

November 17, 2021

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Image of the day - St Fin Barre's Cathedral, Cork

News Reports

Presbyterian Church responds to Abortion Services (Safe Access Zones) Bill

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI) has responded to the call made by the Northern Ireland Assembly Committee for Health for written evidence on the Abortion Services (Safe Access Zones) Bill. In their submission, the Church states that there must be space within society to express views with which others may disagree. At the same time, it also says there are activities and behaviours that should not be part of any legitimate protest.

The private members' bill, proposed by Green Party MLA, Clare Bailey, seeks to create safe access zones outside premises providing abortion services, including information, advice or counselling.

Rev Daniel Kane, Convener of PCI's Council for Public Affairs, said, "As a Church with a strong pro-life position, we put on record again our total opposition to the abortion laws that were imposed upon the people of Northern Ireland, removing all protection from the lives of unborn children as a result of some of the most liberal abortion legislation in Europe.

"We recognise the matters reflected in this Bill are not only sensitive, but cut across the lives and personal experiences

November 17, 2021

of women and their families who have experienced a crisis pregnancy situation in the past, or who may do so in the future. This is not simply a theological or academic exercise for us, as many of our ministers, and others in congregations, have journeyed alongside women and families who have experienced a pregnancy crisis and been presented with very difficult decisions.

“As a Church we are actively considering how we can better support women and their families who face these challenges. We deplore any situation that would compound anyone’s distress,” he said.

“The broad scope of this Bill, however, gives us considerable concern with regard to the potential for restricting freedom of expression and interference with the freedom of religious belief and conviction. In any democratic society there should be freedom to protest, and freedom to share opinion in a reasonable, lawful and peaceful manner.”

Mr Kane continued, “Of course there are activities and behaviours that should not be part of any legitimate protest. For example, this might include images so graphic and explicit that cause distress to people who may be seeking access to a venue that provides for abortions, or information and advice, or those who work in other parts of the same building and even passers-by.

“Physically impeding a person should also not be part of reasonable freedom of expression, or a display of freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Neither should the recording of images – either photographs or video

November 17, 2021

recordings – be deemed to be an appropriate, or reasonable form of protest,” he said.

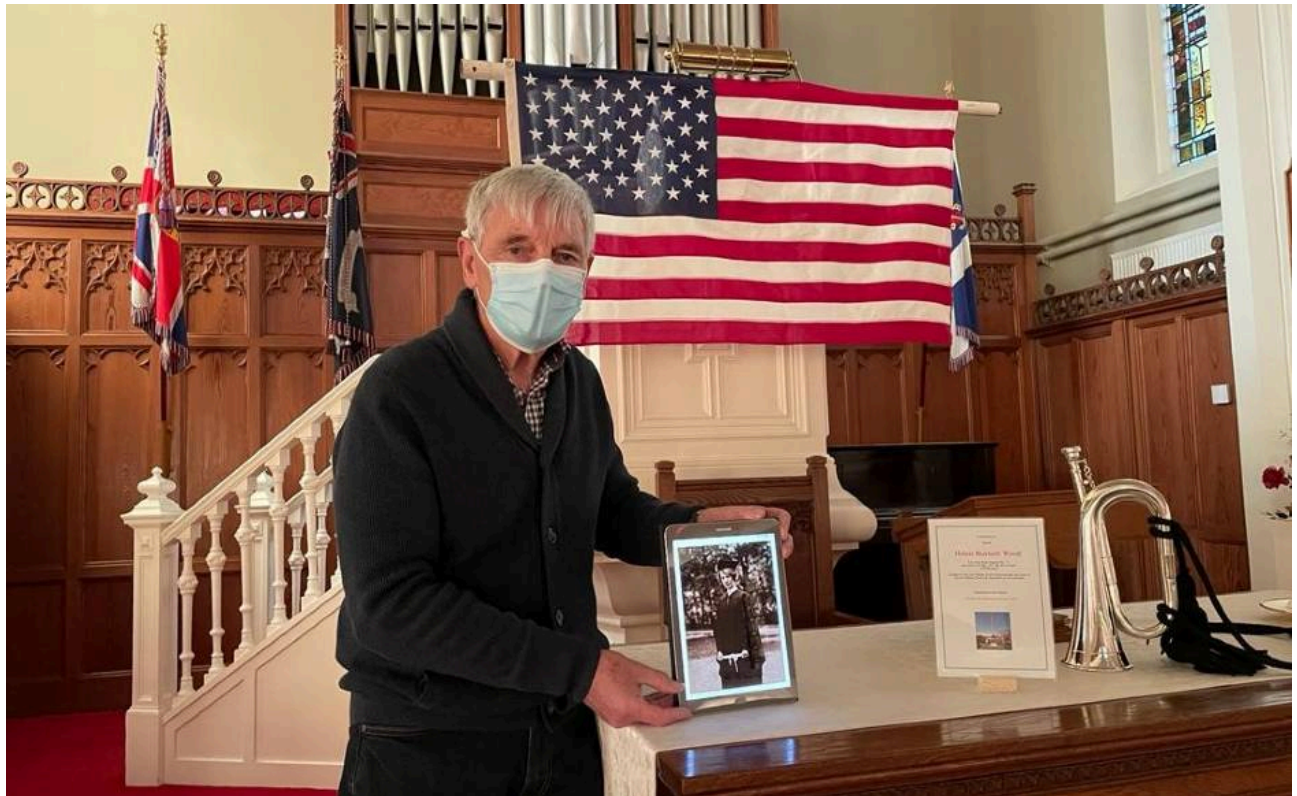
“The Bill does not seek to differentiate, however, between those individuals acting properly, lawfully and in a sensitive and appropriate fashion, and those who are engaged in conduct which undoubtedly is offensive and involves harassment and intimidation.”

