

Church News Ireland



Image of the day – Waterford’s Hope and Friendship Tree

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The Hope and Friendship Tree, the brainchild of the South East Construction Workers Group, is standing in Waterford's Christ Church Cathedral throughout the Christmas celebrations the Waterford News & Star reports.

Speaking to the Waterford News & Star in Christ Church, group member Martin Hourigan said that 112 wooden hands were assembled into a Christmas tree design, with almost another 100 hands also designed and signed for this year.

“Each of the hands has been taken from an outline that each participant themselves has drawn of their own hands, which they also wrote a message of hope on,” said Martin.

“And we got a lot of those outlines from a conference that Waterford Disability Network (WDN) held in the Large Room on November 10 when people took the time to draw their hands and include a message.”

From City & County Mayor John O'Leary to prominent diplomats, including the British, German and Spanish Ambassadors to Ireland, broadcaster Niall Power, journalist John O'Connor and dozens of school children, the hands and messages were plentiful.

Martin added: “The war in Ukraine is on a lot of our minds at the moment, as you can even see on the tree itself (“I wish to go back to my own country,” wrote Nikita) and then of course there are so many issues at home as well in terms of homelessness and poverty. So this tree is about hope, friendship and a bright future for people here in Ireland and throughout the world. We couldn’t do this the last few years due to Covid so it’s great to have the tree here again and to have had such great support for it.”

The tree, sponsored by M&R Steel Fabrication (which sponsored its steel frame), Smartply Europe Ltd and Morris’s DIY and Builders Providers, also earned recognition from President Michael D Higgins, who provided his poem, ‘Take Care’, to be read at the launch.

The honours were performed by Devon Lonergan.

“In the journey to the light, the dark moments should not threaten. Belief requires that you hold them steady. Bend, if you will, with the wind. The tree is your teacher, roots at once more firm from experience in the soil made fragile. Your gentle dew will come and a stirring of power to go on towards the space of sharing. In the misery of the I, in rage, against all others, but to weaken is to die in the misery of the knowing the journey abandoned towards the sharing of all human hope and cries is the loss of all we know, of the divine reclaimed for our shared humanity. Hold firm. Take care. Come home together.”

Mary O’Donoghue, who also spoke at the launch, which was also attended by Dean of Waterford Bruce Hayes, outlined what the tree means.



Martin Hourigan of the South East Construction Workers Group, speaking at the launch of the Friendship Tree at Christ Church Cathedral

“It represents all the people of the world, our hopes and friendships... Many of us survived Covid but it left its mark which many people are still dealing with. Others weren’t so lucky and we lost many friends. But have we learned anything? Maybe not. We still have war, homelessness, poverty, famine, greed, hate, lies. How can we fix this? I don’t know but tearing each other down won’t help. Is there

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hope? There is always hope. We all have hopes and dreams, some realistic but if hope is gone, what is left?"

So why use a hand as a symbol? Mary continued: "Before Covid we all greeted each other with handshakes to show our friendship. Through Covid we lost all physical contact with our friends, which had a major affect on us all. The hands are there to show we can shake hands again and be there for one another. Our messages of hope written within the hands are to show others that we all have the same hopes and dreams."

The messages on the many hands on and beneath the tree were thoughtful, while incredibly varied.



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“I hope that all orphanages and sick children get what they want from Santa... My hope for 2023 is to smash Crossfit open!... My hope is to have a new baby... There are people there who want to listen when you are ready to talk... Don't let the 'muggles' get you... I hope every animal I care for lives a happy and healthy life by my side before passing peacefully in their sleep within my arms... Waterford to win the All-Ireland!... Always let your conscience be your guide.”

When asked to outline my own hand, I then added the following message: “That heavy hearts everywhere are lifted.”

Photos and report courtesy the Waterford News & Star

News reports

God gave me the gift of moving people, Archbishop of York says

The Archbishop of York has said God gave him the “ability to move people and make them cry” – a gift he does not abuse.

Writing for The Sunday Telegraph, Stephen Cottrell described growing up at an academically unambitious school, discovering his talent for talking and how being convinced to attend an all-girls' sixth form “saved” his life.

