

Carrickfergus Parish Newsletter

Incorporating the Churches of:
ST NICHOLAS
OUR LADY OF LOURDES

carrickparish.org

SUMMER 2004
Produced by
Carrickfergus Parish Pastoral Council

It's a GIFT for our youngsters



Some of the young participants in the GIFT programme

by Gerardine Stewart

Thirty P7 and Year 8 children from the parish accepted Father Cosgrove's invitation to take part in the GIFT (Growing In Faith Together) program running this year.

GIFT evenings usually start off with an icebreaker,

followed by a description of the topic, e.g. friendship. A relevant story or piece of scripture is read, sometimes by the children themselves, and the adult leader then shares a personal example. The young people are then encouraged to share their stories and experiences.

After the time of sharing, worksheets are distributed, provoking some more thought on the topic. When the worksheets are complete, and any further discussion is over, we have a few minutes quiet time. Some background music is played and we all reflect on how we will live out what we have been discussing during the coming week.

We finish the formal part of the night with a closing prayer. Each session lasts about an hour, and then we get 15 minutes to have refreshments and relax together.

The topics for the final two weeks were 'Our Parish' and 'Prayer'. We discussed how we see and fit into our parish, and then the importance of prayer in all our lives. Now we will have to ask Fr. Cosgrove to

line up some small jobs for those people who may not have been aware of just how important they are to our parish life!

There was an extra hour's celebration at the end of the final session, in recognition of the course and our valuable time together.

Running the program has been a great idea. It has built up the community spirit amongst all the participants, by their sharing of stories and spending time together. It has also encouraged us all to focus on a living faith. I hope that the young people in particular have experienced the continuing interest of the parish in them and in their faith development.

Footballers celebrate a great day

by Michael Johnston

The McKeown-Scallons are the official family footballing champions in the parish, after the beating the Smiths 1-0 in the final of a thrilling competition on 12 June.

Organised by the St Nicholas' Reunited committee, the first ever Family Football Challenge in the parish was a runaway success, with 60 players, 25 cheerleaders and a crowd of around 150 spectators gathering to take part in the event at Carrick Leisure Centre.

Arranged as 'a game of two halves' the second half evening family prizegiving in the parish hall proved equally popular and saw the McKeown-Scallons cel-

brate their victory in style.

The 'first half' tournament featured ten family teams, all of which needed two generations of players aged 13 and upwards to be eligible, and who each had to have a parish connection by either living, or once having lived in the parish.

Young girls from the parish, complete with stylish green and white outfits and pom-poms were also involved. They did everyone proud with a cheer-leading display on the pitch which was greeted by loud applause by the spectators.

Two penalty competitions - both won by brothers Carl and Niall Brannigan - captured the interest of the younger boys who weren't eligible for their



The McKeown-Scallon team with the Family Football Challenge Cup and winning medals

family team.

Father Cosgrove presented the cup and medals at the evening event saying: "The whole parish is a winner today, I hope we can see more of this type of event in the future."

The Smiths lost out despite

having a secret weapon in the shape of a very fit Father Anthony Fitzsimons from Greenisland.

The other semi finalists were the Brocks and the Morans

• More photos available soon on the parish web site.

From the Pen of the Parish Priest

Looking back and forward

Once again we have almost come to the end of yet another very successful year in our parish.

Schools are winding down towards the end of the academic year. Parish organisations and groups are getting ready to take a well-earned summer break. Parents are preparing to get used to their children being around the house for the next couple of months. Our young people are coming to the end of the exam season. Others are preparing for the next stage of their lives as students, or launching out into the world of work.

Whatever your situation, I wish you every success in whatever it is you choose to do with your life.

For me, I would like to think that over the last year our Parish has travelled a long way down the road in our 'Journey in Understanding'. During the year, as you know, we took part in two very successful 'Journeys in Understanding', with other Churches in Carrickfergus, and we forged new and stronger links with our Christian neighbours. We can only hope and pray that those links will continue to grow and strengthen in the years to come, so that we can show to the country and the world that we are doing our

best to bring about peace and reconciliation in our community.

I would like to think of our Parish as a 'praying parish'. It was Fr. Peyton, 'The Rosary Priest', who many years ago coined the phrase, "The family that prays together, stays together". I think our 'parish family' could adopt this phrase, "The parish family that prays together, stays together".

To this end I am pleased to announce that the Redemptorist Fathers will be with us for a Parish Mission at the beginning of Advent, helping us to pray together. The Mission will run from 27th November to 4th December 2004, so keep an eye to the Sunday Bulletin for further announcements.

