FOR I WILL RESTORE HEALTH TO YOU, AND YOUR WOUNDS I WILL HEAL, DECLARES THE LORD...”

JEREMIAH 30:17
Welcome in Church?

The Derry and Raphoe Diocesan Board of Social Responsibility are working together to find new ways to support children with additional needs and their families. Kirsty McCartney reports.

A few months ago I read an article about a father who had taken his two sons, one who is on the Autistic Spectrum, to an Evesong service in King’s College. The father describes how, during the service, he was approached by an usher and asked to leave with his autistic son as he was being too noisy and disturbing other people worshipping. The 9 year old who is non-verbal makes his excitement known through shouting out and laughing. He loves church buildings and choral music so I am sure he was delighted to be there. The father left with his sons but did not leave it there - he wrote a letter to the Dean which was published online. The Dean issued a public apology noting King’s College tries to meet the needs of all who attend, but had spectacularly failed the family on this occasion. As a result the Dean met with the father and the two are working on different ways to make the church and worship more accessible. Sadly this is not an isolated incident and families with children with additional needs can often be faced with various challenges in everyday life. Church is no exception to this.

If you have experience of working with children with additional needs, or have someone in your family with additional needs, you will know life can be very challenging, and sometimes something as simple as going to church is far from simple. If the child has sensory issues, will church cause a meltdown? Will service sheets be printed in large print? Will there be somewhere to put a wheelchair, so it is not seen as a hazard? These and more questions should be considered before even entering a church building (as long as there are no steps)!

My family has first-hand experience of taking a teenager in a wheelchair to church. For the most part we were lucky as our church family saw the need to make changes and even out a pew so that the person in the wheelchair formed part of the congregation and was not stranded in the aisle. But for every positive there was nearly always a negative. Like the boy in Evesong, my sister was non-verbal but loved music and let her excitement show vocally. Many people accepted this but tuts could also be heard around the church building. This reaction of a minority had a negative impact and often leaves a feeling of being disheartened and isolated.

It is not all bad news though as we as a family of God do so many things to help. Instead of tutting if someone non-verbal makes noise at the “wrong” time during the service, talk to the family afterwards – and say something to the child like “you were really enjoying the music today,” or “it was lovely to hear you joining in our worship.” Be available to help families if needed. For an example if an Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) child has a meltdown, lie there to help. If there are other children with the family engage them and allow the parents to remove and space to deal with the meltdown if needed! (Be sure to adhere to Safeguarding Trust guidelines) Ask parents what you can do to support them - they will know best and it is better than second-guessing.

Work with Sunday School leaders to make the material inclusive. Volunteer to be a one-to-one support for the child, after going through Access NI and Safeguarding Trust Training. Recent should not be ruled out to be there for every lesson - they need time to worship independently. Acknowledge the family during social times and do not leave them on the fringes. It takes time to get to know all the family. Talk to the children with additional needs - not just about them or over their heads. Possibly more important than talking is listening. When you ask a question listen to the response - if hospital appointments are happening what is the outcome? How is the new school year going? People may not want you to know all details but a listening ear is always beneficial. Once this relationship is established you can ask if there is anything in particular for which the family would appreciate prayer.

These are only small changes but could make a massive difference. We are all part of the family of God and are all entitled to worship together. The Board of Social Responsibility and SEEDS Children’s ministry are working together to find new ways to support children with additional needs and their families. A few parishes have taken some training in Makaton (a form of communication using words, signs and symbols) and it is hoped we can provide more training for parishes in the future. If there is anything we can practically do to help please do not hesitate to get in touch by emailing kirsty@derryandraphoe.org

In this issue of revision we welcome back familiar faces and old revision friends to learn of their lockdown experiences and thoughts.

A friend of the Diocese, Bishop Tim Wambunya of Butere Diocese in Kenya, rekindled the link between his diocese and ours in 2016. This link was originally forged in 1916 when 2 children of Bishop George Chadwick of Derry and Raphoe worked there as missionaries. Bishop Tim’s many friends in Derry and Raphoe joined in prayer when they learnt of his hospitalisation due to Covid. Bishop Tim features on our cover, pictured on his release from hospital.

A new friend of the diocese, Bishop Halli Spiers of Mahajanga, originally from the parish of Urmey, gives revision a glimpse of life some 9,200km away, during Covid-19.

Whilst a number of articles in this issue deal with the effect of Covid 19 on our lives, their optimistic outlook is heartening. Other features add to this breath of fresh air blowing through our diocese. During the lockdown months we have missed our shared worship in the familiar surroundings of our local churches. The good news is that we have rediscovered an important truth which we have always known. All of us, lay people, clergy and those in Church leadership, are the real vibrant Church which continues to worship and witness collectively through the creative and imaginative use of social media, internet and radio as well as snail mail and phone!

Always before us the affirming words of Bishop Andrew – “We are a people of faith, not fear.”

Our faith is in the God of restoration. We live in a broken, argumentative world and sometimes we feel as if life breaks us. Some feel frightened, helpless and without hope, but we know we can place ourselves in the restorative, repairing and healing hands of God. God can take the broken pieces of our lives, our shattered and damaged hearts and repair them. He is a God of restoration. He will sustain us with strength and encouragement to continue our journey with him. Jeremiah 30:17 “For I will restore health to you and heal your wounds, says the Lord.”

Each day we pray anew, Thy Kingdom come.

Rev Katie McAteer, the Editor
E: kmcateer51@gmail.com

*Diocesan Manoeuvres - articles will feature these appointments or moves occurring between the last issue of n:vision and 3 weeks prior to issue date of current issue. Up-to-the-minute news of clergy and lay appointments, moves and other announcements may be found through the Diocesan Facebook page and website www.derry.anglican.org

In this issue...
Dear friends,

How could anyone accurately describe what we have been living through over these last months? The world has changed and we have been changed with it.

As we slowly and tentatively move out of lockdown our thoughts are with those who are wrestling with grief due to COVID-19 and those who have known added pain in their bereavement as a result of the necessary restrictions of these days. Financial hardship and uncertainty have become unwelcome companions to many. Children and young people have missed classroom and friends, and grandparents have longed for the loving embrace of their grandchildren. The trials of this time have been more than matched by the kindness and love that has been so evident. Many had been seeing your kingdom come.

As Christians we believe it is the most wonderful thing in the world to be followers of Jesus Christ and, at this time, maybe more than ever, we are called to engage with those who are searching for faith, hope and love. The dedication of those at the frontline of medical care has been, quite simply, astounding and must never be forgotten.

The days ahead as we journey back to some sense of normality will be uncertain but each step, no matter how small, is important and gives us hope.

Each Sunday during lockdown I have surfed the internet and have been able to feel part of the community relationships with others, in the way of connecting and kindling greater love and give us peace. Amen

God is near in this time of distance. Show us protection in the embrace of your kingdom. May we place our hope in you above all else.

Bishop Andrew

Write...
N’vision is grateful to Bishop Hall Speers and his wife, Sarah, for the regular updates from Mahajanga. These communiqués are entitled ‘Our Mad Life’.

The Virus arrives
Last Thursday (19th March) having stopped all international flights Madagascar was celebrating the fact it was free of the coronavirus. Not being quite so upbeat I called a meeting of the diocesan Development Committee at short notice fearing that such meetings might soon be banned. We had some useful discussion as we went along about the very forward and a lot of depressing feedback about projects wanting interimly for signatures from various government offices. I asked the rural dean of our southern district what his weekend programme was and he told me he was going to a parish meeting in Manarantany on Saturday. I made a stop decision to go as this avoided a long walk at a later date. I might have a chance to look after me and it would be a great opportunity to know at first hand what is happening in the church in that area. I caught an early taxi to the airport, met the rural dean, the Revd Constant, met the mayor of the town with an entourage and arrived in Madagascar via air passengers from Paris. We sat on the verandah of Erick’s house and listened to the radio news on the radio facility of a mobile phone: a message from the President of Madagascar, followed by a very clear statement from the Cardinal Archbishop saying all RC churches and schools must close that morning and remain so. I had already made provision for a social distancing service for the morning in my eventualty. I phoned the Venerable and confirmed that our churches must shut that Saturday night. In less than an hour the mayor of the town with an entourage was out with a megaphone telling everyone that all children were to be kept at home as schools were shut, all places of worship would shut down that night and everyone was to stop shaking hands and wash their hands regularly. Very efficient and very clear. This was repeated throughout the morning. Thus sadly Madagascar has joined the rest of the world as we struggle with the unknown outcome of the coronavirus pandemic.

