

the
Connection

December 2020



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

By arrangement. 3 month's 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 minimum of one month's notice.

CONFESSIONS

Carrickfergus : Saturday 5.30pm to 5.50pm

Whitehead : Sunday before Mass

Winter sun setting over Carrick Marina

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Christmas Message

When we gathered in our churches to observe Ash Wednesday on 26th February never could any of us have imagined that within less than a month public worship would have been suspended and admission to our churches forbidden.



The time of pandemic, the inexorable spread of the Coronavirus (Covid-19) all over the world, was to change radically every aspect of our lives, private, personal, public and professional, and bring suffering, death and heartbreak on a colossal scale.

This Christmas 2020 edition of 'The Connection' is intended as a record of how we, the parish family of Carrickfergus and Whitehead, fared and continue to fare during this time of unprecedented disruption and deprivation, mindful that our local and global journey through pandemic is far from over. The postponement of baptisms and weddings and First Holy Communions was a source of great frustration, but most distressing of all was the unavailability of the normal funeral rites of the Church. The challenge emerged more clearly as the days passed: Keep faith and trust in God in this time of uncertainty and fear. We were overjoyed when our churches reopened in June for the return of the public celebration of the sacraments.

I gratefully acknowledge the outstanding service to our parish during this period of crisis of the Parish Pastoral Council, the Covid-19 Team, the Safeguarding Committee, the Communications Group, the Liturgy Committee, the Society of St Vincent de Paul, the Bethany Bereavement Support Group and so many others, not least our parish secretary Natalie Gallagher.

I wish all of you Christmas Blessings and God's gracious protection for the new year and all that lies ahead.

Fr. P.J. Owens P.P.

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Covid – 19 and our Parish Family



When the Covid-19 pandemic, and lockdown started, the Parish Pastoral Council (PPC) had not expected the extent to which it would change how we live our lives and how we live our roles within our parish. We realised quickly that we needed to assemble and provide support to our parishioners and our priest. Thankfully, technology permitted us to meet virtually. In the Covid world these meetings are virtual meetings online.

The PPC has met through virtual meetings every 2-3 weeks since April 2020. During this time, we have invited other parish groups to coordinate what was required to keep people informed and give assistance where needed, with a view to a return to public worship.

Working alongside, SVP, the Safeguarding committee, the Finance group, the Liturgy group and the Covid team was necessary. Volunteers also came forward to assist and this was humbling and invaluable during the difficult times. All this support and communication assisted the Parish Priest and the PPC in forward planning.

The initial meetings looked at how we communicate with our parishioners. We kept the parish web site up to date, with notifications from the diocesan office, the weekly parish bulletin, and notices about the reopening of our churches for private prayer and Sunday Mass.

Early on the PPC identified a need to contact those parishioners who may be isolating by shielding and include those who are at home with young children as well as older people.



Feedback was positive from PPC members providing ongoing contact through visits and from hand delivering weekly bulletins. The parish envelopes and the facemasks kindly made by the hand of Sarah Dixon were also delivered.

The parish weekly bulletin has been uploaded online every week and shared on the parish Facebook page since last March.

The weekly bulletin continues to be hand delivered across the parish to those who are not on social media sites.



Doorstep delivery of envelopes and Sarah's masks

The Pandemic and lockdown were identified as a risk to the mental health of parishioners and the potential of increasing safeguarding concerns. Father Peter and Amanda Stewart from the parish safeguarding committee did raise awareness through the communication channels available, the weekly bulletin, the parish website, and the parish Facebook group.

To increase the audience and hence reach as many of our parishioners online as possible the Facebook group as an example was encouraged to invite new members, and increased its membership from 80 to 199

Government restrictions initially controlled attendance at Mass, therefore we facilitated Father Peter to say Mass which was recorded and played, weekly through You Tube.

Life carried on maybe not as we knew it. There were sad passing's during times when for a while funeral services were not permitted in the Churches. Fr Peter arranged for a recorded service if a bereaved family requested that and subsequently played on you tube.

Weddings could only be celebrated outdoors at the height of the first wave of Covid, with a maximum of 5 people. Fr Peter has already conducted 2 outdoor weddings,



Since then weddings have gladly recommenced

In 2020, the world has been grappling with an invisible enemy, P4 classes and their parents throughout the country were also dealing with a predicament; the impact of the virus on their First Communion plans. St. Nicholas' Carrickfergus was no exception....

The original First Communion had been scheduled for 30 May 2020. Many parents thoughts were on practical matters- when would the First Communion actually happen, who would we be able to invite and would the outfits purchased still fit many months after they were meant to be worn? Even when the new date of 3 October was confirmed, they were nervous that all might be cancelled at the last moment. But at last, it became clear that this time it was really happening!



