

THE PARISH OF ST PETER AND ST JAMES
BELFAST

PARISH NOTES

OCTOBER 2021

Rector: The Rev'd Brian Lacey
St Peter's Rectory,
17 Waterloo Park South,
Belfast, BT15 5HX

*The Crafty Goodness group
hard at work!*

GOD . LOVING . PEOPLE

RECTOR'S NOTES

SERVICES IN OCTOBER

Our 10am Sunday services continue with a different form of service each week: Family Service (3rd October), Holy Communion (10th October), Morning Prayer (17th October), Healing Service (24th October), and a Service of the Word for Halloween (31st October). Each of these services last between 20–30 minutes, are entirely said (no singing), and are a little less formal than the 11am service. You are very welcome to join us.



There are two changes to our normal pattern of 11am Sunday services:

We will celebrate our Harvest Thanksgiving on Sunday 17th October. This will be a Service of the Word (instead of Holy Communion) and the guest preacher will be the Very Rev'd John Bond, formerly both Dean of Connor and Rector of Broughshane. If you would like to help decorate the church for Harvest, please come along on the morning of Saturday 16th October, anytime between 10am—12noon. You may also leave fruit, vegetables, and flowers.

There will also be a traditional-language celebration of Holy Communion (Form One) on All Saints' Day, Sunday 31st October. At this service, the names of parishioners whose funerals were conducted in the last two years, will be read aloud.

COVID-19

A quick look at a graph of reported Covid-19 cases in Northern Ireland would suggest that we are in the second wave of the virus this year. From February to July, the number of new cases was relatively low, but these increased rapidly over the summer, and (at time of writing) there are around 1,000 new cases being reported each day.

Recently several of our neighbouring parishes have been affected, with both members of the congregation and clergy testing positive. In one such parish, Sunday services had to be cancelled for two weeks with very little notice. We're now at a crossroads in our society, in which we still need to protect the vulnerable, and at the same time, we need to emerge from the restrictions of Lockdown and attempt to normalise everyday life.

As we navigate through this, some parishioners will undoubtedly test positive, and naturally there will be concerns over whether others have been infected. My advice to you, is that if you have any doubts, please do a lateral flow test—these are freely available from the NHS. If, however, you have symptoms of Covid-19, you should go online and book a PCR test instead. (If you have any difficulty booking a test online, please speak to me and I'll be glad to help you arrange it. I will not, however, be able to accompany you to the test itself.)

As always, please continue to wear a mask in St Peter's; use hand sanitiser when entering and exiting the building; avoid close contact with others in the congregation; do not shake hands or hug, and try to avoid moving around the building before/during/after services unless it is really necessary.

CHARITIES

There are two charities that we can support in very practical ways in the next couple of months. First of all, we will have our usual Harvest collection of tinned goods, tea/coffee, and toiletries for the **Welcome Organisation**. Please bring your donations to the church by Wednesday 13th October. These will benefit the homeless who find some respite during the daytime at the Welcome Centre. In addition they are currently asking for items of men's and women's underwear (new) and also sleeping bags, so if you have any in good condition that you no longer need please bring them along. Second, we will support the **Blytheswood Shoebox Appeal**. David Cromie has written about this elsewhere in these Parish Notes, so please read his instructions if you would like to help.

MEN'S FELLOWSHIP

We are about to re-launch our Men's Fellowship! This will be open to any adult men in the parish, whether newcomers or long-time parishioners, and will focus on a fry-up breakfast on a Saturday morning in the parish halls, followed by a short talk/discussion, about once a month. We hope to organise two such breakfasts before Christmas. If you're interested in attending, please inform David Cromie or myself as soon as possible.

PASTURES NEW

Last month, the Rev'd Alan McCracken and the Rev'd Nathan Ervine were ordained as priests and began their curacies in Moville and Carrickfergus, respectively. Originally a parishioner of Whitehouse & St Ninnian's, Alan joined us in 2016 in order to gain experience of leading worship in another parish, before heading down to the Theological Institute in Dublin in 2017 to train part-time. A member of Lisburn Cathedral, Nathan was

employed as our Families Worker in 2017, before commencing full-time training in Dublin in 2018. Despite their different pathways to ordained ministry, both became deacons last year at a service in St Anne's Cathedral. Now priests, Alan is the Bishop's Curate in the Moville Group of parishes in north Donegal, and Nathan is the Curate Assistant in St Nicholas, Carrickfergus. (Note that a Curate Assistant ministers alongside a training rector, whereas a Bishop's Curate tends to minister alone, supported by neighbouring clergy.)

