

the Connection

Christmas 2019



Mass Times

St Nicholas' Church, Carrickfergus
Vigil Mass Saturday 6:00pm, Sunday 11:30am
Tuesday and Thursday 10:00am

Our Lady of Lourdes Church, Whitehead
Sunday 9:30am
Monday and Wednesday 10:00am

Confessions

Carrickfergus: Saturday 5:30pm to 5:50pm
Whitehead: Sunday morning before Mass

Eucharistic Adoration

Carrickfergus: Saturday 10:00am to 1:00pm,
Tuesday and Thursday 10:30am to 10:45pm
Whitehead: Monday and Wednesday 10:30am to 10:45am

Baptisms

Carrickfergus: 2nd Sunday in the month
Whitehead: 1st Sunday in the month
One month's notice is required.

Weddings

By arrangement. Three months' notice is required.



CARRICKFERGUS
P A R I S H

Parish Priest: Father Peter Owens

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Christmas Message

On behalf of Fr Owens we are delighted to welcome you all to the 12th edition of "The Connection". Once again we offer sincere thanks to the Parish Communications Committee for their dedication and professionalism.



There is an urgent need to rediscover the personal and pastoral leadership value of the life and work of our Parish Priest in this time of profound cultural change. We need to value and support this calling to serve the local community. It is a way of life not for the faint hearted.

To father Owens we wish him a speedy recovery and the assurance of a warm welcome when he returns.

Throughout this past year the PPC has been busy making progress on the Parish 3 Year Pastoral Plan. This cumulated in September with the calling of a Parish Assembly. The purpose of this was to openly invite all parishioners to hear what was being done on their behalf and to take on board their views going forward. A living Parish embraces as much as possible the will and the wishes of its Parishioners.

Christmas is a time for family, friends , exchanging gifts, showing gratitude , loving and making people happy.

Foremost it is a time for celebrating the birth of our Saviour, Jesus Christ. May God Bless and guide us all.

Yours the Parish Pastrol Council

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Parish Wedding

Our son Patrick got married to Miss Ashleigh Bloomfield on Saturday 19th October in Our Lady of Lourdes Church in Whitehead. The grounds around the church and the interior of the church were in excellent condition for the occasion, thanks to the hard work of Eileen, Barry and Sylvia.



Ashleigh wore a beautiful ivory satin dress and her three bridesmaids were resplendent in long emerald green dresses, carrying lovely bouquets of cream roses. The men in the wedding party wore blue suits, white shirts and navy blue ties. Catherine Hamilton (harpist and soprano) provided the music and singing, which everyone really enjoyed.

We would like to thank Fr. Owens for conferring the sacrament of marriage on Patrick and Ashleigh. He made it such a special occasion for them, with his usual relaxed manner and sense of humour. Thanks also to David Butler for serving on the day.

After Mass we went to the Ballygally Castle Hotel for a celebration with family and friends. The weather was good for the time of year and everyone was able to enjoy the grounds at the church and the gardens at the hotel for the many photos. It was a very happy day for our whole family circle and friends.

Article by Gerardine and Paddy Stewart



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Whitehead Wombles Juniors

If you're out on a Sunday in Whitehead you might see some Wombles by the seashore. The Wombles are a volunteer group named after the litter-picking characters in a memorable 1970s television show. Marianne McVey is the organiser of the Whitehead Wombles Juniors, made up of children from the town, plus their parents. "We're a voluntary clean-up group," she explains. "We are out to clean the environment, learn about the environment, and encourage a spirit of volunteering."



Libby Woods, 11, is a member, and an altar server at Our Lady of Lourdes Church, Whitehead. What's it like spending Sunday mornings working in church before going out litter-picking? "I only go for half an hour because of church. It's confusing and tiring, but fun, because I get to do it with friends. It's a worthwhile thing to do."

To promote the group Marianne contacted artist Steve Diamond, who is actually Whitehead church choir member and Minister of the Word Stephen O'Donoghue. Together they had an idea for the Lough Mess Monster, a rubbish sculpture. This won the Allianz Arts & Business NI Community Art Award for 2019. Funding from the insurance company's prize allowed Steve to build the giant sea monster from chicken wire and rubbish gathered by Libby and her friends. It also paid for an aluminium skeleton forged by Islandmagee blacksmith Aaron Leach.

