

Church News Ireland



Image of the day – Church Leaders’ New Year Message

News reports

Church Leaders' 2023 New Year Message

In their New Year Message Irish Church leaders have praised the 'compassionate and practical' response of people across the island of Ireland as they welcomed those who had fled the war in Ukraine and other conflicts around the world.

Speaking as the Church Leaders' Group (Ireland) the Church of Ireland and Roman Catholic Archbishops of Armagh, Most Rev John McDowell, Most Rev Eamon Martin, Presbyterian Moderator, Rt Rev Dr John Kirkpatrick, and the Presidents of the Methodist Church and Irish Council of Churches, Rev Ken Nixon and Bishop Andrew Forster, said that, "When millions of people had to flee their homes there was however an extraordinary compassionate and practical response on our island, north and south, to welcoming and meeting the needs of those who arrived here..."

The five Church Leaders also said that this had "...also challenged us all as to our attitudes towards people who have had to flee conflict in other parts of the world. The compassion and care that Christ calls us to offer to the stranger in our midst cannot be conditional on their country of origin or indeed the colour of their skin."

Speaking of the continuing cost of living crisis the Church Leaders said that it had “impacted many areas of life” and had exacerbated “the scandal of homelessness”. At the same time, “many who have a home find themselves unable to afford to heat it during the cold weather. This simply should not be the case in countries of great wealth, and shows the urgent need for a refocusing of government policies in both jurisdictions to deliver real and meaningful social justice and eliminate poverty across this island...”

As they looked ahead to the 25th anniversary of the Belfast/ Good Friday Agreement in 2023, which they said “transformed the conflict in Northern Ireland, resulting in countless lives being saved...” they also shared “their great concern for the state of our fragile peace on this island...” saying that “we are more aware than ever that the work of peace is unfinished.” Together they recommitted themselves “...to continue our work towards a vision of an island of restored relationships, where all can flourish and fully participate in our common life.

“Yet, amidst all that has been in 2022 and all that lies ahead in 2023, as Christians, we have a sure and certain hope of new creation in Christ. Through the miracle of His incarnation, Emmanuel – God with us – came to reconcile us to himself...” they said.

[Full text of the Church Leaders’ 2023 New Year Message](#)

If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. (2 Corinthians 5:17-18)



The year 2022 has been one of significant trauma and shock for many, on this island, across Europe, and around the world. As the most significant restrictions necessitated by the Covid-19 pandemic began to ease, war broke out in Europe with the invasion of Ukraine by Russia. When millions of people had to flee their homes there was however an extraordinary compassionate and practical response on our island, north and south, to welcoming and meeting the needs of those who arrived here. However, this has also challenged us all as to our attitudes towards people who have had to flee conflict in other parts of the world. The compassion and care that Christ calls us to offer to the stranger in our midst cannot be conditional on their country of origin or indeed the colour of their skin.

Communities across our island have also experienced a significantly increased cost of living in 2022. This has

impacted many areas of life, such as exacerbating the scandal of homelessness and also meaning that many who have a home find themselves unable to afford to heat it during the cold weather. This simply should not be the case in countries of great wealth, and shows the urgent need for a refocusing of government policies in both jurisdictions to deliver real and meaningful social justice and eliminate poverty across this island.

Looking ahead, the year 2023 brings the 25th anniversary of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement. The Agreement itself transformed the conflict in Northern Ireland, resulting in countless lives being saved. We know that so many continue to live with the pain and trauma inflicted on them and we also recognise that the agreement came at a high price for many, for whom the release of prisoners was, and still is, particularly painful. Its 25th anniversary comes at a time when we have great concern for the state of our fragile peace on this island and we are more aware than ever that the work of peace is unfinished. As individual Christians and as leaders in our respective Christian traditions, we recommit ourselves to continue our work towards a vision of an island of restored relationships, where all can flourish and fully participate in our common life.

Yet, amidst all that has been in 2022 and all that lies ahead in 2023, as Christians, we have a sure and certain hope of new creation in Christ. Through the miracle of His incarnation, Emmanuel – God with us – came to reconcile us to himself. In His life, death resurrection and ascension the Lord Jesus showed us his power to reconcile broken relationships and called us to participate in his ongoing reconciling work in our communities. That remains the task

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before us in 2023, as we share the Good News of Jesus both in word and deed in our broken and needy world.

Right Reverend Andrew Forster

President of the Irish Council of Churches

Right Reverend Dr John Kirkpatrick

Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland

Most Reverend John McDowell

Church of Ireland Archbishop of Armagh & Primate of all Ireland

Most Reverend Eamon Martin

Roman Catholic Archbishop of Armagh & Primate of all Ireland

Reverend David Nixon

President of the Methodist Church in Ireland

Council to target Dublin church sites in major land-buying programme

Existing low-rise estates may be considered for demolition to make better use of land for housing, Dublin City Council chief executive says - Irish Times reports.

A major land-purchase programme, targeting church-owned and other institutional sites, is to be initiated by Dublin City Council within the next six months, council chief executive Owen Keegan has said.

