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People and places

Mothers' Union knits Christmas tree for recycling into blankets for the homeless

Caerphilly & Eglwysilan Mothers' Union knitted a huge Christmas Tree which will be recycled into blankets for the homeless after Christmas.

In Merthyr Tydfil, St David's Church Knit & Natter group have created a knitted Christmas angel that will become baby blankets for families in need.

Members met during their weekly Knit 'n Natter sessions to knit over a 1000 rectangles and fold them to make leaves for the Christmas tree. Pupils from St Martin's School Caerphilly also helped by creating the Christmas tree frame. The 8ft Christmas tree is an eco-friendly gift for the



community and is on display at the Caerphilly Miner's Centre for the Community.

After Christmas, the tree will be dismantled, and the leaves made into blankets to be distributed to the homeless and those in need of a warm blanket.

Sue Rivers, Mothers' Union Llandaff President says, "After months of knitting it's wonderful to see this project come alive. The knitted tree looks superb. I'm so glad to see much-needed outreach projects going on in the community.

"The tree will bring joy to those who visit it and comfort for those in need after Christmas. This is our Christmas gift to the local community."

Mothers' Union Knit 'n Natter members meet regularly throughout the year over Zoom or face-to-face in members gardens when it was safe and warm to meet up. On average, the knitters make 30 blankets a year and donate them to homeless charities. Bethel Baptist church and members of the local community also contributed to the Christmas tree project.

Anglican Communion seeks Secretary General

The current Secretary General of the Anglican Communion, Archbishop Josiah Idowu-Fearon, is due to retire in August 2022. The Anglican Communion Office has commenced a process to appoint his successor.

CNI December 29. 2021

To apply for this role please submit your CV and supporting statement by 23:59 GMT Friday 11th February 2022 on this link. Details of the vacancy are available here -

[[] <https://micro.green-park.co.uk/anglicancommunion/>]

Webinars, music, resources, broadcasts and books

Aled Jones: The chorister turned TV presenter counts his blessings

Aled Jones' path to stardom was littered with occurrences that many would call God ordained. His first break came,

[At a rectory near you?](#)



aged twelve, after a congregation member wrote to a record company without his knowledge. Soon afterwards he'd recorded his debut album, toured the Holy Land with the BBC and shot to fame as the angelic, golden-haired chorister who sang 'Walking in the air'. More than three decades later, Jones is still making a living singing the nation's favourite hymns. But what of his own personal faith? Emma Fowle spoke to him to find out more, and hear about his new children's book Bobby Dean Saves Christmas. Podcast by Premier News.

[[] https://www.premierchristianradio.com/Shows/Saturday/The-Profile/Episodes/Aled-Jones-The-chorister-turned-TV-presenter-counts-his-blessings?utm_]

New film about C.S. Lewis' struggle to believe has something for everyone

The man remembered when illness and death first cast a shadow in his life. It was a toothache, of all things, and he was calling for his mother. He became distressed when she didn't come.

"That was because she was ill, too; and what was odd was that there were several doctors in her room, and voices and comings and goings all over the house and doors shutting and opening," wrote the great Christian author C.S. Lewis years later. "And then my father, in tears, came into my room and began to try to convey to my terrified mind things it had never conceived before. It was in fact cancer and followed the usual course."



The death of Lewis' mother caused him to lose the little faith he had. His prayers had not been successful, and so he did not bother about God for another two decades. He was the grandson of an Anglican minister, the great-great-grandson of a Church of Ireland bishop, but none of that mattered.

Lewis later recalled (to great shame) that he had made his first Communion (in the Church of Ireland) without any faith in Jesus. He was appalled at his earlier lack of faith after he had found God — or, rather, after God had found him.

The young man served in the trenches in World War I and was the exception to the old adage that there are no atheists in the foxholes. He was a brilliant student at Oxford after the war, and there God gave him a set of friends, including the novelist and scholar J.R.R. Tolkien, who helped him accept the Christian faith (but never quite succeeded in converting him to Catholicism).

