

The

# CONNECTION

December 2022



The Parish of Carrickfergus & Whitehead



## Mass Times

### St. Nicholas' Carrickfergus

Sunday 11.30 am

Tuesday 10.00 am

Wednesday 7.00 pm

Holy Days: As announced

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### Our Lady of Lourdes, Whitehead

Sunday 9.30 am

Wednesday 10.00 am

Holy Days: As announced

## Confessions

### Carrickfergus:

1st Wednesday of each month.

6 pm to 6.45 pm

### Whitehead:-

Sunday before Mass

## Baptism

The Sacrament of Baptism is celebrated in Our Lady of Lourdes on the first Sunday of the month and in St. Nicholas' on the second Sunday.

Contact the parish office giving a minimum of one month's notice

## Weddings

By Arrangement.

Three months' notice required.

## Sacrament of the Sick

Father Owens attends the sick and house-bound monthly as announced in the parish Bulletin or as required.



# Dear Parishioners

# W

hat does the word 'synod' mean to you?

Possibly not very much, although it is a word you may have heard being mentioned occasionally at Mass or in the media over the past year or so. A synod is a formal meeting of members of the Church, usually ordained, the purpose of which is to deliberate and legislate on matters of ecclesiastical teaching and discipline. Pope Francis has convened a synod in October next year (he has recently announced that he wishes it to reconvene the following year), but this is to be a synod with a difference – this 2023/2024 synod will involve non-ordained and ordained at every stage of its preparation and realisation (hence the recent publicity).

To facilitate this, the Pope has asked the People of God to engage in a process of LISTENING – listening respectfully and attentively to one another as we share our journey and story of faith in a spirit of prayerful trust. The Holy Father is convinced that in this ethos of listening the Holy Spirit will reveal the Divine Will for the renovation and renewal of the Universal Church, so undermined and compromised by secularism and scandal.

“Listening exercises” have been taking place all over the world to enable Catholics to gather locally to listen to one another reflecting on their Christian belief and practice, and already hundreds of reports synthesizing these discussions have been sent to Rome with a view to the preparation of an agenda for the Synod that will represent the “sense of faith” of the global People of God.

The Communications Group here in our Parish of Carrickfergus and Whitehead have decided to take a lead from Pope Francis and the Synodal Pathway and dedicate this Christmas 2022 edition of “The Connection” to how our parishioners and other friends LISTEN to God’s self-revelation in all areas of their lives.

“Speak, Lord, your servant is **listening**” (1 Samuel, 3:9).

Listening is key to mutual understanding, which, in turn, is essential for relating to the other person. We’ve heard, many times, at Mass about the importance of listening and that superficial listening isn’t enough. The examples provided via homilies always strike a chord and give food for thought. It can be difficult to give someone your full attention, to practice ‘active listening’. Quite often, we don’t actually listen properly to others. We tend to think we know what is going to be said and so our minds prepare a response before the other person even finishes speaking.

Also, a person will start to talk about something that has happened to them and we often interrupt and tell them how the same thing has happened to us.

During the lockdowns in the pandemic, the world was a lot quieter and we had the time to hear



Image: Courtesy of Joanne Campbell

the birds twittering and singing together. No doubt they were always chirping, but we just hadn't heard them so clearly, hadn't listened attentively for them.

When a baby is, say, around a table where there are some adults having a meal and chatting together, they will start to babble at great length (and volume). They want to be heard. They have no words yet, but still have a strong desire to be listened to; we humans love to have someone around to listen to them. Especially at this time of year, we can easily hear the wind and the rain outside the bedroom window, when we are warm and safe in bed. For some, that often brings the homeless to mind – how do they manage to

survive outside on nights like that? Will we take a minute to listen to them when we might otherwise rush past them when we are busy out and about around our towns and cities?

Maybe you're already planning your New Year's resolution? A suggestion might be to become a 'better listener' – surely, that is one resolution that we could work on throughout 2023?

The members of the Parish Pastoral Council (PPC) would like to extend to all Parishioners a Blessed, Joyful and Christ-centred Christmas season.

**Fr. Peter Owens (President PPC) & Paddy Stewart (Chair-person PPC)**

# Listening to God



**T**he dictionary gives at least three definitions of listening: -

1. To give attention with the ear – in conversation, greetings, or general socialising. We enjoy time together just talking, laughing and catching up.
2. To pay attention, to heed or obey – this is listening with intent. We listen because we want and need to hear, so we focus on the speaker. We need direction, instruction, information.
3. To wait attentively as for a sound – an expected knock on the door, traffic, alarms, etc.

In a cell group context, all three scenarios are present and essential.

As we gather together as a group, we chat and socialise until our numbers are complete and we are ready to come to God. We welcome Jesus into our midst and ask the Holy Spirit to be our guide, and He does. We open our hearts and minds to listen to Him and notice that when we choose our praise songs, they are often the choice of more than one member. The Holy Spirit leads us into praise, and when we are giving thanks for blessings received we are hearing of His work in each other's lives. Listening to thanksgiving in others lifts us to be more thankful.

*"We enter His gates with thanksgiving in our hearts" (Psalm 100:4)*

We read our Gospel passage, and we enter into listening with intent. We are listening to the voice of God. We are all God's children and He speaks to us individually and together, so when we share our thoughts on the Gospel passage we are enriched, excited and encouraged. We listen to the teaching of Father Michael Hurley and receive instruction and revelation from the passage. It is incumbent on us to hear, heed and obey the teaching of Jesus if we want to be truly like Him.

Sometimes we need to be very still and listen carefully to one another. This is so important when we come to pray together. We are now listening to the heartbeat of the group. We hear the outpouring of a heart in prayer and we add our prayers to their prayers in support – whether it be for help, guidance, or just an outpouring of joy. We are there for each other.

May we learn to really listen to one another and grow in love.

To 'hear' is not quite the same as to 'listen'. An elderly person might say "I think I need a hearing test". They find the need to increase the volume on the TV, they find they are saying "Please could you repeat that" much more often! Then again, bird watchers may say to their friends, "Are you able to 'hear' the 'pee wit' sound from the red beaked birds on the shore?" Or again a mother may say, "Oh I can 'hear' my baby is awake." Or again there may be a 'clunk' at the front door, and when we 'hear' that sound we know it is the post dropping on the mat in the hall.

To 'listen' means something more than just hearing. My husband, now not too well these days, tells me he is not able to enjoy listening to music these days — 'Why?', I say. He then says sadly that he cannot concentrate on it, and therefore does not enjoy it. To him, 'listening' to music is more than just 'hearing' it. I was at my Poetry reading Club last week at which we are given a subject and choose poems that we like to read out loud on that particular subject. One of the poems was so beautiful and so deep, I asked if the member could read it again. I could not quite take it all in.

That happened to Our Lady. She was so amazed and bewildered by what she was hearing. The Shepherds had been out in the hills that dark night and the light of the Lord had been shining all around, and an Angel had been telling them some Good News of a Saviour who had been born. This had been followed by a multitude of Angels singing and praising God. We are told that Our Lady 'treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart". The story REALLY affected her and entered into her soul; she surely 'listened'.

