



CHRISTMAS 2025

# SAINTS *Alive!*

[antrim.connor.anglican.org](http://antrim.connor.anglican.org)

THE MAGAZINE OF ALL SAINTS' PARISH, ANTRIM

## THE WONDER OF HIS LOVE



I am amazed at the talents of an artist who can use the colours on their palate to express their innermost feelings or the beauty of a landscape. I admire a composer who can write a piece of music that will stir our emotions. Artists and composers do not need words to express feelings such as beauty, joy, anger, love or sorrow in a way that we can easily understand. When God wished to convey the message of his love for us, he didn't use a book, or a prophet, his message was the Word made flesh, Jesus, Immanuel, born in a stable, a freezing out-house at the back of an inn.

I love all the hustle and bustle of the preparations for Christmas. Some of it has more to do with Santa than Jesus, but let's not be Scroogelike, because we are not asked to deny ourselves completely and sideline all the secular as we search for the sacred. Churches see an upsurge in business as our spiritual and charitable instincts are aroused from their slumber.

We enjoy singing the familiar carols about the angels and the wise men. We will, in our imagination, go with the shepherds to the stable and see the babe lying in a manger.

I enjoy all that goes with the side shows of Christmas, however, it is a time of the year when we do our best to connect with those parishioners who through bereavement, will have a loved one missing from their presence and for whom the season will not be so festive.

The emotions we feel at Christmas are a reminder that sometimes life can be incredibly unjust, unforgiving and cruel. It can be bleak, and dark.

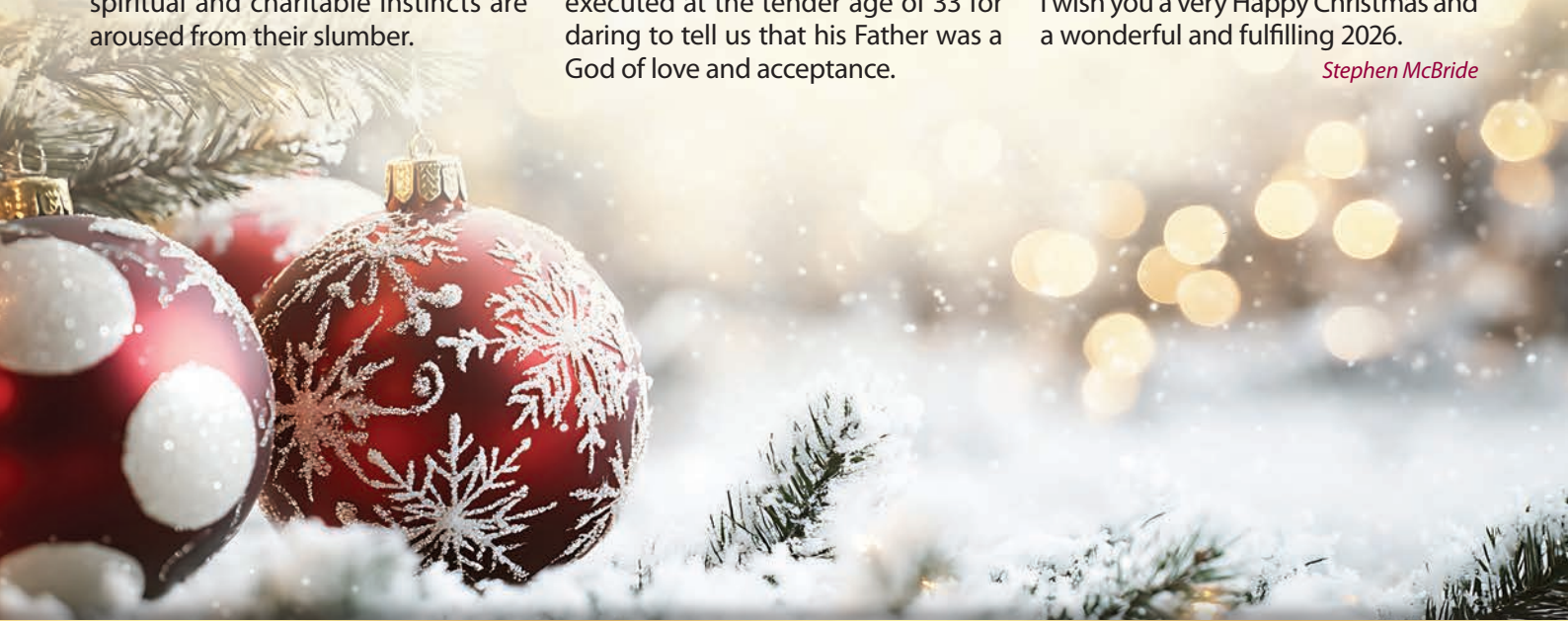
It is good to remember that in Jesus, we have a Saviour who experienced all of these issues because God chose to be born at a time when human life was cheap. He was born into a lowly estate, with no privileges and was executed at the tender age of 33 for daring to tell us that his Father was a God of love and acceptance.

