



**Image of the day**

**HRH Princess  
Royal at Mission  
to Seafarers  
Service of Nine  
Lessons and  
Carols**



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Belfast Cathedral with the largest Celtic Cross in Ireland

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## People and places

### **HRH The Princess Royal at Mission to Seafarers annual Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols**

**This week the Mission to Seafarers hosted its annual Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols, in the presence of its President, HRH The Princess Royal, who read the seventh lesson of the service.**

“We were grateful for the opportunity to host our carols service at All Hallows by the Tower, the oldest surviving church building in London. Thank you also to Trinity Hall for their hospitality during our reception where we were able to reforge old connections and form new friendships”.

### **Presbyterian Church marks centenary of NI with series of seminars**

**The centenary of partition and the creation of Northern Ireland is being marked by the Presbyterian Church (PCI) with a series of four seminars designed to “promote a thoughtful and open dialogue”.**

The seminars follow the PCI’s principal centenary event which took place at the Union Theological College in Belfast in September.

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He said: “From 1921, for 11 years, PCI’s Union Theological College (Photo above) was home to the Parliament of Northern Ireland before it moved to Stormont. A century on, we wanted to acknowledge the role that the College played in the momentous events of 100 years ago with a special event there.”

The seminars will “focus on different audiences from young adults and border communities to urban, working class, loyalist communities”.

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The final event will involve key decision makers within PCI. Learning from each of the previous three seminars will feed into this final session, with discussion centred on what challenges the Church's reflections on the centenary might have for it and how they might be addressed in light of changing relationships on the island of Ireland, and between the rest of the UK and the island of Ireland.

The first seminar involved a dialogue with a panel of three ministers working in urban, working class, loyalist communities across Northern Ireland and Debbie Watters of the restorative justice programme, Alternatives NI.

Rev Dr Martin McNeely, minister of Ballykeel Presbyterian Church, welcomed just over 30 key listeners within the denomination and other interested parties to his church to reflect on how the events of 100 years ago still play out in regard to political and community expression.



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He was also joined by Rev Dave Clawson, minister of West Kirk Presbyterian Church on the Shankill Road in Belfast and Rev Dr John Coulter of Ballysally Presbyterian in Coleraine.

The panellists also looked at current opportunities and challenges faced by Protestant unionist loyalist communities.

## **New role for Down & Dromore Children's Officer**



**Julie Currie, the Diocese of Down and Dromore's Children's Development Officer is taking up a new appointment as Family Ministry Pastor at Hillsborough Parish.**

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Julie will take up her new role in February 2022.

Bishop David McClay says: “Julie has served the Diocese of Down and Dromore as Children’s Development Officer these past 11 years. She has done so with energy, passion, professionalism, and a desire to see children’s lives impacted by Jesus and a new generation incorporated into the life of his church.

“As bishop I will miss Julie as part of our diocesan team, but I am pleased that her new role will enrich the ministry to families and children in Hillsborough.”

## **Emmanuel! God is with us - joint message from Bishops of Clogher**

**Bishops Duffy and Ellis write - Over 2,000 years ago, a young couple travelled across a difficult terrain in trying conditions.**

Despite fears and trials, they travelled in hope. A mother was with child. They made their way to Bethlehem, not out of any wish of their own but in answer to a political order. They were to be counted, not for their own wellbeing or social advancement but for the levying of taxes and political exploitation. When they arrived in Bethlehem, they found themselves to be homeless, without shelter, forced to rely on the generosity of others. Into this scene on the fringes of an empire, God came among us, as a baby in a manger. The angels announced his birth and the deep peace that would come to the earth through him. The first to visit him were not the great and good, but lowly shepherds - vulnerable people on the margins of society. At one level,



the political order was bringing people together for the purposes of power, but God came amongst his people in a lowly stable, to bring love and peace, without boundaries or divisions.

As we celebrate the feast of Christmas 2021, we journey together amidst the continuing restrictions and challenges imposed on us individually and as a community by the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite all the progress so far, we still feel vulnerable. This virus has shown us, in a most tangible way, our vulnerability and fragility. There is a danger too that it can foster divisions among people.

