

## Restored cathedral 'symbol for a renewed Church' - bishop



***Bishop Colm O'Reilly***

**Irish Catholic - The restoration of St Mel's Cathedral in Longford, five years after being gutted by fire, is a powerful symbol of the much-needed renewal of the Church in Ireland, Bishop Colm O'Reilly has said.**

The restored cathedral opened its doors this Christmas for the first time since fire ravaged through the building in the early hours of Christmas Day 2009. At the time, a devastated Bishop O'Reilly pledged to restore the building. Now, like the phoenix rising from the ashes, St Mel's is once again restored as the centre of worship in Longford and the Mother Church of the Diocese of Ardagh & Clonmacnoise.

Bishop O'Reilly (79) said the restoration of St Mel's was much more than just a building or reconstruction project. "Let this be a symbol for the entire Church in a new Ireland," Dr O'Reilly said.

"We hope that this time of darkness can transform more than just this building but the people of God," he said.

Dr O'Reilly, a native of Longford, painstakingly oversaw the mammoth restoration project before retiring as bishop last year. His successor, Bishop Francis Duffy, presided at ceremonies marking the cathedral's re-opening.

Speaking in an RTÉ television documentary broadcast over the festive season, Dr O'Reilly said that finances for the project were coming in

the main from the insurance coverage that was in place on St Mel's when it was gutted by fire.

"Nothing is coming out of anybody's pockets for this work," he

said, "we are using the money from the insurance and that is the only use we could have made of that money – to try and restore not just a building that would be disengaged from people but something that will be part of the community in a new Ireland."

More at -

<http://irishcatholic.ie/article/restored-cathedral-symbol-renewed-church-bishop>

## **Puddleducks Nursery Opens New Baby Room at Belfast Central Mission**

Belfast Central Mission's Puddleducks Nursery has some exciting news. Next year they will be opening a brand new baby room.

The demand for places at Puddleducks in the 0-2 year age group has been huge and Puddleducks is excited to be able to offer more children an

opportunity to benefit from the high quality care they offer.



Places for the new room have already be allocated to those on the waiting list. However, they will have a limited number of places available in February 2015.

Puddleducks is a social enterprise of the Belfast Central Mission. It has a city centre location near to the Europa Bus Station and private car park where parents and carers can drop of and pick

up their children. For more information [visit their web site](#).

## **Campaigner Marie Collins 'honoured' to be named 'Catholic of the Year'**



Irish abuse survivor Marie Collins has said she is “honoured” to be named as one of the ‘Catholics of the Year’ by a prestigious US newspaper.

Irish Catholic - Our Sunday Visitor, which is published weekly, named Mrs Collins alongside seven prominent Catholics including Archbishop of Boston, Cardinal Sean O'Malley and

Archbishop Emeritus of Chicago, Cardinal Francis George.

Lauding Mrs Collins for her “outstanding” leadership and contribution to the Church and society throughout the year, Our Sunday Visitor said the Irish woman had been an “inspiration to others in the Catholic community and beyond”.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Mrs Collins said she “really appreciated the gesture”.

“I was not expecting to be picked out, but I am honoured to be chosen. I hope I can live up to it,” she said.

Mrs Collins, who was named in March as a member of the Pope’s newly established body set to prioritise his drive to safeguard children in the Church, said the nomination was an “indication” that her work to ensure the safety and protection of children was being taken seriously.

“It’s quite a distance from when I was looked on as somebody who wanted to damage the Church. All I have done down through the years has been for the good of the Church. My

intention was always to improve the Church for the future,” she said.

Meanwhile, Pope Francis has named nine new members to the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, of which Mrs Collins is a member, thus completing its composition.

Mrs Collins said she was “delighted” the Pope had appointed Peter Saunders, a male abuse survivor, to the commission.

Mr Saunders, who was abused throughout his childhood in London, England, set up the National Association for People Abused in Childhood (NAPAC), for supporting all survivors and for developing greater resources for responding to child abuse.

“It’s very important to have a male survivor’s voice heard. Peter is a very strong advocate and will be a great asset to the work of the commission,” she said.

## **Ronnie and Maggie Briggs of CMS to return to Kenya**

CMS Ireland Mission Director, Ronnie Briggs, and his wife, Maggie, were recently accepted as

‘Mission Partners in Training’ with the Society and are hoping to return to Kenya towards the end of February 2015.