In the meantime, have a lovely summer, keep safe, but above all keep praying!

Autumn Club goes on tour

by Joe Boylan

The Autumn Club meets every Wednesday afternoon in St Nicholas' Community Centre, and has been in existence for the past 16 years.

It is open to everyone over 50 years of age.

SVP celebrates 160

by Paddy Stewart

This year, 2004, SVP celebrates 160 years of unbroken service to the poor and vulnerable in Ireland.

The first meeting of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in Ireland was held in Dublin in 1844. As an organisation, we witnessed the Irish Famine, and have remained ever since as a strong beacon of hope and support for poor and disadvantaged people across the island of Ireland.

Today, SVP is Ireland's largest volunteer organisation, with a proud tradition of supporting and championing the rights of the poorest members of our society. We offer a very direct approach to helping people. In our local conferences, we can identify those who need help and we can give that help in a respectful, confidential and caring way, without going through layers of bureaucracy to determine what type and level of help is needed. We

also have a strong spiritual dimension to our work. We believe that reaching out to help those in need offers us a powerful way of giving expression to our Christian values.

We seek to respond to the call every Christian receives, to bring the love of Christ to those we serve in the spirit of the Gospel message "I was hungry and you gave me to eat". No work of charity is foreign to the Society.

We are also very appreciative of the generosity of you, the people of our local Parish here in Carrickfergus. Without your ongoing support to the special appeals and the weekly red box collections, we wouldn't be able to offer our services to those less fortunate than ourselves in the local community. May God bless you all for your kindness and generosity, as we continue with our commitment in the months and years ahead to be able to provide caring and practical support to those we help.

This year, for our annual holiday, we are going to Dalmally in Scotland in the first week of August. The holiday is organised by the Highland Heritage Coach Company, and during the week they will take us to various places of interest in the Highland Region of Scotland.

During the year we had a number of bus outings, to Ballymena, Coleraine, Newry and Lisburn. On the first Saturday in July we will be going to Coleraine and on to Limavady via Downhill.

As usual, we will finish the year in December with our Christmas dinner.

Hester sees meaning in children's liturgy

by Hester McMillan

"When I was going to Mass as a child, I never really felt included in the service and always thought it was aimed towards adults. I feel the Liturgy Group has remedied this for children today and brings the Gospel to life in a meaningful way to those who attend.

"The Children's Liturgy has now been here for over 2 years and what a success it has been. It is thoroughly enjoyed by all

the children who attend. The Liturgy Club has been long awaited for by the children of the parish and their parents.

"Children need practical things to do in order to learn and this is why the Liturgy Group is so important. It teaches the word of God in a way that is interesting and fun through different tasks and activities relating to the reading of that particular Sunday.

"The children are invited to the Liturgy at the beginning of

the Mass and in they all go with their friends and big smiles on their faces. They then sit down and get settled, ready to learn and the candle is lit to remind everyone that Christ is present.

"The reading is read out and questions are asked. Then the activities about the information which they have just heard are given out. There are plays, songs and music to help the children understand the readings and God's work.

"I have been helping with the Liturgy for two years and I see the benefit of it and how much it encourages the children to be active in and feel part of their parish community.

"I am sure there are many parents with older children who wish this has been set up a long time ago because it is so special in that it makes the Gospel real and brings the word of God in an understanding way to children."

Pentecost an 'exciting experience'

On Pentecost Sunday parishioners gathered in Lourdes Hall, Whitehead to celebrate this wonderful feast day, the third most important in the Church's calendar. Some of our youth participated, and Fionntan Arkins, a Year 8 student acted as reporter for the evening. This could be the beginning of a wonderful career in journalism for Fionntan!

The evening began at 7.30pm and the atmosphere seemed very intense prior to the ceremony, although there was a nice crowd attending. Lovely pictures representing the Holy Spirit were posted onto the walls. There was a candle tree with candles dispersed throughout the tree. Candles were placed onto the windowsills. The gifts of the Holy Spirit were displayed: judgement, reverence, wisdom and courage – each surrounded by a bird.

COME HOLY SPIRIT COME!

Hymns were excellently sung. Everyone participated with the singing, instruments played along, and the whole sound was thunderous in a small space.

Members of the congregation spoke at length and informatively on the meaning of Pentecost Sunday.

Margaret Webb gave an excellent introduction telling

everyone the programme of events for the evening. She explained the meaning of the Holy Spirit in a way that everyone present understood.