At Christmas we can either find that we have no room for him because of our busy schedules, or we can wonder if he is really there at all in the midst of the mess of our lives. Hopefully we can find time to join the shepherds and the wise men and look at and look into the manger this Christmas season and see this amazing thing that has come to pass. And if our life is going through a time of darkness, may the light and the love of the Christ Child shine upon us and give us some hope for the future.

As we approach the New Year and 2026, we will be encouraged through a variety of sources to ditch some bad habits and take on some new ones which will enhance our life and our living. Perhaps we can ask where the things of God and his church fit into our schedules and discover more of the joy and meaning this will give to us.

I wish you a very Happy Christmas and a wonderful and fulfilling 2026.

*Stephen McBride*





# CHRISTMAS SERVICE SCHEDULE

## Sunday 14 December

11.30 am Family Service Carols for Christmas  
*We look forward to welcoming our youth organisation members and their families.*

## Sunday 21 December

11.30 am Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols

## Wednesday 24 December CHRISTMAS EVE

10.00 pm First Holy Communion of Christmas

## Thursday 25 December CHRISTMAS DAY

8.30 am Holy Communion

10.30 am Family Christmas Service and  
Funday Club Nativity

## Sunday 28 December

8.30 am Holy Communion

11.30 am Songs of Praise celebration  
with Carols for Christmas

## FUNDAY CLUB HOLIDAYS

There will be no Funday Club on  
**21 & 28 December** and **4 January**  
Funday Club will resume on **11 January 2026**



# OASIS FOOD BANK

In association with the Oasis Group we have been joining with churches in Antrim in supporting the food bank project which has provided much needed practical care for families in the Antrim area who are enduring difficult times. As we prepare to celebrate Christmas, it would be good to think about those from whom Christmas will be a time of difficulty. Families are referred to the food bank through Social Services to Oasis who provide them with a food parcel. Please consider bringing an item or two from the list across and leave it in the box in the porch. This is a marvellous way of showing God's love in a very practical way. I hope we will give it our fullest support.

## Donation Suggestions:

- |                     |                 |                     |
|---------------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| ■ Selection Box     | ■ Cereal        | ■ Hot Water Bottle  |
| ■ Mince Pies        | ■ Pasta         | ■ Cuppa soup        |
| ■ Christmas Pudding | ■ Rice          | ■ Toiletry Gift Set |
| ■ Tins of Sweets    | ■ Tea Bags      | ■ Toilet Rolls      |
| ■ Gravy Granules    | ■ Coffee        | ■ Soap              |
| ■ Tinned Ham        | ■ Hot Chocolate | ■ Shampoo           |
| ■ Tinned Soup       | ■ Gift Vouchers | ■ Roll-on Deodorant |
| ■ Savoury Snacks    | ■ Slipper Socks |                     |
|                     | ■ Tinned Fruit  |                     |

## FREEWILL OFFERING ENVELOPES

The Hon. Treasurer wishes to close the books for the year ending December 2025 on **Sunday 28 December 2025**. It would be greatly appreciated if you could have all outstanding FWO envelopes for 2025 in by this date if you wish your contributions to be recorded in the 2025 year.