He went on to become a Cambridge professor and the author of more than 30 books, including the well-known “The Chronicles of Narnia,” “The Screwtape Letters,” “Mere Christianity,” and other classics of modern apologetics. During World War II, he broadcast inspirational Christian sermons on the BBC. The lonely, disappointed boy grieving for his mother became one of the finest Christian writers of the 20th century.


It’s a conversion story that serves as the basis of a new movie, “The Most Reluctant Convert: The Untold Story of C.S. Lewis,” which began showing in select theaters in November. The film will serve both as an introduction to those who have never read him, and an enjoyable refreshment for those who know and love his writings.

The movie originated from a one-man play written and acted by Max McClean, who plays the older C.S. Lewis in the movie. McClean’s voice and demeanor convey the richness of Lewis’ writings with gravitas. He speaks what seem to be actual quotes from the works, but in a way that is quite natural. Lewis is telling us the story of his conversion.

Switching from a one-man play to a movie with other actors required some ingenuity, and the production is extremely clever. There is a younger Lewis, played by Nicholas Ralph, and his older self witnesses key events in the story of his conversion. It reminded me of Scrooge seeing his younger self with the ghost of his past in “A Christmas Carol.” It is as if we have been invited to accompany Lewis for a rendezvous with the history of his own soul, and we can see his bemused reactions to the distance he has traveled.

The screenplay is subtle, and the more you know about Lewis the more you can relish the references to books and authors like G.K. Chesterton. Thankfully, however, understanding his intellectual legacy isn't necessary to appreciate a production that involves the viewer in the young Lewis' struggle about faith on an emotional and personal level.

For a while, Lewis was what he called a materialist, denying the existence of God and holding for a purely mechanical-



We thank You for Your transforming power,
which brings life,
and strength, love and joy into our lives.
We thank You for the presence of the Holy Spirit,
Who equips us for a lifetime in Your service.

chemical explanation of human behavior. His friends would point out to him that if our lives were just a question of chemical reactions, then there would be no nobility, no spiritual values, no real meaning.

I was reminded of a man making a Fifth Step in the Alcoholics Anonymous program at my parish, who said that he believed in no higher power (something really impossible in AA). We are the accident of molecules which come together, he said. He had spoken to me about his son, however, about how he was anxious to get custody of the child, and how it was the most important goal in his life to raise his boy.

“And is that just about molecules?” I asked him. Different people have different religious experiences that point to the transcendent in the particular circumstances of their lives. This man’s love for his son was such an experience, even if he didn’t know it. Lewis was convinced by his friends because of aesthetic and idealistic values and then became what he called a theist. There was a Creator God but there was no way we could be in relationship with him.

He said he admired Jesus as a teacher, and Tolkien and another friend pointed out that we either take Jesus at his word or we reject him. He was either the Son of God, as he claimed, the source of salvation for all, or he was a madman. Jesus demanded all or nothing.

McClean narrates the scene of Lewis’ conversion at Oxford, quoting from the writer’s splendid partial autobiography, “Surprised by Joy”: “You must picture me alone in that room in Magdalen, night after night, feeling, whenever my mind

lifted even for a second from my work, the steady, unrelenting approach of Him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet. That which I greatly feared has at last come upon me. In the Trinity Term of 1929 I gave in, and admitted God was God, and knelt and prayed: perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in England.”

There are many young people who think that they are atheists today. My counseling of drug addicts and alcoholics leads me to believe that some are merely agnostic and most have problems with God because they are prisoners of resentments and a great deal of emotional pain. I hope some of them have a chance to see “The Most Reluctant Convert.”

The last chapter of “Surprised by Joy” is titled “Checkmate.” May our prayers support all those who are trying to talk themselves out of belief so that they let God win.

News Reports

Anglican Communion delegate asks: ‘Was COP26 a success or a failure?’