Marianne called the monster, "Messie," after the legendary Nessie, from Lough Ness in Scotland. Steve explains that when Messie appears at litter-picking events "People want to take a photo, and ask what

she is. We explain that she shows the kinds of the plastic waste we create, and how we can clear it from our beaches."

Messie also visited Whitehead Primary School, providing a memorable day of information on litter and plastic pollution.

The many Whitehead Wombles Juniors, and parents, write their names on the monster's traffic cone tail. It was yet another seaweed-filled piece of plastic the juniors collected from the seashore.



Messie is helping the growing group of Wombles Juniors to spread the message that we can tackle the issues of littering and plastic pollution. When Libby and her friends go out to gather all manner of surprising rubbish, they have a great time together. Parents who would like to join with their children can ask Marianne McVey, Stephen O'Donoghue, or leave their contact details with the office of Whitehead Community Centre.



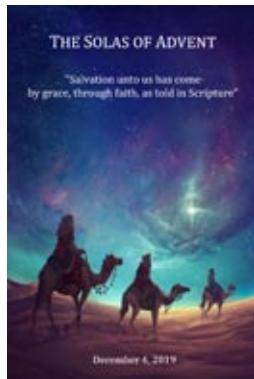


A Cover Story

Hello everyone!

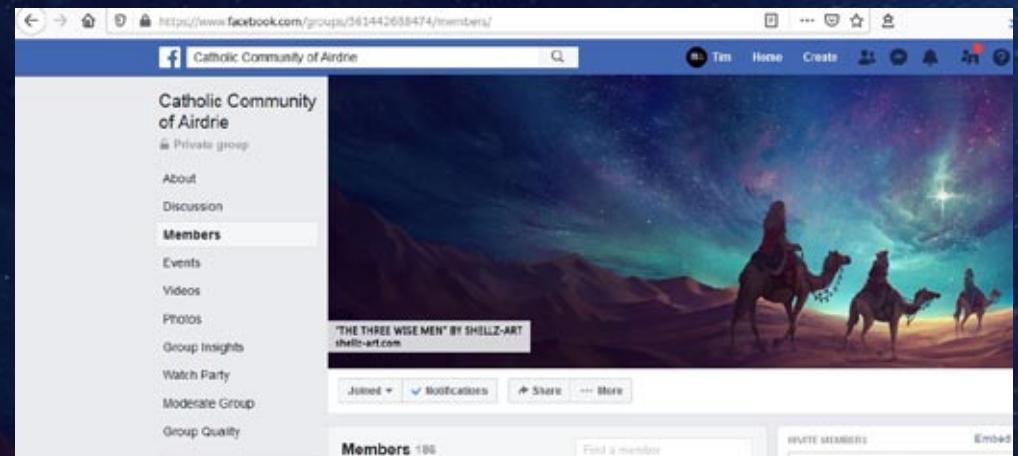
I'm Shelly, the artist behind the Connection covers. Working with the Communications Committee has always been a lot of fun, and this year was particularly special for us. Last year's cover illustration of "**The Three Wise Men**" has travelled all across the world!

If you remember last year's Christmas Cover, I created an illustration of The Three Wise Men riding camels under a starry night. I was so happy to see that everyone liked it! I started thinking what to draw for this year's Christmas cover when I saw a new email pop up in my inbox. It was a letter all the way from Australia! The Archdiocese of Brisbane in South East Queensland to be exact. The Archbishop had seen our "**The Three Wise Men**" illustration and was wanting to use it for their Christmas Cards! I was so happy to see that our little bulletin cover had reached Australia. After getting the go-ahead from the Communications Committee, I gave The Archdiocese of Brisbane permission to use our illustration for 700 cards!



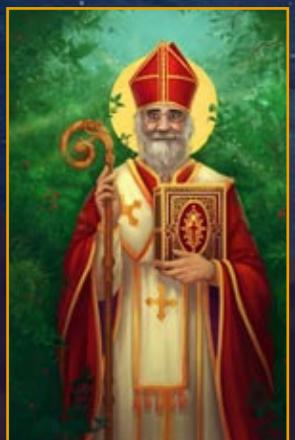
It was only a few days after, when I received yet another email! It was from an Administrative Assistant at St. Luke's Church in Pennsylvania, America. The bishop loved the painting and wanted to use it as their Christmas Bulletin cover, too! I happily agreed and they were able to send me a PDF draft of their booklet. It was so nice to see what the other churches were up to across the world.

