



Christmas Carol Singing in Dublin supports projects in Zambia

The pre-Christmas period is the busiest time of the year for fundraising by most charities as they scramble to try to be different. Some just do a straight-forward 'ask' whilst others try to give something as encouragement to the public to donate to their cause. Carol signing is one of the

well recognised preparations for the Christmas season. Many Christian-inspired charities organise such singing as a means to raise much needed funds for a wide variety of charitable causes.

Christmas carol singing outside the GPO in Dublin's O'Connell Street, and annual table quizzes have raised over €290,000 to fund a number of development projects in deprived communities in Africa. The Zambia Appeal Group was set up by volunteers in 1999, and is now a registered charity that remains run by volunteers with all funds raised going directly to charitable projects.

Maureen O'Dwyer – a founding member of the group – points out how “a little raised in Ireland can go a long way in providing essential services for the poor or marginalised in Africa”. This year's carol singing raised €7,500 of which almost €4,000 was collected on the street over an eight hour period on Sunday 17th December. Singers, musicians and collectors including individuals from many different religious congregations all contributed to an enjoyable Christmas spirit that has become part of the Christmas scene in O'Connell Street.

The Zambia Appeal Group is a very small voluntary group that likes to support project activities that may not be funded by large donors. The small donations made by shoppers and passers-by support the development of two fish ponds to help create youth employment in a rural location in Zambia; the installation of water tanks for harvesting water at a piggery project; ongoing maintenance costs of wells and equipment at a special needs school; surgery, medication and travel costs for children with special needs; school materials, cupboards and shelving at a community school for orphans and vulnerable children, and the provision of food.

Some of the funds from Ireland also support two visually impaired girls with education fees and school materials, and two other students with their third level education – one with a disability studying to be a maths teacher that the Group has supported since he started primary school and the other from a very vulnerable background who is studying biochemistry.

A Christmas seasonal and fun event in Dublin can make a big difference in the lives of under-privileged and special needs children and youth in Zambia. A true example of ‘a little can go a long way’ in changing someone’s life. The Group’s annual table quiz will take place in

February. They can be contacted at zambiachildrensappeal@gmail.com.

Former President opens Nano Nagle Place in Cork

Dr Mary McAleese, former President of Ireland, officially opened the newly developed Nano Nagle Place in Cork on Monday last

Nano Nagle Place is a complex of beautifully regenerated 18th century convent buildings, including a formal school, on a 3.5 acre site where the Presentation Congregation was founded by Nano Nagle in 1775.

It is described as... an unexpected oasis in the centre of bustling Cork City, a place that celebrates Nano Nagle's vision of empowerment through education, community inclusion and spiritual engagement for a contemporary world. The complex houses a heritage centre, gardens, a café (opening Autumn 2017), and shop.

It is also home to several educational charities. The regeneration project cost €10.5 million, and '...has been described as a living showcase of one of Ireland's greatest social justice pioneers.'



At the official opening of Nano Nagle Place were (l-r) Bishop Paul Colton, Mr Jim Corr (Chairman of the Trust), Sister Mary Deane (Congregational Leader of the Presentation Sisters), Bishop William Crean, Cllr Tony Fitzgerald (Lord Mayor of Cork), Dr Mary McAleese, and Bishop John Buckley.

Nano Nagle (christened Honora) was born in 1718 of a long-standing Catholic family at Ballygriffin near Mallow in North Cork. Her home lay in the beautiful valley of the Blackwater backed by the Nagle Mountains to the south. She sensed a special vocation to care for the poor and for their education.

By the time of her death in 1784 she had set up a whole network of schools in Cork, with over four hundred pupils in seven parishes. With an eye to the practical, she introduced classes in needlework, lace-making, and other crafts, designed to enable pupils to learn their livelihood and to gain a foothold in society. To a large extent, in the absence of models for this kind of education in Ireland, Nano had to become an educator in her own right. Her abiding conviction: “We must prefer the schools to all others.” To put her schools on a more lasting and more professional basis, she decided to bring Ursuline Sisters from France to teach in Cork. But, for various reasons, the experiment as it materialised did not fit in with Nano’s vision.

This led to her setting up her own congregation of religious sisters under a constitution suited to their special vocation of educating the poor. Thus was established, on Christmas Eve 1775, what was at first entitled ‘The Sisters of Charitable Instruction of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Nano’s preferred title, which was later to become the ‘Presentation Sisters of the Blessed Virgin Mary’ (PBVM), as they are still called. Nano was the Order’s first superior. Today the Order works in more than 20 countries around the world.

