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Image of the day - or night - Salisbury Cathedral

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People and places

Sandbag instead of a stocking in Limerick for Christmas

**A new
tradition
began in**

Limerick last week when a Church of Ireland rector hung a sandbag on his mantelpiece instead of a Christmas stocking, to raise awareness of the hunger crisis in flood-hit South Sudan.



With his sandbag Christmas stocking, Very Rev Niall Sloane, who is rector of Limerick City Parish and Dean of Limerick, is giving his backing to Christian Aid Ireland's Christmas appeal, which focuses on the hunger crisis in South Sudan.

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The Church of Ireland is one of Christian Aid's sponsoring churches and Dean Sloane is an enthusiastic supporter of its work to end extreme poverty.

Dublin Black Santa 2021 appeal off to a flying start

Lord Mayor of Dublin Alison Gilliland and the Archbishop of Dublin, Dr Michael Jackson, will formally launch the 2021 Black Santa Sit Out at St Ann's Church, Dawson Street, today Tuesday December 21 at 1pm.

This year marks the 21st anniversary of the Black Santa Sit Out in Dublin. Over that time the annual appeal has raised over €700,000 for local good causes.

This year, once again, the sit out will differ from its usual format. To ensure the safety of everyone involved there will be no choirs on Dawson Street this year.

However, St Ann's caretaker, Fred Deane, and his team of volunteers will take to the streets right up until Christmas Eve appealing to the generosity of those passing by.

The 2021 appeal is off to a flying start already. It has received a generous donation of €10,000 from a major international company in lieu of the Christmas party it would have thrown for its staff. Eager to get started, volunteers were also out on the street shaking their buckets at the weekend.

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While footfall in the city centre is inevitably lighter with people working from home and keeping themselves safe, this year, more than ever, the charities supported by Black Santa need support. The parish has opened its online donations page once again and donations can be made on the St Ann's website: www.stann.dublin.anglican.org

As always, every cent donated goes directly to the charities supported by Black Santa. These include the Salvation Army, The Simon Community and the Peter McVerry Trust, all of which work with homeless people and also Protestant Aid, Barnardo's, St Vincent De Paul, the Laura Lynn Foundation and the Solas Project.

Black Santa in Dublin is modelled on a similar appeal, which has been run by successive Deans of St Anne's Cathedral



Sunrise on Binnion, in the Mourne

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in Belfast for many years. It has become known as the Black Santa appeal because of the long heavy black cloaks worn by the clergy to keep out the cold. All the charities supported by Black Santa do invaluable work and every cent donated to the appeal is divided among them.

Appointment of Dean of Waterford

The Reverend Bruce Hayes, currently rector of Dalkey parish in the Diocese of Dublin & Glendalough, has been appointed dean of Waterford and rector of Waterford Union of Parishes in the Church of Ireland Diocese of Cashel, Ferns and Ossory.

His installation as dean and institution as rector will take place on Wednesday April 6 at 7 p.m.

The announcement of the new appointment was made by Bishop Michael Burrows on Sunday morning, December 19th 2021.

Making the announcement Bishop Burrows said: “The appointment of Bruce Hayes as dean of Waterford is great news for parish and diocese. We look forward to benefiting from his energy, positivity and pastoral commitment. He brings to his new parish rich experience from contexts as different as Skibbereen, Co Cork and Dalkey, Co Dublin. Waterford will discover him to be joyful in his approach, and sensitive in his care.”

The dean – elect is married to Samantha and they have three sons. He was born in Dublin and grew up in Tullow,

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County Dublin. He graduated from UCD in 1997 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Economics and Philosophy, was ordained deacon in 2001, and priest the following year.

He served at Saint Finnian's Church, in Belfast, as a curate and accepted the call to Abbeystrewry Union in Cork in 2004 where he served as rector until 2013. He then returned to Dublin to serve as rector of St. Patrick's Church, Dalkey. A rugby fan, he also enjoys vegetable growing and carpentry.

"I look forward to getting to know the people and the city of Waterford," he says, "and trust they will hold my family and I in their prayers whilst we prepare for the move."

Joint Christmas Message from the Bishops of Cork

The Most Revd Dr Fintan Gavin & The Rt Revd Dr Paul Colton

This has been a tough year. The COVID–19 pandemic continues to affect all our lives. The scriptures tell us that after their visit to the new–born Saviour in Bethlehem, the wise men 'went home by a different way'. The pandemic has also forced many of us to change our ways, to do things differently. Nobody has been unaffected.

As we celebrate Christmas, we are very conscious of many people and families whose lives and plans continue to be disrupted.



