

The Newsletter

December 2015

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Bringing In The Cattle

by

Gregory Moore

Clonenagh Group of Parishes

Annatrim, Borris-in-Ossory, Lacca, Mountrath, Roskelton, Seir Kieran.

Rector's Letter

"Happy Holidays" declared a poster in a shop off of Dublin's Grafton Street last December. The poster was an advertisement for an American clothing brand, the country from which the greeting comes. "Happy holidays" was not devised as a form of political correctness, it was devised as a way of being inclusive of other religious traditions who have festivals around the time that Christmas occurs, in particular the Jewish festival of Hanukkah. In the United States the word "Chrimukkah", a combination of "Christmas" and "Hanukkah", is now used by some to describe the festival time. "Happy Holidays" is also a recognition that the United States is officially a secular country in which no religious group is favoured; "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion," says the First Amendment to the American Constitution. Coca-Cola have used the term for some years with their advertisement showing trucks speeding through snowy landscapes accompanied by the jingle, "Holidays are coming."

But should we say "Happy Holidays" or "Happy Christmas"? When we look at the advertising on the television, and we look at the vast stocks in the shops, and we look at the massive amounts of food and alcohol, and we look at the huge debts people will incur in the coming

weeks, we have to ask ourselves what any of it has to do with a child being born in Bethlehem.

Taking Christmas seriously may mean that Christians have to say that what many people now celebrate is not Christmas. Telling people that their Christmas celebrations are not really Christmas at all is hardly an approach that will in many friends, but what do we say about God and about the story of his Son coming into our world if we allow that story to be trivialized? What do we say about the tale of the Nativity if it is regarded as no more than a children's play? If we value Saint John's words that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, if we value Saint Luke's description of the angels and the shepherds coming to worship the child in Bethlehem, if we value Saint Matthew's account of wise men coming from the East, shouldn't we be careful in the way that we use the word "Christmas"?

We may know people where "Happy Holidays" is a more appropriate greeting for their time of celebration. If we are going to say, "Happy Christmas", let's be sure of what we are saying.



Church of Ireland News

National Day of Prayer for Climate Justice & Ecumenical Prayer Service

Eco–Congregation Ireland, Christian Aid and Trócaire are encouraging people from all denominations to pray for the upcoming UN Climate Summit, otherwise known as COP21, that is due to take place in Paris from 30th November to 11th December 2015.

A National Day of Prayer will take place on the eve of the summit – 29th November – and it is hoped that all church services throughout the country that day will include a prayer for the successful outcome of the climate summit. Encouraging people from all denominations to take part in this initiative, which has been endorsed by the Irish Council of Churches, Archdeacon Andrew Orr said, “The COP 21 climate summit represents a real moment of opportunity for world leaders to come up with an enforceable, sustainable programme for reducing carbon emissions, which will be necessary to keep global temperature rise under two degrees Celsius.

“Christians everywhere need to be people of both prayer and action in the run up to these talks. Pressure has to be put on politicians to make this summit meaningful and this will happen if we make our voices heard. At the same time, our prayers help us to stand in solidarity with all life on our planet and especially the poorest communities most affected by climate change. By joining our intercessions with our actions, we become part of the answer to our own prayers. Please join us in making a real difference.”

Political accommodation and agreement welcomed by Church leaders

With the conclusion of the political negotiations and the publication of The Stormont Agreement and Implementation Plan entitled ‘A Fresh Start’, involving political parties in Northern Ireland and the governments of the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland, in a joint statement Church leaders have welcomed the fact that an accommodation has been reached.

‘As Church leaders, we came together in September and called on our elected representatives to place at the heart of their discussions “an awareness of their shared responsibility for the common good”. We welcome the announcement that, with the support of the two Governments, a wide ranging agreement has been reached.

‘We recognise that everyone involved in the negotiations will not have achieved all that they wanted in this agreement, nor will everyone who reads it be fully content with every aspect of it. Such is the nature of any agreed accommodation. However, we pray that this particular accommodation reached in the interests of all, will be the basis for beginning to restore hope to those who are struggling and re–establish the trust that has been slowly ebbing from our political institutions. As Churches we will study the detail of The Stormont Agreement and Implementation Plan and will no doubt comment further. We also encourage it to be carefully and widely read across the community and given fair and thorough consideration.’

