



The Gettys perform carol concert for US Vice President Mike Pence

Hymn writers Keith and Kristyn Getty have performed for US Vice President Mike Pence and his wife Second Lady Karen Pence.

The "In Christ Alone" creators and their touring band performed their modern hymns and led guests in traditional carol singing at the Vice President's residence.

The musical married couple from Northern Ireland also brought their Christmas tour to the the John F Kennedy Center for the Performing

Arts Opera House for a sold-out performance of "Sing! An Irish Christmas".

They led thousands of guests in traditional carol singing along with classical violinist David Kim and jazz bassist John Patitucci.

Vice President Mike Pence and his wife were also amongst the crowd.

The Sing! Tour is part of a global initiative aimed at reviving congregational singing. The Getty's next stop is Carnegie Hall in New York City.

Joint Christmas Message from the Archbishops of Armagh

In a joint Christmas message The Most Revd Richard Clarke & The Most Revd Eamon Martin comment on "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." John 1:5

The archbishops write: A couple of weeks ago, we both travelled to Rome to meet with members of the Sant'Egidio Community and to experience at first hand – however briefly – some of the wonderful work that these remarkable



The Anglican and Roman Catholic Primates of Ireland: Archbishop Eamon Martin (I), the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Armagh, and Archbishop Richard Clarke, the Church of Ireland Archbishop of Armagh.

Christian disciples are carrying out. Not only are members of the community working for reconciliation in many countries of the world, but they are also to be found among the dispossessed of Rome giving practical and material help. In more recent times they have been at the forefront of caring for – and taking responsibility for – refugees who have found their way (sometimes in the most difficult of circumstances) to Italy.

It was in this context that we had the opportunity, one evening, to meet a number of these refugees – some from Syria and some from Eritrea. Three Eritrean girls, possibly still teenagers, had arrived in Rome only a few hours earlier, having been rescued from danger in Ethiopia by members of the Sant'Egidio Community. In conversation, we asked the girls how they were now feeling. One of them, with a sudden huge smile on her face, replied in just one word – “safe”.

In the Old Testament God's people were promised that if they trust in the Lord, they will find a place of rest, safety, security, a refuge and a reason for hope and confidence. The Christmas promise went deeper and further. To those who would put their trust in Him, Jesus came to offer spiritual safety – the reward of eternal salvation.

Part of the challenge of Christmas is to seek to bring “safety”, in its widest sense, into the lives of those around us. There are people in our midst who are without the security of food or even of a roof over their heads. There are those who are newcomers to our country, perhaps of a different religious faith and culture, who feel that they are objects of suspicion and dislike. And there are also those whose need for security in

their lives is less evident – those who are alone and afraid, those who are without friends and without people who will “look out for them”, and some who feel that their lives have become aimless or “useless”, almost empty of hope and confidence. In the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew’s Gospel, Our Lord assures us that we meet him when we care for those who need us, whoever they may be. Christmas is a time when many of us are happy to have the emotional security and safety of our family and friends around us, and the comfort and assurance of strong faith in the birth of the Saviour. Let us be ready to share our safety and our “reasons for hoping” with others.

Archbishops broadcast on RTÉ1 TV on Christmas Day

The Archbishops of Armagh, Archbishop Richard Clarke and Archbishop Eamon Martin, will deliver their annual joint seasonal message on RTÉ1 TV on Christmas Day at 12.10pm. The broadcast this year will come from the Armagh Planetarium and Observatory. The Observatory was originally founded by Archbishop Robinson to advance human understanding of what lies beyond this world, physically and spiritually, and is today a modern astronomical research institute which is proud of its heritage.

The broadcast will also include contributions at the Planetarium from Windsor Hill Primary School, Newry; St Patrick's Primary School, Mullanaskea; St Patrick's Grammar School, Armagh; and the Royal School, Armagh.

The Christmas Message will be available on the RTÉ Player afterwards, and will also be broadcast on RTÉ Radio 1.

President praises work of Dublin Central Mission

The work of the [Dublin Central](#) Mission was praised by President [Michael D Higgins](#) during a visit there on Tuesday.

Founded in 1893, the [Abbey](#) Street-based mission is an agency of the [Methodist Church in Ireland](#), and, apart from a place of worship, it provides a base for many community and self-help groups. Its congregation is drawn from more than 20 countries.

Mr Higgins said many people had experienced the mission's warm embrace.

"There are many voices in our society, not just those with power. For instance, there are the



Rev Dr Laurence Graham, president of the Methodist Church in Ireland, presents a gift to President Michael D Higgins to mark his visit to the Dublin Central Mission, Abbey Street.

voices seeking basic needs such as food and shelter.”

Mr Higgins contrasted the lot of people seeking those things with those engaged in an insatiable pursuit of wealth and the mark of celebrity.

“There are many people addicted to acquiring ever more wealth. They should pause and reflect that it is much better to be living among people rather than numbers.”