The local authority has for several years warned it is running out of land for the development of social housing, with

almost all remaining sites in its ownership either already under construction or at various stages of the planning process.

Mr Keegan said while the council would be open to considering the purchase of any land suitable for housing, sites which were not yet zoned for residential use, including institutional lands and industrial lands, would represent the best value for money.

The council might also consider the demolition of some of its existing low-rise social housing estates to allow for the “intensification” of housing on council-owned lands, he said.
More at -

[\[https://www.irishtimes.com/ireland/dublin/2022/12/29/council-to-target-dublin-church-sites-in-land-buying-programme/\]](https://www.irishtimes.com/ireland/dublin/2022/12/29/council-to-target-dublin-church-sites-in-land-buying-programme/)

Bethlehem rebounds from pandemic, lifting Christmas spirits

Tourism is the economic lifeblood of this town in the occupied West Bank, where for the past two years the pandemic kept international visitors away.

The biblical town of Bethlehem marked a merry Christmas on Saturday, with thousands of visitors descending upon the traditional birthplace of Jesus as it rebounds from the coronavirus pandemic.



Tourism is the economic lifeblood of this town in the occupied West Bank, and for the past two years, the pandemic kept international visitors away.

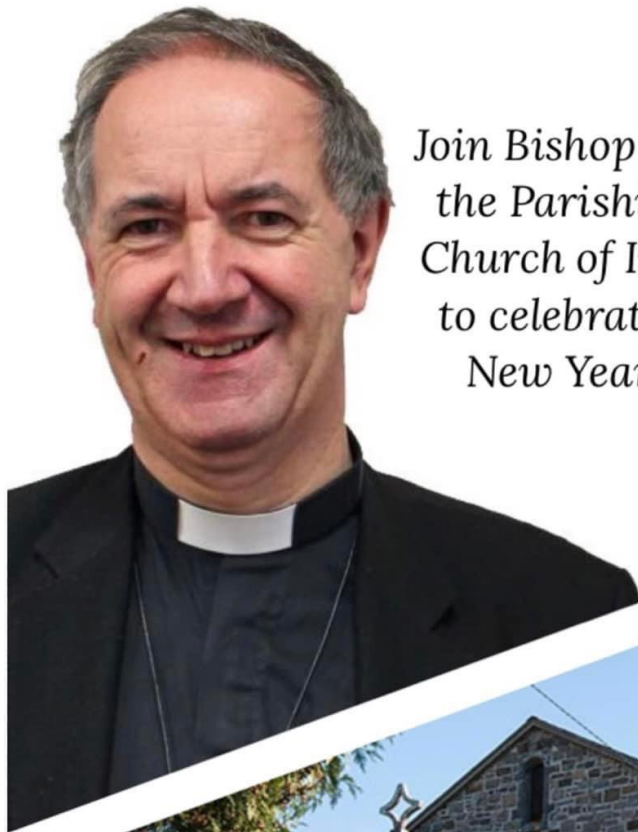
This year, visitors are back, hotels are full and shopkeepers have reported a brisk business in the runup to the holiday. Although the numbers have not reached pre-pandemic levels, the return of tourists has palpably raised spirits in Bethlehem.

“We are celebrating Christmas this year in a very much different way than last year,” Palestinian Tourism Minister Rula Maayah said. “We’re celebrating Christmas with pilgrims coming from all over the world.”

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Throughout the day, hundreds of people strolled through Manger Square for Christmas Eve celebrations. Marching bands pounding on drums and playing bagpipes paraded through the area, and foreign tourists meandered about and snapped selfies with the town's large Christmas tree behind them.

Cool gray weather, along with an occasional rain shower, did little to dampen spirits, though many people headed



Join Bishop Michael Burrows & the Parishioners of St Mary's Church of Ireland, Roundstone to celebrate the Eucharist on New Years Day at 12 noon



indoors to shops and restaurants to warm up. By nightfall, the crowds had thinned.

Daisy Lucas, a 38-year-old Filipina who works in Israel, said it was a dream come true to mark the holiday in such an important place.

“As a Christian walking in the places in the Bible, it’s so overwhelming,” she said. “This is the birthplace of Jesus Christ. As a Christian, that’s one achievement that’s on my bucket list.”

Latin Patriarch Pierbattista Pizzaballa, the top Roman Catholic clergyman in the Holy Land, arrived from Jerusalem through a checkpoint in Israel’s West Bank separation barrier.

“We are living in very difficult challenges,” he said, noting the war in Ukraine and a recent wave of Israeli-Palestinian violence. “But the message of Christmas is a message of peace.”

“It’s possible to change things,” he added. “We will be very clear in what we have to do and what we have to say in order to preserve the importance of unity and reconciliation among all.”

Pizzaballa walked through Manger Square, waving to well-wishers before heading to the Church of the Nativity, built on the spot where Christians believe Jesus was born. Later, he was to celebrate Midnight Mass.