And so now we come to our Cell Meeting. In our opening Prayer when we have lit the Candle, which symbolises Christ's presence among us, we say, "Lord we are here to 'listen' to your Word, we are here to search for your Truth. Speak to us Lord your servants are 'listening' "

How do we try to achieve this? Well, one of the ways is we take a short passage from the bible (often the gospel of the following Sunday). We 'listen' to it being read more than once from our own different bible translations. We ponder over certain words or phrases and try and get to the heart of the passage as to what Christ is telling us. Then we discuss how we might be able to put the teaching into practice ourselves. We are helped by listening to a message on a phone or laptop, kindly sent to us from Father Hurley. He poses questions for us to discuss.

During the meeting we also 'listen' to each other when we take time for prayers of intercession. Everything that we pray for is treated with great confidentiality. It is heart warming to hear someone is recovering well after an operation or sickness, so it is also a time for prayers of thanksgiving. We not only pray for our personal family and friends but also for our Parish, and for our Country and World and its Leaders. We need God's help in all we do.

We also take time to 'listen' in case any of us have faith stories to tell. Perhaps we have experienced a brief encounter where someone we met has been helped by OUR words or actions, or perhaps WE have been helped by someone else. Sometimes a member may have heard a religious service on the radio or internet and how it affected them in some way, or they have been taking part in a religious course of instruction. We also like to hear if someone is reading a good book, the life of a Saint or words from our Pope or previous Popes, perhaps. Sometimes members tell us about a pilgrimage they have been on, maybe to Rome or Santiago in Spain.

Our Cell encourages us to 'listen' to others, because by doing this we may pick up a light from Christ, and of course we too could be the light for others. This light would be the light of Christ working through us. We would be Christ's 'instrument'. In our prayers at the beginning of a meeting, we ask for the Holy Spirit to enable us "to go out boldly and share this new life with all in our community". Our Mission!



**Ruth Bates**



**CONNECTION**

# Listening to Music

In 2009, archaeologists excavating a cave in southern Germany uncovered a flute carved from a vulture's wing bone. The delicate artefact is the oldest known musical instrument on earth – indicating that people have been making music for over 40,000 years. Researchers consider the existence of instruments as a clear marker of advanced and settled societies. Although we can't be sure exactly when humans began listening to music, scientists do know something about why we do. Listening to music benefits us individually and collectively. Music has the power to improve our physical, mental and emotional health.

Music is a powerful way of uniting people. National anthems connect crowds at sporting events, creating a sense of belonging and pride. Protest songs stir a sense of shared purpose during marches. Hymns build group identity in houses of worship. Love songs help prospective partners bond during courtship and lullabies enable parents and infants to develop secure attachments.

Music brings people together by creating social cohesion. It speaks to all when words can fail and wherever you go in the world it is understood. Music is a universal gift and art form with human interaction at its centre. It connects people either through the instruments they play, a shared interest in a particular style of music, or by simply stomping your feet along to a good old ceilidh tune.

Music stimulates the brain helping to reduce stress, improve memory and even providing pain relief. It improves mood and helps to reduce anxiety. By bringing people together it is also an antidote to loneliness and social isolation. Music can have a huge impact on people with dementia, helping to calm and relax them.

In a digital age where many services and products are available at the click of a button, learning a musical instrument or new piece of music takes time and perseverance and plenty of practice. There are many different skills required to achieve success: learning to read music, technique, expression all of which help you to build resilience. If at first you don't succeed, keep trying!

Similarly, as a member of a choir, band or orchestra you develop team work and leadership skills, and a real sense of achievement and pride when you finally master a piece of music, all of which come together to build confidence. These are not only skills required to learn music but important life skills that can be transferred into your employment and your wider social life.

Music is incredibly creative providing opportunities for people from all social and cultural backgrounds to express themselves. Musicians have been using music since the earliest times as a way of expressing themselves and getting their voices heard.



The 42,000-year-old flutes from Hohle Fels, Vogelherd and Geißenklösterle upper Danube region (now southwest Germany)



Music is also fun; helping to lift spirits. It is welcoming – everyone can sing, even if the notes are in the wrong order, key or whatever. At Advent and Christmas time especially, you hear music everywhere – in shops, in the Chapel and on the TV or radio. I challenge any of you not to sing along to Wizard’s, “I wish it could be Christmas Everyday”.

Of all the beautiful and iconic works of art produced by the Church from paintings like the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel or architecture like great cathedrals and basilicas, none is more beautiful and edifying than the musical traditions of the Church. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states,



***"The musical tradition of the universal Church is a treasure of inestimable value, greater even than that of any other art."***

Perhaps of all the musical traditions of the Church, none is more beautiful than the deep and long tradition of chant. It is at once both simple and complex; the work of humans but the sounds of Heaven. Through much of the history of the Church, chant held the place of primacy in the liturgical traditions of the West. Think about the Exultet sung at the Easter Vigil – it links us with the past and takes pride of place in that particular service.

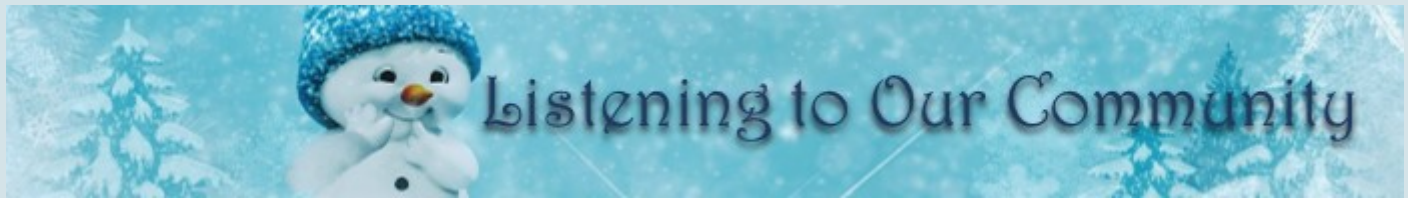


But times change. Today we are blessed to have a vast array of hymns at our disposal in a variety of different styles. In our parish praise we try to provide a balanced mix of old and traditional with contemporary and modern tunes. As a Folk Group, “Onward Christian Soldiers” would be a challenge, but we try to reflect the liturgy. Our hymns help to educate us all about God, Jesus and the Gospels. They reinforce the readings and prayers and as St. Augustine said,

***“To sing well is to pray twice”***

Anne Nagley





**M**y name is Calum Pollard, I am 12 years old and I live in Whitehead. I would like to tell you how I became the sailing World Champion this year on Lake Garda in Italy. I have been sailing boats for as long as I can remember. When I was really small I was sailing with my family and when I was 7 I started to sail Toppers on my own. My Dad coached me every week from when I was young. Two years ago, I was selected onto the Royal Yachting Association Northern Ireland Topper Squad. This meant I would start weekend winter training, which was really tough but I enjoyed it. I had been training for the world championships that were meant to take place in Cork in 2021 but these were cancelled due to COVID-19, so instead Mum and Dad decided we would travel to Lake Garda in Italy for the World Championships in 2022, which was a lot warmer.