Edel Stewart, year eight, speaking very clearly without hesitation, read a passage from the Book of

Joel – "I will pour out my Spirit "

Kathryn Degnan, year eight, recited a prayer with such a beautiful voice that was very pleasing to the ear. The prayer was very moving.

Joseph McCullough, year eight, expertly read an extract from St Paul's letter to the Corinthians about the Holy Spirit.

Patrick Stewart, year ten, read from St Paul's letter to Timothy - "Filled with the Holy Spirit". Patrick spoke with a very deep voice, but it was very soothing.

The music administrator made a short speech. People

make a real difference by singing and thanking God. A short extract from the bible was read.

Martin Murray prayed a short prayer to God thanking Him for the beauty of this world, the birds, blue seas, sandy beaches and the beauty of nature. Martin finished by asking, "Why are we here tonight? Why, because we love you God!"

Everybody stood up and sang two very lively hymns. They all clapped, swayed and smiled at the happiness of giving praise through song. It was like a real concert, but with about 50,000 people short, but hey, this is good stuff, brilliant! A third hymn was sung. This was not so lively, but smooth and lovely. The quality of the instrumentalists and singers was very good.

More gifts of the Holy Spirit were explained: words of wis-

dom, words of knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, distinguishing of spirits, tongues (prayer and prophecy) interpretation

All the above was explained very well by Martin. Along with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, truthfulness, humility and self control.

An option was given of either going to a corner of the room to pray with other people or to just listen to the music, or both.

Everyone prayed whilst listening to soft, gentle, relaxing music. I think I even fell asleep for a moment, but not from boredom!

Margaret Webb gave a thank you speech to all participants. One last hymn was sung - My Jesus, My Saviour.

Afterwards, tea and biscuits were served, very delicious!

Overall, it was a very exciting experience. With thanks to all who made this Sunday evening very special.

Fionntan Arkins

Successful year of fundraising for PTAs

by Ursula Kelly and Daphne Mulholland in Carrickfergus

St. Nicholas' Primary School PTA has enjoyed another successful fundraising year.

Our main events this year included a Christmas Disco and ballot, a Night at the Races (run jointly with the Primary School football team) and our Summer Family Fun Day.

A successful silver jewellery night in November allowed parents and parishioners the opportunity to do a little early Christmas shopping.

With donations of recipes from parents and parishioners, we were able to compile our own St. Nicholas' recipe book, which proved very popular.

Our funds were boosted by

an 'Awards for All' grant, enabling us to have our playgrounds colourfully marked out for both educational and recreational games.

We subsidised a trip to the pantomime for the whole school in January, and have provided a new and innovative spelling scheme for the school.

The PTA would like to take this opportunity to thank all parents and parishioners for your continued support.

Forthcoming events will include a Salsa Party Night in mid-September, further details of which will be in the parish bulletin nearer the event.

by Joanne Read in Whitehead

This school year has been filled with lots of activities for the children and fundraising for the school.

We began the year with a fancy dress disco for Halloween and in November we held a traditional Irish evening to warmly welcome teachers from across Europe as part of the ongoing European Contact Programme. They came laden with gifts for the school and spent time with the children sharing experiences about school life in other countries.

December gave us all an opportunity to see how many budding young stars we have in our midst, with the school production of *The Hoity, Toity Fairy*. After all their hard work the children were

able to sit back and relax when they went to Belfast's Waterfront Hall to see the Pantomime, *Aladdin*.

In February we held a disco for the adults at Whitehead Golf Club. There was a fantastic turn out on the night with parents, friends of the school and parish raising over £750. Finally, wrapping up this year's activity was a family quiz and bar-b-que.

The money we raised throughout the year has enabled us to landscape the school grounds with trees & shrubs. We have also been able to provide new equipment which has given the children a brand new look to their playground.

May we take this opportunity to thank everyone in the Parish for your support.

Thoughts on the Eucharist

By Faithful Adorer

At the Last Supper, our Lord instituted the Eucharistic Sacrifice of his Body and Blood. Not only is the Holy Eucharist the 'source and summit of the Christian Life' but also it is called the Most Blessed Sacrament because it is the Sacrament of Sacraments to which all other Sacraments and all the works of the Church and Apostolate are oriented, for in the Blessed Eucharist, is contained the whole spiritual good of the church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch.

In brief, the Eucharist is the sum and summary of our Faith. It is the King of all the sacraments. Faithful to the Lord's command, the Church continues to consecrate the bread and wine which, by the words of Christ and the invocation of the Holy Spirit, became Christ's Body and Blood and will continue to do so until his glorious return. The gift of a lively and joyful faith in the glorious Eucharist, has to some small extent, been captured in the prayer so loved by Edel Quinn:

"Dear Jesus make thyself to me a living bright reality,
More present to faith's vision keen,
Than any outward object seen
More dear, more intimately nigh
Than even the sweetest earthly tie."