The Archbishop, who was appointed to the role in 2020, grew up in Leigh-on-Sea, Essex. In the article, he described

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his school as: “set up to pour people into the labour market – you left at 15 and got a job.”

His school reports dismissed him as “a bit of a dreamer”, he said, while failing to see his potential, but his life was transformed by a book report he presented to his class.

“Amazingly I’d read the book, which I’d really enjoyed, and done the homework, so I had prepared a text. But when I stood up to speak in front of the class I abandoned my notes

Thank You, Creator God,
Eternal Christ,
Reconciling Spirit
for the transformative power of Emmanuel,
God with Us.



and just started talking to my peers extemporaneously about the book," he said.

“And as I started talking I had this experience that I knew I had their attention, in fact I sort of had them in the palm of my hand, everybody was with me and they were listening.

“And it was a powerful moment. Standing up in that classroom I didn’t make the connection that one day I’d become a priest, but I think I realised – and I feel embarrassed saying this to you – that God had given me probably one of His greatest gifts, that I’ve got the ability to move people. I know I can make a congregation cry, but I don’t turn it on, and I hope I don’t abuse the gift.”

The Archbishop singled out a “Mr Sennett”, the deputy head teacher at his school who identified potential in him and persuaded him to try and join the nearby girls’ school for sixth form. His own school did not have one.

It was that decision, he said, that “maybe saved” his life by placing him in a culture of learning. It was at that school that his religious education teacher, Violet Rouse, led him to explore his faith.

The Archbishop eventually returned to the school, which is now high-achieving, when he became Bishop of Chelmsford and was invited to be a governor.

He described his mixed feelings towards his education, saying that “in a funny kind of way it made me”.

Christmas message from Bishop Martin Hayes and Bishop Ferran Glenfield

The following is a Christmas message from Bishop Martin Hayes, Roman Catholic Bishop of Kilmore and Bishop Ferran Glenfield, Church of Ireland Bishop of Kilmore, Elphin & Ardagh:

“I have taken root in a privileged people” (Ecclesiasticus 24:12) – a line from the Old Testament wisdom literature. It indicates how God has always wanted to be among us and to care for us.

“At this time, we are living in a troubled world, with the war in Ukraine and famine in the Horn of Africa being among the



places that we are hearing about. They are places far away yet near to us as news of suffering due to war, famine, destruction and death are communicated hourly and daily via our screens, radio channels and newspapers.

“Indeed, the effects of these situations are having an impact upon us here in Ireland with the arrival of an increasing number of refugees. Also, we know that more people in Ireland are suffering the effects of simply trying to make ends meet.

“The Christmas story is about the baby Jesus being born at the darkest time of the year. Joseph and Mary undertook a considerable journey of 90 miles (almost 150km) from Nazareth to Bethlehem, to the city of Joseph’s ancestors to complete the Roman census.

“We remember that Mary, nine months pregnant, travelled on a donkey during Winter. Their uphill and downhill journey took some days, and they endured freezing nights as well as the threat of outlaws and wild animals.

“Then Jesus was born among strangers in the noisy and dirty conditions of a cave used for housing animals, as there was no place else. Therefore, Jesus came among us as a helpless vulnerable child born into poverty and hardship.

“In that spirit of Christmas, we welcome family and friends, we give gifts, and we are mindful of the those suffering the effects of war, poverty and hardship. It is a time of goodwill, and we like to include others and provide as best we can for those in need.

“We are that privileged people challenged to include others and we can respond especially at Christmas time. In the aftermath of the worst effects of the pandemic, we appreciate all the more the value of being able to gather, provide a welcome and include each other in our gatherings.

“We give thanks for the opportunity to reach out to others, especially, those most in need at this time in our world, our country and our communities. As a privileged people, whom God has come among as a little helpless baby, we are called to include others especially those who are suffering hardship and poverty.

“We give thanks for that desire within us to provide what we can for those in need. May we respond generously to that desire within us so that others may experience the love of God, a light in the midst of darkness, the ways in which God cares for us through us. We give thanks to God who has taken root in a privileged people.

“With prayerful good wishes in the spirit of Christmas.”

