

the Connection

December 2015



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 9:00am
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 5:00pm
Whitehead: Monday and Wednesday 10:30am to 10:45am

Baptisms

Carrickfergus: 3rd Saturday in the month
Whitehead: 1st Saturday in the month
One month's notice is required.

Weddings

By arrangement. Three month's notice is required



CARRICKFERGUS
PARISH

Parish Priest: Father Peter Owens

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Introduction from Father Peter Owens



I am delighted to introduce this first edition of “The Connection”, the newsletter of the Parish of Carrickfergus and Whitehead, which is being distributed at all of the Christmas Masses at the beginning of the Year of Mercy. I thank the Parish Communications Committee which has produced it, with a view to making as widely known as possible the various liturgical ministries, pastoral services and social activities operating within the parish.

Our Parish Pastoral Council has had a very busy year consolidating existing parish groups and organisations and launching new ones – for example the Communications Committee itself and the Social and Hospitality Committee.

A living parish is so much more than a defined geographical area; it is a local community of Christian faith where there is a felt experience of belonging, togetherness and co-responsibility – priest and parishioners collaborating with mutual trust and respect in the service of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the common good of the Church, our local neighbourhood and society at large.

It is just over a year since Bishop Noel Treanor appointed me as Parish Priest of Carrickfergus and Whitehead. After 14 years in St Agnes’ in Andersonstown, I had come to feel very much at home there and had made many close friends, so I was sorry to leave behind familiar faces and surroundings. However, from my very first day in Carrickfergus and Whitehead, I could not have wished for a warmer and kindlier welcome, and during this first year I have been so impressed by the spirit of genuine hospitality and generous service which distinguishes my new parish, which I now call HOME.

As has been said: “God has given each of us different gifts and talents so that we would all need each other” – it is this spirit of shared living and service that will inspire the development of the Parish Family of Carrickfergus and Whitehead, now and in the years to come.

May God bless and guide all of us.

P. J. Owens, P.P.

the
Connection

The Connection



A message from Bill Webb, Chairperson of the Parish Pastoral Council

Welcome to the first edition of “The Connection”, our parish’s newsletter which will be published quarterly.

We hope that in some small way, our newsletter will help to connect all Catholics in our community, without disconnecting with the wider community of which we have so much to offer. Our aim is to give all Catholics in Carrickfergus and Whitehead, and their extended families, a sense of belonging to our vibrant parish family.

What a perfect time to introduce this new initiative after many months of preparation. After all, advent is a time of preparation and expectation, albeit for a far greater event the coming of Christ.

Our Church has already received a special gift this advent. Recently, Pope Francis declared this year to be a Holy Year of Mercy which is a re-awakening of all Christians. He said that this year will be a time to heal, to help and to forgive. The Holy Year of Mercy commenced on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception on 8th December, and will conclude on the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe on 20th November 2016.

There is a richness of commitment in our parish – commitment to our Church, to our parish and to our neighbour. This is demonstrated not only through the tireless work of our many groups and committees, but also by individuals who quietly get on with their acts of charity, and kindness. I cannot possibly list all of the efforts of the many groups and individuals, but I do think that it is appropriate at this time to acknowledge the extraordinary work of our conference of The Society of St Vincent de Paul. This is never more evident than at Christmas, which while being a time of great joy for many of us, can be a time of struggle and difficulty for others. Of course, the great work of our SVdP

team would be impossible to carry out without the abundant generosity of us, the parishioners of Carrickfergus and Whitehead. We are showing mercy to our neighbour, which is an example of what Pope Francis is calling us to do.

I would also like to take this opportunity to introduce you to our new Communications Committee who have worked so hard to bring you this first edition of "The Connection". They all have their own unique talents and gifts, and are skilled in the fields of journalism, copywriting, graphic design, marketing, IT and social media. The committee members are:

Pauline Cowan, Jackie Entwistle, Sarah Johnston, Paul Mayne, Shelly Mullan, Caoimhe Rice and myself Bill Webb.