## NI HOSPICE FUNDRAISER

The Vicar and some of our parishioners enjoyed a cup of coffee together as we handed over our donation to David, Regional Fundraiser for Northern Ireland Hospice, following our annual 'Big Coffee Break' held during the October Family Service. A wonderful total of £600 was raised to help support the vital care the Hospice provides to so many of our loved ones. Sincere thanks to everyone who contributed and supported this special event.





# CONFIRMATION

On Sunday 23 November, the Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev George Davison conducted a service of Confirmation in St Patrick's Church, Templepatrick. We are most grateful to the rector, the Rev Jeremy Mould for extending an invitation to us to join with his parishioners who were being confirmed alongside our young adults.

## *Front row*

Ava McLaughlin, the Bishop, Anna Armstrong

## *Second row*

Lara Melly

## *Third row*

George McLaughlin, Aaron Totten, Sam Reid and Charlotte Betts,

## *Back row*

The Rev Claire Thompson, The Rev Peter Blake and The Ven Dr Stephen McBride



# POPPY DISPLAY

Irene Gates, our Parish Hon Secretary and Mothers' Union member, saw a magnificent display of poppies on the railings of a church in London and set about enthusing ladies of the parish to recreate our own display.

More than 500 handmade poppies were displayed on the railings outside the Parish Centre each weekend ahead of Remembrance Day, honouring all who have lost their lives in wars and conflicts. The ladies of the parish came together to knit, crochet and sew poppies of all shapes and sizes, creating these wonderful displays that speak of love, gratitude and community spirit.

Thank you to everyone who contributed their time and talent to this thoughtful act of remembrance.





