



The witness of the years - Round Tower at Antrim



Irish Church Leaders' New Year Message

As 2021 begins, many people will be hopeful for a brighter and safer future. The pandemic of 2020 brought grief, anxiety and uncertainty, as well as economic loss and disruption of livelihoods. Many aspects of life that we had taken for granted, like

visiting loved ones in nursing homes, or popping in to a see a friend, suddenly changed.

The events of 2020 have served to remind us of our interconnectedness as human beings. Together we stood and applauded frontline workers and discovered a new sense of community with our neighbours. We wash our hands, wear face coverings, refrain from embracing and maintain distance, mindful that the actions of each of us as individuals have the potential to protect or endanger others.

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The actions of frontline workers who have sacrificially gone about their business, or those who have delivered groceries for neighbours who are self-isolating, sewn scrubs or kept in touch with others by phone have been a reminder that everyone has the potential to benefit others.

Churches too have been part of that collective response and in seeking to act in the interests of those who are most vulnerable have sought to live out faith in the context of the spread of Coronavirus. Faith has been a source of strength and support to many throughout this difficult time. Clergy, ministers, priests and lay people of faith have responded with compassion and imagination to the challenges of the pandemic, with online services, pastoral support and provision of opportunities for prayer.

Political leaders in both jurisdictions have faced huge challenges. We continue to pray for them and encourage

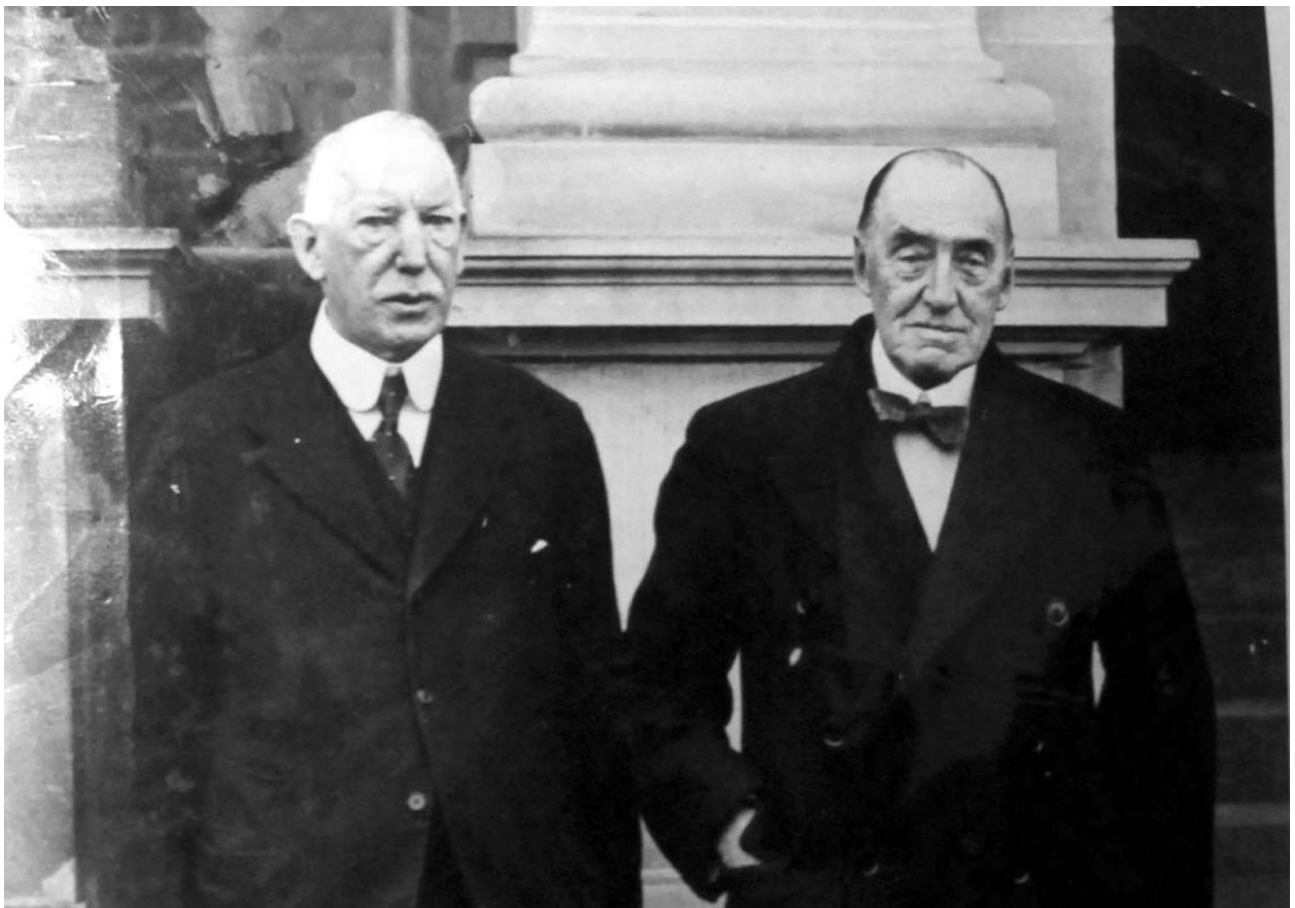


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them to work together towards the building of political stability in which the whole community can prosper.

