

the Connection

Christmas 2016



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

Baptisms

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

Weddings

By arrangement. Three month's notice is required



Parish Priest: Father Peter Owens

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Christmas Message



It is very hard to believe that we are publishing the fourth edition of the Connection. As with the other three, this edition represents many hours of planning and preparation.

Someone once remarked: "God loved the world so much that He sent His only Son...and not a committee!" As the member and chair of many committees inside and outside the parish, I appreciate the irony, but if a committee is well chaired, directed by a clear agenda and orientated to effective action, it need not be so dreaded. We have been fortunate indeed in the Parish of Carrickfergus and Whitehead to have had for

many years now a most dynamic and imaginative Pastoral Council, which has been of colossal help to me and my predecessors. It was with great sadness that we learned recently that Bill Webb would be stepping down as chairperson of the Pastoral Council, as well as from all his other pastoral leadership roles in this parish, in order to assume a placement in Glengormley Parish as a vital part of his formation for the Permanent Diaconate. I was delighted to be able to thank Bill at all the Sunday Masses on the feast of Christ the King and wish him every blessing for his apostolate in Glengormley.

A short time later I was really gratified when Mary McCormack, vice-chairperson of the Pastoral Council, accepted the invitation to replace Bill, and when Paul Smith agreed to serve as vice-chairperson. Already several new members have been recruited and the Pastoral Council promises to go from strength to strength. This represents the proud fact that we are a parish where priest and parishioners work together, precisely in keeping with the spirit of co-responsibility promoted so strongly by Bishop Treanor in his Pastoral Plan for our diocese of Down and Connor and by Pope Francis in his Petrine ministry to the universal Church.

This model of parish is amply conveyed in the pages of this Christmas issue of our parish newsletter, and I am indebted to all the contributors. Sometimes the Church is caricatured as tired and irrelevant to younger people and families - it would be hard to say this of the Parish of Carrickfergus and Whitehead without sounding foolish. Just look at "The Connection"!

I wish all our dear parishioners and visitors a blessed Christmas and peaceful New Year.

P. J. Owens, P.P.

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St Nicholas' Bright Lights

Christmas time already – I can hardly believe it and such a successful year we've had so far.

Thank you so much for all the support you have given to our pupils, staff, Governors, the PTA and myself over the last few months.

Thank you also for your generosity in supporting our chosen charities. Already this year we have donated to good causes including the Mission Schools, NSPCC, Children in Need and St Vincent de Paul – thank you so much!

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of you who took time out of your busy schedule to help us with our questionnaire/surveys for the 2016-19 School Development Plan. The feedback was very informative and has helped us create targets for the short and long term development of the school.

Our Shared Education Project goes from strength to strength
A recent ETI inspection of the Shared Education Project noted the dedication, hard work and commitment of all those involved in the project. The inspectorate were particularly impressed by the work of the co-ordinators from the three schools. (Model, Sunnylands and St Nicholas'). We look forward to the shared lessons planned for 2017.
As a result of our commitment to Shared Education our staff will receive training through the teacher Professional Learning Programme. Additional teacher training helps us to improve the outcomes for all our pupils at St Nicholas'

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the Staff and Governors of St Nicholas' PS. It is a joy to come to work each day and a privilege to work alongside a team which places every child at the centre of everything we do. St Nicholas' staff continue to work above and beyond their remit because of their dedication, commitment and care for your children. I wish them all a fantastic, well-deserved Christmas break!



Finally, may I take this opportunity to wish you all a very peaceful and happy Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

Principal Kieran Austin

Our Parish Prize Winning Poet

Young Poets' Competition

recognition of the role older people have in our society, and to mark Abbeyfield's 60th anniversary, young people were challenged to write a poem about any aspect of ageing.

Local songwriter and performer, Duke Special, supported and judged the competition.

In Isabel's poem, one aspect of poetry is about distilling words down to just what is needed to attempt to paint a picture or tell a story or convey an emotion. In Isabel's poem 'Nanny Nellie' she has done this really well with some great lines 'blue teeth talk' and the description of how friendly chats can get in the way of what you're meant to be doing. This made me be able to picture this nanny and the old person she is.