These past 21 months have shown us the importance and value of solidarity in our world. In times of trial and fear, in times when we ponder future possibilities, people seek and deserve hope-filled and inspired leadership; something that

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unites, something that seeks to erase the division between those who have and those who have not, between people of different nations and faiths, between different political outlooks. This continues to challenge those of us in Church and Civic leadership.

God is with us! Jesus comes among us to show God's solidarity with us - through love. The love that Jesus first brought to the world in Bethlehem reached its depth on the Cross of Calvary. It continues to do so to this day. His example and his teachings challenge us. His love inspires us to reach out with the good news of the Gospel, to respect others, to dialogue and to trust, even in the most difficult situations.

Emmanuel! God is with us!

Wishing all people across the Diocese of Clogher the blessings of Christmas.

+ Larry Duffy, Roman Catholic Bishop of Clogher

+ Ian Ellis, Church of Ireland Bishop of Clogher

## **Dean of Cloyne participates in Ecumenical Blessing of SHARE Crib**

**On Wednesday, 15th December, representing the Bishop of Cork, Cloyne and Ross, Dr Paul Colton, the Dean of Cloyne, the Very Reverend Susan Green, joined Bishop Fintan Gavin on Patrick Street in Cork for the annual ecumenical blessing of the SHARE Crib.**

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SHARE, which stands for Students Harness Aid for the Relief of the Elderly, was founded 51 years ago by students of the Presentation Brothers School in Cork but has now expanded to involve 22 schools in the metropolitan Cork area.

## **New Community Choir in Knocknagoney**

Jude Frame is known to many as a talented musician and worship leader but her day job (as well as being a Mum) is teaching music in Ballyholme Primary School where she has, not one but four choirs! And now Jude has added another, this time a Community Choir that rehearses every Wednesday night in the spacious Knocknagoney Church.



## **CMSI is recruiting**

**CMSI seeking to fill two roles in early 2022.**

Communications Coordinator

CMSI is seeking to appoint a part-time Communications Coordinator.

This is an exciting opportunity for a committed, motivated and resourceful individual to play an important part in CMSI's mission and ministry. The successful candidate will play a key role in sharing stories, news updates and prayer requests and will lead the process of developing CMSI's online community. The role will initially involve a critical review of CMSI's use of Social Media and the development of a new Social Media strategy.

The closing date for applications to this post is 1pm on Wednesday 19th January 2022.

Find out more & apply

<https://www.cmsireland.org/job-opportunities>

Administration Coordinator (Maternity Cover)

[churchnewsireland@gmail.org](mailto:churchnewsireland@gmail.org)

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CMSI is seeking to appoint a part-time Administration Coordinator to work in our Belfast office for a nine-month period of maternity cover, commencing in January/February 2022.

The successful candidate will work in CMSI's Belfast office, overseeing the administration function of the society and managing the day-to-day administration activities of the office. As part of a team of seven staff and occasional volunteers, the Administration Coordinator will play a key role in helping ensure that the society is efficient and effective in its work.

The closing date for applications to this post is 1pm on Friday 14th January 2022.

Find out more & apply

<https://www.cmsireland.org/job-opportunities>

## Webinars, music, resources, broadcasts and books

## Arklow Presbyterian Church to lead RTE Christmas Service

**Arklow viewers tuning into the Christmas Day Service on RTE at 11 a.m. will see some familiar faces as Reverend Michael Anderson from Arklow Presbyterian Church will lead it.**

Members of the Arklow Shipping Silver Band, the Presbyterian Church, and pupils from Carysfort NS will perform at the Service.

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It's not the first time the Arklow Presbyterian Church has been on RTE's screens, Rev. Anderson led the Palm Sunday Service at Easter.

Elaine Kearon says that Arklow Presbyterian Church is delighted to be asked back for Christmas.

She said: "RTE very kindly asked us back to do the service for Christmas Day and we are delighted to accept it.

"There are so many talented members of the congregation involved, it's a lovely collaboration between all members of the church.

"I hope that everybody tunes in on the day and enjoys the service."

Rev. Michael Anderson is joined by musical director Alison Crammond and singers Tara Crammond, Holly Prestage, Elaine Kearon and Sharon O'Sullivan.

Rebecca Kearon, Artur Bosy, Kate and Laura O'Sullivan will be on the brass section during the Service along with musicians Lesley Shepherd, Hannah and Micah Joung.

