

THE PARISH OF ST PETER AND ST JAMES
BELFAST

PARISH NOTES

NOVEMBER 2020

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



*Catherine Lyons and Derek Gallop
presenting David Cromie
with shoeboxes for the
Blythwood Care Appeal.*

GOD . LOVING . PEOPLE

RECTOR'S NOTES

SERVICES IN NOVEMBER

There will be services at 10am and 11am every Sunday throughout the month. Please do join us as often as you are able.

Sunday 1st November is All Saints' Day. Normally, on that Sunday evening there is a special service during which the names are read out of those parishioners who have died in recent years, and candles are lit by the congregation in memory of their deceased loved ones. Unfortunately that practical expression of our grief and hope cannot happen this year, but I will read from the Register of Burials during the 11am celebration of Holy Communion instead.

Sunday 8th November is Remembrance Sunday. With only very minor adjustments to our normal routine, I think we will be able to commemorate this important date as usual. At our 11am service of Morning Prayer, wreaths will be placed at both our First and Second World War memorials, the list of the Fallen from the parish will be read out, and a time of silence will be observed.

Sunday 15th November is the Second Sunday before Advent.

Sunday 22nd November is the feast day of the Kingship of Christ. This will be the last Sunday in the Church's calendar, which begins again with the Season of Advent.

Sunday 29th November is the First Sunday of Advent. Under normal circumstances, we would have an Advent Carol Service. Notwithstanding the pandemic, we will aim to do something very similar at 11am.

10am ALL-AGE SERVICE

Our 10am All-Age service on Sundays has settled into a comfortable liturgical pattern of greeting, confession, introduction to the theme, Bible reading, questions on the reading, a thought for the day, a challenge for the week ahead, prayers, and dismissal. Within the 30 minutes that we have, it ticks all of the boxes that we would expect to find in a Church of Ireland service, but those elements are presented in a way which encourages—and in fact requires—input from the congregation. In order to put together the services, I am using material called ROOTS, which is an interdenominational publication, for use in Sunday Schools or All-Age services. It is designed to be meaningful both to children and adults, although of course sometimes that will naturally lead it to stray between basic and advanced themes. I heartily encourage you to come along and experience this form of Christian worship, regardless of how old you are. And if you do happen to prefer more traditional, choral forms of worship, such as our 11am service, then please do suggest the 10am service to anyone you know who you think might appreciate it—particularly your family, friends, and neighbours who have never before been to St Peter's.

ONLINE SERVICES

We will continue to broadcast our 11am Sunday and 10.30am Wednesday services on Facebook Live. If you cannot come to church, and are dependent on the online broadcasts, then please be aware that we are always at the mercy of technology, and occasionally the computer will decide at the last minute that it wants to spend thirty minutes updating its software. Such obstacles are genuinely as much of an annoyance to me as they will be to you, when you are waiting forlornly for the service to appear on your screen. I will always aim to start the broadcast on time, but if the computer is playing up, then I will naturally need

to re-focus my attention on commencing the service, rather than keeping everyone in the church waiting whilst the computer sorts itself out. Thankfully, times such as these are rare, but if it happens—and it did for our Harvest Thanksgiving—then all I can do is try to record the service on the computer and then upload it at a later time. But let's always count our blessings: the technology works far more often than not, and it has enabled us to maintain contact with those who are unable to come to church, and thereby include them in our worship.

EASTER VESTRY MEETING

You would imagine that our Easter Vestry Meeting might be held around Easter, but—owing to the Coronavirus—it was postponed until Sunday 18th October. As is often the case when the meeting is affixed to the end of a Sunday morning service, there was a good turn-out. Our excellent Honorary Treasurer, Ashlee McCune, gave a report of the parish finances for last year, which, although discussing specific details from what now feels like the distant past, is still very much relevant to us today: We must increase our income if we are to address our deficit each year. To do so, Ashlee suggested that whilst seeking new members will help, she pointedly reminded us that we all need to increase our Free Will Offering to the Church as well. I've written a little more about that below, so please do read the next section carefully.

In addition to the Treasurer's Report, we also held our elections for various parochial officers and representatives. Many of them will serve for the forthcoming year, which—again, owing the Coronavirus—is really only half a year. However, the Diocesan Synodspersons and the Parochial Nominators will serve for three years. I've listed all those elected/appointed elsewhere in these Notes.