The word Eucharist means Thanksgiving, and it is a sacrifice of Thanksgiving to the Father for all his benefits, for all he has accomplished through creation, redemption and sanctification and it is also the sacrifice of praise by which the Church sings the glory of God in the name of all creation.

In the most Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist, the body and blood, soul and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, is really, truly and substantially contained.

This is called the Real Presence. The Eucharistic Presence of Christ begins at the moment of Consecration and endures as long as the Eucharistic species subsists.



As early as 155 AD, St Justin, Martyr, described the order of the Eucharistic celebration to the pagan Roman Emperor, Antoninus Pius and the celebration described is a similar liturgy to that of our own day. Many other early church fathers, including St Augustine, St Cyril of Jerusalem, St Ambrose, St John Chrysostom and the angelic Dr St Thomas Aquinas, also write about the Holy Eucharist.

St Augustine writes that the Church continues to reproduce the Redeemer's Sacrifice in the Sacrament of the Altar. St Thomas Aquinas writes, that in this Sacrament are the true Body of Christ and his true Blood which is something that cannot be understood by the senses but only by faith which relies on divine authority and in his beautiful hymn: *Adoro Te Devote*. Thomas Writes

Hidden God, devoutly I adore thee.
Truly present underneath these veils.
Not to sight or taste or touch be credit,
I believe for God the Son has said it.
Word of Truth that ever shall endure.

Regarding St Luke 22.19, where we read: This is my Body given for you, St Cyril says "Do not doubt whether this is true, but rather receive the Saviour's words in faith, for since He is the Truth, He cannot lie".

The Eastern Churches that are not in full communion with Rome, celebrate the Eucharist with great love. These separated Churches possess

true Sacraments especially the Priesthood and the Eucharist and sometimes communion with them is permitted. Each time the Eucharist is celebrated the work of redemption is carried on and it sustains our strength along the way, makes us long for eternal life and unites us even now to the Church in Heaven, The Blessed Virgin and all the Saints. The Church and the world have a great need for Eucharistic Worship. Jesus awaits us in this Sacrament of Love. Let us not refuse the time to go to meet him in Adoration, in Thanksgiving, in Atonement for sins and crimes in the world.

Let our Adoration and awe in His Real Presence never cease.

Some very famous people in the past, were firm believers in the Eucharistic Presence, viz:

Martin Luther, who wrote about the scriptures and the Real Presence, "The text is too strong, I cannot escape, I must believe."

King Henry VIII was also a believer in The Real Presence and remained so until his death. His disagreement with the Pope was on authority rather than doctrine. Even today many prominent non-Catholics believe in the Real Presence and when James Boswell, the biographer, of the famous Samuel Johnson, discussed transubstantiation, Johnson mentioned the ancient and continued tradition of the Church and also that able men indeed, have said they believe it. In a later discourse, Johnson was fully convinced of "The Propitiatory Sacrifice", as we read in Boswell's *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides*, in 1773.

The Great St Thomas Aquinas himself who wrote so much and so beautifully on the Holy Eucharist, was once praying before The Blessed Sacrament shortly before his death, when he had a vision, about which he said little beyond stating that all he had written about the Holy Eucharist, was as STRAW and that he would write no more. It was thought that he may have been given a very small glimpse of the beauty of the Beatific Vision. How beautiful are some

of the verses written in honour of the Holy Eucharistic, e.g.

In the sequence of the Mass of CORPUS CHRISTI, we read:

Let the praise be loud and high,
Sweet and tranquil be the joy,
Felt today in every breast on
this Festival divine, which
records the origin of the
Glorious Eucharist
Here for empty shadows fled,
Is reality instead
Here instead of darkness, light
Lo upon the altar lies
Hidden deep from human eyes,
Bread of angels from the skies,
Made the food of mortal man.

And how many of us miss the former benediction of the Holy Sacrament, with the lovely 'Tantum Ergo', which sounds so lovely and instructive, even in our own language?

"Down in adoration falling,
Lo the Sacred Host we hail,
Lo over ancient forms
departing,
Newer rites of grace prevail,
Faith for all defects supplying,
Where the feeble senses fail.
To the everlasting Father/and
the Son who reigns on high,
With the Holy Ghost
proceeding
forth from each eternally./Be
salvation, honour, blessing
might and endless majesty"
AMEN

How very helpful it is to many, when during exposition, there is very beautiful background music, which is so discreetly produced that it could in no way, be a source of distraction to even the most devout believer, who may prefer to pray in the utmost silence.