Caleb Prestage, Daniel Fenton and Luke Purser from Carysfort National School will also be at the Service.

The Service will be available on the RTE player for three weeks after Christmas.

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## MindMatters - C of I summary research report now available



**The MindMatters C of I summary research report, became available this week.**

It also is on the research tab of the project website:  
<https://mindmatters.ireland.anglican.org>

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This report shares the findings from the survey with the response to each question in the appendices.

The findings show a need to prioritise four areas:

Promoting connections

Reducing stigma

Exploring the role of clergy and the supports and training that would be useful for them

Exploring the role of faith in promoting positive mental health

The working groups states, “Now that we have a better understanding of the Church’s attitudes and awareness of mental health, we are developing our next steps. With this in mind, we are going to roll out mental health awareness training in late January, with an invitation to apply for seed funding opening in late spring.”

## News Reports

### Leading Presbyterian Prof Sam McConkey condemns church’s threat to dismiss Dublin minister

**The threat of dismissal facing a Presbyterian minister in Dublin and the disciplining of a parish council has been criticised by one of the State’s best-known members of the church, Prof Sam McConkey - Patsy McGarry writes in The Irish Times.**

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Rev Katherine Meyer and the Christ Church, Sandymount parish council have been ordered to recant following the appointment of Steven Smyrl, who is in a same-sex marriage, to a place on the council.

A commission of the church's Dublin and Munster presbytery, which despite its name covers all of the Republic, gave Rev Meyer and the council until last Monday to back down, or else face disciplinary proceedings on January 18th.

However, Prof McConkey, an elder at the Clontarf Presbyterian church in Dublin, but better known as the head of the Department of International Health and Tropical Medicines at the Royal College of Surgeons, said: "Command and control, and sanction from on high, is not the Presbyterian way."

### **'Scandal'**

Following an investigation, the commission said Rev Meyer and the church council had caused "scandal injurious to the purity and peace of the church", recalling how St Paul how instructed believers "not to associate with sexually immoral people if they bear the name of brother".

Highly critical of the commission's action, Prof McConkey said: "What they are doing is bringing shame on the church and should stop trying to apply sexuality standards from thousands of years ago.

"Have they similar views about slavery and the subjugation of women? If they don't, they are being inconsistent," he

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said, adding that most Presbyterians in the Republic “favour a tolerant, open church which embraces people who are different”.

Most church members do not favour “a literalist interpretation of the Bible”, said Prof McConkey, adding that the Presbyterian Church “has had women in leadership positions for years. Do they want to stop that too? “Presbyterianism has very diverse voices, they are going in the opposite direction,” he said.

### **‘Witch-hunt’**

Robert Simmons, an elder at Rathgar Presbyterian Church in Dublin, criticised what he described as “the witch-hunt by



## **Peterborough Cathedral**

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the Presbytery of Dublin and Munster against the minister and church council of Christ Church Sandymount”.

He described it as “a totally unacceptable form of behaviour, and one which rightly brings shame upon the church or other body which allows it to take place. There is no place this side of the Border for kangaroo courts and ecclesiastical ‘kneecapping’.”

Christ Church Sandymount is shared with the Methodist Church. The southern chair of its Council on Social Responsibility Rev Steven Foster said he is “quite simply disgusted at the relentless pursuit of Rev Katherine Meyer and the Church Council at Sandymount”.

There was, he said, “a lot of discussion among southern Methodists who are expressing their disgust at these things” and “a sadness more broadly among Methodists about the influence of a northern-based fundamentalism, that southern



**Jude Frame - Choir director at Knocknagoney -  
see Page 5 above**

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Methodists, and Presbyterians, do not recognise as part of their faith”.

Courtesy The Irish Times 22/01/2021

## **C of E offers virtual reality carol concert to worshippers**

**Viewers can be immersed in the service from the comfort of their own home using 360-degree film**

The Church of England has launched its first virtual reality carol service for those “uncomfortable” with mixing with others during the pandemic.

The choir of St Martin’s Voices has made a 360-degree film of them singing festive songs from St Martin-in-the-Fields near London’s Trafalgar Square.

Aired on the Church of England’s YouTube channel it will “transport” worshippers into the historic building, giving them an immersive experience.