The Communications Committee is also responsible for the new parish logo, website, Facebook page and a number of new initiatives which are still in development. All will be revealed in due course.

Finally, on behalf of the Parish Pastoral Council, I would like to wish everyone a very Holy, Healthy and Happy Christmas.

God Bless

Bill



Clare Cowan's inspirational report from Zambia

In July 2015, I had the honour of joining ten volunteers working with "Hope Mission Zambia" in the capital city of Lusaka. We were involved in establishing a 10 year long term project working with some of the most impoverished communities in the world.

Our vision is to help improve education facilities available to the children within these communities. 70% of families here live on less than £1 a week. We hope, in our own small way, to help to equip these children towards a way out of poverty.



As well as working alongside schools, we are also involved in supporting Saint Cecilia's orphanage, which provides a home and a safe haven for 17 children. These vulnerable kids would otherwise have been left to fend for themselves on the streets.

The money raised this summer has already made an immeasurable difference to these wonderful communities, as well as building work and repairs to existing schools including The Garden House, the first school for disabled children in Lusaka.

Thanks to last years fund raising amongst various building projects, we have been able to provide teachers wages for the next year, set up feeding programmes in the schools, pay for the entire Blessed Hope School to sit end of year exams to ensure progression into the next year of education. We also provided the orphanage with the first gas cooker and sofa that the village has ever seen!

The real privilege for me was to be able to spend three weeks living and working alongside these communities. Though they are some of the poorest people on the planet, they were some of the happiest, energetic and most loving people I have ever met.



Each volunteer was asked to raise the sum of £2500. With the help of our incredibly generous parishioners, I was lucky to be able to raise over £4,000.

I would like to extend my personal thanks, as well as the team from Hope Mission Zambia and the amazing people of Mapepe township, Lusaka. Your generosity and support has allowed us to not just make an amazing start but also a real hope for the future!!

I gained far more than I could give on this life changing trip. I know that there will be others in the parish that would love to be involved in one way or another... Our next trip is July 2016.. If you have any questions or would like to make a donation, please feel free to contact me on 07929142039.

St Nicholas' Primary School

The pupils and staff of St Nicholas' have had a very busy half term from August to October.

Staff have been busy planning and engaging in lots of wonderful learning activities to enrich the curriculum and move it beyond the classroom. P1 and P2 have had a visit from the PSNI dog handling unit, there was a lot of excitement when the specialist unit visited the school.

In Keeping with our K9 theme, the whole school had a recent visit from the Dogs Trust, they helped the children understand the responsibilities that come with owning a dog. Gilly, a poodle puppy, was brought along for the children to view.

Stem... Science Technology Engineering and Maths.

P5 led the way with their home grown rocket construction. Lots of wonderful, wacky creations were put on display ahead of the official rocket launching session. P5, Miss Doherty and Jimmy had great fun launching the missiles. They did manage to take off!

We are the proud bearers of the BECTA ICT Kite mark, recognising excellence in ICT, and are one of only 3.2% of schools in the UK to have achieved this. We also hold the Unicef Right-Respecting Schools Award, the Intermediate International Award for our work with partner schools in Spain and Germany and in Oct 2015, we were awarded our second Eco-Schools Green Flag Award.



St. Nicholas' Primary also has an excellent reputation for producing pupils of all-round talents. We have had much success in the Carrickfergus Festival, Dramatic Arts, Dance and many Sporting ventures.



We have hosted visits from teachers around the world to share our good practice and exchange methodologies.

We are a forward-thinking learning community where everyone has a voice and we actively encourage pupil involvement via our pupil councils.

We recognise achievement not just as an end-product but as a journey of improvement upon which all of our pupils travel.



Our reputation for successfully supporting children with Special Educational Needs is wide-reaching and as such we have recently hosted placements for two trainee Headteachers to share in our good practice.