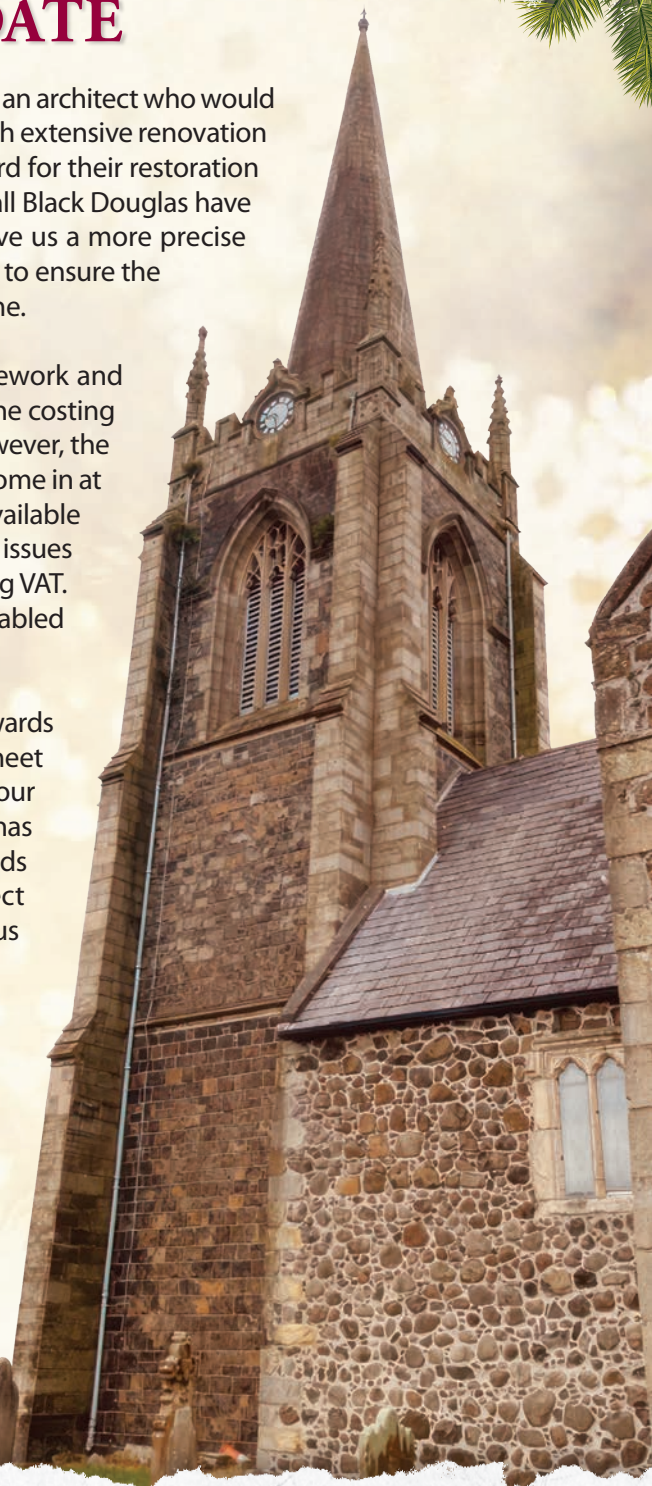
# CHURCH TOWER UPDATE

Last Christmas we were just about to embark of the tendering process for an architect who would oversee the restoration project. Hall Black Douglas, a Belfast practice with extensive renovation experience won the contract. Most recently they received an RIBA award for their restoration of the Bank Buildings in Belfast which was severely damaged by fire. Hall Black Douglas have carried out extensive surveys on all four elevations of the tower to give us a more precise picture of all the works that will be needed over the next period of time to ensure the tower and spire are in the best possible condition for many years to come.

Phase one of the restoration will include essential repairs to the stonework and pointing of the north elevation, which is the one with the main door. The costing of our initial survey which was carried out in 2023/24 was £262,812. However, the costing of the more recent survey, when VAT and fees are included has come in at £345,642 leaving us with a shortfall of £82,830 from the funds we have available for the repairs. The increase in costs between the two surveys is due to issues such as the further degradation of the stonework and the loss of reclaiming VAT. The Government's Listed Places of Worship Grant scheme would have enabled us to reclaim £43,800 of VAT but this grant has now ended.

The National Lottery Heritage Fund have granted us a total of £172,708 towards the repairs and we have made a further application to the Fund to help meet with the shortfall. On 25 November, the Vicar received a phone call from our Fund Manager to let us know that our application for the top-up grant has been successful and we will be receiving a further grant of £77,292 towards the renovations. With the unknown costs of the fire restoration project still to be fully worked out, it is such a relief to receive this most generous further funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

The tenders for this work will be issued in January and we hope to see some exterior scaffolding being erected in late February 2026. After a few false starts, it will all be happening in 2026!



## THE EXTRA MILE BUCKET

Through the donations we have received in the Extra Mile bucket we have helped raise £1000s for fantastic projects. Most recently we have purchased two shelter boxes which will be used to provide two families, whose homes have been devastated in a natural disaster with a place of security. Our next project was inspired through a visit of the Rev Tom Robinson from kids4schools who are building houses in Tanzania. People who previously lived in mud huts, which are not very water tight and offer no security are being provided with houses constructed with concrete blocks and a tin roof. So far over 80 have been complete at a cost of £5,000 each.

As we look forward to worshipping again in our beautiful House of God, we are setting a target of providing one house as our thank offering.





# FIRE RESTORATION UPDATE



Who would ever have thought that as we closed the doors of the church on Christmas Day 2024 after some inspirational services over the festive period that on 27 December, we would have discovered that one of the candles had reignited and caused £2.7million worth of damage?

I will never forget receiving the phone call from Sylvia Smyth at 2.30pm to let me know that there had been a fire in the church. First of all, I thank God that Sylvia and David were not seriously injured when they opened the doors and were the first to discover the devastation the fire had caused. This could have been catastrophic for them and us. We can repair damaged pews and monuments, but we cannot replace lost lives.

