

200 years ago this year a new Church was consecrated on this site and became the place of worship of the local Church of Ireland community, replacing one, the ruins of which still stand, in the grounds of Howth Castle. As a building it received mixed reviews. In one Diocesan report it was described as in excellent condition, in another later on it was said to be in poor condition. A former Provost of Trinity described it as an ugly white washed house. Then 150 years later it was replaced by the present Church of St Mary's. It was interesting that the old one was not completely demolished; the tower was incorporated into the spire of the present Church. In other words, part of what had gone before was incorporated into the new and the new was built on the foundations of the old. I'll just leave that thought with you for the moment.

2016 is a significant year for the Parish of Howth, representing as it does a double anniversary, the 200th anniversary of the old Church and the 150th anniversary of the new. In connection with this we will be welcoming the Archbishop of Armagh to Howth on Sunday 13th October, which is close to the anniversary of the consecration of the old Church.

In the meantime next Friday we will be launching the new Parish history which has been produced by a team lead by Daphne Henly. Daphne would be the first to say that there has been a huge amount of work done by many other people but I would still want to say a particular thank you to Daphne who has spent hours researching documents in the RCB Library and contemporary news reports and without whom this project would not have got off the ground. Come along on Friday for what promises to be a lovely evening. We will be joined by Cecil Hyland who will formally launch the book and there will be an opportunity to see old cinefilm of Burrow School sports in the 60's and 70's and other archive material that has been unearthed during the process.

A building of this age obviously needs maintenance. This year a large amount of background work has gone into laying the foundations for work on the roof. Since last year's Easter General Vestry a team consisting of Derek Fennell, Stephen Shaw and Ian Malcolm have been entrusted by the Select Vestry with the task of selecting a Project Manager, conducting a survey on the roof, overseeing the production of tender documents, selection of firms from whom tenders will be sought. This group has reported back to the Select Vestry on a regular basis to report on progress and to seek ratification of recommendations by the project management team. We have already been awarded a grant by Fingal County Council and other sources of grants are being pursued. Once tenders are received, the Select Vestry will shortly be in a position to decide whether we have the finances to proceed this year or whether we would defer till next year.

Buildings need maintenance. Part of that process is looking out for warning signs and responding to them. The Church of course is more than the building – it is primarily the community that gathers to worship – we need to look out for warning signs and respond to them. There are two warning signs that we would be foolish to ignore.

Our numbers attending services are declining. With the exception of Family Service and to a lesser extent the Family Communion, our numbers have dropped – the 9:30 is down to 20 – 25 from 30 – 35 five years ago.

the 11:00 services of MP and Parish Communion are down to 55-60 compared to 80 five years ago.

Along side this the number of people making regular contributions through the envelope scheme or through standing order is declining (though there have

been a small number of people taking out standing orders since the last appeal in the Newsletter and by email).

The issues of numbers will have to be addressed. It is not just a matter of retaining children. As Bishop Kenneth Kearon pointed out at his first Synod as Bishop of Limerick, we have lost our own generation. We are about to move into the third century of Christian worship on this site. Let us embrace the challenge that is before us. Change can be painful but to refuse to change only stores up problems for the future. When the work on the roof is being done, be it this year or next year, we will be worshipping for at least two months in this Hall. Worship in this space, if it is to work, cannot be simply as it is in the Church – particularly for the celebration of Holy Communion. It is, by the very nature of the smaller space available to us, going to be more intimate. We have a horrible tendency, when change is suggested, to immediately react ‘No way!’- I think of that time I moved the communion table and I notice the ropes for the pews have gone ‘missing’. Could we use the weeks that we are in here to open our minds, to reflect on what we could be doing in the third century of worship in this beautiful Church that we have inherited and that we hold in trust for generations to come.

Remember at the outset I said of the replacement of the old Church by the new: It was interesting that the old one was not completely demolished; the tower was incorporated into the spire of the present Church. In other words, part of what had gone before was incorporated into the new and the new was built on the foundations of the old.

I am sure there were those who mourned the destruction of the old Church – this was the place where people had been married, children had been baptised; the place where funerals of loved ones had been held. But they moved

forwards and we have benefited from their vision. And changes have been made to the current building – you will remember the font being moved. But long before that the chancel steps, which were once just past the Vestry door were moved to their present position – in memory of a former Sexton. These changes were all undertaken to reflect the changing liturgical needs of their generation.

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 Garrett Wren who took over as Secretary of our Select Vestry. 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.

I have already spoken of the considerable work undertaken by the Roof Project Group. This year Frank Macnamara has not been in a position to do much of the work he has done in the past. Stephen, in addition to the work he has done on the roof project has continued in his usual quiet and unobtrusive way to attend to those many jobs that people often do not notice.

I would like to thank Randal Henly for his continued service as both Organist and Editor of the Parish Newsletter. 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. I would at the same time like to thank the team of helpers who assemble and distribute the magazine.

I would also like to thank Bill Snodgrass, Rachel and Linda Rowden for their work in developing the music for the Family Service and the singers who help give a lead..

I would also like to thank Elke, our Youth Worker, for her contribution to our Family Services – she has a particular gift with prayer and some of her ideas with shadow puppets have been appreciated by all ages. I would also like to thank her for her work with the children out in the Hall during the Family Communion. All this is in addition to her other work in her role as Youth Worker with us in our Youth Clubs. I would want to pay particular tribute to Louise Fuller in the work she has done in coordinating the Youth Work Project since its inception. This work has really been fundamental to our continued success in this whole project.

Jackie Lawless has now taken on the running of the 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.

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 and Fred Spendlove for their continued coordination of this.

The Garden Gang continues to thrive under the leadership, or should I say command, of Lorna Hopkins. The wonderful teas that Mary used to provide are now provided by Gowan Bryce and Susan Massey. The next meeting of the Group is next Saturday – new faces very welcome. Thank you also for Derek Fennell and the team for mowing the grass. Again new faces welcome.

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.

In the past twelve months I have performed 6 Baptisms and I officiated at 3 weddings.

This year there were the following funerals:

Betty Skelton

Gwen Holmes

Cecil Jermyn

Daphne Anderson

Jennifer Guinness Booth

Elsie Currie

I am pleased to announce that Eileen Geaney has agreed to act as Rector's Church Warden for the coming year and that Mr Stephen Shaw has kindly agreed to continue to act as Rector's Glebe Warden.