



## **Presbyterian Moderator's Christmas Message: Remembering the greatest gift**

In his Christmas message, the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, Rt. Rev. Dr. Noble McNeely focuses on the giving and receiving of gifts, especially those that create a lasting memory.

He talks of a memorable, yet humbling gift of a scrawny chicken that he received earlier this year in Zambia, and a Christmas shoebox appeal at home for thousands of children in eastern Europe, which also made a lasting impression on him, “boxes of simple delight that will bring so much joy to those who receive them,” Dr. McNeely writes.

But it is the greatest gift that we have been given that he asks we remember and celebrate at this special time saying, “As we approach Christmas Day itself, let us remember another gift, a gift that has been given freely: the one and only perfect gift of Jesus, coming to earth and meeting humanity in its greatest need.

“The birth of Christ – and the salvation that He offers to all who will receive Him - is a wonderful demonstration and constant reminder of God’s perfect love for each of us. This gift is a living memory, which we celebrate, and a precious reminder that at just the right moment in history, “when the time had fully come, God sent his Son” (Galatians 4:4).

*See page 18 below for the Full Text of the Moderator’s 2017 Christmas Message*

## New Chief Executive for Christian Aid

Christian Aid has announced the appointment of Amanda Khozi Mukwashi as Chief Executive.

Amanda has more than 20 years' experience, extensive knowledge and expertise in working to alleviate poverty, injustice and inequality, with a special focus on women's leadership, civic engagement and volunteering.

Her most recent appointment was as the Chief of Volunteer Knowledge and Innovation for the United Nations Volunteer Programme, based in Germany, a post she has held since December 2012. Prior to this she was the Director of Policy for VSO International, based in London, where she was responsible for programme policy and programme effectiveness across the whole federation and VSO global.

She has also served as Head of External Relations and Head of Programmes at Skillshare International UK as well as Women in Business Coordinator at the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa in Lusaka where she began her career in international development.

Amanda has a Master's degree in International Economic Law from the University of Warwick, and a Bachelor of Laws degree, from the University of Zambia.

Dr Rowan Williams, Chair of Trustees, comments that 'Amanda comes with very special qualifications and aptitude for this enormous and exhilarating position. We are delighted to announce this appointment and look forward to welcoming Amanda.'

Amanda says 'I am humbled and absolutely thrilled to be joining such a family as Christian Aid. Christian Aid represents to me, much of the goodness found in humanity.'

Amanda will take up her duties at Christian Aid in April 2018.

## **The ability of disability at Nenagh Christmas Tree Festival**

Saint Cronan's Association, which provides services to people with intellectual disabilities, is the partner for this year's Nenagh Christmas Tree Festival. One of the winning trees last year was their 'Journey to Bethlehem', telling the Christmas story from the visit of the angel



**The 'Journey to Bethlehem' tree, one of last year's winning trees.**

Gabriel to Mary to tell her she has been chosen to be the mother of Jesus, all the way to the coming birth in a stable. It was designed and created with a brainstorming session and used story boards to develop the scenes along the way.

The arts & crafts and woodwork group were

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responsible for much of it, including the cutting out of figures and the crocheted and stiffened angels and snowflakes. It was so beautifully thought out and brought joy to everyone who saw it, and particularly the children. This winning tree illustrates once again that 'ability' is the key element of 'disability'.

Trees are unique to the individual. This new one, by Isobel Deere, is hung with animals and has a dedication: "This tree is in remembrance of my grandad James, who loved animals, especially horses. Hope you like my tree. Merry Christmas everybody. From Isobel."

Come to the Nenagh Christmas Tree Festival and see what else people have created at St Mary's Church of Ireland, Wednesday December 13th to Sunday December 17th, 1-6pm each day.

## **Cork launch of new book: 55 Ways to Connect with Families in your Parish**

On Sunday last Bishop John Buckley, Bishop of Cork and Ross, launched a new book entitled 55



*Ways to Connect with Families in your Parish* at Saint Columba's Church in Douglas, Cork.

The book is written by Sister Karen Kent OSU, a member of the Cork and Ross pastoral development team, and is published by Veritas Publications.

Speaking at the launch, Bishop Buckley described the book as a very useful resource for priests and lay people in preparation for the World Meeting of Families next year.

Inspired by *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis' Apostolic Exhortation on the joy of love, Bishop Buckley said that the book would be a welcome

guide book for priests and people and provides thoughtful and practical ideas for involving families especially in the Church throughout the year.

The book takes in all the key events in the Christian calendar from Advent at Christmas through to Lent and Easter and also covers selected feast days and secular events.

In his address Bishop Buckley referred to Pope Francis' beautiful description of the family 'the nearest hospital, the first school for the young and the best home for the elderly'. He said that many of our social ills today can be traced through a weakening of family relationships.