When you sail you are used to travelling around Ireland to get to events, so my Mum and Dad got a motor home to take our family to events and tow our three boats along with Dad's coaching dinghy. My season started really well, I won the Winter Championships in the Royal North of Ireland Yacht Club. I was really pleased with this result but knew I could do even better. My next event was in Dun Laoghaire, the Southern Championships. The weather was really challenging and some of the races were completed inside the harbour which was very tricky and I had to use all my tactical knowledge – I was delighted to win the event and become Southern Champion. Then we travelled to Dunmore East in Waterford for the Irish Nationals. This was a three-day event and I won all 7 races making me the Irish Champion. I knew after this event I was having a great season but going to the World Championships would be very different.

We travelled from Whitehead in our motorhome, towing our boats behind. It took us 4 days, travelling through 9 countries to get to Italy. The scenery was amazing. When we got to the campsite at Lake Garda, we got ready for 5 days of on the water training followed by two days rest before the event. My Dad brought myself and my brother Rory out onto the race track for training. It was really windy and challenging. We did this every day so we could understand the conditions. Then all our friends from Ireland arrived. One of my stand out moments was at the opening ceremony when all the competitors marched through the streets of Riva del Garda. I was on Rory's shoulders waving the Irish flag at the head of the Irish Team.

The racing lasted for five gruelling days with three races per day scheduled. There were 250 sailors from all around the world. I was in the 4.2 class and Rory was in the 5.3 fleet. We were racing on the water for up to six hours every day. The first race I finished third, which enabled me to see my competition. I knew I could do better – the next three races I was first. After the first day I was given the gold bib as the leader of the event and I kept the bib until the end of the event as I was leading every day. However, with sailing, anything can happen so I was really nervous up until the start of the last race that something might go wrong.

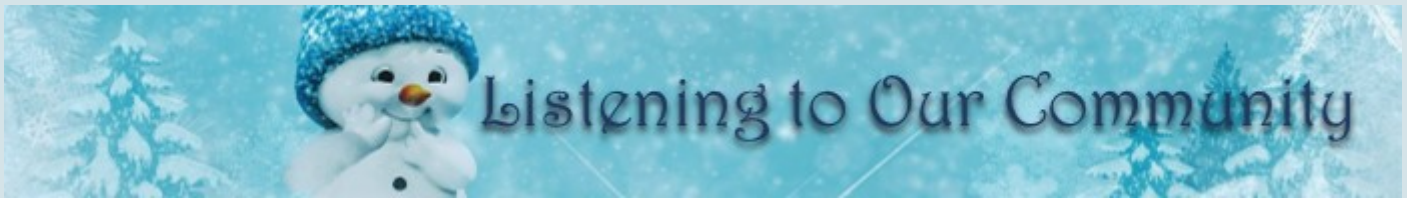
When I started the last race, I think my Dad was more nervous than I was. He was on the water every day in his dingy with spare parts in case we broke something, and he was in constant contact with my Mum, who was on the shore with the other Irish families – everyone was both excited and nervous!! When I crossed the finishing line and I realised I had done it, I could hear the screams and cheers from all the Irish support boats. When my Dad came up to me and said I had done it, I couldn't quite believe it, I had been so focused on the race. I was given the Irish flag and it was attached to my mast. One of the most amazing things was being towed in by my Dad through the fleet. I was able to see Rory, as he was sailing in another Gold fleet. I could hear him shouting, and all my friends who were all cheering. When I got to the slipway, there was a large crowd, saw my Mum who was cheering, and some of the Irish dads lifted my boat straight from the water and carried me up the slipway, which was amazing. My little sister Aoife was also there screaming and shouting!

At the awards ceremony when they said, "and the new Topper World Champion is Calum Pollard" I was so proud; all my hard work and determination had paid off. When I arrived home my Granny and Granda Boylan had arranged for banners to be put across our house saying Calum Pollard World Champion and Rory Pollard Gold Fleet Champion. They had also arranged a welcoming party with people from the local Yacht Club. I then got an email from my absolute hero Sir Ben Ainslie congratulating me on my win. After that, I was interviewed by UTV and there was a civic reception and cavalcade with the Lord Mayor! My school principal did a special assembly about me and I had to bring in all my trophies to show everyone. At the Yacht Club Captains Night, the club presented me with a large framed picture of me being lifted up the slipway and my picture is on the wall of the yacht club which is amazing.



**Callum Pollard**

The **CONNECTION**



# Listening to Our Community

I was delighted when I received the phone call to say that I had been selected to play for Northern Ireland for my seventh Commonwealth Games, especially as it was going to be in Birmingham. That meant I was able to bring my family, Helen and Jordan, over to enjoy the events and support me in my bowling competitions.

When we arrived at the village, our team manager contacted me to tell me the great news that I was going to be the flag bearer for our Country. This was a great honour for me and my family, one that will live with me for the rest of my life, as it is something that I have always dreamt about, walking out carrying the flag for Northern Ireland.

To play in the bowling fours with my club mates Sam Barkley and Adam McKeown, their first Commonwealth Games, was such a special occasion; the other member of the team was my great friend Ian McClure. We have great friendship and camaraderie playing together, which helped enormously throughout the competition. When we



beat Wales in the semi-final and got through to playing for the gold medal in the match against India, we all believed in one another and trusted each other implicitly.

We were so excited to be playing for the gold medal on Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> August and were obviously delighted when we won the match against India. To win the gold was an unbelievable feeling.

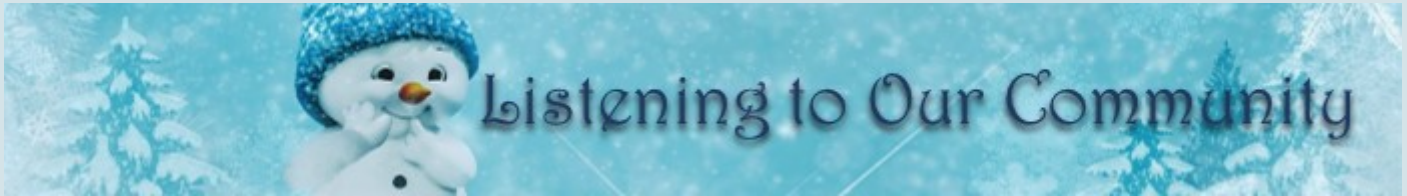
Our motto was the same then as now,

***'Believe and Don't Give-Up'***



It was such a wonderful feeling to stand on the podium and hear our National Anthem play – it brought a tear to my eyes.

**Marty McHugh**



**W**hat an incredible day I had at Royal Hillsborough Castle where I received my award for services to patients and their families at the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children. I have dedicated thirteen years of my life to this project and will continue to support the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children and their staff.

It was great meeting other people and seeing them receive awards for the work they have been doing in their communities.