Just a few days into December, I got another email in my inbox. This time from a little place called Airdrie in Alberta, Canada! The Catholic Community of Airdrie wished to use The Three Wise Men as their Facebook Group Cover over the Christmas season. They kindly shared a link with me to their Facebook Group and I think the illustration fit quite well!



So there you have it, The Three Wise Men have so far travelled all the way from Ireland to Australia, Canada and America. I wonder where they're off to next?

This year's cover features St. Nicholas of Myra one of the most popular minor saints commemorated in the Eastern and Western churches and now traditionally associated with the festival of Christmas. In many countries children receive gifts on December 6, St. Nicholas Day.



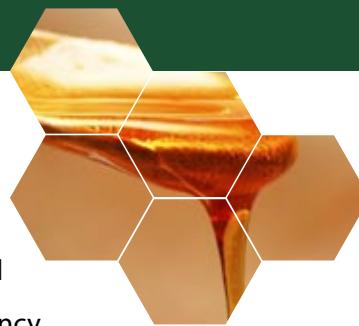
Article by Shelly

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Cell Seminar

This year's Cell Seminar was being held in Leixlip and I decided to attend. On Friday I travelled down by train with some fellow Cell members and stayed until Sunday morning at the home of Thomas and Bridie Clancy. Thomas keeps bees and they make honey for him. Never mind the Seminar I'd go to Leixlip again just for the Honey.



We had plenty of speeches, stories, testimonies, hymns, and talks of all sorts but they have more or less blended together in my memory and I find it hard to remember who it was that gave which talk. What sticks in my mind is the joy and comradery of everyone there, the enthusiasm of the organisers and speakers. It was a meeting of old friends I'd never met, if you get my drift. It was good to meet people I had heard so much of at the Cell meetings, people such as Father Michael Hurley who has been providing our Cell meetings with recorded talks on the roles of the Cell groups in our parishes etc. There was oodles of tea and tasties the whole day long with an excellent lunch and dins.

On Saturday we had an hour or so at Adoration which gave a quiet, calm break from all the chat and chinking tea cups. I made sure I was at the hall for Father Hurley's talk on the future of Cells, a talk which gave everyone a lot of ideas for discussion during the following tea break. It was during these breaks that I met so many people from Cells from all over Ireland as well as a few from other shores too. This I think was my favourite part of the Seminar, good craic with real good people.

Concelebrated evening Mass was enlivened by an excellent gospel choir whilst we

sat on the most uncomfortable pews in all Christendom. Again with the tea! We were awash.

To end the first day we broke into groups of eight or so to join with other Cell groups for a meeting. Thomas Clancy led the group I was with which was all men, my group at home be's mostly women so that was a wee bit different. I enjoyed that evening so I did, right bunch of blokes. After Thomas brought us back to his house we sat around discussing the day and what was on the agenda for Sunday before heading off to bed.

Sunday morning breakfast consisted of something or other plus Honey. Spring Honey, Thomas told me, that's when the bees are feeding off Lime trees and clover and the Honey is very runny. Runny Honey, yummy! Back at the parish hall we listened to testimonies from Cell communities, Cell experiences and members personal stories. A much less formal day than yesterday with a few good laughs to be had. Father Hurley closed the Seminar before Mass at 12:15. Back to the hall after Mass for a bit of lunch and a chance to talk with my new mates before Thomas ran us to the train station to start our journey home. There are very few men in the parish Cell groups here so we thought it would be good, if we could get some interest from the chaps, to start a men only Cell.

