



Archbishop of Armagh's Christmas message - see Reflection today on CNI

News from Ireland, GB and International - featuring the plight of Syria's families



Prison service staff remember deceased officers at carol service

David Ford joined Prison Service staff and their families on Sunday at the annual carol service held to support relatives of deceased officers.

The St Anne's Cathedral service is organised each year with the NI Prison Service Central Benevolent Fund (CBF), which also helps injured and ill officers.

News Letter - Thanking the CBF for the invitation, the Justice Minister said: "It is once again an honour and a privilege for me to join with the Prison Service family in such a sacred and serene setting."

“The annual carol service is a key date in the Prison Service calendar and I thank the organisers and all who participated in today’s ceremony. The musicians, choir and soloist all helped to make it a truly wonderful occasion.

“The Central Benevolent Fund performs a vital work on behalf of the widows of deceased officers as well as retired and serving staff. I extend my best wishes for Christmas and the New Year to them and their families.”

The annual carol service is now in its 15th year following the success of the first event in 1999.

This year it was based on the nine lessons of Christmas and was conducted by the Very Reverend John Mann, the Dean of St Anne’s.

The soloist for the service was Jamaican-born Clover Watts, with the music performed by Murley Silver Band, Omagh and the choir of King’s Park Primary School from Lurgan.



Christmas - Whats the meaning of it all? Bishop asks students

On a visit to a packed school sports hall at Bandon Grammar School on Thursday last, Bishop Paul Colton told students that our Christmas celebrations have become

so packed with ‘stuff all over the place’ that we can lose sight of the meaning of it all.

He said, ‘It’s like trying to find something precious that you really need, in a school locker that is packed full of stuff, or trying to get access to that one photo, message or file on a laptop or phone that is chaotic and full of years of stuff,’ he said. ‘Christmas is like that – centuries of traditions and customs as well as the ones we think are essential to making our own Christmas special all piled on layer upon layer. We have also to engage the brain God gave us when it comes to looking at the two main Gospel accounts of the birth of Jesus; Matthew and Luke – each so different in many ways. What is the

meaning of it all? And having asked ourselves that, the next question is', said Bishop Colton 'how does this story change me?'

After the Service organised by the school chaplain, the Reverend Anne Skuse, the Bishop, while walking through the locker area, sprung an impromptu 'examination' of some lockers on a group of students, to reinforce his point. 'How do you find anything you really need in there?' he joked.

Dean of Killaloe Installed



Killaloe Cathedral was well filled on the evening of December 12 to welcome Gary Paulsen as the new Rector of the Killaloe and

Stradbally Unions of Parishes, and to witness his installation as Dean of Killaloe.

There were the inevitable moments of legal solemnity as all the necessary documents were read out and duly signed by Bishop Trevor Williams, but it was also an occasion of great joy, hope and expectation as the parish welcomed their new Rector following a long vacancy.

Gary has been ordained for ten years. He came to the Limerick and Killaloe Dioceses from their link diocese of Saldahna Bay, in South Africa where he had been serving as a parish priest in Paarl, in the midst of Western Cape's famous wine lands. Until 12th December 2013 he was Rector of Adare. He has two children, Simeon who lives with Gary here in Ireland, and Cassie who works on cruise liners throughout the world.

As has become the tradition in the diocese Gary was welcomed by the wardens of the Churches in the Unions, each presenting him with symbolic tokens of his future ministry, oil for healing, a towel as a reminder of service, bread wine and water for the sacraments.

The preacher for the service was the Rev'd Stephen Neill. Stephen spoke of Gary's family life, and the affliction he shares with his son Simeon, of supporting Chelsea. On a more serious note Stephen also spoke of Gary's experience in South Africa, both in his employment in the construction and property development industry and later as a priest with special responsibility for lay ministry in the diocese of Saldanha Bay. Gary has, he said, a deep sense of calling to ministry, to ministry in Ireland and to the parishes of the Killaloe and Stradbally Unions.

Calling was at the very heart of Stephen's sermon, the call to the priesthood, the call to a particular ministry in a particular parish or group. The call of Gary, or indeed any priest is however not the only call. The whole community of the Church is called into the mission and ministry of Christ. Gary's ministry is not an exhibit to look at but an example to follow. There is an ecumenical dimension to this call of the whole people of God, and this was represented by the many clergy and members of the Roman Catholic and Methodist communities present. Ultimately calling is rooted in God and the whole community of Christ is called to move forward together trusting in God and following the example of Jesus as servant.

After the service the congregation were treated to refreshments at the Lakeside Hotel in Killaloe. There it was good to see many of the members of Gary's old parish of Adare gathered to share in the occasion. Gary will welcome the prayers of his many friends, old and new, as he begins his ministry as Rector of the Killaloe and Stradbally communities and as Dean of Killaloe

Events and services

Crosslinks conference

Dr Don Carson is the guest speaker. He is research professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois.

He is a prolific thinker, author, Bible scholar and exegete and has a very keen interest in world mission.

The conference, entitled 'The Uniqueness of Christ' intends to affirm and explore the conviction that Jesus Christ is the only means of salvation in the context of a religiously pluralistic society and, sometimes church.

"The conference will provide a strong biblical foundation and renewed confidence in Christ as the only Saviour and Lord, as well as highlighting current threats to this position and, consequently, a weakening rationale for mission and confidence in the Gospel. Our hope is that this conference will rekindle a passion to proclaim the good news about Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth", say the organisers.

The five sessions are as follows:

Friday

7.30–9.30 pm Jesus the Only Redeemer

Saturday

9.30–11.00 am Jesus the Unique Messiah

11.30 am–1.00 pm Jesus the Unique Son of God

3.00–4.00 pm Q&A

4.30–5.30 pm Jesus the Unique Word of God

The conference, which will cost £25/€30, will take place at St Anne's Cathedral, Belfast with a crèche and children's programme available on the Saturday.

