

the
Connection

May 2021



MASS TIMES

St Nicholas' Carrickfergus

Vigil Saturday 6pm

Sunday 11.30am

Tuesday and Thursday 10.00am

Holy Days : As announced

Our Lady of Lourdes: Whitehead

Sunday 9.30am

Monday and Wednesday 10.00am

WEDDINGS

Arrangement. 3 months' notice
required

SACRAMENT OF SICK

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

BAPTISMS

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

Contact the Parish office giving a mini-
mum of one month's notice.

CONFESSIONS

Carrickfergus : Saturday 5.30pm to 5.50pm

Whitehead : Sunday before Mass

The Sun has risen !

the
Connecⁱon

Pentecost Message

The last edition of “The Connection” (Christmas 2020) was intended as a record of how our parish had fared during the pandemic and lockdowns. This Pentecost 2021 edition again chronicles some aspects of parish life in the face of Covid – 19, but also looks to the future and new horizons with hope. Such hope does not equate with a vague optimism but with a firm confidence in the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit.



Having been able to keep our churches open for public worship during Advent and Christmas, we were forced to close them once again immediately afterwards, only to be permitted to reopen them for Palm Sunday, Holy Week and Easter, albeit with mitigations. We have been able to keep them open since then, due in no small part to the continuing dedication of our two Covid – 19 Teams. The installation of a webcam at Mount Saint Nicholas in mid-December last year, has allowed for the live-streaming of all our liturgies in Carrickfergus and their availability on our new website (www.carrickparish.org). We hope to develop and expand our online ministry.

A subgroup of the Pastoral Council has reviewed the Parish Pastoral Plan 2017 – 2020, which was graciously launched by Bishop Treanor, and has produced an “Annex” to the Plan to extend over the coming year, identifying priorities such as the faith formation of the young and lay leadership – feedback was sought from a number of parishioners and this has proven extremely helpful.

As ever, St Nicholas’ Primary School has continued to enrich the life of our parish, not least with the celebration of Confirmation on 22 April and First Penance/Confession on 28 April and First Holy Communion on 8th May. However, this Pentecost issue of “The Connection” reminds us that the Holy Spirit is operative not only in the sacraments and pastoral services of the Church but also in the quiet goodness of so many parishioners, some of whom have shared their recent life-stories here. There is a South African proverb: “A person is a person because of other people” – above all, it is in this CONNECTION that the gifts and fruits of the Spirit of Pentecost generate new life in Christ.

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of Your faithful and renew the face of the earth!

Fr P.J. Owens, P.P., V.F.

PPC Update May 2021



We, your Parish Pastoral Council (PPC), have continued to meet and have supported Father Peter and parish administration during the past pandemic year. Covid-19 has had such an impact and enforced so many changes in how we carry out our daily lives.

At the beginning of 'Lockdown', when no one knew what was in store for us, we met virtually every two weeks. Indeed, it took us some time to familiarise ourselves with the technology, but we got there. Our first meeting took place on 30th March when we focused on supporting the food store, updating communication to parishioners, and gathering support network numbers to add to the parish website.

When it looked like Mass would not be happening in public for some time, the meetings which followed were taken up with planning 'recorded Masses' to be streamed via the website. This started in mid-April and again stretched the IT abilities of our PPC, but with the knowledge and skills we have in our small parish, we succeeded in relaying the Mass into your homes. With the sad situation where families and friends were suddenly unable to attend funerals, the capacity to record and stream the funeral was made possible.

The PPC invited other parish groups e.g. SVP, Safeguarding Committee, Finance Committee, Cell Groups and Liturgy Group into the virtual meetings throughout the year.

In May, Bishop Treanor announced that churches could open for 'Private Prayer'. This came as very timely since many parishioners had expressed how they were now 'missing' and 'needing' to attend the church in person. A subgroup of the PPC, with support from other parish bodies was formed, called 'The Covid Team'. They carried out risk assessments in both churches, as directed by the Diocesan Office and prepared both churches safely to allow parishioners to attend private prayer. This involved a volunteer's rota for stewarding and cleaning both churches. On 7th June we started with both Mount St. Nicholas and Our Lady of Lourdes churches open on Sunday from 4-6pm. There was good attendance at both and positive feedback from you all with regard to feeling in a safe environment.

The weekly parish bulletin continued to be printed and delivered by hand to those parishioners who were unable to access the parish website. This gave the PPC and other parish groups information on when the church was open, when Mass started, stopped, and started again publicly and how we invited parishioners on a rota using surnames alphabetically over 4 weeks. Information from Cell Groups, The Safeguarding Committee and family notices continue via the bulletin.

In July we got the good news that public worship could recommence. The PPC and Covid Team were back to the planning stage again. It was agreed to try inviting parishioners over a 4-week rota by surname alphabetically. This was a successful way of ensuring everyone could get to Mass at least once every 4 weeks, although we were aware this situation was not ideal. With stewards in place and a cleaning team at the ready, Mass resumed on 2nd August 2020. Father Peter and the sacristans worked extremely hard to make Mass as normal as possible, keeping everyone safe. Mass continued to be recorded and streamed weekly.

By now the PPC were planning the installation of a Webcam at Mount St Nicholas' as this seemed to be the way forward. Paul Smith, with help and skilled assistance from parishioners, succeeded in getting all the technology in place with our first live-streamed Mass in December.

The parish website saw a big overhaul and was relaunched in November. Apologies that this has taken quite some time to get together but the result has been well worth it. We can now add information easily, allow links for Mass and weekly bulletins and it looks very inviting to anyone new to the parish and from around the world.

First Holy Communion took place at two incredibly special Masses in October. Again, with planning, it was possible to accommodate family members for these special days.

Having had a beautiful week of Christmas Masses, enabling everyone to attend, we sadly went into another Lockdown on 26th December.

As had happened in the spring, both churches were open for private prayer and with the webcam now in action, the PPC, Covid Team and volunteers jumped back into action. Mass continues to be streamed from Mount St. Nicholas on Sunday, with St. Patrick's Day and Ash Wednesday Mass recorded from Our Lady of Lourdes.

Thankfully, we were all able to return to public worship again at Easter 2021.



The members of the PPC would like to thank all the parishioners of Carrickfergus and Whitehead for their patience, support, thanks, and respect that you have given us over the past 13 months. We are aware that at times we have had to make decisions and implement restrictions which have made life challenging for you. We also have found the months difficult. Hopefully, we are looking to a brighter future. Not forgetting there are some families who have lost loved ones during the pandemic. We will hope to have a service for all of them when it is safe to do so.

In 2017 Bishop Noel Treanor endorsed the Parish Pastoral Plan. This was due for review in 2020. We have been working on a temporary annex to bring us up to date and plan for the future. The PPC and some parishioners have agreed the following document and I would encourage you all to read it, with a view to all of us together as a Parish Family moving forward to new beginnings.



PASTORAL PLAN 2017-2020

(Annex 2021)

INTRODUCTION

The exceptional restrictions introduced as a result of the Covid19 Pandemic have impacted on everyone's daily lives during 2020 and 2021. For many, this has included limitations or the prohibition of some forms of individual and communal worship.

In 2021, it is hoped that society will incrementally move towards the lifting of the Covid19 restrictions, with normality gradually returning. This document is an Annex to the existing Pastoral Plan and it focuses on five Pastoral Themes, on how we as a Parish can continue to support parishioners, living their faith, through these difficult times.

It is envisaged that a new Pastoral Plan (2022-2025) will be developed for the Parish, with the work commencing in quarter four of this year, assuming that we will be in a post Covid19 era.

PASTORAL THEMES

Transition to Normality

In order to encourage a return to normal forms of public worship, including Mass, we need to ensure that our parishioners will feel safe to return.