One final little prayer which some may find to be a source of inspiration before the Blessed Sacrament:

"May my life, Oh my Jesus, be entirely devoted to thee.
May it be spent in the peaceful endeavour to lead others to know and love thee and when weary with labour, I sigh for the sweetness of repose, may I ever find it in thy Sacramental Presence in the pure joy of Thy Holy Eucharist"
AMEN

Come and see for yourself

by Louise, John and Bridget

Just a few short months ago, we invited the youth of our parish to a new group called 'Come and See – the Next Generation'.

Our hope was to come together on a regular basis with young adults, finding out more about ourselves, each other and God, and at the same time to have a bit of craic!

We've been doing just that, looking at our journeys of faith and our experience of God in our lives and in the world around us using things like the Bible, newspapers, music, activities, birthday cakes and coffee!

One of our 'regulars', Mary McAuley, shares her experience of the group: "I received a leaflet from Ruth Bates about the youth group and after hearing Louise's talk on the subject, I decided to go to a group meeting to see if it was for me... to see if being part of a



group increased my spiritual awareness. I have found the group to be really friendly and the weekly discussions a great help in understanding the complexities of my religion."

Where do we go from here – the sky's the limit! We want to plug into events around us in our own parish and further afield. We're channelling information about programmes such as 'Search' and 'Choice' in St.

Clements - don't miss them, they are fantastic, let us book you in. Then there's events like Summer Madness in July - a must for any young person who goes mad in the summer and enjoys good music. See Delirious live! – yes please, (they did outsell Robbie Williams in the USA).

If there is anything you would like to see happening in the parish for young people like

yourself, or if you have any good ideas please pass them on. Better still, drop into Louise's house and see what's happening (young people that is - more mature people have much more mature things to go to!) or talk to us by email. We want to hear your views on things. Also visit the youth page on the parish website.

Factfile

Where?

Louise McKernan's house – the one with the new sofas.

When?

Every Tuesday at 8.00pm

Who?

Louise: 9332 9424 John: 9050 6837 Bridget: 9086 0915

Email:

youth@carrickparish.org

• Come along – it's time you found what you've been looking for!

Bereavement support grows strong

Since Christmas the Parish Bereavement Support Group has met monthly, and is now firmly established and ready to take up active ministry in our parish.

During the last months we investigated programmes designed to help the bereaved. One of the courses researched was Grief Share. Some members of the group attended var-

ious introductory sessions of this programme and though they felt the programme was very good, and would be beneficial for those wishing to join a group which specialised in helping the bereaved, that perhaps the programme may not suit the bereaved in our parish.

As well as researching programmes, time was also devoted to further training and again

we are grateful to Funeral Service NI Ltd for their sponsorship of the facilitator on these evenings. These sessions have been invaluable in building confidence and confirming our role.

Another task undertaken in the last few months was the composition of suitable booklets for the bereaved and general information for all

parishioners. These initiatives are almost ready for publication.

During the month of June members of our Support Group will be visiting the recently bereaved of the parish.

If you wish to talk to a member of our group contact can be made through the Parish Pastoral Centre, phone 9336 3269.

Bowlers hit their 35 year marker

by Vera Foley

It is hard to believe that our club has been going strong for 35 years, and that two of its founder members, Bert Gordon and Kathleen O'Toole, are still contributing to its smooth running.

During those 35 years we have seen our club topple some of the major teams in the local leagues. We can boast

that former member, and now World Champion, Stephen Moran, served his 'apprenticeship' with us. Stephen, along with others in his age group, was virtually unbeatable. Although today we no longer have players of their calibre, and our rankings in the leagues are much less enviable, we still enjoy the competition and the friendly banter with those from other clubs.

Why not come along any Monday or Tuesday night and see for yourself? Who knows, you might get the bug!

On a sad note, we regret to report the loss of two of our most highly esteemed members, Kathleen McCullough and Sam Rapple. Kathleen, as well as being a very competent bowler, was renowned for her culinary skills, and won widespread praise, particularly from

those on visiting teams for her delicious apple tarts. Sammy was also an accomplished bowler and, as a measure of his popularity and ability, was elected by the members to serve as match team selector for the 2003/2004 season.

We extend our deepest sympathy to both Kathleen's and Sammy's family circles.