Archbishop of Canterbury met and prayed with asylum seekers

On Friday Archbishop Welby likened prayers for migrants on “perilous journeys” to those for the Holy Family.

He made the remarks after a pastoral visit to Napier Barracks in Folkestone, in his own Diocese of Canterbury, where he met and prayed with asylum seekers.

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The former army barracks, which are for men only, accommodates asylum seekers from all over the world including Eritrea, Somalia, Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Archbishop was shown around the centre, which can hold 328 people who are going through the asylum process and stay between 60 to 90 days, and heard stories from men who described some of their circumstances.

He told the men: “All of you know joy. All of you know sadness. All of you are missing your family.”

The Archbishop went to the dorm area where the men sleep, the gym, the recreation space and the multi-faith area where he led a prayer service which included a Bible reading and a Christmas carol.

After the visit he said: “Today I made a pastoral visit to Napier Barracks in Canterbury diocese to hear the stories of those here seeking asylum. Like the Holy Family, we keep all those on perilous journeys in our prayers this Christmas.”

Last year the centre was ruled unlawful by the High Court after a legal challenge by six residents over the “squalid” accommodation.

‘Our Christian heritage should inspire us to treat asylum seekers with compassion’

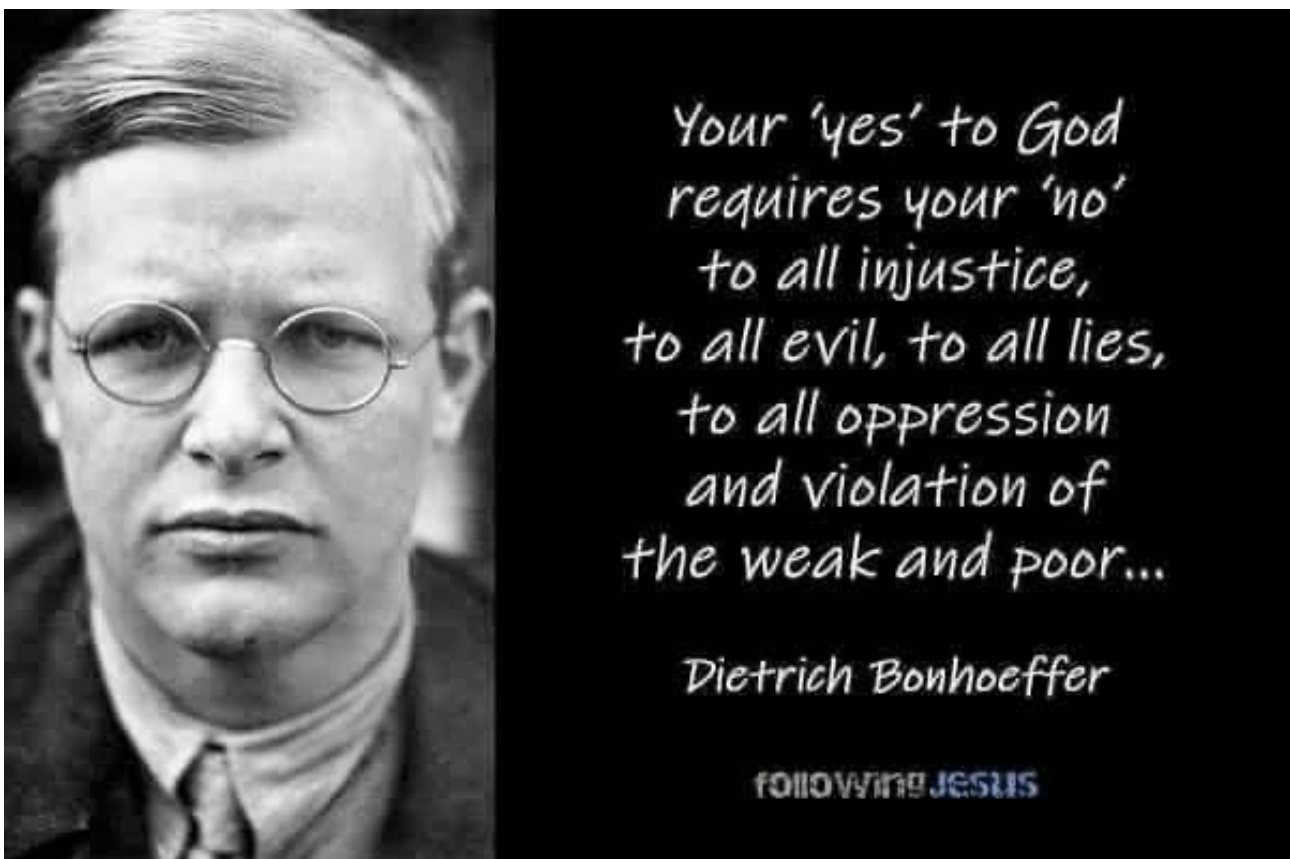
The Home Office was warned by Public Health England (PHE) that the accommodation was unsuitable when it was initially designated to house asylum seekers.