The following actions will help the Parish address this theme:

- To continue to apply a risk assessment approach when planning public and private worship.
- To comply with the guidance issued by the Northern Catholic Bishops in relation to Covid19 restrictions, while in full compliance with public health guidelines.
- To maximise the use of all methods of Parish communications media, to promote and encourage the Laity to return to Mass and public worship.

Improved Communications Going Forward

During the Covid19 Pandemic, the Parish has increased the use of various communication technologies in order to maintain links with parishioners. These have included: the updating our Parish website, installing an on-line webcam [at Mount St Nicholas](#) for the live streaming of Masses, and supporting relevant social media links.

The following actions will help the Parish address this theme:

- To investigate the possibility of using parishioner e-mail addresses to proactively communicate Parish news and messages to them.
- To continue to publish the Parish magazine "The Connection".
- To consider inviting parishioners, originally from other countries, to contribute articles.

PASTORAL PLAN 2017-2020 (Annex 2021)

Increased Participation by the Laity

It is anticipated that, in future, there will be fewer Catholic Priests in Ireland to service Parishes. As a consequence, it will be necessary for more members of the laity to become involved in leading or assisting Parish worship.

The following actions will help the Parish address this theme:

- To encourage more of the laity to use their talents in supporting activities and groups in the Parish.
- To seek to encourage more parishioners to speak at Mass about the liturgy, or some aspect of their faith.

On-Line Ministry

Some parishioners have been proactive and have initiated on-line prayer meetings during the Covid19 Pandemic, in lieu of meeting in private homes or church buildings. We believe this should be further encouraged. We believe that this should be further encouraged and in a way that promotes a safe and welcoming place for children and young people in our Parish.

The following actions will help the Parish address this theme:

- To publish articles in the Parish Bulletin to raise wider awareness of the presence of these prayer groups and liturgy groups.
- To promote increased participation of parishioners in these groups and in other devotional activities.
- To develop an on-line pastoral ministry to include children and young people, facilitated by the Parish Safeguarding Committee, after approval is obtained from the Diocesan Safeguarding Office.

Outreach to the Young and Families

Given that 2021 will be another abnormal year for the Church and parishioners, in particular for families with young children, special arrangements need to be made to ensure that our children are adequately prepared for the sacraments of First Holy Communion, First Penance, and Confirmation.

The following action will help the Parish address this theme:

- To prepare guidance packs for families with young children, who are to receive the Sacraments this year.
- To cooperate even more closely with the Primary School to provide further pastoral support for children and young families in the Parish.

Robert Sweeney

Covid-19 and the Liturgy

Comparing the celebration of Easter back home, on the North Shore of Massachusetts, with Northern Ireland is a difficult task. In part this is because my experience of Easter here has been in the context of COVID-19, lockdown, and social distancing. I also suspect that many of my traditions will be familiar to people here.

The Easter Bunny, and his varied chocolate incarnations, is a common image in supermarkets, general stores, and television adverts. We enjoy our sweets, though I suspect that Americans indulge in a greater variety of Easter candies. The two most common are Peeps and Jellybeans.



My parents used to hide plastic Easter eggs filled with jellybeans around the house the night before Easter. Before attending Easter Sunday Mass, my brother and I would run around the house trying to find more than the other. We would then leave our treasures in our Easter Baskets, which my parents had filled with Peeps, chocolates, and other sugary treats, as we went to Mass. As altar servers, my brother and I would often attend multiple Easter Sunday Masses.

Our Easter celebration was a family affair, with all four of my grandparents driving over for our mid-afternoon Easter dinner. My mother usually cooked turkey because as a child I was a fairly picky eater and refused to eat ham. Once I received my driver's licence, I would drive to a friend's house and join his large family-and-friends Easter party.

While at university I developed a great love of the Easter Vigil Mass, especially when celebrated at midnight and complete with all the readings. The mixture of solemnity and joy, darkness and light, expectation and celebration, makes the late hour and lengthy Mass more significant and more beautiful than any other celebration of the year for me.

On top of this, the Easter Vigil distinguishes time in a significant way. It takes place in the dark of night and carries one into the radiance of Easter Sunday. The Vigil makes a dramatic and hopeful climax to Lent, completing the time of fasting and inaugurating the time of feasting. It helps me to remember that the Resurrection changed everything.

Covid-19 has changed the world through many deaths and great suffering, but Jesus' Resurrection demonstrates that suffering and death do not have the last word. There is much desire that the world will return to normal as vaccines are distributed, shops and restaurants open, and restrictions on gatherings are eased. I try, rather, to place my hope in the Risen Christ. Christ was crucified, died, and was buried; Christ rose from the dead; Christ sent the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and commissioned the disciples to preach His Name to the whole world. Lockdown has been a long Lent, a waiting in the tomb, and there will be lifting of lockdown and a sense of freedom. But the post-lockdown world, and perhaps someday the post-Covid world, ought not to be like the pre-Covid world. Rather it ought to be a world transformed by the Risen Christ, where we – His disciples in this place, in this time – love our neighbours as Christ loves us.

Jason Charewicz originally from Massachusetts and member of PPC

Covid-19 and the Liturgy

Pandemic. Lockdown. Social distance. Masks. Germs. Viruses... All words which we would never really think of just became everyday language and we heard them so many times in the last year and half. All of a sudden many things were changed. Being able to go wherever we want became "stay at home!" Meeting with people was prohibited. Routines were totally changed. We had to be cautious of where we went, what we touched, with whom we were in contact. Everything had to slow down and we had to think about things which we used to take for granted. Perhaps that was a new opportunity. For me it was a chance to find some new hobbies: drawing, doing jigsaws, painting figures; walking around the area, discovering local things which I had passed by and not even noticed. Also it was a chance to think more about things which are important in our lives. About people I miss, about my family, about myself, about God. There was a similarity to Lent, like going through the desert stripped away of the things which would distract us from thinking of real values. It was fasting from enjoyment, relaxation and doing whatever we want, "hunger" for the stuff we used to do and "thirst" for hugs and being close.

Many things at that point seemed so unimportant and there was more of a realisation about things of importance. Often we realise how precious something is after it is taken away.

At Easter time we think about Jesus' death and how forcefully He was taken away from his friends and family. How they missed Him a lot. But then He rose from the dead and was again with them. They could be together again. Even through the valley of death in a pandemic God is with His people. Everything seems grim, people being sick and many deaths. But in the end The Life prevailed over death and hope will prevail over despair.

These verses reminded me of the hope we have in Jesus and that our sufferings are not pointless: "Through him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God. More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us." (Romans 5: 2-5)

Where I am from in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Easter looks a bit different than here in Northern Ireland. There are three major ethnic communities: Croats (mainly Catholics), Bosniaks (mainly Muslims) and Serbs (mainly Orthodox). Only one third of the country celebrates Easter at this time, since Muslims don't celebrate Easter and the Orthodox Church will celebrate on 2 May this year. Catholics in Bosnia and Herzegovina have plenty of Easter traditions. On Holy Saturday morning people bring the food which is going to be served for family lunch on Sunday to church for a blessing. After Sunday Mass people gather in front of the church wearing traditional clothes and circle dance to live folk music. Another tradition is egg painting which is done with wax and paint. There are competitions for the prettiest painted egg and hardest egg (a smashing competition, something like conkers). At dinner time people gather at homes and there is roasted meat cooked on a spit, pies, smoked sausages, dry meats, soups, cheese, eggs, salad and plenty of other old fashioned homemade recipes. It is an opportunity for family reunions, especially for people who live outside of the country, who come and visit. I would have gone this year and last year, but the pandemic prevented it. Still, even when we couldn't celebrate in the way we wanted it, we are still united in the Spirit of Easter.