Our Mad Life - Life Goes On
An Easter like no other - we all hope. I am hugely impressed by how many continue to update and advance their IT communications skills. I struggle, before the lockdown I had arranged that we would use the school Easter holiday to assemble people for various meetings: the Mission and Evangelisation department, the Development department, schools, and a committee organizing the 25th anniversary of the diocese in August. Since the travel regulations had been eased we decided to meet as planned. So I had to get busy preparing agendas and some input. From a financial point of view it was good to have all these back to back since some people - archdeacon, rural deans - sit on most of these. But it came as a shock to be presented with the travelling costs. Due to social distancing we had to halve the number of people as we had originally intended. The staff has been reduced to one chef and one waiter. This also exposes another problem. Few employers pay social security to their employees and so this man finds himself with a pregnant wife and no source of income and no right to any benefits. One is so conscious that this situation is spreading around the world. The positives. Madagascar believes it has a plant medicine for Covid-19 and so far nobody here appears to have died from the virus. The organic treatment is developed by a government agency from Artemisia, a plant used in malaria treatment, and the publicity says it is to be free to residents! As we heard the sad news that Madagascar had its first case of covid-19, the person was one of the 9 o’clock services unimaginable, numbers were less. At the end of the service my robes were soaked through and I realised another reason why the earlier service felt so good - the temperature! Yesterday all seemed good here in Mahajanga as we heard the sad news that Madagascar had its first case of covid-19. The person was one of the 9 o’clock services unimaginable, numbers were less. At the end of the service my robes were soaked through and I realised another reason why the earlier service felt so good - the temperature! Yesterday all seemed good here in Mahajanga as we heard the sad news that Madagascar had its first case of covid-19. The person was one of the 9 o’clock services unimaginable, numbers were less. At the end of the service my robes were soaked through and I realised another reason why the earlier service felt so good - the temperature!... Meanwhile life goes on and I find myself in that strange position, that I suspect most of you are in, constantly asking the question. ‘What can I plan?’... Will Mahajanga now be cordoned off like the capital and Toamasina? It told uncertainty about fixed dates in fact the ‘new normal’. What hasn’t changed is people’s belief that the bishop has access to the goose that lays the golden egg and he will dispense funds if pleased with persistently. Pointing out that “the goose” is currently in lockdown and not providing, goes unheard and so the requests flow in. We have just received relief funds from the Barnabas Fund, which many of you will be familiar with, to be distributed equally between the clergy, catechists (Lay Readers) and evangelists which works out at just under £20 each. For some of them this will be a huge blessing, for others not so significant. I find myself sheltering behind the regulations when I know how different people’s circumstances are. A lot of my devotional reading today has been about discernment. One bit of advice hit home: if your plan is absolutely clear both in the short and the long term, the chances are that it’s yours and not God’s. We are not endowed with clear knowledge of the future but are called to take one step at a time. Thank you for your love and prayers.

At the moment ‘Isara’ is not in Mahajanga, but Bishop Hall has sent emails in this issue we read highlights of some of his comings and goings.

The New Normal?
Social distancing demanded that our Sunday morning Sung Eucharist at the cathedral be divided into two services. 6pm and the usual time of 8am. Accordingly I surfaced slightly blearily eyed at 5am and found myself in the street at dawn at 6am behind groups of young people laughing and chatting. I thought “If only these young people were all making their joyful way to church!” I was duly astounded to discover that they were indeed all on their way to the cathedral. I had been dreading all those hymns, normally nine, plus chant and psalm, Gloria, etc… To my surprise, given the cathedral had a large congregation with a lower average age, the singing was a joy and it was good to be back to what felt normal - except that it wasn’t.

Today, Thursday, the classes sitting state exams today were less. At the end of the service my robes were soaked through and I realised another reason why the earlier service felt so good - the temperature!
In the blink of an eye our many members became Indoor Members - confined to home, cocooning or in self-isolation - freedom whipped away, and “stay home, save lives” became the order of the day.

Other members found themselves in the front line as nurses, teachers, carers, cleaners, shop workers, food providers and others. A member recently remarked, “whilst life has taken on a different dimension in ways of working and navigating through the inconvenience of the restrictions, life for us, as key workers, has retained a certain amount of normality.”

We dreaded the thought of loneliness and have missed visits of family and neighbours and the loss of loved ones. Yet members have found new ways of coping and supporting each other within the unexpected and in true fashion rallied round. A Branch survey reveals that branches have been busy organising phone calls, creating WhatsApp groups, facetimeing, zooming and keeping in touch by sharing prayers, hymns, photographs, jokes, recipes and thoughts. Jean Stevens, a Branch Leader, now conducts her gentle exercise class, “Fitness for Fogeys” on YouTube. In Lickpatrick and Dunnalagon members down tools at 8pm on Mondays to say the Grace, wherever they may be.

Little things have meant a lot. Templmore Branch Leader with her Sunday School put together some 20 Treat Bags for indoor and older members in the Parish. These were “safely” delivered to people’s homes with a cherry note. In Drumahose MU members contributed to Easter hampers, and boxes of home-made tray bakes that were delivered on VE Day. Recipients were surprised, delighted, and uplifted by this thoughtful gesture. Members feel very blessed by the kindness and compassion of fellow members, the neighbour who has pushed a note through the door, the weekly shopper, the letter on the mat, the welcoming nature of the community spirit around them. There has been a bond of togetherness and a sense that “God is good. It is what it is, and we must get on with it.”

Every crisis provides opportunities. Those on-line have felt spiritually enriched and in touch through wonderful reflections and services online. Off-line members have been encouraged to link in with DAILY HOPE the free phone line(0800 804 9044) created by the Church of England which contains an array of options from listening to hymns, prayers, services to the great stories behind the hymns. Option 4 then Option 8 leads you daily to Mothers’ Union Midday Prayers.

Sewing machines, knitting needles and crochet hooks have been busy - our partner hospitals will be thrilled to receive the array of comfort teddies, neonatal jackets, cap, blankets, fiddle muffs, cancer drain bags, knee blankets and caps for pre-term babies that have been created. Crafing has adapted to Covid times and members have made facemasks, facemask adaptors, scrubs, scrub bags, knotted doctors and nurses and crochet Scrubs Bears. For those isolated in hospital away from their families knitted hearts are being provided in pairs with a prayer. The patient / care home resident keeps one at hand and the family has the other - it is a means of connection and a way of saying “you have not been forgotten - you matter”. In Raphoe Diocese, Letter and Clonmonaghan Branches have forwarded dozens of hearts to Letterkenny University Hospital ICU Unit where they have been much appreciated.

Altnagelvin Hospital have been delighted to receive Toiletry Packs whilst Foyle Women’s Aid (FWA) would now welcome them, together with baby supplies, e.g. nappies, blankets etc., as they prepare for increased numbers arriving as lockdown unwinds. Unfortunately, lockdown has led to a four-fold increase in the incidence of domestic abuse reports and we are thankful that throughout lockdown helplines have remained open.

A note from Donegal Women’s Domestic Violence Service (DWDVS) reads, “The families we are working with at this time are financially struggling much more than usual. Food hampers or vouchers would be greatly appreciated and single and double duvets and beding and towels too for the refuge as we are going through them quickly due to increased hygiene precautions.”

With the rise in FOOD POVERTY members have been encouraged to drop items into the Food Banks in their local supermarkets. The ladies in Enigal MU are involved with their parish in making meals for the vulnerable in their community.

If any branch or parish can donate to our hospital projects, FWA, DWDVS or to their local food bank provider, this practical help would be very much appreciated.

In coming months we ask you to remember our AFIA scheme - Away From It All breaks - if you know of a family who have been under particular duress and would welcome a treat day - please contact Elizabeth Fielding, in confidence, at drmu.afia@gmail.com for details.

On-line we have been busy on Facebook page, Mothers’ Union Raphoe & Raphoe, through which we have aimed to post uplifting thoughts, share our MU stories, promote health and wellbeing, support the bereaved, family life and keep members in touch with our diocesan partners and MU worldwide. The Derry & Raphoe Mothers’ Union website is back up and running at www.derry.mothersunion.ie

Our monthly newsletter The Derry & Raphoe MU News - is now being shared around branches. The main website for Mothers’ Union www.mothersunion.org contains an array of activities in their section “Challenging Times”.

In abnormality we have created a new normality. Yes, God does move in mysterious and unexpected ways but the hymn writer, William Cowper, also invites us to trust and take fresh courage, “God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform...one expects plain...The clouds you so much dread are his own interpreter, and he will make it easy to trust and take fresh courage, "God is good. It is what it is, and we must get on with it.”

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Coronavirus has a huge impact on the rich countries of the world. Our health systems are stretched and struggling. Tens of thousands of lives have been lost and the death toll grows with each passing day. But in the world's poorest countries, perhaps just three weeks behind the UK and Ireland, a catastrophe is unfolding. The infection has reached every one of the countries in which Christian Aid works, with the highest numbers of reported cases being in Brazil, India and the Dominican Republic.

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The governments of poor countries lack the social welfare systems to help those who lose their jobs due to lockdown. For the newly unemployed in these countries, there will be no government bail-out or guaranteed 80% of their salaries to help ensure they are still able to feed their families. Many people will have no choice but to go to work, spreading the infection.

The poorest people work in jobs that are insecure and cash-in-hand, leaving them with just enough money to get by each day. Even a single day of lockdown would cause hardship.

In Afghanistan, our local partner has given hygiene kits containing soap to 1,400 people.

In Afghanistan and Bangladesh, we are sharing vital health information via religious leaders.

In Bangladesh and Myanmar, we are bringing food and soap to families facing hardship after losing their jobs due to the lockdown.

In Myanmar, our local partners have given soap to more than 30,000 people and distributed 2,000 surgical masks.

In the Rohingya refugee camps of Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh, we are setting up isolation areas in health facilities to prevent the spread of fake news.

In Angola, El Salvador, Gaza and Guatemala we are helping women at risk of domestic violence during lockdown.

In South Africa, our local partners are campaigning to ban evictions during the pandemic so that shanty town dwellers don’t face an even greater risk of infection.

Please donate today to save lives. Visit caid.ie/coronavirus or call 028 9064 8133 (Belfast) or 01 496 4070 (Dublin).
Here is a timetable for the week, with the themes for each day:

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<td>Worship Wind Up</td>
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Join Derry and Raphoe Youth as On The move goes virtual
Release a pandemic of Christian love in every parish and community

Wednesday 1st July - Sunday 5th July 2020
All ages are welcome to participate
Sign up or register your interest: dryboard123@gmail.com

On the move

Over the past few years, churches in our diocese have raised almost £200,000 for the 'Nets for Nigeria' project and to buy cows for Butere.