Parish Notes

Sympathy: We extend our sympathy to the family of Mary (Cis) Thompson of Ballyfin who died at the great age of ninety-nine years and three months after spending eight years in the care of the staff at Kilminchy Nursing Home. A native of Togher in Portlaoise, her memories of daily life in the 1920s were like the pages of a history book brought to life. Cis could recall the hardships of the 1930s, the laughter of bicycle rides as groups of friends rode off to "socials," the delight of having a chance to continue to learn in her times spent at the "Tech." Moving to Ballyfin on her marriage to Billy, Cis was an ever attentive wife and mother, even in Kilminchy days, still concerned that all the family were well. Cis never expected to outlive Billy by more than thirty years, but accepted, with good grace, each day that came along and enjoyed the twenty-four years living in Mountrath with Aileen and Joe. For Cis, faith was at the heart of her daily life, her Bible reading and prayers were important, as were attendance at church and Holy Communion, and her departing from this life was to go to a rest to which Cis looked forward. Her funeral took place in Saint John the Baptist's Church, Ballyfin on 27th October.

We also remember the family of Tommy Birney of the New Line in Mountrath, who died suddenly at his home on 5th November. A native of Redcastle, Tommy was born in September 1943 and his mother died in February 1947, during the harshest winter in generations, when Tommy was just three years old. Tommy would spend much time during his childhood years with his aunt at Cloncullen. Growing up on farms, Tommy was educated at Clonenagh National School, remembered with affection by old school friends. Moving to the farm at Derrycanton with his father, marriage took Tommy to farm at Rosznaclonagh before he moved back

into the town, living in Church Street and then the New Line. Tommy was a man who enjoyed the company of his friends and dancing, he was a man who was known for his smiles and his gentle friendliness, he was a man who was appreciative of the kindnesses he received. Tommy was a much loved dad and granddad whose sudden death came as a harsh blow to his family, who were given no chance to say "goodbye." Tommy's funeral took place in Saint Peter's Church, Mountrath on Sunday, 8th November and he was buried with his parents in the family grave.

Book launch: At the Abbeyleix Manor Hotel On Wednesday, 25th November at 7.30 pm for 8.00, Richie Roe's book "Mice at the Threshing" will be launched by Anna May McHugh. Proceeds are for the Alzheimer's and Parkinson's Societies. Do go along and support the event.

Vigil against Violence: The Mothers' Union is organising a vigil against gender-based violence on Saturday, 28th November. The vigil for Ossory and Leighlin will be in Saint Canice's Cathedral, Kilkenny from 3 pm to 5 pm. There will be a forty-five minute time of prayers, readings and reflections, including a speaker from the Amber Women's Refuge, followed by half an hour for tea and conversation, and then a second forty-five minute session when there will be a speaker on violence against men. Everyone is welcome at the vigil.

Advent Sunday: 29th November is a fifth Sunday of the month. There will be Holy Communion in Mountrath at 9 am and a group service in Borris-in-Ossory at 10.30 am. Group services are actually an opportunity to demonstrate unity and strength within a group of parishes, for some reason, in Clonenagh Group, they seem to be regarded by most people as

an opportunity not to go to church. People will support us to the extent that we support them – generosity brings forth generosity. Let's have a good turnout to mark this Advent Sunday.

Saint Andrew's Day: There will be Holy Communion for Saint Andrew's Day on Monday, 30th November at 8 pm in Mountrath church. Andrew is the patron saint of mission work and it is the eve of the Rector's departure for Rwanda. He would value your prayers that evening.

Shyogwe Visit: The Rector flies to Rwanda on Tuesday, 1st December, an overnight flight from Dublin to Addis Ababa in Ethiopia and then a flight on to Kigali, the capital of Rwanda, arriving at lunchtime on Wednesday, 2nd December. The party of eight people is being led by Robbie Syme of Enniscorthy Parish and will be visiting the projects that have been supported by people here and will be sharing in worship with the Reverend Amos Nsengiyumva, who studied in Ireland from 2012-2013 and who is known to many people here. The week-long visit concludes on Wednesday, 9th December and the group hope to arrive back in Dublin in the early hours of the morning of Thursday, 10th December. Please pray for their safe travelling and for the work in Africa they will be visiting.

New school board of management: On 1st December, all across the country, new national school boards of management assumed office for a four year term. The task is not easy and can take many hours of the time of those who have volunteered to be members; this is particularly the case for those who chair the boards. We are very grateful to all our board of management members and ask for prayers for wisdom in the coming four years.

