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**Image of the day - Armagh Cathedral**

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Armagh Cathedral

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## People and places

### Bishop joins in call to speak out against paramilitary human rights abuses

**The Bishop of Down and Dromore, Rt Rev David McClay joined other church leaders and politicians yesterday in calling for people to take a stand against the human rights abuses that paramilitary crime gangs continue to carry out across Northern Ireland.**

The bishop was attending an event in Belfast organised by the Stop Attacks Forum who have invited people to take a pledge and to demonstrate their opposition by wearing a black ribbon and/or using a black ribbon on their social media posts.



## QUILTS FOR ADVENT

*The Christmas Story told in colourful hand-stitched quilts.*

We are delighted to invite you to, once again, have the opportunity to see these wonderful quilts which bring to life the reality of the first Christmas.

St Cedma's will be open on  
Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> December, 2pm - 4pm  
for visitors to enjoy the quilts.

#### PLEASE NOTE

A one-way system will be in operation entering through the west door. We would ask everyone to respect the safety of others by wearing masks, sanitizing hands before entry and adhering to social distancing. We thank you for your co-operation in this and look forward to a joyful afternoon!

*St.Cedma's Parish Piecemakers*



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The Stop Attacks Forum wants everyone in society “to open their eyes to the abuse and harm caused by criminal paramilitary gangs who inflict grievous violence on members of their own communities”.

Bishop David said, “It was a privilege on International Human Rights Day to be present at an event where politicians and church leaders together made the pledge below which we would like to share widely. We encourage others to join us in speaking out to say that shootings, beatings and expulsions of young people must not be tolerated in our society and fall into the category of human rights abuses and indeed in some cases, child abuse.”

## The Pledge

I pledge to open my eyes to the suffering inflicted by paramilitary criminal gangs. I am asking you to do the same.

I pledge to open my eyes to the human rights abuses that they allege to carry out on behalf of our communities. These shootings, beatings, and expulsions are not justice. They are not in my name.

I pledge to stand with those who work to eradicate this inhumane violence and ask others to have courage to speak out with me.

I pledge to encourage others to open their eyes to the damage these barbaric acts course.

I pledge to stand up and speak out.

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As a sign of speaking out and standing up against this suffering – I pledge to wear this black ribbon for 1 day.

To show my support to end these attacks – I pledge to use this black ribbon for 1 day on my social media pages.

## Retired hospital chaplain scores high in Mastermind



The Rev Allister Mallon, right, on the Mastermind set.

**The Rev Allister Mallon, retired hospital chaplain, Connor Diocese, scored impressively in his challenge for the BBC's Mastermind title, coming out on top in his first round in the prestigious competition.**

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Allister now progresses to one of six semi-finals when he will once again face the questions from presenter Clive Myrie.

In his first round specialist subject, James Craig, First Viscount Craigavon, Allister got full points, going on to win the round after the general knowledge questions with a total of 22 points.

The programme was broadcast on Monday December 6, and you can watch Allister in action on the BBC iPlayer.

## **New role as National Children and Families Development worker**

**Congratulations to Racheal Murphy of Cashel diocese on her appointment as National Children and Families Development worker.**

In the diocesan magazine Rachael talks about her appointment and how she is looking forward to her new role:

“I am delighted to be starting a new role in January as the National Children and Families Development worker. I am both humbled and excited by the appointment in equal measure, as it brings together my love for children’s ministry and my passion to see families equipped and empowered.

“The past two years in particular have seen our families and children’s ministry come under great strain and it has required us as the Church to look for new and innovative ways to engage with them. As the saying goes “necessity is

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the mother of invention” and there have been some fantastic ideas and programmes which have come forward during this time, so it is exciting to see how the church can now further develop them for God’s glory.

“There are so many amazing, dedicated and talented people who have been working tirelessly for God through this period and long before, to reach out to children and parents. It is my hope to honour and support those who have given and continue to give so much of their time, skills and energy, and to find ways for us to work together across the island of Ireland.”

## **Belfast Black Santa Sit-out gets underway on Monday**

**The Very Rev Stephen Forde, Dean of Belfast, is preparing for his fourth Black Santa Sit-out which begins at St Anne’s Cathedral on December 13.**

Dean Stephen Forde and Santa’s little helpers will be on the steps of St Anne’s Cathedral, Belfast, for two weeks on Monday December 13 as the 2021 Black Santa Sit-out for charities gets underway.

