org/news/ufu-and-n>

Pointers for prayer

May the joy of the angels, the eagerness of the shepherds, the perseverance of the wise men, the obedience of Joseph & Mary, and the peace of the Christ-child be yours this Christmas and the blessing of the Father, Son & Holy Spirit be with you. Amen

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.



Today we pray for the transformation which Jesus brings. This Christmas, we remember the coming of Jesus to our world, and the promise of hope which that brings with it.

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.

Speaking to the soul

Mary gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them.

Luke 2:5-7 NLT

In a few brief verses Luke summarizes the birth of Jesus. Brief as they are, Luke offers us more details than any of the other gospel writers. That means that we need to treasure every detail that he gives us, and they are all amazing.

After placing the birth of Jesus within Roman and Jewish history we are given some very specific details about the birth. With the town crammed full for the census there was, not surprisingly, nowhere for the family to stay and after his birth Jesus was placed in a manger, a cattle feeding trough. The manger has been dolled up over the years and on many Christmas cards it looks like an idyllic place to be put straight after birth. But it wasn't. It was just the only place that was available. It would have been smelly and

unhygienic and the last place that anyone would want to use for a newborn.

The idea of God coming to this earth in human form is amazing enough. But for him to have made his entrance in the least suitable place at a time of profound political upheaval tells us much about the nature of our God. He could, of course, have come to a palace and had attendants waiting on him. He could have ensured that doctors were on hand and that servants would have ensured that every surface had been meticulously cleaned. As God he could have done all that and more. But he chose to come to this tangled, confused, distracted world just as it was.

He comes in the same way to you and me today. He doesn't wait for everything to become ideal. He meets with us where we are and gladly enters into our lives.

QUESTION

Are you willing to welcome Jesus just where you are?

PRAYER

Thank you Lord that you showed the full extent of your love when you sent Jesus into the world. I praise your name.
Amen.