St. Nicholas' Primary is a vibrant, family-oriented, growing school community. Our mission is to develop each child's full potential in a climate of joy, challenge, co-operation and celebration.



As a staff we make it our core business to get to know each pupil and we endeavour also to get to know you, their families as well. Our door is always open to you and we will always be happy to meet with you.

Primary 6 & 7 Retreat Day

For the last 3 years, the Parish Pastoral Council has hosted an end of term Retreat Day for the Primary 6 and Primary 7 pupils of the parish. We brought pupils together from St Nicholas' Primary School, Acorn Integrated Primary School, Whitehead Primary School and Greenisland Primary School.



This year, the theme of the day was "Connections" and we explored the importance of having a friendship with God. We also encouraged the children to become aware of their connections with each other, their families and with their parish, and how to sustain and develop their friendships.

We concluded with a liturgy in the church which was delivered through words (scripture and prayer), music and art by the children.

"Many thanks to the volunteers who made it a great success for the children, and to the parents who attended the liturgy"



Youth Pastoral Council Litter Pick

In June of this year on a sunny Sunday afternoon, the young people of the parish had a litter pick and tidy up of the grounds of the church and school. Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful sponsored 15 litter picker gloves and hi-vis jackets. It was great to see the young people channel their energy into an environmental project within our community and everyone was shocked with 3 full bin-liners collected. Parents were reportedly also shocked at the enthusiasm of the young people for tidying up!

Get in touch through Carrickfergus Parish Facebook or talk to Bill Webb (Tel: 07860331297) or Siobhan Gilmore if you'd like to get involved!



What does the Youth Pastoral Council do?

The Youth Pastoral Council is a group of young people aged 14-21, who come together regularly to discuss issues and put forward ideas that affect not only the youth of the parish, but also the parish as a whole. We are committed to our Church, as well as social justice and environmental issues. We organize fund raising events for organizations like Trocaire, Morning Star House in Belfast and the Capuchin Day Centre in Dublin.

Cell Group's audience with Pope Francis in Rome

On the Feast of The Divine Mercy this year, the Parish Cells of Evangelisation were finally recognised by the Church, by Decree and final approval.

In September, a group of 108 people from Ireland including 7 from our parish, travelled to Rome to join Cell members from all over the world to listen to words of encouragement from the Pontiff himself.



Even the deluge on the said day didn't dampen anyone's spirit if the buzz of excitement in the reception area of the Paul VI hall was anything to go by, as old friends greeted one another and new acquaintances were made.

While we waited for the celebration of Mass before the audience with Pope Francis, the angelic voices of a primary school choir helped us to

compose ourselves, as did singers and musicians from Milan. Many of us were very moved by a group of young people who told the story of how good overcomes evil through dance and mime. A gentleman then told his story about how at one time he was uninterested in any religion, but through the faith of his wife, he not only joined the Parish Cells in his parish in England, but he now follows the Catholic faith. Most poignant was the testimony of a young Chinese priest who related how even through persecution and fear of death or imprisonment, Parish Cells are flourishing in China. The majestic procession of Priests entering the hall to say Mass reminded us of the solemnity of the occasion.

Then it was 'The' moment! Well, I must say, Pope Francis is not a very good time keeper. He kept us all waiting for at least half an hour! Though I suppose if you are as important a person as Pope Francis, you are entitled to keep your flock waiting. However, from the uproar that greeted him, no one seemed to mind being kept waiting.

Pope Francis encouraged us to keep faith with the Holy Spirit, telling us that the Spirit will always help us through all of our trials and tribulations. He reminded us to be charitable; not to prejudge other people; and that a few words of encouragement for others can go a long way.

Pope Francis likened Parish Cells to a mustard seed that once planted and cared for, will grow and grow, as the Cell community from small beginnings has already spread throughout the world.

On finishing, Pope Francis asked us all to remember him in our prayers. I only wish I could have bottled some of the atmosphere and excitement of my day at the Vatican.

by Maria Flanagan



What to expect during a Parish Cell Group meeting?