We may feel that the pandemic presents our own churches with some considerable challenges, but there is never a time when we are not called to help and support fellow Christians in other parts of the world who are in need of our help. As soon as the situation allows, our diocese will be promoting a project to support the Church in Mahajanga.

Why Mahajanga?

On March 31st, 2019, Rev’d Hall Speers, a son of the Diocese, was ordained Bishop of Mahajanga, 6,000 miles away in the Indian Ocean. He had not sought the position - in fact he had retired from active ministry - but he said "yes" to the call. "It just seemed such a direct call of God." Now, Bishop Speers, his clergy and their parishioners need our help.

Where is Mahajanga?

Mahajanga is on the northwest coast of the island of Madagascar. The diocese is seven times the size of Wales.

How can we help?

Financial resources in Mahajanga are almost non-existent! Our Diocesan Board of Mission and Unity, in conjunction with Bishop Speers, has identified three priorities:

- Rice - buying a rice field costs around £4,000 and sustains the local economy and the local parish in particular. Bishop Speers has already managed to buy one field but can see great benefit from having more.

- Rectories - a decent house can be built for around £2,500. Currently, none of the clergy have adequate accommodation. The provision of quality accommodation will enable more leaders to serve in the diocese.

- Resources - The diocese plans to train more leaders, ordained and lay, with a focus on equipping the church with evangelists. Currently, though, the diocese doesn't have the resources to do this. Many young people and adults are confirmed each year but most can't afford Bibles. In Mahajanga a little can achieve a lot!

The Covid-19 virus has affected the people of Mahajanga, as it has affected us, adding to the considerable challenges they already face. But Bishop Hall and his people are determined to press forward, bearing the light of Christ for all to see.

How might your parish support the project?

Firstly, and most importantly, by praying. Then, when the situation allows, we will be inviting parishes to consider what they might do to support our fellow Christians practically. Perhaps you could use this time to think of ideas that might raise awareness of the need and gather donations?

What is the next step?

Please take time to consider if and how you can support this project. When lockdown lifts and we can come together again, perhaps you could get a few people together to work out how best your parish can play its part. No doubt ideas will flow. It is envisaged that the project will run until the end of 2021, depending on circumstances. In March 2019, Bishop Hall Speers answered. Can you hear Mahajanga calling? 'Mahajanga Calling' is a project promoted by the Diocesan Board of Mission and Unity.
nvision asked some of our previous ‘cover personalities’ to share some of their thoughts and experiences of lockdown.

In lockdown but not locked-in...

JONNY McNEE

Like countless others I’m sure, at the start of the year I chucked at the endless stream of social media funny making light of what was happening on the far side of the world.

Gags about how it started; DIY masks and how we, in the organised modern world, would take it in our stride if it ever came here. However, there soon came a paint when the sniggering decreased proportionately with the increasing height of our toilet roll stockpiles. Like a twisted version of the European Song Contest, countries started to deliver the Covid scores as this unseen terror rampaged westwards.

‘lockdown’ I hope you, like myself, have used the time to re-focus. In my personal ‘lockdown’, I have found myself just slowing down. But over the past month, I have found myself to cope. Robin and I know we are very fortunate. Family have shopped for us and left messages on the doorstep and backed the peak’ and most importantly ‘protect kindness. Those that are not self-serving, divisions were never far away as they bickered about dark days ahead, but the usual tribal divisions were never far away as they bickered behind the scenes. The virus doesn’t care what foot you kick with.

And so we all sit and participate in what has become the most surreal version of Big Brother. It’s a little bit hit film without the biting. We were all entertained at first by the internet ‘look at me’ brigade who delivered a barrage of amusing dance videos, and sketches to ensure their profiles were maintained, as they could no longer be seen out in public. But over the past month, I have found myself greatly appreciating genuine acts of human kindness. Those that are not self-serving, internet ‘look at me’ brigade who delivered a barrage of amusing dance videos, and sketches to ensure their profiles were maintained, as they could no longer be seen out in public.

Each Covid death is a tragedy, and this ‘new normal’ is going to take some getting used to. But while society may have been in lockdown, I have appreciated so much of our lives trying to draw closer to people in good days and in terrible times, here and around the world. Now an unseen virus means the best we can do is stay afloat. From others, learning at home we were told would be for our children and grandchildren, it has been much more than that, as adults, learn how to use different ways of communicating. Meetings by Zoom, Microsoft and Skype have connected families and work colleagues alike and for me they have imposed a new, and probably misused, discipline of what to speak and when to be quiet. Society marked 75 years since the end of the war in Europe and our thoughts were focussed on similarities between then, just 6 years ago and now, people died far from their loved ones and a generation of those bereaved could only shed their tears in silence.

For those of us fortunate to have a garden it has been a beautiful spring and early summer. For those trying to manage in cities and high rise flats the good weather may well have been oppressive. So many vulnerable - children, students, those who watch their businesses and jobs in jeopardy, the elderly and those alone. So many frightened, abused, hungry in their own homes. So many missed occasions of sadness and joy for young and old.

At the beginning of lockdown I woke one morning to hear the birds sing and look at the sky and wondered why I couldn’t go out and gather together what I miss most: my Church, my family, my friends. But my Church, my family (five of them are doctors and the subject of our constant prayers) and my friends have taught me that new ways of living and of receiving God’s love and my dependence upon Him.

The lockdown has given everyone a chance to “re-set” – to examine ourselves and prioritise what really matters. For me, my ministry of preaching and teaching God’s word continues via the electronic information highway… the internet, but not at the expense of getting to know God more because He has graciously given me time to do so.

“For everything there is a season,” Ecclesiastes 3:1. Use this season, challenging as it is to get to know God more.

Summary of the main points.

1. Since the beginning of lockdown I have found myself just slowing down.
2. Each Covid death is a tragedy, and this ‘new normal’ is going to take some getting used to.
3. The lockdown has given everyone a chance to “re-set” – to examine ourselves and prioritise what really matters.
4. The pace of modern life with all its demands mean that we have to be confident that we will get there.
5. Many people know about God but don’t know God. Others claim to follow His ways, but act in disobedience to His word. Daniel 12:4 “many will run to and fro and knowledge shall be increased” but is that making things better?

SUMMER 2020

ROY WALKER

From the beginning of the global pandemic and the change to our lives, I’ve been asked to write a reflection to “be still and know that I am God”.

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Many people know about God but don’t know God. Others claim to follow His ways, but act in disobedience to His word. Daniel 12:4 “many will run to and fro and knowledge shall be increased” but is that making things better?
BISHOP TIM WAMBUNYA
A report from Kenya Citizen TV...

Bishop Tim Wambunya makes full recovery after 18 days in ICU. Even as the numbers continue to soar, the Good news is a total of 464 have recovered and discharged from hospital. One such lucky patient is Bishop Tim Wambunya who came close to death and was even placed on the life support machine - a ventilator for 18 days. Bishop Wambunya of the Anglican Church of Kenya Diocese of Bungoma who contracted the virus while on a trip to the United Kingdom speaks of his ordeal on You Tube.

Bishop Tim Wambunya makes full recovery after 18 days in...
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RZ-a_Sk9aYk

In April the Diocese of Derry and Raphoe heard that Bishop Tim had been admitted to Hospital. Along with his wife, Gertrude, he visited Derry and Raphoe in October 2018. He is a man of deep faith who was uplifted to learn that many of his friends’ here, in his sister diocese, were thinking of him and praying for his recovery.

PAUL CLARK
This time last year, I thought that Brexit would be the defining event of my long journalistic career. I was wrong! Now, I know better.

Until December, I had never heard of Wuhan - a huge city with a population of over 11 million; and certainly not the Province of...woefully lacking…

Fast forward to the present, and, as I look to the middle of March, my wife has been self-died in a hospice. He had been living with two cancers. In the last days of his life Dad 16 secondary source on his death certificate. Currently, I am living with my mum, which is something of a silver lining for her. So these days I am providing for two families and fronting UTV Live. In a sense, delivering of what too many people are experiencing.

At the time of writing, church services have been temporarily suspended in most places but by a bug. He said, “Part of the reason in nuclear deterrents, but we’ve actually invested very little in a system to stop...in our own supreme self-confidence? As people of faith, we need to return to basics. The Bible was written, mostly, in tough and dangerous times. God is not out in space somewhere with no understanding. God came to live among us in Jesus. He can empathise with our humanity. He writes to us as a Coach who understands and offers us mercy and grace in this time of uncertainty and anxiety. Let us pray for one another - the wider community - and offer our prayers for our elderly loved ones who have been isolated for so long.

IAN MCELHINNEY
This has been a very trying time for many people. Those still working have been under pressure at the frontline, or busy behind the scenes desperately seeking ways to go forward once the restrictions ease. Some have been unlucky to have contracted the virus. A few will have had to fight it with all their might. Some will have lost that fight. Some will be coping with the effect of losing a loved one, a friend or a pet. It feels like watching helplessly from the sidelines. All of us will have been experiencing anxiety and stress as we cope with uncertainty, fear, frustration and economic pressures. In contrast it seems trivial to talk about my own experience.

I have been unemployed, yes, and am currently unemployable as an actor in TV and theatre. However, beyond that, I have been one of the lucky ones. The weather has been unbearably good, and I have a garden and a house which have benefitted from my having time to do work in them. I am, like many, now keen to know the when, and how, of my return to work. Unfortunately the resolution of these questions is still some time away. I just hope I can stay upbeat and positive while I wait for the answers. I wish everyone, my parents only a few times a year, to have more time with them than I have in a decade. Without lockdown, that would not have happened.

