

During his time as our Archbishop, Dr Jackson has made a series of initiatives designed to encourage us to think about Church, the nature of our fellowship, our understanding of mission – where we are, what we are here for. On occasion his analysis has provoked some sharp reaction – the term ‘polyster Protestant’ will not soon be forgotten.

Utilising his connections and the respect in which he is held in the wider Church, he has invited key speakers to address both clergy and laity. Among recent visitors we were privileged to welcome the Bishop of London, Dr Richard Chartres who share with both clergy and laity his experience of working in a large and diverse city that is London, with its wide variety of cultures, of traditions. He spoke of the need to respect all traditions, to include all traditions in the life of the Church, remarking that every legitimate expression must have a spoon in the soup.

You may recall last autumn you were asked to fill out survey cards as part of a church wide survey of church attendances in the Church of Ireland across the country. This prompted me to conduct my own survey of Church attendances at our various services over the last five years. These are summarised in the chart you will find on the back of your agenda sheets. You will see a pattern developing of the beginnings of a decline over the last two years. During this period we have lost a number of stalwarts who would have been the backbone of Parish life and regular in their attendance at public worship.

All this has prompted me to embark upon a process of reflection as to how we see our Church in 10 years time. One issue that has to be recognised is the age profile of our worshipping congregation. Let me say now, the problems we face are not unique to the Parish of Howth and we are probably better placed than a number of other Parishes in our Diocese

2016 will see two key anniversaries in the life of this Parish. It will be 200 years since the building of the first Church on this site, of which the spire is the only part remaining. It will also be the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the building of the present Church. It will be a time to look back but also to look forward.

I invited a group to join with me to reflect on the future – this was drawn from the range of ages and worship preferences that make up our Parish. They have gone to experience worship in a range of churches in our diocese to see how they are responding to the challenges we are all facing. This is part of a process of discernment as to how we, that part of the Body of Christ that gathers around this place, move into the future.

One thing is clear. Doing nothing is not an option – unless we just regard continuing decline as inevitable. As I said a few weeks ago – fixing the roof is the easy part. Ensuring the future of a community to worship under that roof – that will require more thought.

Not all is dark. We have a wonderful history of faithful worship and service up to the present day that has brought us to this point. We are recognised to be a warm welcoming community. We have a fine tradition of worship that has been served by generations of people who have sung in the choir, who have played on the organ. We have been blessed by those who have occupied the Rectory over the years, whose ministry is still remembered with great gratitude and affection, those who have taught in our Sunday School, those who have faithfully worshipped here week by week.

The best way we can celebrate our past is to build for our future. We have a number of younger families who are keen to engage, who want their children to engage with the Church. This year our Youth clubs have continued to flourish – so much so we have had to split the Tuesday night club into two sections, meeting on alternate weeks. Our Saturday night club, catering for secondary school pupils, has grown and a number have taken part in a European youth exchange – our thanks are due to Tim, assisted by Andy Waller, for the patient and tireless work that has gone into this. Over the last six months we have seen signs of a reversal of the decline in our family worship as additional resources have been deployed to encourage singing.

We have wonderful opportunities. As we face into the future let us build on our past. Let us have the faith and confidence to embrace these opportunities and enrich our tradition as we incorporate new patterns of worship and community into the tradition of this place.

This year has been something of a new experience for us as we have welcomed Rev Linda Frost as our deacon intern. We have had students in the past, but the deacon intern enters more fully into the life of the Parish in what is their final year of training for the ordained ministry of the Church of Ireland. Linda came to us in September and

immediately had to face her own tragedy in the death of her father in England. In her short time with us Linda has made her own lasting impression upon us in her conduct of worship and in her pastoral visiting. I know of many who have been particularly touched by her gentle pastoral touch. She has also played a central role in the formation of a women's group, something that we hope will continue after she leaves. I have benefitted from having a colleague with whom I can reflect on wider issues of ministry. This has been a demanding year for her. She has completed a dissertation on the pastoral response to suicide along with other academic requirements. Her time is drawing to a close – she is currently involved in the process of appointment to her first curacy so she will not be with us for the next few Sundays though she will continue to work with us during the week.

As is customary, I want to thank a number of people who have served the Parish over the last year. I thank the outgoing Church Wardens, Mr Eddie Kerr, who has served for two years as Rector's Church Warden, and Mrs Carolyn O'Laoire, who has served as People's Church Warden.

I would like to thank the outgoing Select Vestry for their continued commitment. I would like to thank two individuals for their particular ongoing contribution. I speak of Audrey as Secretary of our Select Vestry and Tadhg in his continuing stewardship of our finances as Treasurer. In the midst of very heavy professional commitments Tadhg has continued to provide very clear and professional advice as we have sought to steer ourselves through these troubled financial times.

This year our Glebe Wardens, Frank Macnamara and Stephen Shaw have continued in their work as Glebe Wardens. This is one of those unseen jobs that is all too easily taken for granted – we notice when things are not done but when all is looking well we fail to recognise the amount of work that is done behind the scenes with great willingness and cheerfulness. Thank you gentlemen.