8 year old twins Joseph and Marie-Therese Quinn

In June, a Sub Committee convened to review regulations and guidelines for COVID19, and submitted detailed risk assessments of our churches, to the Diocese, in preparation for opening up for Private Prayer. In August, the PPC had set up a COVID team for the re-introduction of Masses to our churches. At a PPC meeting, on Tues 13th Oct, we continued to review the attendance at Sunday Masses and the first Wednesday masses were started. For the moment, we will continue with Sunday mass invitations by Surname and open invitation to the Wednesday masses. This will be continued to be reviewed.

We thank you all for your patience while attending Mass at these difficult times. The strict controls are there, to keep everyone safe, our parishioners, our volunteers, and our priest.

In discussion with how our neighbouring parishes were keeping in touch with their flock it was evident we needed to move to 'web cam'. The PPC are currently working on procuring and installing equipment, initially at Mount St Nicholas, to provide 'streamed live' Masses. This is hoped to be in place in time for the Advent services.

The Parish magazine, 'The Connection' was not printed at Easter or in the summer, so we are currently assisting the Communications team to get a bumper issue ready for Christmas.

Over the coming months, you will also see a new revamped website appearing. We would welcome your feedback on this when it is ready. <http://www.carrickparish.org/>

The new website will make it easier for parishioners to find important information on pious subjects, parish events via a Parish calendar, Parish Life, and a photo gallery, as well as Mass times, copies of the bulletin. The Connection magazine and access to either Parish recorded services or the live stream via the new webcam in Mount St Nicholas will also be at your fingertips.

A Welcome booklet incorporating the parish directory has been produced and will be accessible via the new Website. It describes the many aspects of Parish Life. We expect this may be useful for new people to the area. Printed copies will be made available to those parishioners unable to access it on the parish website