Welcoming the President to the mission, Rev Dr [Laurence Graham](#), president of the Methodist Church in Ireland, thanked him for his interest, and for meeting his commitment to pay a visit to the mission.

He said that for more than 120 years the Methodist people of Dublin had, through the mission's work, provided shelter, support and care to the most vulnerable in the city. People battling addiction attended one of 17 different 12-step self-help groups. Four evenings a week 30 volunteers took turns in providing food, clothing and friendship to homeless people.

He said its work also included the provision of independent living facilities in two sheltered housing complexes in [Sandymount](#) and [Glenageary](#) in Dublin. Report courtesy The Irish Times

New initiative in Dublin to give pastoral support for clergy

A new initiative providing pastoral support for clergy has been launched in the United Dioceses of Dublin & Glendalough. 'Who Cares for the Carers' will equip clergy and provide resources for dealing with issues they face in ordained ministry.

What can we offer?
Support to clergy in areas of mentoring and support networks (for new incumbents), mediation, spiritual support, professional counselling and retreats.

How can we help?
If you feel you need to avail of Pastoral Support we can arrange for the appropriate professional type of help which will be most useful and, where appropriate, will offer up to four counselling sessions with a qualified counsellor.

When and where?
You can confidentially meet a member of the Pastoral Support Team at a time and place suitable to you both.

How to get in touch?
Please contact the archbishop's secretary Ruth Burleigh in strictest confidence at archdiablinoffice@gmail.com or by calling 01 4125 663.
(Please be assured that immediate and strictly confidential pastoral care in situations of urgency continues to be provided by the archbishop.)

PASTORAL SUPPORT

'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.'
(Matthew 11:28)

PASTORAL SUPPORT

The United Diocese of Dublin and Glendalough
is a registered charity. CHY 7249.

‘Who Cares for the Carers’ has been put in place following the completion of The Tanner Report which highlights extensive research into issues associated with ordained life and gives scope for encouragement of a fulfilled life on the part of clergy working alongside and in partnership with others, lay and ordained.

A pilot project seeks to equip clergy, particularly those in their first incumbency, to draw together a number of approaches. This will include the publication of a comprehensive booklet setting out the role of clergy and committees which will be widely available and will help clergy create and maintain appropriate boundaries.

Meanwhile, all concerned are referred to the resources made available on the Church of Ireland website around these issues and to the Dignity in Church Life documentation.

Arrangements have been made for the provision of counselling and a pilot mentoring programme has been established. This mentoring programme is aimed particularly at new incumbents who will be paired with established rectors to build a relationship of confidence and empowerment in the context of collaborative ministry and service. New incumbents will also be encouraged to consolidate their relationships with one another as a peer support group of critical friends.

Alongside this there is provision for a professional mediator who may be made available to clergy, both established and new, and on an entirely confidential basis. Announcing details of the initiative, Archbishop Michael Jackson, said that, within the love of God, the call to care for others was not intended to be a call away from self-understanding, self-belief and self-care. He said that the issues raised in The Tanner Report were reflected in studies carried out in other dioceses and in international research.

“If tithing is a Biblically-based principle of giving in church life, we should equally make tithing for self-care a principle in personal and in professional life. A further tithing should also be extended to the joys and responsibilities of family and domestic life and for the special friendships with people whom we cherish. My hope would be that united with a structured life of prayer and Scripture and sufficient relaxation and refreshment, the combination of these can enable each and every one of us to fulfil the shared duty of The Ordinal in an enriched and enriching service of God and community,” he said.

A number of issues on the experience of those in ordained ministry were raised in The Tanner Report, which was compiled by a group chaired by the Revd John Tanner.

Isolation emerged as a key factor in individual distress. Bureaucratic expectations, particularly when set alongside a very individual sense of calling, emerged as another key factor in loss of confidence, loss of direction and loss of professional self-worth. This can lead to heightened anxiety that radically diminishes happiness, both personal and domestic.

Alongside The Tanner Report, the Archbishop received reports from a group of clergy and a group of lay people. He has also consulted with the neighbouring diocese of Meath and Kildare and with the Diocese of Connor.

Prince Charles: don't take your Christian freedoms for granted

Prince Charles has urged Christians in the UK not to take for granted the freedom to practise their faith, as he pointed to extreme persecution against believers in the Middle East.

The Prince of Wales issued the stark warning after meeting Christian children forced from their homes by the recent bloody conflict to grip Iraq and Syria.

His Royal Highness said: "It is heart-breaking beyond words to see just how much pain and suffering is being endured by Christians in this day, simply because of their faith.

"As Christians we remember of course how our Lord called upon us to love our enemies and to pray for those who persecute, but for those confronted with such hatred and oppression I



can only begin to imagine how incredibly hard it must be to follow Christ's example."