A warm welcome

A reading from the bible and prayer

The choice to share or to remain quiet

Friendship

A cup of tea

A choice to simply come and see what a Parish Cell Group meeting is like



Cell Contacts:

Matt Monaghan	07442 229303
Maria Flanagan	07803 297129
Patsy Bell	07773 038159
Anne McFerran	07803 158489
Jim Mullan	07841 428436
Tommy Mone	07713 849471
Ruth Bates	93 378958
Margaret Webb	07779 729505

Our Polish wedding in Carrickfergus

From the first time that we visited the church of St Nicholas' since we moved to Carrickfergus, the great and powerful new feelings were there with us. We found ourselves in a new place with kind people and most importantly, a new language which had a great effect on our mind, senses and emotions.

Never before have we had to deal with the English language, but the desire to participate in Holy Mass was so great that we did not mind. Without being able to speak or understand this language, we still felt that through the love of God, we were home.

We were welcomed very warmly and cordially in St Nicholas' by open and helpful people. There was no way of not feeling a part of this parish family. We felt warmth and support from all directions.





We will always be thankful for the special support through the help of Father Owens who is not only a magnificent priest, but also a wholehearted person. Love towards others from him is truly real and it is something that many of us are missing in these difficult times. Let us thank God for such a wonderful person who was sent to this community.

Bill Webb is a great friend, who is always there to help; there to support us with warm words; and there at the doorway of the church, greeting us with a wonderful smile. They say that there is no such thing as irreplaceable people, but we believe that he is not replaceable, God Bless!

The recent arrival of our family for our wedding was an extraordinary experience for many reasons. We waited for so long, counting the hours and minutes to their arrival. After 3 years of separation, we could together enjoy moments of which my husband and I dreamed of. Our family and friends were a big support, without which we could not have managed such an important day.

Thank you to our families and thank you to our new parish family of St Nicholas!

by Ewa Gostkowska and Stanley Gostkowski

Community Events

Family Fun Night - Whitehead

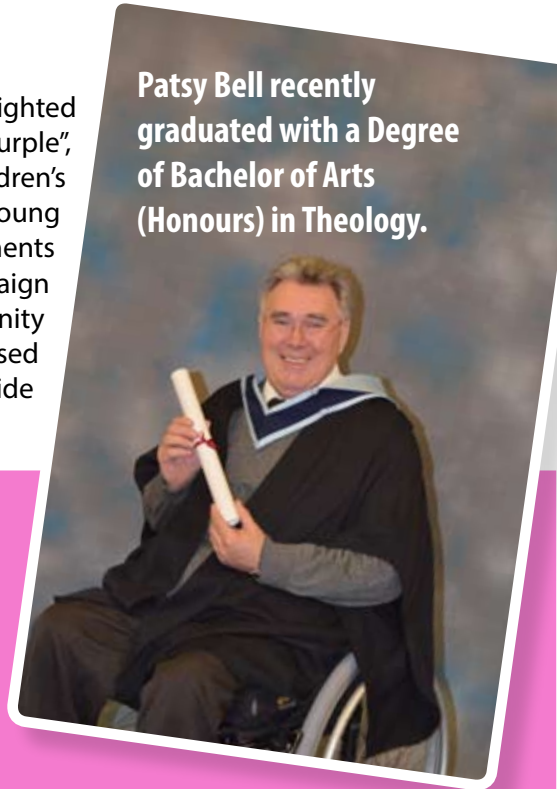
One of the highlights of Our Lady of Lourdes social programme this year was the Family Fun Night which took place on Friday 26th June. Now in its third year and with all sides of the community being represented, visitors were treated to an array of fun activities with everyone enjoying both McMaster's tasty barbeque and delicious ice cream generously donated by Mauds. The grand finale to the evening was several hotly contested games of bingo where tremendous fun was had by all. The evening raised over £500, of which £300 was handed over to Parish Funds to assist in the maintenance costs for the school building, with the remainder being donated to the very worthy charity Mary's Meals.

