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People and places



Enjoying the Christmas story – panto style – in All Saints’, Antrim

Connor Christmas Panto Trail was on the road at the weekend, retelling the magical story of Christmas in St Patrick’s, Whitehead, on Saturday, and in Drummaul Parish Church, Randalstown on Sunday morning, and All Saints’, Antrim, on Sunday afternoon.

It was a busy weekend for Connor Children’s Ministry Development Officer Victoria Jackson, Karen Webb of churchnewsireland@gmail.org

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Church Army, members of Connor Children's Council and the artistes from Play it By Ear drama company.

The Christmas Panto Trail begins with a performance of the Nativity Story from Play it By Ear, and children, parents and grandparents, in small groups in accordance with Covid-19 guidelines, follow the performance through different stations before sitting down for arts crafts and refreshments (including hot chocolate!)

Families then enjoy a Christingle Service, led by puppets, and children have the opportunity to make their own Christingle to take home.

The remaining Advent Panto Trails will take place as follows. Places must be booked in advance via the host parish:

Derryvolgie Parish – Friday December 17, 6:30-8:30pm
Lisburn Cathedral – Saturday December 18, 11am-2pm

Cleric moves from Connor to Derry

The parishioners of Desertmartin and Termoneeny learned on Sunday morning that a new rector has been appointed for their parishes.

Rev Philip Benson – a Bangor man – will be instituted in February, and will succeed Rev Mike Dornan who retired in October 2020.

The appointment was announced at this morning's services in St Comgall's Church in Desertmartin and St Conlus'



Church in Termoneeny, as well as in Rev Benson's current parish, Kilwaughter and Cairncastle with All Saints in Larne.

The new rector was ordained a deacon in September 2014, serving his internship in the Grouped Parishes of Finaghy and Upper Malone. Following his ordination as a priest, in September 2015, he became curate in Larne and Inver with Glynn and Raloo.

Philip is married to Carolyn, and they have one daughter, Hannah.

He grew up attending Carnalea Methodist Church. He was educated at RBAI and Queen's University, Belfast where he studied Theology. Prior to ministry, he was employed as a

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full-time youth worker and worked for Goldsmiths Jewellers. His interests include football, movies, music and history.

Sister act 2 - Martina's getting back into the habit

A journalist who became a trainee nun only to be then forced to leave is returning to the religious life.

After announcing she was joining an order in the Republic, former BBC NI political correspondent Martina Purdy proclaimed the latest step in her journey “a miracle”, Noel McAdam writes in the Belfast Telegraph.

Her colleagues thought of staging an intervention when she announced seven years ago she was giving up journalism to join the Sisters of Adoration on Belfast's Falls Road.

But in 2019, Ms Purdy and Elaine Kelly, who left a legal career to also train as a nun, were told they would be unable to take their vows because the order had become too small.

They then became guides for Downpatrick's St Patrick's Centre, leading walks most days, but are now back on the spiritual path.

Ms Purdy said: “When I left the convent, there were times I felt the scandal of it. I was rather embarrassed and, like Mary to the Angel Gabriel, I kept asking, 'How can this be?’

“It didn't make sense because I knew I was called and I knew God is faithful to His promises, then out of the clear



Elaine and Martina

blue sky, this miracle. Elaine and I received an amazing offer, a chance to return to religious life.

“We grabbed the chance and, two weeks ago, we were accepted into the Poor Clares in Co Louth. We will be Sisters again, back from the dead, full of new life, living the dream.”

Now, after years of writing and broadcasting about the border, she is living on it, in a monastery at Faughart.

“We live in the South but look at the North across the street. It was quite a surprise to find an order that suited us so well,” she said.

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Unlike the Sisters of Adoration, the Poor Clares is not an enclosed order, so Ms Purdy has more freedom to go outside.

impossible

“At one stage, I would have laughed in your face if you had told me I would one day quit my job as a BBC political correspondent to enter a convent on the Falls Road, two doors down from where I used to interview Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness,” she said.

“I would have said that was impossible and I'm pretty sure Gerry and Martin would have said the same thing.