More than 700,000 Christians have left Syria during a conflict which is now into its sixth year, while the major city of Aleppo has shed 75 per cent of its Christian population - only 35,000 remain.

Prince Charles attended a prayer service in central London on Tuesday at St Barnabas Church Pimlico, an Anglican church which also hosts a Middle Eastern Catholic congregation.

Addressing members of the local Melkite Greek-Catholic community, he said: "It is so vitally important in this season of Advent and throughout the year that Christians in this country and elsewhere, who enjoy the rights of

freedom to worship and freedom of expression, do not take those rights for granted.

"And that we remember to do what we can to support our fellow Christians [who are denied this rights]."

Islamic extremism remains the primary factor behind Iraq and Syria being ranked two of the countries where living as a Christian is most difficult, according to the anti-persecution charity Open Doors.

Disgraced US cardinal dies in Rome

Cardinal Bernard Law, who was forced to resign as archbishop of Boston 15 years ago over a Church sex abuse scandal, has died aged 86 in Rome.

Cardinal Law stepped down in 2002 after journalists reported he had moved paedophile priests between parishes rather than addressing victims' claims. The film Spotlight was later made about the allegations against dozens of priests in his Boston diocese.



Cardinal Bernard Law resignation send shockwaves through the Catholic church

After leaving Boston, Cardinal Law took a post at the Vatican.

He worked there until 2011.

The child sex abuse allegations, which covered events over a period of decades, led to hundreds of lawsuits and threatened the Boston diocese with bankruptcy.

As a result, it agreed to sell land and buildings for more than \$100m (£63m) to fund legal settlements for more than 500 victims.

The scandal prompted the Vatican to draw up new plans to combat child sex abuse in the Roman Catholic Church.

BBC pledges to have more of God in programming

The BBC has promised to do better religious broadcasting.

The BBC says that it is to “raise our game across all output” in the way that it treats religion, as the result of a year-long review of its religion and ethics output.

Plans include the establishment of a religion editor for news, a global team of specialist reporters, a greater focus on religious festivals, and making 2019 a “Year of Belief”.

In a foreword to the [BBC’s Religion and Ethics review](#), published on Wednesday, the Director-General of the BBC, Tony Hall, writes that the plans “will ensure that the BBC better reflects the UK, the world, and the role that religion plays in everyday life. They will also raise understanding of the impact religion has on decisions made at home and abroad.”



The review points out that, although in the UK only about 50 per cent of the population is affiliated to a religion, the global figure is 84 per cent, which is predicted to rise above 90 per cent in the next few decades.

Under the new plans, more religious voices, drawn from a wider range of ages and backgrounds, will be heard on existing BBC programmes, and new drama and documentary programmes will be sought. The religious themes and a wider range of religious festivals will be marked on flagship shows such as BBC1's *The One Show*, or Chris Evans's Radio 2 breakfast show.

There is also a commitment to making religion more explicable. The review states: "We want to do more to help people understand the role of Christianity in today's world, and more to understand other faiths and beliefs as well."

The existing items *Thought for the Day* and *Pause for Thought* “will continue as religious slots in primetime radio”. Although there will be occasions when these can relate to news stories, the review also states: “It is important that these slots are grounded in different lived experiences of faith . . . so that the item is not just a reflection of current events, but also a chance to learn more about other religious beliefs.”

A “Year of Beliefs” will be marked in 2019, with specialist programming and documentaries about religion and faith across the BBC.

More than 150 faith groups and experts were consulted as part of the review, including the Archbishop of Canterbury. The review reports: “Many stakeholders feel that the BBC doesn’t reflect the everyday role of faith or diversity of communities in our mainstream drama and comedy, and people of faith are often absent, poorly presented, or satirised.”

Recommendations include:

- elevating the post of religious-affairs correspondent to a religion editor within BBC news;
- the creation of new global team focusing on religion made up of specialist reporters;

- a “slow news” approach to big stories to give time to reflect how religion affects them, “i.e. why things happen rather than simply what is happening”;
- new “landmark” series and programmes “that explore religion in all its forms”;
- a biennial “Belief Summit”;
- a “Year of Beliefs” in 2019;
- a greater diversity of contributors across all channels and programmes;
- improving religious literacy both inside the BBC and outside in the general public;
- specific features and content for all religious festivals on flagship programmes;
- tackling religious issues in mainstream BBC dramas on TV and radio;
- new religious programming targeted at under-45s;
- working more closely with other “stakeholders”, including “faith and secular belief groups”, and organisations such as the Scottish Religious Advisory Committee and the Sandford St Martin Trust.

The Bishop of Norwich, the Rt Revd Graham James, the Church of England’s lead bishop for media matters, said: “We welcome the collaborative, open-hearted way in which the BBC has engaged with leaders from the different Churches and faith communities as well as broader society to inform their perspective.

“We look forward to seeing how their commitment to first-class coverage of religious affairs develops in its sophistication and scope in the months and years ahead.”

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