ICA Choir concert: Clonenagh Parish host the ICA Choir for a concert of Advent and Christmas music on Sunday, 6th December at 3 pm. Proceeds are for the €85,000 project to replace the disintegrat-

ing window frames in Mountrath church. Planning permission for the work was sought in October 2014, over a year later our architect is still awaiting an answer from Laois County Council. Even after the damage caused by the storm Abigail, the Council have made little attempt at a speedy response. There will be no service in Mountrath church that morning, we hope everyone will join us for the seasonal music.

School Christmas Market: Please note that you will see an error in the Clonenagh notes in the diocesan magazine, there will not be a school Christmas market this year. The notes for the diocesan magazine have to be sent in by 10th of previous month, so the notes for the magazine appearing on Sunday, 6th December had to be submitted on Tuesday, 10th November, which means there is a tendency to rely on notes for the previous year when sending in material.

Annatrim Carol Service: The Christmas carol service season begins in Annatrim church on Sunday, 13th December at 11 am.

Midweek carols: Borris-in-Ossory and Seir Kieran churches will hold their carol services at 8 pm on Wednesday, 16th December in Borris-in-Ossory and at 8 pm on Thursday, 17th December in Seir Kieran.

School Christmas service: Clonenagh National School hold their Christmas service in Mountrath church on Friday, 18th December at 7 pm. Attendances at school services have been very good and we look forward to again welcoming parents, friends and the wider community.

Final carol services: The carol service season concludes on Sunday, 20th December when we shall be holding services in Lacca at 4 pm and in Mountrath at 7 pm.

Christmas services: Our Christmas Holy Communion services begin at 7pm on Thursday, 24th December at Seir Kieran. This is followed by Borris-in-Ossory at 8.15 pm and Lacca at 9.30 pm. On Christmas morning, we begin with Roskelton at 9.30 am and then have services at Annatrim at 10.30 am and Mountrath at 11.30 am. It would be encouraging to see every single parishioner in church at Christmas. At the harvest services in Lacca and Annatrim, the congregations were over a hundred, let's aim for similar attendances at Christmastime.

Post-Christmas services: On Sunday, 27th December, the Sunday after Christmas, the services will be in Seir Kieran at 9.15 am, Annatrim at 10.30 am and Mountrath at 11.30 am. There will be the usual family service at Lacca that day.

Tractor Run: The annual Tractor Run to raise funds for Clonenagh National School takes place on Monday, 28th December, meeting in Coolrain at 1 pm.

Covenant Service: There will be covenant services, committing the coming year into God's hands in each church of the five churches in which there is worship on the first Sunday of the New Year, Sunday, 3rd January 2015. We hope people will start the year as they mean to continue and will be present to make New Year spiritual resolutions.

Epiphany: We remember the coming of the wise men with Holy Communion for the Epiphany in Mountrath Church on Wednesday, 6th January at 8 pm.

Farmers' Service: Our annual service of prayers for the farming year and the blessing of the plough takes place on Plough Sunday, 10th January 2015, at Mountrath Church at 7 pm.

Coffee Morning: Thank you to those who supported the Parents and Toddlers coffee morning for the Premature Babies charity. €211 was raised on the morning with further donations to come.

Ordained local ministry: A motion on ordained local ministry, proposed by the rector, was carried at the diocesan synod in October. Ordained local ministry would be a recovery of the style of non-stipendiary ministry of former times, ministry like that of the Revd Ann Wallace. It was ministry that contributed so much to our diocese before ordination training was changed to the "one size fits all" approach that now governs training in Dublin. It would allow the potential for new life in our small communities and churches, as appropriate people were identified as local ministers, and would relieve our church members of some of the burden of having to pay to sustain expensive stipendiary clergy. For communities like our own, ordained local ministry would be a shift away from the trend towards centralisation in the church, with more and more parishes being merged in order to be able to pay stipend, and would be more like the church in early times; it would put the initiative back into the hands of our local communities.

Leprosy Mission boxes should be returned to Olga Telford by December 5th so that the money can reach the charity before Christmas.

Laois Federation I.C.A. Choir will perform an Advent/Christmas Concert in St Peter's Church Mountrath on Sunday December 6th at 3pm. This concert is in aid of the Window Restoration Fund, so your support will be appreciated. Refreshments will be served, and contributions of refreshments would be most welcome.