“Of course, after I entered the convent, I would have said it was impossible that I would ever leave, but it happened because for God nothing is impossible.

“I don't know why I was so shocked at what happened because it says in the Book of Sirach, if you aspire to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for an ordeal.”

The 56-year-old also admitted she found herself in a dark place after a previous offer of a place in an order was withdrawn.

“We got this amazing offer, one that would restore almost everything we had lost, including a new home where we could adore Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament every day and every night. We were overjoyed. We were, as Elaine always said, living the dream,” she said

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“But then, almost as suddenly as it arrived, it was withdrawn. I started wondering what God was up to. Instead of trusting in His love and His amazing plan for my life, I was in danger of plunging into a dark place; a place of anger, resentment and confusion.

“So, I did what every sensible Catholic does when this happens: I went on a retreat to a monastery to get some perspective.

Courtesy the Belfast Telegraph 12/12/2021

Webinars, music, resources, broadcasts and books

Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols online from St Patrick's, Dublin

You may join St Patrick's, Dublin, next Sunday, either in person or online, for the annual Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols at 3.15pm sung by the boy choristers and lay vicars of the Cathedral Choir.

Music for the service includes Bob Chilcott's Shepherd's Carol, David Blackmore's arrangement of 'Lo how a Rose e'er blooming' and 'Make good cheer' by bass Lay Vicar Choral Eoghan Desmond alongside music by Howells, Willcocks, Goldshmidt and Ledger.

Numbers are restricted, so early arrival is essential. However, you will also be able to tune in either via the



cathedral's livestream page or via RTÉ Radio when the service is repeated on Christmas Eve at 4pm. That way you will also be able to join in with the singing of the congregational carols from the comfort and safety of

your own homes, which is sadly something (due to current restrictions) that isn't currently permitted whilst in the Cathedral.

www.stpatrickscathedral.ie/worship

News Reports

Samaritan's Purse responds to deadly tornadoes

The evangelical humanitarian charity Samaritan's Purse has sent teams with equipment and supplies to respond to the devastation caused by deadly tornadoes that tore through six states in the South and Midwest of the USA on Friday night an through Saturday morning, killing dozens.

Some estimates suggest more than 100 were people were killed, and hundreds of homes were destroyed as more than 30 tornadoes ripped through Arkansas, Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri, Mississippi and Tennessee.

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In a statement, Samaritan's Purse said it is deploying teams to Arkansas and Kentucky.

"We have sent one Disaster Response Unit — a tractor trailer loaded with equipment and supplies — to Arkansas already and another headed to Kentucky on Sunday," the Saturday statement reads. "Some of our staff members are already on the ground in both states."

The charity encourages those who want to help in the tornado relief efforts to sign up for volunteer opportunities.

"Overall, this unusually violent, late fall outbreak is believed to be the deadliest U.S. tornado event ever recorded for December, surpassing storms that killed 38 people in Mississippi on Dec. 5, 1953," the Samaritan's Purse statement reads.

"One of the Dec. 10-11 tornadoes, known as the 'quad-state tornado,' formed in Arkansas, crossed parts of Tennessee and Missouri, and then ripped across southwestern Kentucky. This storm, (which may actually have been a cluster of closely aligned tornadoes rather than a single one), left a trail of destruction more than 200 miles long, among the lengthiest twister tracks ever documented in the United States."

More than 70 people were killed in Kentucky, a state victimized by four tornadoes, including one that stayed on the ground for over 200 miles. The collapse of a candle factory trapped dozens. Gov. Andy Beshear said Saturday that the death toll "could end up exceeding 100 before the

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day is done." Deaths were also reported in Tennessee, Arkansas and Illinois, where an Amazon factory collapsed.

The worst damage may be across western Kentucky. Gov. Beshear declared a state of emergency. He activated over 180 Kentucky National Guard members and the Kentucky State Police. The state is using armories as places of refuge for those in need of shelter.

"I'm pretty sure that number [killed in Kentucky] is north of 70. ... It may, in fact, exceed 100 before the day is done," Beshear said in a statement, calling the storms "the most severe tornado event in Kentucky's history." The city of Mayfield, with a population of 10,000 in Graves County, was especially devastated. When a tornado hit the Mayfield Consumer Products candle factory Friday night, about 110 people were working and dozens are feared dead there, Beshear said, according to CNN.

