

Successful Antrim Christmas Tree Festival aids Lough Neagh Rescue and Macmillan Cancer Support



There were some fabulous trees on display in All Saints', Antrim, over the weekend.

All Saints' Parish Church, hosted a very successful Christmas Tree Festival from November 30-December 3.

Proceeds from the *The Son of God : Love's Pure Light* festival will be donated to Lough Neagh Rescue and Macmillan Cancer Support.

The festival opened at 10am on Thursday November 30 and that evening there was a free Christmas concert led by the Harlandic Male Voice Choir.

This was attended by the Lord Lieutenant of Co Antrim, Mrs Joan Christie, the Deputy Mayor of Antrim and Newtownabbey, Councillor Vera McWilliam, Dame Mary Peters, and pupils from Riverside Special School, Antrim Primary School and Parkhall Integrated Primary School.

Hundreds of visitors viewed the trees on display on the Friday and Saturday and on Sunday December 3 the festival opened at 2pm. It featured a Children's Christingle Service organised by Connor Mothers' Union that afternoon attended by more than 60 children accompanied by adults. Later that evening the church was packed for the Antrim Town Community Carol service.

Throughout the festival visitors enjoyed refreshments in the Parish Centre.

There was much positive feedback about the weekend with comments on social media



The opening concert of the All Saints', Antrim, Christmas Tree Festival.

including: Amazing display of Christmas trees; Fabulous evening at your Carol Service; and Well done on an excellent display of trees, & the refreshments.

Archdeacon Stephen McBride, Vicar of Antrim, said it the festival had been fun for all involved. "From beginning to end it has been a really good effort," he said. "It was wonderful, the church looked spectacular. The trees were really imaginative and the festival brought people in from the fringes of the parish.

“It was also very important to support the Lough Neagh Rescue and Macmillan, and to involve so many schools. As a parish we want to look out towards the community.”

Derry MP calls on Parliament to commemorate missionary Amy Carmichael

A Northern Irish MP is calling on Parliament to celebrate the life of missionary Amy Carmichael upon the 150 anniversary of her birth.

Carmichael, who lived between 1867 and 1951, served the Lord in India for 55 years working with the poor.

She also founded an orphanage in Dohnavur, taking young women into her care.

DUP MP, Gregory Campbell, wants Parliament to recognise the dedication of Carmichael's service.

He said: "She dedicated her life to helping others and sharing the gospel and I think the other enduring quality of her contribution is that 100 years after she started quite a small



charitable missionary endeavour, it is still functioning and actively helping people today. "I think that marks her out as a very, very significant Christian missionary and someone who hasn't fully been recognised in the passage of time."

Campbell said he would like to see "a means of recognition...just to indicate the enduring memory of someone like Amy Carmichael and the fact that she came from Northern Ireland, went to India and her enduring legacy continues."

St Patrick's lights up Ballymacarrett

St Patrick's Ballymacarrett, has begun the Advent season by inviting the local community to join in their Christmas tree light switch-on

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Members of the Salvation Army, Revd Pat Lennox, Joe (100 yrs old), Bishop Harold Miller, Mary (95 yrs old), Revd John Cunningham (rector), Fr. Peter Conlan (St. Matthew's) and a representative from YWAM.

Friday 1 December was a cold, crisp night but almost 200 people representing so many walks of life in the area came along. You can't get more traditional than the Salvation Army band playing carols and a little choir of girls from the neighbouring parish, St. Brendan's, singing, 'Away in a manger', not forgetting the mince pies, hot dogs and mulled wine!

Revd Pat Lennox, part-time curate in St Patrick's said:

“We organised the tree and the light switch-on event to reawaken local interest in St. Patrick’s; to remind people that we’re there. It was also designed to be a simple and welcoming event that communicated the true Christmas miracle of God’s love for the world.

“Light was the underlying theme and St. Patrick’s has been a light in east Belfast for nearly 200 years. And our three switch-on people (above right) were not your regular celebrities but have for years shone their light in the world: Joe, 100 years old, from east Belfast and for 20 years a missionary in Nigeria; Mary, 95 years old and a long-time member at St. Patrick’s; and Ronnie, whose family bakery business, Jordan’s, has been synonymous with the Newtownards Road for well over 100 years. The beautifully lit tree is there to remind anyone who walks or drives past, that at the first Christmas the Light of the World was born.”

“A 20 foot tree is bigger than the normal trees you see outside churches but even 20 foot can look less dominating when next to such a big and beautiful church that is St. Patrick’s! However, when the lights are on, the tree grows up and takes command of this space on the Newtownards Road, whilst augmenting the grandeur of St. Patrick’s.

“The generosity of people who helped make it all work would have warmed Charles Dickens’ heart – ‘God bless us, every one!’”

Diocesan Boards take part in Clogher Advent Carol Service

The Clogher Diocesan Advent Carol Service took place on Sunday evening, 3rd December, in St Macartan’s Cathedral, Clogher.

The service of lessons and carols marked the beginning of the season of Advent described as “under a month of restrained and prayerful preparation for the joy and jubilation of Christmas.”