Operation Purple

Our Lady of Lourdes parishioners were delighted recently to be able to support "Operation Purple", a fundraising programme for the NI Children's Hospice which provides palliative care for young people across Northern Ireland. Refreshments served after mass as part of a wider campaign driven by the Whitehead Community Association's "Operation Purple" appeal raised £167 contributing to the community wide total of £6613.

Let us know if you have any stories or events that you would like us to share in our next addition of The Connection

Patsy Bell recently graduated with a Degree of Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Theology.





On November 21st the Living Church invited Parish Cells to host an information table at the Waterfront Hall, Belfast when Jeff Cavins, one of the foremost Catholic Bible teachers around today gave a day on “The Bible: Our Everlasting Story”



Margaret Webb and Anne McFerran host a table for Parish Cell Groups of Evangelization at the Down and Connor Faith and Life Convention in Our Lady and St Patrick’s College, Knock, Belfast.

Parish Groups and Committees

Parish Pastoral Council

See inside back page for details.

Youth Pastoral Council

See article in this newsletter for details.

Communications Committee

We are responsible for this newsletter, as well as the website, social media, Sunday bulletin and all other forms of illustrating and communicating the life of our parish.



Parish Cell System of Evangelization

See article in this newsletter for details.

Ministry of Welcome

We smile, greet, listen and try to make EVERYONE feel welcome in our parish.

Parish Safeguarding Committee

The role of the Committee is to develop and promote best practice towards children, young people and vulnerable adults. We carry out an annual audit of all activities that occur in both churches and parish halls, and we maintain a list of all of the individuals involved.

Society of St Vincent de Paul

SVdP is a widely recognised global charity that has been helping people in crisis for almost two centuries. Today, the need to help families and single adults who are struggling continues, and we in the St Nicholas' Conference, work voluntarily to help all members of our community who are in need. Our mobile number is: 07517 159 222.

The Carrickfergus Parish Bethany Bereavement Support Group

The group aims to help the bereaved and grieving. Visits are arranged to families who have recently been bereaved.

Children's Liturgy

The aim is to give our children a positive age-appropriate experience of the Church and of coming to Mass. They learn valuable lessons of God's love for them and for everyone.

Pre-Sacraments Preparation Programme

The team instruct and prepare the children who do not attend St Nicholas' Primary School or Acorn Integrated School, for the sacraments of First Penance, First Holy Communion and Confirmation.

Entertainment & Community Development Committee

The aim is to bring the parish together using various means including social events, and to promote the use of the parish halls. The committee endeavours to help us feel that we "belong", not just within the parish but also in the wider community.

Finance Committee

The committee assists the parish priest by advising him on financial and governance issues that affect the parish.

Social & Hospitality Group

Providing catering and hospitality to the many social events in the parish.

Other hard working volunteer groups include:

Sacristans

Choirs

Ministers of the Word

Eucharistic Ministers

Altar Servers

Flower Teams

Offertory counters

Cleaners

Cemetery Committee

School Board of Governors

School PTA

Autumn Club for the senior members of our parish.

Youth Club for the junior members of our parish.

The Door of Mercy



On 8th December 2015 Pope Francis opened the Holy Door, the Door of Mercy, in St Peter's Basilica, Rome, inaugurating the Year of Mercy. He then invited each diocese throughout the world also to open a Door of Mercy, at the Cathedral or another church of special significance. I have chosen St Patrick's Church, Donegall St, Belfast, to host the Door of Mercy for the Diocese. The parish celebrates its bicentenary this year, 1815-2015.

A 'Pilgrim's Prayer Card' will be available at the Door of Mercy to guide the pilgrim on the 'Pilgrim's Way': a journey around the church reflective of life and of faith. During Masses, funerals and weddings the Door of Mercy will be accessible but the 'Pilgrim's Way' will not be accessible until the Liturgy ends.