Since then, there has been a roller coaster of emotions for me and for everyone who has been involved in making progress. Initially I found it extremely difficult to go into the church and see and smell the damage and wonder if we would ever be able to get things going again. Cecil and Sylvia Barton have done so much behind the scenes quietly cleaning and salvaging items that could have been lost and they have been inspirational in all that they have done.

Ian Maconachie who is co-ordinating our restoration project has done a mammoth amount of work. His previous experience of restoring churches that have been damaged by fire has been much to our benefit. He is enthusiastic, full of ideas and full of energy. He has a marvellous rapport with the staff of Felix O'Hare, our builders, React Polygon our cleaners, CWS who are restoring and cleaning our windows and Beattie Flannagan our mechanical and electrical engineers. We are so fortunate that he is taking care of the project and it is his aim to give us back a church that is even more majestic that it was before the fire.



We are hoping that we will be back in All Saints in November, but in the meantime, we are continuing to enjoy worshipping together in the Parish Centre and our thanks go to everyone who makes the service happen through their endeavours.





# MISSIONARY SMARTIE TUBE APPEAL

Each year we give out Smartie Tubes which can be filled with 20p coins or even £1 coins. They are regularly deposited on the collection baskets at the entrance of the parish hall. For over 15 years, the money raised in the tubes has been used to support the training of new clergy in the Anglican Church in Zambia. The Vicar and the Rev David Ferguson, when he was curate, visited St John's Seminary in Kitwee and met with those who training for the ordained ministry. Initially we helped to fund a new water storage system to enable the students to shower every day as the water supply was so irregular. Each year, through our smartie tube collections, we now support two students with their studies.

The Principal of the College, The Rev Canon Francis Mwanza, in appreciation of the funding wrote, 'thank you for your open-hearted and open-handed generosity towards the staff and students at St John's Anglican Seminary, Kitwee, in Zambia. For the first time in their history, the college has welcomed its first two female ordinands.



## SAFEGUARDING TRUST



**Dr Brian Ford**  
**028 9446 2378**



**Hazel Dalton**  
**07740 641167**



**Ven Dr Stephen McBride**  
**028 9446 2186**

### POLICY

*"IT IS THE POLICY OF THE CHURCH OF IRELAND TO SAFEGUARD ALL CHILDREN SHARING IN ITS MINISTRY AND TO PROTECT THEM FROM ALL FORMS OF HARM AND ABUSE."*

### PURPOSE

The Church of Ireland believes that children should never experience abuse of any kind. Everyone has a responsibility to promote the welfare of all children and to keep them safe. The Church of Ireland is committed to implementing procedures and practices which safeguard all children.

### PRINCIPLES

Thousands of children visit Church of Ireland premises for worship and other social, educational and recreational purposes each week. The Church's ministry to them is a priority for the Church and it is only possible because of the voluntary commitment of adults who are prepared to take responsibility for children in their care. Safeguarding Trust is designed to protect and to enhance that ministry. Bishops, clergy, staff and volunteers exercising the Church of Ireland's ministry with children are committed to implementing procedures and practices which promote the welfare of children and protects them from harm.

**IF YOU HAVE ANY CONCERNS YOU MAY WISH TO CONTACT ONE OF OUR PANEL MEMBERS  
AND YOUR CONCERNS WILL BE DEALT WITH IN A CONFIDENTIAL MANNER**

The Duty Worker or local area manager may be contacted at the local Gateway team on **0300 1234 333**  
In an emergency contact Antrim PSNI on **0845 600 8000**

Further details about our policies can be found at [safeguarding.ireland.anglican.org](http://safeguarding.ireland.anglican.org)



# 30 YEAR CELEBRATIONS



All Saints' Parish, Antrim, marked 30 years of ministry by the Venerable Dr Stephen McBride with a surprise presentation to him on Sunday 2nd November. Two of the original nominators, John Wallace and William Hurst, presented Stephen with a gift from the parish, after which the Bishop of Connor, the Right Reverend George Davison, offered words of appreciation. Stephen's wife, Helen, was presented with a bouquet by long standing vestry member, Sylvia Barton.