The service was led by the Dean of Clogher, the Very Revd Kenneth Hall and the Bishop of Clogher, the Right Revd John McDowell, sang the blessing.

The Cantor, the Revd John McClenaghan, sang ‘A Matin Responsory’ at the beginning of the service before the processional hymn.

The service, attended by clergy and lay people from throughout the diocese, took the form of

seven lessons, read by representatives of various committees within the diocese.

These included Rosemary Barton MLA, a member of Clogher Diocesan Council; Robert Forde, a member of the Clogher Diocesan Glebes Committee; the Revd Charles Eames, from the Clogher Diocesan Board for Social Theology in Action; Brian Donaldson, representing the Clogher Diocesan Magazine Committee; the Revd Phillip Bryson, from the Clogher Diocesan Youth Council; Joyce Clingen, a member of the Clogher Diocesan Board of Religious Education; and Canon Maurice Armstrong, a member of Clogher Diocesan Ministry of Healing.

The organist Diane Whittaker and combined choirs of the Clogher Cathedral Group of Parishes, led the singing of the hymns and anthems.

The hymns were; 'O come, O come, Emmanuel,' 'Waken, O sleeper, wake and rise,' 'The Magnificat,' 'On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry,' 'Make way, make way, for Christ the King,' 'Hail to the Lord's anointed' and 'Lo! he comes with clouds descending.' There were two anthems – 'Come, the Redeemer of the earth' and 'Zion, at thy shining gates.'

The collection was taken up in aid of Bird of Paradise Ministries, a charity registered in Northern Ireland and operating in Rwanda where it provides the basic needs of shelter and care for destitute elderly people. These people had families decimated during the genocide of the mid-1990s.

Bird of Paradise Ministries is the initiative of Canon Jerome Munyangaju and his wife, Mary. Canon Jerome is originally from Rwanda and was rector of Killyleagh for over 10 years before returning to Rwanda. Instead of retiring, he began this new ministry when he saw the needs of elderly people.

C of I and Welsh clergy share their priorities

The clergy of Meath and Kildare joined with clergy in Bangor diocese for a two-day residential conference in Llandudno, on the north coast of Wales. It took place from November 20 - 22.

Three years ago both dioceses formed a link relationship with each other. This has involved a number of visits to each other's dioceses to learn from each other. It has also included a joint

youth residential. These visits have usually involved up to a dozen visitors. The joint clergy residential is the most ambitious expression of the link, to date.

Meath and Kildare dioceses share many demographic similarities, with Bangor - both being largely rural, with some large towns. They also share the experience of the rest of the Anglican Communion on these islands, in having to respond to the changing place of the Church in society.

Bangor diocese has three priorities:

1. Nurturing disciples
2. Growing new ministries
3. Welcoming children, young people and families.

‘Together in God’s love transforming lives’ is the vision of Meath and Kildare. Under this it also has three priorities:

1. To develop discipleship:
2. To develop different models of ministry:
3. To deliver practical action in our local communities, delivered across the diocese.

The themes of the conference grew out of the shared emphasis on nurturing discipleship.

Over the three days, the clergy from both dioceses explored ways of forming missional communities. A keynote address and a series of workshops allowed clergy to explore different types of missional communities and different ways of engaging with those they live amongst. It is hoped that both dioceses will be able to learn from each other in a time of change, as both dioceses seek to prosper and grow.

A full conference programme may be downloaded by [clicking here](#)

Christian cake maker to appear before US Supreme Court

The US Supreme Court will this week hear the case of Jack Phillips the Christian cake maker who refused to make a same sex wedding cake.

Mr Phillips, who's being defended by religious freedom charity Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF), says he shouldn't be forced to do something against his religious beliefs.

The cake maker from Masterpiece Cakeshop was told in 2014 by the Colorado Civil Rights



Commission that it was unlawful to refuse the work and that he should re-educate his staff. Two years earlier he had declined an order claiming his faith meant he could not design a cake promoting same sex marriage.

With the backing of religious freedom charity Alliance Defending Freedom, lawyers for Mr Phillips say the government cannot coerce Phillips to create artistic expression that communicates a message with which he fundamentally disagrees.

They're calling on justices to affirm his constitutional right to refuse the order.

Speaking about the impact the case could have on Christians across the USA, Jeremy Tedesco from ADF said: "If the government has the power to coerce Jack Phillips to create artistic

expression that violate his beliefs then it ultimately has that power over all of us.

"The principle established in this case is going to be very important moving forward."

The case mirrors the legal action faced by Ashers Bakery in Northern Ireland.

The owners were found to have discriminated against a customer based on his sexual orientation after they refused to make a cake which said 'support gay marriage'.

Having been told to pay compensation, they're still trying to overturn the decision.

Pope Francis urged to visit troubled South Sudan after making donation

The leaders of South Sudan's Roman Catholic Church have called on Pope Francis to visit the war-torn nation.

"We know his heart is in South Sudan," Samuel Abe, secretary general for the archdiocese of Juba said yesterday.