ORGANISATIONS

Since the start of September, organisations have once again been meeting in our parish halls—in some cases, for the first time since March 2020. In addition to the Badminton Club, Grief Share, Walking Group, Crafty Goodness (see front cover), PhysioPilates, Rainbows, Brownies, Guides, Bible Study, and Speech & Drama, two new groups have recently joined us: Baby Sensory and Weightwatchers. As we return to normality, it is likely that more organisations will recommence. In the meantime, we are still bound by Covid-19 regulations, which state that masks should be worn (unless exempt, or if the group is eating/drinking, or if it is a committee meeting), that hands should be washed/sanitised, that at least a one metre distance must be kept between members at all times, and that a risk assessment be carried out beforehand. If you have any questions about these regulations, please contact either Anne Cromie or myself.

IS YOUR CHRISTIAN FAITH A SECRET?

It might seem strange, but our Lord Jesus often told people not to talk about him. One well known passage is the pivotal moment when Jesus asks what the disciples think of him, and Peter answers that Jesus is the Messiah. And in response,

Jesus—whilst not disagreeing—instructs the disciples to tell no one. This is called the Messianic Secret.

One ironic example is the healing of a deaf man, who had an impediment in his speech. We read, “Immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. Then Jesus ordered him to tell no one.” Can you imagine being miraculously able to hear and speak clearly for the first time, and eager in your excitement to share your good news with everyone, and to talk about how Jesus had healed you, and then to be told “tell no one.” It would be difficult!

But that need for secrecy had to do with preventing people from misunderstanding what sort of Messiah Jesus would be. For centuries, the Jews had expected a saviour who would be both spiritual and military—a new King David. And, understandably, during the Roman occupation of Palestine, the people expected a Messiah who would free them from foreign oppression, and build a divine empire on earth, with Jerusalem at its centre.

Had Jesus allowed himself to be linked to that concept of military victory, then the people would be disappointed. In fact, we see that in the triumphal entry into Jerusalem when he was acclaimed as the victorious king, and yet a few days later, following his arrest and failure—as they saw it, he was derided by the people, who begged for his crucifixion.

With hindsight, we know that the victory of Jesus was won upon the Cross, where he gave his life as a ransom for many. But until that happened, Jesus needed to manage how the message of salvation was being proclaimed.

For us, of course, there is no need for such secrecy. We know that by the death and resurrection of Jesus, our broken relationship with God has been healed, and that through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and by following that pattern of self-sacrificial behaviour that Jesus has given us, the world can be transformed. We know all of that. There is no need for secrecy now. And yet, do we have the zeal to proclaim that message of the wonders of Jesus our Messiah, or are we silent?

Pause for Thought and Prayer

by Rosemary Johnston

Non Government Organisations (NGOs)

NGOs are many and varied and operate all over the world. They have a wealth of knowledge and experience and work with the poorest and most disadvantaged people, who find themselves in dire circumstances through poor harvests, caused by drought, floods, fire, locust swarms as well as attacks by marauding gangs. The NGOs work alongside the local people; in times of food shortage, bringing provisions as well as medical supplies but also helping the people to cope in poor conditions, often the result of climate change. One NGO has developed a food 'purse', designed with the help of a doctor, which contains the nutrients necessary for sustaining health. This involves local people in the production of the 'purses' which are made in a factory in the area. It is like 'teaching a man to fish' rather than just handing out the food. Other areas of their work cover health, education, helping construct wells to provide clean water—many diseases, including eye diseases are caused by river water. Many NGOs concentrate on taking food, medical supplies and tents to dangerous places, such as Afghanistan and Yemen, and some have lost their lives, either caught in crossfire or have been deliberately attacked by the warring factions. Then there are those who are involved in rescue after disasters, eg, earthquakes, floods, fire as well as manmade catastrophes. The NGOs are unsung heroes whose work goes mostly unnoticed. Without them many of the world's poorest people would not survive, or have a life devoid of any quality.