***Ronnie and Maggie Briggs***

In some senses, this new chapter for Ronnie and Maggie sees them heading back ‘home’ – they’ve spent much of the past 30 years living and working in Kenya and they brought up their family there. But, as Maggie observes, this latest development was somewhat unexpected:

When we returned from Kenya to Ireland in September 2010, so that Ronnie could take up the post of Mission Director, we began settling-in with the long-term – and eventually retirement –



in mind. Little did we know that God had a whole new chapter awaiting us in Kenya with retirement fading into the distant horizon! Sometimes I think that He has a great sense of humour.

As Ronnie points us, the process of discerning this new call has been a long and careful one, but has reached a positive conclusion:

Having spent considerable time praying and sharing with friends and family, and with the support of both Bishop Gaddiel, from Kajiado Diocese, and CMS Ireland's Chairman, Bishop Alan, we decided to apply for Mission Partner status. This news was shared with the staff team and Board of Trustees in September and a selection process then began. Last month, Maggie and I were accepted as Mission Partners in Training with CMS Ireland.

## **Christmas Day Dinner for Donegal people living on their own**

The 9th Annual Christmas Day Dinner for people living on their own was held today in the Conwal Parish Hall, behind the Church of Ireland (opposite St. Eunan's Cathedral) in Letterkenny.

The purpose of the event was to help people who are living on their own or who are lonely on the day, or who do not have company, to share Christmas Day Dinner with others - and to have some fun as well.

It proved to be a resounding success, and great credit must go to the volunteers and all involved.

## **Baghdad's Christians gathered defiantly for Christmas Eve mass**



Baghdad's embattled Christian community worshipped defiantly Wednesday night at Christmas Eve mass.

The pews filled at Baghdad's Sacred Heart church, as people reflected on the darkest year in memory.

Blast walls shielded the church and seven policeman flanked the outside of the house of worship, in an indication of the government's fear of an attack on the religious groups by jihadists who consider them non-believers.

The congregation sang in unison: "Praise Jesus, our Lord. Oh praise him" as incense burnt in the darkened church.

The worshippers paid tribute to the thousands of Christians displaced this summer in northern Iraq when Islamic State seized the city of Mosul in June and in August pushed on toward Iraqi Kurdistan, over-running Christian towns on the Nineveh plain.

"The recent conditions have left us with a bit of sadness for our brethren, be they Christian or non-Christian, those who were displaced and harmed," Father Thair Abdul Masih told Reuters.

"Christianity is the religion of peace and we pray for these people to return to their homes. We pray for all evil to vanish," he said.

Some had personal stories of those displaced this summer in northern Iraq, who have scattered to Iraqi Kurdistan, Turkey and Lebanon.

"They live in misery... yet we still exchange blessings and congratulations of Christmas and the New Year," said Fadi Rafaat, 27, an assistant to the priest. "We celebrate the happiness of Christmas, but deep inside we carry the sadness of Iraq."

The holiday season weighed heavily on some. Earlier in the day, a mother and daughter on a busy street in the neighborhood of Karrada, argued about whether they should stay in Iraq or give up on the country.

The mother insisted she would die in Iraq unafraid, but her daughter longed to escape. Last year her son was robbed at gunpoint working in a jewelry shop.

"I wish to leave this country as soon as possible because we, Christians, have been hunted down by extremists and reduced into a very small minority," the woman said, who declined to give her name. "Life is not very kind to us these days."

Iraq's Christians once numbered about 1.5 million. There are now believed to be less than 500,000 out of a population estimated at 32 million, according to the US State Department's 2013 International Religious Freedom Report.

## **Archbishop Martin calls for shift in social policy in bid to solve homelessness crisis**



***Archbishop of Dublin Diarmuid Martin with President Michael D***

***Higgins and Sabina Higgins at Christmas Day morning mass in the Pro-Cathedral in Dublin***

Archbishop of Dublin Diarmuid Martin praised the "deeply rooted Christian goodness in society" after local communities reached out to help the less fortunate this Christmas.

Irish Independent - His words came after he recently appealed to his diocese for help on behalf of the Crosscare food bank in the capital.

He said that the "increase in generosity" was badly needed, as the food bank has had to "double its supply of food" in recent times.

Archbishop Martin was speaking at Christmas Day mass in the Pro-Cathedral, which was attended by President Michael D Higgins and his wife Sabina.

He told the congregation that the recent death of homeless man Jonathan Corrie close to Leinster House sparked a "concrete resolve to address at least the most glaring dimensions of the homelessness crisis".