Petar Šego originally from Croatia and member of PPC



Monica O'Donnell



I was absolutely delighted when my nephew, Patrick Stewart, asked me to provide an article for the Connection Magazine. My dear friends it is so lovely to have this wee chat with you and to share my experiences of my recent emigration to Cape Town, South Africa.

The onset of Covid made me realise that I was no longer just a plane ride away from my immediate family in Cape Town and as such I made the decision to leave Whitehead for a new life 6,000 miles away. I know I made the right choice as God was quietly guiding me through every step, turn and challenge of my journey.

In my heart I still feel I belong to Our Lady of Lourdes Church in Whitehead. I was a parishioner at that church for 63 years and my best and lasting memories are of the people from that parish and of Reverend Father Peter Owens, the Parish Priest.

I live in a secure complex called Augusta, my bungalow is opposite the park and I enjoy hearing the birds tweeting and the children laughing and playing in the park which includes my own two great-grandchildren. I have been living here now for four months and I am very happy and content to be so close to my family. I live five minutes by car from Blouberg Strand and I enjoy looking at Table Mountain and seeing the waves crashing onto the shore which reminds me of Whitehead.

I am now a member of the Church of the Resurrection in a place called Tableview.

The Parish priest is Reverend Father Carlo and the Assistant Parish Priest is Father Chris (who looks like a cuddly teddy bear!!). The Church building is very humble built with plain red brick. There is a beautiful altar dedicated to Saint Joseph and it is always decorated with white flowers. There is a six foot crucifix hanging from the ceiling in the centre of the church and of course our blessed mother Mary has her own special altar which is also decorated with beautiful flowers. The focus at church is praying for those who have died of from who are sick with Covid and to pray for the family and friends of those impacted.

I derive strength from my faith and I feel blessed to be able to still go to Mass and Communion and to also have Confessions heard. Covid has made me realize even more how precious my faith is and never to take it for granted as it guides my life and gives me enormous strength. I never in my lifetime thought we would be limited in going to Mass and for me Covid has only increased my faith.



The pandemic is still uppermost in people's minds and in South Africa we have just started the vaccination process with essential healthcare workers as first priority. Masks are mandatory outside of your home and your temperature is taken as well as being required to sanitize before entering any building. Due to the size of the congregation and the Covid restrictions I am only able to go to Mass on a Friday, and I really look forward to this.

What I also really enjoy is joining in with the Masses that are being streamed and available on YouTube from the Carrickfergus Parish channel (which also includes Masses recorded at Our Lady of Lourdes) and being able to see Reverend Father Peter Owens and a few of the old familiar faces. I am still in touch with my dear friends in Whitehead and Carrickfergus and you will always have a special place in my heart.

I look forward to a new dawn when our Masses will resume full-time in a post pandemic world. I believe that happy day will come, we must never give up hope and humbly trust in God's plan. I wish you and your families Gods' blessings – until we meet again.

Sincerely , Monica O'Donnell

Frances Degnan

I have been working as a Staff Nurse in the Recovery Ward at the Royal Victoria Hospital now for 28 years. This past year, under the shadow of COVID, has been one of the most challenging times that our Health Service has faced.

Watching the television footage last year of the hectic scenes within the Italian Hospitals, felt like waiting for a Tsunami to hit our shores.

Preparation for what was to come started last February, with sadly operations being cancelled and staff being given additional training on how to support our Intensive Care Nurses in the event that COVID patients would need this specialist care.



Staff were understandably worried and I remember as we practised “Donning” and “Doffing” (how to put on and remove PPE safely) how we would all cope with what was to come.

For me personally ,this came to a head when in January I was re-deployed for a month to the COVID Intensive Care Unit at the Nightingale Hospital (BCH) as a “ Support Nurse”. I admit at the time it was stressful, a strange environment , working in full PPE and having feelings of inadequacy at what was a very different role for me.

What helped me through this, was the love and support of my family and the camaraderie from working with many other Nurses who had been re-deployed from their usual “comfort zones” – some of them for many months.

Frances Degnan

We all had the same goal of doing the best we could to care for these very ill patients. We shared the sorrow when some patients sadly passed away and the joy when other patients improved enough to be discharged from Intensive Care.

I have been back in my own workplace for several months now. We have been very busy carrying out surgery from many different specialities.

Reflecting on this past year, although challenging, I have been overwhelmed by the outpouring of kindness and support that people have shown to me personally and to the NHS as a whole.

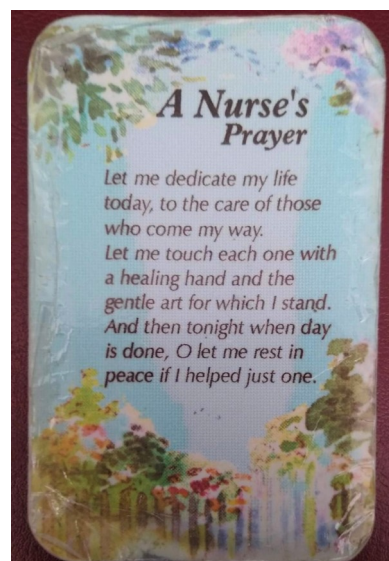


From lovely gestures such as my nephew delivering a “ little act of kindness” gift to me, to donations of Easter Eggs from the Eilish Degnan Foundation to NHS staff. People making scrubs, donating handcreams, offering their prayers..... these things really helped to lift our spirits and were very much appreciated.

Although we can never be complacent about COVID, with our vaccination programme in full swing I am hopeful that in the not too distant future, some form of “normality” can return to our home and Parish life. I look forward to the time when we can remove our masks, give each other a hug and of course – visit the pub again....all things in moderation as they say!

Thank you for supporting the NHS.

Frances Degnan



COVID – 19 VACCINATION



The decision whether or not to receive one of the vaccines to counteract the Coronavirus (Covid – 19) is both personal and a matter of individual choice. No one can say for certain that there is no element of risk involved. All one can do is ensure that one’s choice is informed by prevailing scientific and medical advice. Every person is accountable to the voice of conscience. In his “Urbi et Orbi” address on Easter Sunday Pope Francis, who like his predecessor Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, has himself been vaccinated, said: “Everyone, especially the most vulnerable among us, requires assistance and has the right to have access to necessary care... This is even more evident in these times when all of us are called to combat the pandemic... Vaccines are an essential tool in this fight”. True to his word, the Holy Father personally arranged for many of Rome’s poor and homeless to have immediate access to vaccination within Vatican City.

Here once again, as so often during the past year, Pope Francis has given prophetic leadership, appealing to the conscience of humanity in the time of pandemic.

On 3 October, the Vigil of the feast of St Francis, he travelled to Assisi in order to sign his new encyclical letter “Fratelli Tutti” (“All Brothers / Sisters”), which has been described as his prescription for a post- Covid world. Once again Pope Francis places the focus on the most vulnerable.

When we think about how unfairly the world’s resources are distributed, we are reminded that we who live in relatively affluent societies have access to health-care facilities, including vaccination programmes, that most of our brothers and sisters in the global family can only dream about.

When I was contacted by my GP surgery to offer me one of the Covid – 19 vaccines, I said a heartfelt thank-you.



May God bless and protect all our front-line workers, and especially all those who care for our health, both physical and psychological.