A full video of the official opening is available on the Nano Nagle Place website.

The Right Reverend Dr Paul Colton (Bishop of Cork, Cloyne and Ross), joined the Most Reverend Dr John Buckley (Bishop of Cork and Ross), and the Most Reverend Dr William Crean (Bishop of Cloyne) in the blessing of the new complex prior to the official opening.

The Archbishop of Canterbury's Ecumenical Christmas Letter 2017

The Archbishop's Christmas 2017 letter to churches around the world was released yesterday.

Archbishop Justin Welby focuses on Luke 2.10 - 'Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people', and writes:

Earlier this year I made a very moving visit to the Holy Land. Amid a busy schedule of meetings and visits there were some moments of stillness and prayerful encounter with the living God. At the traditional sites associated with Our Lord's life, ministry, death and resurrection we were

able to stop and to pray. In Nazareth we prayed with Mary, the Mother of God, at the site of the annunciation; in Bethlehem, amidst the activity of restoration works in the Church of the Nativity, we found that place of quiet where Christians come to venerate Jesus' birth; in Jerusalem, in the restored aedicule within the Church of the Holy Sepulchre we rejoiced in the resurrection of our crucified Lord.

The gospel story, the saving story of Jesus Christ is good news indeed. The Gospel according to St Luke tells us the story of the good news announced to the Shepherds. On the hillsides above Bethlehem the Angel of the Lord appeared and brought good news. The good news was none other than the birth in Bethlehem of a Saviour, the Christ, the Lord.

This year we have learned a new phrase in various parts of the world. This phrase is 'fake news'. Fake news is dishonest; it is deliberate misinformation published in order to deceive, to confuse and disrupt. Fake news is used as a weapon to achieve dishonest advantage and to subvert honest debate and discussion. It is the antithesis of the good news. Fake news is but lying and does not come from God.

But we like the Angels proclaim good news and, like the Shepherds, we receive good news. The good news is good news for all people, whatever their situation in life. It is good news for politicians and leaders but is also good news for the refugees and displaced persons who continue to flee from danger and seek safety and sanctuary. As St Gregory Nazianzen writes: He who gives riches becomes poor, for he assumes the poverty of my flesh, that I may assume the richness of his Godhead. He that is full empties himself, for he empties himself of his glory for a short while, that I may have a share in his fullness. (Oration 38. 13)

This is truth and this is good news. As receivers of the good news we are called to pass on the good news and to make real the promise of that good news to those in need. In a poem reflecting on the evangelist St Luke, the poet and priest Malcolm Guite wrote:

‘He breathes good news to all who bear a burden
Good news to all who turn and try again,
The meek rejoice and prodigals find pardon,
A lost thief reaches paradise through pain,
The voiceless find their voice in every word
And, with Our Lady, magnify Our Lord.’

(from 'St Luke', in *Sounding the Seasons*,
(Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2012)

This Christmas I pray that we might, as
Christians with one voice, proclaim again the
good news that is our salvation in Jesus Christ.

Fr Brian D'Arcy: Ex-taoiseach Albert Reynolds kick-started my writing career

Aside from being one of architects who helped bring about the IRA ceasefire which precipitated the peace process, former taoiseach and Fianna Fáil leader Albert Reynolds has another legacy; he encouraged a young pop music-mad seminarian to write about his passion, Joanne Sweeney writes in *The Irish News*.

That man was Fr Brian D'Arcy, one of the most well-known and loved Catholic priests of his time, who has since become a best-selling writer, newspaper columnist and broadcaster over the last four decades.

Aside from his weekly broadcasts on BBC Radio Ulster and BBC Radio 2, Fermanagh man D'Arcy has written – and never missed a deadline for – his column in the *Sunday World* for the past 41



years which, at 1,200 words a time, totals over 2.5 million words in print.

Added to that, the Passionist priest, who is now based at the Tobar Mhuire Retreat Centre in Crossgar, Co Down, released Gold Collection, his 17th book, last month.

Just like his other books, it has already sold well – the proceeds of his writing go to support charities to help the poor and homeless at home and abroad.

