



Rector's Update – Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> November 2025

## Advent and Christmas at Banbridge Church of Ireland

Dear All

It is hard to believe, but this Sunday we will celebrate the First Sunday of Advent which means there are only four Sundays to go before Christmas Day! To Ava, and all our American friends today, we take this opportunity to wish you a Happy Thanksgiving!

I want to begin by extending my thanks to everyone who made last weekend so special. We had a wonderful evening at our Twilight Christmas Fayre & Market, with good support from both the parish and the town. We lifted £2300 which was an excellent effort. Thank you! This was followed up by a powerful message from Raymond at Holy Trinity and Diane at the Village, calling us all to prepare for Advent by welcoming Jesus back into our lives, with the challenge being made personal, as we were encouraged to welcome Jesus as King of over lives. Hand on heart it was a meaningful call to keep Jesus at the very centre of Advent and Christmas.

This weekend, in church, we are going to launch our **Christmas Appeal 2025**. This year it will be food-bags! With the food gifts you give us we will be able to support the Foodbank at Grace Generation, and to help with food parcels to be distributed through Banbridge High School, and other school outlets, who very much appreciate our help. Our **Christmas Appeal 2025 Launch Video** is available and all our Banbridge Church of Ireland social media platforms will also carry the video. Click or paste this link into your browser: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nJKC3Pf6ULk> or use the attached video download.

In the food-bag we are asking for the following food items:

**Shloer, Mince pies, Madeira cake, a box of biscuits, Pringles/family bags of crisps, tinned peas, large tinned ham, hot chocolate, coffee, Hartley's jelly and a small selection box.** This food-bag should cost around £20. Please make sure the food items you purchase have **long shelf-life** dates. Individual food items will also be welcomed for those who do not wish to spend £20. The usual pasta, rice, pasta sauces, pot noodles, tinned pies, tinned potatoes, tinned carrots, tea, coffee, UHT milk etc will be very much appreciated.

If you would prefer to make a financial donation to the **Christmas Appeal 2025** please drop your gift in with Dorothy in the office or use the gift-aid envelope you will receive with your **food-bag** this Sunday from both churches, then simply drop your donation on the offertory plate on Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> December. Financial donations will be used to help purchase food, gas and electricity for those struggling to make ends meet this Christmas through the High School and other school outlets. If you are aware of someone in need, please let me know and I will make sure we respond as appropriately as we can. Ava is keen to involve the uniformed organisations in this ministry and will be visiting them this week and next week to encourage them to get involved; last year the Scouts and Guides did a great job in helping with our Christmas Appeal. I have asked Iain and Tracey Weir to help co-ordinate the Christmas Appeal 2025 for us. If you are donating by cheque and/or the Gift-Aid Envelopes, cheques are payable to: **Seapattrick Parish Church** as usual.

This Friday evening (28<sup>th</sup> November) at 6pm we have been invited to lead the Carol Singing, a Bible reading and a Christmas thought at **ABC Council lighting of the Christmas Tree and Decorations** in the town centre. I encourage you to come along and to take your place with our **staff team** and other clergy from the town in giving importance to the Christmas message in the middle of what can become very secular celebrations. Last year there was a poor crowd for the Christian part of the celebrations, so it would be great to have a couple of hundred people from the Church of Ireland singing our hearts out at for the lighting of the trees! This is after all a celebration of **'our season'** and **'our Saviour'**. We should not take lightly the privilege it is to

have **ABC Council** making space for a Christian Act of Worship at the very heart of this celebration. Thank you to ABC Council for this opportunity. We give thanks for those who advocate for the Christian faith through the work of the Council.

I take this opportunity to thank Denise for taking over the running of Mums and Tots. She is doing a great job, but needs more volunteers to help with the weekly food and set up etc. Please speak to myself or Denise if you would be willing to be part of a helper's rota. Note well: on Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> December at 10.30am we will welcome **Santa** to Mums Tots for the **Mums and Tots Christmas Party**. Please bring along your children and grandchildren to this exciting ministry and encourage your childminders to come each week with your children.

Can I also draw your attention to the **Pensioners Senior Citizens Christmas Lunch** on Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> December at 12noon. We are grateful to Brenda and Sharon and their team of helpers (**the Elves**) for planning this event. The Parish, together with the generosity of some parishioners, are sponsoring the event which means we are able to offer the meal for **£12/person** to parishioners, **£15/person** to non-parishioners and **£22/person** to those who aren't yet pensioners. Please book in with Sharon, Brenda or in the office with Dorothy by Friday 5<sup>th</sup> December. The Parish Office phone number is: 02840622744. All payments should be with the office by Friday 12<sup>th</sup> December. This was a wonderful event last year and we trust it will be bigger and better this year!