He believes that the issue of homelessness requires "a shift in thinking and social policy".

"There are many examples of deeply rooted Christian goodness in our society. I would like to express my thanks to all those who contributed to the Crosscare food bank appeals. On one Sunday in Advent, we collected over 120 tonnes of food, more food on one Sunday this year than in three Sundays last year.

"The mass-going Catholic community in this Archdiocese is a truly generous community. Sadly, that increase in generosity is being accompanied by an increase in need."

Later he attended that the 90th annual Christmas Day Dinner in the RDS, which was also attended by Dublin city Lord Mayor Christy Burke.

Archbishop Martin said that he witnessed "an awful lot of loneliness". "One of the things that struck me is the number of people there who are not from Ireland. It's sad."

## **Boxing Day tsunami: Survivors pray on 10th anniversary**

Survivors of Asia's 2004 tsunami and relatives of its 226,000 victims cried and prayed as they gathered along Indian Ocean shorelines on Friday for memorials to mark the 10th

anniversary of a disaster that still leaves an indelible mark on the region.



***Relatives put flowers on a wave-shaped tsunami monument for victims of the 2004 tsunami in Ban Nam Khem, a southern fishing village destroyed by the wave.***

When a 9.15-magnitude quake opened a faultline deep beneath the ocean on Dec. 26 a decade ago, it triggered a wave as high as 17.4 metres (57 feet) which crashed ashore in more than a dozen countries, wiping some communities off the map in seconds.



Hundreds gathered in Indonesia's Aceh province, many bursting into tears as poems and songs were heard and a montage was screened showing the devastation from a disaster that killed 126,741 people in Aceh alone.

"It seems there's no bigger lesson to Aceh than this. It is as if the souls of the dead are still with us," said provincial governor Zaini Abdullah, formerly a prominent figure in a long-running separatist conflict the tsunami helped end.

Vice President Jusuf Kalla said the memorial brought him to tears but he took solace in a peace deal that proved adversity could bring people together to reconcile differences.

Mass prayers were held late on Thursday at Banda Aceh's Grand Mosque, one of few buildings that withstood the wave.

"Allah kept his house unscathed," said Azman Ismail, the Great Imam of the Masjid Baiturrahman mosque.

Relatives of victims also prayed at the graves of loved ones in Hambantota, Sri Lanka, where 677 Muslim families were relocated after the tsunami

destroyed their village. Some 40,000 people were killed in Sri Lanka, but heavy rains in Hambantota forced the cancellation of memorial events there on Friday.

Fisherman Tuan Ilyas Idrees, who lost 10 family members, was deep in prayer after finding his dead mother close to a coconut tree by a mosque.

Idrees tearfully said his entire village was wiped out.

"I ran to my house to save my mother and others, but in just five minutes, there was no house at all," Idrees said.

"We buried hundreds of bodies here."

Crowds also gathered and laid wreaths at Thailand's tsunami memorial park in Ban Nam Khem, a southern fishing village decimated by the wave.

Some 5,395 people were killed in Thailand, among them about 2,000 foreign tourists. Almost 3,000 people remain missing.

Eighty percent of Thailand's victims were killed in the province of Phang Nga, where experts from 39 nations quickly gathered to identify bodies in what became the world's biggest international forensics investigation.

About 700 people carrying flowers and banners marched from the beach where the wave smashed against India's southern Tamil Nadu coast to a black granite memorial, stopping by a Christian shrine to pray for the dead. An inter-faith ceremony was held for the 6,000 who died in

Tamil Nadu, featuring Christian hymns and verses read from the Koran and Hindu texts. Illaycha, who lost five children, was inconsolable as she lit a candle. "I'm praying to the gods that they should take care of them in heaven," she said.

Tsunami escape drills were to be held to demonstrate the readiness of Tamil Nadu's large fishing community.

But doubts linger about how ready countries on the Indian Ocean really are for another giant wave. The past decade has seen more than \$400 million spent across 28 countries on an

early-warning system comprising 101 sea level gauges, 148 seismometers and nine buoys, but there are concerns about the effectiveness and maintenance of the systems in place.

Some experts say complacency is leaving millions vulnerable.

Abdullah, Aceh's governor, said lessons must be learned.

"This experience reminds us that Indonesia is a place prone to natural disasters," he said. "We have to prepare when disaster comes, so we can mitigate it fast and right."

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