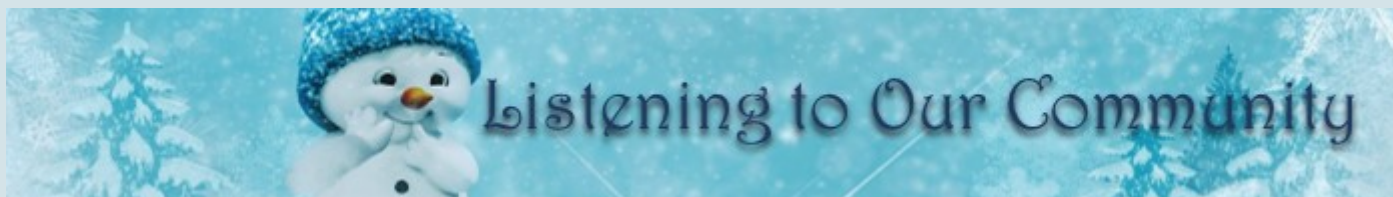


It was then on to Stormont for some fine dining. Once again, I enjoyed an incredible time and, on a tour of the building, I received some really warm comments from the staff.

The Eilish Degnan Children’s Foundation is dedicated to the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children. On behalf of the Foundation I accepted the award for thirteen years of work. I simply could not do without the help and support I have received over the years. A massive thank you is extended to everyone who has supported me and the Foundation set up in my Mother’s memory. There’s lots more to do, so no time to rest. Special thanks also to Robin Swann MLA, Minister of Health, the Lord Mayor of Antrim and Newtownabbey, the Lord Lieutenant and the staffs of Royal Hillsborough Castle, Stormont Building and the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children.



**John Fitzgerald Degnan BEM.**



**F**rom a very young age Shane and Tara have always displayed astounding sporting abilities and we, as parents, are not quite sure where they originated!

Shane began playing rugby for the Minis at Belfast High School Old Boys in Greenisland, where the roots of his love for rugby were planted and began to flourish. After years of playing tournaments and games for Belfast High Old Boys, he took all he had learnt to Carrickfergus Rugby Club where, as an 11-year-old boy, he strived to further develop his grassroots with a bigger team. He began to show his true potential as a key player in Carrickfergus Rugby Club, where he captained his team to many victories.

When you ask Shane about his fondest memory of his rugby years, he will always tell the story of captaining the Under 14 team to the Ulster Final at the Kingspan Stadium in 2020. He will relive the momentary disappointment of a very narrow loss, but fond memories of true teamwork and sportsmanship will always be told with a broad smile!



Shane began to train and play for the Ulster Club's Development Squad, where his skills and talent really began to rocket. It was quite extraordinary to watch. As with any sport there are always knockbacks and for Shane this came in a very bittersweet way. When he moved to Carrickfergus Grammar School and began to play in the Rugby Schools' Leagues, he had to leave the Ulster Club side. Shane is currently the Captain of the First Fifteen in Carrickfergus Grammar School, earning him the coveted burgundy blazer. For Shane playing for the First Fifteen in Carrickfergus Rugby Club has always been an aspiration and now, with this in sight, his rugby is continuing to go from strength to strength.

As parents, we always thought Tara would emulate Kerry as an Irish Dancer, but after a few years, she decided it was time to succumb to her undeniable talent and love for football. Tara began to play for Whitehead Eagles as the only girl on an all-boys team, which never phased her. Whitehead Eagles taught Tara the basics of what she knows on the pitch.

She then moved to Carnmoney Ladies' Football Club, a community she has always loved. Training and matches all year round, multiple times a week became very normal for us, and every minute has been worth it to watch her do what she loves, even in the cold, dark, winter nights. Tara was noticed by Northern Ireland Ladies' Excellence Squad when she was about 12 and began to train and play with them. To say Tara's journey with the Northern Ireland development programme has been a rocky one would be an understatement! Continuous trials, summers spent on Jordanstown pitches and training all over the country became second nature to her. As she matured all her hard work meant she reaped rewards through selections for British and European tournaments. Travelling the length of Ireland, UK and Europe has enriched her with experiences which were once a dream. Hotel living and the NI Coach are second nature to her now!

Often Tara's determination and resilience are remarked upon, as she takes everything in her stride and can turn every negative into a positive. This became particularly clear when she was all set to travel to Israel for the Under-17 Euros Tournament. Unfortunately she contracted COVID-

19 leaving her unable to travel. The devastation was something indescribable and, as parents, we felt helpless. The immense hard work Tara had put into her training on the pitch, in the gym and in the classroom in preparation for this opportunity felt like a waste. However, this was not something Tara was going to lie under and on the day she was meant to take off for Israel, she captained her school, Aquinas Grammar, Ladies' Gaelic team to a victory in the Ulster Final! This was an achievement for Tara which taught her the art of putting positivity into practice.

Tara has always played a fearless style of football and has always been fearless in her approach. It was once a hobby in St. Nicholas' playground and on the street where she would kick a football against a wall for hours. To have witnessed her journey to where she is now as an Under-19 International has been tremendous.



Tara and Shane have made both of us beyond proud. They have achieved goals which initially they both only dreamed of, and they often remind us of how much more there is still to achieve. Both Tara and Shane, train and play according to a philosophy which they introduced us to,

***'Hard work beats talent when talent doesn't work hard'***

**Paul & Siobhán Gilmore**





# Listening as an Active Listener

Over the course of many years listening is one of the most powerful gifts I have been blessed with.

Listening runs much deeper than what each of us say. In and around 2005, I began my journey of becoming a counsellor. I could say listening wasn't my main objective at school. However I always had, and still do have time to listen to people. The journey began after I had spent years working with children whose parents/carers had interventions with Social Services. Some of the children had difficulty with speech and language, others with behaviour. I often spent time with the parents/carers listening to the issues they faced and the impact this had on life. It was fed back that I heard what they had to say, and they felt valued. I also experienced the need to be heard and invested in counselling over the years to deal with my own experiences. The relief when the issues become shared has many benefits.

Seeking to understand from a non- judgemental perspective, giving undivided attention to those trusting us with their inner thoughts is a privilege. Listening is a skill

developed over a period, both used negatively as a form of influence but also positively comprehending the speaker's emotional need, respecting their thoughts in that moment.

As humans we hope or expect to be understood. Listening is a way of creating a bond, offering affirmation that our feelings, actions and thoughts matter. To be heard is a gift placing value on the parts of ourselves we doubt. Listening cultivates relationships. As we develop, we use our senses to survive in our environment. Communication is a massive part of today's society and is taken for granted. We sit in meetings and our minds wander; .... "What will I make for dinner?"; "Have the dogs been fed?"; "Are the kids at home?" .... This can often be how we are in many parts of our lives.



Listening therapeutically or spiritually opens us up mentally and emotionally and makes us more self-aware. Listening skills can be taught. However, some people are already, innately, good listeners. Counselling combines the ability to listen, connect, and understand people.

The empowerment that comes to a person who is heard is necessary for emotional repair and has a lifetime impact for the person who was not dealing with life as it was. Listening develops trust, reduces miscommunication, encourages empathy, deepens friendships, and therapeutically or spiritually helps the communication language of each individual so that the appropriate healing can be encouraged to take place.