Webinars, music, resources, broadcasts, and books

The Boys' Brigade Christmas Gift Book for 1892 was 'The Union Jack', by Rev. Professor Marcus Dods

This book was warmly received with over 20,000 copies issued

Explore the pages of this 130 year old book for yourself on our virtual museum.

www.thebbmuseum.org/the-boys-brigade/the-union-jack

Perspective

Massacre of the Innocents by Bishop Guli Francis-Dehqani

The Bishop of Chelmsford Rt Revd Dr Guli Francis-Dehqani as a child fled with her family from persecution. She gave this Thought for the Day on the BBC Today Programme edition which was guest edited by Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe.

In the church calendar, today is known as the Massacre of the Innocents when Christians recall events outlined in St. Matthew's Gospel right at the heart of the Christmas story. King Herod, hearing about the birth of the Christ child,



perceives him to be a threat to his own kingdom and, just to be safe, orders the execution of all male children under the age of 2 in the region of Bethlehem. Lest we be tempted to sit too comfortably with the nativity narratives, this is a harsh reminder of the brutality still evident in the world, even amid the promise of hope and salvation. There are no easy answers to this horror, only questions and agonising silence.

Today too in our contemporary world we witness far too many “massacres of the innocent” – men, women and

children caught up in violence, not of their own making; swallowed up by powers and principalities with no respect for individual freedom and dignity – systems that might be political, religious or economic, but systems that have one thing in common: fear. Power can corrupt and once corrupted, the powerful are fearful of losing their grip and so become ever more controlling, coercive and cruel.

The baby born in a manger 2000 years ago, whose message of peace and goodwill the angels declared, was perceived as such a threat. Years later, in the days before his death, Jesus would again cast fear into the hearts of some amongst the powerful, when he rode on a donkey into Jerusalem and was greeted rapturously by the crowds. Ordered to stop the people from chanting, his chilling response echoes across the centuries and rings a warning bell to all who seek, fearfully and forcibly, to maintain control today: I tell you, Jesus said, if the people were silent, the very stones would then cry out.

Countless experience persecution in many parts of the world, including Iran where Today's Guest Editor and I both come from. Thousands have been arrested, held captive unjustly or executed; others flee to safety, leaving home, family and friends in a desperate effort to find refuge elsewhere. But courageous and peaceful protestors continue, those who feel they have nothing to lose, still hoping for justice and liberty. Some voices might be silenced but the cries will surely continue. And as it does, I offer my ongoing prayers for the country of my birth, that beautiful and fractured land, with its rich culture and ancient heritage, and a people longing for freedom.

Courtesy of Chelmsford diocese.

Poem for today

Martin by Kevin Daly

There's a mist rising over Brandon,
Snow is falling softy to the ground,
A Christmas light flickers in a cottage far away,
and Martin is woken with a sound.

'Get up Paddy what you doing here,
Go and make a nuisance back at home,
We don't need a tramp in our shop doorway,'
Martin, he is feeling so alone.

Alone at Christmas time in London,
While families together laugh and play,
Kids holding hands, excited thoughts of Santa Clause,
To Martin it is just another day.
He thinks back to the foot of Brandon Hill
When he left his father and his kin.
The argument they had and now he feels so bad
'Cause he knows he won't see Brandon Hill again.

A small child stops and stares at Martin,
As he gathers up his bedding and his booze.
She says, 'Mam look over to that pavement,
That man he isn't wearing any shoes.'

It hadn't always been this way, he thought to himself.

I used to have a very different life.
When I first arrived in Shepherds Bush in '63
I met the darling lady of my life.

She passed away so tragically, in '65
The year of love and peace and hair.
We were London flower kids, way back then.
The darling couple of Sloane Square.

Where are all his friends from that time in his life?
Tonight will he ever find a bed?
Everyday just brings more trouble and more strife,
In his mind's eye he sees Sleat Head.

The nights as a young man spent in Dingle town,
The music in his soul and in his toes,
The banjo the whistle and the mandolin,
The feeling of loneliness just grows.

Then from behind him he hears a child
running with her mother by her side.
'Happy Christmas mister,' Martin hears from them
His eyes they were welling up inside.
She handed him a brand new pair of walking shoes
No booze, a cup of warm soup instead.
'Just in case Santa couldn't find you sir,
we knew you didn't have a bed.'

With tears on cheek he thanked them then they walked
away,
He stared at their backs till out of sight,
T'was the first time in years it was Christmas time for Martin,

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As he rolled out his bedsheet for the night.
When Martin's eyes finally closed that night,
He walked up Brandon Hill in his new shoes,
By his side his father smiling back at him,

Martin left this earth that night his body blue.
The December cold had claimed its latest casualty,
Another nameless soul upon the street,
'I wonder when they came from,' was the remark
When they removed the shoes from off his feet.

So this Christmas time in London or New York or Cork
In Dublin in Limerick or in Rome,
Spare a thought for those poor souls like Martin,
Who are on the streets and have no place called home.

The cold and the old,
The afflicted,
The addicted,
And the ones who are all alone.

Because everybody deserves a Christmas.

Speaking to the soul – Christmas series

Short reading and a prayer - daily on this site

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