

Dean's Christmas Letter 2025

Dear Friends

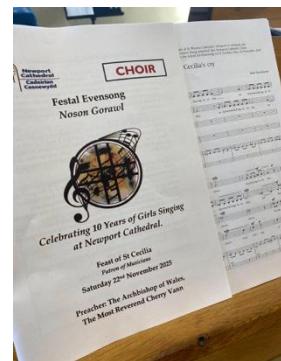
Advent and Christmas are times of both busy preparations but also reflection. We think back over the past year as Christmastide coincides with the changing of the year and look forward in hope to all that is to come. That hope is seen supremely in the awe and wonder of God among us in human life. However deep or unsure our faith may be, Christmas captures a sense that God made us, loves us, and will never let us go. All that we are, all that we share with others, or have shared, is held in those outstretched loving arms.



This has been a momentous year in the Cathedral and one that came as a surprise. An outstanding highlight was the enthronement of Archbishop Cherry in November. The circumstances around her election overshadowed the Church in Wales and it fell to us to give a moment of joy, celebration and restoration. We started planning that service in August (with a few thoughts before, guessing that it might just come our way). We have a small team, but they rose to the occasion brilliantly and the accolades have been flooding in from Wales, other Anglican churches in England, Scotland and Ireland, as well as the representatives from other church in Europe and beyond. There was and is a feeling of a new start, refocus and renewed mission.

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We weren't able to rest for long, with the installation of new canons, including a second ecumenical canon, the celebration of 10 years of girls singing in the choir and the choir concert. The celebrations of boys and girls singing together in the choir included a new commission by Ruth Brychmore, kindly funded by the Cathedral Friends. To be able to perform new music along with familiar pieces is an important part of keeping the cathedral music tradition alive.



Amidst all the sparkle there have been moments when we have provided quieter reflection, sometimes for the saddest moments in life. The baby and young person memorial service is always well attended, and it is our privilege to enable the loving arms of Christ to hold the deepest pains that there are. We see in Mary a parent who knows this grief. We have added to this the Blue Christmas service, a quieter moment of reflection for those who find this time of year harder.

Throughout the year the daily round of prayer and praise has been maintained. Each day begins and ends in the Cathedral with prayer. This, together with our regular Sunday services, is the heartbeat of everything we do.



Again, this year, Advent has brought a Posada into the Cathedral, situated in the St Luke's Chapel (below the Presentation window). Involving various groups, the different groupings accompany Mary and Joseph as they journey to Bethlehem, this year in the form of the former pub across the road. Additionally, there is a small set being passed from house to house, as Mary and Joseph are given shelter each evening in a different person's home. It will even go into a

hospital to be with someone as communion is taken to them, and be received by one of our ecumenical canon's church as they call at the Salvation Army for their Carol Service.

As people arrive for Christmas services and events they will be greeted by the new external lighting, shining lights along the path giving a more welcoming feel to the Cathedral as well as a safer one. This work was completed during the summer and the lights are automatic, so don't rely on anyone needing to turn them on (or off).

The tower work continues to get closer to being able to start, with the final surveys and permissions being granted. As the works are costed, we will be able to assess how the funds will be found. The facilities questionnaire, which we carried out over the summer, will provide rich evidence of the needs for a development phase as part of a bigger project. The responses varied, but included some very important perspectives from voices we might otherwise not have heard.

Financially, the resilience of the Cathedral was enhanced by a tremendous response to the planned giving renewal back in March. This produced a 41% rise in the level of regular giving, and together with the reintroduction of a physical collection has made a significant contribution to the Cathedral's finances.



Earlier in the year the Chapter launched its vision and plan document, 'Charting the Way'. This set out what we do and where we aim to be under four 'P's: prayer (the heartbeat of everything), proclamation (telling the story of faith and the hope we have in Jesus Christ), pastoral (caring and responding to need), prophetic (speaking of justice and transformational love). To underpin these, we aim to strengthen resilience: spiritually, in our finances, buildings and governance.

We also outlined how we aim to be, the tone and values we want to espouse as a community, which are: kind, gracious and

generous, inclusive, loving and joyful. There is an angry and divisive mood in our society that aims to grab attention, highlighted and enhanced by various online platforms. It is important that we make it clear that we aim to live differently, and to reinforce these values regularly to help us be resilient in our outlook.

Being followers of Jesus Christ, aiming to grow more and more in his likeness should bring us together, help us be more loving, welcoming and open to all, whoever they are. At a time when some are trying to cover hatred in Christian terms, this coming festival reminds us of the true Christian values to draw us all ever closer to God and one another – as strangers and friends, fellow pilgrims on the way.

The angel announced 'Emmanuel', God is with us (Matthew 1:23). It is the central message of Matthew's gospel, of Christmas, and the source of our hope.

Along with all my colleagues here, we wish you a joyful and hope-filled Christmas.

Ian Black
Dean