"My wish is if he comes he can be a voice for the voiceless."

Francis had planned to visit the country in October, but cancelled citing security concerns caused by the country's civil war.

He has donated 25 million euro to help feed the country's most vulnerable citizens ahead of the upcoming dry season.

The money was given to the United Nations' agricultural arm, to alleviate a period of "grave food insecurity and major displacement", said the Vatican

Australia's Prime Minister insists on protecting religious people from same-sex marriage amendments

Australia's gay-marriage supporting Prime Minister will continue to push for amendments to be made to a same-sex marriage bill to protect religious people from being forced to marry same-sex couples.

Last week the Senate approved the bill and rejected all proposed amendments that would



have increased legal protections for those who would discriminate against gay couples on religious grounds.

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, said he wants wedding celebrants, not just those affiliated with churches, to have the right to refuse to officiate at same-sex marriages.

He told Parliament, which resumed on Monday for its final two-week session of the year, that nothing in the bill threatened religious freedoms.

He explained: "We must not fail to recognise that there is sincere, heartfelt anxiety about the bill's impact on religious freedom.

"That is why I will support several amendments to the bill which will provide that additional

reassurance in respect of their fundamental rights and freedoms."

The debated bill could soon legalise same-sex marriage in Australia as the major parties want the legislation passed this week after a majority of Australians endorsed reform in a postal ballot last month.

If the House of Representatives support Mr Turnbull's proposed amendment, then the altered bill would have to return to the Senate for ratification, delaying the reform.

Meanwhile, Tim Wilson, who is part of the conservative coalition, was among the first politicians to join the debate and used his speech to propose to his 33-year-old partner Ryan Bolger, a primary school teacher, who was watching from the public gallery.

Fighting tears, he said: "In my first speech I defined our bond by the ring that sits on both of our left hands.

"There's only one thing left to do: Ryan Patrick Bolger, will you marry me?"

A nonbinding postal survey found that 62 per cent of Australians resisted pressure from

Church leaders by voting in favour of legalising same-sex marriage.

The 'Yes' vote on allowing gay couples to tie the knot won in all six Australian states, despite the most senior figure of the country's Anglican Church warning such a move would have "irreparable consequences" effects.

Energy price increases knock the joy out of Christmas in Ireland says St Vincent de Paul

Big increases in energy bills and the cost of broadband that come into effect this week, will hit low-income families hard as they struggle to make ends meet in the run up to Christmas, says the Society of St Vincent de Paul.

A price increase by Bord Gáis means a typical customer faces a 3.4% rise in their gas bill, worth an extra €2.12 a month, and a 5.9% rise in their electricity costs, equivalent to €4.77 a month. Since the start of November, SSE Airtricity has increased its household electricity prices by an average of 5.6%. From the start of December, Energia is charging 3.9% more and Flogas has increased its prices by 3.3% Electric Ireland hasn't increased its prices yet, but it has

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announced that they will rise by 4% in February, which means that the ESB company's customers will typically be paying an extra €2.91 a month.

When it comes to broadband services, since last Friday, Sky's charges have increased by between €2 and €4 a month for many of its customers and Vodafone's customers will be paying an average of €4 a month more. On top of this, the cost of public transport is also on the increase – Luas fares increase by 5% from Friday December 8th and Dublin Bus increases its fares by about 5.6%.

The Society of St Vincent de Paul (SVP) says that the price increases for energy and broadband all coming together just weeks before

Christmas is a further blow to struggling low-income families.

“This is a particularly difficult time for families worrying about upcoming Christmas expenses and getting through the winter months when energy bills are at their highest.” said SVP National President, Kieran Stafford. “Because austerity and poverty no longer figure in news headlines, it is easy to forget that there are still thousands of people who continue to live in hardship and with limited income. We help people throughout the year at times when families find themselves in financial difficulties. These price increases will add to those financial difficulties.”

The head of Ireland’s largest charity said that the SVP had expected to deal with 50,000 calls for help over the winter months but already it is getting a sense that this number may increase. In November, the SVP East region, which covers Dublin, Kildare and Wicklow, had nearly 12,000 calls for assistance, which is 1,000 more appeals for help than during the same month last year.

One way in which the SVP raises much needed funds is through its charity shops, and in November its third shop in Dundalk, was officially opened pop sensations Jedward. Earlier

in the month, John and Edward also travelled to Northern Ireland to launch the 2017 Family Appeal that is organised jointly by the SVP and the Salvation Army. Last year, the appeal saw 50,000 gifts distributed to children across the Six Counties.

Major Paul Kingscott, the Salvation Army's divisional leader, said: "As a church and charity, we are inspired by the Christmas message to reach out to people in need. The Family Appeal allows us to help thousands of children and young people in Northern Ireland."

You can help the SVP's work by donating locally or online here <https://www.svp.ie/Get-Involved/Donate/Single-Donation.aspx>. You can also send a cheque, made payable to 'Society of St Vincent de Paul National Council' to SVP, PO Box 1234, Dublin 1.

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