So if you’re fortunate enough that your elderly loved ones have stayed well through this, when you do get to see them again, embrace every single second. Listen to every story. You might not have heard them all before.
Plenty has gone wrong in my life, things that may have you asking why would God allow such things to happen to a supposedly good person. What follows are my theologically uneducated thoughts on it all. However, they have been formed by my 21 years of following Christ.

James 1:17 - Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

For the Christian, God is good. There can be no variant on this. The Christian must choose to believe this in the hardest times, and believing sometimes is a 'grit your teeth' choice. I see it like this: goodness can only exist because of God. Without God, there is no goodness. When you experience anything good, it is only because of God's Grace. His Grace allows even the most hardened non-believer to experience goodness as a concept. This is the power of the Cross! No God means no good, which sounds pretty much like Hell to me!

Isaiah 41:10 reminds us God is with us, Immanuel. Christ's work on the Cross is so powerful that its effects shook even the foundations of time and the overspill of that work is that goodness exists that darkness cannot overcome it (John 1:5). Does God give good things to us? Yes - 'the Cross has been given, the Cross is enough - It is finished'.

Does God give us good things like car park spaces, or heal people of cancer etc? Well, it is only because of the Cross and the continuing presence of God on earth that good things happen, 'every good gift is from above'.

Should God be Glorified when such things happen? Of course - we are people who love God, and ascribe all goodness to Him, or at least we should. Does this mean God chooses to heal certain people over others? This one, I'm not convinced about. Remember we are not an entitled people; rather we are people of Grace through faith. Of course God could and can do whatever He wants, but if He doesn't act the way I hoped, does that mean I have done something wrong? Where does prayer come in?

Well, first and foremost, we are sinners. So, yes we have done many things wrong. However, we are redeemed by the blood of Jesus, saved by Grace. That which is good within even the non-believer, is only there because we all have something of God in us. We are made in His image. We are undeserving of anything. However, we are recipients of the work on the Cross. Saved by Grace. Grace permits us to approach the Lord with our petitions. 1 Peter 3:12 reminds us God is attentive to the prayers of the righteous. Let that sink in - He hears us. He listens to what we say. He cares.

Secondly, when we do good works the primary reason should be to point to the impact of God’s love on our lives. We love others because He first loved us. Matthew 6:19 reminds us we don't store up treasure where thieves steal it here on earth; rather it’s in Heaven. We shouldn’t seek earthly rewards in lieu of our works, for what does that say about our motivation? No, our lives should be a response to the Cross. Our lives should be a witness to Grace, a thank offering for what has already been done. Our faith will not protect us from pain or grief or hardship. Indeed the Christian is told to rejoice in suffering as Christ suffered, to expect persecution. Our God is the God of the poor, the downtrodden, the broken. Our wealth or popularity is no comfort when we face brokenness (as we will in life). Yet in those moments we find the Lord. Remember the Lord longs to commune with us, to hear our prayer, and it is often in those times we come closest to Him. How He responds is up to Him. He is worthy of praise because of what He has done on the Cross.
The Church of Ireland has published protocols for a return to in-church worship to provide guidance to parishes – in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland – in relation to the reopening of places of worship that have been closed due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Church of Ireland Launches Returning to In-Church Worship Protocols

The Returning to In-Church Worship Protocols document is now available in the Parish Resources section of the Church of Ireland website: www.ireland.anglican.org/parish-resources

In a joint introduction, the Archbishop of Armagh, the Most Revd John McDowell, and the Archbishop of Dublin, the Most Revd Dr Michael Jackson, write: “Reopening churches for public worship is only possible if it can be done safely and by minimising the risk of spreading Covid-19. We strongly commend the implementation of these protocols.”

Nine stages for reopening church buildings are set out, starting with communicating with workers and parishioners prior to opening on a specific date. The protocols have been prepared by representatives from the House of Bishops, the Representative Body Executive Committee, and the staff of the Representative Church Body, the Church’s central trustee body.

At all times, churches must comply fully with all relevant current legislation in their respective jurisdiction, and follow the advice of health authorities, particularly in relation to social distancing, hand hygiene, and respiratory hygiene.

Bishop Andrew will ensure that all parishes are kept informed of the reopening of church buildings for public worship in the Diocese of Derry and Raphoe.

Caption Competition

Have a go at our caption competition. Entries must be received by the editor not later than 26th August. Winning entries will be published in the next issue of n:vision...

Noel at sound desk for drive through church

Archdeacon Huss begins his bike visits

Rev Peter Ferguson runs marathon round his parish

Bishop Andrew and Dean Raymond at the Derry Deanery

Archdeacon Huss begins his bike visits

Bishop Andrew will ensure that all parishes are kept informed of the reopening of church buildings for public worship in the Diocese of Derry and Raphoe.
Ian Peilow

What is the vibe in the garden centre this time of year?

It’s very busy, because most people are interested in bedding plants and shrubs, and we have our best selection this time of year. So a lot of people come in for these items, and then they ask for compost, fertilisers and all that they need for the plants.

What are your major challenges this time of year?

Trying to make sure that we can either grow that go on behind the scenes. We spend a lot of time with customers, too - answering questions, giving advice, and helping them find what they need. So time is precious.

How does your faith shape how you approach your work?

I think we’ve all got a positive contribution to make to society. Being in employment is for me one of the most important things, so that I can have enough money to keep a house going, to keep my family, to pay all the bills, and not to depend, necessarily, on the government or anybody else. Being able to stand on my own two feet and having enough money to give towards church and charities is for me an important Christian principle.

Through my faith I believe that God has created everything on this earth - the mountains, the sea, the sky, but also the plants, animals, all the different types trees all over the world. I believe it’s a privilege to be able to work in this field, to be able to nurture a selection of plants, and to encourage people to come and purchase them and plant them in their own gardens and continue to look after them and let them thrive.

What tips would you have for gardeners this time of year?

It’s still okay to plant summer bedding, if you can get it. You can do so hanging baskets and containers, and plant shrubs and trees in your garden. But you must remember that it’s summer time, and it can get very warm. The bedding plants and hanging baskets and containers probably need to be watered every day if they’re in a sunny spot, or at least a good watering every other day. Trees and shrubs probably need to be watered a couple of times a week. A hedge planted in the Spring will also need to be watered.

Mothers’ Union

HOPE

The dictionary definition of hope is, ‘a feeling of expectation and desire for a particular thing to happen’, but I prefer the description of hope attributed to the Danish philosopher and theologian Søren Kierkegaard - ‘Hope is passion for what is possible.’

In Mothers’ Union everything we do is anchored in the hope that we are making a difference, advancing our vision - ‘...of a world where God’s love is shown through loving, respectful and flourishing relationships’. This is not a vague hope, but a goal we actively pursue by praying, campaigning, and enabling. The role of Social Policy within Mothers’ Union is to raise awareness of social issues that affect families locally, nationally, and internationally. When, as an organisation, or as individual members, we become involved in a campaign, however big or small, it is always in the hope that with a successful outcome we can make someone’s life better, and offer them hope for a brighter future.

Some notable successes in recent years:

Since 2014 Mothers’ Union have been involved in the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence campaign. Thanks to events held across the twelve dioceses in Ireland the issue of domestic violence has been brought to the fore. Survivors and victims have been given a voice, campaigners for justice, a platform to get their message out, and many more within the Church and society the courage to speak up and speak out. The practical support provided by our members through donations of items to local women’s refuges has been phenomenal. Women and children arriving at a refuge with nothing have hope for a brighter future when they know that someone cared enough to give them the practical things they need to set up a new home, safe from fear and harm.

In 1876 when Mary Sumner held the first Mothers’ Union meeting, she could have had no perception of what the world would be like in 2020 or, indeed, the challenges we would face!

Since becoming involved in Social Policy within Mothers’ Union I am constantly inspired by what we have already achieved and filled with hope for what we can achieve now and in the future. When we emerge from the shadow of Covid-19 it will be into a different world, and like many organisations and charities the Mothers’ Union will have to remodel itself to fit into that world. After all, an organisation of 4 million members active in 84 countries around the world will still be a force to be reckoned with!

Having started with a hope-filled quote I shall finish with a couple of hope-inspired lines from ‘You’ll Never Walk Alone’. This has nothing to do with the fact that I am a Liverpool fan, but because it has been adopted as a song of hope during this crisis; ‘Walk on, Walk on, With hope in your heart; And you’ll never walk alone...’

Jean Thompson, All-Ireland Social Policy Contact with responsibility for Northern Ireland
Welcome to Derry and Raphoe Iain. Congratulations on your appointment as Curate-assistant of Glendermott.

1. Please tell us a little about yourself, your family and your journey to Glendermott.

I am from Lisburn, went to school at Wallace High, am an only child and was a parishioner of St John’s Church Moira for several years, where I began to discern a call to ministry. I was sent to selection and that call was confirmed. I trained in CITI and then was Deacon in St Donard’s East Belfast. Few twists and turns on the way, but that is mostly that.

2. How has the coronavirus affected your Deacon intern year?

It has been on zoom. I have had very little to do in terms of parish life, mostly telephone calls and a few pre-recorded sermons.

3. Please tell us about a person (living or dead) who has had an influence on your life.

There are so many! The one that sticks out is my mother. I approach ministry.

4. What are you passionate about in ministry?

Mission. I hold a passionate belief that mission is the normal response of the Christian. We have something great and we want to share it. Workplaces, schools, friendship groups, all places where normal life take place are also the places where we do mission. Everyone is involved in mission and everyone is called to share Jesus with the world. Encouraging those around me to get stuck into normal everyday mission is my passion.

5. How do you chill out?

Being in the wild. Mountains, the sea, reading, spending time with friends and coffee.