COVID – 19 VACCINATION

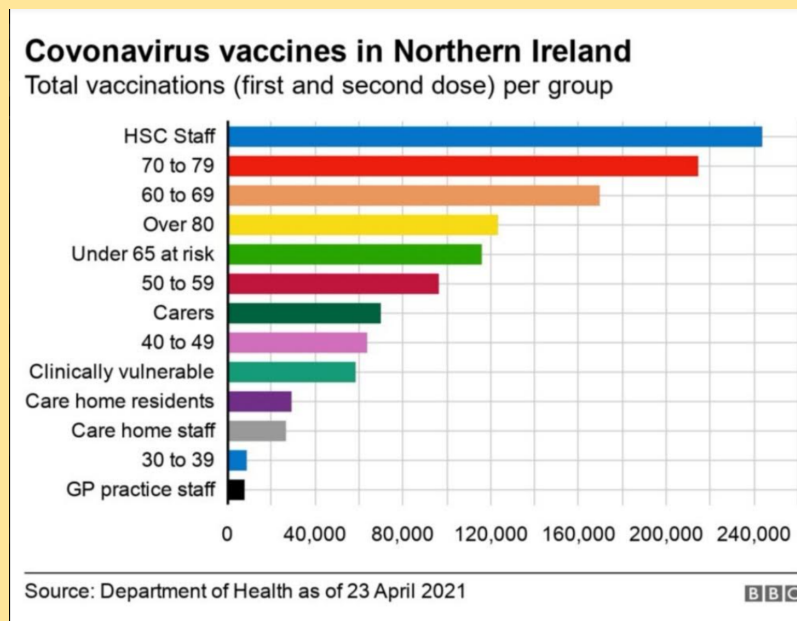
‘Jab Battle’ not over for under-50s

NHS vaccination programmers want to encourage younger people to get the Covid vaccine when their turn comes, as the rollout continues down the age ranges.



In Northern Ireland more than 900,000 people have now received at least one dose of a Covid-19 vaccine,.

While a great success that is only 50 per cent of the overall population.



The following is the most up-to-date uptake data for first doses by age group in Northern Ireland (up until April 21)

- 94% of over 80-year-olds
- 93% of 70-79 age group
- 96% of 60-69 age group
- 81% of 50-59 age group
- 56% of 40-49 age group

As a young person ,when your turn comes around and your offered the ‘Jab’ , please consider carefully the prevailing scientific and medical advice should and remember the common good.

Bereavement

This year has been one of so many bereavements in the community at large, and in our parish in particular.

During the lockdown, it was not possible for the Bethany Group to visit the bereaved in their homes, or to hold the annual Mass for the Bereaved.

Hopefully, the online service on the 24th November (still accessible on the parish website) went some way towards bringing comfort, and remembering those we have lost.

We pray for all those who are sad and lonely at this time, that the Peace of Christ will come to each one. We pray for the sick and dying, and for all those who lovingly care for them.

We pray that the Light of Christ will turn despair into hope, and bring joy to our lives again.

We pray for our beloved dead, especially those we lost throughout this year.

Bethany Bereavement Support Group

Eileen Vance

Maria Flanagan

Margo Bairsto

Pauline Cowan

Phil Cunningham

Margaret Jervis

Matt Monaghan

Tel: 07598825187 to

contact a

member of the group

PRAYER IN THE TIME OF BEREAVEMENT

Lord, you are close to the brokenhearted
be with me now in my grief and loneliness.

Give me the courage to face my loss
and not to grieve in silence.

Be with me as I struggle with many
different and painful feelings.

Ease the hurt in my heart.

Encircle me in your love.

Help me to believe that one day I will
no longer have this deep sorrow.

May I find comfort in sharing my grief
with those who understand the strong
bonds of love.

Stay with me, Lord, support me.
Help me to know that your power is at
work within me as I deal with my grief.

Amen

Sr. Sheila McAuliffe RSCJ

Finding faith during dark times as a funeral arranger



Margo McNamara, Funeral Arranger at Mulhollands Funeral Directors

It is always difficult losing a loved one and the Covid-19 pandemic has made it even more painful for many families, with churches and cemeteries closing, the need for graveside services increasing and limits being placed on the number of mourners allowed to attend funerals.

Social distancing restrictions have also made it challenging for my colleagues and I at Mulhollands Funeral Directors to serve families as normal during their time of need. However, our ultimate goal has always been to give loved ones the utmost respect and dignity they deserve on their journey to their place of rest, no matter the circumstances.

I gained great confidence in our mission by meeting families who were deprived of the chance to say goodbye to their loved ones before their passing. Speaking with them made me realise that faith has an enormous part to play in finding the strength and courage to carry on for those we care for, and that while my faith is strong, it could be even stronger.

Being both a funeral arranger and a member of the Catholic church makes me greatly appreciate the importance of Requiem Mass, where all of the parish can come together and show their support for those who have lost loved ones. A sense of community is an invaluable part of the grieving process for the families we serve, so as Mass and other communal activities became unable to continue during lockdown, I feared for their wellbeing.

However, even in their darkest days, the bereaved have been able to see the importance of these restrictions in saving lives and shown remarkable faith as a result. And thanks to the determination of their family and friends, as well as the wonders of technology, many have been able to find some respite.

I therefore don't take for granted and very much look forward to celebrating Mass again with my family and parish as lockdown restrictions ease, and I put my faith in God that He will continue to shine His light for those going through this long and dark tunnel.

Now That I Am Gone

Now that I am gone,
Remember me with smiles and laughter.
And if you need to cry,
Cry with your brother and sister
Who walk in grief beside you.

And when you need me,
Put your arms around anyone
And give to them what you need to give to me.
There are so many who need so much.

I want to leave with you something-
Something much better than words or sounds.
Look for me in the people I've known
Or helped in some special way.

Let me live in your heart
As well as in your mind.
You can love me most
By letting your love reach out to your loved ones,
By embracing them and living in their love.

Love does not die, people do.
So when all that's left of me is love,
Give me away as best you can.

Mary Lavery

Our mum was born on 21 May 1951 at the City Hospital, Belfast to Mary McAlone & John Dobbin, and raised in 8 Elizabeth Avenue, Larne. She met our dad, Philip at the young age of 17, they married and moved into our childhood home of 17 Elmwood Park, Carrickfergus (where mum lived the rest of her life). By the time mum had just turned 21, she had three daughters (Elaine, Angela and me). Number 4 (Lisa) came along 11 years later – a bit of a surprise to us all. In later years, mum became a much beloved “Nanny Mary” to her six grandchildren.

Despite moving to Carrick, mum and granny remained very close – they had a great bond and we get some comfort from knowing that they are once again, together in heaven.

Mum really was the most wonderful mother. We have a big heavy treasure chest bursting with loving, happy memories. We didn't have much but mum made our childhoods magical – Halloween parties ducking for apples and making us carved-out turnips with a little candle in it, putting cotton wool around the Christmas tree and sprinkling it with glitter....she made every Christmas and birthday so special.

Mum loved the simple things in life. We always had a hearty meal for dinner, she loved Chinese food (and would often treat herself at the weekend to a chow mein or a beef curry), going to the hairdressers to get her hair done, listening to music on the radio (particularly Country & Western), watching all types of sport on the TV. She supported Man United and loved FA Cup Final day which often fell on her birthday. She was also a big tennis fan and was overjoyed to attend the Australian Open with Angela several times.

As evidenced by the outpouring of love since mum's passing, everyone loved her – she was kind, loving, selfless, non-judgmental and gentle – a true beautiful soul.

Mum passed away on Tuesday 9 March in the same hospital where she had been born some 69 years previously – The City Hospital, Belfast. She had fought a long hard battle against COVID-19 and had been on a ventilator for two months. Mum's passing was peaceful and we are so thankful that we were there in the end – albeit via zoom. As much as we are heartbroken that our wonderful mum is no longer here with us in body, we are so thankful to have had her as our mum and we know her lovely, kind spirit lives on in each of us.

Jo and Lisa Lavery



Baptism—Ava Kelly Tierney



Parents : Josef and Nikki Tierney
Godparents: John Tierney and Sarah Rodgers

Ava was born on 30th May 2020 in the middle of lockdown. I have to admit it was a scary time for myself and Nikki as there was so much uncertainty at the beginning of the pandemic. I wasn't allowed into any appointments and even during birth I had to wait out in the car park until the very last minute. It was hard for Nikki going through that all on her own. But like so many other mums she took it all in her stride.

