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Image of the day - New reflections St Patrick's Cathedral

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photographed by Scott Hayes**

News Reports

Justice Minister addresses MU service on gender-based violence

Justice Minister Naomi Long addressed a Down & Dromore diocesan Mothers' Union (MU) service in St Mark's Dundela on Saturday highlighting the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence Campaign.

This is an international campaign which takes place each year from 25 November (International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women) until 10 December (International Human Rights Day).

Throughout the campaign, MU members join with others globally to raise awareness of, and call for an end to, gender-based violence in all forms and in all societies.

Naomi Long commended MU for their work in this area and said:

“During the 16 days of activism it is fitting that we reflect on work that has been undertaken to address gendered based violence as well as looking forward as to how we can all collectively address these issues.

“I have made it clear that progressing domestic abuse legislation is a key priority for me.

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“A new domestic abuse offence will close a gap in the current law and ensure that protection is not limited to physically violent behaviour, as at present. It also sends a clear message that domestic abuse in all its forms, both physical and non–physical abusive behaviour, is wrong and will not be tolerated.”

MU chose Saturday 27th November as a day to gather and highlight the theme, “No More 1 in 3”, raising awareness of the fact that 1 in 3 women will be abused in some way in their lifetime.

In a powerful act of solidarity and symbolism, at 1.03 pm, the congregation joined MU members across Britain and Ireland in a 3–minute silence. The day was also marked by the wearing of purple scarves.

The rector of Dundela, Canon Helen Steed, gave a reflection on John 4: 7–26 and the Samaritan woman’s life–changing encounter with Jesus. She said:

“We have a joint calling, a shared responsibility as Christians to support the abused and speak with a prophetic

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voice, challenging the structures and individuals that distort God's creation – women and men created in God's image.”
Practical support

MU members in Down and Dromore have observed the 16 days of Activism Campaign since 2014. For many years they have also provided support for Woman's Aid refuges in the diocese who say that; “It really does make a difference to the women and their families.”

Since Covid, restrictions have meant that only new items can be accepted and so many bags of hand knitted adult and children's clothing, trauma teddies, bales of towels, bed linen and toiletries have been donated together with food vouchers. One refuge alone has received almost £700 worth of food vouchers in the last two years to help those women and children in most need.

Woman's Aid experience a high demand for their services and the expectation is that this demand will continue to increase. Only last week the Secretary General of the United Nations stated that gender-based violence continues to be the most “pervasive and pressing issue in the world today”.

Joy Silcock, Social Policy Representative for Down and Dromore MU said: “I want to thank the Justice Minister for taking time out of her very busy schedule to be with us today. We value hearing from her how changes to our law in NI will help those families impacted by gender-based violence. We in this diocese will continue to focus our prayers during these 16 days and to raise awareness and offer practical help throughout the whole year.”

Climate chaos in South Sudan: Christian Aid Ireland's Christmas Appeal

There are several long-standing links between Irish churches and South Sudan. Down & Dromore has longstanding links to South Sudan through its partnership with Maridi Diocese, and are supporting the Christian Aid Ireland Christmas Appeal.

For a long time, 27-year-old Adut Mariu had no choice but to give her children water that she knew wasn't safe.

“We were in desperate need,” Adut said. “To look after my children, they had to drink the dirty river water.”

People were frequently ill from drinking the water but the river closest to the village of Biet in the north-west of South Sudan was the community's only water source.

To make matters worse, Adut is also on the frontline of the climate crisis. South Sudan suffers with drought and flooding and many areas have been badly hit for three years in a row. Locust swarms have also devastated crops.

The river near Adut's village dries up during periods of drought, forcing people to walk long distances in search of water. And it floods during the rainy season, polluting fragile water sources, killing crops and destroying homes. But with support from Christian Aid, a new borehole was sunk in Adut's village, bringing clean water for her children to drink, whatever the weather.



“The water from the hand pump is very good. It’s free from disease. We drink it with peace of mind.”

It means no more upset tummies from drinking dirty water.

Thanks to this borehole, Adut’s family was safe the last time the river flooded. “In the autumn it flooded but we were not going to the river. We drank the clean water,” Adut said proudly.

The borehole is life–changing but clean water is in short supply across the region and the borehole is being used by three times more people than it should be.