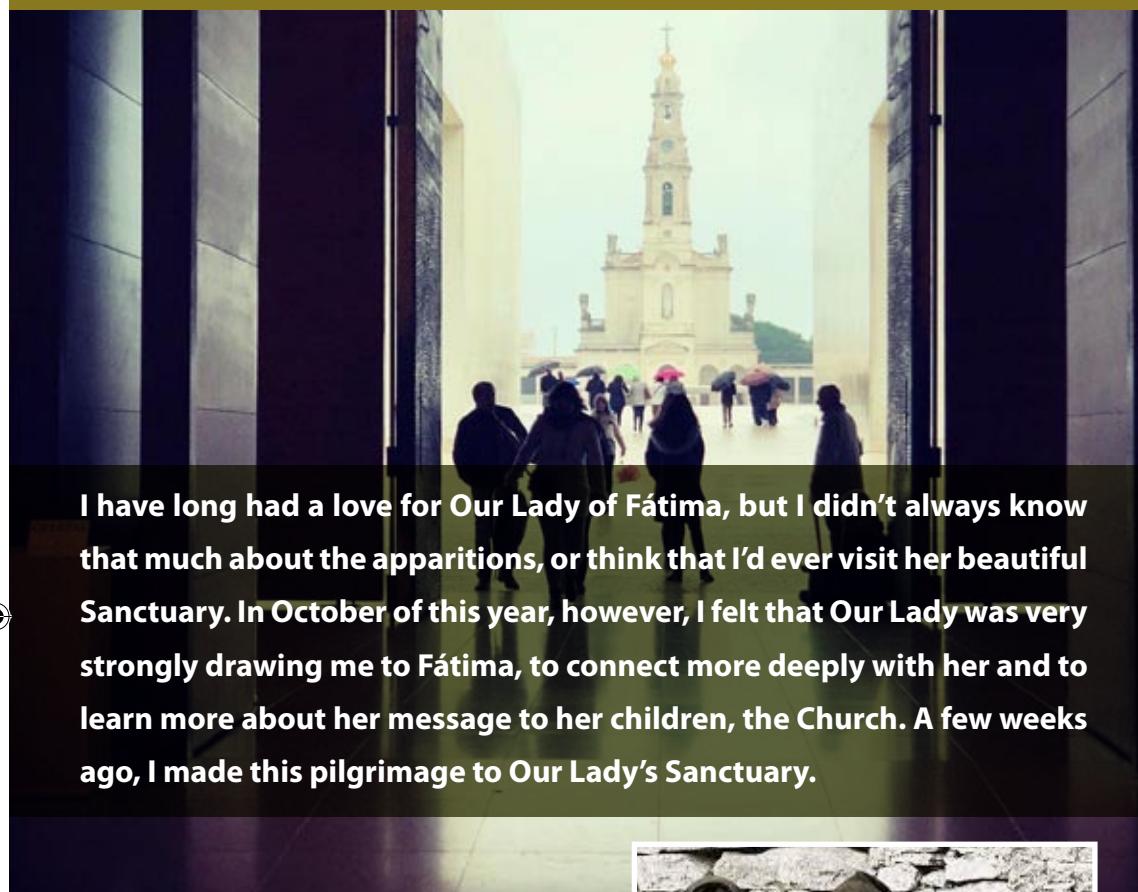
Give it some thought, it's a great way to reinvigorate your faith life, to share the Gospel message with other guys. Who makes the tea will be difficult to sort out but we'll surely think of something. If you're interested let me or any of the Cell members know, there be's numbers in the bulletin or call me on 07841 428436.

Article by the Cell Group

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Our Lady of Fátima



I have long had a love for Our Lady of Fátima, but I didn't always know that much about the apparitions, or think that I'd ever visit her beautiful Sanctuary. In October of this year, however, I felt that Our Lady was very strongly drawing me to Fátima, to connect more deeply with her and to learn more about her message to her children, the Church. A few weeks ago, I made this pilgrimage to Our Lady's Sanctuary.

The story of Fátima is one that most Catholics have at least heard of: the apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary to the three 'Pastorinhos' (little shepherds) – siblings Francisco and Jacinta Marto, and their cousin Lúcia Dos Santos. These apparitions took place in a field outside the little Portuguese mountain village of Fátima; on the thirteenth of every month from May to October 1917, while WWI was raging through Europe.



Our Lady asked the children – and by virtue all of us – to "pray much, and make sacrifices for sinners". Specifically, she asked us to make reparations for blasphemies and offences against the Sacred Heart of Jesus and her own Immaculate Heart. She promised that if we pray the rosary every day, she will obtain peace for the world and end war. During the July apparition, she showed the 'Pastorinhos' a vision of demons and of blackened human souls in Hell, but promised them that through the devotion of God's Church to her Immaculate Heart, many souls would be saved from the inferno.

Our Lady promised the children that, on the 13th October she would reveal her identity to the world and perform a miracle so that many would believe. Tens of thousands of people flocked Fátima on that day; believers and unbelievers alike. It was raining heavily and the ground was soaked. Suddenly, the clouds parted and the sun appeared as a spinning disc in the sky, projecting lights of many colours across the fields. The sun then appeared to dart towards the earth and zig-zag back into the sky. Many witnesses said that their clothes, soaked by the rain, dried immediately during this 'Miracle of the Sun'.