Mr Kane concluded by saying, “The risk here is that the Bill does not merely propose to inhibit harassment and intimidation and the wrongful actions of third parties interfering with a legal right to access abortion services. It may have the effect of restricting any conduct, no matter how benign, within a ‘safe access zone’ on the grounds that it would amount to a criminal offence. In our submission we have encouraged the Committee to consider whether existing legislative provision, properly enforced, provides the remedies sought.”

Flag flown over US Capitol hung in Scots church in honour of WW1 nurse

An American flag that was recently flown over the US Capitol building in honour of a Scottish nurse was sent to her home town to mark Remembrance Sunday.

Helen Burnett Wood, one of the first members of an American unit killed during the First World War, was commemorated during a special service at Northesk Parish Church in Musselburgh, East Lothian .



She was the daughter of John S and Francis Wood of Mall Avenue and is named on the church's war memorial along with her younger brother, William, who was killed while serving with the 5th Royal Scots at Gallipoli in 1915.

Born in 1888, Helen emigrated to Evanston near Chicago in Illinois in 1909 when she was 21 and worked as a telephone operator for a spell before training to be a nurse.

The eldest of six children, she volunteered to serve with U.S Army Base Hospital Number 12, a unit largely comprised of Northwestern University students, alumni, and faculty staff, and was deployed to France in May, 1917.

Helen, who had red golden hair and a cheery smile, was aboard the SS Mongolia along with other American medical personnel when a tragic accident happened the day after it left New York.



Helen Burnett Wood was born in Portobello, Edinburgh and raised in nearby Musselburgh. Image courtesy of Evanston History Centre

One of the ship's guns exploded during a practice drill, sending a shower of shrapnel across the deck which killed the 29-year-old Scot and fellow Army nurse, Edith Ayres.

News of her death on the 20th of May, 1917 was later reported in the Scotsman and her sister Annie, who also emigrated to the US, told a Chicago newspaper: "I didn't want Helen to go, but she said if her brothers could risk their lives for Britain, she could risk hers for America."

Buried in Rosehill Cemetery in Chicago, Helen's sacrifice and that of all the men named on the church war memorial has been recorded on special cards which were handed out to people attending the service.

November 17, 2021

It was led by US-born Rev Hayley Cohen, minister of Northesk Parish Church, and elder Alastair Knowles, played the "Last Post" and "Taps" - calls played at British and US military remembrance ceremonies - on the bugle.

The 75-year-old has played the instrument at local Remembrance events since he was 13 years old.

Ms Cohen said: "Helen moved to America when she was around the same age that I was when I first moved to Scotland but she left home in a time when a simple FaceTime call wasn't an option.

"I can only imagine the mixture of excitement and trepidation that she felt as she left her family for a new adventure abroad.

"Since she trained as a nurse, I would imagine that Helen had quite a servant heart, a desire to heal and help others so when the war came, it makes sense that she would volunteer her services."