Like most people I speak to I did ask the question 'Where is God in this pandemic?' How can He stand by and watch so many people suffer and die? For me God was in the Doctors and Nurses, in the scientists developing a vaccine and the community spirit of helping those in need.

We were very glad to finally get Ava Christened. Although restrictions meant our full family could not be there it was a great day.

We are looking forward to all the restrictions lifting so we can properly introduce Ava to the world.

Joe Tierney

Jayne Logan - Parish Baptism Co-Ordinator

Whoever thought a pandemic would sweep across the world so quickly and with so little warning. Things like this didn't happen in 'real life', they only happened in disaster movies with dashing heroes and gorgeous heroines, not in Carrickfergus where my husband looks or acts nothing like James Bond. In March last year this was exactly what happen and life changed, suddenly and dramatically. Through the media we were bombarded with constant stories of the dangers of Covid-19 to our loved ones, the need to isolate and shield to save lives; whoever thought a trip to Tesco (other supermarkets are available) could mean life or death?

Covid, for me, took away a great deal of things I took for granted and there were many, many things that I missed (including a visit to the hairdressers), but it was, as they say, the small things that I missed most - the family dinners and the battles around the kitchen table. I missed seeing my grandson every day. I missed my friends; Zoom calls are great but they are not an alternative to a cuppa and a heart to heart chat with a good friend. I wonder how many people had to carry their burdens alone or for longer than necessary because they didn't have anyone to share their troubles with?

Work changed dramatically and was very stressful. I found myself working many extra hours to keep on top of things and it was during this time that I found myself talking to God more, asking him to get me through another day and to give me the strength to carry on. He never let me down, no matter how difficult my days were He was always there. As the poem 'Footprints in the Sand reminds us, *'when you see only one set of footprints in the sand it was then that I carried you'*. I don't think a truer word has ever been written.

Within the Parish I have the privilege of supporting parents who wish to get their child baptised and I would have an opportunity to visit the parents and baby. Unsurprisingly, home visits stopped immediately and this for me was particularly sad. It was always exciting to meet the newest members of our Parish, they are so small and perfectly formed. A baby truly is a miracle, they are a symbol of newness, hope and most of all a reminder of God's love for us. The bubble of love a baby brings cannot be underestimated or fully explained, it seems to radiate to everyone who comes into contact with it. Babies remind us of how beautiful and perfect the world is, they remind us of the truly important things in life - love and family. The children start their journey with God through the Sacrament of Baptism and during lockdown many Baptisms were subject to the social distancing regulations which meant fewer family members could attend. This may not have been the day originally planned or hoped for yet the day was still memorable and special

I'm looking forward to the future and our 'new normal', whatever that may mean. I hope I can keep the lessons I have learned and I'm hopeful that Church events can resume. Mass truly is the only time you can sit down and totally stop. The world pauses for a short time allowing us all to catch our breath, be still and reflect. This was the time we need to talk to God, to listen to the word of God and draw comfort from being in God's house. Fortified by this we can then face the world and the week ahead. Selfishly I'm hopeful that home visits recommence and I can enjoy the glow of a new baby and be reminded of the beauty and love in the world around us.

Lastly I'm hopeful that I'll lose the 'few extra pounds' I've put on in the last year.

Jayne Logan



Covid—19 and our Local Community

The pandemic lockdowns and travel restrictions have had an impact on Carrickfergus Parish's relationships with other Christian churches, but the effects were not all bad.

Some members of the parish cells have been using Zoom to very successfully meet fortnightly online and welcome some new faces, in lieu of meeting in private homes or church buildings. We believe this should be further encouraged.

A Rosary Service has been broadcast over the four weeks of May, May being the month of the Rosary

The boom of online liturgies and conferences have given many Christians greater opportunities to participate in the worship and liturgies of their Christian neighbours and to "attend" online conferences and workshops with them.

In the Diocese, Fr Tony McAleese hosted a series of Lenten talks on the Theme: "From Covid To Light" with guest speakers.

But all relationships require face time, and that goes for the Catholic Church's relationships with other Christian churches as well. Zoom meetings are very good for organisational, practical meetings, but in effect make ecumenical dialogue much more difficult, because in dialogue you need the back and forth of discussion and reaction, which is very difficult on a laptop!

The local Carrickfergus Church Forum group has not been meeting over the past year, but one example of contact among our local Churches, with face time ie time for chat, was the occasion of the very generous donation of face masks by Carrickfergus Rangers FC. This was facilitated by Peter Clarke, Chairman.

It is good to see a growing appreciation and sense of responsibility for the local environment with many individuals and groups taking up litter picking in their neighbourhoods and at local beauty spots, eg Whitehead Wombles. Maybe this is something we, as a parish, could encourage and participate in? Volunteers please :)

Another ecumenical item of interest is the Irish School of Ecumenics celebrating its Golden Jubilee this year with the launch of a three-community education and research project entitled "Is there a Common Good?". This too has had to move online in the form of a series of presentations and conversations allowing participants to imagine and discuss what a 'common good' might look like and consider what are the obstacles that stand in the way of its achievement. The talks can be accessed here:-

<https://www.tcd.ie/ise/ise-at-50/common-good/resources/>

Paul Smith Vice Chair PPC

Covid—19 and our Local Community



Carrick Rangers FC is a Club at the very heart of the community in Carrickfergus. We see our role as bringing people together through sport, and doing what we can to help all those in our local community. During this pandemic we have been fortunate that our First Team has continued to play, but we are mindful that sports participation has been denied many people. Our response to this has been to focus our efforts in providing practical help and support where we can. We have delivered meals and food parcels; we have collected and delivered prescriptions; we have continually used our Social Media platforms to promote the importance of mental health and well-being and, we have partnered with a multi-national Corporation, Flex, to supply face masks to all of the Churches in the greater Carrickfergus area.

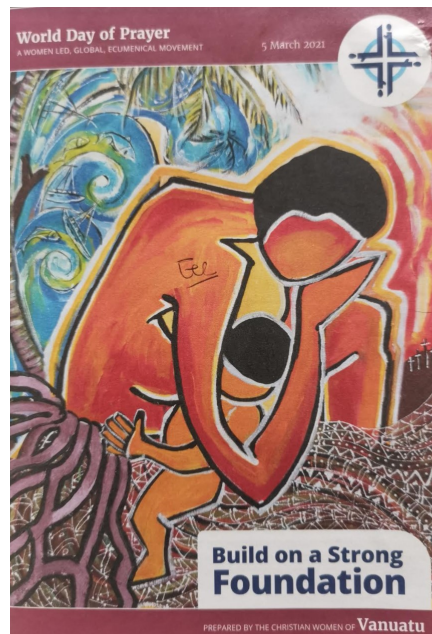
We are very mindful that, for many people in our area their faith is important, and never more so than at this challenging time. We recognised a need to provide face-masks that would help reassure parishioners that they could return to worship in a safe and healthy environment. We also saw this as a way of uniting all of our denominations, albeit for a short time, in a very positive and uplifting way. We were delighted that representatives of all the main denominations came to our Ground, and we hope that we have been able to help in a small way during this awful pandemic.

Peter Clarke, Chair, Carrickfergus Rangers FC



Covid—19 and our LocalCommunity

World Day of Prayer 2021



The congregations in the churches in Whitehead and the surrounding area were very disappointed when it was confirmed that we would be unable to gather together in prayer for the annual World Day of Prayer event on Friday 5th March 2021, due to the Covid pandemic. The WDP service is a great opportunity to meet together with people from the other five churches in our local 'circuit' and many of us have become good friends over the years.