Other 'Secrets' were also given to the children, including a promise that Russia would eventually be converted if it was consecrated to her Immaculate Heart; and a message that is interpreted as a prophecy of the attempted assassination of Pope John Paul II. She promised, finally, that her Immaculate Heart would triumph over the world for the glory of the Most Holy Trinity.

Francisco and Jacinta died in a flu epidemic not long after the apparitions, aged just 10 and 9 respectively, and were canonised by Pope Francis on 13th May 2017. Lúcia became a Sister of the Discalced Carmelite Order, and died at age 97 in 2005. The cause for her sainthood is currently underway. The 1917 apparitions at Fátima have been declared worthy of belief by the Holy Mother Church.

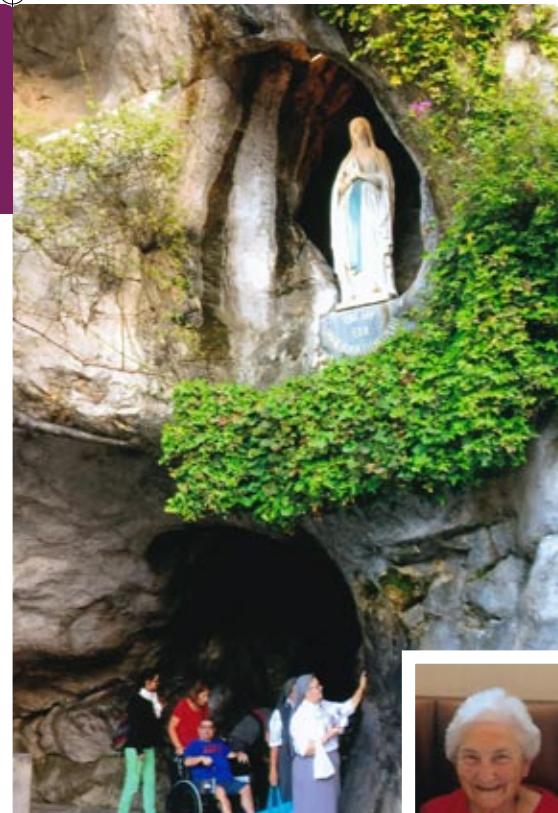
Article by David Gorman

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My tenth visit to Lourdes

This year I decided to go alone and do a personal pilgrimage for sick members in my family. After checking in, I proceeded to the departure lounge. There I met Mary McAllister from Carrickfergus. She was waiting for her brother, sister-in-law and other friends from Whitehouse parish. When we arrived at our hotel, we were allocated rooms and a table in the dining room. We were very privileged to be seated next to Bishop Farquer and his sister. Our opening mass was at the grotto at 8.30 the following morning. The celebrant was Bishop Trainor. The theme of this year's pilgrimage was "Blessed are the poor". Bishop Farquer delivered a very moving homily. It was a poignant reminder of all the poor throughout the whole world. I attended all organised services, mass, penitential rites, Stations of the Cross, torchlight procession and the "Baths". Like myself, many pilgrims spent a lot of time alone at the grotto and the adoration church. I met many people from around the world. As I entered a large tent, a lady approached me and gave me a rosary and a prayer for the beatification of Fr. Peyton. His message was "the family that prays together stays together". I met a lady from Canada. She was originally from Co. Tyrone. She had lost two members of her family to suicide. She decided to do menial work in the hospital, to help her to come to terms with this tragedy. I met my cousin Stephen Mc Coy from Toomebridge. Stephen was seriously injured in the Kegworth plane crash when he was a teenager. He has been coming to Lourdes every year with his sister Yvonne, who is his carer. His faith is unbelievable. At the mass Stephen and Yvonne did the offertory procession. Lourdes is the highlight of Stephens year. He is undergoing intensive therapy to enable him to walk. The underground basilica is unbelievable. It can seat 26,000 people. Down and Connor pilgrims attended a mass there, priests and bishops from every country processed to the altar, followed by banner bearers from each country. The mass, readings and hymns were shared in different languages. The basilica is shaped like an overturned boat, the rafters are supposed to resemble a whale -hence' Jonas in whale's belly'. No wonder he survived!! Before the end of our pilgrimage everyone contributed towards two very large candles which were left burning for all our intentions.