Isabel's poem 'Nanny Nellie' was able to recall a great many details of his surroundings from when he was growing and created great lists of the sights and sounds and smells he associated with his childhood. Sophie Fox's description of her 'eyes grandad' uses this idea of lists to good effect and conjures up a very vivid and somewhat mischievous grandparent who has taught her many useful things including how to take a short sleep when no one is looking.

Isabel's poem 'The Memory Book' uses very few words to describe in a fitting way someone in the winter of their life who still has pages to write. The story is not very difficult to choose an overall winner but since I must, I think it will go to 'Cathal's Memory Book.'



Competition sponsored by Danske Bank

Congratulations

to Isabel Thompson (Primary 7) who recently won a young poetry competition celebrating older people. Isabel's prizewinning poem was a funny and touching tribute to her 'Nanny Nellie'.



The competition, held by Abbeyfield charitable housing association to mark their 60th year of providing housing and support for older people, was entered by over 200 children from across Northern Ireland and was judged by local songwriter and performer Duke Special.

Duke read aloud Isabel's poem at Abbeyfield's 60th anniversary ceremony at the Long Gallery in Stormont, and it is currently on display as part of an exhibition at The Curve Gallery, Carnegie Library, Bangor.

St Nicholas' is also very proud of other poetic pupils, Ethan Barrett, who was a runner-up in the 8-11 years category; and of Joey Ashby and Tara Gilmore, who both received commendations.

Pilgrimage to the Door of Mercy

On 29th October, 40 parishioners went to the Door of Mercy at St Patrick's Church, Belfast to take part in a mini pilgrimage.



There were 5 stations on the pilgrimage where we were invited to **PAUSE**, to **THINK**, to **PRAY** and to **ACT**. The stations included veneration of the church's ancient mission cross which met us as we entered through the "Door"; the baptismal font; the altar; the columbarium where the ashes of the deceased lie at peace; and then finally to the beautiful painting called 'Madonna of the Lakes' which was painted by the great artist Sir John Lavery and given by him to St Patrick's Church, the church of his baptism.

This short pilgrimage recalled our journey through life in faith, from the beginning to the end and in the great community spirit of our parish, we concluded the day with a meal together in the Loughshore Hotel.

Year of Mercy Ideas Evening

Earlier in the year Fr Tim Bartlett led the parish in a discussion on the Year of Mercy. We closed the evening with the question: "How can we as a parish and as individuals respond to the call of mercy?"



On Monday 14th November, the parish came together again to put forward concrete ideas as to how the parish can answer this call. Several ideas were put forward, but the overwhelming favourite idea was for the establishment of a Parish Visitation Team to visit the housebound, the lonely and anyone who needs a caring, attentive ear. The Parish Pastoral Council will consider all of the ideas that were suggested, and it is anticipated that at least one of these ideas will be implemented in early 2017.

My Wonderful Welcome

I first came to St Nicholas' parish in the Summer of 2015 to sing at the 11.30 Sunday Mass, as the folk choir were having a well-earned break. I was immediately struck by the friendliness and genuine warmth of the parishioners. I was greeted Sunday after Sunday with beautiful smiles, fond embraces and words of encouragement. As a church singer, I have performed in many parishes throughout Ireland and met some really friendly people, but St Nicholas' is a very special parish. The welcome I received was so over-whelming and totally unexpected. It's very hard to describe that beautiful feeling you get when you enter our church; it's like being enveloped in a warm blanket. It almost feels like coming home. I believe that's because Christ is so very visibly moving through the parish; he is in every single person, every smile, every embrace, every touch. Its beautifully infectious. Romans 16:16 springs to my mind... Greet one another with a holy kiss.

As my summer ended I was invited by Anne Hayes, the folk choir director, to join and be part of the team. I have always worked in parishes on my own, as my full-time job is predominantly a wedding and funeral singer. As such, it can be a little lonely at times. I nervously agreed; Anne had a lovely warm smile and twinkling eyes - how could I say no! On my first morning, I remember being warmly embraced by Anne and Roisin White. Every member was so welcoming and we all got along so well. I had nothing to fear. There was such fun, laughter and a real sense of longing to worship Christ through song. We are united in our desire to sing and make music. Ephesians 5:19 proclaims 'Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord.'