6. What book are you reading at the moment and why would you recommend it?

I re-read The Screwtape Letters by C.S. Lewis and it was a really refreshing insight into the human condition and the spiritual realm of which we can be forgetful. I recommend it to anyone.

7. Do you have a favourite charity and why?

CMNI because they support local churches to do mission and try to make mission as indigenous as possible.

8. If you had a time machine what era would you like to visit and why?

This is a toss-up between the cliché 1st Century and the 1940s/1950s. I have idyllic ideas about both.

9. What book are you reading at the moment and why would you recommend it?

I am re-reading The Abbingdon of Canterbury’s Lent Book 2020: “Saying Yes to Life” by Ruth Valerio, as I have found it quite a wake-up call. I think it has reinforced for me the interdependence between creation and the way we live our lives. In Ireland we think about how we shall cope with climate change as we move into the future. The reality is that millions across the globe are already living with the devastation and reality of climate change, in their lives. The book has brought me to the realisation that we need to think about how we shall live our lives.

10. Do you have a favourite era or time period and why?

I love the world of Jane Austen and Charles Dickens. I love the windows they created in their novels. It fascinates me that writings in this period was the social media of their day. They led to the advent of activism and legal changes. I believe they were the social media of their day. Their writing laid the foundation for the rights of the underprivileged, laying foundations that we still build on today.

Diocesan Manoeuvres!
Book Review by Ven. Robert Miller

The Boy, the mole, the fox and the Horse

Charlie Mackesy
Publisher: Penguin
ISBN: 9781529105100

Take time and read this book, permit yourself to be moved. As the boy meets three new friends, you’ll be wrapping yourself in a warmth that will remind you of the equivalent of settling in front of the fire on a cold crisp autumn evening; of lying back in the grass when the summer sun is high in the sky. It is escapism of the best kind. As Elizabeth Gilbert says ‘the world that I am required to inhabit is this one. But the world I long to inhabit is the one that Charlie Mackesy has created.’

The truth is I need pictures, they are like islands, places to get to in a sea of words.’ This is a book that will delight you. It may also have you in tears, but those tears will be as refreshing as a swim in the sea on a warm Summer day.

I absolutely loved this book and I know I will return to it again and again. It’s a book that you can dip into or read through in one sitting. It is a book with a big heart. It is a book for a reader of any age or ability. Anyone who has ever had a pet will be able to identify with the themes in this book. The mole, the fox and the horse all encounter the boy and one another in a way that enriches them all. It is the story of a journey where friendship, kindness and understanding are all beautifully expressed in a series of short encounters and pictures.

Whilst very straightforward it does present you with the challenge of how you encounter others, and whether those you encounter in life are enriched.

The pictures are as important as the words. As you open the book, you’ll see they are sketched in such a way as to allow you to fill in the details in your mind’s eye. For me, this was one of the wonderful aspects of the book. There is space for you to read yourself into the narrative and the author even encourages you to draw yourself in and join the journey.

Since the sudden and unexpected closure of all our churches in March 2020, we have been exploring and experiencing whole new ways of being ‘Church’. Little did we realise that our Service of Confirmation on Sunday 8th March would be the last service in our group of parishes for some time.

The following Sunday we broadcast a service form the Cathedral on Facebook live – a new and very unusual experience for me. I then turned 60 (I know - I can’t believe it myself!), and due to an underlying medical condition, my doctor advised me to ‘cocoon’. I admit that it took me a little while to fully realise the implications of this, and how it would affect me.

With the help of Nathan and Brigid, we started to record our Sunday services to put up on our Facebook page each Sunday. We then encouraged others to take part by reading and leading us in prayer. It has also been great to get the young people involved as well. Seeing parishioners each week has helped us to feel in some way still connected with each other. The online services have been an important way for all of us join together, although very much apart and distant, in worship. And so many people have commented to me about how much they have appreciated this way of being together in heart and mind and spirit. It has been said that the virus closed the churches, but God has opened a church in every home. And that is so true, as we now do ‘church’ in our sitting rooms and kitchens.

We also have, as part of our worship each Sunday, a ‘Community Interview’ with people who are still working in the community, helping to look after our health, safety and well-being. We have already heard from a nurse, a member of An Garda Síochána, a retailer and others are planned. They have told us their stories and what life is like for them as they deal with the coronavirus pandemic.

We have also been keeping in contact with parishioners by email, and text messaging, and through personal telephone calls. I am also aware that a number of parishioners are keeping in contact with elderly and vulnerable parishioners. The community spirit of caring for others has been highlighted in many ways, and by many people and organisations. Local groups have been looking after the vulnerable, schools have been using their lunch grants to provide food parcels for local families, shops are doing deliveries, teachers have been ensuring that education continues, and people are on the one hand staying distant, and on the other getting closer. Now, when we ask ‘How are you?’, we really do mean it.

But there have been so many other challenges too. Not least in terms of finance and fund-raising. Parishes are facing serious cash flow difficulties with no regular weekly income. And all fund-raising events have been cancelled. Unfortunately, the Raphoe Cathedral Restoration Project has had to be put on hold for the time being.

But we are an Easter people. We are people of Hope. And we shall continue to live in hope. Even when things seem very uncertain, we live in the faith, hope and love of God.

Raphoe, Raymochy & Clonleigh
Dean Arthur Barrett

Convoy, Monellan & Donaghmore
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Pastor to Producer to Pastor
A proverb comes to mind “May you live in interesting times” “May you live in interesting times” is an English expression that purports to be a translation of a traditional Chinese curse. While seemingly a blessing, the expression is normally used ironically; life is better in “uninteresting times” of peace and tranquillity than in “interesting” ones, which are usually times of trouble.

For me at this time, it is where two worlds collide, science and faith. I worked as a microbiologist before being a minister and I am all too familiar with infection control. I have and will be putting my experience to practice in keeping us safe as we ‘open up’. Yet the path to opening up is far from straightforward.

Yet we do not lose hope as we are people of Hope in God who is compassionate and perfect in our weakness.

I would like to take this opportunity to say thank-you for all those sticking with our church online at this time. To John and Karl, my patient and willing technical team, to those generous to share music, videos and technical knowledge; it is great to see the gifts and blessing being shared.

In the future we are looking forward to returning to somewhat normal services. However it looks as only a few will be able to attend as we all must obey vital social distancing. Therefore we will, God willing, operate a hybrid service. People will be attending the service in person and online together.

We in these days are living out God’s strength made perfect in our weakness. As faithful followers of Jesus Christ we mirror the example of Paul. He prayed to be released from his weakness and received this answer: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness.” 2 Corinthians 12:7-10.
Our world is full of fear. Why shouldn't we be afraid? We have to remember that God is with us no matter what fearful time we are going through.

In the Bible the word 'fear' is mentioned many times. Over and over again, God says to us 'Do not be afraid'.

What is fear? Fear is feeling scared or afraid about something. How do we stop being afraid? God will help us. We can't do it on our own. He plants his words deep in our hearts. When we are scared his words can comfort us and help us through any difficult times we face. We have all the grow-ups in our lives to support us too.

What if we don't want to be afraid anymore? How can we stop being afraid? God will help us. We can't do it on our own. He plants his words deep in our hearts. When we are scared his words can comfort us and help us through any difficult times we face. We have all the grow-ups in our lives to support us too.

How can we trust God? Will he help us with our fears? God's love for us is perfect. Perfect love can help us have faith and drive away any fears that we may have.

If we learn to trust God, more than we fear what is happening in the world around us, then we show love in return. We will have all that we need, and we will work through any fear we may have.

When God first commanded Gideon to rescue the Israelites, Gideon was hiding to escape his enemies. Gideon constantly tested God by asking him to perform signs. He showed little faith. Gideon was afraid, but when he finally put his trust in God and obeyed, the Israelites were freed from seven years of oppression.

There will be moments in life when we are worried or experience fear, for many different reasons and different situations, but we must have the faith to follow God in difficult times. Remember, we must be a people of faith not fear.

The shield below is to symbolise God's protection of us. In the Middle Ages, soldiers could not tell each other apart because they were wearing so much armour to protect themselves. It was for this reason the soldiers started painting their own shields with things that were important to them. They would have included elements that would help show people the type of person they were. They could have included a lion to show their courage, a bee would show they were hardworking, whereas if they included an eagle it would be a sign of their leadership. What would you include on your shield? I would like you to design a shield below to remind you that you do not have to be afraid. Can you think of a Bible verse to include? Keeping God's word in our hearts will help us when we need it. You could include a cross, a heart full of trust for God, a hand to illustrate God's helping hand for example. Make sure you include symbols that describe who you are and what you are interested in.

Perhaps you could think of other gift ideas to share messages with others...

Be brave, have faith!
I know that over the past days and weeks it has been difficult not being able to be as close to people as we usually are. It has been a challenge to keep in contact. I have been amazed by how everyone in our Diocese of Derry and Raphoe have continued to keep connections going throughout this time. There have been so many activities and services of which we can be a part to keep our church communities active and together. See opposite, such wonderful work!

Since lockdown we have been learning about so much at our family fun time on Facebook from Fahan Upper and Lower! We learned about Palm Sunday, Easter Day, Jesus the Good Shepherd, Jesus the Way the Truth and the Life, Jesus’ love for us, his promise always to be with us, the Ascension and Pentecost and then made pictures or craft or prayers. We have been busy!

We have made new friends in lockdown and meet with them on a Friday morning. Then on a Sunday we all share our work as we worship God together!

It is important that we take time to say ‘Thank You’ to others. A big thank you to all the people who have been working hard to keep us safe, cared for and connected: the doctors and nurses, carers, schools, ministers, shop workers, delivery drivers, farmers and so many more that we each could add to the list. To you all we say ‘Thank You’.