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The six men, all said to be “survivors of torture and/or human trafficking”, argued that the Home Office unlawfully accommodated people at the barracks and conditions there posed “real and immediate risks to life and of ill-treatment”.

Mr Justice Linden ruled in favour of the men in June last year and found that the Home Office acted unlawfully when deciding the former military camp was appropriate.

At the time the Home Office said that the site would “continue to operate and provide safe and secure accommodation” and that the judgement did not require them to close it.



They added they would “carefully consider the ruling and our next steps”.

Campaigners including Liberty and the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants have previously called for the barracks to be shut down.

Last week it emerged that dozens of asylum seekers are being moved out of hotels to the barracks.

Archbishop Welby has previously spoken out against the treatment of migrants. Earlier this year the entire leadership of the Church of England united in condemnation of the Government's plan to deport migrants to Rwanda as an "immoral policy that shames Britain".

All 25 bishops in the House of Lords – including the archbishops of Canterbury and York – said deportations and forced returns of asylum seekers "were not the way".

"Whether or not the first deportation flight leaves Britain [on Tuesday] for Rwanda, this policy should shame us as a nation," they said.

"The shame is our own, because our Christian heritage should inspire us to treat asylum seekers with compassion, fairness and justice, as we have for centuries."

Earlier in the day the Archbishop visited a food bank in Canterbury run by All Saints Canterbury (Church of England) church where he met with people affected by the cost of living crisis.

He made the visit as new research by the Church of England shows nearly three million adults in the UK are

estimated to have sought help from church or other religious organisations since the start of the year.

Pope's Christmas 2022 Urbi et Orbi Message 'The Lord's birth is the birth of peace'

Pope Francis delivered his traditional Christmas greetings and 'Urbi et Orbi' message and blessing today from the central loggia of St Peter's Basilica. Thousands of pilgrims gathered in the square on a sunny and mild day to hear him.

In his Christmas message the Pope said this day brings joy when we "turn our gaze to Bethlehem," and the "Lord comes to the world in a stable and is laid in a manger for animals" since there was no room at the inn when Mary was to give birth.

"The true light, which enlightens everyone was coming into the world," he recalled from today's Gospel.

Jesus is born in our midst; he is God with us. He comes to accompany our daily lives, to share with us in all things: our joys and sorrows, our hopes and fears.

The Lord comes to us "as a helpless child...poor among the poor," knocking on the "door of heart to find warmth and shelter."



Pope Francis encouraged everyone to contemplate the true message of Christmas and rise above "the hue and din" of this time when the focus can be more on the festivities and gifts, hardening our hearts, rather than focusing on the great event of the Son of God born for us.

"Like the shepherds of Bethlehem, surrounded by light, may we set out to see the sign that God has given us. May we overcome our spiritual drowsiness and the shallow holiday glitter that makes us forget the One whose birth we are celebrating."

Quoting Saint Leo the Great, "the Lord's birth is the birth of peace", the Pope said Jesus is truly our peace, one the world cannot give.

Jesus Christ is also the way of peace. By his incarnation, passion, death and resurrection, he has opened the way that leads from a world closed in on itself and oppressed by the dark shadows of enmity and war, to a world that is open and free to live in fraternity and peace. Let us follow that road!