Time and again I get asked from parishioners where I'm from. The reaction is always the same. One of surprise, for I travel from Glenavy every Sunday to be a part of this parish. It's a journey I look forward to, because I know I want to be with genuinely good people who make me smile and who make me want to be a better person. We have an abundance of such good people in our parish.

The people we surround ourselves with either raise or lower our standards. They either help us to become the best version of ourselves or encourage us to become lesser versions of ourselves. We essentially become like our friends. No man becomes great on his own. No woman becomes great on her own. The people around them help to make them great. We all need people in our lives who raise our standards, remind us of our essential purpose, and challenge us to become the best version of ourselves.

If you wish to know the mind of a person listen to their words, for there are many eloquent speakers in life who talk the talk, but if you want to know their heart observe their actions. It is people who walk the walk who have the light of Christ shining within. May your character preach much louder than your words. I observe our parishioners every week with shining eyes, warm smiles, gentle handshakes and tender embraces. We care for one another in a very special way. For we are the body of Christ.

Mother Teresa famously said: 'Spread love everywhere you go. Let no one ever come to you without leaving happier'

Thank you for making me feel so welcome.

Catherine McCallum

For three Monday evenings during Advent we joined together as a parish for a series of liturgies celebrating the 'Family'. Each of these special services was led by a different group central to our ministry - **Children's Liturgy**, **Sacramental Preparation** and the **Ministry of Sacred Music**.

On each evening the group chose hymns, readings, prayers and reflections which were both emotionally significant to them and which really conveyed to those present something of the important and unique contribution they make to our parish life. Speakers talked briefly about their role and shared personal stories, insights and experiences. Time was also set aside on each evening for silent prayer and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.

Children's Liturgy - Trea Buick

"It is a privilege to share the Catholic faith with the young people of our parish and to watch them grow in the love and understanding of God. The time we spend with the children on a Sunday is very short; therefore, we must study the gospel carefully to prepare interesting ways of conveying its key message so that they can own it in their hearts.

This can be challenging at times, particularly during the season of Advent, when outside of the church our children are culturally predisposed to think of getting presents at Christmas above all else. When in church, we try to keep them from confusing consumer celebrations with the worship of Jesus. We always appreciate the support of parents and grandparents in our work".

Sacramental Preparation - Mary Muir

"When parents ask for Baptism for their child, we help them to prepare for the initial Sacrament. Baptism opens the door to all other Sacraments and marks our soul with an everlasting sign. We become children of God, children of the light and part of the Body of Christ.

As children prepare for the Sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist we help them to recognise the importance of thanking God for the loving care of family and friends. We focus on the celebration of the Mass, listening to God's Word, offering thanks, sharing the Bread of Life and going out to spread the Good News of the Gospel.

As our young people prepare for adult life within the Church, through the Sacrament of Confirmation, they need a deeper understanding of faith and a fuller appreciation of the Holy Spirit. We continue to help them talk to God in prayer and listen to him in the silence of their hearts. We help them develop the moral qualities of self-discipline, perseverance, determination, patience, fair-play and consideration of others.

It is a very enriching and humbling experience to work with all these young people and we ask for your prayers for us and for them".

Ministry of Sacred Music - Sarah Dixon

"The members of all three parish choirs were delighted to be asked to lead this year's final advent liturgy. This was the perfect opportunity for us to reflect and contemplate the meaning of Christmas as we expectantly wait and make preparations for the celebration of the Nativity of Our Lord.

The music carefully selected for the evening captured the musical flavour of each choir as we all sang with one voice. We were delighted that so many people not only attended the evening, but also joined in the singing. It is a pleasure to serve the parish in the Ministry of Sacred Music, in its all forms, and we give thanks that we are able to 'proclaim God's glory with glad voices'".

“the office of a deacon - a body of deacons”

There have been Permanent Deacons around the world for almost 50 years, but it was only 3 years ago that Bishop Treanor decided to restore this ministry to the Diocese of Down and Connor.