We, as humans, enjoy touch. Post COVID-19, many people have presented with failing communication issues either personally or in work. However, COVID-19 has highlighted for many how isolated they have been even before the pandemic as no one has listened or heard them throughout their lives. Many who grew up in homes in which physical affection had not been apparent have struggled to learn how to be heard, how to communicate and how to initiate relationships outside mechanical reality. They have become aware of how they mirrored others and did not truly understand the depth of what a powerful communication tool it is, personally and professionally. Learning what it is to be heard has impacted self-awareness beyond their expectations.

As a facilitator of this healing, listening has been an instrument alongside, empathy, congruence, and all the core conditions therapists work to. Listening is an undervalued tool and is equally as important as any other sense. It is as important to listen to ourselves as to others and give ourselves the space we make for others in our lives. It has been a joy to reflect on the listening process from an alternative view. I often forget how as a listening agent we can become complacent and forget to value the ability.

*“If he who listens, listens fully, then he who listens becomes he who understands. “*

*Ptahhotep*

***Maggie Lavery***

***<https://caimcounselling.com/>***



**CONNECTION**



# Listening to Children



# M

ost of us find ourselves thinking about these questions,

“Am I doing enough for my children?”,

“What does my child think of me?”

“Am I a good parent/teacher?”.

The simplest way to know, is to ask. In other words, take feedback from your children.

Why it matters;

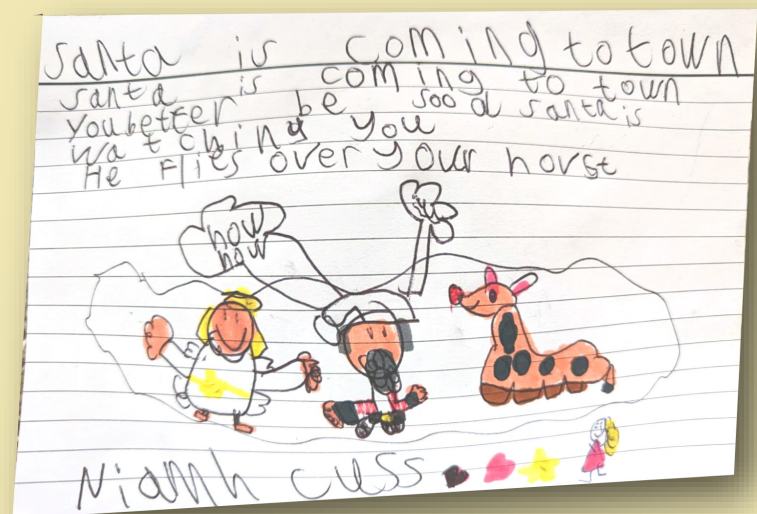
it makes the child feel heard and that their opinion matters. They learn that communication is a two-way process. It helps the child to stand up for themselves in the future. If they are caught in a situation that makes them uncomfortable, they know that they can always speak out and give feedback. It makes them open to feedback. Once a child feels heard, they will be open to hearing from you as well.

But, aren't children too young to give feedback?

Children observe and infer every action you make. They are constantly thinking about why you are doing what you are doing. What we can do is help them put words to it in a helpful manner. I recently found myself on 'Granda' watch with two of our grandkids, Niamh and Orlagh. Their Mum, (a teacher!) prepped them to help Granda write this article. Niamh wrote a poem about Santa... And drew a little picture...

I was able to ask her about her thinking around both; she told me about her thoughts and wishes.

Orlagh and I chatted (with the TV off) about Santa. She told me Santa would bring her presents because she did good things this year. She said she was kind to people. Especially her good friend in school. (No names!!) She also tried to be kind with another girl but she said she wouldn't be her friend. (No names!!) .... Never too young to give feedback!!



Simple moments with your grandchildren often become the most priceless memories. As grandparents, we are embracing a new role in life. Seeing our children grow up to have children of their own is one of life's great joys and privileges, and it reminds us of how life is a circle, with so many stages and cycles. The young become the old, and,

***"The Child is father of the Man,"***

as William Wordsworth wrote.

The best grandparents know how to listen. Just being there to listen to your grandchildren's stories and encourage their enthusiasm is a wonderful gift to give. Life is busy, and our grandchildren have busy parents who work full-time jobs to provide for their family. Grandkids have a hectic life of sport, gymnastics, parties and a club list from A-Z. I felt tired just listening to my daughter's logistics over a typical weekend of activities for her kids. We old folk have more time now in our retirement to slow down and sit down with our grandkids, in person or virtually. We have another two little 'beauts' in Oz.



They may not always make much sense and they may have far-fetched ideas and stories, but it's important that they feel listened to and acknowledged.

One final thought...

*"Grandchildren: the only people who can get more out of you than the Taxman"*

— Gene Perret

**Paul (Granda) Smith**

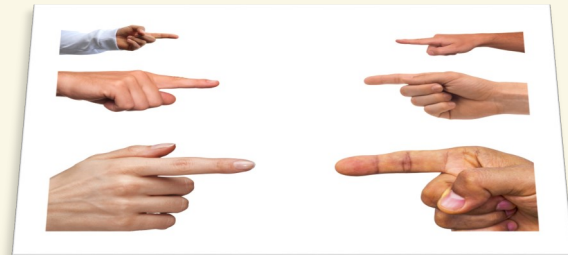
# Are You Listening?

**T**wo eyes, two ears, one mouth ...

I was told from a young age to use these senses in that proportion. Look and see what's actually going on, listen well to hear what's being said, not what you think is being said. Engage brain, switch your filter on, then respond appropriately. Ah, if only it were so easy. We'd all be in a happier place if we got it right a little more often.

It may come as a surprise to many to know that there is an 'art' to listening. The first days of a counselling session will be devoted to what is called active listening. This is not listening whilst out exercising by the way, more of a learned skill to develop the ability to listen in greater depth.

How many fights and fall outs have come from our inability to listen properly? There is an old joke about how Chinese whispers can change a message completely after being passed through different channels; *"Send reinforcements, we're going to advance"* becomes, *"Send two and sixpence, we're going to a dance."*!



How good a listener are you? Can you think of a time when you were talking with someone, and you knew you weren't being listened to? It's a horrible experience and can feel belittling and even humiliating. So many relationships break down due to a lack of good communication,

*"You never listen to me!",* or

*"I told you that the other night but, as usual, you weren't listening; .... too busy on your phone!"*

It's also about what we're listening to. The classic openers of, *"you never"* or, *"you always"* or, *"no, you're wrong"* are sure-fire triggers to make the listener instantly shut down, leading to the talker wasting their breath on the rest of the sentence. Once those defences are up there's no chance of anything much getting through! The main culprit to poor listening is a thing I call, 'listening to reply'. This occurs when a person says something to us, and we instantly start to formulate a reply in our head. We then get so focussed on what we are going to say in reply that we miss the rest of what's being said. By the time we make our reply it becomes clear that the person doesn't know what we mean because they have ended saying something different and we've missed it.

The other thing we are good at is wanting to talk back before the person has finished speaking. We are so desperate to get our reply out that we constantly attempt to interrupt, and they don't get a chance to say what they want to. *"If you'd let me finish"*, is all we end up hearing from an exasperated other half.

