

Looking over my notes for the Easter General Vestry last year, I noticed that we were looking forward to a number of events. We were looking forward to our Anniversary Service. That was a wonderful event as we welcomed the two Archbishops and neighbouring clergy to celebrate 200 years of Christian worship on this site.

We also saw the publication of Daphne Henly's history of our Parish. As all have since agreed, this book struck a wonderful balance between recording not just the history of our Church building but also the community that has down through the years been associated with this place.

We also thought of the preparations being made to restore St Mary's Church. We have come a long way since that fateful morning when we heard the sounds of slates tumbling off the roof of the Church. The Select Vestry set about the task of beginning to raise the necessary finances to complete the work. We did not start in auspicious times. Everyone was being forced to tighten their belts. I remember saying at the time that the way to eat an elephant is in small pieces. And people set about the task. There were cake sales, garden open days, sponsored runs, a number of people took out additional weekly commitment, others made generous gifts. Then two years ago we found ourselves in the position of being able to start making plans. Robert Garrett undertook the position of Project manager. Surveys were commissioned, a scheme of works was drawn up and tenders sought. The trouble with surveys is that they reveal even more problems and this time last year we found the work was beyond the sums we had managed to raise and so the work was deferred for a year.

Over this past twelve months the Select Vestry has worked tirelessly to bring us to the point where we will be commencing work in 3 weeks time. The roof project committee, under the chairmanship of Derek Fennell have liaised with the Project management team. A variety of issues have had to be dealt with. We have bats in the roof – so under Conservation legislation provision has to be made for their welfare. We discovered that we stand on the site of a National Monument – the site of the Battle of Evora and also a burial site dating back to the 8th century. Dr Mark Clinton, an archaeologist of some distinction living in the Parish, is giving freely of his services.

Notwithstanding all this, in the autumn the Select Vestry was faced with a number of crucial decisions. One option was to sell St Fintans Park. In the short term that would have solved our problem but would have involved disposing of our one disposable asset which has the capacity to provide a valuable income stream once the outstanding loan is paid off. That was kept in reserve as option B. Our Treasurer, Tadhg Young, resolved to explore all options to enable us to retain St Fintans Park. A fund raising committee, under Billy Navan was charged with exploring all options. Prior to Christmas an appeal was made to the whole Parish seeking substantial gifts from those who were in a position to make them. Ian Malcolm was given the task of exploring all possible sources of grants. The response to the appeal has been remarkable. This enabled the Select Vestry to shelve option B and proceed with awarding the contract to Custom Crew, who have previously completed work on St John's Church in Clontarf and are currently completing work on the roof of Adare Manor. Ian Malcolm's work has already borne fruit with indications of

more to come. While I want to thank all those involved, I would particularly want to thank Tadgh for the leadership he has given in this whole project.

So in three weeks time the scaffolding will go up and we will be vacating the Church for the duration of the work. From Sunday 14th May services will be held here in the Parish Centre until the end of September. Worship in this space, if it is to work, cannot be simply as it is in the Church – particularly for the celebration of Holy Communion. It is, by the very nature of the smaller space available to us, going to be more intimate. For May and June we will continue with the two services at 9:30 and 11:00. The change in venue will mean that will have a different layout for our services. There will be more of a sense of a community gathered around the table for our worship and of course we will be seated closer together. This in itself will emphasise that we assemble for worship not as a group of separate individuals but as members of the Body of Christ.

The 9:30 service will be a quiet reflective service. There will be no hymns and a short sermon. It will obviously not be feasible to kneel for communion so communion will be taken standing.

The 11:00 services will follow our usual routines. As with the 9:30 it will not be feasible to kneel for communion. We are currently reflecting on how we retain the dignity and simplicity of receiving communion in this different setting. Please be patient as we seek to get this right.

How can you help? First and foremost by continuing to gather for worship – please do not see this as ‘time out’ from Sunday worship! The Church is not the building – it is the People of God gathered for worship. Please be patient as we fine tune arrangements and layout of the Hall.

Please offer to help in the various teams that are being brought together to clear the Church on Monday 8th, the groups that are coming together to assemble the Service Booklets (we had our first session on Friday and we were finished in 30 minutes) and also prepare the Parish Centre for worship. A number of you will have been getting ‘Doodle’ emails – don’t put them into spam, open them. It provides a simple way of organising groups and ensuring the work does not fall on just a few shoulders.

As is customary, I want to thank a number of people who have served the Parish over the last year. I thank the outgoing Church Wardens, Mrs Eileen Geaney, who has served as Rector’s Church Warden, and Mrs Carolyn O’Laoire, who has served as People’s Church Warden. Unfortunately Eileen has been unable to act for a large part of this time due to reasons of health. Thank you to a number of people who have stepped into the breach.

I would like to thank the outgoing Select Vestry for their continued commitment. As I said this has been a significant year. Issues have been debated thoroughly, all options considered and decisions arrived after mature reflection – and we still manage to smile! I would like to thank two individuals for their particular ongoing contribution. I speak of Garrett Wren who has continued to act as Secretary of our Select Vestry. I want to pay a special tribute to Tadhg in his continuing stewardship of our finances as Treasurer. A

Treasurer is more than just a book keeper, he has the task of planning for the future. In the midst of very heavy professional commitments Tadhg has given very clear leadership in guiding us through the decision making process, at all times ensuring the long term financial stability of the Parish.

I have already spoken of the considerable work undertaken by the Roof Project Group. Stephen Shaw, in addition to the work he has done on the roof project has continued in his usual quiet and unobtrusive way to attend to those many jobs that people often do not notice.