This is a fourth Christmas sit-out for Dean Forde, with last year’s event going ahead despite the restrictions of the Covid-19 pandemic.

This year marks the 45th Black Santa Appeal, a tradition started in December 1976 by Dean Sammy Crooks and



maintained by his successors, Deans Jack Shearer, Houston McKelvey and John Mann.

Dean Crooks was dubbed Black Santa by the media because he wore a black Anglican clerical cloak to protect him from the elements, and the name has stuck for more than four decades.

This year, Black Santa will stage his sit-out during the two weeks before Christmas.

## **Installations and validations in Kilmore, Elphin and Ardagh**

**The Diocese of Kilmore, Elphin and Ardagh has two cathedrals at Kilmore and Sligo. The present cathedral**



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**in Kilmore was opened in 1860 and replaced an earlier building which now serves as the parish hall.**

St. John's Church in Sligo became the cathedral for Elphin and Ardagh in 1961. It replaced Elphin Cathedral which was severely damaged in a storm in February 1957 and subsequently demolished in 1964. The medieval cathedral in Ardagh ceased to be used in 1630. Thereafter, the cathedral in Elphin served both dioceses of Elphin and Ardagh until the transfer to Sligo sixty years ago.

Each cathedral is administered by a Dean on behalf of the Bishop. The administration team in a cathedral, known as a



**CHRISTMAS SERVICES AT THE CATHEDRAL 2021**

Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> December at 3.15pm  
Carol Service sung by the Young Men  
of the Cathedral Choir

Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> December at 3.15pm  
The Festival of Nine Lessons & Carols

Christmas Eve at 5pm  
Choral Evensong and Blessing of the Crib

Christmas Day  
10am Eucharist (Said)  
11am Sung Eucharist  
Celebrant & Preacher: The Archbishop

**Armagh Cathedral**

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chapter, consists of Archdeacons and Prebendaries, more commonly known as Canons, an honorary title for a clergyperson.

This month two new Archdeacons: Rev. Patrick Bamber for Elphin and Rev. Hazel Hicks for Ardagh will be installed at a service on 9th January in Sligo Cathedral at 4:30pm.

At the same service three new Canons: Rev. Linda Frost, Rev. Andrew Ison and Rev. Christiaan Snell will also be installed. During the installation service Certificates in Theology validated by Queen's University Belfast, will be awarded to: Rev. Albert Dawson, Rev. Stephen Frost, Rev. Adam Norris, and Rev. Edmund Smyth, on the completion of their Ordained Local Ministry studies.

Likewise, two new Canons: Rev. Ian Horner and Rev. Ruth West will be installed at a service on 23rd January in Kilmore Cathedral at 4:30pm. Finally, a service of welcome will be held in St. John's Longford on 30th January at 4:30pm for the new Ardagh Archdeacon and Canons.

## **Churches in Ireland General Secretary Vacancy**

The General Secretary is the senior executive officer of the ICC and also holds the position of joint secretary of the IICM. The main duties will include, but may not be confined to:

+Providing analytical and strategic analysis and direction to inter-church relations and ecumenism in Ireland

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+Serving as secretary to the ICC and IICM and ensuring that agreed decisions are carried out

+Servicing, with other staff members, all associated committees, liaison and working groups meeting under the ICC/ IICM



+Line-managing other staff, including those who may be based outside the office

+Overseeing and co-ordinating the work of externally funded projects

+Maintaining close relationships with member churches and with relevant inter-church bodies

+Furthering ecumenism nationally and locally by implementing an agreed vision and strategy for enhancing Irish ecumenism

+Developing relationships and co-ordinating dialogues with government and relevant civil society partners

+Assisting in the co-ordination, development and dissemination of shared policies and position papers

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- +Representing the churches and co-ordinating inter-church representation as requested by the leadership
- +Ensuring overall financial stability, streamlining costs as appropriate and seeking to maintain and increase support

Closing date for applications: Friday 14th January 2022.  
The application pack is now available at

[[] <https://www.irishchurches.org/news-blog/3739/general-secretary-vacancy> ]

## **Webinars, music, resources, broadcasts and books**

### **Carol Service from St Patrick's, Maynooth**

This year three Maynooth College and University choirs will gather for the annual carol service: the College Chapel Choir, directed by Dr John O'Keeffe; the Schola Gregoriana, led by Dr Darina McCarthy; and Maynooth University Chamber Choir, under the direction of Dr Michael Dawson.