*Heavenly Father: We pray for your blessing on,
and protection for, all NGOs, in their invaluable work.*

PARISH REGISTER

Christian Burial

"At rest in the Lord."

Rosemary Hoolon Kinds

Burial at Carnmoney Cemetery

on 3rd September 2021

Parish Notes On-line

There are full colour versions of Parish Notes on our website.
Visit www.stpeters.connor.anglican.org and click "Parish Notes".

Blythwood Care Shoebox Appeal

by David Cromie

**"Truly I tell you whatever you did
for the least of these brothers,
you did for me."**

Matthew 25:40



This year we are once again supporting Blythwood Care, a local charity which sends shoeboxes of essential items to vulnerable communities across Eastern Europe at

Christmas time. They are hoping to send boxes to Albania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Kosovo, Moldova, Romania, Serbia and Ukraine, so we would need to have our boxes and items ready to go by the end of October.

We would like you to consider filling shoeboxes with new, essential items, such as toothbrushes and toothpaste; hats, scarves and gloves; soap and shampoo; underwear; clothes; stationery; toys; sanitary products; razors; socks and tights—you get the idea. We will also need gifts of money to pay for transport. You can target your purchases to a specific gender or age category if you like. Most goods go to children, but there are older folks in dire need and, without properly functioning state help, are dependent on charity for help.

For full details please find the enclosed leaflet.

Filled shoeboxes, or bags of essentials should be left at the back of the church no later than **Sunday 31st October**.

Anybody who would like to support this appeal, but is unable to come to church, can leave a message with Anne in the parish office, tel 90 776 706, or email me at:

davidcromie@stpeterbelfast.org

and I'll arrange a mutually convenient pick-up time with you.

Thank you very much in anticipation!

See overleaf to read some Shoebox Appeal stories.





Gleb's Story

Gleb is nine years old and lives with his mother. Sometimes she has too much to drink. When this happens volunteers from a local association for people with Down syndrome help to take care of the child. She was amazed when the association presented her boy with a Blythswood shoebox, telling the volunteer, "There are so many things in one box and such a beautiful scarf and hat." Gleb liked it too – especially the pencils as he loves to draw.

Rifca's Story

Rifca and her family are the only Roma in the village where they live, in Suceava, north-east Romania. "The neighbours are not happy that they live there," says shoebox distributor Paula Croitor. "Rifca doesn't have running water and her well is dry. The neighbours don't want to give her water but she found a Christian who lives further away from her house and who lets her take from his fountain the water she needs to drink, cook, wash and clean. "She received the shoebox with so much joy as she isn't used to too many kind gestures. We also gave her a gift box for her new-born baby. She felt so spoiled and blessed!"





Firjona's Story

Firjona is five years old, Valtrimi is three and Valtrina is not yet two. They were not wearing shoes when Faton Berisha delivered Blythswood shoeboxes to their one-roomed home in a village near the city of Gjakova, Kosovo. It is unlikely they own shoes.

The parents of these children struggle to even feed their family, and their only available work is recycling waste aluminium and plastics. Almost half of all households in the Balkan state have no refuse collection, which creates an opportunity for families like these to rummage through the waste.

But it comes at a considerable cost: it was estimated that workers in the unregulated recycling sector earned between 50 and 100 euros per month, with children often assisting their parents in the hazardous work. The result is missed school and further stigmatisation of ethnic minorities. Working with rubbish does not build respect.

"The mother of these children said that the shoeboxes are so helpful to them," Faton says. "Especially toiletries such as soap, shampoo and toothpaste."

***The gifts you so lovingly pack in your shoebox are essential
for these families who are living in such dire poverty.
You are making a difference in this world.***

Ladies' Guild—A Bientot

Tuesday 11th October 1994 was the day on which Christine Marshall passed to me the Ladies' Guild 'reins', but I'm sorry to say that after 27 years I have come to the conclusion that I must now hand them over to someone new. This is not a decision I made lightly and it was certainly not my intention that you should feel abandoned, however I feel the time has come.



