

On 24th June of this year, I will have completed ten years as your Rector. I want to take this opportunity of reflecting on what has happened, what is happening and what lies ahead. Arriving in 2005, I left a Northern Ireland that was edging towards the political settlement that we now have, a society edging towards peace and away from the mayhem of the previous 35 years. I arrived in a far more dynamic and prosperous Dublin than the one I had left in 1983 to go to the Mountmellick Group of Parishes. I came back to a very different Republic to the one I left in 1989 to go to service in Ahoghill.

Then of course within 4 years the Celtic Tiger had come to a shuddering halt, before limping off into the distance. In the ensuing economic collapse Irish society received a massive blow to its self confidence and tens of thousands paid the price in loss of employment, mass emigration, loss of homes, loss of hope – only now are we beginning to emerge.

Our Parish has seen changes during this time. There has been the loss of the evening service and in the last two years we have seen a significant decline in many of our morning services with the demise of many faithful members of our Parish community. This, along with the impact of the financial crisis, has also had its impact upon our income stream as Tadhg will indicate in his report.

Of course during this time we have seen things to encourage us. I think of the development of our Youth Worker Project, financed from interest accrued on the proceeds of the half the Old Rectory site, held on deposit until the building of the new Rectory. In Shaz Basdeo, Stephen Byford, Tim Allcutt and now Elke Koker we have been blessed with a succession of people who have each brought their own skills to bear on the post. Our Youth Clubs have prospered encouraging many young people to remain connected to the Parish. This year, for the first time, former club members have assisted in the running of our Youth Clubs.

In recent years we have seen a welcome development in our Family Services, made possible by the contribution of Bill Snodgrass, Rachel Brew and a band of singers, including Tadhg Snodgrass and Sarah Stanley enabling a widening of the repertoire of music played at Family Service. I am grateful to members of the choir for coming alongside in this development.

In recent years we have suffered from the absence of a Sunday School. Last year Cathy Lawless maintained a presence providing activities for young children. This year we have started to utilise the particular gifts and experience that Elke has brought to the post of Youth Worker, with a Sunday School operating on the 4th Sunday of each month alongside Family Communion. This has been well received and I would hope that other people will come forward to enable us to operate this on other Sundays. I have been greatly encouraged by the improvement we have seen in attendance at Family Service and, since the inception of Sunday School, Family Communion.

next year will see the 150th Anniversary of the consecration of St Mary's Church and the 200th Anniversary of the original church on this site. Daphne Henly, who produced some very informative material on members of the Parish involved in the Great War, is alongside others currently working on a history of the Parish.

As we move into the next stage of our history, we are in a period of transition. People who over the years have faithfully performed so many tasks are beginning to step aside. People who have supported the Parish in their giving are now passing on. The next generation are now having to step up to the plate. But as that happens, the way we do things, whether it be in worship, in the activities we engage in will have to be responsive to their needs and aspirations. Transition does involve change as we seek to respond to the changing situation in which the Church is called to witness. Transition does not involve a denigration or rejection of the past. This Parish has a proud history of worship and service. As the memorial tablets on the wall of the Church bear witness, members of the Parish have served with distinction in society, in business, in academia, in the Church. They in their day faced and responded to rapidly changing circumstances following on from the Home Rule Crisis, the Easter Rising and War of Independence, the Civil War. In the late 1800's, in response to the need to finance new Church of Ireland Parishes in a rapidly growing City of Belfast, this Parish alongside others in this city generously contributed to a fund providing for the provision of clergy in Belfast, providing £100 in one year.

We occupy our present position thanks to the faithfulness of past generations. It falls to us in our time to ensure that not only is the physical structure of the Church maintained but also to ensure the continuance of a strong, confident community that gathers here for worship and goes out to serve the wider community.

We will do this, not be resisting change but embracing change. Not change for the sake of change; but a change that enables us to face the future with confidence as we seek to bear our own distinctive witness to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Last year we benefitted from the ministry of Rev Linda Frost. This was a new experience for the Parish as Linda completed her Deacon Intern year with us before her ordination to the Priesthood in Sligo. A number of people travelled up to Sligo for the service and it was a real privilege for me when the Bishop of Kilmore asked me to preach at the service.