The service will be led by the President of St Patrick's College, Maynooth, Rev Prof Michael Mullaney.

Following public health guidance, a much-reduced congregation will attend this year's carol service, which will be livestreamed on Wednesday 15 December at 7:30pm.

The link for the carol service can be found here:  
<https://maynoothcollege.ie/liv....>



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## News Reports

### Presbyterian minister and council face disciplinary sanctions for 'endorsing homosexual relationship' of elder

**Disciplinary sanctions being faced by a Presbyterian minister and a church council disciplinary sanctions for**

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**"endorsing a homosexual relationship" have been described as a "grave injustice".**

It's after a Presbyterian Church investigation into Rev Katherine Meyer and the Christ Church, Sandymount church council were found to have justified "approval for that which in scripture God condemns" for their support of a gay couple, one of whom was an elder in the church, according to a report by the BBC.

Steven Smyrl was sacked as an elder at the Dublin church in October 2019 but the church decided to investigate the leadership which allowed Mr Smyrl - who married his long-term partner Roy Stanley in 2018 - to be an elder.

The Rev Katherine Meyer and the Christ Church, Sandymount church council in Dublin, a shared church run by PCI and the Methodist Church in Ireland, have been threatened with disciplinary sanctions after allowing Mr Smyrl to continue in that role.

Mr Smyrl said the charges were "aimed only at publicly diminishing the lives of gay Presbyterians".

"The Dublin presbytery has charged our minister, Rev Katherine Meyer, with supporting and endorsing me in a 'sexually immoral' relationship," he said.

"Yet despite being challenged they have failed to produce even a shred of evidence that I have been involved in any form of sexual immorality or indeed sexual activity of any kind. Their aim is to squash dissent and to attack and



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remove anyone who voices even a modicum of support or empathy.

"Unless reason and fairness prevail, this sorry affair can only end in a grave injustice against a blameless pastor and teacher," he said.

Last year, Mr Smyrl issued solicitor's letters to the church alleging a minister in the Republic referred to him as "an



Elisabeth  
Kubler-Ross

PEOPLE ARE LIKE  
STAINED - GLASS  
WINDOWS. THEY  
SPARKLE AND SHINE  
WHEN THE SUN IS  
OUT, BUT WHEN THE  
DARKNESS SETS IN,  
THEIR TRUE BEAUTY  
IS REVEALED ONLY  
IF THERE IS A LIGHT  
FROM WITHIN.

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unrepentant fornicator" at a meeting of the Dublin and Munster Presbytery in December 2019.

A judicial commission of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI) in Belfast ruled that the Dublin and Munster Presbytery could set up what is known as a "Par 161 commission" to investigate Dr Meyer and the church council of Christ Church, Sandymount.

Rev Meyer and the Church Council were found to have justified "approval for that which in scripture God condemns".

The commission found that the "words and actions of both minister and church council demonstrate their persistent deviation from the confessional standards of the Presbyterian Church" and said that this was "to the extent of justifying approval for that which in scripture God condemns".

The Presbytery said that in 1 Corinthians "Paul instructs the church in Corinth not to associate with sexually immoral people if they bear the name of brother".

"In contrast, however, both the minister and church council of Christ Church, Sandymount, have supported the homosexual relationship of two of its members over many years.

"The minister and church council have caused scandal injurious to the purity and peace of the Church."



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The PCI's Dublin and Munster Presbytery found that Mr Smyrl had been co-opted to the church council after he had been sacked as an elder.

The Presbytery instructed the church council to reverse that decision and said that if Dr Meyer did not accept their findings, the presbytery would "initiate disciplinary proceedings" against her.

Dr Meyer attempted to then appeal the decision of the Presbytery investigation to a judicial commission of the church but was rejected when the judicial commission met on Friday November 19.

As a result, the judicial commission also said that the church council should remove Mr Smyrl from the council and ruled

We do not draw people to Christ by loudly discrediting what they believe, by telling them how wrong they are and how right we are, but by showing them a light that is so lovely that they want with all their hearts to know the source of it.

- Madeleine L'Engle

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that Dr Meyer and the church council should accept the findings of the Presbytery investigation by Monday December 20 2021, or the Presbytery could initiate "disciplinary proceedings" against her and the council.