There are currently 12 men in our diocese including myself, who are studying and working toward becoming ordained Permanent Deacons. We will be the first Permanent Deacons to be ordained in our diocese. It is a tough road which entails 4 years of discernment, academic studies and pastoral work. We attend St Mary's University College every 2nd weekend and we now have 1 ½ years left to go in our 4 year formation programme.

Ordination is never guaranteed. At any time, right up to the day of ordination, you or the diocese may feel that this calling is not right for you. Perhaps your gifts lie elsewhere. There is no success or failure. No shame in recognizing that God has a different plan for you.

So what does a deacon do?

- Assist the priest at the celebration of the Eucharist
- Presides over the celebration of Baptism
- Celebrates marriages (with the appropriate delegation)
- Presides at funerals
- Proclaims the Gospel at the Liturgy
- Preaches the homily
- Visits the sick, the bereaved and prisoners
- Promotes awareness of the social teaching of the Church
- Promotes justice and human rights

The past few months have been a bitter-sweet time for me, because as part of my formation, I have been asked to continue my pastoral work in a new parish. As such, I have stood down as chair of the Parish Pastoral Council for Carrickfergus and Whitehead, as well as the other roles that I have filled (including editor of this magazine), and I have taken up my new pastoral placement in Glengormley. I hope to return home to attend Sunday Mass here in Carrickfergus as often as possible.

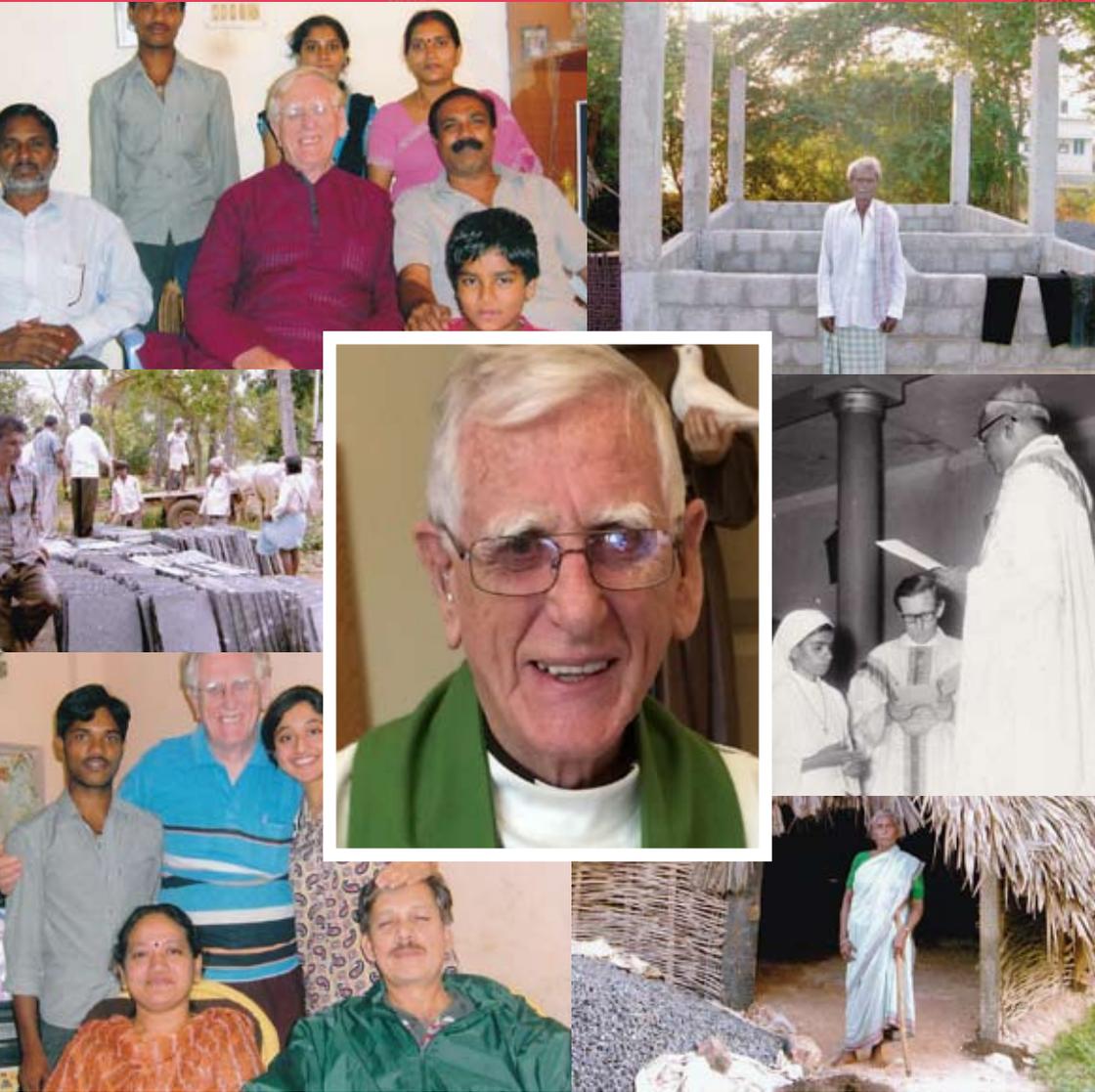
Carrickfergus is the only home that I have known since I left Canada 22 years ago and I have been blessed with the many friendships formed through my adoption into the parish. Thank you for taking me in and for accepting my “Canadianisms”.



