



Netflix TV hit series Stranger Things inspires Christian Aid's Nativity film

Christian Aid has launched '[A Stranger Christmas Story](#)', a short stop-frame animation film inspired by the popular Netflix TV show Stranger Things, to highlight the 65 million people who are displaced by conflict and disaster this Christmas.

The film, directed by Rebecca Gower, features animation based on characters from Stranger

Things, but also pays homage to the Nativity. It's a Christmas story mash-up with Christmas lights at the centre of the action, a nod to both Stranger Things and the charity's Christmas appeal 'Light the Way'. The appeal aims to offer a beacon of hope for those who've fled their homes in search of safety.

The short film follows the journey of three wise boys as they use their special gifts to [search for a boy who was far from home](#). The ambiguous boy alludes to Stranger Things' character Will Byers, Baby Jesus and the millions of displaced people who can't be at home this Christmas. The boys are helped on their journey with a message from an angelic young girl who knows where the boy can be found.

Emma Wigley, Multimedia Communications Manager at Christian Aid said: 'This year we wanted to find a unique way to highlight our Christmas appeal. With a narrative that involves the search for a young boy, a messenger who bridges two worlds and lights that guide the way, strong parallels can be made between the TV series and the Nativity. We wanted to use that idea to produce a film that is both contemporary

and timeless, but ultimately draws attention to the worst global displacement crisis of our time.’

Christian Aid was founded 70 years ago to support refugees in the wake of the Second World War, and continues to support those searching for safety today, including people from war-torn nations such as Syria and Iraq.

Ongoing violence and instability in South Sudan, DRC, Afghanistan and Nigeria – among others – has resulted in the huge scale movement of desperate people. Most stay within their own country or are hosted in neighbouring countries, and a small percentage are seeking safety in Europe.

Just £5 could give an essential set of clothes to a person fleeing violence, £11 could supply a week’s worth of hygiene essentials to a family of five in Serbia, and £50 could provide seeds and tools to help a family forced out of their home in the DRC to grow food to feed themselves.

Link to film: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=al8EprTtx0U>

Images and behind the scenes photos also available

The film was directed by Rebecca Gower and the music composed by David M Saunders.

For information, case studies or to donate to the Christmas Appeal, visit

www.caid.org.uk/stranger-christmas

BBC's Christmas *Call the Midwife* drama highlights work of USPG

The Christmas special of BBC's popular *Call the Midwife* drama will feature the work of the Anglican mission agency USPG. The show follows the fortunes of the midwives and nuns at Nonnatus House, in east London, in 1961. In the Christmas special, the Revd Tom Hereward and a number of the Sisters and midwives are sent by SPG, as USPG was known in the 1960s; to help a struggling clinic in South Africa.

Today's USPG played a significant role in helping the BBC to research the episode, including input from Canon Edgar Ruddock, who was a missionary in South Africa in the 1980s.

"I had a lengthy phone conversation with the key researcher who tapped into my knowledge of the 1980s when many church-founded hospitals were still operating across rural southern Africa,"



he cast of Call the Midwife on set in South Africa

Ruddock explained. “I was also able to point them to various older colleagues who had worked there as doctors or nurses during the 1960s.”

Setting the scene for the Christmas Special, the BBC said: “Nonnatus House receives an SOS from a tiny mission hospital. Understaffed, underfunded, and with a poor water supply, struggling Hope Clinic is faced with closure. Far from home and everything familiar, the team are both shaken and exhilarated by the challenges

they face – and by the time the mission trip is over, some lives are permanently changed.”

The global relations director for USPG, Rachel Parry, said: “Mission has changed a lot since the 1960s. We used to think of mission as something that ‘we over here’ did for ‘them over there’ – but now we understand that mission is ‘from everywhere to everywhere’. There is no one part of the church that has the monopoly on Christian understanding – instead we are all learning from each other.

“Another change is that USPG no longer sends missionaries in the old-fashioned sense. However, we do still support and encourage the movement of people in mission. The difference is that the movement of people today is, again, ‘from everywhere to everywhere’. In recent years, USPG has supported a Cuban doctor to work in Uruguay and a Ghanaian priest to work in The Gambia.

“Mission today is about a global network of Christians who all have needs and skills, something they need to learn and something they have to share.”

USPG has [published a range of resources](#) to accompany the programme to highlight the work it is doing today to support midwifery services.

