

This year I am chairing my 7th Easter General Vestry since my arrival in the Parish of Howth. This means that after Ahoghill & Portglenone, where we spent 16 years, this is the longest period of time I have spent anywhere in the course of my ordained ministry in the Church of Ireland. A lot has happened in personal terms since we arrived here. We have seen the marriage of our older son and the arrival of his two boys. Within the Parish we have seen the building of the new Rectory, the establishment of the post of Youth Worker. It has been my privilege to enter into and become part of the life of this place. I have shared in moments of great sadness and moments of great joy. I have been welcomed into homes and benefited from your love and support in the ups and downs of life. Rachel and I have enjoyed the many facets of the life of this place.

In Church this morning, as we reflected on the Gospel and Jesus' talk of himself in terms of shepherd, I spoke of a deep sense of belonging, a belonging to God and to one another. It is all part of what it means to be a member of the Body of Christ that we were thinking about in the context of Baptism during the season of Lent. Part of our belonging is the care we have for one another. A lot of this happens quite naturally and spontaneously. People calling in on neighbours, the telephone calls, the simple acts of kindness. I am also aware that as the years go by those who cared start to need help themselves. We need to be aware of that as, for example, people who brought others to Church now begin to need that help themselves. I am aware of people who are very active in the local community, the meals on wheels, various support groups and community groups.

The last meeting of our Diocesan Synod saw the development of the Diocesan Social Action Group. The purpose of this group is to provide a forum within which parishes are encouraged to reflect on how they can respond to the needs of their local communities. Yesterday Carolyn O'Laoire and I attended a forum in the College of Education. The meeting was addressed by Fr Peter McVerry and Sr Alice Leahy. They both spoke of their experiences of working with the homeless. Rev Olive Donohoe, Rector of Stradbally, spoke of simple initiatives that can be taken at Parish level to support agencies working with the disadvantaged in our society, such as the collection of toys and groceries we already do for Focus Ireland at Christmas. The Archbishop spoke of his ambitions for developments in this area in the diocese. This is an issue we will be hearing more of in the months to come.

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 Aubrey McMurtry, who has served for two years as Rector's Church Warden, and Mrs Eileen Rowden, 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 Eddie Kerr 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.

I have already spoken of the work of the Sunday School Team and of the contribution of Tim Alcutt as he comes to the end of his first year as our Youth Worker. 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 involvement in training for Confirmation, 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 out door 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. For many years this has been under the very able stewardship of Norman MacCann. Norman has stood down this year as secretary but I want to take this opportunity to thank him on behalf of the Parish for all that he has done. Then there is the Art Group that meets on a Friday morning. Iris has a most wonderful knack of teaching. As one who was told at school that I was useless at art she managed to get even me to have a go and enjoy it. 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

For the last four years the Parish Fete has been under the very capable stewardship of Mrs Helen McVeigh. She has now had to stand down. This year the Fete is being organised by Richard McMurtry, 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 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 8 Baptisms and
I officiated at 3 weddings.

This year there were the following funerals:

Timothy Conboy

Joan Byrne

Michael Wilson

Doris Blennerhassett

May McCabe

Leslie Hopkins

tom Stanley

Ronnie Collier

Marjorie Parker

I am pleased to announce that Mr Eddie Kerr 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.