Dr Elizabeth Perry, one of the Anglican Communion delegation to COP26 and Advocacy and Communication Manager for the Anglican Alliance, has written a reflection on her time at the COP in Glasgow. She reflects on the question of whether COP26 was a success or a failure; what the delegation did during the conference; the importance of changing the narrative; and what comes next. To read her thoughts, click here -

[[] <https://anglicanalliance.org/reflecting-on-the-anglican-communions-engagement-with-cop26/>]



The Anglican Communion's delegation at COP26:
Archbishop Julio Murray, Dr Elizabeth Perry and Mr
Nicholas Pande.

Pope Francis: Letter to Married Couples

Pope Francis released a letter for married couples across the globe on Sunday as part of the Amoris Laetitia Family Year in the runup to the World Meeting of Families set for 26 June 2022.

Pope Francis begins his letter by expressing his desire that families feel his "affection and closeness at this very special time," which has been marked by the Covid-19 pandemic and recurring lockdowns.



"The present situation has made me want to accompany with humility, affection and openness each individual, married couple and family in all those situations in which you find yourselves."

Pope Francis focused his letter to couples on the constant presence of Jesus in the day-to-day situations of family life.

"Our relationship with God shapes us, accompanies us and sends us forth as individuals and, ultimately, helps us to "set out from our land", albeit in many cases with a certain trepidation and even fear in the face of the unknown."

Yet, he added, our Christian faith reminds us that we are not alone in the challenges of married life, since Jesus is present as time passes, children are born and grow up, and work and illness ebb and flow.

Married couples "set out towards the land that God promises: to be two in Christ, two in one," said the Pope. "Your lives become a single life; you become a 'we' in loving communion with Jesus, alive and present at every moment of your existence."

"God is always at your side; He loves you unconditionally. You are not alone!"

The Holy Father then turned his thoughts to couples with children. He urged parents to live Christ's love in every interaction, since children are always paying attention and soaking up everything.

"Children are always a gift; they change the history of every family. They are thirsty for love, gratitude, esteem and trust. Being parents calls you to pass on to your children the joy of realizing that they are God's children."

The Pope admitted that raising children is no easy task, but that children also "raise" their parents, helping them grow in authority that gives children a sense of security and confidence.

Pope Francis also urged couples to be active members in their parishes, assisting the Church in her mission of accompanying other families less aware of God's presence.

"You have the mission of transforming society by your presence in the workplace and ensuring that the needs of families are taken into due account," he said.

He called marriage a vocation and likened it to a boat on a sometimes stormy sea. Jesus, said the Pope, is always either in the boat to calm the sea or walking nearby and awaiting our invitation to climb aboard.

"It is important that, together, you keep your eyes fixed on Jesus. Only in this way, will you find peace, overcome conflicts and discover solutions to many of your problems. Those problems, of course, will not disappear, but you will be able to see them from a different perspective."

The Pope went on to reflect on the difficulties and opportunities facing families during the pandemic.

He said recurring lockdowns have forced many families to work, study, play and rest in the same house, a situation he said may be difficult at times.

"The time you spend together, far from being a penance, will be become a refuge amid the storms," he said. "May every family be a place of acceptance and understanding."

Pope Francis also recalled his invitation to say "please, thanks, sorry", while avoiding going to bed without making peace.

He encourages couples to pray together.

The Holy Father noted that some couples have found the pandemic unbearable and sought separation, a situation he lamented as causing great pain to children. But he assured separated couples of his "closeness and affection".

Finally, Pope Francis encouraged couples preparing for marriage to have "creative courage" as they make the more-difficult-than-ever journey toward married life.

And he sent a word of greeting to grandparents, many of whom have felt more alone during lockdowns, and called them "humanity's living memory."

The Pope wrapped up his letter to married couples with an encouragement to always live their vocation with a smile and enthusiasm, never letting their faces "grow sad or gloomy".

"May Saint Joseph inspire in all families a creative courage, so essential for these times of epochal change. May Our Lady help you to foster in your married lives the culture of encounter that we so urgently need in order to face today's problems and troubles."

Read the full Letter to Married Couples here -
[www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2021/documents/20211226-lettera-sposi-anno-famiglia-amorislaetitia.html]

Saint Andrew Declaration makes front page news

St Andrew's Day was marked by the signing of a joint Declaration between the Scottish Episcopal Church and the Church of Scotland during a special service at St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral in Edinburgh.