Peace

Ms Cohen, who grew up in New Jersey, said the 85 people named on the church's war memorial serve as a reminder of the "sacrificial love" of Jesus, who said there is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends.

"In the pandemic, it is perhaps easier for us to identify with the sheer sense of loss and grief that families during World War I, World War II and subsequent conflicts faced," she added.

November 17, 2021

"We can identify with the concerns over the safety and well-being of loved ones, especially when we think of all those front-line services and key workers who risk their lives for the sake of others.

"I hope that reflecting on our own losses and the sacrifices made in the pandemic give us a greater sense of connection to all those we pause to remember and we recommit ourselves to the work of peace in our world so that no generation experiences such loss again."

The American flag in memory of Helen Wood was flown above the US Capitol building in Washington DC this autumn at the behest of the Evanston History Centre as part of activity leading up to the centennial of the commemoration of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia.

Its director of education is Jenny Thompson who teamed up with Simon Fairnie, a local historian and member of Northesk Parish Church, to arrange for it to be sent to Musselburgh and he sent her a Saltire flag in return.

"As one of the very first American casualties during the First World War, a woman who volunteered to serve and an immigrant to the US, Helen Wood's story resonates more and more each passing year," said Ms Thompson.

"We have been fascinated by her story for many years and we wanted to do more to connect our two towns and explore the history that unites us."

November 17, 2021

The centre has sent the church a recorded video greeting that will be played during the service.

It includes an account of the locations in Evanston where Helen Wood is honoured, including a war memorial.

Confession can be place where church fights abuse, Jesuit says

To protect the sacrament of reconciliation as a “channel of grace” for victims of sexual abuse, the Catholic Church must do a better job instructing priests on what to do if a victim recounts his or her abuse in the confessional and in the unlikely case that an abuser confesses, said Jesuit Father Hans Zollner.

“If the church did more to help confessors be empathetic listeners as well as skilled interpreters of the church’s moral teaching, it would make it clearer that the sacrament of reconciliation can be an instrument in the fight against abuse,” Father Zollner wrote Nov. 11 in *The Tablet*, the London-based Catholic journal.

“If the church is not able to better explain why it does not protect abusers or other serious criminals from justice — and why the seal can help safeguard children and vulnerable adults — state legislators may come to target the inviolability of the seal of confession,” he wrote.

The Jesuit has been a member of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors since its creation and is president of the Institute of Anthropology: Interdisciplinary



Jesuit Father Hans Zollner, a leading expert on child protection

Studies on Human Dignity and Care at Rome's Pontifical Gregorian University.

Father Zollner's article was occasioned by debate in France after the release in October of a report by an independent commission estimated more than 330,000 children had been abused by church personnel since the 1950s.

The report "provoked the question that had been raised after the publication of similar reports in Australia, Ireland, the United States and elsewhere: Should it be mandatory for a priest who hears about sexual abuse committed against a minor in confession to report it to the secular authorities?"

November 17, 2021

However, he wrote, there is no “compelling evidence showing that abuse would be prevented by removing the seal” of the confessional.

The Code of Canon Law absolutely forbids a priest from revealing anything he has learned in the confessional for any reason. As Father Zollner wrote, “A priest cannot break the seal to save his own life, to protect his good name, to save the life of another or to aid the course of justice. Priests who violate the seal of confession are automatically excommunicated.”

While the church’s poor record of preventing abuse and handling allegations has created suspicion about its vigorous protection of the secrecy of the confessional, the Jesuit said that secrecy makes “people feel free to say things in confession they wouldn’t say anywhere else.”

Historically and still today, he said, that “safe space” is used much more often by survivors and victims than by abusers.

“With the exception of prison chaplains, priests are highly unlikely to ever hear a confession from a perpetrator of sexual abuse of children. Just one priest has told me that he had heard the confession of a perpetrator — and that was on just one occasion,” he wrote.

But, he said, “a victim of clerical sexual abuse as an adult made the sometimes-neglected point to me that many victims feel guilty and find it extremely difficult to speak for the first time about the unspeakable. She worries that if you cannot be absolutely sure that what you say in confession will remain confidential, one of the few safe places where

November 17, 2021

starting to talk about an experience of abuse is possible may be lost.”

To assist victims, protect the sacramental seal and promote justice, Father Zollner said, the Catholic Church should issue a new instruction for priests who hear confessions, spelling out things they need to know specifically regarding cases of abuse or suspected abuse.