Your gifts this Christmas could help to build more boreholes, provide seeds and farming tools, and give mums the chance to set up small businesses to earn a cash income. With clean water, nutritious food and ways to earn money, mums like Adut won’t face such impossible choices.

Life for Adut has been tough, but so is she. She’s lived through displacement, conflict, loss and now the climate crisis. But she is still full of hope for her children’s futures.

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We all do what we can for the children in our lives, especially at Christmas.

To find out more and to donate, please visit christianaid.ie/christmas-appeal or you can make a telephone donation by calling (028) 9064 8133.

Scottish Bishops reintroduce obligation to attend Mass

Unlike the Bishops of England and Wales, who left the issue open after their recent conference - the Catholic Bishops of Scotland have issued a statement today reinstating the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days from early next year.

In a 'Pastoral Letter to the Catholics of Scotland' issued last weekend 27/28 November, Scotland's Catholic bishops have announced that with effect from Sunday 2 January 2022 the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of obligation will be reinstated. The requirement was dispensed at the beginning of the pandemic and although churches opened and communal worship resumed attendance was not obligatory. In their letter which was read at all Masses across Scotland last weekend the bishops say;

"We have often been asked about reinstating the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of obligation. In our fluid situation, this is not an easy judgment to make. Thanks, however, to the effort and good sense of so many, our churches have proven to be safe places. So, saving any

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serious worsening of the situation, we believe that Christmastide provides an opportune moment to restore the obligation. The obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holydays of Obligation will therefore be reinstated from Sunday 2nd January, the first of the new year."

The bishops' letter states that anyone who is ill, showing symptoms of COVID, having underlying health conditions or those with responsibilities for people in need of special care are not obliged to attend and anyone in those groups can continue to participate online.

The bishops go on to point out that: "online participation does not fulfil the obligation" noting that "Nothing can adequately replace actual presence. At the heart of our Christian life is the event of the Word becoming flesh and our incorporation through the Sacraments into his Body. It's to experience this that we come to church."

People and places

Bugs, Bees and Native trees in Dundalk

A tree planting initiative took place at St. Nicholas parish Church (The Green Church) this month.

Prof. Ronan Mullan from the Bugs, Bees and Native Trees initiative also attended the event on November 13th to explain the project as well as Church of Ireland's Armagh Diocesan Youth and Children's Officer, Mr David Brown, and Rev Richard Moore who blessed the children and their planting, Michelle O'Keefe writes in the Dundalk Democrat.

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The Diocese of Armagh, the “Bugs, Bees and Native trees” project and Christian Aid (Ireland) have teamed up to plant local species of trees across Parishes supporting children in being more aware of better protecting God’s gift of creation, locally and globally, a spokesperson explained.

Ms Tori Eveson of St. Nicholas Parish Church who is committee member of the AYAC (Armagh Youth and Children) in the Diocese of Armagh organized some members of the church from Sunday school, Mothers’ Union and the church choir, all helped plant trees and shrubs within the church yard which is part of the “Bugs, Bees and Native Trees” initiative.

The Bugs, Bees and Native Trees, is to support young people and concerned citizens on the island of Ireland to churchnewsireland@gmail.org

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address issues of the environment, biodiversity and climate change through tree planting and environmental community initiatives.

Tori registered all five churches within the Dundalk Group of Parishes for this project and all trees are linked to the website www.bugsbeesandnativetrees.com/projects and the aim is to cover the Island of Ireland with newly planted trees. The trees are all numbered with a code which is also linked to the site.

Dundalk Democrat.

Clogher Mothers' Union host services against gender-based violence

Cloghe Diocese Mothers' Union (MU) hosted two services last weekend to mark their 16 Days of Activism against gender-based violence campaign, part of an international campaign from Mothers' Union and others.

The MU arranged two services as part of its support for the campaign.

St. Macartin's Cathedral, Enniskillen, and St. Patrick's Church, Monaghan, were the venues.

The Bishop of Clogher, Rev. Dr. Ian Ellis, spoke at the service in Enniskillen. Representatives were also present from Women's Aid in Enniskillen and Tearmann Domestic Violence Services in Monaghan.

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On November 27, on a global day of action, members around the world stepped out of their comfort zones to support survivors. They were each invited to wear a purple scarf and to host three minutes' silence at 1:03, supporting the anti-violence theme of #NOMORE1IN3.