**St Patrick's Church,
Donegall St, Belfast**



The opening of this door is symbolic of Jesus opening his arms on the cross, in loving mercy, to all mankind. I invite the Diocese to go on pilgrimage to this Door of Mercy as a sign of true conversion and to “experience the love of God who consoles, pardons and instils hope” (Pope Francis). The pilgrimage can be made at any time during the Year of Mercy.

The Door of Mercy will be opened:

Mon-Fri 10.30am-8:00pm

Masses 10:00am & 1:00pm

Sat 10.30am-7.00pm

Masses 10:00am, 1:00pm & 7:00pm

Sun 8.30am-7.00pm

Masses 8:00am, 10:00am,
12:00 noon & 7:00pm

For those unable to go on this pilgrimage physically, the housebound or those imprisoned, a ‘virtual pilgrimage’ is available online accessible via the Diocesan Website. Go to **www.downandconnor.org** and choose the Year of Mercy Icon.

+ **Noel Treanor**

Eucharistic Adoration for the Holy Year of Mercy



As our commitment to the Holy Year of Mercy, The Parish Pastoral Council recently renewed Eucharistic Adoration on Saturdays between 10:00am and 5:00pm in the rear chapel of St Nicholas' Church.

“Could you not watch one hour with Me?”

Eucharistic Adoration is the adoration of Jesus Christ present in the Holy Eucharist. Christ's great love for us was shown when he was crucified on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins and give us eternal life. He loves us without limit, and offers Himself to us in the Holy sacrament of the Eucharist. Can we not give Jesus one hour of love and adoration in return?

Jesus asks for so little.... Yet, He gives so much!

The more time we spend with Jesus, the more we will come away feeling renewed and healed. We can offer Him our petitions, our concerns, our troubles, our joys, our gratitude, our disappointments, our needs and our aspirations. We can speak with Him about everything. Or, we can just be with Him in silence. Therefore, our time spent with our Beloved Saviour in Adoration, can become the most profound, meaningful, joyful, peaceful and healing experience we could ever encounter.

If you are prepared to spend one hour with Jesus every week, please contact Ann Woods on 07859 078 151.

Even if you cannot make this commitment, please accept Jesus' invitation to come along to Eucharistic Adoration at anytime between 10am and 5pm on Saturdays.

Parish Pastoral Council

The Parish Pastoral Council is a partnership of clergy and laity consulting and working together to provide leadership and contribute to the building of a welcoming Catholic Faith community.

The Council must discern and then decide on priorities and set goals for appropriate pastoral activity in a wide range of areas, such as Faith Formation, Education and Personal Growth; Development of Worship, Prayer and relevant Liturgy; encouragement of Support Groups; Youth Ministry; Ecumenism; Evangelization; Work for Peace and Justice; Community Development and Good Relations. It is not the role of the Council to carry out these tasks itself, but with everyone in the parish using their God-given gifts, together we can build a living, growing, healthy community of faith. Together we really can make a difference.

Mission Statement

The final words of Matthew's gospel records Jesus' great commission to His Church: "go then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples, baptise them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And I will be with you always, to the end of the age". (Matthew 28: 19-20)

This is the task of the Church in the World, and each parish community and each individual Christian has a role to play in the fulfilling of this task.

However, our ability to respond to this call will depend on the extent to which we allow our parish to become a living, growing, healthy community of faith. It is the role of the Parish Pastoral Council to encourage and nurture this. It endeavours to build up the community of faith, not for its own sake, but in order that it might be a force for good (or rather, a force for God), as it reaches out, intent on making a real difference in the wider community and world.

Pastoral Council members:

Father Peter Owens (President), Bill Webb (Chairperson), Mary McCormack (Vice-Chairperson), Martin Dempster, Siobhan Gilmore, Roisin Rice, Paul Smith, Gerardine Stewart, Bob Sweeney and Ann Woods.



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