First, he said, it would “reiterate obligations to respect the laws for reporting abuse outside of the confessional and it would also reaffirm the seal. It would emphasize the personal responsibility of the confessor,” including “the requirement to call on a perpetrator to stop the abuse, to report themselves to the statutory authorities, and to seek therapeutic help.”

The instruction would make clear that “absolution for the sin of abuse cannot be given unless not only has sincere contrition been shown but the willingness to make up for the harm done has been demonstrated.”

“The instruction would also make clear that in the case of a victim speaking about being abused, the confessor must listen with empathy and respect,” he said. “The priest could then offer to meet the person alleging abuse outside the confessional space and encourage him or her to contact therapists and lawyers. Adequate accompaniment must be provided, given that many victims who speak about abuse for the first time feel uneasy about talking again about what had happened, particularly if it might open the area of legal proceedings.”

November 17, 2021

“The seal of confession creates a sacred space in which a penitent is completely free to put before God whatever is on their conscience, and — when they show contrition — find forgiveness, reconciliation and healing,” he said. “That the seal has in the past been a pretext for abuse and other crimes should not lead to what is a channel of grace being discarded.”

People and places

Remembrance Sunday Service at St Patrick's Cathedral

The annual Service of Remembrance in St Patrick's Cathedral Dublin took place on Sunday November 14 in the presence of President Michael D Higgins and the Lord Mayor of Dublin Alison Gilliland.

The service was also attended by representatives of the Government including Housing Minister Darragh O'Brien. The Opposition was represented by Deputy Mary Lou McDonald, leader of Sinn Féin. Members of the Defence Forces, Garda Síochána and diplomatic corps were also present.

The service was led by the Dean, the Very Revd William Morton and the President's Chaplain was Canon David Oxley. It was sung by the Cathedral Choir. The lessons were read by the Ambassador of the United Kingdom Paul Johnston and the District Secretary of the RBL Republic of Ireland Brian Crawford.



The congregation in St Patrick's Cathedral for the Remembrance Sunday service.

Wreaths were laid at the War Memorial in the north transept by President Higgins and Lieutenant Colonel Ken Martin President of the RBL Republic of Ireland.

The preacher was the Very Revd CJC McMullen who is an Ecumenical Canon of St Patrick's.

His sermon drew on the readings from Micah 5: 1–5 and **West Cork Secret Halloween event**

On the 29th October, Diocesan Youth Officer Hilda Connolly took a group of young people from across the diocese to Kilbrittain to visit the renowned West Cork Secret Halloween Trail.

November 17, 2021



Hilda said,
“The walk from the carpark to the main building was a challenge as you are greeted by a few interesting characters along the path in the dark. The teens were broken up into groups of six and were sent on their merry way out around the gardens to be terrorised! Plenty of screaming and

laughter was heard around the grounds. It was another successful trip!”

C of I Day of Prayer for Young People and Youth Ministry

The Church of Ireland Youth Department’s Day of Prayer is coming up on Sunday, 21st November. This annual event previously took place on the Sunday before Lent but has

November 17, 2021

now been moved to the Sunday before Advent. CIYD is encouraging all churches to make space to pray for young people on that day.

A PDF version of a book published by CIYD in 2019 with lots of ideas of how to pray is available to help local churches to plan ahead for the Day of Prayer. Please email admin@ciyd.org for your copy.

Steve Grasham, CIYD's Development Officer for the Southern Region, has also prepared a resource with prayer ideas for Advent, and can be contacted at steve@ciyd.org

Bishop Pat Storey, President of CIYD, says: "As our annual Day of Prayer moves to the Sunday before Advent each year, we remember that Advent is a time to prepare and to look forward. As we exit this pandemic, we will take time ahead of and during Advent to pray for our young people who have had their lives on hold for so long. We pray for their spiritual future and their unique contribution to the Church. We celebrate their commitment and enthusiasm. We long to meet together again and to connect." "This Advent, our Day of Prayer for our young people and youth ministry thus holds special significance. We bring them before God and we celebrate each one. We pray; God hears!"

Simon Henry, CIYD's National Youth Officer, adds: "Youth ministry has been mightily challenged over the past year and young people have missed out on so much. This is an opportunity to bring them once again to the forefront of our thoughts and prayers."