We also say, ‘Thank You God’! Who would you like to say ‘Thank You’ to?

Hello Summer!

Contact me on email cj@dogerryandraphoe.org

Kate Rafferty

8pm and Fridays at 1pm. We have been able to pray, sing, learn and fellowship together and among many highlights was having 25 of our Sunday Schools members do the reading on Pentecost Sunday (see photo). Online services will continue in some form even after the lockdown - see Facebook.com/DonegalGroupofParishes for updates.

Maintaining a Witness

We are grateful to those who have been ringing the church bells as a tribute to frontline workers and as a gesture to show the churches are still active. There have also been opportunities to go on local radio to share what is going on in response to Covid-19.

Staying in Touch

In addition to contacting parishioners by phone, WhatsApp, email etc, we have published a weekly Parish Update which we have endeavoured to share with everyone to keep us up to date and on the same page. We have been thankful to parishioners who have continued their financial giving through Standing Orders or through the safe hand-over of envelopes. Brian and Sandra have hosted Zoom Bible Study groups which have been a great help to those who have taken part.

Meeting Needs Locally

Louise and the Mustard Seed have got involved with the Food Bank run locally by the Family Resource Centre, helping households who are struggling to stay fed. We were also able to sponsor a dinner for older people with ‘Chef Aid’ and to help a number of people access grants through Protestant Aid and other sources.

Getting Out and About

The Rector has embarked on a socially-distanced parish visitation by bike, touring the many townlands of the four parishes and hopefully bringing some encouragement! This is just a taste of the many things which have been going on. Let’s continue to pray that the Lord, who works for good in all things, will bring blessing out of this very difficult time.

Drumholm, Kilbarron & Rossnowlagh

Rev Canon Brian Russell
Tel. 0749734025
Email: brianrussell117@gmail.com

Inver, Mountcharles, Kilaghtee & Killybegs

Bishop’s Curate: Rev Lindsey Farrell
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Even Though our Church Doors are Closed, the Love of Christ Shines Through, Strengthening Us For Today and Tomorrow.

This period of lockdown has created many challenges. We have been unable to meet and worship together on a Sunday morning; we have been prevented from spending time together; we have been separated from our friends and families; we have been put out of our usual routine. Even the simplest of tasks has to be thought out in line with new guidance and restrictions. This present time that we now inhabit was unforeseen by any of us, and many of us have struggled under the heavy regulations that have been imposed. But, with every challenge comes an opportunity. We have been forced to re-assess our home life, and how we manage our time with work and with those we live with. For us, this has meant more family time, something that we have sought for quite some time. It has meant overseeing school work in a new and remote way, which isn’t easy for the technologically challenged. It has meant taking time to reflect on the importance of family and friends as we feel their absence keenly. It has meant re-assessing how we interact as a church community. What began as an ominous void of time and distance from our brothers and sisters in Christ has now become an opportunity to interact regularly in worship services, and more frequently than normal by telephone.

Continued on page 34.
We are no longer the same church community. We are no stronger, swifter, than I say slightly technologically improved, but, most importantly we are more focused on Jesus Christ. We are more aware of his call on our lives. We have time to reflect on our relationship with him. We have been forced to contemplate our own mortality, our place in this small world, the fragility of life and the promise of hope that eternal life brings, offered by Jesus Christ himself to those who make the decision to accept him as their Lord and Saviour.

Many lives have been touched by the arrival of this virus. Many loved ones have been lost. Grief has been intensified by our inability to share in the last moments of the lives of those we love. The grieving process has been stalled by the community not being able to come together and show love and support in the normal way. But we are a people of faith, and we are strengthened and sustained by a God who promises to comfort all who mourn, and who has made a commitment to be with us until the end of the age. We have lost loved ones during this crisis, whether as a result of this virus or not, please be assured that the community weeps with you, and the loss is felt even more acutely because their sympathy cannot be offered in the usual supportive and loving way.

Psalm 62 asks ‘how long?’ How long do we have to endure the challenges of this pandemic? How long will it be until I can see my loved ones again? How long until normality returns? We all have moments of lost faith or doubt, and there is no避 of the difficult times in our lives. So, as we begin to emerge from a lengthy period of lockdown, as we begin to see family and friends again, let us never forget God as our one constant throughout this time of uncertainty. God is and is ever shall be present in everything we do, standing alongside us gently guiding and carefully protecting. Even in the midst of our darkest times when our soul cries out ‘how long?’ the beamng light of his love still shines through.

The future at the moment is a daunting prospect. Our focus now shifts from enduring the restrictions of lockdown, to what lies ahead when the restrictions are lifted. Job losses are looming, contracted hours are being cut, livelihoods are teetering on the brink and government support is drying up. Hard times lie ahead, and we must endure these hard times as steadfastly as we endured lockdown. As a community of faith, our strength lies in the source of our power - the love of Jesus Christ. He will sustain us through the challenges that lie ahead, and as brothers and sisters in Christ, we too must stand shoulder to shoulder with those who continue to suffer the effects of this virus whether physically, mentally or financially. When we work together as a body of faith we will, in time, emerge from the impact of this virus stronger, better, more focused and united both with one another, and under the headship of Jesus Christ. This will take time, and we must prepare ourselves for this new and turbulent journey.

As we prepare for the re-opening of our churches and the beginning of a new ‘normal’ and all the uncertainty and challenge that this brings, let us hold fast to the words of Psalm 62, ‘Truly my soul finds rest in God’. He is our anchor in times of trouble. He leads us beside quiet waters. He sets us high upon a rock in a place of safety. He holds us in the palm of his hand. He is our God. He is our Comforter. He is our Redeemer. He is our Salvation. Thanks be to God. Heavenly Father, we give you thanks for your many blessings given to us, not least your only Son, Jesus Christ. Sustain us on this earthly journey by the power of your Word. Guide us safely onto the path of your choosing. Strengthen us to sustain those around us with your love, and direct us toward your heavenly kingdom. This we ask in your name’s sake. Amen.

Signs of Hope!

We certainly are living in unusual times since the lockdown. Since I arrived here in Dunfanaghy over a year ago I have been told how busy the place is over the Easter period and St. Patrick’s Day!!! The town has been exceptionally quiet. Out walking the dog at about 11.00pm, two or three cars passing by is very busy. The lockdown has been hard for many people. It is so unnatural not being able to mix and socialise with others - and especially family contact. A Granny told me how hard it was for her teenage grandsons not being able to come into the house and give her a hug. The lockdown proved too much for my dog. She got the opportunity when I was down at the hall and broke out through the boundary fence at the hall. I noticed her missing and she was nowhere to be found. I got a phone call from the churchwarden to ask me if I had lost the dog and that she had made several attempts to get into the shop nearby. Later that evening I heard that Facebook had a picture of a dog like mine wondering on the beach. Thankfully, everyone is keeping fairly well. We have had a few people in hospital and we wish them well. Thankfully there have been no funerals. At this time we need to thank God for the many people who have helped (at whatever level) in the smooth running of the country and the administration of our health care. Our last service was a celebration of Holy Communion on St Patrick’s Day. Little did we realise what was going to happen next...
and how we would continue to worship God, corporately and in a meaningful way. My technology is not so good and with my limited skills, an order of service is produced each Sunday as a hard copy for parishioners who do not have Wi-Fi. Emails were sent to those whose addresses we have. I have to thank Rev. Niall Johnston for using Zoom and recording the service so that it can go on Facebook each Sunday morning. I thank Niall, and Patrick who lead the worship and to our bible readers. I am greatly indebted to the Very Rev James Gillespie for allowing me to use the facilities in St. Fionán’s, Falcarragh and enabling me to broadcast the service to the people in the area live on Facebook.

His help at this time is greatly appreciated, I would like to thank the clergy in the area for their help and support.

Our Lenten project, this year has gone exceptionally well. We have raised almost €1000, which will go to ‘Jeel-al- ‘Amar’ orphanage in Bethany near Jerusalem. Your help towards this orphanage is greatly appreciated. During this time of great uncertainty I appreciate all those who continue to leave the weekly envelopes at the church and those who have set up payments through e-banking.

Sadly, the Select Vestry had to take the decision to cancel our Summer Fare for this year. We felt that it was too risky. We hope later in the year to have other fund-raising activities. If you have any ideas please let me, or members of the Select Vestry or committee know.

There can be great uncertainty as the phased return begins, doubt and fear I feel that this pandemic could not have happened at a better time. The weather is improving. As I write these notes sun is being shining and it has got a lot great warmer. The reading for each Sunday could not have been more reassuring and the whole theme of the Easter message, which can be simply summed up in: for every Good Friday, there is an Easter Day.

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Priest in Charge: Rev David Griscome
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Priest in Charge: Rev Canon George Irwin
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In all my communication with parishioners over the many weeks of the lockdown one of the things that I have found truly inspirational is the fortitude shown by people in meeting the challenge of the Covid-19 pandemic. We are living through tough times and our resources are being tested to the limit, yet people show a cheerful courage and sense of hope. All of this reminds me of the words of exhortation by St. Paul:

And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, for we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

(ROMANS 5:2-5) How refreshing and inspiring it is to read and hear of people using this time of lockdown to do many creative things. And this in addition to completing - much sooner than scheduled - various routine projects around the house and garden. As for myself, I have been writing poetry, mostly about my cherished memories of Donegal, and I look forward to sharing this with you in due course.

Until we are all able to meet again in the way to which we have been accustomed, be assured that you are constantly in my prayers. I trust that you are making good use of the Parish Daily Prayer Guide. This is not just a framework and aid for our devotions but also a valuable means of keeping us all together as a praying, witnessing Church community.