Ava, Cosmin and Raymond are organising a free family Christmas event for us on Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> December at 7pm: **Polar Express – Journey to the manger!** This event is for our children, their parents and grandparents. Please invite children and families from across the whole community to join us. To help with catering and the preparation of resources, please use the QR Code below or this website link to book in: [www.banbridgechurchofireland.com/events/polar-express-journey-to-the-manger](http://www.banbridgechurchofireland.com/events/polar-express-journey-to-the-manger)



This year we are once again enjoying getting ready for Christmas with the **Christmas Community Choir**. Ruth Jess and Raymond have already started the rehearsals, but there is still time for YOU to get involved with the choir. We will be singing at all our Christmas Services, so I encourage both our Parish Church Choirs, and all the Praise Band musicians, both old and young, at Holy Trinity and the Village to get involved. The rehearsals continue at 7pm in Holy Trinity on: **Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> November, Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> December, Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> December and Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> December**. We need you to attend a minimum of two practices to get to know the pieces, but we encourage you to attend all the rehearsals. Phone Raymond on: 07399322296 for more details or just turn up at the rehearsals. This is already a blessing as we have welcomed three ladies into the choir who don't normally attend Banbridge Church of Ireland.

The **Men's Group** and the **Women Together** group are also getting busy in the Advent and Christmas season. The **Men's Group** has two events for you to get in the diary. Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> December at 7pm is the **Christmas Dinner**. Please book with Iain, Mel Slaine or Craig at church this weekend. The cost is £30. Monies and bookings to be in by Friday 5<sup>th</sup> December. They also have their **Whiskey Tasting** event on Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> December at 1pm in Harry's Bar at a cost of £25; again please book this in advance with Iain, Mel or Craig. For more details of both the **Men's Group** events phone, or preferably text, Iain on: 07974821229. The **Women Together** are hosting Dr Rosie Steele who will head up a **Christmas Table Decoration** making evening on Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> December at 7.45pm in the main hall. To help with planning resources please let Rhoda, Noelle, Tracey or Caz know on Sunday if you intend to come along phone, or preferably text, Caz on: 07882093641.

This year my **Rector's 24hr Charity Sit Out** will run from **5pm on Friday 19<sup>th</sup> December** to **5pm on Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> December** on Newry Street. The charities I have chosen to support this year are the **Haematology Unit at Craigavon Area Hospital** and **PSPA (CBD)**. I have chosen these two worthy causes due to their very close and personal links with the Parish. During the past year alone, three parishioners: Rhoda McCarter, the late Douglas Sally and the late Jim Woods, each greatly benefitted from the care of Craigavon Area Hospital **Haematology Unit**. Alongside this, Joanne Downey, who grew up in Holy Trinity, is suffering from the debilitating life-limiting condition **PSPA (CBD – Corticobasal Degeneration)**. Joanne is the daughter of the late Norman, and Daphne Russell, and sister of Julie McCreanor. I felt I wanted us to bless these much-loved families in our congregation through this year's **Rector's 24hr Charity Sit-Out**. The funds from my Sit-Out, together with half of the offering from the Carols by Candlelight on Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> December, will support these two charities. These families will very much appreciate your generosity and kind support.

On 7<sup>th</sup> December at 7.30pm, in Holy Trinity, Ava will host the '**Unshaken Youth Service**', which is a Youth Service for all the local churches in the area to come together with their young people. Please make sure your 12-18 year olds are aware of the service and encourage them to join Raymond, Ava, the Inspire Youth Group and myself for this service. Supporting our young people is important, so let us be an encouragement to them in every way.

This year we are having an **Advent Speaking Series** at Holy Trinity. Our Advent speakers are Adam Stewart, Niall McCarter, Wilf Carter and Daniel Marcus. This Sunday begins with Adam speaking at the 9.45am service at Holy Trinity. Ava will lead the service with the help of some of our Inspire Youth Group. The Village will have a similar **Speaking Series** during Lent. They will be addressing the **Advent themes** of death, judgement, heaven and hell; amongst others! On Friday morning you will receive a flyer advertising our **Advent Speaking Series**. We are planning a similar Lent Series at the Village Church. The dates and services they will speak at are below:

**Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> November 9.45am – Adam Stewart**  
**Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> December 11.15am – Niall McCarter**  
**Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> December 9.45am – Wilf Carter**  
**Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> December 11.15am – Daniel Marcus**

Please note the **change of times and service pattern** from Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> December 2025 through to Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> January 2026 at Holy Trinity. On Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> December, Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> December and Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> January there will be **one combined service** for the 8.30am, 9.45am and 11.15am at **11am** in Holy Trinity. Services will be at 10am as usual in the Village on these Sundays. **On Christmas Eve** there will be **Holy Communion at Holy Trinity at 11pm** and then on **Christmas Day** there will be a **Family Communion at 10am in the Village** and a **Family Christmas Celebration at 11am in Holy Trinity**.