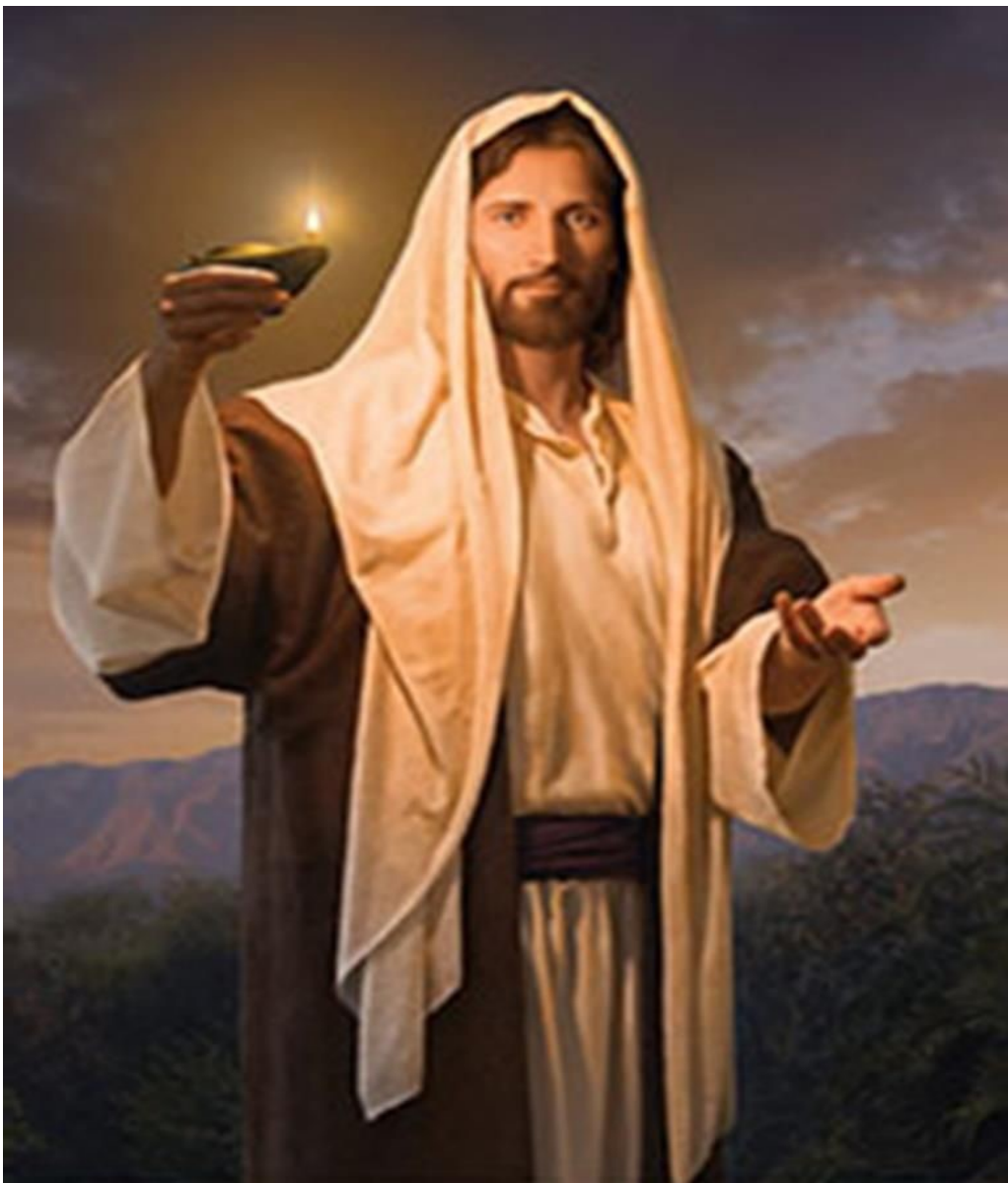
Welcome

Introducing the Parish of
Carrickfergus and Whitehead



There are currently 12 members of the PPC, including Father Peter. They represent both Carrickfergus and Whitehead and bring a wide range of experiences and skills to the parish. Father Peter is incredibly supportive of the PPC, he gives guidance and accepts suggestions very graciously. The PPC will continue to meet. If anyone would like to propose a topic for discussion, they can do so through any of the members of the PPC - we are a representative body. Or phone the parish office.

We would like to wish you all a very safe and Holy Christmas and look forward to meeting you all again in 2012.



COVID Teams in Carrickfergus and Whitehead



Living through the COVID pandemic has seen all of us making sacrifices and experience profound changes to our daily routines. Some of these sacrifices and changes have been more difficult than others, but one that hit a lot of people hard was not being able to get to Mass and receive the Eucharist.

Closing our Churches on the 17th of March was not a decision made lightly so, when we received permission to re-open for public worship, we knew strict rules and processes would have to be put in place to ensure the safety of our parishioners, priest and volunteers as far as possible. I was asked by Fr Peter to conduct a risk assessment for St Nicholas' in Carrickfergus, relying on the regulations from the NI Executive and much more detailed guidance from the Diocese. Paddy Stewart conducted the exercise in Whitehead.

Planning the re-opening of the churches began mid-June by assessing seating capacity in each church and identifying teams of volunteers for a range of roles including cleaning of all used surfaces after each service, stewarding and obtaining details of every person in the church for track and tracing purposes. Both St Nicholas' and Our Lady of Lourdes reopened for Sunday Mass on 2nd of August with numbers attending controlled by surname. Sunday Mass celebrated by Fr Peter has been recorded and made available online since April, which has been helpful in keeping our local Catholic community alive. Wednesday evening Mass began in both churches in October and, like Sunday Mass, is well attended.

Weddings funerals, baptisms and a beautiful First Holy Communion Mass have also taken place in the Parish, with groups of volunteers working tirelessly in the background to ensure the safety of all parishioners and visitors.

The Parish COVID committee reviews all these arrangements on a regular basis, informed by directives from the NI Executive, the Diocese and detailed data analysis prepared by Patrick Quinn each week.

These challenging times are likely to continue for some time but I think most people are adapting to the "new normal".

Marian Frampton

Christine's Pebbles



At a time when the world seemed an uncertain and a scary place thanks to Covid-19, the boys (Callum and Ethan) and I thought we would spread a little Hope and Cheer.

It started with our one daily exercise, we would cycle to the shore, collect some stones, take them home and paint them before setting off the next day to surprise deliver them on our bicycles around Whitehead. To the businesses that were open and supplying our neighbourhood to the doctors, the nursing homes and to the neighbours. One by one they popped up. A little misery to the locals, but a happy gift no less!

The message a little painting of the symbolic coloured houses along the shore, an upside down rainbow (when our world felt upside down) and the message 'Stay Safe'.

We have delivered over 300 'stay safe' stones now and we're recently nominated to receive a certificate from the Mayor in recognition of our time volunteering to spread a smile during Covid.

Christina Baker



Women's World Day of Prayer



The World Day of Prayer is a women-led, global, ecumenical service which takes place annually on the first Friday in March. The service this year was prepared by the women of Zimbabwe, with the theme “Rise! Take your mat and walk”. Six churches in Whitehead and the surrounding area take it in turn to host the annual event and it was hosted by Our Lady of Lourdes this year.

A committee, comprised of 2 members from each of the six churches, meet and allocate roles for people from the different congregations for the readings and prayers at the service.