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SEESPORT

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MARTYN MCLAUGHLIN, PAGE 22



St Andrew's Declaration: Scottish churches sign accord

Primus Most Rev Mark Strange and Moderator Lord Wallace marked St Andrew's Day yesterday with the signing of a joint Declaration between the Scottish Episcopal Church and the Church of Scotland at St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral in Edinburgh. The Declaration outlines a series of acknowledgments and commitments between the churches intended to deepen their relationship, and look at new ways of working together to serve the people of Scotland.

Race to ramp up boosters and testing as new variant spreads

By ELSA MAISHMAN

Covid-19 testing kits will be free and readily available to combat the spread of the new variant Omicron in the run-up to Christmas, Nicola Sturgeon has announced.

The booster vaccine rollout will also be expanded to everyone over 18, but health secretary Humza Yousaf admitted staffing shortages in the NHS will limit how quickly this can be done.

Further infection 'almost certain' says Sturgeon, as nine cases are linked

Boris Johnson has committed to all adults in England receiving a third dose by the end of January, with at least 400 military personnel employed to help and temporary vaccination centres "popping up like Christmas trees". The Scottish Government has not given a timeline for the delivery of booster vaccines.

In the run-up to Christmas, free lateral flow tests will be widely available in Scotland, including at shopping centres, supermarkets, sports grounds and Christmas markets. Ms Sturgeon said in an update to MSPs yesterday.

The tests will come from existing stocks held by the Scottish Government.

Following Mr Yousaf's comments on shortages of vaccine staff, a Scottish Government spokesperson was unable to say whether extra staff will be needed for this testing.

The First Minister urged the public to make use of these tests, to give "the best possible chance" of enjoying a normal Christmas and avoiding further restrictions in coming weeks.

Ms Sturgeon has asked Mr Johnson to agree to UK-wide tougher rules on

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Thousands still lacking water and electricity

By AMY WATSON

Around 17,000 properties in Scotland were without power for a fifth day yesterday because of Storm Arwen.

In addition, 1,500 homes remained without water engineers worked to restore supplies, with the north-east particularly hard hit.

Deputy First Minister John Swinney said the storm was a "more significant" event than the Beast from the East in 2018, bringing winds of "incredible ferocity" from an unusual direction.

But the Scottish Conservatives labelled the Scottish Government's response a "monumental failure of planning".

FULL STORY, PAGE 12

Police treat 16-year-old girl's death as murder

By RUSSELL JACKSON

Police are treating the death of a 16-year-old girl as murder. Amber Gibson was reported missing from Hamilton in South Lanarkshire on Friday.

She left her home at about 9.15pm and was last seen in Cadzow Street around 9.55pm. Her body was found near Cadzow Glen in the town on Sunday.

Police asked anyone with any information about the teenager's death or anyone who believes they saw her between Friday and Sunday to contact them.

FULL STORY, PAGE 18

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At the service the Most Rev Mark Strange, the Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church, and Lord Wallace, the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, officially signed the Saint Andrew Declaration on behalf of the two churches.

OnPleasingly, the signing made front page news on The Scotsman, and attracted a large online audience.



The Primus and Moderator.

The Declaration outlines a series of acknowledgments and commitments between the churches intended to deepen their relationship, and look at new ways of working together to serve the people of Scotland.

The agreement was welcomed and approved at both the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland and the General Synod of the Scottish Episcopal Church earlier this year.

After a conference to discuss and explore the churches' future relationship, Rev Prof Canon Charlotte Methuen from the Scottish Episcopal Church and the Rev Sandy Horsburgh from the Church of Scotland led the cathedral service where the Declaration was jointly signed by the Moderator and the Primus.



Left to right: Rev Sandy Horsburgh, Most Rev Mark Strange, Lord Wallace, and Rev Prof Canon Charlotte Methuen at St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral, Edinburgh

The Most Rev Mark Strange said: "In many places in rural Scotland there is now only one church building. It might be Episcopalian or it might be Presbyterian, yet there will be people of both churches in the community.