In the Bible we are told of the, *'still small voice in the storm'* (1 Kings 19:11-13 ). We are told Jesus says, *"He who has ears, let him hear"* (Matthew 11:15). We put our faith in words said at the time and transcribed years later in the hope that the writer was a good listener and got it right.

What I've noticed in recent years is people out walking with earphones in; oblivious to the wonderful sounds of nature all around them. It gives a good insight into how connected we are to the world around us. Next time you get the chance to go on a country walk when the cows are in the field, stop a while and listen to the noise they make as they rip up the grass to chew it. Or, listen out for the sound of a pheasant as it gives out a crow-like warning that someone is approaching. Notice the sound of the rain as it hits your waterproof coat; an all too common experience in this country.

During lockdown the country became far more aware of birdsong. Was that because we had no aircraft or traffic noise to drown it out or were we more attuned to it because our minds weren't as distracted as usual? Either way, nature provided much needed relief and respite to so many at that time.

In conclusion then, ask yourself these questions. "Am I a person who listens to reply?", "Do I actually listen to what is being said" or, "Have I gone off on one before I've heard the whole conversation?", "When was the last time I truly engaged in listening to the world around me?", "When was the last time I talked with someone about an important issue and had the phone, TV, radio and computer switched off, so my listening was switched on?"

Perhaps it's time for all of us to take more time out, connect more with ourselves and the world around us and learn to listen. "Am I **really** listening?" Sounds a simple thing to do but I think you'd be surprised at how difficult it can be.

**"Two ears, two eyes, one mouth".**

Not bad advice to get us through life.

Noel McKee (OBE)



**CONNECTION**



# My Christmas Wish

Christmas is a time for celebrating the birth of Jesus, a time of peace, a time for love and cheer, a time for memories to last throughout the year.

This year I wish for good things to happen to those who need it the most.

I wish that the poor and homeless have a peaceful Christmas. I hope that people show generosity by donating to food banks and homeless charities

I'm very thankful for the work of our NHS during COVID-19 and I hope they have a deserved peaceful Christmas. I hope they keep their good work up.

My personal wish is to get together with my family again for a nice Christmas. I am so thankful for what I have got in life. I have got a brother, a dog and a great Mum and Dad.

Ethan Baker P6



Christmas is a time of showing love and care to others. It's a big holiday celebrating Jesus' birth. It's a date of the year no one will forget, everyone will wait for, exchanging gifts, the feast and sharing stories!

This year I wish peace and happiness upon all those who are struggling by experiencing war, financial hardship, poverty, homelessness. I wish upon those who deserve it, a good Christmas and good things coming their way.

This Christmas I don't want a lot, I just have a few things I really want. They are: a Polaroid camera (may need film), I really want some car tracks (one of the big packs) and a Christmas costume for my dog.



Mia P7

**C**HRISTMAS IS A TIME FOR CELEBRATING THE BIRTH OF JESUS, A TIME FOR MAKING MEMORIES TO LAST THROUGHOUT THE YEARS.

THIS CHRISTMAS I WISH THAT I CAN GO TO MY GRANNY'S GRAVE ON THE 25TH OF DECEMBER AND PRAY THAT SHE'S WELL UP IN HEAVEN.

I WISH THAT THE HOMELESS PEOPLE GET A HOME, FOOD AND WATER BECAUSE SOME PEOPLE HAVE BEEN SUFFERING AND ARE COLD BECAUSE THEY DON'T HAVE FAMILY, FRIENDS OR MONEY TO GET A HOUSE.

I HOPE THAT THE WAR BETWEEN UKRAINE AND RUSSIA ENDS AND THAT ALL THOSE AFFECTED BY CONFLICT AROUND THE WORLD EXPERIENCE PEACE.

I WISH THAT OUR NHS STAFF HAVE A DESERVED PEACEFUL CHRISTMAS BECAUSE THEY SAVED THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE'S LIVES AND STAYED IN THE HOSPITALS FOR WEEKS AND MONTHS TO HELP PEOPLE WITH COVID-19. SO, I WISH THAT THEY COULD GET A PAY RISE FOR THE EFFORT THEY GIVE.

**PHEARSE HARKIN P7**



**C**hristmas is a time for celebrating the birth of Jesus, a time for joy, a time for love and cheer, a time to make memories to last throughout the year.

For this year's Christmas wish I wish for everyone to have a good and peaceful time. I wish that good things come to the poor and unlucky souls of this planet. That all conflicts of Earth like border conflicts (Russia and Ukraine), rivalries between countries (India and Pakistan), rebellions from countries (Yemen) and terror attacks from countries end. I want all poverty stricken people of Earth to manage to get food, water and a roof over their heads.

**Ryan P7**





**C**HRISTMAS IS A TIME FOR CELEBRATING THE BIRTH OF JESUS, A TIME OF JOY , A TIME FOR LOVE AND CHEER, A TIME FOR MAKING MEMORIES TO LAST THROUGHOUT THE YEAR.

THIS CHRISTMAS I WISH THAT EVERYONE AROUND THE WORLD WILL BE ABLE TO SEE THEIR FAMILY AND FRIENDS, TO BE HAPPY AND CHEERFUL, PARTICULARLY THOSE WHO LIVE AWAY FROM THEIR LOVED ONES. I WANT PEOPLE TO RECOVER SAFELY FROM ILLNESS. I WISH THAT PEOPLE WHO ARE EXPERIENCING CONFLICT HAVE A PEACEFUL LIFE. I



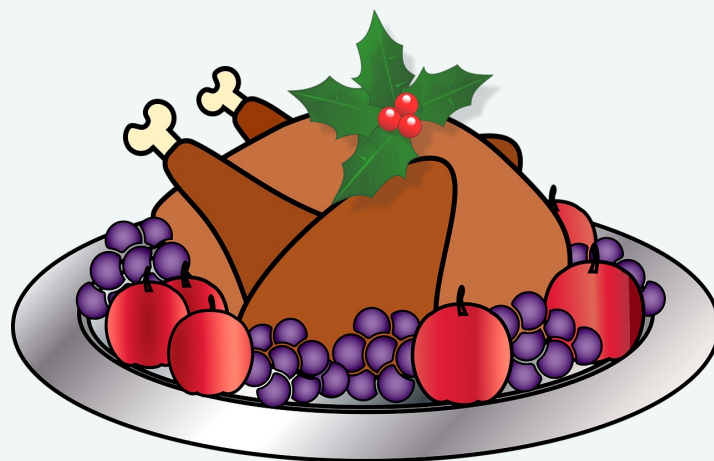
I WISH THAT THOSE EXPERIENCING FINANCIAL DIFFICULTIES HAVE SOME RELIEF. I HOPE I WILL BE ABLE TO SPEND QUALITY TIME WITH MY FAMILY AND EXCHANGE GIFTS WITH OTHERS TO REMEMBER THE GIFTS JESUS RECEIVED FROM THE THREE WISE MEN.

**MATTHEW P7**

**C**hristmas is a time for celebrating the birth of Jesus, a time of joy, a time for love and cheer, a time for making memories to last through the year .

I wish this Christmas that everyone would have enough food to eat so nobody starves. I wish that everyone around the world could be healthy and happy and know God's love. I also pray for all the sick people around the world, that they could get better this Christmas and have a peaceful time.