Irish Presbyterian Moderator returns from Nepal

Returning from his 10-day visit to Nepal, Presbyterian Moderator, Rt. Rev. Dr. Frank Sellar, said that it had been a ‘wonderful privilege to visit such a beautiful country’. During the visit, Dr Sellar brought encouragement and pastoral support to the Church’s mission personnel who work in the Himalayan nation and saw first-hand the post-earthquake emergency relief, reconstruction and development activities that the Church had contributed to.

Based in the Nepali capital, Kathmandu, the Moderator travelled widely during his trip, visiting the Rupandehi district, which borders northern India, to see a number of projects supported by PCI’s partner United Mission to Nepal (UMN). He also went to Dhading district and in western Nepal where he visited the United Mission Hospital in Tansen.

Speaking in Belfast, after a long journey home with his wife Claire and daughter Ruth, who accompanied him, Dr. Sellar said, “In April of last year, a massive earthquake hit Nepal killing 9,000 people and injuring 22,000. Our members across Ireland responded generously to the Moderator’s Appeal, enabling us to send £640,000 and I was able to see the blessing that had brought.

“It has been a wonderful privilege to visit this beautiful country to meet its people and see first-hand how these gifts have been used in the reconstruction process by our partners UMN, Tearfund and Christian Aid.

“I was profoundly touched to see the fantastic work being done in ordinary communities. The solid dedication of the United Mission to Nepal, where co-operatives have given women independence and dignity. I also saw organic farms producing healthy vegetables for the benefit of the local community.

“I was incredibly humbled to meet indigenous believers and have the opportunity to spend time with pastors, women workers and youth leaders - sold out in the love of Christ Jesus. People who

are passionate about sharing their faith and reaching out, even to those who have persecuted them.

“We also had a very special time with our overseas mission personnel, Stephen and Laura Coulter, Peter and Valerie Lockwood, along with their children. It is one thing to read about them in our prayer bulletins at home, it is quite another to spend time with them and actually see the work that they do. It was a privilege to spend time with them and see something of their great work,” Dr. Sellar said.

During his visit, the Moderator preached at Kathmandu International Christian Congregation and in Aashish Presbyterian Church in the capital. At the Kathmandu International Study Centre he took a school assembly and gave a seminar on the Book of Revelation to some masters students at the Nepal Theological Academy. The Moderator also participated in a forum with various faith leaders at a peace conference, exploring how community relationships might be healed and restored.

In a series called ‘Postcards from Nepal,’ Dr. Sellar wrote a number of blogs during his

overseas visit. These can be found on the PCI website: www.presbyterianireland.org/blog.

Historic Church of Scotland and the Church of England agreement signed

A landmark agreement to enter into an historic ecumenical partnership has been signed by the Church of Scotland and the Church of England on Monday of this week.

Right Rev Dr Russell Barr, Moderator of the General Assembly, and Archbishop of Canterbury the Most Rev Justin Welby made the Columba Declaration official in London.

The ceremony at Crown Court Church near Covent Garden was attended by a range of dignitaries including Very Rev Dr John Chalmers, Principal Clerk of the Church of Scotland, Rev Canon John McLuckie of the Scottish Episcopal Church and representatives of the Church of England and British Armed Forces.

The Columba Declaration, which was 15 years in the making, represents a "significant step" between the two denominations and will open up

new future possibilities of closer working together to develop God's Church.

The Scottish Episcopal Church will also be involved.

The Declaration marks the Church of England and the Church of Scotland's mutual acknowledgment of each other as 'belonging to the One, Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ and truly participating in the apostolic ministry and mission of the whole people of God.'

Among the mutual commitments the Churches make in the Declaration, all building on the foundational one: 'We commit ourselves to grow together in communion and to strengthen our partnership in mission.'

Under the terms of the agreement, the Church of Scotland and the Church of England would welcome one another's members into congregations and ordained ministers would be allowed to exercise ministry within the existing discipline of each church, though only within England and continental Europe.

Belfast Parish a winner in Beat–the Street game

St Columba's Parish Church, Knock, recently entered an enthusiastic team into the Northern Ireland Beat–the Street game over a period of 7 weeks from 14 Sept – 2 Nov. The aim of the game was to walk, cycle, scoot or run as many journeys as you could during the 7 weeks. The team scored points on their way to and from work, school, shops or while walking their dogs by tapping their Beat the Street card on Beat Box sensors placed on lamp posts at intervals across Belfast.