I may now live Ireland. I may now live in Carrickfergus. But I **TRULY COME ALIVE** when I am in this parish and I will miss it greatly.

Bill Webb

Spotlight on Father Martin Cushnan, CSSR



Earlier this year, Father Martin's extended family joined with Father Peter and the parish community in welcoming a wonderful man home for a well-earned break. As usual, Father Martin took on his customary role in the parish, and it was a pleasure to hear him say Mass, and to give us an insight into the work he does in India.

The second youngest in a family of six children, Father Martin joined the Redemptorists at the age of seventeen, and his vocation was always to be a missionary. He studied for the priesthood at Cluan Mhuire in Galway, but as ordained priests were not allowed into India at that time, he made the journey there while still a seminarian. His ordination took place in India in 1959 when he was 24 years old. Radio Eirean made a recording of the event, and a family Mass was held in Carrickfergus. Life was very different in those days, with letters taking weeks to arrive, and Father Martin was only allowed a visit home every eight years, which meant that family events were inevitably missed.

Father Martin had begun his lifetime's work with the poorest of the poor. He lived and worked in a few places before being based in Tenali, where he speaks the Telegu dialect proficiently. He set out to improve the conditions of those at the margins of Indian society in very practical ways, by sinking wells, setting up irrigation schemes, helping people to grow their own food, and building better homes. He took in boys who were living on the streets, providing a boarding facility, Bolarun which also grew into a school. Many of these boys used their education well, and became successful in their adult lives.

Father Martin's work in Tenali is supported by family, friends, parishioners and other benefactors. He is a remarkable man who has used meagre resources to provide for those who need his help. Children attending the school in Tenali get a parcel of clothing, and a rare treat of a visit to the beach. He has an amazing capacity to make money stretch. First and foremost, he is a priest, but people come for miles to seek his help as a teacher, advisor, social worker and even doctor. India has a lot of social issues, and Father Martin has dealt with many of these, including that of women most brutally treated by their husbands.

Father Martin is held in high esteem by all those people in India who have benefited from his work. It is a testament to his dedication that although he is now in his eighties, he is currently back in Tenali, continuing with his important projects. All of us in Carrickfergus should be very proud that Father Martin comes from our parish, and calls it home.

Many thanks to the Arkins family, for supplying information and photographs.

Nice Day for a Witt Wedding

The sun shone over St. Nicholas' on July 8th 2016 as we welcomed friends and family from around the globe to celebrate the marriage of our daughter Bronagh and Mr Cody Witt. After many months of preparation the happy couple, who met whilst studying and working in Spain, exchanged vows in front of their guests.



Cody's family travelled from Nevada, USA, for the wedding whilst he and Bronagh flew in from New York where they had been living for the past few years. Fr. Owens officiated on the day whilst many of the Parish groups were involved during the preparation and on the day itself.

We would like to thank the choir, flower arrangers, altar servers, church cleaners, entertainment committee, hospitality group, sacristans and all of our friends and family who contributed to making this such a special day.