"If this Declaration gives people the confidence to share, and to allow the church to be open and present to each other, then what a wonderful place we have reached.

"I look forward to seeing where we can now go from here, together."

Lord Wallace said: "I am delighted to be able to sign the Declaration on St Andrew's Day in person alongside our

friends in the Scottish Episcopal Church as we celebrate the close-working relationship between our two churches.

“We look forward in faithfulness to continuing to strengthen the ties, which already have deep foundations, and exploring our common calling further.”

During the service, there were readings from Rev Canon John McLuckie, former Convener of the Inter-church Relations Committee of the SEC, and the Rev Alison McDonald, former Convener of the Committee on Ecumenical Relations of the Church of Scotland.

Music was by the St Mary's Cathedral Choir under the direction of Duncan Ferguson, organist and Master of the Music, and Imogen Morgan, Assistant Master of the Music.

Perspective

Claims of past bias against Catholics are greatly exaggerated, yet even unionists are not challenging them - by Graham Gudgin

In the latest extract from a pro Union book, Graham Gudgin says nationalists unfairly won the 1960s propaganda battle:

In a BBCNI TV discussion with Mark Carruthers a couple of years ago I said that statistics from the 1971 census of

Population showed that Catholics were over-represented in social housing in Northern Ireland after 50 years of unionist rule in Northern Ireland.

The leader of the SDLP, Colum Eastwood, who was also on the programme, said this was “rubbish”. I said that he could check the census figures like anyone else but the issue was left at that.

This nicely illustrates the problem with any discussion on past discrimination in Northern Ireland.

Accusations of discrimination, and more general abuse of civil rights, formed the backbone of sympathy for the nationalist cause among neutral observers, and of antagonism to the unionist case.

Some have used a belief in widespread discrimination as at least a partial justification for 30 years of terrorism by the IRA.

Nationalists comprehensively and unfairly won the late 1960s propaganda battle over discrimination and are understandably keen never to re-open debate on what really happened.

The accusations remain enormously important in political terms because nationalists persuaded the world that they were greatly discriminated against in housing, employment and voting. Unionists were strangely inert in face of accusations they should have known were greatly exaggerated.

Part of the political problem was the anti-intellectual nature of political unionism, with little effort put into gathering and analysing data or arguing their case (at least until David Trimble's leadership of the UUP).

Famously, the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) failed to make any submission at all to the 1968 UK Government's Cameron Commission on the causes of the disturbances in Northern Ireland.

As Lord Bew has written 'Cocooned in their devolutionist shell the Unionists found it particularly difficult to explain themselves to the London political elite'.

Allegations of discrimination in housing have a long history in Northern Ireland but they first came to more than local prominence in the civil rights campaign in the 1960s.

The charge of discrimination achieved a tremendous boost in 1968 when two Catholic families in Caledon, County Tyrone, squatted in empty houses, one due to be let to a single Protestant about to be married.

A short sit-in by Stormont politician and (later southern government minister) Austin Currie led to the incident becoming widely reported internationally, and it came to symbolise the abuse of civil rights by unionist authorities in Northern Ireland.

The resulting picture of widespread discrimination in housing painted at the time was (and still is) widely believed, including by a significant number of Protestants.

It is, however, untrue, as can be clearly seen in the 1971 census of population taken in the dying months of the 50-year unionist rule from Stormont.

In that year there were 148,000 social dwellings in Northern Ireland, of which between 45,000 and 55,000 were occupied by Catholic families (depending on what is assumed about the religion of those who declined to answer the Religion question in the population census of that year).

We can see immediately that the idea that there were few houses for Catholics is completely wrong.

In fact, Catholics had a disproportionately large share of social housing. Catholics comprised 26% of households but occupied 31% of social housing. Forty per cent of Catholic families were in social houses compared with just over 30% of Protestants.