Parish Diary

November

- 25th Wednesday.....Book Launch (page 4)
28th Saturday.....Mothers' Union Vigil (page 4)
30th Monday.....St. Andrew's Day Service (page 5)

December

- 5th Saturday.....Final date for return of Leprosy Mission boxes (page 6)
6th Sunday.....ICA Choir Concert (pages 5 & 6)
22nd Tuesday.....Closing date for January 2016 Newsletter
28th Monday.....Tractor Run (page 6)

January

- 6th Wednesday.....Epiphany Service (page 6)
10th Sunday.....Farmer's Service (page 6)

Smiles

Young Eddie was spending Christmas with his grandparents. On Christmas morning the family went to church. While they were waiting Eddie looked at the church walls. When he came to a war memorial tablet with lots of names, he whispered to his grandmother, 'Who are all those names on the wall?' His grandmother replied, "Those are the men who died in the services" Dumb-founded, young Eddie asked, 'Was that the carol service or the Christmas Day service?'

* * *

Father George was opening his Christmas cards one December morning. Out of one the cards came a single sheet of paper on it was written only one word: 'Fool'. The following Sunday, in church, Father George announced to the assembled congregation, 'I have known many people who have written notes to me and forgotten to sign their names. But this week I received a note from someone who signed his name and had forgotten to write a letter.'

'There will be a meeting of the Board immediately after the Christmas service,' announced Reverend Morris. After the close of the service, the group gathered at the back of church for the announced meeting. However, this Christmas there was a stranger in their midst. He was a visitor who had never attended their church before.

'My friend,' asked Reverend Morris, 'did you understand that this is a meeting of the Board?'

'Oh, yes,' came the rejoinder from the visitor, 'and after that sermon, I'm about as bored as you can get.'

* * *

The parents began to assemble the special Christmas gift they had for their children. They had ordered a kit for a tree house and received the plans for it. However, the materials they received were for a sailing boat. They wrote the company to complain. The company's reply: "While we regret the inconvenience this mistake must have caused you, it is nothing compared to that of the man who is out on a lake somewhere trying to sail your tree house."

Services & Readings

November 2015						
Fifth Sunday 29th	Jeremiah 33:14-16 Psalm 25: 1-10 1 Thessalonians 3: 9-13 Luke 21:25-36	Mountrath 9.00am Holy Communion	Borris-in-Ossory 10.30am Group Service			
December 2015						
First Sunday 6th	Malachi 3: 1-4 Philippians 1: 3-11 Luke 3: 1-6	Roskelton 9.30am Morning Prayer	Seir Kieran 9.30am Morning Prayer	Lacca 10.30am Holy Communion	Borris-in-Ossory 11.00am Morning Prayer	Mountrath 3.00pm Music for Advent & Christmas
Second Sunday 13th	Zephaniah 3: 14-20 Psalm 146:4-10 Philippians 4: 4-7 Luke 3: 7-18	Seir Kieran 9.30am Holy Communion		Annatrim 11.00am Carol Service		Mountrath 11.30am Morning Prayer
Wednesday 16th		Borris-in-Ossory 8.00pm Carol Service				
Thursday 17th		Seir Kieran 8.00pm Carol Service				
Friday 18th		Mountrath 8.00pm Clonenagh National School Christmas Service				
Third Sunday 20th	Micah 5: 2-5a Psalm 80: 1-8 Hebrews 10: 5-10 Luke 1: 39-45,46-55	Roskelton 9.30am Holy Communion	Seir Kieran 9.30am Morning Prayer	Borris-in-Ossory 11.00am Holy Communion	Lacca 4.00pm Carol Service	Mountrath 7.00pm Carol Service
Christmas Eve 24th	Isaiah 9: 2-7 Psalm 96 Titus 2: 11-14 Luke 2: 1-14, 15-20	Seir Kieran 7.00pm Holy Communion		Borris-in-Ossory 8.15pm Holy Communion		Lacca 9.30pm Holy Communion
Christmas Day 25th	Isaiah 62: 6-12 Psalm 97 Titus 3: 4-7 Luke 2:1-7, 8-20	Roskelton 9.30am Holy Communion		Annatrim 10.30am Holy Communion		Mountrath 11.30am Holy Communion
Fourth Sunday 27th	1 Samuel 2: 18-20, 26 Psalm 148 Colossians 3: 12-17 Luke 2: 41-52	Seir Kieran 9.15am Morning Prayer	Annatrim 10.30am Holy Communion	Lacca 10.30am Family Service		Mountrath 11.30am Holy Communion

Items for the January 2016 Newsletter need to be with the editor by **TUESDAY December 22nd AT THE LATEST**, so that the Newsletter can be assembled in time for Christmas Eve, December 24th.

PLEASE make your item as ready for publication as possible, and most importantly, please ensure that you spell names correctly.

Ideally, items should be submitted by e-mail to-
newsletter@clonenagh.com

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