As people arrived at the church on the evening of Friday 6th March, they could see the wonderful Zimbabwe scenery on the wall behind the altar, using a projector provided by Stanley Gilpin from the Methodist church. Everyone was given a small cup of water to welcome them, as is the custom in most of the cultures in Zimbabwe.

The church had been prepared and decorated by Moira Rodgers and Gerardine Stewart in the way suggested by the women of Zimbabwe. A table was draped with the colours of the Zimbabwean flag and examples of their musical instruments and pictures were on display. Another table held displays of their indigenous food and samples of minerals used in their main industries e.g. coal, gold, diamonds and copper. The altar was decorated with “Flame Lilies”, which are the national flowers of Zimbabwe and mean “full of glory”. A large Zimbabwean flag was attached to the lectern, where the service was introduced and led by Mary McCormack. The sacred music, led by our own organist Claire Pollard, was truly beautiful and the entire church joined in the singing.

The gift-aided collection amounted to £702, which will be shared across the world by various Christian charities. A light supper, prepared by our ladies, was served afterwards in the Pastoral Centre and thoroughly enjoyed by everyone.

We were so pleased to be the host church for the World Day of Prayer this year. It was particularly good to meet up again with our great friends from the other churches in the area just before the lockdown, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Please God things will improve before the time of the next World Day of Prayer, scheduled for 5th March 2021

Two Weddings in a garden



Having met on 14 Feb 1983, Anne and Jay's long-lasting friendship blossomed into an engagement in autumn 2019, an interval of just 37 years.

The date was set for May 2nd, 2020 and all was in hand until lockdown arrived. In late March, Jay drove from London to Carrickfergus (the presence of his cat, Elsa, making flying complicated). The couple sat out the first weeks of lockdown, and it became steadily clearer that May 2nd was not going to happen. Having given up trying to predict a date, Anne and Jay were still determined to go ahead as soon as possible – after all 37 years had now become 38 years, which was quite enough. In late May, Father Peter relayed the wonderful news that the couple could get married in an outdoor ceremony on May 29th.

With just a week's notice, and all services locked down (including the dressmaker who had the wedding dress), everything had to be replanned in days with a cast reduced from hundreds to just a handful. Two of Anne's friends came to the rescue magnificently: Caroline, whose hobby is floristry did a fantastic job of the flowers, and Pat, who is a keen photographer, did a wonderful job of the pictures. Both were helped by a day of beautiful weather – much to the surprise of Jay, who thought he had permanently left warm sunshine behind in London.

With the church out of bounds, the group assessed the holy ground for the perfect spot. Father Peter set up the altar and the happy couple were united in the sacrament of marriage. The only witnesses were Anne's parents and one cousin. It may sound rather a stark occasion, but nothing could be further from the truth. Thanks to a tiny team having fun working everything out, the incredible warmth and love of Father Peter and the fantastic weather, it felt like the perfect essence of a wedding.

What could have been a bit of an anti-climax turned into a unique occasion that will be treasured by the (admittedly small) group that were present. It was not the wedding the couple would have chosen, but it was also the wedding the couple would not have missed. As Father Peter said "Sancta Simplicitas".

Jay Nagley

Two Weddings in a garden



After over a year of planning and several months of Covid-19 generated uncertainty , Louise and I finally had our wedding. Funny enough, it took place on the same day that we had intended all along, albeit without family and friends present.

It was a wonderful ceremony outside on a windy (and slightly rainy day), and I couldn't be happier that Louise and I are married . I'm stunned at how beautiful Louise is and how gorgeous she looks in her wedding dress.

In the Autumn, post COVID-19 lockdown measures, we will have a proper celebration with friends and family. But even without the big celebration we had initially planned, I am , and will remain, overwhelmed with joy about our marriage.

Louise and I had initially planned to postpone the wedding celebration until October of 2020, but as the summer passed it became clear we would have to delay our celebration a second time if we wanted friends and family to be present, let alone to celebrate properly. So we delayed our celebration again until May 2021, almost exactly a year from the initial date of our wedding, and we're hoping and praying that this time we'll finally have the chance to have our wedding party.