To follow Jesus means doing away with the burdens that can weigh on us and become obstacles. Pope Francis said these can include greed, pride, thirst for power, hypocrisy, problems of old as they are of today that "exclude us from the grace of Christmas" and "block the entrance to the path of peace." The Pope lamented that a result of this reality is that the "icy winds of war" still hurt humanity today.

If we want it to be Christmas, the Birth of Jesus and of peace, let us look to Bethlehem and contemplate the face of the Child who is born for us! And in that small and innocent face, let us see the faces of all those children who, everywhere in the world, long for peace.

Looking at our world today, the Pope called on everyone to "see the faces of our Ukrainian brothers and sisters" who are experiencing darkness and cold this year, many faraway from home due to ten months of war devastation.

May the Lord inspire us to offer concrete gestures of solidarity to assist all those who are suffering, and may he enlighten the minds of those who have the power to silence the thunder of weapons and put an immediate end to this senseless war!

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The Pope decried today's grave "famine of peace" in other parts of the world of what he termed this "third world war." He recalled the people of Syria, still suffering from a years old conflict that has fallen into the background, and those living in the Holy Land where violence and casualties have increased in recent months. He prayed that in this land that witnessed the Lord's birth there may be renewed dialogue and efforts to build mutual trust between Israelis and Palestinians.

May the Child Jesus sustain the Christian communities living in the Middle East, so that each of those countries can experience the beauty of fraternal coexistence between individuals of different faiths.

The Pope remembered the people of Lebanon and encouraged the international community to give the country a hand in its struggle for survival. "May the light of Christ illumine the region of the Sahel," so that peaceful coexistence between peoples may take root again over the conflicts in the region. The Pope then prayed for a lasting truce in Yemen, reconciliation in Myanmar and Iran, and an end to all bloodshed.

Turning to the Americas, the Pope mentioned in particular the people of Haiti, who have been suffering for many years, and he prayed that political authorities and all people of good will throughout the continents work together to overcome social and political tensions.

Recalling how Bethlehem means "house of bread," the Pope called on us to remember children who go hungry today while so much food is wasted and resources are

spent instead on weapons. He pointed out how the war in Ukraine has worsened the reality of world hunger, especially in Afghanistan and the Horn of Africa, facing widespread famine. He lamented how wars can use food as a weapon by making distribution difficult to people already suffering.

On this day, let us learn from the Prince of Peace and, starting with those who hold political responsibilities, commit ourselves to making food solely an instrument of peace.

The Pope then called on our solidarity when remembering the unemployed and poor experiencing hardship in this time of economic crisis.

As Jesus came into a world marked by indifference and hostility, the Pope said today also we see the same with how foreigners and the poor face rejection today. He called on everyone to find room in their hearts for displaced persons and refugees who "knock at our door in search of some comfort, warmth and food."

Let us not forget the marginalized, those living alone, the orphans and the elderly who risk being set aside, and prisoners, whom we regard solely for the mistakes they have made and not as our fellow men and women.

In conclusion, the Pope explained how Bethlehem "shows us the simplicity of God, who reveals himself not to the wise and the intelligent but to the little ones, to those with a pure and open heart," and that may we, like the shepherds, be "amazed by the unthinkable event of God who becomes man for our salvation." God, the source of all good, makes

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himself poor in Jesus and asks "as alms our own poor humanity."

Let us allow ourselves to be deeply moved by the love of God. And let us follow Jesus, who stripped himself of his glory in order to give us a share in his fullness.

Watch the full Message on Vatican Youtube channel: Copy and paste

www.youtube.com/watch?v=XprzZZBWymE

Poem for today

The Oxen by Thomas Hardy

Christmas Eve, and twelve of the clock.
"Now they are all on their knees,"
An elder said as we sat in a flock
By the embers in hearthside ease.

We pictured the meek mild creatures where
They dwelt in their strawy pen,
Nor did it occur to one of us there
To doubt they were kneeling then.

So fair a fancy few would weave
In these years! Yet, I feel,
If someone said on Christmas Eve,
"Come; see the oxen kneel,

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“In the lonely barton by yonder coomb
Our childhood used to know,”
I should go with him in the gloom,
Hoping it might be so.

Speaking to the soul – Christmas series

Short reading and a prayer - daily on this site

Church News Ireland

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