Bishop Buckley encouraged government officials to further promote the importance of the family, saying, 'No school, excellent though our schools are, and no teacher, dedicated and conscientious though our teachers are, will have the same influence on young people as the home has. Young people may leave their home, they may leave their parish, they may leave their country but they will never leave the home because the lessons learned in the home will never be forgotten. We all carry with us through life the stamp of the home. The kitchen floor, as they say in West Cork, is sacred ground.'



He concluded, 'One of the great challenges facing families today is how to hand on the faith to their children. It is their first duty and greatest privilege. The greatest challenge facing parents is how to weave the thread of daily family prayer into the changing pattern of modern life.'

For more information on *55 Ways to Connect with Families in your Parish* visit [www.veritasbooksonline.com](http://www.veritasbooksonline.com).

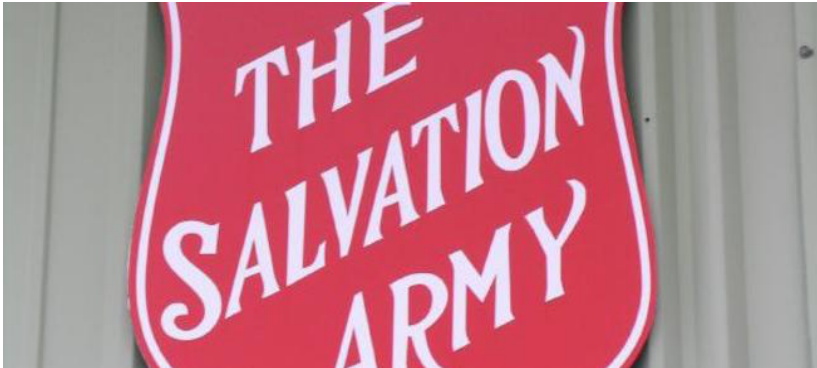
## **Salvation Army raises most money of any Christian charity in the UK**

The Salvation Army raised £209.008 million last year from a combination of fundraising and government sources.

The Salvation Army was born on the streets of the East End of London in 1865 and uses its money for many different societal needs including reducing homelessness, helping those in modern slavery and people in poverty.

The charity raised £126 million of that through volunteering and fundraising projects.

It is an openly Christian charity which also runs churches across the world and states on its



website it aims to: "make known the good news about Jesus Christ and to persuade people to become his followers."

Its international branch, Salvation Army International Trust, raised £59 million and was 8th on the list.

The second biggest Christian charity of Charity Financials website in terms of income is Christian Aid. Its annual income reached £107 million in 2016, and spends its money on fighting global poverty.

Also in the top 10 is World Vision UK at four and Tearfund at five.

The combined annual incomes of the top ten Christian charities in the UK is just over half a billion pounds.



## **Australian probe into child abuse calls for end to Catholic celibacy demands**

An Australian inquiry into child abuse has recommended the Catholic Church lift its demand of celibacy from clergy and clarify the extent that the seal of the confession conceals evidence of child abuse.

Australia's Royal Commission into Institution Responses to Child Sexual Abuse delivered its final 17-volume report and 189 recommendations following a wide-ranging investigation.

Australia's longest-running royal commission - which is the country's highest form of inquiry - has been investigating since 2012 how the Catholic Church and other institutions

responded to sexual abuse of children in Australia over 90 years.

The report heard the testimonies of more than 8,000 survivors of child sex abuse. Of those who were abused in religious institution, 62% were Catholics.

"We have concluded that there were catastrophic failures of leadership of Catholic Church authorities over many decades," the report said.

Recommendations include that the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference request that the Vatican consider introducing voluntary celibacy for clergy.

The bishops' body should also request clarity on whether information received in the confessional that a child has been sexually abused is covered by the seal of secrecy and whether absolution of a perpetrator should be withdrawn until the perpetrator confesses to police.

Catholic clerics who testified to the royal commission gave varying opinions about what if anything a priest could divulge about what was said in a confessional about child abuse.



## **The Hon Justice Peter McClellan AM and Justice Jennifer Coate hear proceedings at the commission**

The commission's recommendations, which with interim reports total 409, include making failure to report child abuse a criminal offence. Clerics would not be exempt from being charged. Pope Francis's former finance minister, Cardinal George Pell, testified in a video link from the Vatican in 2016 about his time as a priest and bishop in Australia. Pell this year became the most senior Catholic official to face sex offence charges.

Pell has vowed to fight the charges of sexual assault offences.

The commission found that the church's responses to complaints and concerns about clerics in Australia were "remarkably and disturbingly similar".

President of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, Archbishop Denis Hart, said the commission "would have significant impact on the way the Catholic Church and others operate in Australia".

He said the bishops would put to the Vatican the recommendations on celibacy and the confession.

"The seal of the confessional, or the relationship with God that's carried through the priest and with the person, is inviolable. It can't be broken," he told reporters.

He apologised for the church failing children in the past.

Catholicism is the largest denomination in majority-Christian Australia.



