

**THE PARISH OF ST PETER AND ST JAMES
BELFAST**

PARISH NOTES

OCTOBER 2020

Rector: The Rev'd Brian Lacey

St Peter's Rectory, 17 Waterloo Park South, Belfast, BT15 5HX



GOD . LOVING . PEOPLE

RECTOR'S NOTES

SERVICES IN OCTOBER

Throughout the month we will have two services in St Peter's each Sunday morning: our informal contemporary service at 10am, and our traditional choral service at 11am.

It was really lovely to have 16 people at our 10am service when we restarted it in mid-September. Unlike last year, this will be a weekly service, rather than monthly. Although informal and designed to be understood by children, it is nevertheless aimed at people of all ages. So please do come along some Sunday and see if you like it.

Our Harvest Thanksgiving service will be on Sunday 18th October. This is much later than previous years, in order to give us time to see what restrictions will be placed upon us by Coronavirus regulations. At this stage, it is unlikely that the usual decoration of the church will be permitted, but this will be kept under review. What we do need, however, is the collection of hygiene products and tins of food, which we can donate to the Welcome Organisation for the homeless. We can begin to amass such products in the coming weeks, so please bring something the next time you come to St Peter's on any Wednesday or Sunday before, or up to the 18th October.

CORONAVIRUS UPDATE

I am very pleased that everyone coming into St Peter's for worship has—by and large—followed our social distancing rules. There have been only a few blips, but I can understand that people want to speak to each other, and it's easy to slip

into old patterns of behaviour. However, please make a concerted effort to implement the rules which have been laid down by the central authorities of the Church of Ireland: use hand sanitiser; wear a face mask; sit in your assigned seat; do not move around the church; do not sit or stand within two metres of other people; avoid using the toilets; follow the instructions of the officiant and the churchwardens.

In the second half of September, churches in Dublin were closed once again in order to prevent the spread of the Coronavirus. Given that our own government has indicated that we could soon also face more restrictions here, it is entirely possible that St Peter's could close to the public for a few weeks at short notice. If that happens, you will see on the news that a Lockdown has been reintroduced, but I will also make an announcement on Facebook, and email everyone on the parish database. (If you were not receiving emails from me in recent months, but would like to do so, then please email me, brianlacey@stpeterbelfast.org and I will add you to the list.) Under such circumstances, David Cromie and I would continue to broadcast services online, but the church building would be closed to everyone else. Note that—at this stage—this is only a possibility.

ORDINATIONS

Every member of the Christian Church is important in God's eyes, and every one of us has a purpose which God has given us. One of the most obvious examples of God's assignment of function within his Church, is the ordination of individuals to the diaconate, priesthood, and episcopacy. In other words: deacons, priests, and bishops! Although there are many examples of how lay people can exercise leadership in the Church, the authority to shepherd the Christian flock is largely

vested in our ordained ministers, otherwise known as the clergy. Such ministers comprise those individuals who have felt God call them to a position of leadership; they have then been assessed, trained, ordained, and licensed by the Bishop. When a person is first ordained, they become a deacon. This gives them authority to lead worship, preach, and baptise, but they may not yet celebrate Holy Communion, nor pronounce the Absolution nor the Blessing. That authority is usually given after about a year, when the deacon is made a priest. Note that these are considered separate orders, which means that I am both a deacon and a priest, rather than a priest who has been promoted from being a deacon. On Sunday 13th September, Bishop George ordained several new deacons, including the now Reverends Alan McCracken and Nathan Ervine. Both Alan and Nathan belonged to our parish community in recent years, with Alan being amongst us for experience during the application stage of his road to ordination, and Nathan serving as our Children & Families Worker. It was delightful to see both of these reverend gentlemen entering Holy Orders, and I encourage you to pray for them and their families as they exercise the ministry of Deacon in their new parishes. Both of them have written short summaries about their journeys, which you can read elsewhere in these Parish Notes.

OUR NEW BISHOP AND ARCHDEACON

At the very end of 2019, Bishop Alan Abernethy announced his retirement after twelve years, and elected to succeed him was the Venerable George Davison, Rector of Carrickfergus and Archdeacon of Belfast. Owing to the Lockdown, the consecration of our new Bishop could not be held earlier this year as planned, and



instead it was held on Thursday 3rd September. Consequently, with Bishop George elevated to the episcopacy, he appointed the Rev'd Barry Forde to succeed him as Archdeacon of Belfast. Barry is currently the joint Church of Ireland and Methodist Chaplain at Queen's University. Please pray for Bishop George and Archdeacon Barry as they undertake their new duties. I hope that in the not-too-distant future I will be able to invite them to come to St Peter's.