Homeless

The Welcome Organisation provides a range of potentially life-saving services to around 1,400 people affected by homelessness across greater Belfast every year. The organisation recorded a 35% increase in the number of individuals sleeping rough in Belfast in the first three months of 2019. Rough sleeping is a visible sign of homelessness.



The life-size bronze sculpture has been installed in more than 50 cities worldwide. It represents the presence of Christ among the most marginalized and vulnerable members of society.

CAN YOU HELP?

welcome
ORGANISATION

Can you help? Welcome Organisation for rough sleepers in Belfast are currently running low on several items. Any of the following would be very gratefully received:



Sleeping bags are also gratefully received.

<https://www.homelessbelfast.org/donate>

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Whitehead Storehouse

Storehouse is housed in Lourdes' Pastoral Centre, St. Vicent de Paul and all the local Churches work closely to supply food to those who sometimes need a little extra help, due to many different reasons. We would on average get 3-4 requests

Christmas Hamper from food donated and toys for kids. If required we can provide a chicken dinner with all the trimmings, donated by local Spar.



We would like to thank all those who have donated and supported us during the year and let you know its very much appreciated!



per month with sharp increase in December. For Christmas we review those who we have helped during the year to check how they are coping and can provide a

Article by Eileen Vance

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Parish Visitation Team

A new parish group has been formed – the Parish Visitation Team (PVT).

The current three year Parish Pastoral Plan, approved and launched by Bishop Noel Treanor on Sunday 17th September 2017, consists of five themes, one of which is “Open and Welcoming Community”. One objective of this theme is the establishment of a Parish Visitation Team.

Over the past 18 months a small group of interested parishioners, supported by members of the Parish Pastoral Council, met regularly to explore the purpose of and the processes involved in setting up a Parish Visitation Team. They decided that the main purpose of a PVT is to provide company and contact to those who are housebound or in nursing homes, those who are lonely and those in need of support – for example those recovering at home after some time in hospital and newcomers to the parish. A Code of Conduct was developed and approved by the Chair of the Parish Safeguarding Committee. The Parish Safeguarding Committee also organised and facilitated an Adult Safeguarding Awareness Seminar. PVT members attended this seminar on Monday 18th March 2019.

The PVT currently consists of 16 members. As a starting point Fr Peter Owens provided names of those he visits who indicated that they would welcome visits from the PVT in addition to his visits. As a result 14 parishioners are being visited in their own home or in care homes such as Whitehead Nursing Home, Carrickfergus Manor and Burleigh Hill House. PVT members visit in pairs. The time and frequency of visits is agreed with the person whom they are visiting.

Feedback received from the person being visited, their family members and members of the PVT themselves has been very positive.

“Dad has been thrilled to receive two visits so far from Eileen and Selina. Both visits have been so beneficial to him and our family, as it is a joy to go in afterwards to see him in such good spirits, laughing and regaling us with tales of the “lovely ladies”. It is so important for Dad to still feel part of the parish community, especially as he can no longer attend Mass in person and keeps that connection alive with the Church that has been such an important part of his life. Girls, keep up the good work.” Julie Feenan , daughter of Terry Mulvenna.

PVT members have reported that they are enjoying the visits as much as those they visit.

“To bring a smile and spend an hour with one of our parish members who through illness cannot attend Sunday Mass is an honour – just one hour out of your busy week once or twice a month to give someone laughter and the knowledge of knowing they are cherished by our parish family. I challenge you to try it. You will find you get more back than you give.” Selina Lydon

If you or some you know would benefit from visits please contact the Parish Office (Tel: 028 93363629 / Email: carrickfergus@downandconnor.org) providing contact details. This information will be forwarded to the PVT.

If you are interested in joining the PVT or would like to find out more about it please speak to Fr Peter Owens or any member of the Parish Pastoral Council who will be happy to help.

Article by Claire Bagshaw

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Christening Eden Florence Smith



My son, Conor, who lives in Wollongong , Australia, came home with his family, wife Erin, son Darcy and daughter Eden to have Eden's Christening here in Carrickfergus. The ceremony was held in St Nicholas, Sunday 20th Oct 2019, conducted by his Uncle Fr Tony Fitzsimons, formerly from Greenisland. There was a reception afterwards in Carrickfergus Golf club.