I am greatly encouraged by reports of how people are maintaining the discipline of worship on Sundays, not least by tuning in to the Services broadcast on BBC 1 and RTE 1.

From the registers
Burials: “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.”
Sunday, 5th April: Malcolm Ralph Park, Marblehill Road, Ballymore.
Sunday, 3rd May: Brigd Myrtle (Biddy) McGettrich, Marblehill Road, Ballymore.
Monday, 11th May: Robert John Moore, Cashel.

Clondevorkey, Cashel & Mevagh
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Conwal Union with Gartan
Rector: Revd David Houlton

SUMMER 2020
we are mortal. Perhaps when this is all compared to Almighty God. He is Almighty, despite our cleverness, we are as nothing. We need to be thought through. After all, we regard to holy things and church attendance is a Divine wake up call, perhaps the least we can do is to consider returning to this is a Divine message in all this - that we have gone too far in advancements, for which thanks be to God - with all our modern technology and medical advancements, for which thanks be to God. The Holy Spirit, we have begun to think that we no longer need God. Whether or not this is a Divine wake up call, perhaps the least we can do is to consider returning to God, our Creator, Redeemer, Saviour and Sanctifier. Perhaps our carelessness with God, our Creator, Redeemer, Saviour and Sanctifier, asking me if I was alright. Such pastoral care goes both ways! I can hardly wait to work here on Sundays at 11.00am, so that between us there can be services in Killea or Taughboyne and everyone can work here on Sundays at 11.00am. Sean will be commissioned sometime soon, and no doubt, we will want to acknowledge his achievement. His is no mean achievement, no doubt, we will want to acknowledge his achievement. His is no mean achievement, which is much more rigorous than the previous system.

We have been providing worship every Sunday online, and especially to Bishop Forster every Sunday at 4.00pm. And finally, one delightful piece of good news in all this: Mr. Sean McClafferty has completed the Lay Reader course, and is now fully trained as a Diocesan Reader, and allowed to preach and lead Divine Worship in any parish in Derry and Raphoe, from Killyowen, Coleraine to Glencolumbkille, from Gweedore to Edenry. However, Sean has kindly agreed to work here on Sundays at 11.00am, so that between us there can be services in Killea or Taughboyne and All Saints at 11.00am. Sean will be commissioned sometime soon, and no doubt, we will want to acknowledge his achievement. His is no mean achievement, and for he had to train under the new system, which is much more rigorous than the previous system.

Dear Lord, I thank you for keeping me and my family. God, thank you for my house and my family. God, thank you for me being able to play with my brother Alex. God, thank you for helping everyone stay together and help each other out when we need it most. Lord continue to walk with us through COVID 19 and help us become stronger each day. We ask this in your name. Amen Riley and Jane

E is for each of us. God loves us everyone. A is for a broken world, so he sent his Son. S is for for sins that Jesus took away. T is for the tomb where he lay for 3 whole days. E is for the empty tomb, the stone was rolled away. R is for the risen Lord. Jesus is alive today. Jake

The great gift of Easter is hope. Christian hope which makes us have that confidence in God, in his ultimate triumph and in his goodness and love which nothing can shake. Dylan

Easter time is the beginning of Spring. Lambs are jumping in the fields. Farmers are happy as days are getting longer. But take care as the Coronavirus is getting stronger! Owen and Matthew and Andrea.

We pray with hope that God will refine us in the fire of this current chaos, heal our land and that his church will be revived.

TIM: SUMMER 2020
Our Vision for 2020 is: 1 John 3 verse 18 ‘Let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.’

As I write we are still in a situation of ‘lockdown’ in both Northern Ireland and the Republic. People are still dying from the disease caused by the virus. I want to ask each of you to join me in praying that God will both redeem the evil of this time and heal also and heal and deliver us. Prayer is very important; this indeed has been one of the aspects of my faith that God has reminded me of in this time. The following prayer is from the 1926 edition of the Book of Common Prayer that didn’t find its way into our current edition. Although the language is dated the cry to God is not weakened by this; our current edition. Although the language is dated the cry to God is not weakened by this;

O Almighty God, the Lord of life and death, of health and sickness; Have pity upon the miserable sinners, now visited with great sickness (and mortality). Withdraw from us this grievous affliction. Sanctify us, we beseech thee, this thy fatherly correction. Enlarge our charity to relieve those who need our help. Bless the remedies applied to assist them. Give us prudence to see, and vigour to use, those means which thy providence affords, for preventing and alleviating such calamities. And, above all, teach us to know how frail and uncertain our condition is, and to number our days, that we may seriously apply our hearts to that holy and heavenly wisdom, whilst we live here, which may in the end bring us to life everlasting; through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, thine only Son our Lord Amen.

One of the challenges for us as the Church is that we are currently unable to meet together physically for corporate worship and prayer. In March we were told to ‘Stop!’ However, it is encouraging that we have continued worshipping and praying as the Church, in new ways. We have had to remind ourselves that important though it is to meet together regularly for corporate worship, our faith is not more than the time we spend physically together.

I hope you will join me in prayer for the healing of our world. I also hope we will continue to use the opportunity to reach out beyond the walls of our church buildings and connect with people that they might have hope. This is in short supply in our world, whereas the Church has hope as one of our foundation stones.

I know many of you have been able to connect with us in worship on our Facebook Page @CCCMSp on Wednesdays at 7.00pm and Sundays at 11.00am. We intend to continue this whilst the pandemic continues. We are very grateful to DRIVE 105.3FM in Derry/Londonderry who have been broadcasting our Sunday Service at 11.00am each week allowing us to reach many more.

We are now in the Season of Pentecost. It is a time when we remember and give thanks for the gift of the Holy Spirit. I pray that He may encourage you; God is alongside you in all you face. God is present and at work through us and in us to redeem the evil of this time. If the clergy can be of any help, please get in touch. You all continue to be in our prayers and we ask you to continue to remember us in your prayers.

Yours in Christ,
Robert+"
Well, what can I say that all our Clergy are not saying? We have all been rocked by this new virus and how deadly it can be. Thousands of lives are being lost all over the world. However the acts of kindness and care have been unbelievable. Carol and I go out for a walk almost every day and everyone is waving and bidding the time of day to everyone. As editor of the newsletter I get to read them before anyone else and what is coming through very strongly is that everyone is getting on with it all in many different ways and our response has been creative and ground breaking.

In our parishes we have been providing a hot meal every Wednesday to 23 vulnerable parishioners. However we brought it to a finish after week 12 because we feel people need to move on to a new normal. We are very grateful to Steve and Avril Murdock parishioners of Dunnalong for the provision of all these meals for the past 11 weeks. Stephen runs the food, Supervalu Newbuildings, Mitchell Meats Strabane and Glen Fresh Foods the food, Nesbitt and his wife Carol for all their work and support during this lockdown. The Rector has also hosted a few sing-a-long on Facebook live and this has been very enjoyable. We have been partnering Bright Ballyмагorry Community group in the provision of food parcels and bags for those

Leckpatrick & Dunnalong

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Summertime in the fields

“Sometimes in a lonely place, in the presence of my God, I stand and listen. In the silence of my heart I can hear God’s will, when I listen. For I am but a servant who is guided by my King, when I listen.”

(St. Columba)

How many weeks has it been since Lockdown? How many weeks of social isolation? How many weeks of coming to terms with the ‘New Normal’? We have seen the effect of a virus that has had a massive effect on our lives. So many weeks of not being together in worship. So many weeks of having to come to terms with modern technology and social media. So many weeks of living with “virtual reality”. Church services online either from home, or in isolation in church. Bible studies with no one present. Church services in a car park. Prayer meetings by Zoom! Of course, it doesn’t affect everyone to the same degree, but it does affect us as a society. We have seen what a physical virus can do. But there is a far worse virus - the virus of sin.

That virus has affected everyone born into this world for all time. We have seen what it will do when unleashed. It is indiscriminate. We're now in a situation where we can attend to things we have put off - our houses have never been cleaner… our gardens have never been tidier… our hair has never been longer…

I have found that this has given me the opportunity to spend more time in God’s Word and in prayer. If we have discovered the church is more than bricks and mortar, is He preparing us for a new way forward? Could it be that God is getting us to recalibrate our priorities? What happens when this all is over? Do we simply go back to the way things were? Or, do we take the opportunity to learn the lessons and make the necessary changes? Do we go back or move forward? Oh, do we continue with the “new normal” that is now normal?

Has the world not only been shaken but also the world? Is it not time for Jesus to be Lord of the Church? ‘Ants are features of little strength, yet they store up food in the summer’ Proverbs 30:25. Solomon speaks of the ant, and explains that the wonder of the ant is not only in the contrast between the ant’s size and its efficiency. Solomon uses the ant to illustrate the accumulated effect of steady, repeated movement in the right direction. It’s the power of consistency. As we contemplate the slow and steady progress of ants here’s a challenge. What is an activity or discipline you can devote yourself to day after day, week after week, and now month after month? Some of our most significant growth can be measured only after months or even years. Be patient. The small changes we make today, do matter. Each journey of 1000 miles begins with one step.

God bless and stay safe.

Camus-Juxta-Mourne (Strabane)

Rector - Rev John White
Our Vision... ‘Preach the Word… be shaped by the Word’.

Our thoughts and prayers are very much with the Clarke, Dinsmore, Gardiner, Black, Godfrey, McIntyre and Caldwell families. Believe or not there will be many positives outcomes of this pandemic. Relationships and friendships are deepening. We are really getting to know one another and all these have stepped up to a new level. We long to return to our churches and are indebted to those who are still returning their FWO envelopes and those who pay the parishes by standing order or direct debit.