Sharing the good news of our parish cell groups with our neighbours

by Margaret Webb

On 28th February the National Service Cell group met with cell leaders and co-leaders, from our parish and Star of The Sea parish, Glengormley in our Pastoral Centre.

The National Service Cell group consisted of Fr Michael Hurley (Co Kildare), Noel Ryan (Dublin), Bobbie Smyth (Dublin), Hilary McCann (Dublin), Denis O'Leary (Co Kilkenny) Sr Margaret Reid (Dublin), Tommy Mone

(Carrickfergus) and Margaret Webb, (Carrickfergus).

The purpose of the National Service Cell group is clearly stated in our mission statement: "Our mission is to foster within parishes through small faith groups, a greater community spirit, and an awareness of Jesus in a more personal way."

This was the first time that the National Group had the opportunity to meet with cell leaders in Northern Ireland. The meeting, which lasted from 10.00am until lunchtime,

was informal and was led by Fr. Michael. Our time together was a real opportunity to share our cell experience and to encourage each other in our work.

After lunch, the National Group met with priests from the greater Belfast area, who were invited by Fr. Cosgrove and Fr. Whyte (Star of the Sea parish). This was a wonderful opportunity to share with other parish priests in our diocese the difference cell groups are making to parishes around the country.

Again, Fr. Michael Hurley led the afternoon meeting. After a short time of prayer, the group gave an insight into the history and benefits of cell groups in parishes. Hilary McCann went on to personally share how cell groups are making a difference to her life. There was a time for questions and answers and the priests were given a Cell Information pack to take away with them, with details and contact names to help them begin cell groups in their own parishes.

The power of prayer in cell groups

by Linda Mellon

Prayer plays a very prominent role within the cell groups. We begin and end each meeting with prayers - opening and closing prayer, the Lord's prayer and our special prayer for cells.

Then mid way through our meeting we settle into intercessory and healing prayer, which lasts an average of 10-15 minutes, depending on the particular needs of the group on the evening.

This is a time for us to reflect - to relax in God's presence - to listen to his voice - and to be led by his hand to pray for others - (to intercede) - to bring our thoughts, our concerns and our praise to God.

When we intercede we are offering to God our love and concern for others, and God uses these prayers to bless, heal and help people, though not always in the way we expect. For me it's a very special time:

Remembering Mark's Gospel: - Chapter 18; verses 19 and 20. "Also I tell you that if two of you on earth agree on something, and pray for it, it will be done by my Father in heaven. This is true, because if two or three are gathered together in

my name, I am there with them." This is such a beautiful and comforting verse, and brings to me an overwhelming feeling of God's presence in my house, where our cell meeting is held. I always think of this as I am sitting quietly, soaking up the presence of the Holy Spirit. It gives me a really happy and contented feeling knowing that the Holy Spirit is in our midst. I am also thinking of the lighted candle, which is burning during our cell meeting, signifying God's presence among us.

Prayers don't always have to be spoken out loud, and our cell leader makes that clear when she is bringing the prayer to a close, saying that God hears the prayers in our hearts. Some people don't always feel comfortable praying out loud, especially new members to the cell group. Others may never have had this group experience. Personally, it doesn't always come easy to me to pray out loud in company, but sometimes when the needs of someone are weighing heavily on my mind, then I don't think twice about it, because I feel that by actively sharing this prayer, that it somehow adds more weight to it, and creates more power around the process

of the healing power of the Holy Spirit.

This time of prayer brings us closer to each other and helps us grow on our Christian journey. As I listen each week to other people's prayers I realise what special people they are and this brings me a special feeling of friendship and closeness. It deepens my faith and brings us closer as cell members, because this time of sharing prayer is also sharing part of ourselves - our thoughts, our feelings and what is sometimes happening in our personal, work and family life.

Each time we meet one of the group always prays for Fr Cosgrove and for support for his continued work in the parish. Another person always brings each individual member of the cell before God, thanking him for the special gifts we all bring to the group. Also in praying together we are acknowledging our faith that God answers prayer - as we bring the needs of our family, friends, colleagues, parish, town, country and world before Him.

Once we've brought our intercessory prayer to a close we move on to a time of healing prayer. This prayer can be

for physical healing, spiritual healing or for help in difficult situations. The cell leader usually asks if anyone in the group would like healing prayer. If no one feels that they want healing prayer, then we may pray a healing prayer for someone outside the group - friends, colleagues, and relatives. Each of us then offers a prayer, either vocally or silently.

