

Pope's visit to Scotland

The Leader of the Catholic Church in Scotland, Cardinal Keith Patrick O'Brien, is today launching the [St Ninian's Day Parade](#) - a 'grand Scottish spectacle' to welcome Pope Benedict XVI to this country next month, while also raising money for good causes at home and abroad. To launch the event, the Cardinal will be joined by the Minister for Culture and External Affairs, Fiona Hyslop MSP.

The Pope arrives in Edinburgh on the morning of 16 September - St Ninian's Day - where he will meet Her Majesty The Queen at the Palace of Holyroodhouse. It is estimated there could be as many as a billion people watching worldwide. To mark the occasion, Cardinal O'Brien has invited over a thousand pipers, hundreds of school children, dozens of historical characters plus two nominated charities to greet the Pope and entertain the crowds who'll gather in the capital that morning.

The pipers will be drawn from bands from Scotland and further afield with particular emphasis on school and youth pipe bands. They will lead the parade from

Regent Road to Princes Street where they will play 'Highland Cathedral' as the Pope

travels past in the Popemobile.

- The school children are the parade VIPs - they are invited from all 14 schools

across the country named after St Ninian. That includes Catholic, Episcopalian and

non-denominational schools.

- The historical characters will chart the history of Christianity

in Scotland since

the days of St Ninian himself 1600 years ago. Characters will include St Columba, St

Margaret, Mary Queen of Scots, John Knox and, from more recent times, Eric Liddell,

George Mackay Brown and Muriel Spark.

The nominated charities that will benefit from fundraising at the parade are Marie

Curie Cancer Care and Mary's Meals. Marie Curie has two hospices in Scotland –

Glasgow and Edinburgh. It also has a network of nurses working in communities

across Scotland. Mary's Meals sets up and runs school feeding projects in communities

where poverty and hunger prevent children from gaining an education. It currently

provides daily meals for 400,000 children in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

The St Ninian's Day Parade will begin at 11am from Regent Road and will march along

Princes Street concluding at 12.30pm with the arrival of the Holy Father himself in the Popemobile.

The event is free and spectators are advised to arrive in plenty of time.

Cardinal O'Brien said:-

"In centuries gone by St Ninian's Day was always a great occasion for national celebration and charitable giving.

We've now got a fabulous chance to resurrect that noble Scottish tradition by raising money for

two wonderful charities."

Fiona Hyslop MSP, Minister for Culture and External Affairs, said:-

"The St Ninian's Day parade will be a wonderful occasion as crowds gather in the streets of Edinburgh to extend the world-renowned warm Scottish welcome to the Holy Father. This is a great opportunity for all of Scotland to celebrate the positive contribution all our faith communities make to the life of our nation."

Head of Community Fundraising for Marie Curie Cancer Care, Paul Thompson, said:-

"We are delighted to have been chosen as one of the beneficiary charities for the Pope's visit.

With tens of thousands expected to turn out for both the parade and the Pope's journey through

Edinburgh, it's a fantastic opportunity for Marie Curie to raise substantial funds for the services

we provide here in Scotland".

The founder and Chief Executive of Mary's Meals, Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow, said:-

"The St Ninian's Day Parade promises to be a wonderful event, bringing together people from across Scotland to welcome the Pope. Mary's Meals is thrilled to have been chosen as one of the charities to benefit from the celebration and our staff and volunteers are looking forward to being involved on the day. Any monies raised by Mary's Meals will help provide school meals for hungry children in some of the world's poorest countries, enabling them to access education that will help them to escape poverty in the long term."

The Leader of Edinburgh City Council, Councillor Jenny Dawe, said

"This is a superb opportunity for Edinburgh to be seen on the world stage and to showcase the city as an excellent host of major events. While many people overseas already appreciate Edinburgh's qualities as a place in which to work, study and holiday, I hope that some of the millions watching the Pope's arrival in the UK are encouraged to come and see our city for themselves. It is undoubtedly a significant visit and I'm sure that the city will, as usual, rise to the occasion."