As 2021 begins, we will face new challenges and opportunities.

The changes which Brexit will bring are another powerful reminder of that interconnectedness. As Church Leaders, we continue to encourage the building of relationships across and between these islands. The new context that Brexit brings demands a commitment to working together in constructive ways.



This coming year marks the centenary of the foundation of Northern Ireland and of Partition. We recognise that people will approach the centenary from a variety of perspectives - for some this is a cause for celebration, others will look upon the last century with a sense of loss and separation. For us,

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as Church Leaders, the centenary opens up opportunities for greater understanding of each other, for further healing and reconciliation between our communities. This centenary also provides the opportunity for us to reflect together on the failings of relationships and use of violence across the whole island which have marred our past and which in some ways continue to cast a shadow on the present. Mindful of our interconnectedness we recognise our different perspectives on this centenary even among us as Church Leaders. Still we commit ourselves to building a future together in which historic mistrust and division becomes a thing of the past.

Our interconnectedness extends beyond our own communities to the global community.



Covid-19 has made the daily challenges faced by those who live with poverty even greater than they were. We have corporate and individual responsibility to use resources not just for

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our own benefit, but for the benefit of others around the world.

Jesus' reminder to love our neighbour is particularly relevant in this context. Jesus shows us what that love looks like in His care for others even in the context of historic differences, His concern for those whom many thought unimportant and His willingness to put the needs of others before His own. He came to serve not to be served. In our united commitment to be good neighbours we play our part as servants of the Gospel in building communities and a society in which all know that they are significant and in which all can prosper.

So, as we begin this new year we point to the hope that is made real as we recognise that we are interconnected and work together to build a better future. And as Christian leaders we point to, and stand within, the hope which has been made known in Jesus, who has promised His presence in every situation and who is the light of the world. God bless you.

Rt Rev Dr David Bruce

Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland

Most Rev John McDowell

Church of Ireland Archbishop of Armagh & Primate of all Ireland

Rev Dr Thomas McKnight

President of the Methodist Church in Ireland

Most Rev Eamon Martin

Roman Catholic Archbishop of Armagh & Primate of all Ireland

Very Rev Dr Ivan Patterson

President of the Irish Council of Churches

churchnewsireland@gmail.org



Pope proclaims year of families, offers advice to keep peace

Pope Francis doubled down on one of his papal priorities and urged renewed attention to his controversial 2016 document on family. Pope Francis on Sunday proclaimed an upcoming year dedicated to the family as he doubled down on one of his papal priorities and urged renewed attention to his controversial 2016 document on family life.

Francis announced the upcoming year on the family would begin March 19, the fifth anniversary of his document “The Joy of Love.”

Among other things, the document opened the door to letting divorced and civilly remarried couples receive Communion, sparking criticism and even claims of heresy from conservative Catholics.

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Francis penned the document after summoning bishops from around the world to debate how the Catholic Church can better minister to families. While the divorce-remarriage issue dominated headlines during the back-to-back synods, the discussion also touched on ministering to gay people and other “non-traditional” families.

Francis made the comments during his Sunday noon blessing, delivered from inside his studio to prevent people from gathering in St. Peter’s Square below as part of the Vatican’s anti-virus precautions.

In making the announcement, Francis offered some friendly papal advice to bickering families, reminding them to say “pardon me, thank you and sorry” and never end the day without making peace.

“Because the Cold War the day after is dangerous,” he quipped.

Covid-19 silences the bells of Christ Church Cathedral on New Year’s Eve

Centuries-old tradition another casualty of the stricter lockdown

Covid-19 restrictions mean the bells of [Christ Church Cathedral](#) in Dublin will not ring in the New Year for the first time in living memory and possibly in centuries.

The cathedral has been a focal point for generations of Dubliners at midnight on New Year’s Eve. It used to be



accompanied by a religious ceremony but in recent years people have gathered on the steps outside the Jury's hotel in Christ Church.

The Dean of Christ Church Rev [Dermot Dunne](#) said social distancing scuppered any plans they might have had to ring out the bells.

A full ring of the 19 bells takes at least 10 bellringers.

“We decided to call it off,” he said. “It’s been a long tradition for us so long that I don’t know how long it goes back. We are going back into a stricter lockdown. The bellringers are conscious of their need to keep apart as well.”