So what happened in the last 27 years?

Since 1994 our membership has remained on average 20 ladies. We have said goodbye to many of our loved ones but have also welcomed several new faces. We have shared news of family weddings, births, deaths, new hips, sore toes and everything in between.

We learned about and supported many charities including Christian Aid for which we ran the annual Bread and Cheese lunches and picnics. Many items were supplied to St Peter's eg the recently acquired boiler which is in constant use in the kitchen.

Since 1994 we welcomed and 'interrogated' four new rectors. We learnt fascinating facts about flowers in the Bible and women in church and—dare I say it—we heard the confessions of a church organist (but not Mr Thompson I hasten to add!).

Speakers have told us of their lives as nuns and barristers and how to keep ourselves safe in this dangerous world. A few of us were even compelled to acknowledge our inner hoarder!

We had many visits to interesting places and tried our hands at crafts such as ceramic painting and flower arranging.

Many skills have been shared with us for example lace making, the art of salt dough, the creation of walking sticks and how to make handbags out of old clothes.

We have been poked and prodded by reflexologists, chiropractors and acupuncturists and have learnt which colours are the most flattering for our skin tones. We have even witnessed the creation of our own personal scars!

Many miles have been travelled with our speakers and we have discovered more about other cultures and ways of life. Most importantly we have been around the world and back again with Noel and Annette Beattie and their travelling company!

We had many parties and afternoon teas and enjoyed our annual Christmas get togethers with the Bowling club. I have the photograph to prove that Beryl McDowell can sport a very nice white ankle sock!

For my part, some of our best afternoons were when we 'did it ourselves'. We salivated over puddings, biscuits and sweets and learnt about their history at the same time. Our achievements were celebrated in an Award Ceremony and also when we ran our Sports Day and Spring Fair. We learnt about the history of buttons and discussed our most embarrassing moments! (Mum's the word!)

As you may imagine this is only the briefest summary of our activities in the last 27 years!

If I were to sum it up I would say that the main purpose of the Ladies' Guild has been to facilitate a get together where the ladies could chat freely and enjoy a cuppa in a nice relaxed setting. I often felt we didn't even need speakers! If that is all that I achieved in my time with the Ladies' Guild then I can feel satisfied.

I would like to thank everyone for their cooperation and help and for always encouraging me and marvelling at events which may not have been of their choosing. Thank you also to my family for never questioning my mad ideas but always jumping at my requests for help or input.

Much love and thanks to all my ladies. I have had a wonderful time.

Anne Stewart

St Simeon Stylites: Getting away from it all?

by David Cromie

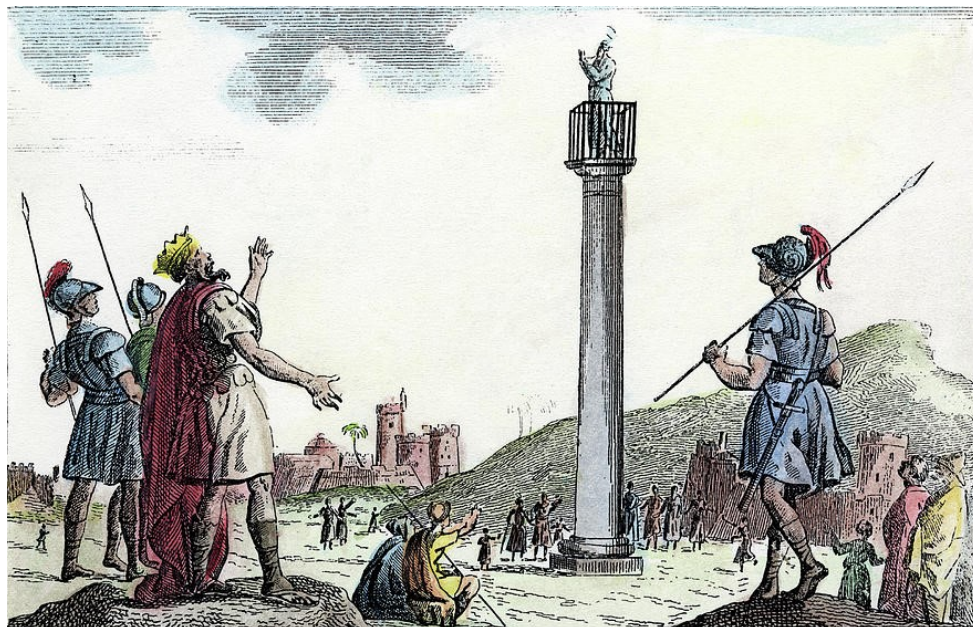
More years ago that I care to number, in my first year at Queen's, I took a one-year course in Byzantine Studies. I was enthralled by the East Roman Empire and its thousand year struggle to thrive and survive, which effectively ended in 1453 with the fall of Constantinople. Amongst the list of extraordinary people who litter the pages of its history, one rather stood out; one who was at least as fascinating as the great Justinian, or Anna Comnena or the unfortunately, if aptly, named Basil the Bulgar-slayer: his name—Simeon Stylites.