There have been times during the pandemic when public health requirements restricted our public worship; we were even forced to close church doors at times. However, even in those times, parishes tried to remain open in spirit to everyone. It's thanks to the creative gifts and commitment of so many people that we remain connected to one another as a family of faith.

With all that's changing, we need to focus on important values that we would never want to lose. Our Christian faith calls us to be a welcoming people and to reach out to the vulnerable. This faith challenges us to be fair and just in our sharing of the world's resources. The frailty of our planet also cries out for shared action to hand on our "common home" to future generations.

Each time of crisis provides an opportunity which must be seized. These pandemic times bring us to the heart of the Gospel message: what we agree to do as a community is more authentic and lasting than our individual concerns.

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This is a time for unity and for shared concern for one another.

At Christmas, we pray that through Christ, we will all be united in shared goals:

to look out for and care for one another more;
to reach out to those who have less;
to support those who have lost loved ones in the pandemic;
and to be eternally grateful for the many blessings we have — today and always.

May the Lord of Light shine on you and on your loved ones this Christmas and in the New Year.

+Fintan Gavin, Bishop of Cork and Ross

+Paul Colton, Bishop of Cork, Cloyne and Ross

O Holy Night' is UK's favourite Xmas carol

O Holy Night has topped a poll to find the UK's favourite Christmas carol, beating Silent Night to the top spot.

Gustav Holst's version of In The Bleak Midwinter came in at number three and Hark! The Herald Angels Sing was in fourth, in an annual survey by Classic FM.

O Holy Night, believed to be the first ever carol played on the radio in 1906, holds on to the top spot for the sixth year in a row.

The lyrics for the carol come from a French poem, with the music subsequently written by Adolphe Adam. More than 17,000 votes were cast in the 20th year of the poll.

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Webinars, music, resources, broadcasts, and books

A Christmas Day message from the Archbishops of Armagh

RTÉ One: 12.10–12.20pm / RTÉ Radio 1: 1.05pm–1.15pm



The Gordon family talk about Christmas as part of the Archbishops' Christmas message.

The Primates of All Ireland, Archbishop Eamon Martin and Archbishop John McDowell, offer a Christmas message on

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A joint choir from the Royal School Armagh and St Paul's, Bessbrook, take their places to sing in the Cathedral.

the theme of 'hopes and fears', reflecting on the suffering and changes brought about by the coronavirus

pandemic and subsequent restrictions, yet prayerfully looking forward in hope to a new year.

The message, filmed in Armagh's Church of Ireland Cathedral, will feature carols performed by pupils from the Royal School Armagh and St Paul's High School, Bessbrook, and interviews with a local hospice nurse and a young family about those things which have sustained them through difficult days, and the difference that the Christian faith brings in their lives. The Archbishops will also affirm

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the hopes of young people expressed in the Church Leaders' Service of Reflection and Hope, which took place in the Cathedral in October of this year.

This programme will be broadcast on RTÉ One television at 12.10pm and on RTÉ Radio 1 at 1.05pm on Christmas Day.

Christmas in St Patrick's

RTÉ One television - Dáithí Ó Sé hosts this sumptuous, festive show in St Patrick's Cathedral, newly restored in time for its 800th anniversary. Performers and guests include Andrea Corr, Tolú Makay, Declan O'Rourke, Lisa O'Neill, Ultan O'Brien, Eoghan Ó Ceannabháin, Alice Leahy, Dean William Morton, operatic star Sinead Campbell Wallace, David Brophy's Frontline Choir, the Choir of St Patrick's Cathedral, and the RTÉ Concert Orchestra.

The concert will be broadcast on RTÉ One television from 8.15pm to 9.15pm on Christmas Eve (Saturday, 24th December) and repeated on Christmas Day morning from 9.00am.

TCD Virtual Carol Service

"On the 6th day to Christmas", the TCD Virtual Carol Service is available to re-watch on our YouTube channel. Here's a sneak peak of what you can expect!

Cosy up by the fire and immerse yourself in some Christmas cheer Christmas tree Multiple musical notes

<https://bit.ly/3oPylo8>

BBC Radio Ulster Christmas Day Morning Service with Black Santa

This Christmas Day, for BBC Radio Ulster's Morning Service, the Dean of Belfast, the Very Revd Stephen Forde, reflects on sitting outside St Anne's Cathedral as the Black Santa, with music from the Choir of the Cathedral.

You, Lord, are our hope and our strength;
Your grace permeates everything and everywhere;
the sound of Your handiwork resounds in all things;
Your mystery's breadth and depth exhausts our
understanding.