FREE WILL OFFERING

In the coming weeks, you will receive a receipt from Noel Beattie, our FWO Secretary, for your Free Will Offering so far this year, compared to what you gave during the previous year. You can also see an anonymous list of how much was given in our Annual Report, which was printed a few weeks ago, and which can be viewed online.

Now, neither Noel nor I enjoy talking about money, and nobody expects anyone who is struggling financially to give more than they can afford. Nor do we want anyone to receive their receipt and feel bad about themselves. But, in many cases, if we are financially comfortable, then we can and should increase our offering each year. If the cost of living keeps going up, then the costs of running the parish go up as well. We also need to remember that the financial support of the Church is an important element of our responsibilities as Christians, and it should be done joyfully rather than begrudgingly.

So please, take a moment to consider how much you currently support the Christian mission and ministries of the parish, and—only if possible—please give more this year, than what you gave last year. Even if it's only a few pounds extra, it will all add up, and it will go towards helping us survive, in the face of the very sad closure of other churches all around us.

SELECT VESTRY

The Select Vestry is a committee of seventeen parishioners and myself, who manage the resources of the parish, including our staff and volunteers, our property, and our money. Two of the other sixteen members of the committee are appointed by me, with the remaining fourteen elected by and from our registered parishioners

at the Easter Vestry. There are six Senior Officers, including two Churchwardens, two Glebewardens, an Honorary Secretary, and an Honorary Treasurer. As the next elections will be around Easter 2021, our new Select Vestry will serve for six months.

The current membership consists of: Noel Beattie, Colin Bell, Jill Bradley, Peter Coiley, David Cromie, Yvonne Crozier, Victor Davis, Brian Davison, Dr Olivia Dornan, Dora Hanna, Sandra Hutchman, Rosemary Johnston, Matthew Lambert, Daphne McClements, Ashlee McCune, Quintin Mulligan, and myself.

It is vital for the health of the parish that the composition of the Select Vestry changes slightly from year to year, in order to enable newcomers to be involved. Three such changes occurred this year, with Peter Coiley rejoining the committee after a couple of years, and Yvonne Crozier and Matthew Lambert joining for the first time. We are very glad to see people enthusiastic about using their experience, education, and spiritual gifts for the benefit of the Church.

Of course, for someone new to join the Select Vestry, exiting members must unfortunately come off. Margi Crawford, Gareth Larmour, and Tony Swan, each made the decision not to seek re-nomination, and I heartily thank them on behalf of all of us, for everything that they contributed over recent years. The door is, of course, always open for them to seek nomination at future elections! A particular word of thanks to Gareth, for serving very conscientiously as our Honorary Secretary since 2016.

PAROCHIAL APPOINTMENTS

In addition to the election of a new Select Vestry, there are a raft of other appointments that need to be made every year. Some are chosen by me, some by the Easter Vestry, and some by the Select Vestry:

Churchwarden (Rector's)	Daphne McClements
Churchwarden (People's)	Dora Hanna
Coordinator of Sidespersons (<i>Assistant</i> Churchwarden)	Kathryn Hennessy
Sidesperson (<i>Assistant</i> Churchwarden)	Colin Bell
Sidesperson (<i>Assistant</i> Churchwarden)	Rosemary Johnston
Sidesperson (<i>Assistant</i> Churchwarden)	Quintin Mulligan
Coordinator of Church Flowers	Sandra Davison
Coordinator of Groundskeepers	Noel Beattie
Diocesan Synod Synodsperson (under 35 years)	Samuel Cromie
Diocesan Synod Synodsperson	Aaron Crozier
Diocesan Synod Synodsperson	Wes Holmes
<i>Supplemental</i> Diocesan Synodsperson (under 35 years)	Dr Rebecca Delaney
<i>Supplemental</i> Diocesan Synodsperson (1)	Ashlee McCune
<i>Supplemental</i> Diocesan Synodsperson (2)	Quintin Mulligan
FWO & Gift Aid Secretary	Noel Beattie
Glebewarden (Rector's)	Victor Davis
Glebewarden (People's)	Quintin Mulligan
<i>Assistant</i> Glebewarden	Aaron Crozier
<i>Assistant</i> Glebewarden	Albert George
<i>Assistant</i> Glebewarden	Sam Hutton
Insurance Officer	Brian Davison
Health & Safety Officer	Colin Bell
Human Resources Officer	Matthew Lambert
Parochial Nominator	Noel Beattie
Parochial Nominator	David Cromie
Parochial Nominator	Ashlee McCune
Parochial Nominator	Rosemary Johnston
<i>Supplemental</i> Parochial Nominator (1)	Dora Hanna
<i>Supplemental</i> Parochial Nominator (2)	Hilary Shields
<i>Supplemental</i> Parochial Nominator (3)	Daphne McClements
<i>Supplemental</i> Parochial Nominator (4)	Jill Bradley
Safeguarding Trust Panel	Philip Williamson
Safeguarding Trust Panel	Florrie Greer
Social Secretary	Daphne McClements