Very Rev Dunne said the cathedral was able to ring the bells for services on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, but the stricter lockdown and escalating Covid-19 cases makes that impossible.

Nativity-themed posters encourage climate emergency conversations over Christmas

Posters have been on display over the Christmas holidays asking the public to have conversations about the climate emergency.

The posters are inspired by the Nativity and feature a manger scene with the strapline: "A child is born. What kind of future do we want for our children?"

A spokesperson for Christian Climate Action (CCA) said: "The climate emergency hasn't gone away and we know that during the pandemic, support for taking serious action on climate change has remained high.

"As 2020 draws to a close and we look forward to the UK hosting the UN climate conference, COP26, in November





2021, we're asking people to consider what role they might play in tackling this emergency.

"We have very little time left to get our emissions to zero and give ourselves a chance of avoiding catastrophic consequences which will impact the whole of creation."

The poster campaign was launched ahead of the start of 2021, with the UN climate conference COP26 on the horizon.

The UK is hosting the conference in Glasgow next November.

The Rev Jon Swales, of St George's Church, Leeds, said: "As we face the emergency of climate breakdown we are

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encouraged by these posters from Extinction Rebellion and Christian Climate Action, to use this Christmas period to reflect on our own dangerous and dark times and are invited to begin conversations that walk us through grief to sustained action.

"These edgy and perhaps controversial posters can be used to move us from both denial to grief, and from despair to hope filled action."

The Rev Hilary Bond, Pioneer Priest for the parish of Wareham, said: "At Christmas we marvel at the idea of God becoming a vulnerable child among us, offering redemption not only to humanity but to the whole of creation.

"The CCA poster campaign should serve to remind us that we cannot stand back and watch vulnerable children across our world suffer because of the climate emergency - and it is an emergency - when it is within our power, and part of our calling as Christians, to act now, and care for creation as God intended."

News briefs

Tearfund and TBN invite you to DECLARATION - a prayer event

on Sunday 3 January and ends on Jan 9 January 2021.

Featuring dynamic worship leaders and speakers including: Pastor Agu Irukwu, Bishop John Francis, William McDowell, Becca Folkes, Claudine Ried, Michael White, Bishop Wayne Malcolm, Juanita Francis, Emmanuel Smith, Seth Pinnock plus many more!

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For more information visit

[<https://www.tearfund.org/declaration2021>]



We'll never reach united Ireland without bringing unionists onboard, Archbishop Eamon Martin - Ireland's most senior Roman Catholic bishop has warned that a united Ireland will never be achieved unless nationalists are willing to listen to those who are fearful of the prospect of reunification. Archbishop Eamon makes the comment in an exclusive interview with The Irish Catholic ahead of the 2021 anniversary of the partition of the island of Ireland.

Songs of Praise at St Paul's Cathedral - KathJenkins

explores @StPaulsLondon and music includes hymns sung by St Paul's Cathedral Choir and a special performance by Daniel O' Donnell. Sunday 3 Jan at 13.15 BBCOne Songs Of Praise

Connor Diocesan Cycle of Prayer - The 2021 Connor Diocesan Cycle of Prayer is now available online.

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The Diocesan Cycle of Prayer ensures that every parish and chaplaincy in the diocese and its clergy, both active and retired, are prayed for on a specific day each month.

The Cycle of Prayer also includes each of the bishops in the Church of Ireland, our diocesan links and several other groups who have an active connection with the diocese. The members of the Diocesan Council, the Diocesan Office staff and parochial officials are incorporated in the intercessions. Linki at - <https://connor.anglican.org/2020/12/30/2021-connor-diocesan-cycle-of-prayer/>



Mother and Baby Homes report reveals misogyny by the state and the church - The Children's Minister says the Mother and Baby Homes Commission's report has revealed misogyny by the Government the State and the Church. The 4,000-page report into the treatment of residents of facilities such as the Bon Secours Mother and Baby Home in Tuam

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is due to be brought before cabinet on the week of January 11th.

The Children's Minister Roderic O'Gorman has told the Irish Times that the upcoming report details a "massive societal failure."

Minister O'Gorman has said it reveals a "misogyny that went all the way from government to the state to the church, but also permeated all society."

The Mother and Baby Homes Commission's report is to be brought before cabinet on the week of January 11th, while it's understood survivors will be given copies of the document before it is formally released.

It comes as Minister O'Gorman confirmed in September that he would follow through on planned legislation to enable the forensic excavation of the Tuam mother and baby home site.

He says work is also underway to draft legislation so adopted people can get access to their birth information.