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The service will be broadcast between 9.03am and 10.00am, and will be repeated on Boxing Day (Sunday, 26th December) from 10.03am.

Finding Love in Advent - The Gathering Grounds welcoming people with Christian love

The final video from Dublin & Glendalough diocese for Advent 2021 is 'Finding Love in Advent' at the Gathering Grounds in Kilternan Parish Church.

Gathering Grounds is a café run by the church for the community where the Revd Rob and Julie Clements hope everyone is met with God's love.

They have created a café run with the help of a great team of volunteers where they serve great coffee and sweet treats and, on two days a week, lunches. But more importantly they have created a space where conversations can happen.

Rob believes that in the times we are living through people are thirsting for places where they can gather.

"We are blessed with Kilternan Parish Centre but all churches can create spaces where people can gather safely," he says. "You don't need fancy cappuccinos but we do need to think about how we widen our church doors and receive people with Christian love."

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The presenters talk to Rob and Julie, who saw the importance of creating space for people in her first college job at a drive through coffee house in Seattle. We also meet some of the people who volunteer at the Gathering Grounds and some regular customers.

Throughout Advent we have been finding Hope, Peace, Joy and Love in parishes that are reaching out to the communities in which they are based. If you missed any they are all available on our YouTube channel

[https://www.youtube.com/
TheUnitedDiocesesofDublinandGlendalough](https://www.youtube.com/TheUnitedDiocesesofDublinandGlendalough)

Link also at - [https://dublin.anglican.org/news/2021/12/19/
finding-love-in-advent-the](https://dublin.anglican.org/news/2021/12/19/finding-love-in-advent-the)

News Reports

C of E Cathedrals recommend masks and tests for Christmas services

Cathedral deans have urged congregations to wear masks and take Covid tests at Christmas even though they are not mandatory.

Under Plan B restrictions to combat the spread of coronavirus, coverings have become compulsory in most public indoor venues.

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1,000 - The number of people that Durham Cathedral (Photo right) can allow into the building for services if they take lateral flow tests

However, in accordance with government guidelines, there is a “reasonable excuse exemption”, which allows people to remove a face covering in places of worship while singing if they wish to do so. Despite this, cathedral deans across the country are taking matters into their own hands, and urging those entering their buildings to take extra precautions.

The Very Rev Andrew Nunn, Dean of Southwark Cathedral, said he had not made radical changes this Christmas, but he had insisted that carol singers continue to wear masks.

“We haven’t changed a lot of the things we have been doing throughout the year,” he said, but “we’ve reduced the numbers we were planning to have for Christmas – it’s surprisingly a bit more than at Durham [cathedral], given that Southwark is smaller, so we’re going to have 400 people in church.





“We’re not asking for passports or lateral flow tests but we are asking people to distance and behave responsibly to their neighbour.”

Southwark Cathedral

Regarding asking people to continue singing while wearing masks, he admitted: “It is difficult.”

“It’s particularly difficult when you’re wanting to sing carols,

which demands singing out loud, but we’ve got used to this because we’ve been singing behind masks since singing was reintroduced, so we didn’t take the opportunity of asking people to remove their masks – but it’s not the best.”

The Very Rev Andrew Tremlett, Dean of Durham Cathedral, said that every Church of England cathedral has had to undergo a risk assessment, and for Durham Cathedral, that meant having just 350 people inside the building.

“For us, in a large building, that’s a small amount,” he told BBC Radio 4’s Sunday programme, which rounds up the week’s news on religion and ethics.

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“So on the basis of mission, we wanted to open up to as many people as possible, with additional restrictions, and one of those could be to have a lateral flow test [for] which you don’t need vaccination, [so] we can actually bring in almost 1,000 people, so a lot of our stakeholders and groups have opted to do that.

“And it is only for a minority of services – about 20 per cent of our events and services that are going to have that – but it does mean that we can hold a much larger group of people more securely.”

New law will let church weddings take place outside in England

Open-air ceremonies have proved popular during the pandemic as they ‘feel romantic and Covid-safe’

Church weddings will be allowed outdoors for the first time in more than 250 years under a major liberalisation of marriage law planned by the Government. Ministers are to let churches hold weddings outside in their grounds, officiated by a priest, the biggest change since the Marriage Act of 1753 set the seal on religious ceremonies.

The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) will also relax the rules for civil ceremonies on a permanent basis so that they can continue to be held outdoors in parks, gardens, forests and on beaches, as has been temporarily the case during the pandemic.

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Tom Pursglove, the justice minister, said: “A wedding is one of the [highlights] of a person’s life and it is right that couples should have greater choice in how they celebrate their special day.