HARVEST COLLECTION FOR THE HOMELESS

Each year, we make a donation of food and hygiene products to the Welcome Organisation, which cares for people who are homeless. It is lovely to see the table at the back of the church full, which is a wonderful indicator of the generosity of our parishioners. So thank you very much for supporting those who are homeless, particularly in this very difficult year.



Our next opportunity to share what we have with others, is the Blythswood Care Shoebox Appeal. We have been involved with this project in the last few years, and I do hope you will support it again. One of our Ministry Assistants, David Cromie, has written an article elsewhere in these Notes about the Appeal, so please do read it and do whatever you can to help.

LEARN TO RECOGNISE GOD AROUND YOU AND WITHIN YOU

Is the Lord among us or not? That's the question the Israelites asked one another in Exodus 17: 1-7, after having been rescued from slavery in Egypt, after having seen and experienced the plagues, culminating in the Angel of Death who passed over their homes, having walked through a dry path formed by the parting of

the Red Sea, having seen the Egyptian army swallowed up by the River before they could attack; having been provided with bread from heaven to eat. After all that—having been rescued and provided for by God—they still have the nerve to ask “Is the Lord among us or not?”

Now, in terms of the Old Testament, that is an interesting question. Because regularly throughout the first part of the Bible, God is described as interacting with humans in a very personal way. Take, for example, how God is portrayed in the opening chapters of Genesis where we read that God was “walking in the garden in the cool of the day.” There is nothing in those words that specifies that God looked like a human being, but the implication is certainly that he has legs, that he can walk about. And then God talks to Adam and Eve, in a conversational way. God says something, and Adam and Eve respond. Now, in passages of the Old Testament like that, God is presented almost like the earthly Jesus in the New Testament. He has a body. He can walk and talk. And he can interact with people in a way that they can perceive and understand. But of course, the earthly Jesus doesn’t appear until the Incarnation, two thousand years ago. So it’s difficult to take literally, the Old Testament stories in which God is portrayed in that specific, physical way.

Indeed, these are even at odds with how God interacts with humanity, in many other passages of the Old Testament, where he is more often portrayed in a spiritual way. He communicates not through direct face to face conversations, but through dreams and visions and booming voices. And, in fact, there is a passage in Exodus which tells us that a human being could not behold the true nature of God without immediately dropping dead.

I say this because the question that the Israelites are asking themselves, “Is the Lord among us or not?” implicitly suggests that they were not entirely convinced that God was actually with them. Although they had witnessed the power of God at work in how they were rescued from slavery in Egypt, they had not actually seen God himself.

What's interesting is that this story is designed for us to read it and think, "Aren't those Israelites so selfish and stupid and blind to what's going on?" The passage wants us to think negatively about the inability of the Israelites to perceive God with them, despite the obvious signs to the contrary. And yet, we actually find ourselves in the modern world in the exact same predicament. Indeed, it's precisely because God cannot be seen directly, face-to-face, that atheism and secularism are growing. Because people, whether three and a half thousand years ago (at the time of the Exodus) or today, have a tendency to believe only what they can see. Those of us with enquiring minds, want to see evidence before we will believe. And particularly in this age of science, we want absolute proof of God's existence. And this means that we too often ask the question, "Is the Lord among us or not?"

The difference between us and the ancient Israelites, is that they were not questioning the existence of God. Rather, they were questioning whether or not he was concerned for their welfare. And in the Old Testament story, we read that God proves that he cares, by providing for their needs. He had already done so repeatedly, but now in their journey they are clamouring for water in the desert (which is understandable) and God produces water from a rock.

There are two things here to note. First, is that "the Lord will provide". He does care for his people, and when we have a genuine need, and we call out to him, it is his desire to help us. The second thing, though, is that the passage from Exodus is not really focussed upon the miracle. Rather, the focus is on the doubt of the people.

And that's why we learn two Hebrew words in this passage: "Massah," meaning "quarrelled," and "Meribah," meaning "tested". When the ancient Israelites retold this story to one another over generations, it was not the water from the rock they wanted us to think about; it was the fact that the people did not trust God, and that led to infighting amongst them, and putting God to the test.