It was a unique experience

Jason Charewicz and Louise Murray Charewicz



Bereavement

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

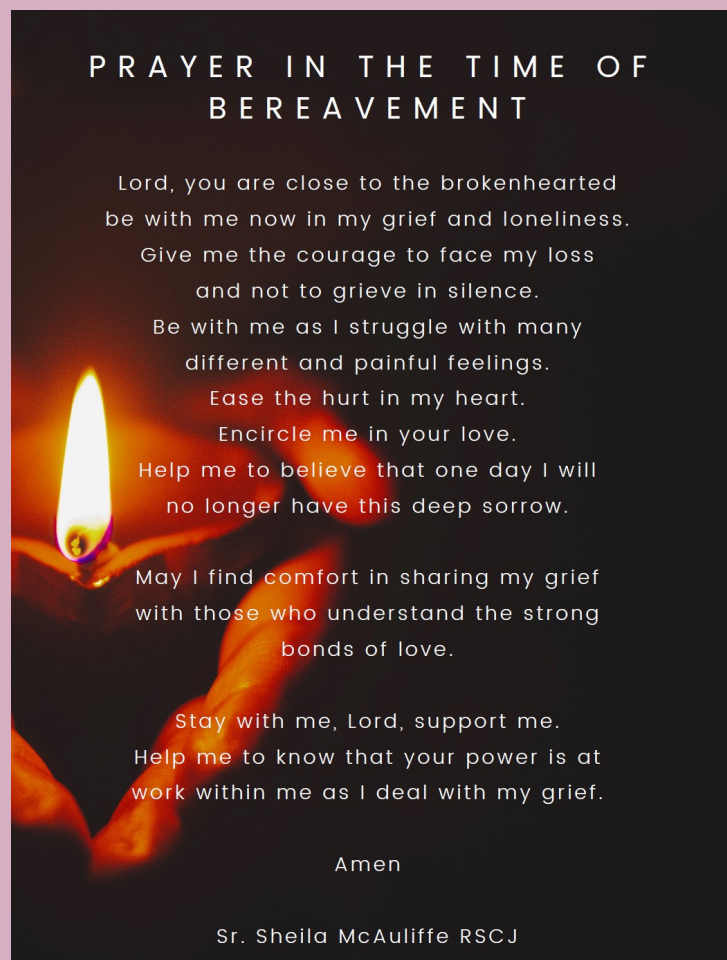
During the lockdown, it was not possible for the Bethany Group to visit the bereaved in their homes, or to hold the annual Mass for the Bereaved.

Hopefully, the online service on the 24th November 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.



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

Celine Arkins



Celine left us on 20th April 2020 and with her departure, a tsunami of memories and emotions engulf us. Many parishioners, perhaps, remember her as the organist whose choir sang old and familiar hymns. But Celine was larger than life. She was often referred to as 'big Celine'. She used to laugh at this and say, 'I only look big because of my broad shoulders'. But, she was, indeed, larger than life.

As a mother of eleven children, Celine needed all the wisdom and intelligence that God had gifted her with. Many years ago, she wrote me a long letter detailing the qualities of each of her children. Each child, she said, has unique qualities from their birth. This understanding and acceptance of others as they are, made Celine a person you would go to with a problem. And many did. She had a cheerful and often humorous greeting and welcome for everyone.

At the time of WW2, we had a vibrant youth group in our parish. I cannot mention names (though I'd love to) because there are too many and I might leave some out! We had tennis, billiards, annual concerts (sometimes in the Town Hall), andIrish dancing. Mary McAllister (then), taught us children the basics, while the elders were so good that they used to take part in feiseanna in the Mansion House, Dublin. Celine used to have a photo of herself and three companions at the feis. But the parish's love for Irish dancing showed itself particularly in the weekly ceilidh. During the dreary war years of black-outs, shortages, rationing and air-raids, the Friday night ceilidh let us forget our woes. Celine was the heart and soul of the ceilidh. Young and old whirled around as her fingers ran over the keys of jigs and reels, ably backed up by two or three fiddlers and a drummer. (Sorry, again, I can't mention names.). There were no mikes and no beer. Just plain fun.

One blessing from W.W.2 was the Perpetual Novena at Clonard. From the beginning, Celine was an ardent devotee of Our Mother of Perpetual Help. On a Thursday evening, she'd hurry home from work to get up to Clonard to join the queue during one of the sessions, so that she'd get a seat for the next session.

I was still very small when Celine brought a large picture of Our Mother of Perpetual help and enthroned it above the fireplace in the kitchen. She was sowing the seed of my vocation to the Redemptorists. After my mother, Celine was the greatest influence on my vocation. The night before I left for the novitiate, on a cold September night in 1951, we stood together on the Castle green watching the aurora borealis flashing over Belfast. I won't get over Celine's departure till I join her in the not too distant future. We'll have a lot to talk about and laugh over.

If Celine played a role in my vocation, the parishioners of my parish helped me in living it. In the nearly 60 years that I have lived among poor villagers in South India, Carrickfergus Parish has helped us to educate hundreds of boys and girls, supplying everything from clothes to fees, build toilets, care for the sick, especially the destitute and children and even build houses for the destitute. Last March, when there was a sudden lock-down, we supplied 900 destitute families with enough rice, spices etc to last them for the three weeks of the shut-down. Many people recalled Jesus having compassion on the multitude and feeding five thousand people. Jesus had compassion, but he could also work miracles. We had the compassion, you helped to perform the miracle!