For further information, please contact Valerie Ellis, email:
vellis@crosslinks.org,

Tel: 028 9079 6028 or visit www.crosslinks.org/exclusive

Calary Carol Service

The Carol Service in Calary Church (between Kilmacanogue and Roundwood) will take place at 7.00 pm on Sunday 22 December. Everyone is invited and the service will be followed by tea and mince pies in the Church Room.

This week in Christ Church Cathedral

WEDNESDAY 18 DECEMBER

6pm Choral Evensong

sung by the Girl Choristers.

Rose, Responses. Antiphon, O Adonai.
Dyson in C minor. Trad. arr.
Carter, Tomorrow shall be my dancing day.

THURSDAY 19 DECEMBER
6pm Choral Evensong
sung by the Cathedral Choir
Rose, Responses.
Antiphon, O Radix Jesse.
Stanford in G. Goldschmidt,
A tender shoot.

Holy Communion in Irish at Christ Church Cathedral

Holy Communion will be
celebrated in Irish at 3.30 pm
in Christ Church Cathedral on Sunday December 29.



A Specialist Course for Clergy & Pastoral Carers

This interactive course is designed especially for Ministers/Priests/Pastors and will comprise the following sessions:

- Exploding the myths surrounding mental illness.
- Exploring the pastoral implications of some commonly encountered mental illnesses (depression, bipolar disorder and schizophrenia among others).
- Exploring the range of Christian responses to mental ill-health.
- Revisiting that Christian response: the interface between faith and mental illness.

Trainers: Rev. Dr. Scott Peddie, Dr. Volodimir Bezulowsky (Psychiatrist) & Dr. Paul Miller (Consultant Psychiatrist and Psychogeriatrician)

Date: Thursday 16th January 2014 from 1-5pm

Venue: Mirabilis Health, Hollywood House, Hollywood, BT18 9HF

Cost: £50 per person

To book a place, please e-mail (scottpeddie@sky.com)

GB

LGBT Catholics seek greater pastoral response from the Church

A group representing LGBT Catholics in Westminster has written to Bishops in England and Wales, urging them to consider a wider programme of pastoral support.

The move comes as a response to the widely publicised consultation on the family ahead of next year's Extraordinary Synod in Rome, which will examine a variety of issues, including family life, birth control and same sex relationships.

The council (now LGBT Catholics Westminster Pastoral Council) was previously known as the Soho Masses Pastoral Council (SMPC). It met at the Church of St Gregory and the Assumption in Warwick Street, Soho, until a move to the Jesuit Church in Mayfair in March 2013.

"In the vast majority of Catholic parishes in the UK there is no dedicated pastoral care of LGBT Catholics," says the written submission.

"Typical Catholic parishes are very unlikely to mention any pastoral care in the parish newsletter, or even to recognise the needs of LGBT Catholics as a group."

In a reference to the provision of pastoral support made available to LGBT Catholics at the Church of the Immaculate Conception at Farm Street in central London, the council asks that consideration be given to "supporting this at national level."

The text has been submitted to Elizabeth Davies, the Marriage and Family Life Project officer at the Catholic Bishops' conference ahead of a January 2014 meeting in which the responses to the consultation will be discussed in detail.

* Full letter from Westminster LGBT Catholics to the Bishops' Conference: <http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/19682>

* LGBT Catholics Westminster Pastoral Council: <http://www.sohomasses.com>

* RC LGBT Chaplaincy: <http://www.rcdow.org.uk/chaplaincies/default.asp?other=lgbt>

International

Syrian families vulnerable to dangerous Lebanese winter storm



As the largest winter storm in years threatens Lebanon, World Vision is stepping up its preparations throughout the region to keep Syrian refugees safe from below freezing temperatures and snow.

More than 2.2 million people have fled to neighbouring countries to escape the violence. Many are living in tented settlements, camps or poorly-equipped apartments that offer little protection from the cold. Within Syria, many of the 6.5 million internally displaced are facing similar challenges.

Health workers in Syria are reporting an increase in respiratory diseases among children as temperatures dip. World Vision and other aid agencies are

striving to reach as many people as possible with the resources they have, but with the sheer scope and scale of the crisis, the need remains immense.

As one Syrian father in Jordan explained, “We left Syria because our house was destroyed in the conflict and we were scared for our children. And now we’re scared of the cold. Perhaps it’s better to be killed by someone than to watch your children die of the cold.” Their home has no heating and no hot water.

“For months we have been concerned about the dire consequences of the approaching winter on these vulnerable families, and we’ve been working to protect as many people as we can. Now there’s little time more for preparations or warnings. For Syrian refugees, time has run out, and winter is here,” said Joe Harbison, World Vision’s response director for the Syria Crisis.

In Za’atari Camp in Jordan and in many of the makeshift settlements in Lebanon, flooding is already a significant problem, adding to the freezing temperatures.

Alongside other agencies, World Vision is responding with a raft of practical aid in the region to make sure families don’t have to fear the cold.

“Speaking with families, we know the fear that winter brings. I’ve seen far too many children with little more than sandals and short sleeves, even as winter approaches,” said Conny Lenneberg, World Vision’s head of programmes for the Middle East.

“We are working hard to ensure that we reach as many of the most vulnerable as we possibly can, so they get the protection they need, no matter the weather,” she said. * World Vision UK: www.worldvision.org.uk

Prayer for Today

**Holy God,
you spoke the world into being.
Pour your Spirit to the ends of the earth,
that your children may return from exile
as citizens of your commonwealth,
and our divisions may be healed
by your word of love and righteousness. Amen.**