The 16 Days of Activism against gender-based violence is an international campaign that runs from November 25 (International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women) through to December 10 (International Human Rights Day).

Throughout the campaign, Mothers' Union joins with others globally to raise awareness of, and call for an end to, gender-based violence in all forms and in all societies.

As part of this campaign, a 16 Days Prayer Diary is available. It is a captivating and compelling set of reflections, exploring gender-based violence.

In addition to highlighting the issues involved, it reveals the positive work taking place across the Church of Ireland in engaging with domestic abuse and gender-based violence.

The diary can be downloaded from the Mothers' Union website at www.mothersunion.ie.

Wreathmas in Magherafelt

A Christmas “Wreath” making morning organised and led by Alyson Scott was held in St Swithin’s Hall on 20 November. Those who came along made some wonderful “Christmas

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wreaths” which will adorn their front doors in the run up to Christmas. Donations were received in aid of the Baby Basics Magherafelt outreach project. The wonderful total of £1000 was raised. Well done to all concerned!

Family baptism in Innishmaccsaint



Sunday was a very special day for the Acheson family. Baby Arthur Thomas Acheson was welcomed into the church family. He is son to Robert and Sarah Acheson. It was made even more special as his Granny Denise baptised him.

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St Bartholomew's Dublin Art & Fine Print Sale

Saint Bartholomew's Church will host an art & fine prints sale in the United Arts Club, 3 Fitzwilliam Street, from 6.00pm on Friday December 3.

The art will be on display in the upstairs main reception room and will be opened by Ib Jorgensen, whose decades-long career in Irish fashion has made him one of the most distinguished names in the business. There will be a wine reception and a raffle on the night.

All are invited to join this very special event and take the opportunity to purchase very beautiful works of art and prints. There will be an option of further viewing and an opportunity to buy on the Saturday, and St Bartholomew's will announce the time for this, if required, closer to the date.

Please note that parking in the area is metred until 7.00pm and you will require a mask and covid pass for entry.

New virtual tour of St George's Visitor Centre, Carrick-on-Shannon

Step inside St George's Heritage and Visitor Centre with a wonderful new 360 degree virtual tour.

The new online attraction allows you to explore St George's in full with six different viewing points to choose from inside and out.

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St. George's Church, built in 1827, has been a place of Church of Ireland worship for nearly 200 years.

In 2005, the Church was restored and refurbished. The refurbishment of St. George's Church included the building of a new heritage centre. Visitors are welcome as part of the St. George's Tour to view a video presentation. Leitrim – Enduring and Enchanting and the Seamus Geraghty Collection donated to Carrick-on-Shannon including original papers belonging to the Clements Estate (Lord Leitrim).
Courtesy the Leitrim Observer



Welcome to Enniskillen

Pictured above is The Rev Chris West following his first service in St Macartin's Cathedral, Enniskillen on Advent Sunday.

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The Rev Chris has taken up the post of Curate Assistant in St Macartin's Cathedral following his transfer from the Diocese of Dublin.

Also pictured are Audrey Williamson (Churchwarden), Scott Elliott (Parish Reader), Andy McCabe (Dean's Verger), The Dean The Very Rev Kenny Hall and Linda Kingston (Churchwarden)

PEACEPLUS Programme

Prior to PEACEPLUS being officially launched we are co-ordinating an on-line Pre-Development workshop on 10 Dec for its Youth Programme.

This ticketed event is for organisations who work with marginalised or excluded young people aged 14-24 years, who are at risk of becoming involved in anti-social behaviour, violence or paramilitary activity. It will provide advice & guidance on a future funding call for this important Investment Area of the EU PEACEPLUS Programme.

To apply for a ticket, please email:

communications@seupb.eu

Bishop's Palace in Raphoe at risk of collapse

An Taisce has warned the Bishop's Palace in Raphoe is at risk of collapse

The Bishop's Palace in Raphoe has been listed as one of the top ten at-risk buildings in the country.

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The Bishop's Palace in Raphoe was built in 1636 and destroyed by fire in 1838

Built in 1636, environmental charity An Taisce says it is one of ten buildings in the country which could be lost to future generations unless direct action is now taken to preserve them.