As a last tribute to Celine, I wish all of you, in her name, a very Happy Christmas and a covid 19-less New Year.



From all here in your

Home Parish of Carrickfergus -

Sláinte and blessings to Fr. Martin Cushnan, C.Ss.R

Pat Heardman

4.3.1938 -4.11.2020



Our Mum was born and brought up in Belfast. She brought up a family of five in Greenisland and made many friends in St Colman's community there.

She moved to Whitehead in 2002 and was delighted to become a member of Lourdes Church Choir and even when she couldn't climb the stairs to sit among them her voice could still be heard to join them.

She spent her last few months in Whitehead Nursing Home and was so happy there looking out to sea from her penthouse suite!

She will be sadly missed by all who knew her.

Catrina Austin

RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation for adults)



At the age of 31, I was officially received into the Catholic Church on the 29th August here at St. Nicholas'. I had spent the previous ten months learning about the Catechism and undertaking the Rite of Christian Initiation for adults. Whilst this was an unconventional entry into the Catholic Community, it was a very meaningful and symbolic journey.

My partner Kylan is from a strong Catholic background and, whilst he has been supportive of me pursuing this faith, he has never tried to influence or push me towards it. During my pregnancy I would go to Mass most weeks and when I was organising my son's Baptism, I made enquiries as to how I could similarly be received into the Church. This was how my journey commenced.

As an adult, being received into the Church was different. I faced obstacles in that I had a young son, I was working full time as a doctor in Emergency Medicine and I had other commitments to my personal and work life. At times, I questioned if it was necessary to complete this work, given that I was already committed to God on a personal and emotional level but ultimately, I felt it was important to me. I was extremely lucky that my mentor, Mary Muir, was extremely flexible and able to work around me. I could not have completed this journey without her and cannot thank her enough for her time and continued support.

Of course, there were some benefits of having undertaken this experience as an adult. I am likely one of the lucky few people to remember moments such as my Baptism which took place on February 9th this year and feel that I participated very actively in the Sacraments such as my Confirmation and Communion. These experiences were very emotional to me and not ones that I will ever forget.

This year has taught me that life is unpredictable and there are lots of things we cannot control. Although life has its ups and downs, it is a gift. When things are difficult, I can always turn to God and take great comfort in knowing that He is looking over me and my family. Having this perspective makes life less stressful. Nothing feels better than knowing God loves me, is always there for me and will always take care of me. When I have a worry, I share it with God and go to sleep.

Lorraine Bouzan.

Christenings



On 8th March 2020, our baby girl Méabh Lily Anderson was baptised at St. Nicholas Chapel. As the only baby Baptised that week, Méabh had all the limelight to herself, and we are so grateful to Father Owen's for the beautiful service.

It was such a lovely afternoon, and we feel especially lucky to have been able to celebrate Méabh's special day with both families, before the lock down measures were put in place.

We have some lovely photos to look back on fondly, and we hope it isn't too long before we are all able to be together again.

Clare Cowan



Christenings



We originally planned our son, Logan's baptism for March 2020 but it had to be cancelled last minute due to the lockdown restrictions. When we managed to rearrange for August, we were only able to invite 25 people to the ceremony and had to wear masks, but this did not dampen the day at all!

We were able to have a close, intimate celebration welcoming Logan into the Christian family, and Fr. Peter conducted the most lovely and inclusive baptism we could have asked for. Logan was so well behaved and even fell asleep as Father poured water on his head and patted it dry.

We were so grateful to have been allowed use of the church hall afterwards and had some tea and party food while catching up with friends and family we hadn't been able to see in months, while Logan zoomed around in his baby Walker and played with his balloons.

Daniel, Jessica, and Logan Armstrong



StoreHouse Mayor's Visit



Lourdes Pastoral Centre has been used by a range of Parish groups and third-party organisations during 2020. The Parish craft group, Chatty Crafters, met on the last Thursday of the month and always had time for socialising and a catch-up over tea and biscuits, as well as developing their craft skills.

There were also the monthly light refreshments after Sunday Mass, which parishioners looked forward to throughout the year.

The main hall in the Pastoral Centre and associated kitchen facilities have been used for Christening parties, First Holy Communion parties, birthday parties and even Wedding Receptions over the last couple of years.

The main hall has also been used for meetings of the Parish Pastoral Council, Saint Vincent de Paul and the Whitehead Cell Group.

Following previous successful Jive and Salsa dance classes, the enthusiastic dancing group hope to try out the Latin American Merengue in a future set of classes.

The Whitehead Coastal Rowing Club uses the Pastoral Centre for training sessions and the local choir practices their singing on a Thursday evening.