The long read

'A Culture of Care as a Path to Peace' – Pope Francis' message for the 54th World Day of Peace on 1 January 2021

1. At the dawn of a new year, I extend cordial greetings to Heads of State and Government, leaders of International

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Organizations, spiritual leaders and followers of the different religions, and to men and women of good will. To all I offer my best wishes that the coming year will enable humanity to advance on the path of fraternity, justice and peace between individuals, communities, peoples and nations.

The year 2020 was marked by the massive Covid-19 health crisis, which became a global phenomenon cutting across boundaries, aggravating deeply interrelated crises like those of the climate, food, the economy and migration, and causing great suffering and hardship. I think especially of all those who lost family members or loved ones, and all who lost their jobs. I think too of physicians and nurses, pharmacists, researchers, volunteers, chaplains and the personnel of hospitals and healthcare centres. They have made, and are continuing to make, great sacrifices to be present to the sick, to alleviate their sufferings and to save their lives; indeed, many of them have died in the process. In paying tribute to them, I renew my appeal to political leaders and the private sector to spare no effort to ensure access to Covid-19 vaccines and to the essential technologies needed to care for the sick, the poor and those who are most vulnerable.[1]

Sad to say, alongside all these testimonies of love and solidarity, we have also seen a surge in various forms of nationalism, racism and xenophobia, and wars and conflicts that bring only death and destruction in their wake.

These and other events that marked humanity's path this past year have taught us how important it is to care for one another and for creation in our efforts to build a more fraternal society. That is why I have chosen as the title of

this year's Message, A Culture of Care as a Path to Peace. A culture of care as a way to combat the culture of indifference, waste and confrontation so prevalent in our time.

2. God the Creator, the source of our human vocation to care
3. God the Creator, a model of care
4. Care in the ministry of Jesus
5. A culture of care in the life of Jesus' followers
6. The principles of the Church's social doctrine as the basis for a culture of care
7. A compass pointing to a common path
8. Educating for a culture of care
9. There can be no peace without a culture of care

Full text at -

[[] <https://www.catholicbishops.ie/2020/12/30/a-culture-of-care-as-a-path-to-peace-pope-francis-message-for-the-54th-world-day-of-peace-on-1-january-2021/>]

Pointers for prayer

Today we pray for people who will be homeless in 2021. As we look towards the new year, people experiencing homelessness will once again be faced with a new set of distinct challenges.

Today we pray for COP26. The global climate conference, rescheduled from 2020, will be taking place in Glasgow in 2021. We pray for ambition and action from world leaders

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on climate change, and pray that those already affected by climate chaos would be kept safe.



The angels came from heaven high,
And they were clad with wings;
And lo, they brought a joyful song
The host of heaven sings.

The angels sang through all the night
Until the rising sun,
But little Jesus fell asleep
Before the song was done.

- Sara Teasdale

May the joy of the angels, the eagerness of the shepherds,
the perseverance of the wise men, the obedience of Joseph
& Mary, and the peace of the Christ-child be yours this

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Christmas and the blessing of the Father, Son & Holy Spirit be with you. Amen

Almighty God, you make us glad with the yearly remembrance of the birth of your Son Jesus Christ. Grant that, as we joyfully receive him as our redeemer, we may with sure confidence behold him when he comes to be our judge. Amen.

Today we pray for the transformation which Jesus brings. This Christmas, we remember the coming of Jesus to our world, and the promise of hope which that brings with it.

Today we pray for those facing redundancy at present. This year, record numbers of people were made redundant during lockdowns and waves of the coronavirus, as Government support changed.

Speaking to the soul

Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often.

Luke 2:19 NLT

This sentence in Luke is what I would call a piece of considerable understatement. Mary, who was probably a teenager and who almost certainly knew very little about the world, has just given birth to the Messiah. She has certainly been given plenty to think about! Older versions of the Bible translate this verse as “Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart”.

The truth is that no one, however old or mature, could possibly have taken it all in. What had happened to Mary was a turning point in human history and stands at the centre of God's loving plan for his world. No one could have claimed to have fully understood what had happened, and theologians two thousand years later are still reflecting deeply on it all. So Mary was wise to ponder.

There is much that we understand about our world, but always much that is beyond us. When we see the wonders of this creation, we can offer a description of what we see but we will never be able to describe completely its beauty and intricacy. When we see the way in which God works in our lives there is much that makes sense but always some things which puzzle us, and which leave us with big questions.

Like Mary, it is good for us to keep pondering and to do that we need to allow ourselves space to reflect. It's so easy to get sucked into a life of relentless activity. I believe God wants us to give ourselves the space to reflect deeply. In some traditions of the church the idea of retreat is very important. A retreat is a time to stand back from life away from home where we can give unhurried time to listen to God. In a world that encourages us to race through our lives at a breathless pace, we need to learn from Mary's example and ponder.

QUESTION

Where are you able to find space to listen to God?

PRAYER

Loving Lord, help me to listen more carefully to your voice.
Amen.

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