**Justin Gabzo P7**





***Christmas is a time for celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ. Christmas is a time of happiness and joy. I wish Jesus to provide for people. I wish for a good life and good Education. I wish for peace to my family and the whole world. I wish for good things to happen to people around me, my family, my friends, my teacher and everybody in the World. I wish I can become a Doctor.***



**David P6**



Christmas is a time for celebrating the birth of Jesus, a time of joy, a time for love and cheer, a time for making memories to last the year.

This Christmas I wish that all poverty stricken families have more money, enough food, and excellent medical care. I also wish

that the country (Government) helps the NHS/National Health Service.

I wish that those around the world who are financially well off, show charity by sharing what they have with the less fortunate. I hope that my family can come together this year and spend some quality time together as it is our first Christmas without my grandmother. I hope that she is well in Heaven.



**Beau. D P7**



# The Art of Listening

**D**espite the fact that there are always new gadgets for communicating, we know that listening is still essential in human communication. But how good are we at listening? Pope Francis, in World Communications Day 2022 said,

*“Communicating means sharing, and sharing demands listening and acceptance.*

*Listening is much more than simply hearing. Hearing is about receiving information, while listening is about communication, and calls for closeness. Listening allows us to get things right, and not simply to be passive onlookers, users or consumers. Listening also means being able to share questions and doubts, to journey side by side, to banish all claims to absolute power and to put our abilities and gifts at the service of the common good.”*

Active listening is an essential skill counsellors use to develop a positive and healthy interaction with a client. This kind of listening intentionally, focuses on who I am listening to, in order to understand what he or she is saying. As the listener, I then repeat back in my own words what they have said to their satisfaction. This does not mean I agree with what they are saying, but that I understand.

We know in Accord that transformational journeys can begin when someone is simply being fully present in a way that requires no proclamation, no preaching, simply identification, solidarity. It is about coming alongside someone, meeting them where they were at, being fully present, actively and intentionally listening. To listen is to act from a place of compassion that doesn't patronise or pity; that neither looks up to people nor looks down on them but looks across at them, recognising and respecting the humanity we share, imagining what it's like to be them. Listening does not begin with questions or answers; it is not about having a textbook with all the right responses. Rather it is about centring on the person before us, on how they're feeling, on what's troubling them; their perspective. It's about building an alliance, building trust, acting in solidarity. To be fully present to someone is a powerful ingredient for flourishing relationships – for establishing a connection.

Some time ago, Accord undertook research called, '*Unhappy Marriages, Does Counselling Work?*' (Dr Kieran Mc Keown, 2002). This longitudinal study, asked the question, "*What contributes to unhappiness in marriage?*". Unsurprisingly, Dr. Mc Keown found that 'not listening' contributes significantly to unhappiness in marriage.

When couples come to Accord, they are given a quiet, safe space to listen to one another and the skill of a professional counsellor who can help the couple to listen, reconnect, let go, rebuild, and grow. It is our work to come alongside, to meet people where they are at, to travel in their direction, however inconvenient. We enter into their stories, their pain, their joys, to identify with them, to listen intently, to be fully present.

Accord counsellors are often asked, *“Will we be able to work things out?”*.

The good news is that, if both individuals wish to stay in their marriage/relationship, genuinely commit to the counselling process, and engage in active listening, then it is possible to deal with and resolve many of the problems existing in a relationship. Listening is key to this possibility; without truly listening, couples cannot hear each other. Trained counsellors can create this safe space where - maybe for the first time - the couple begin to understand what each is feeling. Pope Francis talks about accompanying couples in the first years of married life, and says that,

*“A crisis has a lesson to teach us; we need to learn how to listen for it with the ear of the heart”*.

In his exhortation, ‘Amoris Laetitia’ (The Joy of Love 2016), the Pope notes that,

*“No family drops down from heaven perfectly formed;  
families need constantly to grow and mature in the ability to love”*

The Church has a responsibility to provide a safe space for couples to talk and listen. In this intimate space, hope can often be restored, healing can begin and love can grow again. This kind of healing takes time and perseverance, but if a couple want to change and are willing to work at it, they can - regardless of what has happened between them - learn to love and trust again.

This kind of listening is not just for the counselling room. In the recently published document on the ‘Continental Stage’ of the Synod, we are told that,

*“The free and gratuitous attention to the other, which is the basis of listening, is not a limited resource to be jealously guarded, but an overflowing source that does not run out, but grows the more we draw from it. Listening and dialogue are the way to access the gifts that the Spirit offers us through the multifaceted variety of the one Church: of charisms, of vocations, of talents, of skills, of languages and cultures, of spiritual and theological traditions, of different forms of celebrating and giving thanks.”*

The Art of Listening is ultimately the Art of Accompaniment, with love and compassion.

### **Deirdre O’Rawe**

Director, Accord NI Catholic Marriage Care Service

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# Love across the ages

Joe Boylan was born in Greenisland on the 7th February 1922. Teresa Hendry was born in Carrickfergus, 26th November 1923. They both attended St. Nicholas' Primary School ~ the rest is history ....

Joe & Teresa were married in St.

Nicholas' Church on 27th September 1948 and have been devoted to each other ever since. Throughout their lives they have been active parishioners within the parish. Their involvement and contribution to life in the parish includes membership of the Parish Hall Committee, Parish Bowling Club, as well as, being Chairperson and Treasurer of the Parish Autumn Club.



**2022** has been an exceptional year for the loving couple who, now, sadly, have to live apart due to age-related health issues. Joe, who is now a resident at Carrickfergus Manor Care Home, celebrated his **100th birthday** earlier this year.

Unfortunately, due to COVID-19, and other restrictions, it was not possible to have the celebration he or his family had hoped for. However, due to the kindness and flexibility of the management and staff

at Carrickfergus Manor, the family were able to gather and celebrate this momentous milestone with Joe and Teresa. Family & friends all gathered outside on the home's patio area and, with the French doors open and Joe and Teresa safely together inside shared birthday cake and drinks with they're loved ones. Joe was delighted and proud that his achievement was recognised by both Her Majesty the Queen and the President of Ireland with personalised messages received by him from both.



This September saw another celebration for the loving couple—**74 years of marriage!**

Unfortunately, again, the marking of such a wonderful occasion was curtailed to limited interaction with Joe at Carrickfergus Manor, followed by a family dinner in Whitehead Golf Club. There was hardly a dry eye in the house as staff and other residents watched them walk hand-in-hand along the corridor looking lovingly at each other on their special day. Our sincerest thanks to the wonderful staff and management of Carrickfergus Manor in making this special celebration possible.

Teresa reached the grand young age of 99 in November this year and the celebrations were awesome. A visit to Greenisland House by the Whitehead Ladies Choir finished with a personal request from Teresa for, “Silent Night” followed by “Happy Birthday”. The following day was a gathering at Teresa’s favourite venue, Whitehead Golf Club, for a family meal. On leaving, Teresa stated with tear-filled eyes that she had had a wonderful day and that her only regret was that ‘her Joe’ wasn’t there.