As the weeks progressed so did the competitiveness as they fought to stay in the top 10 places of the leaderboard week after week. By the end of the game St Columba's team of 30 people clocked up a total of 14,980 points and 725 miles. This amazing achievement put them at the top of the community group leaderboard earning a fantastic prize of £500 for the Church.

In addition to the prize money, members of the team reported a wide range of benefits. They mentioned quality time with their family, enjoying



the dry Oct weather, meeting new people, being more active. The St Columba team dogs seemed to particularly enjoy it! The prize money is a legacy of the game and is to be used in the spirit of the competition, i.e. to further engage members of the church and support them to be more physical active in their day-to-day life.

Lisburn 2017 Day of Prayer for peace and healing

A Day of Prayer to help people find God's peace and healing will be held in Lisburn Cathedral on Saturday, February 18, 2017 (10am – 5pm).

Day of Prayer
to find God's
Peace and Healing

Lisburn Cathedral

Saturday
18th
February
10am-5pm

Come and go
as you
please!

Opportunity
to pray
for the
future of
our
country!

- *Are you carrying burdens from the past?*
- *Have you been hurt by the words or actions of others?*
- *Are there things you need to say sorry for and put to rest?*



The joint organisers Dean Sam Wright and Brother David Jardine of Divine Healing Ministries say, “Most of the day will be in silence, but each half-hour there will be a two-minute input.

“We are giving people a chance to lay down their burdens from the past, to forgive those who have hurt them, to say sorry where they may have hurt others, and to pray for the future of our country.

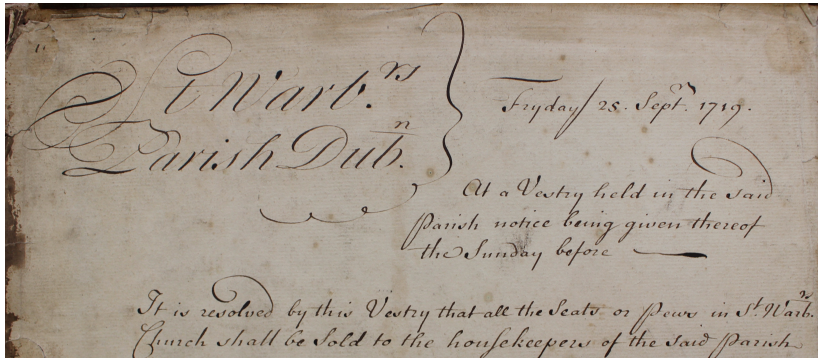
“The fact that most of the day will be in silence means that there is an opportunity for each person to have a real encounter with God.”

Please be seated - archive insights from C of I Pew registers

Please Be Seated: The Content of Church of Ireland Pew Registers' is the working title of the final Archive of the Month presentation for 2016 from the RCB Library. The online exhibit focuses on the relatively rare church record called the pew register, one of an array of record types produced by the parish vestry – the committee that managed the parish (then as now) in the course of its administrative business.

As last month's presentation on the content of the vestry minute book revealed (see: www.ireland.anglican.org/news/6687/the-killougher-vestry-minute-book) the parish vestry was responsible for a wide range of civil as well as religious activities. In some of the larger city parishes, for example, until the late 18th century this even included policing the parish, in the form of the parish watch examined in detail at this link:

www.ireland.anglican.org/news/6350/the-earliest-policing-records-in



Opening entry in the St Werburgh's parish, Dublin, pew register, commencing on 25th September 1719

The latest offering, which is the work of the Library Administrator, Robert Gallagher, looks at the unusual phenomenon of how, in certain parishes, the practice of purchasing, renting or being assigned with a pew was administered by specific parish vestries. This system was primarily found in wealthier parishes, particularly in urban areas, where parishioners were more likely to be able to afford the cost. Pews were considered as property and, as with all property, it was necessary to record the rights and transactions involving them. In many cases, the record of such transactions was simply kept in

the regular vestry minute books of the parish but occasionally, particularly in well-endowed parishes with revenue to spend on dedicated volumes, a separate pew register might be kept.