DON'T BEGRUDGE THE LOVE GOD HAS FOR OTHERS

Why does the Christian Church exist? The answer to this question can be worked out by looking at what our Lord Jesus did when he was on earth.

In the Gospels, we read that Jesus reached out to the people who—for various reasons—had been forgotten by, or looked down upon by, the religious elite, and consequently felt disconnected from God.

And he did two things when he reached out to them: First of all, he fixed whatever reason they had to suffer in this world, which could include physical, mental, or spiritual problems.

And secondly, he restored their relationship with God. He made God known to them in a very personal and direct way, and through his death on the Cross, he bridged the gap between fallen humanity and God, through the forgiveness of our sins.

So, he dealt with people's problems both in this world, and also in the afterlife. Put simply, he made the lives of the people he encountered better, in this world and in the next.

Why, then, does the Christian Church exist?

Well, we, the Church, are here—first of all—because we are the modern recipients of that transformative ministry of Jesus. Jesus has made our lives better. Think about the gospel stories in which Jesus is surrounded by crowds who were clamouring for him to perform miracles or to hear him teach. And if he tried to get away for a while, the crowds would go out searching for him. They did that because they recognised the power of Jesus, and understandably they wanted to be near him.

That is why *we* come to church. Indeed, that is what the Church is. We are the crowd who want to be near Jesus because we have heard about his power to transform lives for the better, and we want him to do that for us, or we want to praise him for having done it.

Or at least, that is what we are supposed to be. Because one of the problems of the institutional church is that we can all become very blasé about the gift that has given us, we can become indifferent to what Jesus has done for us.

Particularly where people have been a member of the Church all their lives, and they have come to church services every Sunday since they were a baby, it can be difficult to recognise how God has actually made a difference to your life. It can be difficult to recognise the transformative work of Jesus.

So, whether or not that applies to you, I want each of you to reflect upon what Jesus has done for you, that has brought you to the point where you want to worship him. In what ways, has Jesus affected your physical, mental, or spiritual health, and how has he transformed your life for the better? It is vital that you know the answer to that question. What is the gift that you have received from God?

Now, I said that we, as the Church, are here—*first of all*—because we are the modern recipients of the transformative ministry of Jesus. But there is also a second reason. We are, each of us, also the instruments that Jesus uses to transform

the lives of the people in the world around us. We share in his ministry, acting as his hands, his feet, and his voice. And he uses us to share his gifts of new life and eternal life with other people.

This is important, and it harks back to what I've touched on a few times in recent months: which is, the Church must be outward looking.

We don't exist purely to give thanks to God for what he has done *for us*. As important as that is, we also exist to draw more people to God, so that *their* lives can be transformed as well.

This is relevant to Matthew 20: 1 - 6, which is the parable of the employer who gave the same pay to all of his workers, regardless of whether they had worked for him for the entire day, or just for one hour. That "payment" is the free gift of healing and salvation which God offers.

The purpose of the story is to highlight the self-centredness that religious people can sometimes have. "I've been a good Christian, coming to church Sunday by Sunday for so long: I deserve to be here. Why should we worry about other people, who have no interest in God? Or why should people who have only just come to faith, receive as much from God as I have?"

This parable criticises that sort of selfish attitude, and it reminds us that THE grace which God pours into our lives, is as much for longstanding members of the Church, as it is for people who haven't even yet walked through the church doors. So what Jesus wants from us, as the people who are here now, as the people who have been—to use the words of the gospel story—hired early in the morning, is that we must not begrudge the fact that God is going to draw more and more people to him as the metaphorical day goes on.

Our purpose as the Church is not just to collect our own reward from God—which is the free gift of healing and salvation—but to ensure that as many people as possible come

after us to do the same.

We should never think that God and the Church exist only for just us. God has enough love to heal and save everyone who wants it.

DON'T JUDGE HOW OTHER PEOPLE APPLY THEIR CHRISTIAN FAITH

For the first few months of the Lockdown, we did not have to wear a face mask when we went into a shop. And I vividly remember making mental remarks about the people who did. My gut reaction was that such people must have the virus, or why else would they be wearing a mask? And then the government told us that we all had to wear a mask. And I vividly remember walking into Tesco wearing one, feeling a bit self-conscious, but then realising that nearly everyone else was wearing one. And I then found myself judging the people who weren't wearing a mask.

Aren't I judgemental?