The Larne and Carrickfergus branch of the National Autistic Society has use of 2 of the classrooms in the Pastoral Centre for their various activities in support of families living with autism in the Larne and Carrickfergus area.

One particular group has used the Pastoral Centre throughout the year. Whitehead Storehouse, which is the foodbank for Whitehead and the surrounding area, is housed in the Pastoral Centre.

It was particularly busy in the early stages of the lockdown, as volunteers worked to deliver the numerous government food parcels that had been organised for those people shielding and most in need in the community.

Indeed, the Mid and East Antrim Mayor, Cllr Peter Johnston, visited the Pastoral Centre in September to personally thank all the volunteers of the Storehouse for their efforts. He presented the group with a certificate of recognition for their outstanding work and contribution to the community during that phase of the pandemic.

The usual day-to-day activities of the Storehouse team continues as they prepare now for the expected increase in demand in December and throughout the winter months. Many thanks to all our parishioners, as well as those from the other Whitehead Churches, the local shops and the Community Centre for all your support provided throughout the year.

Unfortunately, the majority of these activities and events are currently paused due to the ongoing pandemic. We are all hoping and praying for a gradual return to normal times during 2021!

Paddy Stewart



Parish Youth's Covid-19 experience



At the height of the pandemic, we, as a Parish Youth Group began thinking of ways in which we could show our support and appreciation for NHS staff and key workers within our parish and our whole community. We created our rainbow collage by asking all young people in our Parish to draw a rainbow; we received pictures from children as young as three up to the age of eighteen! The rainbows are meant to offer a sense of hope and light during these dark, uncertain times, show our thanks for all key workers and our thoughts and prayers for everyone to stay safe.

The past nine months have been difficult for all young people in many different aspects, due to the halt on all normality, alongside the disruption of school for all ages and cancellation of exams. Despite this, Lockdown has allowed us to learn new ways of connecting with each other online and spared time for us to spend with family. It has offered opportunities to show new ways of appreciation, like the 'Rainbow Collage', and for many it has taught us to appreciate the more basic things in life, what would have previously been taken for granted. However, we look forward to returning to a more familiar way of life, while keeping all Covid-19 has taught us in mind.

Kerry Gilmore

Parish Youth's Covid-19 experience



I got involved with chill by making tea at meetings , going on the Wednesday walks and encouraging the people who swim on Sundays. Through this I have been able to help some of my own friends who are anxious and upset . I encourage friends to talk about their feelings and have loved my role so far . CHILL after Covid will hopefully develop a youth side for the local community.

What lockdown was like for me ?

It was very annoying being with family constantly , it felt like I had no space at times .

I wanted to see my friends a lot and it was annoying that I couldn't see them physically but FaceTime and social media was a positive in the pandemic .

I really wanted to go back to school because I missed my friends and I had no clue how to work goggle classroom , this caused some of the class anxiety and it got me quite upset too .

Even though I was lucky to have a good supportive family some of my friends did not and through my experience of helping in the mental health group CHiLL I was able to support friends who where going through hard times mentally . It also allowed me to look after my own mental health. I spent time doing things I enjoyed like make up and listening to music . It was hard but it taught me lots about myself .

Hannah Lavery

A Parishioner's Covid-19 experience.

Every parishioner has a story to tell about their Covid-19 experience. This is mine.

On Thursday March 12th I returned from England. When I arrived back in Carrick there was an eerie feeling in the town. People were queuing outside supermarkets for food as there was talk of shops closing and shelves were emptying very quickly. Some people had to stay indoors as Covid-19 was spreading everywhere. By this time the churches were closed so we received Mass on the I-pad. Sincere thanks to Father Owens and Paul Smith who recorded the Mass and asked if I could pass it on to my friends on Whatsapp.

The weather in April we were allowed out-of this to visit some pa-a chat and to see how visit Joan McNiece who after a bad fall and her Freda Smith was another update on parish activities to visit Ann and Gerry in Davy's Street. They Communion but since I



and May was very mild and, since side for exercise, I took advantage parishioners who were shielding for they were keeping. It was a joy to was now home from hospital good friend Beatrice Maxwell. er lady who enjoyed a visit and an ties. During this time I also went Moore, a brother and sister living had loved being brought Holy could no longer do this, I just

talked to Ann at the door. Gerry was upstairs very ill in bed and soon after this Gerry, a pillar of our church in Carrickfergus all his life, passed away.

As the weeks went by there were days when I felt agitated, a bit depressed and low in spirit. They tell me this is normal. About this time I found a spiritual station on the I-pad which had a Bible Study class. This was a great help. I would say I have never spoken to God so much in my life. This kept my head sane as well as walking and cycling. I have many friends in the parish and in the town so I was able to have a chat when I needed company.