This picture was confirmed by a major survey undertaken in 1968 by an American professor based in Glasgow, Richard Rose, in his authoritative book *Governing Without Consensus*.

The survey covered a very wide range of political and social issues and included a section on housing conditions. Professor Rose discovered what was later confirmed by the 1971 census, that is, that Catholics had a disproportionately large share of social housing.

The advantage to Catholics was very marked in Belfast, which had a unionist council (19% of Catholics were in social houses compared with 9% of Protestants), and in

areas with nationalist councils (39% of Catholics compared with 15% of Protestants).

Elsewhere, Catholics and Protestants got an equal share of social houses. Professor Rose's conclusion was that there was 'no evidence of systematic discrimination against Catholics. The greatest bias appears to favour Catholics in areas controlled by Catholic councillors'.

Professor Rose controlled for the possibility of differing needs for social housing. He showed that Catholics did not get more social houses because they were poorer. Catholics fared distinctly better than Protestants irrespective of income.

The reason for the Catholic advantage was likely to have been the larger family size of Catholics — in most housing allocation systems in the UK larger families receive priority — a practice formalised within the Northern Ireland Housing Executive from its inception in 1971.

Prior to the establishment of the Housing Executive, it is possible that large Catholic families did not receive as much priority as the (much less common) large Protestant families.

For families with six plus children (78% of which were Roman Catholic) Rose reported that there were 12% more Protestants than Catholics in social housing.

The problem of housing allocation was predominantly one of location of local authority houses by around six of Northern Ireland's 69 (often tiny) local authorities.

These local authorities, mainly in border areas, allocated the few houses they built on the basis of likely voting propensity and was a form of gerrymandering to maintain unionist electoral dominance. This could lead to long waits to be rehoused (as in Caledon) but, as the census figures showed, it did not lead to Catholics being denied housing.

Most state-owned housing was in any case built and operated by the NI Housing Executive rather than by local authorities, and this body received no accusations of discrimination.

The difficulties facing local authorities when one community had larger families than the other were shown by an experiment in nationalist Downpatrick with parallel housing lists to avoid almost all houses going to Catholics. This was discontinued when the council found itself allocating houses to single Protestants while large Catholic families were waiting.

Once the system was reformed in 1971 with the introduction of the NI Housing Executive, all allegations of discrimination ceased.

Importantly, the new system made no real difference to actual housing allocations. Twenty years later the 1991 census showed Catholics remained over-represented in state-owned housing to the same degree as at the end of the old Stormont regime. Little had changed in aggregate. In the most recent census (2011), Catholics remained over-represented in social housing but now by only a small amount.

One factor is the convergence in family sizes. Catholic families, which were formerly 35% larger than Protestant families, were by 2011 only 14% larger.

Professor Tom Wilson of Glasgow University wrote in 1989 that 'the charge of discrimination directed against unionist policy has been repeated so often and with such total assurance that its validity now appears to be widely accepted without evidence, as though it had been fully substantiated as to have made any further presentation of the evidence no longer necessary'.

The facts on housing have been known for 50 years with a number of analyses since then, most recently in this book.

Despite this, these facts gain little publicity in either politics or the media. In particular, the BBC has failed to address the issue.

It is high time it did.'

'Dr Graham Gudgin was a fellow in economics at Cambridge University and later director of the Northern Ireland Economic Research Centre before becoming special advisor to First Minister David Trimble. He is currently honorary research associate at the Centre for Business Resesrch at the Judge Business School at Cambridge University

From The Idea of the Union: Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

The book is edited by John Wilson Foster and William Beattie Smith. Contributors include David and Daphne

Trimble, Ray Bassett, Mike Nesbitt, Jeff Dudgeon and News Letter editor Ben Lowry. There is a foreword by Baroness Hoey

As of late 2021, the book is available for £12.99 through Blackstaff Press, Amazon and bookshops.

This extract by Graham Gudgin was carried by the News Letter on Monday, 20th December 2021.

Poem for today

The Work of Christmas by Howard Thurman

When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and the princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flock,
The work of Christmas begins:
To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among brothers,
To make music in the heart.

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