I would like to thank Randal Henly for his continued service as both Organist and Editor of the Parish Magazine. I would like to thank him and the choir for the lead they give us in our Sunday worship and also the work that goes into our special services at Harvest, Christmas and Easter. Randal continues to put a great deal of energy into the production of the Parish Magazine. I would at the same time like to thank the team of helpers who assemble and distribute the magazine.

This year we have not been in a position to offer a traditional Sunday School. Catherine Lawless has put a great deal of work and imagination in providing a monthly alternative act of worship through a series of activities in the Hall on the third Sunday of the month. Tim Alcutt has built upon the work he began last year. Under his leadership our two youth clubs have continued to grow and prosper as we have continued to maintain contact with our teenage population. I would want to pay particular tribute to Louise Fuller in the work she has done in coordinating the work of the Youth Project Team, consisting of herself along with Troy Hopkins and Audrey Hamilton. The establishment of the post of Youth Worker has been a very significant development in the life of this Parish and we have been blessed in the calibre of the individuals who have filled this post. Each have brought their own particular gifts to this position. As we said last year we have had to scale back on the hours that we are able to offer. I want to pay tribute to the way in which Tim has worked in these more restricted conditions, the development of the Youth Clubs, his encouragement of our young people to engage in events outside the Parish. Louise has also been responsible for the establishment and running of our Parent and Toddler Group which meets every Thursday from 9:30 till 12 and there is also a lovely atmosphere in the Joshua Room.

At the other end of the age spectrum, our very successful Social Group continues to meet on alternate Tuesday afternoons. One Tuesday a month the activities are based here in the Parish Centre and on the other Tuesday the group have organised a trip. Barbara Sargent has been very active in the establishment and the running of this group. We are now moving towards a more collective leadership in which individuals take on the role of organising particular outdoor events.

Then there are those groupings that meet in the Parish, that involve members of the Parish and enhance the life of the Parish. There is the Mafeking Scout Group that meet here in the Parish Centre, to which so many of our young people belong, and who provide wonderful help at the time of the Fete. There is the Bridge Club that meets here on a Wednesday night that has its own unique friendly atmosphere and makes significant annual contribution to our Parish Funds. There is the St Mary's Golf Society that over the years has organised three competitions a year, a wonderful camaraderie and over the years has contributed to the finances of the Parish. Then there is the Art

Group that meets on a Friday morning. Iris has a most wonderful knack of teaching. Thank you Iris for your encouragement and the contribution the group makes to Parish Funds.

We would like to thank Mr Denis Headon for his stewardship of the Free Will Offering Envelopes – he is always ready to respond to requests for new sets of envelopes. I would also like to take this opportunity of thanking those who contribute through this scheme or through standing order.

I would like to thank Carolyn O’Laoire for agreeing to take on the role of Administrator of the Garden of Remembrance.

I would like to thank Cathy Fennell for her continued work in managing our Parish Centre. She has been very proactive in securing tenants so we have maintained our income from bookings. I would also like to thank Jane Caldwell for the quiet efficiency with which she maintains all the necessary supplies for the Parish Centre

Our continued thanks are due to the three musketeers, Richard McMurtry, Stephen Shaw and Kay O’Neill, who once again are organising our Parish Fete. I would like to thank them for the huge amount of work that has already been done in preparation and ask everyone to pull in behind them as the day of the Fete approaches.

An important aspect of our life is fellowship, whether in Church or out of Church. I would like to thank some people in particular. I would like to thank Dorothy MacCann for her continued work with the midweek coffee – this is a lovely opportunity for people to get together for worship and fellowship and chat over a cup of coffee. The coffee after Church each Sunday has been particularly appreciated by those new to the Parish, providing as it does a chance to meet and establish contact with people in a way you cannot do on your way out of the Church door. Thank you to Valerie for coordinating this and to the ladies who have taken on the job of serving it each Sunday. On the odd Sunday we have missed it due to the absence of volunteers, which I think has brought home to us how valuable this meeting after Church has become.

Our thanks are also due to Mr Stan McMullen for his continued work as distributor of the Church Review and to Eddie Kerr, who continues to look after the Church of Ireland Gazette. Both would welcome new subscribers.

Finally, thank you to one and all for your continue support of the Parish, in your attendance at worship, in your financial support and the many and varied ways, seen and unseen, in which you each enhance the life of the Parish of Howth

This year I performed 14 Baptisms and  
I officiated at 2 weddings.

This year there were the following funerals:

Richard McIlhagga  
Douglas Sealy  
Maurice Bishop  
Peggy Morgan  
Betty Tighe  
Tom Freeman  
Bill Webb  
Millie Brown  
Peter Smeed  
Albert Cullen  
Betty Hegarty

There was also a memorial service for Geoff Rowden

I am pleased to announce that Garrett Wren has agreed to act as Rector’s Church Warden for the coming year and that Mr Stephen Shaw has kindly agreed to act as Rector’s Glebe Warden.