After a while as the evenings got darker and I was indoors more often, I found myself having a few beers more than I should have. I realised this was doing harm to my health so, with the help of God, I went off alcohol for a month and regained my routine. As I am in my seventies I need to be careful of my own health and I fear getting the virus. I also get annoyed with myself as I cannot visit as many parishioners as I did during the summer. I would like to thank all those kind people who have been so thoughtful to me during this pandemic.

Matt Monaghan.

First Holy Communion

"Let the little children come to me, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these" (Luke 18:6)

In 2020, the world has been grappling with an invisible enemy and has tried to counter its deadly threat. P4 classes and their parents throughout the country were also dealing with a predicament; the impact of the virus on their First Communion plans. St. Nicholas' Carrickfergus was no exception....

Our only children are 8 year old twins (Joseph and Marie-Therese) and we had been talking for well over a year about how we might celebrate their big day. The twins' original First Communion had been scheduled for 30 May 2020. I can assure you that none of our early plans involved what transpired - spending the day in lockdown, making cupcake buns and watching the kids trampolining!

Psalms 37 tells us to *'Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him'*. However, as parents, Lorraine and I weren't quite as serene as the psalmist directs in relation to the delayed First Communion! Our thoughts were on practical matters- when would the First Communion actually happen, who would we be able to invite and would the outfits purchased still fit many months after they were meant to be worn? Even when the new date of 3 October was confirmed, we were nervous that all might be cancelled at the last moment. But at last, it became clear that this time it was really happening!

We are blessed with a large church in Carrickfergus so the actual arrangements for the big day were more generous than in many other parishes. There were 33 children in total from St. Nicholas' and other local schools making their First Holy Communion that day. Whilst social distancing requirements meant that unfortunately the (now P5) class had to be split into two for the occasion with a separate mass for each, we were delighted that the arrangements meant that some of the twins' wider family circle were able to attend. I must confess that Lorraine and I were also delighted that the twins were at the later session (1pm rather than 10.30am) for practical reasons that morning!

Article by Ronan Quinn



The actual ceremony was grace-filled, with each individual family coming up in turn, slowly and reverently for their child's reception of the sacrament for the first time. Some of the usual trimmings were absent; there were no large group photos and the usual after-communion party in the school had to be cancelled but there was also genuine appreciation that it could happen at all.

Of course, this year's communion class are not the only ones to have had their First Communion delayed. St. Bernadette (who started school late and suffered poor health) could perhaps be considered the Patron Saint of delayed First Communions as she was aged 14 before she received her First Communion, shortly after Our Lady first appeared to her.

First Communion is one of the most important days in our lives. In James Joyce's book, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, there is a passage where Napoleon tells his generals that the happiest day of his life was the day of his First Holy Communion. Belloc, in his biography of Napoleon, confirms this great happiness when he wrote "His preparation for his First Communion he always remembered and that day stood out for him all his life." From our perspective, this year's First Communion was certainly a day we will never forget in a year we will never forget!

Congratulations to all 33 First Communicants from St. Nicholas' PS and other local primary schools on receiving Jesus for the first time in Holy Communion on that special day. On behalf of the parents of the 2020 First Communion class, I thank all involved in the preparation of the children on the "Do This in Memory of Me" programme. I also thank Fr. Peter, Mr. Austin, Mrs Byrne, Mrs Carabine, Mrs Smyth, Mrs Muir, Mrs Hamilton and all the unseen heroes for ensuring the day went so smoothly in the end.



"Although our day was not exactly like we planned, it was a day I won't forget and our Holy Communion was extra special because it happened in the COVID-19 year." **Ella**

"I felt really excited and proud." **Aimee**

"It was one of the best days of my life." **Ryan**

"I was excited to receive Communion for the first time." **Tom**

"I have very happy memories of my Communion Day." **Joseph**



“I received Communion in COVID-19 but was still happy.” **Jake**

“My special day was really, really, really good.” **Scarlett**

“Thanks to Fr Owens for such a special day

Even if it didn’t happen in the month of May” **Marie-Therese**

“My family were very proud.” **Greg**

“I didn’t think it would happen, but it turned into a great day.” **Megan**

“My first Holy Communion inspired me to love God forever.” **Briana**

“I really enjoyed it and I wish that COVID-19 wasn’t here.” **Jessica**



“ On the front cover I’ve painted the Virgin Mary holding a 1st century Herodian oil lamp to symbolise light and hope . In the Parables, women would carry oil lamps to light their way, hoping to see Jesus arriving. I think something simple and respectful during these difficult times is what’s needed. So I hope she exudes peacefulness and calmness for all our readers. “

Shellz - Art

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