The theme for this year was "Build on a Strong Foundation", prepared by the people of Vanuatu, which in an archipelago of 80 islands in the South Pacific. The chair of the Executive Committee originally suggested that our local churches mention the event at our individual Sunday morning services, hoping that some parishioners would then make a donation, even without being able to attend an actual service.

However, the Presbyterian minister in Islandmagee, Rev. Peter Boville, then offered to host a virtual service at his church, with a minimum number of people participating. So, the President and Secretary of our WPD committee, as well as two parishioners from the Presbyterian church, took part in the service, which was recorded in advance of 5th March. They were able to do all the usual 'speaking' parts of the service, as well as display scenery from Vanuatu using their overhead projector and played the hymns for the service from a CD. As a result, everyone was able to participate in the beautiful service which had been prepared by the people of Vanuatu, listen to the hymns they had chosen and admire their local scenery from the comfort and safety of our own homes.

The online service attracted over 400 views, which was considered a huge success, considering around 80 people in total usually attend the equivalent live service in a church. A total of £670 was raised from cash donations from the local churches, as well as the money donated directly online.

We are very grateful to Rev. Boville for all his work and support around enabling this annual ecumenical service to take place this year, especially as so many worthy causes benefit from it each year.

The only downside was that there was no supper afterwards, where we usually catch up and chat over the lovely refreshments. The Presbyterians do always make such amazing sandwiches and tray bakes!

Moira Rodgers, Gerardine Stewart

the
Connection

THE SACRAMENT OF
CONFIRMATION

22 April 2021



Congratulations to the girls and boys from our Parish schools who received the Sacrament of Confirmation on Thursday 22nd April, 2021. The Sacrament was administered by our Parish Priest, Father Peter Owens. Below are some experiences of the children from St. Nicholas' Primary 7 class.

What Confirmation means to me.

To me Confirmation means that I will receive the Gifts and Fruits of the Holy Spirit. I will become a full member of the Catholic Church and I will get to understand what it is like to be a proper Catholic person. I will be taking on the responsibility that my parents took on when I was baptised. I will be more responsible and make good decisions in my life with my parents' help.

By Sophie Rowe

To me Confirmation means that I will receive the Gifts and the Fruits of the Holy Spirit. I will also be a full member of the Catholic Church and the parish. I will also understand more about what it means to be a Catholic. I will be able to take Communion in my hands once I am confirmed. I will be taking on the responsibility that my parents took on when I was baptised. I will be more responsible and will be able to make better decisions in life. My parents will help me be a better person when I become a full member of the Catholic Church.

By Patrycja Cichonska.

To me Confirmation means that I will be filled with the Holy Spirit and become a full member of the Catholic Church and God's Kingdom. I will renew my baptismal promises and God will guide me through rough times and help me to make good decisions. The Fruits and Gifts of the Holy Spirit that I will receive will help me throughout my life.

By Calum Pollard

To me Confirmation means I can finally be a full worker of God's Kingdom and be blessed with the Gifts and the Fruits of the Holy Spirit. Now that I am a full member of God's Kingdom I can spread the word of the Holy Spirit. I will also be able to renew my baptismal promises and take on my role as a full member of the Catholic Community.

By Callum Baker



Confirmation, to me, means that I am being filled with the Holy Spirit. I will be renewing my baptismal promises and I will become a full member of the Catholic Church. I will be supported by God going into the next stage of my life and He will guide me when making hard decisions.

By Erin Kane P7



Ellie Morgan



Life changed but.....

In March 2020 I was a Year 12 student at Carrickfergus Grammar School looking forward to completing 9 GCSE subjects. Suddenly school closed. I had no idea what was going to happen. There were multiple rumours about exams and, to be honest, it was all very confusing. Eventually we were informed that predicted grades were to be given in August. I felt that my grades were now totally out of my control and this made the situation even more complex.

From that point my personal experience of the pandemic was quite difficult and I found it changed my life considerably. It impacted on my education. My friendships and relationships with family and my teenage years were severely disrupted. Online teaching became mandatory and initially I struggled with this new aspect of learning. Like everyone else in my year I just had to knuckle down and adjust.

Prior to the restrictions of the pandemic, I thoroughly enjoyed the company of many friends but this too was reduced. Even family gatherings decreased and, for me, this was upsetting as I normally saw my extended family on a daily basis.

What has the pandemic taught me? I firmly believe that it has made me more independent, more self-sufficient and more mature. Since I had a job, I had the opportunity to meet other people and listen to their experiences of the pandemic. I wasn't the only one struggling.

Since public worship was no longer available I missed the opportunity of being a Minister of the Word. When Mass resumed I was delighted to become involved again and enjoyed participating in the Christmas Liturgies and in the Stations of the Cross during Lent. The knowledge that this pandemic cannot last forever gives me renewed hope and inner strength. I look forward to the day when we will all be able to meet as a parish community, celebrate together and give thanks for the fact that we have come through an awful trauma similar to the horrendous Spanish flu of 1918.

Elinor (Ellie) Morgan

Year 13

Matthew Johnston



I DIDN'T SEE THIS COMING!

As a student going to study Chemistry at the University of Glasgow in 2020, things could not have been more different. There were not going to be any face-to-face lectures, not even the laboratories would be available to use as it was all to be done online to maintain social distancing.

Although Covid-19 cases in Glasgow had been low throughout summer they quickly increased as students like me had to live closely together in student accommodation and most people were ignoring guidelines and meeting up in large numbers. Almost all first-year students, including myself, contracted Covid during September causing cases to spike in Scotland. It was a tumultuous time and although Covid-19 felt like nothing more than a cold at first, it was soon going to wreak havoc on my life.

Having to study online and in halls was difficult. I feel that you simply cannot grasp information from a screen as well as from an in-person lecture. I recovered from Covid-19 but came down with severe symptoms a month later and had to be rushed to hospital where I remained for a week with heart damage caused by Covid. It was an unusual experience as not only was I far from family but also no one could visit at any time.

Thankfully, the damage was not permanent, and I recovered slowly over the next few months. At that point I decided to return home before Christmas with most of my hopes dashed and my life seemingly having taken a turn for the worse. However, I did not give up and prayed to God for guidance in those difficult times.

During December, as my hopes of a Covid-free year in 2021 increased, I once again was admitted to hospital. As an in-patient for over a week I almost died from blood loss but thankfully survived, thanks to the doctors, donated blood and prayers of family and friends alike.

Home just in time for the New Year I realised I had most likely suffered all these effects, at least indirectly, due to Covid-19. Although I thought things would be different, we all still need to remain cautious as we slowly battle through Covid and one day hopefully emerge on the other side back to what we once took as 'normal'. We need to be grateful and praise God for every single day we have because, as we have seen with our own eyes, life as we once knew it can change suddenly and leave us in the dust if we are not prepared.

Matthew Johnston

(First Year Student, Glasgow University)

Covid—19 crochet needle wielding heroine !!

History was made at the end of 2019 when the Royal College of Nurses went on strike for the first time in their history. Most people supported the strike as our wonderful NHS workers were harshly treated by those in government. Who could have anticipated what 2020 would bring and how those same NHS workers would be thrust into the media spotlight once again - only this time they were being hailed as heroes by those in government circles and the country was urged to show support by clapping at 20.00 on a Thursday night.

When the world was forced into lockdown to help curb the spread of Covid 19 and protect the NHS it seemed like everybody turned into a Mary Berry or Paul Hollywood wannabe. Social Media was coming down with pictures of banana bread and flour became as scarce as loo roll! One 84 year old parishioner, Mary McAllister was not going to let the fact that she was now confined to her house get her down. Covid may have robbed her of being able to attend Mass in person or go to the hairdressers on a Wednesday but she wouldn't allow it to stop her from her passion of crochet.