An Taisce has warned that the former Church of Ireland bishop's residence is suffering from structural problems that could lead to a full or partial collapse. A roofless shell none of the original fabric remains other than the external walls.

Also known as Raphoe Castle, the fortified mansion was built by Bishop John Leslie but, soon after its completion, came under attack during the 1641 Rebellion. It was a target again in 1653, this time by Cromwell's forces. In 1689, it

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was damaged in a raid by supporters of King James II, and it also withstood an attack by the United Irishmen in 1798. It was deliberately set ablaze in 1838.

An Taisce says the building remains an imposing and impressive ruin and stands as one of the most striking and important castles in Donegal.

Ian Lumley, head of advocacy at A Taisce said: “There is so much opportunity in restoration and conservation. In these pandemic times, we have seen the value of community and a growing appreciation for spending time and getting to know our local areas. Together with a homeless crisis that has not gone away, offer a compelling argument to save and repurpose many of the buildings listed below and many more for either community or residential use. Restoring and repurposing heritage buildings is also far more sustainable than allowing them to deteriorate, bulldozing them, and constructing new developments from scratch”.

Courtesy Donegal Alive

Perspective

Entering the season of Advent by William Morton

Be vigilant, awake and always on your guard’

Our Lord’s advice in the gospel reading for tomorrow, Advent Sunday, the beginning of a new church’ year, is timely and necessary: “Be on your guard.”

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Strange advice, we might be tempted to think, when, less than four weeks to Christmas, we are anticipating the joy of the festival rather than being on our guard against unspecified perils.

Yet, it is good advice, as never before. Latest news bulletins are reporting ever increasing numbers of confirmed cases of Covid-19 in the last few days causing hospitals and intensive care units to be overwhelmed, indeed to breaking point.

Millions, many of them children, remain unvaccinated in impoverished countries, and at huge risk to infection, serious illness, and death. Changing climate concerns intensify with serious threat to the future of the world. Conflicts and wars remain with us today as in centuries past.

It is at times such as these that God so often insists upon challenging our deepest anxieties and surprising us yet again with divine mercy and redemption. That is also the message of today's gospel narrative. Even in the midst of the world's confusion and chaos, Jesus reassures us: "The Kingdom of God is near". As difficult as it may sometimes be to discern its presence. Our Lord faced turbulent times as well – born of parents forced to seek shelter for the night in a cow shed – not exactly the palace of a prince or king.

Yet, the surprise of Christ's incarnation forces us to look again in our own age at the "signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars", and to consider anew the signs of God's involvement in the world about us.

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Advent is the season when we learn to overcome our “fear and foreboding” and once more open our hearts to others just as God has disclosed and demonstrated his love for us in Christ.

Advent also reminds us that our spiritual winter will come to an end. The fig tree will again blossom and bloom. “Summer is near,” our Lord reassures us – even at the beginning of Advent. “Our redemption is drawing near.”

We pray for all who suffer,
to all for whom this global pandemic is
a daily nightmare.
For the sick, for those who care for the sick.
For those whose jobs are affected.
And who worry about the next meal
or how to be safe.
For those battling with loneliness and isolation.
Lord, be our healer, our provider,
and our abiding presence.



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Amid all the difficulties of this life, when uncertainty and fear loom near, may we ever look to Jesus, and put all our faith and trust in Him, mindful that His word and promise to His people “will not pass away”.

Let us remember His timely warning: “Be on your guard”. We must always recall that, as the Gospel reminds us, our Lord will come like a thief in the night, and at a time when we least expect him. As we enter the Advent season, may we be vigilant, awake, and always on our guard for Christ’s ‘Second Coming’.

The Very Reverend Doctor William Morton, Dean of St Patrick’s Cathedral Dublin, writing in the Belfast News Letter on Saturday past

Poem for today

When all the others were away at Mass by Seamus Heaney

When all the others were away at Mass
I was all hers as we peeled potatoes.
They broke the silence, let fall one by one
Like solder weeping off the soldering iron:
Cold comforts set between us, things to share
Gleaming in a bucket of clean water.
And again let fall. Little pleasant splashes
From each other's work would bring us to our senses.

So while the parish priest at her bedside
Went hammer and tongs at the prayers for the dying

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And some were responding and some crying
I remembered her head bent towards my head,
Her breath in mine, our fluent dipping knives-
Never closer the whole rest of our lives.

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