Archbishop of Canterbury says gov regulation alone cannot protect freedom of speech

The Archbishop of Canterbury has said he believes freedom of speech is a “is a necessary condition” to building “good” and “safe” communities and warned against trying to "legislate ourselves to good behaviour".

Speaking in the House of the Lords, Most Rev Justin Welby said he believed government regulation alone does not protect freedom of speech.



“If freedom of speech is to flourish in this country despite its enemies, we must foster those habits of the heart and the mind that encourage a society that listens, reflects, and responds with generosity and grace,” Archbishop Justin said.

He went on to say he believes there are three “major threats” to freedom of speech - “the fear of reprisal, the distortion of truth, and the dehumanisation of those with whom we disagree” – whilst adding he was in favour of “a maximalist and communitarian approach” when addressing the principle of freedom of speech.

Archbishop Justin also recalled the time a columnist for The Spectator hoped he would be “mugged at knifepoint by a gang of refugees” and said he did not feel “threatened or for that matter offended.”

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“Not only because I doubt many refugees are avid readers of his column, but because like my predecessors I stand here in a position of privilege, which though it makes me noticed, also confers security,” he added.

The head of the Church of England also told peers of the importance of being reminded of “the huge security we have in this country” as many people around the world “can’t speak freely” or “practice their faith freely, or refuse all faith freely” and said that “our understanding of the importance of freedom of speech and the threats to it, needs to keep pace with the threats to its existence.”

He concluded: “I believe that God’s purpose for humanity is not to have fearful slaves, but loving children. We are called to treat each other as we would ourselves like to be treated – with recognition of our flawed-ness, space for forgiveness and support of our freedom. In so doing we are able to create good communities of justice, truth and generosity.”

Pope willing for historic first visit to Moscow

Pope Francis said last week he was willing to go to Moscow for to meet Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill "brother to brother" in what would be the first trip by a pope to Russia.

The pair's meeting in Cuba in 2016 was the first by a pope and a leader of the Russian Orthodox Church since the great schism that split Christianity into Eastern and Western branches in 1054.



Both sides have declared a willingness to work towards unity but they are still far apart theologically and over what role the pope would play in an eventually reunited Church.

"We are brothers and we talk straight to each other. We do not dance the minuet," Francis told reporters aboard his plane returning from a trip to Cyprus and Greece.

"We have to move forward, walking and working towards unity."

He said he was willing to go Moscow and that a top Russian Orthodox official was expected in Rome next week to decide the time and location of the meeting.

Francis said working out the protocols would be less important than meeting "brother to brother" with Kirill.

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The Pope normally travels to countries with a joint invitation from its religious authorities as well as one from the government, meaning that Francis would most likely need an invitation from President Vladimir Putin to visit Russia.

The Russian Orthodox Church, the largest in Christian Orthodoxy, with about 100 million members, is closely aligned with the Kremlin.

Francis said the meeting with Kirill was "on the not too distant horizon".

He said Bishop Hilarion Alfeyev, who is responsible for the Russian Orthodox Church's external relations, would be coming to the Vatican to meet him to discuss where and when the next meeting can take place.

Human Rights Day - CAFOD highlights land and human rights defenders

CAFOD marked Human Rights Day on 10 December with a webinar celebrating the work of human rights defenders in Latin America. They face growing threats for protecting "our common home".

More than 110 participants heard from CAFOD partners how human rights defenders try to keep governments and businesses in check, put people ahead of profits, and protect the planet's natural resources. This is despite facing criminalisation, harassment, and violence.

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The webinar was chaired by Clare Dixon, CAFOD's Regional manager for Latin America, and introduced by Cardinal Pedro Barreto, Archbishop of Huancayo in Peru. He said that "caring for life and our common home is part of our enduring mission".

CAFOD's recent report, 'Protecting our common home: land and human rights defenders in Latin America', found that the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated deep inequalities and led to increased attacks on human rights defenders and their communities.