Rev Claire Thompson, paid a heartfelt tribute to the Vicar, reflecting on how his ministry has consistently been shaped by care, nurture, love, and encouragement. She concluded by saying, "Thank you for showing us what it means to be a servant-leader, for loving us so well, and for making this parish a truly holy and welcoming place. May God shower you with every blessing as you continue to walk with us."

The celebration concluded with the cutting of a special anniversary cake. Parishioners were invited to stay after the Holy Communion service to enjoy tea, cake and fellowship together.



The Vicar responded, 'It is been my great privilege and great fortune to have served 33 of my 38 years in ordained ministry in All Saints as Curate with Canon Leslie Forsythe and as your Vicar. The support, friendship and prayers Helen, Rachael, Alex and I have received has been so special and never has been taken for granted. As Vicar I have shared some incredibly personal times with you, as together we experienced the highs and lows of life. As I have hoped to help and develop your faith, you have done so much to sustain me in my faith.

When I was instituted as Vicar in November 1995, I never imagined that 30 years later, I would still be here and still getting such a joy and challenge out of ministry. I have been so fortunate in so many ways. Thank you all for this most special surprise.'



# CAN WE BE SURE THAT JESUS WAS BORN ON 25th DECEMBER?

The Bible tells us where Jesus was born, in Bethlehem, as it was prophesised in Micah 5:2, **"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."**

The census of Caesar Augustus spoken of in Luke 2:1 is historically accurate and gives us an idea of the year in which Jesus was born, but the scriptures give us no exact date.

So how did December 25 gain its Christian emphasis? Evidently, sometime during the early fourth century, Christians began searching for the proper day to celebrate Christ's birth. Some churches had been celebrating Jesus' birth on January 6, others April 20, May 20, March 29, and September 29.

Finally so much confusion reigned that Saint Cyril, bishop of Jerusalem, about the middle of

the fourth century, inquired of the Roman bishop, Julius, regarding the correct date.

Julius wrote Cyril and reported that he personally favoured December 25. Obviously refusing to accept this date as valid, Cyril and the Jerusalem church continued celebrating the event for many years on January 6.

In A.D. 354, two years following the end of Saint Julius' reign, the new Roman bishop, Liberius, ordered all his people to celebrate December 25 as the correct day of Christ's birth. With the passage of time this date became the more popular and was soon adopted by most of Christendom although there are still those who mark 6 January as the day of our Saviour's birth. Although we cannot be 100% sure of the exact date, we still celebrate the fact that our Saviour was born and came and dwelt among us. That should be our emphasis each Christmas - we don't need to have an exact date.



## WATCH ONLINE

### YOUTUBE DIRECT LINK

Please type this link into your web browser **<https://www.youtube.com/@allsaints4713/streams>** or **allsaints4713** directly into YouTube. Make sure to hit subscribe to make it easier to find next time.

### VIA THE PARISH WEBSITE

Go to **<https://antrim.connor.anglican.org/>**  
Click on the link for church webcam

### ALL SAINTS PARISH FACEBOOK

Go to the Facebook page **<https://www.facebook.com/allsaintsparishantrim>**  
Click on "Watch Now"

## WHO'S WHO

Vicar: **The Venerable Dr Stephen McBride**

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Pastoral Administrator: **The Rev Peter S Blake MTh**

Tel: 07591 373405 E-mail: [rev.peterblake@gmail.com](mailto:rev.peterblake@gmail.com)

Curate Assistant: **The Rev Claire Thompson BSc**

E-mail: [clairesg1@hotmail.com](mailto:clairesg1@hotmail.com)

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Tel: (028) 9446 6430

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Sexton & Caretaker:

**Mr Cecil Barton**

Tel: (028) 9446 5770

The Clergy will be grateful for any notification of serious illness in the Parish and for information regarding the admission and discharge of parishioners from hospitals outside Antrim.