It comes after church carol concerts and nativities have been cancelled across the country because of the rapid spread of the omicron variant of Covid.

Amaris Cole, head of digital at the Church of England, said that the campaign, entitled “At The Heart of Christmas”, will enable people “to bring the church into their own home”.



“This means that wherever people are this Christmas, they can be transported to a church from whatever device they’re using and join in with this tradition of singing carols in their own homes,” she said. She told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme: “You will be on your own singing these songs but it will feel as though you’re transported to the church where we recorded these, and you’ll be able to look around you and see the impressive building – you’ll feel as though you’re amongst the choir and it will feel like a new experience for people wherever they may be this Christmas.”

Ms Cole said that from the start of the pandemic, the church has used technology to reach people who it has never connected with before, “and to reconnect with people who haven’t felt comfortable coming into our buildings”.

“This allows us to connect with people who, perhaps for accessibility reasons, can’t visit us in our buildings; we’re able to connect with them in this innovative way,” she added.

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A ban on congregational singing was lifted earlier this month and there is no central government policy regarding churches opening over Christmas.

Speaking in the House of Lords in July, the Bishop of Gloucester, Rachel Treweek, criticised the Government and called for clarity around the restrictions, “given that singing is not an add-on to worship but integral to it”.

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

However, in accordance with the current 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.

They have also recommended that carol singers continue to wear masks and take Covid tests even though they are not mandatory.

The Very Revd Andrew Nunn, Dean of Southwark Cathedral, in central London, said that he has not made any radical changes this Christmas.

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

Regarding asking people to continue singing while wearing masks, he admitted: “It is difficult – it’s not the best.”

## **Christian group escape nine-week Haiti hostage ordeal by walking 10 miles in dark**

**A group of Christian missionaries held captive in Haiti made a “miraculous” escape and found their way to safety by walking for 10 miles in total darkness, according to the church group they belong to.**

The 12 missionaries eluded their captors and used the stars and a mountain in the distance to navigate.

Ohio-based Christian Aid Ministries said the group included a 10-month-old baby and a three-year-old child.

They were abducted on Oct 16 following a visit to an orphanage they were helping in Port-au-Prince. Their captors, a group called the 400 Mawozo gang, had demanded millions of dollars for their release and threatened to kill them. It remained unclear whether the ransom had been paid.

The hostages came from Amish, Mennonite, and other Anabaptist communities in the US that believe in turning the

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other cheek to evil, wearing plain dress, and separating themselves from mainstream society.

Weston Showalter, a spokesman for Christian Aid Ministries, said they were surrounded after leaving the orphanage and initially held in a small room in a house and then moved several times. He said their captors provided baby food and the missionaries were not physically harmed.

During their captivity, they prayed and planned to escape twice but God told them to wait, Mr Showalter added.

It was not clear how they evaded their captors and got out. Mr Showalter said: "When they sensed the timing was right they found a way to open the door that was closed, filed silently to the path they had chosen to follow, and quickly left the place they were held despite the fact that numerous guards were close.

"They eventually found someone who [made] a phone call for help."

## Poem for today

The Kerry Christmas Carol by Sigerson Clifford

Brush the floor and clean the hearth,  
And set the fire to keep,  
For they might visit us tonight  
When all the world's asleep.

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Don't blow the tall white candle out  
But leave it burning bright,  
So that they'll know they're welcome here  
This holy Christmas night.

Leave out the bread and meat for them,  
And sweet milk for the Child,  
And they will bless the fire, that baked  
And, too, the hands that toiled.

For Joseph will be travel-tired,  
And Mary pale and wan,  
And they can sleep a little while  
Before they journey on.

They will be weary of the roads,  
And rest will comfort them,  
For it must be many a lonely mile  
From here to Bethlehem.

O long the road they have to go,  
The bad mile with the good,  
Till the journey ends on Calvary  
Beneath a cross of wood.

Leave the door upon the latch,  
And set the fire to keep,  
And pray they'll rest with us tonight  
When all the world's asleep.

The poem is an evocation of an old Irish custom in which each household would leave a lighted candle in their window on Christmas night. There was a pious belief that

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Joseph and Mary and the Child still wandered the roads of the world, looking for a place to rest from the persecution of Herod. That they should show a preference for the roads of rural Ireland was accepted as a given.

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