A recurring theme of the couples’ celebrations in 2022 was been tearful joy, happiness and family unity. We now set our sights on 2023 and we look forward to a **75th Wedding Anniversary** along with **100 and 101 Birthdays!**

Colin Boylan

**CONGRATULATIONS!**  
**JOE & TERESA**



# Listening for the Call

**O**n Saturday November 19th two members of Carrickfergus Cell Group, Jim Mullan and Matt Monaghan, made their way to St. Columba's Church, Long Tower, Derry after answering a call on YouTube for the men of Ireland to unite in prayer. We did not really know what the day would bring.

We arrived at the church at 11.30am. We were warmly welcomed and ushered to our seats. Both of us were amazed to find that there were 400 men present and still more arriving.

We were just in time for the start of the Rosary. To see and hear those men who had travelled from all over every county in Ireland show so much reverence to Our Lady was heart warming.

The next two hours were spent in Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. It was so special to see those men show such reverence in the presence of Our Lord in the Holy Sacrament.

Open Confessions were heard during the day by the priests of the parish. I witnessed grown men come away after the Sacrament of Reconciliation with tears in their eyes. I pause for a moment. It was by now 2.30pm and time for lunch.

To cater for such numbers the cafes, restaurants and bars had laid on a meal for each of us. All that was asked in return was a donation for the staff. Wonderful people, the people of Derry! At 4pm we made our way to the Carmelite Hall where we listened to the witness of three young men. After overcoming addictions to drugs, alcohol and turbulent lives they had come to healing through the power of bringing Jesus into their lives through counselling and the power of the Holy Spirit. In fact one of the lads emphasised the importance of your priest because one day you might not have one. Encourage your priest, support your priest and most importantly pray for your priests.

At 6pm we went back to St. Columba's Chapel for evening Mass. What a wonderful day! I got home at 10pm and slept well that night.

**Matt Monaghan**



# Daughter, Wife, Widow

**W**hen Fr. Peter contacted me and asked me to contribute an article on 'reflection' I was very surprised and thought what I have I to contribute? But, after some thought, and discussion I realised everyone goes through periods of reflection in their lives.

I realised that my main three roles in life have been:

(1) Daughter: I was the second eldest of 4 children and was blessed with parents who were not only loving, hard working but modern in their outlook. I was the 2nd child, but eldest girl, and they never treated us differently. They taught both myself and my 3 siblings the meaning of hard work, family values and integrity. I grew up in Windmill Hill, which had a great community spirit. The neighbours were brilliant and I loved living there. I always felt safe and sound and have nothing but happy memories. Unfortunately, I lost my dad over 20 years ago to Alzheimer's and my mum to cancer in late 2019 but I take great comfort in not only having been able to help nurse both my parents but to also be with them at the end, when they were reunited.

(2) Wife: I originally met my husband Terry ("T" as I called him, amongst other things..) when I was 15 and he was 20 at St. Nicholas Youth Club. Unfortunately the age difference was too large and we remained "just good friends". We reconnected again at 18 and 21 but it wasn't until I reached 25 and T 30 that we finally saw sense, got married and I became a wife, my second role.

Like any married couple we encountered many ups and downs but everything that happened to us seemed to bring us closer together. He was my best friend as well as my husband and we enjoyed 30 wonderful (albeit as T said, 'short') years together travelling to long distance parts, visiting family and making memories and friends along the way.

Unfortunately, we were not blessed with children of our own but took great pleasure in being uncle and aunt to many nieces and nephews and I am so thankful that he was my husband. I wouldn't

have wanted to travel this road with anyone else.





(3) Widow: Unfortunately, on 23rd March 2020, the day the country closed down due to COVID-19, I became a widow, my third role. Terry had only been ill for 9 weeks before he passed away and was stoic until the very end. He also retained his sense of humour and remained positive throughout. I was extremely lucky to be allowed to stay with him in hospital on a camp bed (as, to be honest, I kept hiding in the bathroom at night time until they relented) and I became a well needed extra pair of hands during that extremely busy time.

T and I were both humbled and grateful by the amount of visitors (although sometimes we needed a traffic light system to keep it flowing), calls, texts and support we received during that horrendous time. The doctors and nurses were absolutely fantastic during that time and to call them “Angels” is no understatement. We were blessed to be looked after by the doctors and nurses in the Cancer Centre at the City Hospital and will never be able to repay their kindness. T was adamant that when he was better we would have “a shin dig” with food, drink and music to thank everyone who had supported us not only now but throughout our life. Unfortunately that was not to be as God had other plans.

With COVID-19 restrictions just starting, and I had been cosseted in the hospital for 9 weeks, when I came home on 23rd March I thought I had been transported to another planet. The town was so eerie

and everything was grey. I

commented to a friend that it was comforting to know the world was going at my pace and she sent me the beautiful poem “Stop all the clocks” (W.H. Auden) which epitomised everything I was feeling.

As Fr Peter couldn't come to the house he ingeniously came up with a plan to say prayers. Myself, some friends and family gathered in my kitchen and put Fr Peter on speaker phone and placed it beside the coffin. I have to say it felt so poignant and special and was like a

salve to my soul. We were only allowed 10 at the funeral which was extremely hard but thankfully everyone understood and many lined the route to the chapel, even in the rain and I took enormous strength from this support.



I was able to carry out T's wish by having a Celebration of his Life, albeit 18 months later. Again I was floored by the kindness and thoughtfulness of friends, family, parishioners and Fr. Peter in organising and helping with every minute detail (as I probably drove them mad....). Poor Roisin even had to learn a new song from scratch and the choir performed it brilliantly, making the day extra special. Again I would say it was like a salve to my soul and I found particular solace in the hymn, "How Great Thou Art". I was honoured that so many people came out or watched the service via YouTube Livestream. It was such a lovely day reminiscing with friends, old neighbours and T's work colleagues. I have to say that day was a turning point for me, I had kept my word to T and felt a great sense of peace during the service. I now had to give myself a shake and prepare myself for the next chapter.

Since becoming a widow I am trying to find a new purpose. I have taken a few courses and been on some Retreats which I find enriching. I am meeting people that I may never encounter on a day to day basis and I am learning to stand on my own two feet. I promised T, "I would do my best" and when I meet him again the last thing I want him to say is, "I haven't relaxed a day up here because I was worrying about you". So every day I try to be thankful for something, however small.

I can truly say that I couldn't have coped with everything without "my faith". I take immense comfort in prayer and I truly believe in its power. I love the security it gives me in the certainty I will one day be reunited with my loved ones and I take strength in the support from the faith community, friends and family. Someone recently said to me that when I talk about T its like he's still here (Absent/ Present) and I was intrigued. On checking the meaning I was delighted because it's exactly how I feel but could never express it so eloquently.

Upon reflection, I feel I have been truly blessed in my life and if I had to do it all again I can honestly say I wouldn't change a thing (only obviously I would prefer longer...)

**Barbara-Ann Humphrey**



**CONNECTION**



A special word of  
**Congratulations!**

To Hugh & Phyllis Haveron  
on celebrating their  
66<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary  
on  
St. Stephen's Day

# Santa Says .....



SILENT

2

LISTEN