As the pace of life suddenly slowed, almost to a halt for civilisation, people suddenly had an abundance of time on their hands to do all of those tasks and projects that had been put on the back burner to be done some other time. For Mary that meant a new crochet project but what would it be? She started by crocheting a cuddly toy nurse complete with surgical mask for 2 of her grandchildren who were nurses. What started as a kind gesture to show support and love for her grandchildren soon took on legs of its own. It was a simple gesture from a proud grandmother to her grand daughters who were working at the coal face in the fight against this terrible pandemic. The cuddly nurse was shown with pride to colleagues in the hospital and soon requests for others were flying in. Mary decided that she would crochet as many nurses as she received requests for. She believed this was a way for her to offer her personal gratitude to those brave souls in the NHS who were risking their lives to save the rest of us. She asked for no payment for the dolls, only for a donation that she would present to the NHS. Each of those cuddly nurses had love crocheted into them and a prayer that the recipient would stay safe to fight this blight on the planet. In total 56 nurses were made in a variety of colours to represent the different coloured departmental scrubs raising a whopping total in excess of £800! This money was used to purchase 3 ipads for use in the ICU of Antrim Area hospital to allow Covid patients to stay in contact with loved ones at home as visits were not permitted.

No living soul had ever seen such a contagious virus rip through nations killing millions indiscriminately however Mary and other of her generation had lived through World War 2 and knew first hand what it was like to endure hardship and sacrifice life in general in order to survive. Mary had been evacuated to Upperlands outside Maghera during the war, separated from her parents and put in charge of her younger siblings at the tender age of 9 years old earning her a pet name of 'Side of the Road' from her brothers as that would be her instruction to them as traffic passed by! Mary knew that the important things in life are not those possessions bought in shops, rather it is family, loved ones and her faith that had got her through difficult times before and would do so again.

Mary was confined to her home and garden. We were blessed at the start of lockdown by an unprecedented period of glorious weather which helped raise spirits for everyone. Mary was able to sit in her garden and take in the beauty of nature blossoming around her - of course her crochet hook was never far away either!. The world was for once quiet and still with little traffic on the roads and hardly an aeroplane in the skies. The world started to heal itself of the damage caused by mankind. What Mary found so difficult to come to terms with was not being able to have her sons, daughters, grandchildren and great grandchildren visit her. We had to make do with visits to the garden and speaking through the window. Mass was attended online. When asked what she was looking forward to most when this was all over it wasn't dinner at fancy restaurant or a holiday rather it was to hug her family and have her grandchildren and great grandchildren jump into her lap for cuddles (and of course to be spoiled with sweeties and biscuits when mummy and daddy weren't looking!).

Covid—19 crochet needle wielding heroine !!

Lockdown brought terrible sadness to Mary when her eldest brother sadly passed away and she was unable to attend his funeral and her family could not even console her with a hug. Crochet again came into play at this time as she crocheted roses to be scattered on Dan's coffin. Mary now became the eldest living member of her family.

Mary has constantly said that she doesn't know what she would have done without her family during lockdown getting her groceries or bringing a home baked cake or dinner but the reality was that Mary got her family through some dark days by her shining example and belief that better days would come again.

Mary's annual pilgrimage to Lourdes has been put on hold for 2 summers now but she is confident she will be able to visit next summer with her brother and sister. I'm sure she will say a prayer for all of our intentions!

Mary is not alone, we have all had to make grave sacrifices. It would have been so easy to moan and groan about not being able to go out but Mary lead by example to us all and showed us how to make the best of a bad situation.

To say her family and friends are proud of you is an understatement. Not all heroes wear capes - some wear scrubs and ppe and others wield a crochet hook!

A sterling effort from a soon to be 85 year old!

Article by John McAllister



Lockdown at the Gilmores

Pilot of a new TV series soon to be shown on Sky Atlantic

If someone had told us on the 31st December 2019, as we celebrated the dawn of a new year that 2020 (and indeed 2021!) would unfold the way it did, we would have laughed and said they were watching too many movies! Alas, 2020 and 2021 will go down in our family history as years like no other! They have been times where we have learned so much about our family, our friends and ourselves. It has brought sadness but also many weird and wonderful times, although not all bad but it is a time we hope we never have to experience again!

The biggest upset of our ordinary lives came after March 17th when instead of celebrating St Patrick's Day, we were dealing with the imminent closure of schools and workplaces, for what we thought would be three weeks. Little did we know that on St Patrick's Day 2021, we would also be celebrating at home and would still be living in hope of soon returning to school and work. Home schooling came with many challenges and grave uncertainties regarding exam cancellations and predicted grades. I never thought I would hear anyone say they wished they were doing exams, let alone our own children! With numerous teachers' voices echoing through the house from live lessons, and what would have been class discussions happening around the dinner table, we adapted to this new, bizarre way of learning. Work became increasingly harder as the weather got better, working remotely as part of the Finance Team of the NI Hospice in the garden, under the sun was certainly a fresh and different way of working, with the added benefit of acquiring a suntan! Fortunately, for Paul, his work could not be done at home, so we happily compiled a Dad-To-Do list, to keep him busy – this is still an ongoing project.



With everything, in regards to football, rugby and Irish dancing, coming to a halt it meant there was a build-up of energy. Thank goodness for Zoom! With weekly sporting zooms, and swing ball in the back garden, thankfully some energy could be released. However, by early May, a boxing bag became a vital necessity; we will leave the rest to your imagination...

We will never take certain things for granted again, especially the barbers so when Shane and Paul began to resemble cavemen, the girls took action in delivering a 'buzz cut' to solve the problem. Our Saturday nights were spent together on family quizzes, bingo and catch-ups via zoom. We got the opportunity to deliver the Bulletins to those shielding in the Parish and it became a very enjoyable family outing every Saturday. It really was a privilege to have some socially distanced chats with Parishioners and to hear how they were coping with lockdown.

Lockdown at the Gilmores

Pilot of a new TV series soon to be shown on Sky Atlantic



Our dog, Rossa, loved every moment of everyone being at home. He had a minimum of five walks a day and now he hides when he sees his lead! After a lovely, but different Christmas, came ten days of isolation as Covid -19 entered our family home. Thankfully everyone is well, however when I asked Tara to describe it she used the word 'very trying'! Rossa, however had ten days well-deserved rest as no walks were allowed!