Finally, I would like to share with you an experience we had in one of our cell meetings and offer a little word of advice for prayer time! One evening we had just finished our prayer time when there was suddenly a 'great light' from the candle holder. Now unfortunately it wasn't the Holy Spirit! Some people put tissue paper around the bottom of their candles so they can get the little piece of candle out when it burns to the end. Well, I'm one of those people. This great light was the tissue catching fire, as the candle had burnt down and no one had noticed!

So the moral of this story is: Make sure you use a tall candle at the beginning of your cell meeting.

CHILDREN'S CORNER

1. Word puzzle competition

HOW MANY WORDS OF FOUR LETTERS OR MORE CAN YOU MAKE FROM THE SELECTION OF LETTERS BELOW?

The letter A in bold must be used in each word.....Try to find a word which includes all nine letters C A T C R K E R A

2. Linking words competition

FIND THE LINKING WORD LIKE IN THE EXAMPLE

MIDNIGHT ----- BURNER (Answer: oil - midnight oil, oil burner - geddit?)

DINNER ----- CLOTH
GOLF ----- ORANGE
LAWN ----- SHOES
BASKETBALL ----- CAPTAIN
MATCH ----- INSECT
WATER ----- HOLIDAY
CHEQUE ----- CASE

BIKE ----- HOOD
SUMMER ----- TABLE
TWELVE ----- CREED
MAGIC ----- IMAGE
SNOW ----- CHRISTMAS
ROUND ----- QUIZ
NORTH ----- STRUCK

Last issue winners

Wordsearch

Bronagh Stewart, Whitehead

Liturgy quiz

Matthew Murray, Carrickfergus

• Please leave your entries on a separate piece of paper in the sacristy at Carrick or Whitehead by the 15th August. Don't forget to enclose your name, age address and phone number. The prize for each competition is a £10 book token. Good luck!

Parish celebrates confirmation and first communion

Our picture round-up shows many of the little darlings who celebrated the sacraments of confirmation and first communion this year - congratulations to all!



St Nicholas' Playgroup ready to welcome you

St. Nicholas' Playgroup was established in 1985, and is currently under the leadership of Hilda Boyd, with two other permanent members of staff – Lyn Burton and Janice Morrow.

All the staff are qualified to, at least, NVQ Level 3 in Childcare and Education. Other qualifications include courses in child protection, leadership and first aid. Training and

development of staff are regularly updated through various courses provided by NIPPA – the Early Years Organisation. We are also part of the DENI pre-school expansion programme, which aims to provide funding for children in their pre-school year. As part of the programme, we are expected to provide a high standard of education in the seven areas of learning, through

play in the various activities we provide.

In 2001, the playgroup was relocated to St. Nicholas' Primary School, a modern, state of the art school. We have developed good relationships with all of the school staff, who endeavour to accommodate our needs whenever necessary.

We have found that, since moving to the school, the

transition from playgroup to P1 is less of an upheaval for the children, as they are already familiar with the school and its routines.

If you would like to find out more about our playgroup, you can call Hilda on 07729 583143 or, in the evenings, 9336 9905. Or, just come and visit us at the playgroup, where you will be made very welcome.

Church unity - why bother?

by Martin Murray

In light of the furore that accompanied the recent invitation of Archbishop Sean Brady to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland by its newly installed Moderator, the Reverend Ken Newell, you may well be holding your hands up in despair and asking yourself, "Why bother? Has anything changed since the dark and barren days of the 1970s?"

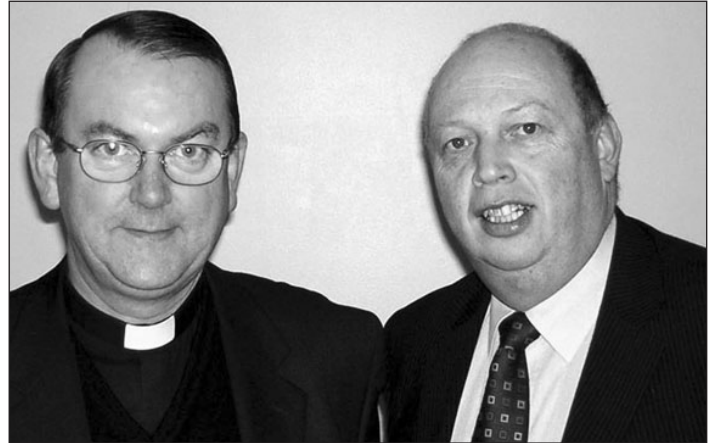
But maybe things aren't as bleak as they may at first seem. Just as we can look at a glass and see that it is half empty, if we look at it again we might just notice that it is half full.