All throughout the Coronavirus Pandemic, we have been subjected to government rules and regulations and guidelines and recommendations. And one of the many sources of confusion that we have encountered, is the question of how strictly must we do what we are asked to do. Is something a law, for which we will face punishment if we don't do what the law states, or is it a recommendation, which is advising and encouraging us to do something, but we have a certain latitude to decide for ourselves whether or not we want to do it. Now, I'll leave it to you to mull over the difference between guidance and regulations in general, but specifically I want us to think about God's law, and to what extent we are obligated as Christians to behave in a certain way, as opposed to having a degree of freedom to behave as we choose.

Let's imagine I asked you: What rules in the Bible are set in

stone? There's no ambiguity to them. They are straightforward and you must obey them? You might point me in the direction of the Ten Commandments.

Let's take a couple of them: You shall not kill. And, you shall not lie.

You would think that they are straightforward enough. Don't kill anyone, and don't tell lies.

Of course, throughout the history of the Church, Christians have killed. And what's worse is that they have tended to kill other Christians who disagree with them over the finer points of Christian doctrine

Largely, such religious fighting is not a feature of our lives anymore (although it does certainly exist elsewhere in the world), but there are two aspects of modern life in which many Christians have a loose interpretation of the world "you shall not kill." One example is the question of whether a Christian can have an abortion, and another is whether a Christian can serve in the military. Is "You shall not kill" a commandment from God, or is it a piece of advice, which we can interpret as we see fit?

Let's take another commandment: "You shall not lie." I think anyone who has been given a dodgy knitted sweater by a great aunt at Christmas, will know that always being completely honest carries the risk of being unnecessarily offensive. All of us will have had occasions when we needed to tell "little white lies" in order to keep the peace, or make someone happy, or to prevent a bad situation from developing into an even worse one.

So again, we're left with the question: Does "You shall not lie" mean literally that, or do we have some wiggle room?

Now, those are examples of commandments which are crystal clear in the Bible. There are other rules which have crept into Christianity over the centuries, which don't come from the Bible.

For example, my mum's parents wouldn't let her go to the cinema when she was young because it was "the devil's house." Or, do you remember when Ian Paisley denounced Line Dancing—alongside all other forms of dancing—as "sinful"? Or—think about the National Lottery—there are many Christians who won't do the lottery, and refuse financial handouts from the Lottery to help their church, because they say it is a sin.

Despite the fact that nowhere, not once, is gambling mentioned in the Bible.

These sort of rules, which you could summarise as "good living", and which include the old standards of "don't drink" and "don't smoke" are not Biblical commandments.

Rather, they are attempts to apply the general principles of the Bible in an extreme way to modern life. But despite that, there are some Christians, and some Christian Churches, which proclaim that such things are "rules" that all Christians must obey.

In Romans 14: 1 - 12, St Paul is addressing an issue which is still as debated today as it clearly was during his lifetime. Should Christians eat meat?

Now, I'm not going to address that issue, but I do want to point out how Paul refers to the Christians who felt that it was wrong to eat meat. He calls them "weak in faith". What I need to stress is that Paul is not suggesting that all vegetarians are weak. Rather, he is making the point that when some Christians come up with an idea about how they think God wants us all to live (for example, by not eating meat) but without any Biblical commandments underpinning their ideas, then they are weak. They are trying to enforce something on everyone in order to either prevent themselves from being tempted to do what they shouldn't do because other people are doing it, or else because they make themselves the morality police, with the self-given right to

decide how everyone else should practice their Christian faith. We might see that as a strong position, because they are trying to impose something on others, but Paul calls it “weak”. The weakness is that when we try to impose our own conscience upon the behaviour of other Christians, we set ourselves up as more intelligent than they are, more spiritual than they are, more in tune with the mind of God than they are, more faithful than they are. And more often than not, we are none of those things.

Paul says, therefore, come to your own conclusions about how to apply the Christian faith in your own life. And don’t worry too much about how others implement theirs. And then he uses the famous line: “Who are you to judge?”

So what is it that I want you to remember from all of this?

Well, the first thing is that there is a difference between biblical commandments such as “You shall not kill” and man-made guidelines such as “You shall not gamble”. The second thing is that it is hard enough for Christians to keep God’s commandments, without Christians making up new rules for us to follow as well. And thirdly, we are all walking with God in our personal journey of faith in this life. We can only ever know where we are on our own journey. We can never fully understand where other people are, or what their relationship with God is. We must never, therefore, seek to impose upon other Christians what is right for us. It might not be what is right for them. And fourthly, don’t judge other Christians for not behaving as you do. You are not their judge. All of us, as Paul says, “will be held accountable” one day, but it is God who will judge us.