The new presentation examines the content of the pew register of St Werburgh's in Dublin, a volume spanning the period from 1719 up to 1839 (although after 1764 entries are very cursory indeed, reflecting how the process of owning or renting a pew began to die out in the late 18th and early 19th centuries). As one of the earliest Anglo-Norman churches established within the city walls and as the parish serving Dublin Castle, St Werburgh's enjoyed a prominent position in the city. Its pew register gives an unusual insight into the parish's social structure, providing glimpses of the wealth and status enjoyed by the parishioners.

Owning a pew in St Werburgh's, Dublin, was a lucrative privilege especially for a person who was able to afford one of the more expensive or well-positioned pews, in a parish whose members included the Lord Mayor of Dublin, the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, and some of the leading businessmen in the city such as David La Touche. The volume reveals the resolutions that

the vestry agreed about pew-related transactions, the income realised from the same, and the parish's wider social structure – indicated by such details as who was sitting where – with the most sought-after pews being located either in the gallery or near the front of the church. While pew registers may be relatively rare, those such as this that do survive provide a colourful asset for researching parish history and the stories of individual parishioners, revealing again the wider responsibilities of the Church of Ireland vestry during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and the value of the Church's records as part of social history.

To view the online exhibition, please see:

www.ireland.anglican.org/library/archive

For further information, please contact: Dr Susan Hood, RCB Library

E-mail: susan.hood@rcbdub.org

£2.9 million lottery grant to Ampleforth Abbey

Ampleforth Abbey, home to the largest Benedictine monastic community in Britain, has

been awarded a grant of £2.9 million by Heritage Lottery Fund.

The grant will be released in its entirety once Ampleforth Abbey processes plans to make urgent repairs to the Grade II listed Monk's Bridge and the Grade I listed Abbey Church.

After the necessary repairs are made, it is hoped that more tourists will be attracted to the abbey and grounds. The 2,200 acre estate in North Yorkshire has been home to the Benedictine community since 1802.

Sue Fisher, director of Development at Ampleforth Abbey, said: "Receiving Heritage Lottery Funding's support is a testament to the historical significance of Ampleforth Abbey. This National Lottery money will enable us to encourage more visitors to come to see and experience the Benedictine way of life in the 21st century."

Funds will extend the visitor experience and provide a better understanding of monastic life and heritage with the 59 monks engaging with visitors through organised retreats, acts of worship, the visitor centre, tearoom, orchard, shop and landscape.

Sir Peter Luff, Chair of Heritage Lottery Fund, said: “Ampleforth Abbey is a place of inspiration and beauty. It has entranced past generations and will continue to do so in the future thanks to National Lottery players. Visitors will see more clearly than ever the wonderful heritage of buildings, of nature and of faith as they marvel at the Abbey’s breath-taking architecture and enjoy the surrounding landscape.” See news links below.

Lithuanian archbishop says citizens anxious about Russian military threat

Lithuanian Archbishop Gintaras Grusas said citizens are anxious about military threats from neighbouring Russia but said support from Europe and the United States helped calm those fears.

The US-born archbishop, president of the Lithuanian bishops’ conference, told Catholic News Service, “The old Soviet empire mentality is still alive, and there are many in Russia who consider the three Baltic states part of that empire.



Lithuanian Archbishop Gintaras Grusas

“But Lithuanians have fought hard to re-establish their independence and are committed to maintaining it. They’ve shown they’re willing to pay a price for freedom – and they’re showing it again today in the turnout of volunteers for military service,” said the Vilnius archbishop.

In early 2017, NATO plans to send 3,000 troops to Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Poland, to counter Russia’s military buildup in the Baltic region.

In a November 29 interview with Catholic News Service, Archbishop Grusas said the projected

US-led deployments had provided “some reassurance,” but cautioned that concern remained high because of repeated airspace violations and the stationing of heavy weaponry in Russia’s military enclave of Kaliningrad, on Lithuania’s western border.

“There are always tensions because we’re close to the Russian border and hard to defend, so having our NATO partners’ boots on the ground here shows we’re not left on our own,” Archbishop Grusas said.

“As a church, we’re following Pope Francis in encouraging prayers for peace. We’re also maintaining a community spirit and helping people seek truth when a lot of negative propaganda is being spread by Russian-language media and the internet.”

Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia became independent from the Soviet Union in 1991. They joined the European Union and NATO in 2004, gaining protection under the alliance’s Article 5 collective defence guarantee.