Simeon was born in 386 AD, and raised as a shepherd boy, in present day Syria. At the age of 13 he latched onto the simple truths of the Beatitudes (Sermon on the Mount) and entered a monastery when he was 15. Simeon's extreme piety and asceticism concerned his superiors who eventually decided he should leave to devote his life to prayer in a more isolated locale. The young Simeon at first sought solace in the wilderness, a traditional haunt for those seeking God, but his growing reputation led to constant harassment by people seeking blessings and advice, to the point where he had to try to find an alternative strategy: his answer: build a tower, live on the top and thus move closer to God and farther from the world of humanity.

We may think that we live in the age of advanced communications, PR specialists and so-called celebrities, but we are merely the latest variant in a story as old as civilisation itself. Building a tower, only built a reputation, the higher he built his tower, and the further he moved from the ground, the more his fame grew, even Bishops and emperors were awed by his piety and sought his advice. It would be wrong to assert that Simeon wanted no contact with the world whatsoever; the popular myth that he just wanted to get away from it all, misses two practical and historic truths: no man can survive on top of a tower for decades without somebody else sending up food and water, and Simeon did advise folk, both the mighty and the humble. He used his life of total devotion to God to bring the wisdom of God to those who sought his help.

Simeon stayed on his tower for some forty years, living on a platform fifty feet above the ground, which itself measured no much more than a square metre. He was burned by summer sun and frozen in wintertime, but ignored these physical tortures to get closer to God. When he died on 2nd September 459 AD, his body was found stooped over in prayer.

Of course, the world wanted a piece of the dead man. Declared a Saint by the Coptic Orthodox Church, they even fought over his mortal remains, dividing them up, though most ended up in Aleppo, where a vast religious complex was constructed around the base of the style, or tower, from



which he took his name. Other monks sought to mimic his asceticism and built their own styles. How Simeon would have hated all of this. So, what is the relevance to us of this ancient ‘mad monk’ and his weird ways? There are times when each of us wants to get away from it all, but usually what we seek is a holiday or some temporary relief from the pressures and demands of life. But we can never quite get away from it all, can we? We still need contact with immediate family and close friends, perhaps with an on-line link to the outside world and certainly access to a phone. Just like Simeon, our heads might be in the clouds, but our feet are firmly on the ground and when we do shut down for a while, we make sure the freezer is well-stocked and there is enough money to pay the bills. Let’s face it, we have sold out to central heating and the welfare state. Even in his day, precious few attempted to do what Simeon did and none exceeded his accomplishment. But whilst we cannot all live on top of fifty-foot towers, we should learn from Simeon that our earthly existence must be ‘grounded’ in a relationship with God, and that if we seek His help and guidance, each of us can be a blessing to others.

***Please send material for the November issue of Parish Notes to:
Anne Cromie, Parish Administrator, St Peter’s Church,
Fortwilliam Drive, Belfast BT15 4EB
or email: annecromie@stpeterbelfast.org
by Monday 25th October. Thank you.***

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FWO & Gift Aid Secretary:	Mr Noel Beatie	90 778 428	
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