“Our proposals would afford them that choice whether they choose a civil or religious ceremony, and would mark a huge boost for those planning a wedding over the coming years.

“Crucially, this will also support the wedding sector by ensuring venues can continue to safely meet the demand for larger ceremonies.”

The law change will apply to all religions, with around 55,000 church weddings a year eligible to take advantage of the expansion to outdoors, 96 per cent of which are Christian.

No religious group will be obliged to provide outdoor ceremonies, and existing protections to safeguard religious freedoms will remain in place.

The change turns the clock back to medieval times when it was common for weddings to take place outside the front of a church, the reason why many of that period have a projecting porch.

Ministers will also consult on whether the current rules – relaxing previous regulations that civil ceremonies must be held indoors or in a structure such as a bandstand – can continue post-pandemic beyond April 2022 when they are due to lapse.

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George Buchanan, of Hodsock Priory in Nottinghamshire, is among those who have embraced outdoors weddings after converting an old tennis court into a licensed venue for civil ceremonies in November 2020.

“The first ceremony was held in June 2021 and it is immediately the most popular choice for our brides as their chosen place on site to say ‘I do’,” Mr Buchanan said.

“Outdoor ceremonies will continue through the winter – the autumn colours are spectacular for this weekend’s weddings. Guests love it as it feels romantic and is Covid-safe, so I would say it’s [an] asset to our venue.”

Ministers have also asked the Law Commission to consider further marriage reforms, including whether ceremonies could take place in a broader range of locations even outside the grounds of a church.

BBC’s US reporter given Bashir’s religion role

Martin Bashir’s replacement as religion editor of the BBC has been announced.

The broadcaster said that Aleem Maqbool would take up the role, after questions were raised about how Mr Bashir secured a Panorama interview with Princess Diana in 1995.

The position has remained unfilled since May, when the journalist stepped down citing “ongoing health issues”.

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The BBC said at the time: “He let us know of his decision last month, just before being readmitted to hospital for another surgical procedure on his heart. Although he underwent major surgery toward the end of last year, he is facing some ongoing issues and has decided to focus on his health.”

“We wish him a complete and speedy recovery.” Mr Maqbool, the corporation’s North America correspondent since 2014, will start in the spring.

The BBC said he was appointed “following a competitive recruitment process. Aleem will take the lead on the BBC’s expert analysis and insight on the major themes and issues affecting faiths in the UK and around the world”.

Mr Maqbool said: “I am delighted to take up a role that focuses on telling stories associated with faith and ethics, and reflecting on the complex way in which they shape our society.”

Jonathan Munro, deputy director of BBC News, says: “Aleem has always been an exceptionally thoughtful reporter and analyst with journalistic drive and a strong vision for reaching new audiences.”

Poem for today

Advent by Christina Rossetti

This Advent moon shines cold and clear,
These Advent nights are long;

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Our lamps have burned year after year,
And still their flame is strong.

“Watchman, what of the night?” we cry,
Heart-sick with hope deferred:

“No speaking signs are in the sky,”
Is still the watchman’s word.

The Porter watches at the gate,
The servants watch within;
The watch is long betimes and late,
The prize is slow to win.

“Watchman, what of the night?” but still
His answer sounds the same:

“No daybreak tops the utmost hill,
Nor pale our lamps of flame.”

One to another hear them speak,
The patient virgins wise:

“Surely He is not far to seek,” —

“All night we watch and rise.”

“The days are evil looking back,
The coming days are dim;
Yet count we not His promise slack,
But watch and wait for Him.”

One with another, soul with soul,
They kindle fire from fire:

“Friends watch us who have touched the goal.”

“They urge us, come up higher.”

“With them shall rest our waysore feet,
With them is built our home,
With Christ.” “They sweet, but He most sweet,
Sweeter than honeycomb.”

There no more parting, no more pain,
The distant ones brought near,
The lost so long are found again,
Long lost but longer dear:
Eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard,
Nor heart conceived that rest,
With them our good things long deferred,
With Jesus Christ our Best.

We weep because the night is long,
We laugh, for day shall rise,
We sing a slow contented song
And knock at Paradise.
Weeping we hold Him fast Who wept
For us,—we hold Him fast;
And will not let Him go except
He bless us first or last.

Weeping we hold Him fast to-night;
We will not let Him go
Till daybreak smite our wearied sight,
And summer smite the snow:
Then figs shall bud, and dove with dove
Shall coo the livelong day;
Then He shall say, "Arise, My love,
My fair one, come away."

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