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”.

The Rev'd Alan McCracken



I grew up in Rathcoole and as a family we worshipped in St John's, Whitehouse. As a lad I was a member of the Boys' Brigade. That Christian organisation played an important part in my young life—it enabled me to meet new friends, but most importantly the Boys' Brigade introduced me to the Gospels and the teaching of Christ.

From an early age I always had my heart set on joining the army so at the age seventeen off I went for a life in the military—with the Royal Irish Rangers. I served my time, came home and got married to Karen. After that, I began working as a Financial Consultant. I worked in this sector for several years, but I missed army life so in 2008 I re-enlisted into the Army Reserve serving with the 2nd Battalion Royal Irish Regiment.

Throughout my life I have always had this voice in my head calling me to Christ which I ignored until I could no longer let it go. I had a strong vocation to share my faith with others so I gave my life to Christ to let Him choose the path I would take. Through the support of my friends, family, clergy and my local church, I began to explore more into my faith and began my vocational journey. I completed the Church of Ireland foundation course which led me on the journey to study for my Master's Degree in Theology at the Church of Ireland Theological Institute.

Throughout my training, I have been on various placements alongside my academic studies. One of my placements was here in St Peter's which I thoroughly enjoyed working alongside Rev Brian and David Cromie, whilst I was preparing to train for ordination as a student. Karen and I were made very welcome as part of your church community and I would like to thank you all for your support and hospitality.

I will be serving my Deacon internship at The United Parish of Christ Church & St John's alongside writing my dissertation and then I will become a Curate in the Church of Ireland.

The Rev'd Nathan Ervine



For those who don't know me, I am married to Grace and we have an almost 3-year-old son, Jacob (and another on the way in December!). Firstly, I would like to say thank you to you all as a Parish for all your support and prayers, both while I was with you in St Peter's and since moving on. I would also like to say a special thank you to the Rector!

I felt God was calling me into full-time ministry shortly after becoming a Christian. I spent the following few years discerning that call. I worked in my home parish of Lisburn Cathedral for a year and then did a degree in Theology at the Irish Baptist College. As part of my degree I did a year's placement in Derryvolgie Parish and a placement in All Saints Church, Vevey. In the final year of my degree, I also completed the foundation course, while working as the families' worker in St Peter's. After completing the course, I went for selection for ordination and was accepted to begin training in September 2018.

For the past two years I have been training for ordination full-time in Dublin at CITI which has been both a blessing (spending time with people, studying God's word, and doing placements in different churches) and challenging (being away from family during the week). During these two years I have been on placement in Lambeg Parish, Bangor Abbey and Hillsborough Parish.

I was ordained Deacon on the 13th September at St Anne's Cathedral to serve in Magheragall Parish alongside the Rev'd Nicholas Dark. Please pray for me over the coming year, as I continue to learn and grow in being a faithful minister of Christ and as I balance ministry, family life and writing a dissertation.

TRAIDCRAFT BOWS OUT

Mainly due to COVID-19 restrictions I am discontinuing with Traidcraft after December.

Many thanks to all of you who supported this very good cause by purchasing items from the stall.

Traidcraft is just one of the companies which promotes fair trade throughout the world—this means that in the production of the items they sell, the workers on the ground receive a fair wage. This is particularly important in the developing world.

If you agree with this worthy principle, and wish to continue supporting it, remember that most of the large supermarkets now sell at least some fairly traded items—just look for the symbol.



Traidcraft is not the only fair trading company—another one is Clipper.

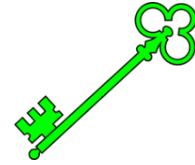
The more support the supermarkets get from you, their customers, the more fairly traded items they will stock—so do keep supporting the cause by searching them out!

Thanks again for your support over the years.

Jill Bradley

Key found

A key was found in the church grounds on Sunday 20th September. If you think it belongs to you please contact the Parish Office.



GENERAL VESTRY MEETING

A meeting of the Registered Members of the parish, postponed since Easter, will be held immediately following the 11am service on Sunday 18th October. At this meeting, a financial report will be given by the Treasurer, and elections will be held for the Select Vestry which will serve until Easter 2021. Copies of the Annual Report for 2019 will be available at the back of the church on Sunday 11th October

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.

Harvest
Thanksgiving
Sunday 18th October at 11am



What are you thankful for?

*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 19th October. Thank you.*