I would like to thank Randal Henly for his continued service as both Organist and Editor of the Parish Newsletter. I would like to thank him and the choir for the lead they give us in our Sunday worship and also the work that goes into our special services at Harvest, Christmas and Easter. Our Christmas Carol Service was particularly memorable with a very significant number of young people participating. Randal has built on that and is currently working with youngsters in the Burrow School in the development of a Junior Choir. I would at the same time like to thank the team of helpers who assemble and distribute the magazine.

I would also like to thank Bill Snodgrass and Rachel for their work in developing the music for the Family Service and the singers who help give a lead.

I would also like to thank Elke, our Youth Worker, for her contribution to our Family Services – she has a particular gift with prayer and some of her ideas with shadow puppets have been appreciated by all ages. I would also like to thank her for her work with the children out in the Hall during the Family

Communion. All this is in addition to her other work in her role as Youth Worker with us in our Youth Clubs. It is a joy to walk into the Hall on a Tuesday night and see the interaction between Elke and the youngsters. I would want to pay particular tribute to Louise Fuller in the work she has done in coordinating the Youth Work Project since its inception. This work has really been fundamental to our continued success in this whole project.

Jackie Lawless continues to organise the Parent and Toddler Group which meets every Thursday from 9:30 till 12. There is also a lovely atmosphere in the Joshua Room. This is a real service being offered to the community at large.

At the other end of the age spectrum, our very successful Social Group continues to meet on alternate Tuesday afternoons. One Tuesday a month the activities are based here in the Parish Centre and on the other Tuesday the group have organised a trip. Different people have offered their services in organising the events in the programme but Barbara Sargent has continued to bring her calm and imaginative enthusiasm to the overall organisation of this.

On the last Saturday of each month the men of the Parish meet to solve the issues of the day over a breakfast that would send shivers down any dietician's spine. Originally meeting in the Marine Hotel, they have now transferred their custom to the Deerpark Golf Club. Thank you to Stan McMullen, Denis Headon and Fred Spendlove for their continued coordination of this. Not to be outdone, the ladies of the Parish now meet on the first Saturday of the month in the Marine Hotel for their breakfast – they offer a healthy option – I'm not sure how many take it. I would like to thank Rachel for the way in which she has established and coordinated this.

The Garden Gang continues to thrive under the leadership, or should I say command, of Lorna Hopkins. The wonderful teas that Mary used to provide are now provided by Gowan Bryce and Susan Massey. The next meeting of the Group is next Saturday – new faces very welcome. Thank you also for Derek Fennell and the team for mowing the grass. Again new faces welcome.

Then there are those groupings that meet in the Parish, that involve members of the Parish and enhance the life of the Parish. There is the Mafeking Scout Group that meet here in the Parish Centre, to which so many of our young people belong, and who provide wonderful help at the time of the Fete. There is the Bridge Club that meets here on a Wednesday night that has its own unique friendly atmosphere and makes significant annual contribution to our Parish Funds. There is the St Mary's Golf Society that over the years has organised three competitions a year, a wonderful camaraderie and over the years has contributed to the finances of the Parish. Then there is the Art Group that meets on a Friday morning. Iris has a most wonderful knack of teaching. Thank you Iris for your encouragement and the contribution the group makes to Parish Funds.

We would like to thank Mr Denis Headon for his stewardship of the Free Will Offering Envelopes – he is always ready to respond to requests for new sets of envelopes. I would also like to take this opportunity of thanking those who contribute through this scheme or through standing order. Details of how you can participate in this are to be found on the small cards in the pews

I would like to thank Carolyn O'Laoire for her work as Administrator of the Garden of Remembrance. The path is in the process of being enhanced thanks to the generosity of Gillian and Mossy Shanahan

I would like to thank Cathy Fennell for her continued work in managing our Parish Centre. She has been very proactive in securing tenants so we have maintained our income from bookings. I would also like to thank Jane Caldwell for the quiet efficiency with which she maintains all the necessary supplies for the Parish Centre

The Fete, that wonderful community event in our annual calendar, is now drawing closer. This year this is being organised by Carolyn O'Laoire, Stephen Shaw and Kay O'Neill. I would like to thank them for the huge amount of work that has already been done in preparation and ask everyone to pull in behind them as the day of the Fete approaches.

An important aspect of our life is fellowship, whether in Church or out of Church. I would like to thank some people in particular. I would like to thank those who have been organising our coffee with the midweek service. The coffee after Church each Sunday has been particularly appreciated by those new to the Parish, providing as it does a chance to meet and establish contact with people in a way you cannot do on your way out of the Church door. Thank you to Valerie for coordinating this and to the ladies who have taken on the job of serving it each Sunday. On the odd Sunday we have missed it due to the absence of volunteers, which I think has brought home to us how valuable this meeting after Church has become.

Our thanks are also due to Mr Stan McMullen for his continued work as distributor of the Church Review and to Eddie Kerr, who continues to look after the Church of Ireland Gazette. Both would welcome new subscribers.

Finally, thank you to one and all for your continue support of the Parish, in your attendance at worship, in your financial support and the many and varied ways, seen and unseen, in which you each enhance the life of the Parish of Howth.

In the past twelve months I have performed 6 Baptisms and I officiated at 1 wedding.

This year there were the following funerals:

Muriel Robinson

Joan Kerr

Paul Kavanagh

Norah O'Byrnes

Erwin Lanz

I am pleased to announce that Denis Headon has agreed to act as Rector's Church Warden for the coming year and that Mr Stephen Shaw has kindly agreed to continue to act as Rector's Glebe Warden. I would emphasise that these burdens cannot continue to be born by the Wardens alone. This year we will be drawing in others to fulfil the tasks of preparing the Church for worship and doing many of the maintenance tasks in the Church and Parish Centre..