"Normally my books would eventually sell between 8,000 and 10,000 copies. Initially only 4,000 of my new book Gold Collection was published in hardback and they were gone within

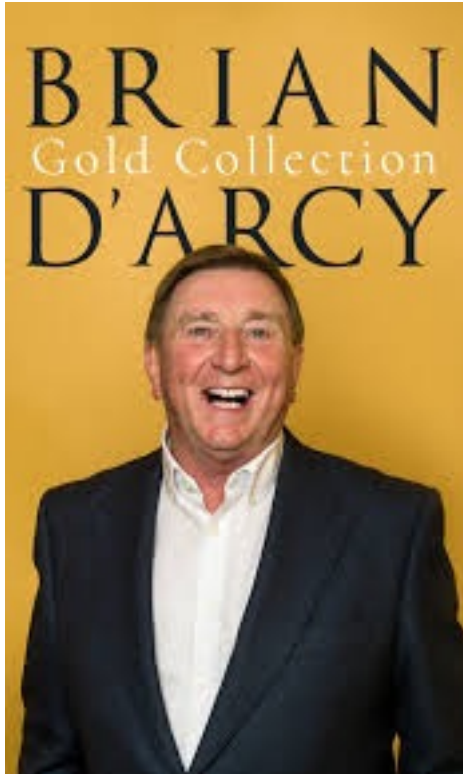
four days so it's being published in paperback now," says D'Arcy.

He contends that he had never thought of writing before a young entrepreneur, magazine publisher and fellow lover of the show-band scene in Dublin, Albert Reynolds, encouraged him to write.

Ahead of appearing with country stars Nathan Carter on last night's Nolan show, he told me: "I've always been interested in pop music. It's the old story, write about what you know. I started writing in 1965 for a paper called The Dancing News which was started by Albert Reynolds who at that time had 17 ballrooms and no notion of politics at all.

"He stopped me in the street in Dublin when I was still a student at UCD and said: 'You know all the bands, so write me for me – I won't be able to pay you.' I said I'm not even allowed to read the paper [as a clerical novice] never mind write for it but it was suggested that I write under the pen name of Hughie (taken after his famous GAA player dad Hugh D'Arcy) and I did that for five years."

He later was asked to write for the Catholic news magazine The Cross, which he went on to edit for five years.



Broadcaster and columnist Fr Brian D'arcy has sold well over 100,000 books and written millions of words in newspaper columns over the last four decades.

He tells Joanne Sweeney how his new book Gold Collection has already sold thousands in less than a month

It was through his late friend, the Dublin journalist Kevin Marron, that he was asked to write his weekly column, inadvertently becoming the inspiration for his other late friend Dermot Morgan's character, Fr Ted Crilly of Father Ted fame.

"Father Ted used to be Father Trendy and it was based on me but that association has turned out to be the bane of my life," says D'Arcy.

All but one of his books are based on excerpts from his sermons, newspaper columns and broadcasts.

"I've only written one book about me and that was A Different Journey, about 10 years ago. That sold about 60,000 copies," says the 72-year-old. "That was more of a memoir and it's probably time to do another on, to be honest.

"I actually didn't feel like doing the first one but it was around that time that certain things had been said about some of my colleagues after they died that couldn't be contradicted by them so I decided to write my own account and put it out there, like to say, 'If there's anything you want to come after me for, come after me now when I'm alive.'"

While he has a gentle personality, he has been a controversial figure in the Catholic Church which tried to censure his newspaper columns in 2012 as it was claimed that what he was writing was contrary to Church teachings. However, he refused and that threat to censure was lifted, he believes, with Pope Francis's papacy the following year.

"Over the years I have learned that people like good thoughts in small portions," says D'Arcy. "I have discovered that the short inspirational

snippets that I regarded as 'fillers' meant more to the readers and listeners than the main articles. People still write in for copies of the reflections.

"Gold Collection is full of easy-to-read, meaningful and helpful thoughts, jokes and stories to inspire readers of all ages. Little things still mean a lot. St Paul in his writings frequently made the point that whilst we enjoy the meat in the meals, it's the snacks that keep us going. That's how I regard these reflections, quotations, inspirational snippets and pointed stories.

"There comes a time in life when all we need is a small injection of spiritual encouragement. In this book you will find some of the most requested reflections from the last 10 years.

"I have thrown in a few new ones just to whet your appetite. I thank all the people who have contributed quotations and reflections over the years. Mostly I have no idea who the source of the inspiration is but please take this as my special thanks to you. Never underestimate the value of a good deed." More at -

<http://www.irishnews.com/arts/2017/12/21/news/fr-brian-d-arcy-ex-taoiseach-albert-reynolds-kick-started-my-writing-career-1215867/?>

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