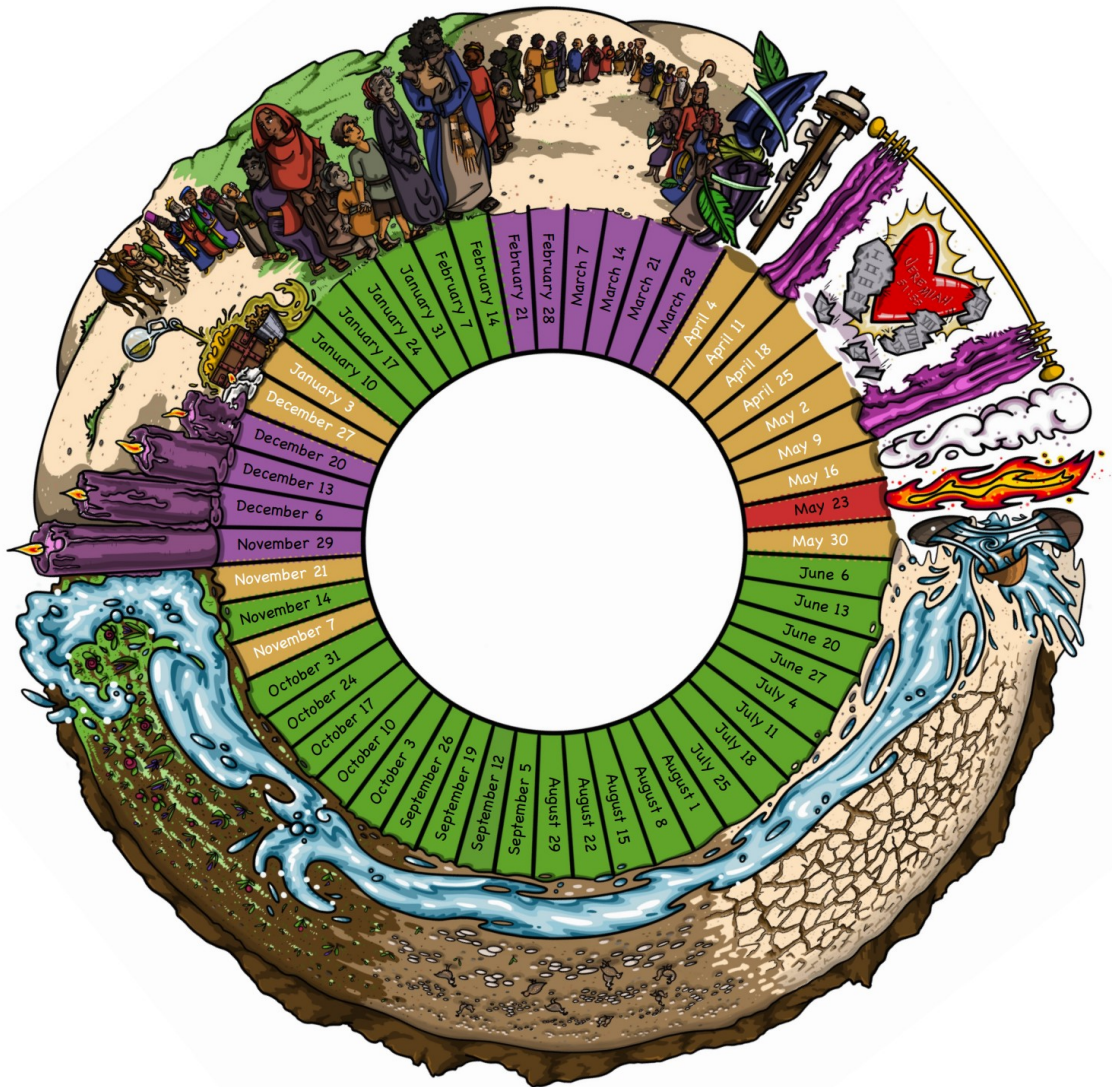
We could talk all day about our lockdown experiences, but now we must look to the future in hope of normality. We thank God, that each of us are here to tell the story and you reading this have survived lockdown and are safe and well. We look forward to resuming life, albeit a bit different, at home and in our Parish.

God Bless.

Article by the Gilmores (Siobhan & Paul)



Parish Liturgy Group



The Parish Liturgy Group is made up of 6 people – Fr. Peter Owens, Margaret Barry, Marion Frampton, Brid Kelly, Mary Muir and Gerardine Stewart. The group was formed in the Spring of 2018 with a remit from Fr. Peter of enhancing the Liturgies in both of our churches in the parish.

The last year has been very challenging due to the pandemic, of course, as it impacted across all aspects of the church and the community at large. In the autumn of 2020, we were in a position to present a Parish Advent Service in each of the churches during December. However, with the tightening of the government guidelines, we were unable to proceed with those planned paraliturgies.

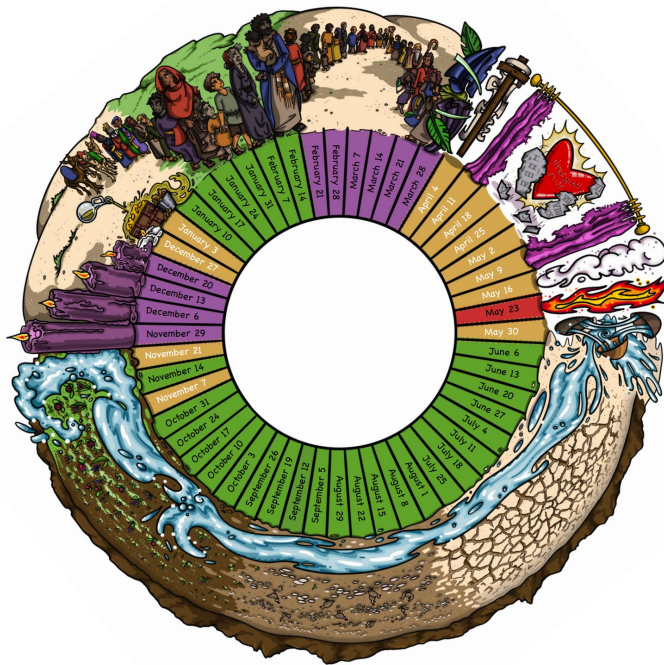
By Lent this year, we were able to offer weekly Stations of the Cross, albeit with no congregation present, using the recently installed webcam facility in St. Nicholas' Church. We are very grateful to the "sound and vision" team for their huge efforts in facilitating the Stations being livestreamed on the day and recorded for the Parish YouTube channel, so that everyone could view the services from the comfort and safety of their own home. Thankfully, small congregations were able to return for Palm Sunday and Holy Week, including the Stations on Good Friday night.

We would also like to take this opportunity to thank our readers and in particular Mary Muir and Paddy Stewart, for all their sterling work in coordinating the reading rotas in the Parish during this last year of the pandemic.

At the time of writing this article, we are preparing for weekly sessions of the Rosary to take place during the month of May. We are also planning, as much as the current restrictions permit, for the Masses on Sunday 23rd May to be as special and as celebratory as possible, for the major church feast of Pentecost.

As the situation continues to improve throughout the spring and into summer, we are all looking forward to seeing our fellow parishioners out and about, enjoying the good weather and catching up with the friends we have missed so much during the past year.

Parish Liturgy Group



Artist Barbara Lyon has created an original 2020/2021 (Year B) Christian liturgical calendar for use in church and home. The calendar is a visually stunning reminder of the joyful rhythm of the Christian year. She has given permission to print and distribute this calendar freely.

Christian Calendar 2020-21 by Barbara Lyon

This year I was at a loss for what to draw for this, my sixth, liturgical calendar. But when I began to sketch the story, beginning in Advent, the images poured forth in an order and clarity that could only come from a Creator God. I drew it out completely in one turn around.

I began with the candles of waiting, a small flame to watch and wait for the Light of the World. For Epiphany I drew the gifts of the Magi, the gold, the myrrh, and the frankincense as oil. I drew the frankincense oil pouring out, as oil anointing a king's head, as Jesus poured himself out for the whole world.

For the Epiphany Ordinary days I drew people following Jesus. They are all types and ages. They bring others along. There are some before and some behind. They are Jesus followers. Whether we feel close through growing places or far away through desert places, we are Jesus followers, too. We follow Jesus to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, to his death on the cross, and to his glory on Easter.

And when Jesus died, the curtain tore. Behind the torn curtain this year we find the verses of Ezekiel 36:26 (NIV), "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh." and Jeremiah 31:33 (NIV), "'This is the covenant I will make with Israel after that time,' announces the Lord. 'I will put my law in their minds. I will write it on their hearts. I will be their God. And they will be my people.'"

The stone tablets of the law were kept in the Ark where God's presence dwelt with his people. But now God's presence is so much closer; God has written his commands on our hearts!

For Ascension Sunday I drew the cloud; for Pentecost Sunday, the fire that burns but does not consume. I continue to love the pillars of cloud and fire next to each other on the calendar each year.

For Trinity Sunday (this may be my favorite Trinity Sunday image yet) I drew three bowls pouring into each other, coming from each other, and overflowing; pouring out into the world. Together we wonder, through Pentecost's Ordinary days, how this pouring-out is abundant yet sufficient. It is life in the driest times, sustenance in desert times, and the verdant source of all good growing things in our lives.

May God go with you as you journey closer to them this year.



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