From Brazil, Maurício Ye'kuana, a Brazilian indigenous leader, activist, and Director of CAFOD partner, the Hutukara Yanomami Association, spoke about the problems indigenous people face from illegal gold mining. Mauricio, from Yanomami Indigenous Territory, said that, "businesses do not care about our people; they just want to make money; they don't even pay many taxes." He told UK listeners that, "if you buy jewellery you need to know where it comes from, for gold from Yanomami territory comes with indigenous blood." He highlighted that campaigners in the UK must pressure the jewellery trade. He feared that Brazil's President Bolsonaro is currently trying to relax laws for the protection of Indigenous Peoples.

From Peru, Ivett Ariana Kana Magaña - an environmental defender from the Huisa community in Espinar, part of the National Platform of People Affected by Heavy Metals, reported that her community has been denouncing the impacts of environmental pollution generated by mining in their territory. Concerns have not been addressed by either the Peruvian state or the mining companies involved. Karem

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Luque, an environmental and human health specialist at CAFOD's partner DHSF in Peru, talked about the social, health and environmental impacts of mining, the criminalisation of social leaders protesting against contamination and the struggle to access healthcare for those affected by heavy metals in Espinar. Both felt that while people internationally know about nearby Cusco, they seem to know little about companies, such as Glencore, devastating the environment and making local communities ill. Karem's parents and brother are all ill because of contaminated water and leaks of mine tailing onto the land. "We were told that mining would bring economic development," she reported, "but it has taken our culture and our identity and destroyed our crops such as Quinoa." She added that, "we hear nothing about this in the media".

From Colombia, Robinson Mejía Alonso, a Forestry Engineer and environmental campaigner in Cajamarca, a mountainous Andes region, spoke about the men and women prepared to defend their land, despite death threats and murders. Colombia had the distinction of being the world leader in slain environmental activists in 2020 (the latest year for which statistics are available). A recent report by Global Witness tallied at least 65 such killings last year -more than twice the number of the next country on the list. Robinson said he and his colleagues want to defend a region which is the breadbasket of the country and an important contributor to the country's food security. He reported that the La Colosa Mining project, the third largest gold project in the world, operated by South African-based multinational AngloGold Ashanti, is threatening water resources, protected snowland territories, and raincloud forests. "We will sacrifice ourselves in order for the region to

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continue to produce food," he said, "and we will never give up our peasant roots." He concluded with, "Cajamarca is an example of hope and we want to continue nourishing our hope despite the threats we face."

The report 'Protecting our common home: land and human rights defenders in Latin America' is available at <https://cafod.org.uk/About-us/Policy-and-research/Private-sector/Human-rights-Latin-America>

Email MP action: <https://action.cafod.org.uk/page/93929/action/1>

Perspective

The government lies for power, but Christianity speaks truth to power by George Pitcher

Government ministers are occupying positions that make no sense, such as claiming that they weren't at a party that didn't happen, says George Pitcher

It's hardly remarkable that Boris Johnson lies.

From £350m a week extra for the NHS as a direct consequence of Brexit to deliberately misleading the Queen in an unlawful attempt to prorogue parliament; from making up quotes for The Times to claiming that home secretary Priti Patel hadn't broken the ministerial code for bullying; from claiming that he had sacked Matt Hancock when he

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had defended him to claiming record NHS investment that doesn't exist, the prime minister occupies a parallel universe to veracity. Actually not all that parallel. And the British public appears to be inured to it.

What is more remarkable is the number of ministers who are prepared to be lured into the tangled web he weaves and are willing, even eager, to join in this practice to deceive. The habit has just become most hallucinatory during briefings about a Christmas party last year at Number 10, which didn't take place, but if it had then it didn't break any lockdown restrictions.

Health secretary Sajid Javid, having evidently failed to notice his predecessor Matt Hancock's meat-shield role for the PM, has been forced onto the public airwaves to take a position somewhere between the Red Queens of his inquisitors and Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds.