This year we have benefitted from the ministry of Rev David Martin. David was already well known to a number of younger families through the Burrow School where his children were already in School. We have all been struck by his lively and engaging manner both in his conduct of worship and in one to one contacts. Quite apart from the pressures that would normally go with an internship, the balance of continued study, pastoral work, preparation for worship and family life, David and Honor have had to face considerable personal difficulties first with Honor's illness and then, following the birth of baby Daniel, his period in hospital. The manner in which he has faced all these have born their own particular witness which we will remember long after he has gone from us. He is now at the stage at which deacons are assigned to the curacies in which they will serve in

September. So over these next few Sundays David will be visiting Parishes who will be looking for curates in the autumn. We wish him, Honor and the family every blessing as they face into this next stage of their life.

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 Garret Wren, who has served as Rector's Church Warden, and Mrs Jane Caldwell, 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. Audrey has indicated that she wishes to stand down this year and I would thank her for the dedication she has brought to this task. I want to pay a special tribute to Tadhg in his continuing stewardship of our finances as Treasurer. A Treasurer is more than just a book keeper, he has the task of planning for the future. 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. On occasion he has had to hold us back but even as he has done so he has suggested alternative ways in which we can achieve our objectives.

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. Who now remembers the trouble we had with the floor in this Hall, the problems we had with the boilers? The trouble is we can also easily forget the work that was involved in dealing with them. This year, as the Roof Fund has approached its target, the Glebe Wardens, along with Derek Fennell have been engaged in preparatory work that is necessary before we engage on a project of this size. They have met with Helena Bergin, the Heritage Officer of Fingal County Council who has advised us on the regulations we have to comply with in undertaking work on a listed building such as our. A survey of the roof has been completed and much thought has gone into preparing a scheme of works that is necessary before preparing tender documents. Garrett Wren has also been hard at work researching possible sources of grants for this work. 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. We particularly appreciate the gesture made in moving downstairs for the Family Service. 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. Finally let us not forget the other side we saw to Randal this year in that wonderful science demonstration he gave in the Parish Centre. We all got an insight into what an inspirational science teacher he has been over the years.

I have already spoken of the recent development in regard to the re-establishment of a Sunday School and the part played in this by our Elke, our Youth Worker. I would also like to thank her for the contribution she has made to our Family Services. This is in addition to her other work in her role as Youth Worker with us. Our Youth Clubs have continued to prosper and as I remarked earlier it has been lovely to see some of our teenagers return to the clubs in their role of assistant leaders. Elke has worked hard in developing links with Youth Workers in neighbouring Parishes and we have been involved in a number of joint ventures. I was lovely to come up here yesterday afternoon and to see young people from a number of different parishes taking part in an event organised by the Surf Project. 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 and her continuing role of offering encouragement and support to our Youth Workers in ensuring that we get maximum benefit from the reduced hours we are able to offer. This work has really been fundamental to our continued success in this whole project.

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. Different people have offered their services in organising the events in the programme.

In addition to these now well established groups we have seen the emergence of new groupings. The Women's Group, established in Linda's time with us, continues to meet. Although small in number it is developing an identity of its own. Then on the last Saturday of each month the men of the Parish meet in the Marine Hotel to solve the issues of the day over a breakfast that would send shivers down any dietician's spine. Thank you to Stan McMullen, Denis Headon, Fred Spendlove and Ian Malcolm for getting this off the ground. Then in Lent, a group came together to explore the whole area of Christian Meditation. This is now continuing each Thursday at 8:00 in the Church as we discover the value of silence in the presence of God. It is becoming the sort of group in which people can come or not come each week as they wish. Thank you to Carolyn for facilitating this.

I was talking earlier of transition. For the last number of years Mary Downes has inspired, cajoled, encouraged a group I have come to call the Garden Gang. We arrived at 10 and Mary allotted us our various tasks. Then, on the blow of the famous whistle, we were called together to feast on her homemade biscuits and tea and coffee before being sent back out to work till 12. Earlier in the year Mary indicated that she wanted to stand down from this. Lorna Hopkins has taken us the role of commander and teas are provided by Gowan Bryce and Susan Massey.

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 her work as 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

The Fete, that wonderful community event in our annual calendar, is now drawing closer. This year this is being organised by Carolyn O'Laoire, Stephen Shaw and Kay O'Neill. 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 those who have been organising our coffee with the midweek service, in particular Hazel Reamsbottom, Eileen Geaney and Jane O'Hara – 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 8 Baptisms and
I officiated at 2 weddings and two marriage blessings.

This year there were the following funerals:

Percy Lovegrove
Gaye Wheeler
Joan Hutson
Madge O'Neill
Bud Bryce
Florrie Rowden
Jack Heaslip
Marjory Johnston
Gillian Rickard
Hazel Ranken

I am pleased to announce that Denis Headon 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.