In January we are going to begin the year with **5 days of Prayer** from **Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> to Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> January** inclusive. This will give us the opportunity to commit ourselves and the work of the Lord in the Parish to the **LORD** in Prayer for 2026 and will be used by the Staff Team to bring to life for you: the **Parish Vision Statement**, the **Parish Core Values**, and our **Statement of Beliefs**, which we worked to put together for the Easter Vestry meeting of 2025, but now want to set at the very heart of who we are as a Parish. We will celebrate Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> January as '**Commitment Sunday**' in both Holy Trinity and the Village. Please pencil these dates into your diary and keep space free to get involved. More details will follow shortly.



Finally, at all our Advent and Christmas services you will be encouraged to sign up for the **Alpha Course** and to invite friends and family to join with us in the Alpha Course. On Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> December we will be encouraging you write the names of one or two people you would like to see joining you at the **Alpha Course** in January on a **Prayer Label**. You will then be encouraged to place your **Prayer Label** on the Church Christmas

Trees, as a way of reminding us that without our **invitation** and **prayer** people will not come. I am hoping for at least **100 people** at this **Alpha Course** and ask you to pray with me for a great response at all our Christmas events and services. I will be asking Raymond and Cosmin to do an **Alpha Course** plug at every Christmas event we host this Advent and Christmas season. We all need to give ourselves to inviting one another along to Alpha. The Course begins on 15<sup>th</sup> January at 7pm and will run weekly through until 26<sup>th</sup> March. Your attendance, help, enthusiasm and prayer for this course is so very important if we are to fulfil our vision to be Rooted in Jesus as we call and equip people to build their lives on Jesus and what he says in the Bible. You can sign up online using this link: <https://www.banbridgechurchofireland.com/alpha> or speak to Raymond at Church. We also need volunteers to help facilitate the course so again do not be shy in offering your help. The QR below is another way to find out more about alpha:



## See below an overview of our **Advent** & **Christmas** dates:

**Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> December 7.45am** – Women Together Christmas Table Decoration Evening

**Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> December 10am** – The Nativity

**Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> December 7.30pm** – Unshaken Youth Service

**Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> December 7pm** – Men's Group Christmas Dinner

**Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> December 10.30am** – Mums & Tots Christmas Party

**Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> December 7pm** – Polar Express 'Journey to the Manger'

**Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> December 10am** – Carol Service

**Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> December 11.15am** – The Nativity

**Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> December 12noon** – The Pensioners Senior Citizens Christmas Lunch

**Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> December 7pm** – Candlelight Carol Service

**Friday 19<sup>th</sup> Dec 5pm to Sat 20<sup>th</sup> Dec 5pm** – Rector's 24hr Sit-Out

**Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> December 1pm** – Men's Group Whiskey Tasting Event

**Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> December 10am** – Songs of Praise for Christmas

**Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> December 11am** – Combined 8.30am, 9.45am and 11.15am Songs of Praise for Christmas

**Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> December 7pm** – Carol Service (Holy Trinity)

**Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> December 11pm** – Christmas Eve Communion (Holy Trinity)

**Christmas Day 10am** – Family Communion (The Village)

**Christmas Day 11am** – Christmas Day Family Service (Holy Trinity)

**Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> December 10am** – Morning Prayer

**Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> December 11am** – Morning Prayer with the choir (Combined 8.30am, 9.45am & 11.15am)

**Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> January 10am** – Shortened Morning Prayer

**Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> January 11am** – Family Service (Combined 8.30am, 9.45am & 11.15am)

I encourage you to take the information in this letter and to use it to pray for the Gospel work we are seeking to do through the various ministries in the Parish in this Advent and Christmas season and into 2026.

Thank you for your ongoing support of the Parish in all the many activities which we are blessed to be involved in and please make every effort to invite as many friends and family as possible to join us for the Advent and Christmas Services, and activities, and to be part of the Alpha Course beginning in January 2026.

I continue to be blessed to serve among you and enjoy the fellowship I share with you. I take this opportunity to wish you all a blessed Advent, Christmas and New Year from myself, Caroline, Anna, Alice and Sam.

Every blessing,

*Willie*

Rev'd Willie.