November 17, 2021

How one parish will mark the Day of Prayer ...

On Sunday, 21st November, a group of over 20 young church leaders in Mullingar Parish will present a very impressive and dramatic presentation – ‘Spreading the News’ – to Bishop Storey, leaders from the other Christian churches in Mullingar, and representatives of Wilson’s Hospital School, along with elected politicians, businesspeople and leaders from public services in Westmeath. This presentation is part of a significant parish initiative, ‘Lighten Our Darkness’, led by the young leaders to help address the problem of climate change which has become a global emergency.



Archdeacon Jack Patterson

The sudden death of the Ven Jack (John) Patterson, former Archdeacon of Dalriada, occurred on Monday November 15.

Jack, 85, was nurtured in his faith in St Mark’s, Ligonel. He was ordained in 1965, and served in St Paul’s, York Street, Belfast with Canon Richard Williams; and the Parish of Larne, Inver, Glynn and Raloo with Can Lex Fair; and the Parish of Ballintoy and Dunseverick, where he was rector for more than 30 years until his retirement in 2005.

He was a Canon of St Anne’s Cathedral, Belfast, from 1997-2001, and in March 2001 was appointed Archdeacon

November 17, 2021

of Dalriada. Until recently, Jack was Chaplain to Retired Clergy in Connor Diocese.

Sincere sympathy is felt and expressed by their many friends to his wife Frances, children Mark, Fiona, Michael and Moira, his grandchildren, his brother Jim and sister-in-law Rosemary and the wider family circle.

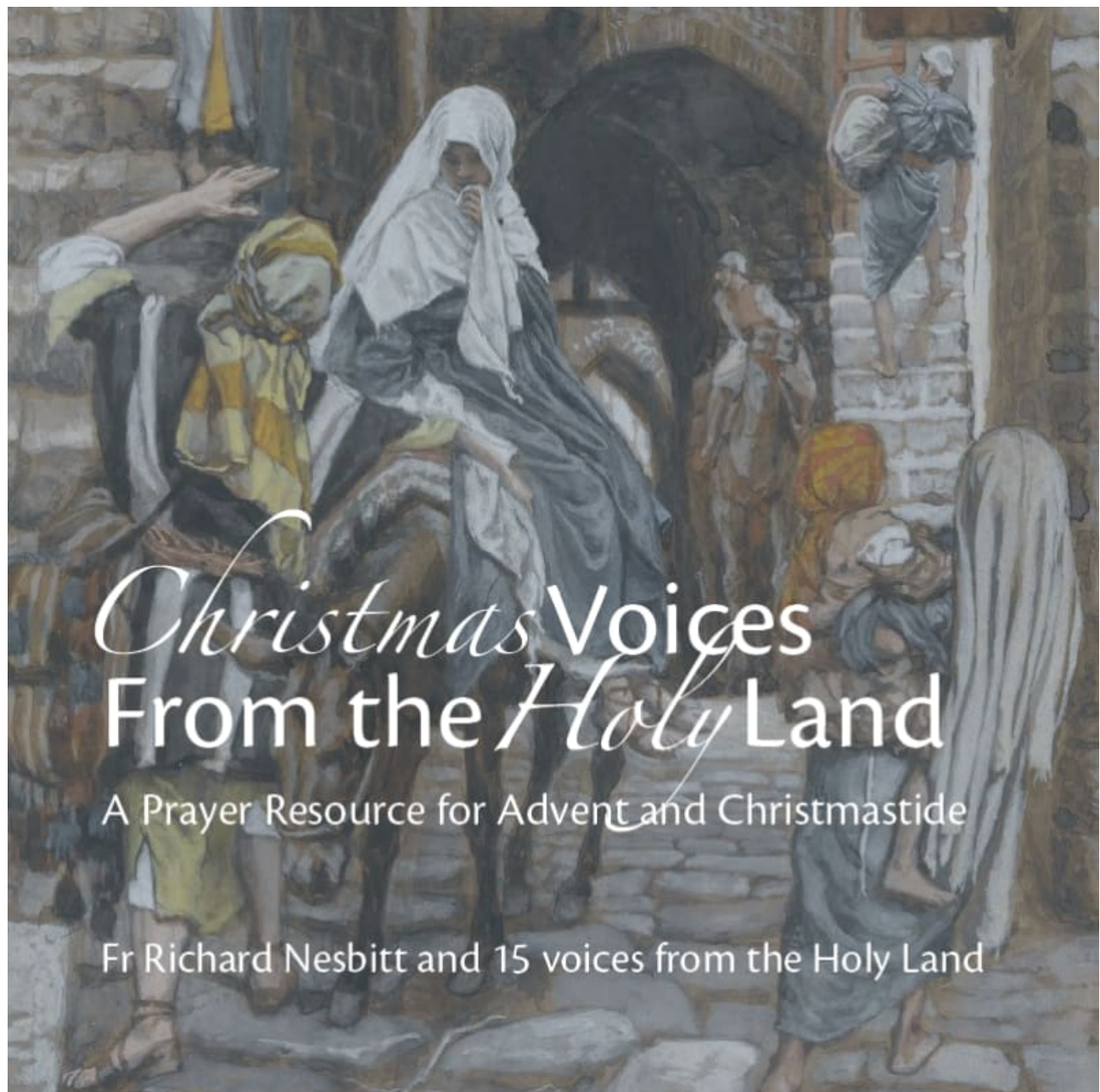
Webinars, music, resources, broadcasts and books