Article by Paul Smith



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Caring and Serving together

Carrickfergus and Whitehead Parish held an assembly of Parishioners in September 2019 - Caring and Serving together. The aim was to communicate with all in attendance progress made with the Parish three year pastoral plan.



It gave the Parishioners an opportunity to see what work was being done on their behalf and what they would like to have considered for the remaining life of the plan.

There is a richness of commitment in our Parish, to our Church, to each other and to the wider community. This is demonstrated not only by Fr Peter Owens' leadership but through the tireless work of our many groups. It is also seen in those individuals who quietly get on with the work of building God's kingdom.

The assembly was structured around the 5 themes of our 3 year Pastoral Plan

- ..Open and Welcoming Community
- ..Faith and Worship
- ..Our Parish Priest and Lay Ministries
- ..Lay Participation
- ..Passing on the Faith



After an opening reflection based on the prayer of Saint John Henry Newman, Jim Deeds, Living Church, skilfully facilitated a lively World Cafe style engagement with those present. He helped us all understand the issues and ensured the event ran smoothly and successfully.

A measure of that success can be gauged from the feedback received from one of our Parishioners, a picture paints a 1000 words....

Article by Jim Deeds

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The Beatitudes (The Sermon on the Mount)

In this Liturgical Year A, Matthew's Gospel is used for our Sunday readings. It's well known that Matthew's Gospel is aimed mainly at the Jewish people because of the way Jesus mentions, in several places, Jewish rules, laws, washing rituals and customs. However, the Sermon on the Mount, more commonly known as the Beatitudes, in Chapter 5:3-11, is the very blueprint for a Christian lifestyle, and most scholars see it as the best summary of the teaching that Jesus gave us. To understand the Beatitudes, we must approach them with an open heart and mind. So let's have a closer look at a few of the Beatitudes.

Jesus sees the crowds following Him and heads to "the mountain" (symbolic for the new Moses giving a new "law") with His disciples. His opening line is: "**How blessed are the poor in spirit; the kingdom of Heaven is theirs**" (Mt.5:3) Jesus doesn't say will be theirs but says "**is theirs**" The "poor in spirit" don't have to play any competitive games; they are not preoccupied with winning, or have a need for worldly possessions. There is no false self which gives a person complete freedom from the secular world.

The last Beatitude is similar. "**Blessed are those who are persecuted in the cause of justice**". Again Jesus tells the listeners that "the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs". Think of the millions of people in the world today who are persecuted for the religion they practice.

"Blessed are the meek they shall have the earth as their inheritance". Anyone who is meek, is humble, non-violent, and unassuming. Jesus is referring to the greed of landowners and those with a multitude of possessions, who, more often than not, acquired land and possessions by violence and force. St Francis understood this Beatitude fully and gave all his possessions to the poor. As we reflect on our possessions, do we really possess them or do they possess us?

Blessed are those who mourn: they shall be comforted. Jesus cried openly for his friend Lazarus. There is nothing more comforting than shedding a tear or two because of the natural therapeutic remedy that is produced from it. A good cry will stimulate a substance in the body called Endorphins which acts as a pain reliever and boosts happiness leading to comfort and contentment. Men usually bottle up emotions. Therefore, sadness turns into a nervous tension which turns into anger and frustration which eventually could lead to a striking-out towards others. Women have the ability to shed tears at a drop of a hat. It's a well known fact that women live a lot longer than men!

Blessed are the pure in heart: they shall see God. This Beatitude, in the middle part of the Sermon, is so short that a very important message is almost missed. Jesus ties the heart with sight in this Beatitude. The heart is our antenna to see God, not physically, but to see God in other people of the world. If we see others with a pure and tender heart we will see them as God sees them.

Blessed are the peacemakers: they shall be recognized as children of God. Jesus tells us to turn the other cheek. He always used non-violent and peaceful words towards His enemies. Unfortunately, wars and violence in the world are used as a means of control not as a means of seeking peace. Anyone with a peaceful heart will see God in everyone. Jesus, the Son of God, was a peacemaker and we, as peacemakers, will also be called Children of God.

Meditate on the Beatitudes yourself and see how they make you feel and think.

Article by Patsy Bell

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Pentecost



From left Ann Woods, Mary McCormack pictured at the Pentecost celebration at Lourdes Pastoral centre, Whithead in June.

Photographs by
Joanne Campbell

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