A spokesperson for the Presbyterian Church in Ireland said: "It is yet again highly disappointing that an individual, or individuals, has sought to go out of their way to comment to a journalist on a sensitive internal church matter and, we are led to believe, even pass on papers that are private to that process. While some issues have been considered, matters are still ongoing and further decisions are still to be made."

They continued: "It would not be appropriate to comment further. That being said, we would like to make clear that no final decisions have been made with regard to 'discipline', or any such related matter, and to claim otherwise is factually inaccurate."

## **Archbishop of York explores the place of Mary in the Christmas story**

**Archbishop Stephen Cottrell and Bible scholar Dr Paula Gooder came together over Youtube to explore the true meaning of Advent and Christmas for a conversation hosted by St Paul's Cathedral.**

The discussion opened with the Archbishop of York candidly sharing with online viewers what the season of Advent means to him.

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"For me Advent is about not just getting ready to celebrate the birth of Christ, but getting ready for that day when we will see Christ face to face. It is about getting ready for death. It is about judgement, heaven and hell and eternal life" he said.

He continued: "I made a promise to myself six or seven years ago that in Advent I will always preach and speak, whether it is to the local infant school or St Paul's Cathedral, about death, judgement, heaven and hell and eternal life."

The conversation then turned to the importance of Jesus' humanity which is at the heart of the Christmas story and how this made a relationship between God and mankind possible.



Join the Chaplains of Altnagelvin Hospital  
and the Hospital Choir.  
Te Deum, by Mozart,  
Christmas favourites and Carols.

Carlisle Road Methodist Church, Derry  
Saturday 18th December  
at 7:30pm

This is a Free event.  
A retiring collection will be held  
in aid of Friends of Altnagelvin

In memory of Stella Burnside

Altnagelvin Hospital Choir  
Estb. 1994

The Queen's Award  
for Voluntary Service

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"It is only because God has completely emptied himself of what it is to be God in order to be human that there can be any hope in the Christian faith. The hope is that in Christ, my life and all humanity finds communion with God," said the Archbishop.

At the centre of Christmas alongside Jesus is his mother Mary whose obedience to God's will is often viewed as an example for followers of Christ to emulate.

Cottrell called her the "first follower" of Jesus.

"I have always found it a very interesting thought that Mary's 'yes' to the angel at the enunciation was not inevitable. For me that is vitally important for my theological understanding of the Christian faith," he said.

He went on to express how Mary's willingness to carry Jesus within her is what made her the "model disciple". "She is able to say completely to God 'your will be done in me'. Isn't that really very simply the challenge for all of us as Christian disciples?" he asked.

He continued: "That for me is the most astonishingly beautiful part of the story of Advent and Christmas, Mary's 'yes' to God."

Dr Gooder said that although Christmas is traditionally a joyous period, there will be people who will struggle in this season as they are reminded of loved ones they have lost.

When asked what he would say to these individuals, the Archbishop suggested taking a deeper look at the story of



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Christmas, particularly at the predicament that Mary found herself in.

"If you did not know the Christmas story as we encounter it in scripture, but just went to a church and perhaps looked at a crib, you would be forgiven for thinking that having a baby in a stable is a lovely place. It is an unimaginably and deeply frightening place for a child to be born," he said.

He continued: "It is a story with a real dark side to it. We remember the massacre of the innocent. Herod in his brutal attempt to get rid of Jesus had many children killed."

He added that those living in difficult circumstances would be able to relate to the story in some capacity.

"It is a deeply human story and a million miles away from the cosy images that are sometimes presented to us at Christmas," he said.

## **NI's Catholic schools 'have always been inclusive'**

**Catholic schools are “amongst the most diverse” in Northern Ireland and play “a fundamental part [in] our shared and diverse future”, the head of the sector has said.**

The comments by Gerry Campbell, the chief executive of the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), come as a Bill on integrated education continues through Stormont, Mark Bain writes in the Belfast Telegraph

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Churches have been criticised for the role they continue to play in education, but Mr Campbell said they deserved more credit.

“Many faith-based schools welcome a diverse range of pupils,” he added.

“Catholic schools are and always have been inclusive — 44% of primary and 29% of post-primary schools are

A poster for Christmas Service Times. The background is a dark blue gradient with a starry night sky and a silhouette of a town at the bottom. The word "Christmas" is written in a large, white, cursive font. Below it, "SERVICE TIMES" is written in a smaller, white, sans-serif font.

**Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> December 2021 / THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT**  
11.00 a.m. Sunday School Nativity Presentation / Children's Celebration  
7.30 p.m. Festival Service of Nine Lessons and Carols.

**Friday 24<sup>th</sup> December 2021 / CHRISTMAS EVE**  
7.30 p.m. The Service of Holy Communion (Order Two).

**Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> December 2021 / CHRISTMAS DAY**  
11.00 a.m. Festival Choral Eucharist (Order Two).  
The Celebrant and Preacher will be The Right Reverend Andrew Forster,  
Bishop of Derry and Raphoe.

**Derry Cathedral**

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Catholic maintained schools. When added to Catholic managed voluntary grammar figures, enrolment equates to 44.7% of the school-age population.

“Some 53% of all newcomer children also attend Catholic schools, arguably making Catholic schools amongst the most diverse and valued in Northern Ireland.

“Faith-based schools exist internationally because parents have the right to choose education in line with their religious and philosophical convictions.”

Mr Campbell said calls for a one-size-fits-all education system were misguided.

“It is contradictory to argue that our education system does not reflect a maturing and diverse society by suggesting that diversity can only be achieved if we remove the diversity of choice that currently exists,” he added.

“Catholic schools listen, encourage constructive dialogue, and support the development of mutual understanding.

“In so doing, they enhance local communities and provide the opportunity for holistic growth.

“Catholic schools play a significant role in breaking down barriers through innovative shared education programmes and in partnership with all sectors.

“The Independent Review of Education provides an opportunity to present proposals that will deliver a high-quality education system for future generations.

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“A diverse society is enriched by diversity in its educational provision. We believe that no sector should be set above any other in terms of recognition and support.

“The CCMS recognises the need to be progressive to ensure that every child has equal access to reach their full potential and contribute to building a strong economy.

“Are Catholic schools a relic of our divided past or, more accurately, a fundamental part of our shared and diverse future?”

Courtesy the Belfast Telegraph 08/12/2021

## Press review

### **The enduring legacy of St Columba**

Christian Today

On 7th December AD 521, a young Gaelic (Irish) woman named Eithne, who lived in north-west Ireland, gave birth to a baby boy. Traditionally, this occurred at Gartan, in what is today County Donegal in the Irish Republic. Eithne and her husband, Fedelmid, were nobles, members of the Irish elite. They named the little boy 'Colum Cille' in Gaelic. It meant 'the dove of the church.' He was to become better known to history by the Latin form of this name: Columba.

[[] <https://www.christiantoday.com/article/the.enduring.legacy.of.st.columba/137850.htm> ]

### **Limerick Priest who opened door to Pope John Paul II audience for Irish soccer stars passes away**

Irish Examiner



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Monsignor Boyle was laid to rest in Newcastle West following funeral mass in the local Church of the Immaculate Conception.

[[] <https://www.irishexaminer.com/sport/soccer/arid-40761135.html> ]

## **The quest for happiness**

Irish News

Fr Martin Henry writes - the nineteenth-century Church of Ireland Archbishop of Dublin, Richard Whately (1787-1863), once wryly noted: "Happiness is no laughing matter."

[[] <https://www.irishnews.com/lifestyle/faithmatters/2021/12/09/news/martin-henry-the-quest-for-happiness-2529857/> ]

## **Liam Neeson Was Absent from Mother's Funeral**

AmoMama

Liam Neeson suffered a painful loss when his mom, Katherine "Kitty" Neeson, died just a day before his 67th birthday. However, what was more heartbreaking was his inability to be physically present at her funeral.

[[] <https://news.amomama.com/283953-liam-neeson-was-absent-mothers-funeral-w.html> ]

## **Poem for today**

### **Desert Places by Robert Frost**

Snow falling and night falling fast, oh, fast  
In a field I looked into going past,  
And the ground almost covered smooth in snow,

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But a few weeds and stubble showing last.

The woods around it have it - it is theirs.  
All animals are smothered in their lairs.  
I am too absent-spirited to count;  
The loneliness includes me unawares.

And lonely as it is, that loneliness  
Will be more lonely ere it will be less -  
A blanker whiteness of benighted snow  
With no expression, nothing to express.

They cannot scare me with their empty spaces  
Between stars - on stars where no human race is.  
I have it in me so much nearer home  
To scare myself with my own desert places.

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