Christmas Voices from the Holy Land - Advent and Christmastide Book

"Christmas Voices from the Holy Land", is now published; a collection of prayers, scripture readings, poems and reflections for Advent and Christmastide.

This is authored by Fr Richard Nesbitt with contributions from Christians in the Holy Land connecting the experiences of the Holy Family with those of the Christian minority still witnessing to Christ today. It follows the route of the Holy Family's journey through Advent and Christmas.

We are delighted that the book includes a foreword by Archbishop Michael Jackson. This is very much an ecumenical prayer resource which could be used for individual or group use in parishes and other church groups across Ireland. As we slowly recover from the challenges to public worship of Covid-19, here is a ready-made Christ-centred resource which speaks so powerfully to our journey



through Advent to the Nativity of Jesus and beyond and hopefully inspire us to come together in prayer.

This spiritual resource which is available now at the price of £9.99 including postage and packing from the UK from our online shop.

[[] <https://www.friendsoftheholyland.org.uk/shop/advent-book-2021>]

The book is now available at £9.99 including UK p&p. If you would like the book to be shipped to you elsewhere in the

November 17, 2021

world, please make contact for shipping prices by emailing:
office@friendsoftheholylnd.org.uk

The book is also available as an e-book at a price of £7.99, using Issuu. You can browse the first chapter of the book before you buy here: [click here](#)

[[] https://issuu.com/fhloffice/docs/cv_complete_digital?fr=sM2EzYTQzNjYxMDE]

New online event at St Paul's - Love is Born

[Love is Born: Exploring Advent and Christmas - Stephen Cottrell and Paula Gooder](#)

Premiers online on Wednesday 8 December, 7-7.45pm

Christmas is one of the defining points of the year, for believers and non-believers alike. In this conversation, Archbishop Stephen Cottrell and Biblical scholar Dr Paula Gooder explore the Advent themes that turn our thoughts to the real meaning of our lives, and the Christmas stories themselves: what Jesus' birth means, how the world is a different place because of it, why Christmas is much more hopeful and also darker than we may think, and why it's all about love.

Stephen Cottrell is the Archbishop of York. Author of more than 20 books, including *Walking Backwards to Christmas* and *Let it Slow: An Advent Calendar with a Difference*. His most recent is *Dear England*, a letter to the country on why the Christian narrative still makes sense today.

November 17, 2021

Paula Gooder is a renowned Biblical scholar and theologian, the Chancellor of St Paul's Cathedral and the author of numerous academic and popular books including Journey to the Manger: Exploring the Birth of Jesus and The Meaning is in the Waiting: The Spirit of Advent.

The event is free, but if you are able to make a donation to the continuing learning programme at St Paul's Cathedral when you register for the event we would be very grateful.

Find out more, register free, and donate to the Adult Learning programme

<https://www.stpauls.co.uk/learning-faith/adult-learning/new-online-events/love-is-born>

Poem for today

The Lake Isle of Innisfree by William Butler Yeats

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made;
Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive for the honey-bee,
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.

And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes
dropping slow,
Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket
sings;
There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow,
And evening full of the linnet's wings.

November 17, 2021

I will arise and go now, for always night and day
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements grey,
I hear it in the deep heart's core.

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