After the ceremony guests and well wishers headed to the Parish hall (which had never looked better!) for refreshments before going on to the reception in the Ballygally Hotel. All of our guests remarked on how beautiful the Chapel and Parish hall looked and the warm welcome which they received. Even the weather was on our side as the sun shone brightly showing the church grounds off at their best!



After a week travelling down the west coast of Ireland, the new Mr and Mrs Witt flew back to USA to begin their married life in Reno, Nevada.

Introducing the Parish Office Team



I came to work in Carrickfergus Parish just over two years ago, having previously worked in church administration elsewhere in the Diocese. I was very touched by the warm welcome shown to me by all of the parishioners that I met personally or spoke with on the phone, and also by the principal and staff of St Nicholas' Primary School.

In particular, I have been extremely grateful for the help that I've been given in settling into my new post and for the advice and assistance that is still readily offered when asked. The role of Parish Secretary is a varied one that involves working closely with Fr Peter on a daily basis.

My responsibilities include taking bookings for baptisms and marriages, arranging funerals, liaising with the The Diocesan Office, various Parish and Diocesan groups, answering general queries and the day-to-day financial management of the Parish. One of the main things that has struck me about Carrickfergus Parish is the willingness and eagerness of people to be involved, to support their priest and to help each other.

Perhaps the best way of informing parishioners about what is happening in our Parish and Pastoral Community, is the parish bulletin. For several years the weekly bulletin has been excellently produced by John McCloskey. When Fr Peter and I both came to the Parish, John very kindly offered to continue with this role and we were delighted to accept his offer. We have gotten to know him well over the last two years and can honestly say that we have both come to regard John as a dear and trusted friend and we sincerely hope that he will continue with his involvement in the parish bulletin for many more years. On account of John and others like him, I can honestly say this parish is a great place to work.

Natalie Gallagher



It's that time of year again and as always, we're very busy with our annual Toy Appeal!

A lot of work goes into sorting the toys and gifts that are always so generously provided by our parishioners and the customers of the local Tesco store. This year we will be helping around 30 families with approximately 70 children, who have requested help in Carrickfergus through SVdP's Regional Office.

Details are passed to our conference and then the busy task of sorting the toys into the right categories for each individual family begins. As you can imagine, this involves a lot of organisation, trying to make sure we distribute the toys fairly and age appropriately, but we always enjoy the process knowing that we're helping children who may not otherwise have a lot of presents on Christmas Day.

We are also able to provide hampers to some families thanks to the generosity of our local primary school and we are continually grateful to them for that.

In recent years, Carrickfergus Forum have kindly let us have free use of the Town Hall where people can come to collect their toy parcels, so this has greatly speeded up the distribution process. They also provide us with a van and manpower to transport the bags of toys to the town hall.

We couldn't carry out the appeal without your help and once again, on behalf of the children,

THANKS!

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The Lampedusa Cross



“
We ourselves need to see,
and then enable others to see, that
migrants and refugees
are brothers and sisters
to be welcomed, respected
and loved”

Pope Francis

Forced out by war, poverty or persecution, millions of people across God's earth face uncertain lives as migrants and refugees. Increasingly we are witnessing families and communities being pulled apart, with many risking - and losing - their lives in a bid to reach safety in Europe.



Our Catholic faith calls us to act, yet such is the scale of the problem it can be hard to know how we can best help. Yet even seemingly small acts can make a huge difference. One example of this is the work of Francesco Tuccio, a carpenter from the small Italian island of Lampedusa.

When hundreds of refugees who were fleeing Eritrea and Somalia drowned off the coast of Lampedusa, he was moved to gather driftwood from the wrecked boats and turn them into crosses, which he offered to survivors as a small but powerful symbol of hope.

“We ourselves need to see, and then to enable others to see, that migrants and refugees are brothers and sisters to be welcomed, respected and loved.” - Pope Francis

Pope Francis carried one of the Lampedusa crosses at a memorial Mass to commemorate people who have died, and the British Museum is now displaying a Lampedusa cross as a reminder to people of the refugee crisis the world is facing.