Stepping out of his newspaper taxi, Javid told reporters that assurances that no illegal rave had happened at Number 10 were enough to satisfy him, while concurrently being enraged that Allegra Stratton (the Girl with Kaleidoscope Eyes) had laughed in a presser rehearsal about the party that hadn't happened and then insisted that it should properly be investigated to establish that it really hadn't happened, but if it did it happened properly.

It's safe to say that to be a member of this government is to occupy an alternative reality. This is funny only to a degree, because it's actually a power play of the autocrat. In her book, *Surviving Autocracy*, Masha Gessen examines the deceit of the Trump presidency in forensic detail.

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Repeatedly, she demonstrates that Donald Trump didn't lie (only) because he's an idiot, a sociopath and a crook, but because it was an effective political technique.

The power lie

He didn't lie in order for an untruth to be believed. He didn't even lie to mislead. He lied because he could. He lied to show that, as president, he could say what he wanted. He lied because his hardcore followers lapped up his defiance of normal political protocols. He lied to show he didn't care and could flip his position subsequently. This is what Gessen calls the "power lie". Russia's Vladimir Putin has been a past-master of the art for decades.

Gessen points to two forms of established dignity in politics: The dignity of participation (every citizen being afforded a voice) and the dignity of performance (procedures, protocols, language and so on). She writes: "Trumpism attacks both sorts of dignity, by degrading the performance of politics and by restricting participation in it."

Thankfully, the US is emerging from its trip through the looking-glass (though it needs to exercise constant vigilance not to relapse). The UK still suffers its similar period of political delusion and continues under Johnson to picture itself in a boat on a river, with tangerine trees and marmalade skies.

It's why ministers can feel free to occupy positions that make no sense. Like claiming that they weren't at a party that didn't happen and, if it did, was quite proper. But, like Trumpism, it's dangerous for democracy, because it's a form of the power lie. Johnson invents his own make-believe

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world to show that he can – and to date he has not only got away with it, but thrived on it. And, naturally, it erodes both the dignities of participation and performance in politics.

Alternative realities don't have to do so. Religious faith invariably offers an alternative reality. The Christian narrative posits that there is a human alternative to death, darkness and despair. Not a fairy story, but a reality founded in the evidence of the human condition in qualities such as consciousness, love and hope.

Darkest time of year

It's what followers of this faith look to in Advent, precisely if symbolically because this is the darkest time of year. It suggests not just that there is more than this – the characteristic critique of the detractor who claims that it's a source of comfort in the face of existential threat – but that we are better than this.

It's a move from subjective manipulation to the objective reality of being held, as Mike Higon puts it in *Difficult Gospel*, in “a wholly loving gaze” by a universal and infinite heart and mind.

That's important, because it's the converse of the alternative reality offered by populist politics. Religious faith shores up rather than undermines human dignity – including those dignities of participation and performance. The voiceless are heard and the reality is codified in the rituals of performance and language; not as pomp, but as in the presence of a God that is with us in the enacted drama of our existence. That

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offers an alternative to what we see about us and becomes a reality when we welcome it.

The question really is this: As Christians await the coming of the light at Christmas, how does what we do differ from the alternative reality of politicians who power-lie to us in false promises and empty redemption? Part of the answer to that must be that the imperative of politics is self-serving and the essence of our faith is self-sacrificial.

George PitcherGeorge is a writer, independent communications and public ethics consultant and an Anglican priest.

Courtesy of georgepitcher.substack.com 10/12/2021

Poem for today

In Memory Of My Mother by Patrick Kavanagh

I do not think of you lying in the wet clay
Of a Monaghan graveyard; I see
You walking down a lane among the poplars
On your way to the station, or happily

Going to second Mass on a summer Sunday -
You meet me and you say:
'Don't forget to see about the cattle - '
Among your earthiest words the angels stray.

And I think of you walking along a headland
Of green oats in June,
churchnewsireland@gmail.org

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So full of repose, so rich with life -
And I see us meeting at the end of a town

On a fair day by accident, after
The bargains are all made and we can walk
Together through the shops and stalls and markets
Free in the oriental streets of thought.

O you are not lying in the wet clay,
For it is a harvest evening now and we
Are piling up the ricks against the moonlight
And you smile up at us - eternally.

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