Now, so many thousand years later, with the benefit of hindsight, we are—as I told you—intended to read this story and sympathise with God. Look how much he had done for these people. Look how much was doing, and would continue to do, for them. And yet they questioned “Is the Lord among us or not?” We are encouraged to ask: “Why didn’t they just trust God, based on everything good that he had already done for them?”

The message for us today is that we must learn to apply that same principle to our own lives. It’s too easy as we go moment by moment through our lives, when bad things happen to us, when we have perhaps legitimate reasons to complain to think “Is the Lord among us or not?” But this passage invites us to look at the totality of our lives, and indeed the totality of human existence, and to recognise that even though we cannot see God directly, face to face, the evidence of his existence, and the evidence of his love for us, is everywhere. In the wondrous complexity of creation; in the acts of goodness and kindness that he works through us to help those in need; in the peace and hope that we can find in his presence.

We need to stop complaining about him, and questioning him, including questioning his existence, and instead begin to recognise him all around us, throughout our lives, and truly come to trust him.

DO NOT CREATE YOUR OWN GODS

As our recent lectionary readings in church have taken us through the Book of Exodus, we have heard the Israelites repeatedly complaining about God. And that theme continues in Exodus 32: 1-14. In that passage, we read that Moses was up on Mount Sinai conversing with God, whilst the people were at the bottom of the mountain, waiting for him. And they begin to grumble because Moses has been away for too long.

And they decide, therefore, that instead of waiting patiently for

Moses to reveal the true God to them, they would pass the time by taking all of their golden jewellery, and fashioning it into the shape of a calf. And they bowed down and worshipped this little golden bull, saying “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.”

Now you might question why—of all the things they could have made to be their substitute god—they decided to worship a calf. Well, they didn’t pluck the idea of the air. In ancient Egypt, one of the many gods that the people believed in, was called Apis. And Apis took the form of a bull. So, what these Israelites are doing, is worshipping one of the Egyptian gods. It would have been a god that they would have been familiar with when living in Egypt. They would have seen statues and pictures of Apis; they would have seen the Egyptians worshipping Apis; and they themselves may have worshipped him. (Remember it was not for nearly a thousand years after the Exodus, that the Jewish people came to the realisation that there is only one God). So what the Israelites are doing, is going back to what they know.

They are impatient for Moses to return with knowledge about this new God that they had to follow. And instead they chose to go back to what they knew best. And as if that was not insulting enough to God, they go further by declaring “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.” They attribute to this false god, to this lifeless statue, the wonders and the works of the one, true, living God. It is no wonder, then, that God is angry. So angry, in fact, that he tells Moses that he is going to wipe them out. He will destroy them, and instead he will create a new people for himself from the descendants of Moses. “Now, let me alone,” says God, “so that my wrath may burn hot against them, and I may consume them; and of you I will make a great nation.”

This passage, and many others throughout the Bible, reveal God’s anger that people keep letting him down. They fail to do and to be what he expects of them. And instead of worshipping him and building their lives around how he wanted them to live, they focus on themselves, and on satisfying their own needs.

Now, how true is that of us, still today? How easy it is for us to create false gods for ourselves, that we can idolise? The love of money is one such idol. We imagine how wonderful it would be to have millions of pounds in the bank, and be able to live however we wanted, without any financial worries. But in thinking that, we make money our god. We make it the thing which we believe will rescue us from our worries.

Likewise, some people chase celebrity. And given the ability of anyone with a smart phone to upload videos of themselves to Facebook, Youtube, Tiktok, or whatever the latest social media fad is, it's easier for us now than at any time in the history of humanity, to broadcast ourselves to the world, and have our fifteen minutes of fame. And for many people, particularly the younger generation, that desire for celebrity status, has become their god. It is the thing, which—if they can achieve—will make them feel fulfilled. It will rescue them from the obscurity and anonymity which they dread.

Whether it's money or fame, or something completely different, unique to ourselves, all of us will have our own false gods. We will have those things which we long for, because we wrongly believe that achieving them will save us; they will change our lives; they will make us complete.

Well, heed the warning of Scripture. Such things as these are not your gods, who will rescue you. That honour belongs only and entirely to the Lord our God. He is the only one who can save us. He is the only one who can heal us. Turn away, therefore, from the false gods in your life, and place your hope and trust in the hands of the one, true, and living God.