However, all three have increased defence spending sharply and stepped up anti-tank defences since Russia’s 2014 annexation of

Crimea and military involvement in Ukraine. The buildup of radar, air defence systems and nuclear batteries in Kaliningrad is believed likely to impede NATO reinforcements in the Baltics during a crisis.

Lithuania's government reintroduced military conscription in 2015 and has circulated civil defence pamphlets advising citizens what to do in the event of a Russian invasion.

Lithuanian Foreign Minister Linas Linkevicius told the BBC on November 18 that there was a danger that Russian President Vladimir Putin could seek to test NATO's military preparedness before the January inauguration of Donald Trump, the new US president.

In his interview, Archbishop Grusas said NATO's European member-states had long been urged to meet their agreed share of defence spending, adding that he believed Trump's threats to scale down US military commitments unless this happened were "nothing new."

"This was most probably campaign rhetoric – even a negotiating stance to push the Europeans to pay their share – so I took his pre-election

comments with a grain of salt,” said the 55-year-old archbishop, who was born in Washington DC, and worked as a marketing consultant with IBM after gaining a mathematics degree at the University of California at Los Angeles.

“Steps have been taken since the US election to reassure NATO members the US position won’t be changed. But we’re in an uncomfortable position for Moscow geographically and fearful of no longer being seen as independent nations,” he said.

Catholics make up about 78 per cent of Lithuania’s 3 million inhabitants, compared to about 20 per cent in Latvia and less than 1 per cent in Estonia. All three Baltic States are home to substantial Russian minorities: 6 per cent in Lithuania, 26 per cent in Latvia and 25 per cent in Estonia.

News links to reports on faith, politics and education

Religious delegation from Syria in Ireland to campaign against EU sanctions

Irish Times

Christian and Muslim leaders from Syria arrive in **Ireland** on Tuesday to ... On Wednesday the group will take part in a **religious** service in the chapel at ...

<http://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/religion-and-beliefs/religious-delegation-from-syria-in-ireland-to-campaign-against-eu-sanctions-1.2885737>

Armagh public park would be 'best fit' for Pope to say Mass, mayor says

the Irish News

The Palace Demesne, the former home of the Archbishop of the **Church of Ireland** until the 1970s, is currently the site of a large public park and ...

<http://www.irishnews.com/news/2016/11/30/news/public-park-in-armagh-would-be-best-fit-for-mass-celebrated-by-pope-says-mayor-809918/>

Only response to Pope's Ireland visit is 'solid protest', says leader of Free Presbyterian Church

The Tablet

Speaking to one of Northern **Ireland's** main daily **newspapers**, **News Letter**, Revd Ian Brown of the Martyrs' Memorial **Church** in Belfast said, "the only ...

<http://www.thetablet.co.uk/news/6449/0/only-response-to-pope-s-ireland-visit-is-solid-protest-says-leader-of-free-presbyterian-church>

Religious Ed as Core Subject Would Benefit Society, Says Irish Education Expert

Gospel Herald

By Julie Brown Patton (news@gospelherald.com) Nov 28, 2016 02:20 PM EST ... An **Irish** education and theology expert, Dr. Amelee Meehan, this week says ... "By its very nature, **religious** education is involved with the ultimate ...
<http://www.gospelherald.com/articles/68349/20161128/religious-ed-as-core-subject-would-benefit-society-says-irish-education-expert.htm>

Students help build a strong community 'habitat for humanity'

Larne Times

The partnership between Habitat for Humanity Northern Ireland and St Michael's **Church of Ireland** Parish, off the Shankill Road, will serve people ...

<http://www.larnetimes.co.uk/lifestyle/students-help-build-a-strong-community-habitat-for-humanity-1-7704098>

Pope on course for historic visit to Northern Ireland

[Telegraph.co.uk](http://www.telegraph.co.uk)

Leaders from across the Province's political and **religious** divide issued strong ... Great **news** that @Pontifex to visit **Ireland** in 2018, I believe he would ...

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/11/28/pope-course-historic-visit-northern-ireland/>

ITV/Lincolnite/Worcester News/Peterborough Tel

Various reports of successful bids by CofE cathedrals for funding in the final round of the First World War Centenary Cathedral Repairs

Fund. Grants totalling nearly £5.5 million have been awarded to 24 Church of England and Catholic cathedrals for repairs including stained glass windows, stone pinnacles, and roofs as well as drainage and lighting. The reports cover grants from the fund to Chichester, Worcester, Lincoln and Peterborough cathedrals.