## **Sir William Hastings, hotelier and churchman**

The hotelier Sir William Hastings has died at the age of 89, his family has announced.

A statement issued by the family on Friday afternoon said: “It is with great sadness that the Hastings family announces that Sir William Hastings (89) passed away peacefully at home today following a short illness.

“He was surrounded by his wife Joy and children Julie, Howard, Allyson and Aileen.

“He was married to Joy for 57 years and as well as being a loving husband, father and grand-father, Billy was Ireland’s leading hotelier and we are immensely proud of his outstanding accomplishments.

A former pupil of Royal Belfast Academical Institution, he left school at 16 and went into the timber trade as a junior apprentice before joining his brother Roy in the family licensed trade business at 18. Together they owned many pubs mainly in East Belfast.

In 1964, he purchased his first hotel, the Adair Arms in Ballymena, and from then was the lifeblood of Northern Ireland’s hotel industry. He did not let the Troubles put him off as he continued to expand his portfolio with the purchase of six railway hotels from Grand Metropolitan in 1971. The beautiful Slieve Donard Hotel is the only one remaining today.

“He played a key role in restoring the hotel industry and in 1993, when many were shying away from investing, he purchased the Europa Hotel and transformed it into one of the world’s most famous hotels offering much local employment and trade to local suppliers.



His dedication to the industry was recognised when he received a Knighthood in 2009 having already been awarded a CBE and an OBE. The University of Ulster awarded him an honorary Doctor of Letters in 1998. He was Chairman and board member of a number of organisations including the Institute of Directors, the Transport Holding Company, the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and Bass Ireland and a passionate member and past president of the Belfast East Rotary Club for 50 years as well as a loyal parishioner formerly of Drumbeg Church of Ireland and latterly of Downpatrick Cathedral.

Throughout his life, he was proud to work with many charities including Help the Aged, Chest Heart and Stroke and Men Against Cancer and this dedication also contributed towards his Knighthood.

“His hobby was golf which he played every Saturday he could. His first club was Mahee Island where he was captain in 1958 and he was a member more recently at Malone Golf Club and Royal County Down.

He also had a great loyalty to Dundela Football Club in his younger days of being a Publican in the Belmont area. He took great pride in working together with us in the family business and until

he took ill earlier this year, he still came into his office every day and continued to play a key role as Chairman of Hastings Hotels. In 2015 Billy was immensely proud to announce the purchase of what is to be the seventh Hastings hotel and he was very much looking forward to seeing the rebirth of the Grand Central Hotel when it opens next year.

“We cannot describe the huge void that he has left in our lives but we take comfort in the fact that he was an inspiration to so many people and has left a lasting legacy which we will remain dedicated in honouring.”

## **The Moderator's 2017 Christmas Message**

The full text of the message -

I often open my mail with a bone-handled cheese knife that has sat on my desk for more than 30 years. I received it as a Christmas gift from a young boy I taught in Bible class. I thought it was a very unusual gift to get at the time, but three decades later I make good use of it. This was a gift that created a particular memory for me.



Over the years I have received many Christmas gifts that, I am sad to say, have long since been forgotten. But it is, however, very special to get a gift that you remember - and to give a gift that creates a lasting memory for someone else.

While in Zambia this year visiting our global mission worker, Diane Cusick, we travelled into the remote bush to visit a community and before leaving we were given a chicken by a couple of very humble villagers. It cost them dearly to give away the scrawny bantam, but it was their

pleasure to part with the bird and by doing so it etched a memory Florence and I won't forget.

Once again this year there will be thousands of Christmas gifts bought in our packed shops. Within days they will more than likely be forgotten and in many cases what was received wasn't something that was really needed.

So, should we consider giving gifts that will form a memory? Could we, as families, try something different that might create a memory that lasts? If we curtail the excesses and consider something imaginative, it may also make a difference to someone else's life.

While travelling around churches in recent months I have seen hundreds of specially prepared Christmas shoeboxes ready to be sent to eastern Europe. On a cold but bright December morning I visited Townsend Street Presbyterian Church in west Belfast, the main distribution point in Northern Ireland for the charity Samaritan's Purse. Here I met many faithful people packing some of the 37,000 boxes being sent out, boxes of simple delight that will bring so much joy to those who receive them.

When a child opens their surprise present, a lasting memory will be formed, especially as it might be the first time a Christmas gift has been received. Many organisations are providing opportunities to give to a Christmas appeal, or subscribe to an ethical gift, like a goat, that will form a lasting memory and practical assistance, for those who receive it.

As we approach Christmas Day itself, let us remember another gift, a gift that has been given freely: the one and only perfect gift of Jesus, coming to earth and meeting humanity in its greatest need. The birth of Christ – and the salvation that He offers to all who will receive Him – is a wonderful demonstration and constant reminder of God's perfect love for each of us. This gift is a living memory, which we celebrate, and a precious reminder that at just the right moment in history, "when the time had fully come, God sent his Son" (Galatians 4:4).

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