Parish Notes On-line

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

Blythswood 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 again supporting Blythswood Care, a local charity which sends shoeboxes of essential items to the poor and needy in south eastern Europe. The next lorry will leave for Ukraine around the end of November, so we would need to have our boxes and items ready to go by Sunday 22nd November.

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.

Full details are posted online at:

<https://blythswood.org/shoeboxappeal/>

and also see the enclosed leaflet.

Filled shoeboxes, or bags of essentials should be left at the back of the church.

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!



Derek Mahon

by Wes Holmes



Derek Mahon who died on 1st October, after a short illness, was widely regarded as 'one of the most talented and innovative poets of the late 20th Century'. He was born in 1941 and by the time he was in his thirties was viewed by some critics as "one of the most gifted poets writing in English". His most celebrated poem, 'A Disused Shed in Wexford', has been described as the best single poem written in Ireland since the death of Yeats. He published over 20 volumes of poetry. He was also an accomplished dramatist who translated and adapted for the stage and television many of the French, Russian and Greek classics. President Higgins wrote of him, 'The loss of Derek Mahon, yet another artist gone from us in recent times, is like the falling of an oak tree ...'

Yet, when I recently mentioned his death to some of our parishioners, the response was, 'Derek who?' This was fairly surprising given that in the late forties and early fifties this "most gifted" poet's family attended St Peter's and Derek himself was a choirboy here. In an interview he gave to Magill Magazine in the 1970s he said, "I was choirboy in St Peter's on the Antrim Road in Belfast where I attended every Wednesday and twice on Sundays". The same article refers to his "being steeped in the Bible—particularly the New Testament—and in the Church of Ireland Hymnal". He acknowledged that his childhood experience of St Peter's was a major influence on his life.



Norman Derek Mahon grew up in Salisbury Avenue. He attended Skegoneil Elementary school, then Inst and on to Trinity College

and then to the Sorbonne, Paris. Despite his brilliance, Mahon never had the public presence of his friends, and fellow northern poets, like Heaney and Longley. For much of his life he struggled with alcoholism. He never returned to live in his native city; he led an almost itinerant academic life in France, the US and London before settling in County Cork where he resided until his death. But there was one visit home which he recorded in his poem "Afterlives" in 1975. After he disembarks from the ferry in Belfast harbour, its last two verses read:

And I step ashore in a fine rain
To a city so changed
By five years of war
I scarcely recognize
The places I grew up in,
The faces that try to explain.
But the hills are still the same
Grey-blue above Belfast.
Perhaps if I'd stayed behind
And lived it bomb by bomb
I might have grown up at last
And learnt what is meant by home.

The words "THANK YOU" are written in large, colorful, 3D block letters. Each letter is filled with a different color and has a patterned or textured surface. The letters are arranged in two rows: "THANK" on top and "YOU" on the bottom. The colors include green, brown, orange, blue, red, and yellow.

During the past few months I have been very grateful for all the support received from friends at St Peter and St James by way of letters, telephone calls and prayers. Many thanks to all for your thoughtfulness and kindness.

Eileen Taylor

FWO ENVELOPES FOR 2021

I know it is very early to be thinking about next year, but I will shortly be preparing the FWO envelopes for use during 2021.

During this unprecedented time for all of us, many of our parishioners have switched from using FWO envelopes to subscribing by standing order or by transferring directly into the parish's bank account. We are very grateful to those who changed to these alternative methods as a regular, dependable income is extremely helpful.

For those who made this change during 2020 and intend to continue one of these other methods of giving in 2021 and beyond, please will you let me know as soon as you can so that I know not to prepare envelopes for you.

If anyone else wishes to swap to one of these ways of giving during 2021 (ie, by banker's standing order or by transferring directly into our parish bank account), please contact me as soon as possible.

Please see the 'Rector's Notes' where he asks if it's possible to give a little more.

Many thanks for your help in this regard and please listen to the Government—**keep at a distance and stay safe.**

Noel Beattie
tel: 90 778 428
email: noel_innisfayle@msn.com

PARISHIONER CONTACT DETAILS

For speed of communication and to keep our records up to date please send your email address to the Parish Office at:

annecromie@stpeterbelfast.org

Also please don't forget to let us know if you move house, change your telephone number or change your email address.

PARISH REGISTER

Holy Baptism

"Born again of water and the Holy Spirit ..."

*Alexander James Delaney
son of Ryan and Rebecca Delaney
Old Mill Cottages
on 27th September 2020*



*Still with wet hair from his baptism,
Alex is wondering what just happened!!*

*Please send material for the December 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 23rd November. Thank you.*