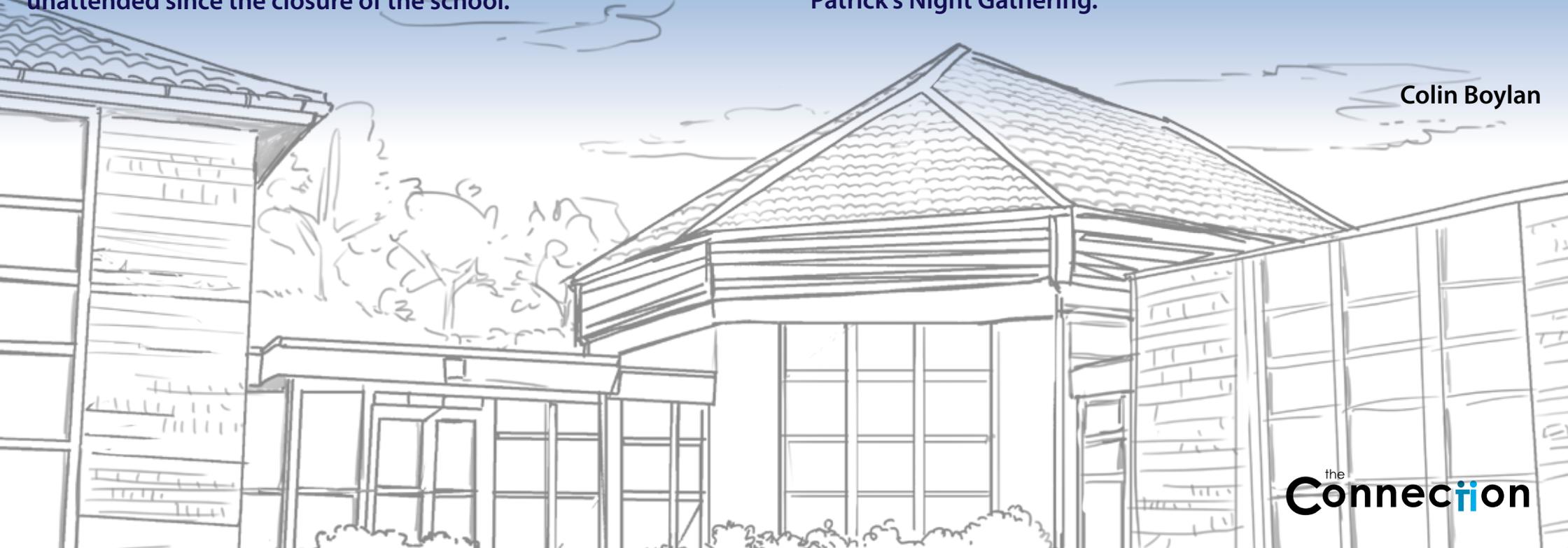
Our New Lady of Lourdes Pastoral Centre

In recent months, the former Our Lady of Lourdes Primary School building in Whitehead has been developed into a new and exciting parish asset. The Finance Committee were aware that a building designed as a school and left vacant for a number of years, would not be the first choice for a parish hall. However, within the current financial climate, the building became an opportunity for us as a parish to develop a vibrant and dynamic centre in which parish groups would have a warm and inviting environment to meet. To date, we have replaced the boiler house roof, a section of roofing on the main building, refurbished the heating system and started necessary maintenance on the grounds, all of which had been left unattended since the closure of the school.

Being aware that present and future maintenance costs could be a prohibiting factor in the development of the centre, it was decided that one side of the building could be leased, with the revenue generated used to offset costs. We were approached by Little Einsteins Afterschool Club who agreed to lease this commercial side of the building.

We recently formed a steering committee of parishioners and in January this group, along with others who are interested, will meet to formulate a way forward. We foresee the new Lourdes Pastoral Centre as vital in the future development of our parish and in forming greater and stronger community links within the Whitehead area. It is anticipated that the first major event to be held in the Lourdes Pastoral Centre, with the help and guidance of the St. Nicholas' Hall Committee, will be the annual parish St. Patrick's Night Gathering.

Colin Boylan



Produced by the Parish Communications Committee:



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Pauline Cowan, Sarah Johnston,
Paul Mayne, Michelle Mullan, Caoimhe Rice
and Bill Webb.