The same can be said about the cause of Christian unity. While at the level of officialdom little seems to be happening, at grassroots level the picture is very different. Traditionally, ecumenism focused its efforts and measured its progress in terms of official doctrinal agreement. But sadly while theologians search valiantly for common ground, very often their potential ground breaking work has found itself thwarted and hemmed in by institutional self-importance and denominational pride. As a result it has to be said that in real terms very little of this has impacted on the lives of ordinary people in the pews and generally speaking it is business as usual.

But at grassroots level the God-given desire for unity among Christians is finding new forms of expression and is no longer shackled to the academic deliberations of experts (important as these may be). Alternative approaches are being found that are based on

relationship and the personal faith of the people. It is a joy to be able to say that Carrickfergus, despite its reputation to the contrary, is at the pioneering end of these initiatives.

On the 30th November 2003, in a move comparable to the Rev. Newell's invitation to Archbishop Brady, (and maybe in local terms, just as historic), the Rev. Morris Gault invited our Parish Priest Fr Cosgrove to speak at the evening service in Downshire Presbyterian Church. The church was packed to capacity for this joy-filled occasion. On Palm Sunday of this year, Fr Cosgrove reciprocated and the Rev. Gault spoke at a special evening service in St Nicholas'. These events were the culmination of a very successful six week inter-church Journey in Understanding programme that was held in the Coast Road Hotel. Since then, a follow-up Journey in Understanding has been completed. This time the venue was our own community centre here in St Nicholas'. Around 60 people from many local churches attended. For many it was the first time in a Roman Catholic church building. People listened respectfully and shared honestly on subjects that have divided Christians for centuries. On one of the evenings for example, around 100 people came to hear the Rev. Ken Newell and Fr Gerry Reynolds speak on 'The place of Mary in the Scriptures and in the Church'. Tell me that could have happened in the 1970s. About 30 people went further and spent an unforgettable weekend together in Drumalis Retreat Centre in Larne. The Journey in Understanding initiative is ongoing. Fr Cosgrove and a number of local ministers



Fr Michael Cosgrove and Rev. Maurice Gault

continue to meet on a regular basis for fellowship, prayer and planning. A cross community group of lay people also met in June to pray and plan for the future and to work in tandem with the clergy. So expect to hear of new events happening in the Autumn.

Unity is also being built around the need for God's people to pray and intercede for the needs of our Churches, Community, Country and World. 'Intercessors for Carrick' meets monthly with no agenda other than to pray in unity for these needs. The venue varies, but the intention is to meet in as many of the local churches as possible and to pray blessing where ever we go. Its hard to believe that this meeting is now in its tenth year. Uniquely this year a special 'Day of Blessing' for Carrickfergus was held in the Town Hall. Personally speaking I initially found I had no great heart for doing this. I found it easier to be cynical about our town and have little expectations of it. I know too that many have voluntarily and involuntarily had to leave the place and I am sure left it with anything but a blessing. But on reflection, if we are to have a future and to quote Fr Cosgrove, if we want to make Carrickfergus 'a better place' for the generations to follow, maybe the time has come to bless and not to curse.

Unity is also being built around Worship. An exiting new monthly gathering called 'Worship Watch' meets simply for an extended time of Praise and Worship mostly through music. In many ways this is not unlike our own adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. Certainly the intention is the same. Mostly the music is soft and reflective, but at other times it is more upbeat and

celebratory. So far this event has taken place on Friday evenings beginning at 8pm and running through to midnight. (There are plans to extend it even further – maybe even an all night vigil). Usually a different group would lead the worship for about an hour. Again St Nicholas' are in there taking a turn. It has been a privilege to bring our modest offering to this united altar of praise and worship. The special giftedness and sheer ability present at these events is exceptional and a hope of our little contributing group from the parish is that the Spirit will allow us to grow and be carried along in the slipstream of our very talented and dedicated brothers and sisters.

Historically, Carrickfergus would not be considered a hotbed of Christian unity and reconciliation. But God is at work here. It may take a while, but the dream of those of us who are involved in the above events is that the day will come when people will hear the word Carrickfergus and will immediately think of these things.

At the end of the day there is no room for despair and no room for indifference. The founder and head of the Church, on the night before His death, expressed in prayer the deepest desire of his heart when He prayed, "Father, may they be one, just as You and I are one, so that the world may believe that you sent me." How tragically we have misrepresented Him in the past. But rather than bemoan what has gone before, let us reach out and take hold of this new work of the Spirit in our time.

• See www.carrickparish.org (Latest News) for details of events mentioned in this article.



Rev. Ken Newell & Fr Gerry Reynolds