<http://www.itv.com/news/central/2016-11-29/cash-boost-for-lincoln-cathedral/>

<http://thelincolnite.co.uk/2016/11/lincoln-cathedral-secures-38k-towards-urgent-repairs/>

<http://www.itv.com/news/meridian/update/2016-11-30/250-000-awarded-to-chichester-cathedral-for-roof-repairs/>

Business Green

Report that the former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams has cautiously praised businesses for their increased progress and collaboration on measures to tackle environmental issues such as climate change. In a speech at an event hosted by the Centre for the Understanding of Sustainable Prosperity, he said, "I'm struck again ... by the way in which a rather surprising number of business concerns are waking up, even if only for pragmatic reasons, to the need to rethink some of their environmental [plans]." However Lord Williams

added that he is not "starry eyed" enough to think the biggest firms are going to be converted overnight.

Mail/Int Business Times

Reports that Britain's financial watchdog has begun a review to discover whether capped interest rates on payday lending have driven vulnerable consumers into borrowing from illegal money lenders. The introduction of the rate cap in January 2015 was in response to concerns including those of the Church of England about the impact that very high interest rates were having on people taking out short-term loans to tide them over until payday. The cap, which ensures that no one ends up paying more than twice the amount borrowed, has resulted in significant improvements for consumers, the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) said yesterday adding that borrowers are now less prone to falling into arrears.

<http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/fca-review-interest-rate-cap-payday-loans-amid-loan-shark-fears-1593952>

Guard

News feature on Government proposals to allow new free schools to select up to 100% of pupils

by reference to faith and a public consultation open until 12 December. The paper features a range of opinion including a spokesperson from the Association of Muslim Schools and a Catholic headteacher.

BBC/Guard/Ind/Times/Mail

Reports that a Black Death burial pit containing 48 skeletons, including the remains of 27 children, has been found at the site of a 14th Century monastery hospital. The bodies were excavated at Thornton Abbey in North Lincolnshire. Between 1347 and 1351 the "Great Pestilence" swept westward across Europe killing millions of people. It arrived on Britain's shores in 1348.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-humber-38146468>

<https://www.theguardian.com/science/2016/nov/30/black-death-mass-burial-pit-abbey-lincolnshire-skeletons-dna-plague>

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/science/archaeology/plague-pit-black-death-skeletons-lincolnshire-children-thornton-abbey-a7446556.html>

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/plague-pit-reveals-how-black-death-ravaged-countryside-kxvb79qp5>

Eve Standard

Report that almost 150 unaccompanied refugee children from the Calais Jungle are now being looked after by London boroughs amid concerns that the Government is not providing enough funding to help councils cover the extra costs of housing, education and social care. New figures from London Councils show more than 1,500 unaccompanied asylum seeking children overall being cared for by the 32 London boroughs, a third of the UK total.

<http://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/london-boroughs-need-70m-more-to-care-for-150-child-refugees-from-jungle-a3407206.html>

Mirror/Exp

Reports that a Christian teaching assistant has received an apology after she was disciplined by a school for telling a pupil she did not approve of gay relationships. Victoria Allen, 51, had threatened to take Brannel school in St Austell, Cornwall, to a tribunal after being issued with a warning for her comments. She claimed injury to feelings and had been seeking compensation.

<http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/school-apologises-christian-teaching-assistant-9357799#ICID=nsm>

[http://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/737873/
School-Christian-teacher-gay-marriage-row](http://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/737873/School-Christian-teacher-gay-marriage-row)

Exp

Reports ten facts about St Andrew.

[http://www.express.co.uk/life-style/top10facts/
737966/Top-10-facts-about-St-Andrew-Scotland-
Patron-November-30](http://www.express.co.uk/life-style/top10facts/737966/Top-10-facts-about-St-Andrew-Scotland-Patron-November-30)

Comment

Spectator: Theresa May's religious faith should bring her more joy writes Theo Hobson.

[http://blogs.spectator.co.uk/2016/11/theresa-
mays-religious-faith-bring-joy/](http://blogs.spectator.co.uk/2016/11/theresa-mays-religious-faith-bring-joy/)