This continues to be a very difficult time for all of us. However, we are beginning to see some light at the end of the tunnel with some restrictions being lifted by the Executive at Stormont. But we still need to be careful and follow the social distancing advice from the medical profession. The meanamount - May the road rise up to meet you. May the wind be always at your back. May the sun shine warm upon your face; the rains fall soft upon your fields and grow your crops, and the fruits of your labour increase. The Rector has also hosted a few sing-a-long services during Lent, Holy Week and every Sunday. Each week we progress and do things a little better. We are now live streaming from the parish churches and on Sunday 31st May we had our first drive-in service in Leckpatrick Parish Car Park and were able to livestream it on Facebook as well. We had between 40 and 50 cars, the weather was very kind to us and we had a fabulous worship time with a little bit of fun thrown in as well. Check out our Facebook pages for the full story - Parishes of Leckpatrick and Dunnalong Church of Ireland.

Sadly during the pandemic we have had seven deaths. Bereavement and pastoral care has become that more difficult with limited attendance, social distancing, no handshakes or hugs, not even a hand on a shoulder. The Rector is deeply saddened about not being able to visit Hospitals and Nursing Homes and pastor and pray for our people but that day will return soon. The Rector has had to do WhatsApp and Facebook live services from the Rectory into the bereaved homes.

Urney and Sion Mills

Rector
Rev Jonathan McFarland

“Sometimes in a lonely place, in the presence of my God, I stand and listen. In the silence of my heart I can hear God’s will, when I listen. For I am but a servant who is guided by my King, when I listen.”

(St. Columba)

Urney can mean a place of prayer or a community of prayer. There is evidence that Urney can mean a place of prayer or a place of prayer. There is evidence that Urney was a praying community going all the way back to the Celts. The Celtic Church knew a lot about silent listening. We need to return to that today.

At Pentecost the disciples were waiting for the Holy Spirit. Their prayers were answered. They burst out of their isolation and preached with courage and truth about the Risen Christ. Peter said to the crowd “Repent believe in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the Holy Spirit.” And this is what happened. Thousands were added to the Church that day.

We may be tempted to believe that our isolation and restricted activity during the coronavirus pandemic is entirely negative.

Not so. God has been at work so that we do not have to go back to the way things were before. We all now crave a new normality, a new way of living and a new depth to our worship of the living God.

Let us pray that the same Holy Spirit, who brought about the birth of the Church, will fill us and make us joyful and bold to bring the anthill rests in the contrast between the ant’s size and its efficiency. Solomon uses the ant to illustrate the accumulated effect of steady, repeated movement in the right direction. It’s the power of consistency. As we contemplate the slow and steady progress of ants here’s a challenge. What is an activity or discipline you can devote yourself to day after day, week after week, and now month after month? Some of our most significant growth can be measured only after months or even years. Be patient. The small changes we make today, do matter. Each journey of 1000 miles begins with one step.

God bless and stay safe.

Donaghheady

Rev Dr Robin Stockitt
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SUMMER 2020
During the cultural revolution in China the churches were closed. However none of us would have anticipated that the churches would be closed here in Northern Ireland in 2020 due to a virus pandemic. This was something we didn’t see coming. If we had we would have been better prepared. The life of the Church is still going on. However, because of lockdown, it has had to go online. We are very fortunate that social media has developed to the degree it has. Here in our group of parishes we have set up Facebook, WhatsApp and Message groups which link into the parish website and this has been very effective for meditations to be posted every week and for us to stay in touch with each other. All the churches have found that social media is reaching a much bigger audience than the people who regularly come to church and this is one of the positive stories of the current pandemic. I would estimate that I am reaching about two thirds of the parish via social media so there is a digital divide in our community with those who have no access to the internet. Perhaps this is an area where we can be of assistance in our families. Do we have a relative whom we could help out to set them up with a mobile or iPad etc to get them online. As it is the vast majority of visits to the parish website for weekly meditations is via mobile phone and a fixed internet connection is not necessary for this.

Fortunately, we have had only one funeral in our group of parishes, the late John Scott of 30 Crew Road, Crew Bridge, Castlecairn was buried in Drumclamph Parish graveyard on Monday 1st June where the family observed social distancing. We remember his family, relatives and friends in our prayers that God will comfort them in their sad loss. We hope and pray that the lockdown will soon end, how soon it ends depends on all of us as a community, as we need to remember social distancing measures when we are out and about at work or doing our shopping. Loneliness will be a problem in our community during lockdown especially those who are shielding so let us remember to keep in touch with them via the occasional phone call.

Yours Sincerely, Rev Robert Keogh

Reaching Out, Reaching In, Reaching Out: for God, for Each Other, for our Community.

Given the current COVID-19 (Coronavirus) crisis here at Derg and Killaldee Parish Group, we are a people of faith and not fear, because Jesus is our hope and has defeated death for us. We are seeking ways to share the love and hope we have in Jesus in real ways. Here are some of the areas we have prayerfully decided to instigate at this time. As the situation progresses we will review, enhance and add as God leads us.

“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear” Psalm 46:1

WORSHIP

- Every day a hymn of praise will be shared on our Facebook page as an anchor
- We have pre-recorded hymns and songs on our church before lockdown
- Praise in the Valley series with musical contributions from parishioners and friends of the parish will be released on our YouTube channel to celebrate key festivals in the church calendar.
- Kneel at Noon – corporate prayer for self-isolators. At 12 noon each day let us stop to pray using our BCP to help
- FWO can be maintained through T. Standing Order, Z. FWO sit-in once a month

WINNERS

- Phone a Friend – a telephone service to
- Daily Bible Readings can be found in our Parish Magazine
- A message of hope from the Bible will be placed on our Facebook page everyday
- Sunday services will continue online with Word proclamation (YouTube channel: Derg and Killaldee Church of Ireland).

When things go wrong, as they sometimes will. Perseverance

Above all, we must maintain our faith and God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear” Psalm 46:1

Proverbs 18:14

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:6-7.

Drumclamph & Clare, Langfield Upper & Lower

When the road you’re trudging seems all uphill. When the funds are low, and the debts are high. And you want to smile, but you have to sigh; When care is pressing you down, and you never can tell how close you are - It may be near when it seems so far. So stick to the fight when you’re hardest hit. It’s when things seem worse that you must not quit. Anon.

Courage

“The human spirit can endure a sick body, but who can bear it if the spirit is crushed”? Proverbs 18:14
The legacy

I pray that what we have been through over the past three months will enable us all to see our light shine before others, that they may call of Christ who in Matthew 5:16 said: ‘Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.’

As we wait for that day to come when we will, once more, meet together in our church buildings, may we continue to ‘be Christ’s Church’ to the community in which we live, and if you would happen to find yourself on the first Sunday back that not many of us might recognise or know. Our churches may never look the same again! Of course, it is the fore of my mind that not everyone can access the online services. Whilst I have done my best to contact all those who cannot, I would appreciate it if you could let me know if there are any people who have been missed out – or anybody who would simply like a phone call for a chat and a prayer.

At the time of writing my submission for the last issue of ‘n:vision’, I had been rectors of Kilcronaghan, Ballynascreen and Six Towns, for barely a week and I had so many plans in mind, for the months ahead. Full of enthusiasm, I began to organise my diary: two baptisms, a wedding, confirmation classes, Lent, Holy Week and Harvest services etc etc etc…Back then, Covid-19 was just something that was out there, somewhere on the horizon, but not yet, declared a pandemic. Never in my wildest imaginations did I envisage that, 15 weeks later, we would be 12 weeks into lockdown, with no definitive plan as to how we could safely move towards meeting together in our church buildings.

TS Elliott once wrote that: ‘The true church can ever fail, because it is built upon a rock.’ While Covid-19 has presented us with many challenges, it is impossible to feel discouraged and are facing, as we move slowly out of lockdown towards a more normal way of life. The Israelis, having been held in captivity in Babylon, knew that their journey towards a more normal way of life, would be a long, slow journey. They were feeling discouraged and uncertain, as to how they would be able to cope with what lay ahead. In response the prophet Isaiah encouraged them to lift their eyes off their circumstances, and look towards the One whose sovereign power knows no limit, saying: ‘Behold your God.’ (v’7) A hymn based on this passage is a personal favourite of mine:

No man can keep you but your God
Behold our King! Nothing can compare
With the love you feel in God’s hand.
Nothing can take the place of your God.

Kilcronaghan, Ballynascreen, Tobermore & Six Towns

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It was the worst of times, it was the best of times. It was the worst of times, it was the best of times.” is perhaps the most famous opening sentence the sentence reads “It was the worst of times, it was the best of times” is perhaps the most famous opening sentence of this great novel. It is a story of two ends of a country, of the extraordinary development of technology and growth, of the abolition of slavery and the rise of the industrial revolution. It is a story of two sides of the world, of the story of a country that was divided. It is a story of two sides of the world, of the story of a country that was divided.

The worst of times”

As we wished each other A Happy New Year at the beginning of 2020, who in their wildest dreams could possibly have imagined what the coming months would bring. Coronavirus has spread rapidly across the world, with more than six million confirmed cases in countries. Over 375,000 people have lost their lives at the time of writing. Life as we knew it is no more - now it is about protecting ourselves and others through social distancing. Churches and businesses have been temporarily shut. Weddings have had to be postponed, plans changed. We have been unable to visit family and friends, but we are the lucky ones for many have had to cope with the loss of a loved one due to Covid-19. Our thoughts and prayers are with all who have been bereaved, as well as with those who are worried and anxious about their health or future employment. Truly we are living in incredibly difficult and stressful times.

The best of times”

Thankfully all is not negative for over the past few months we have witnessed incredible acts of bravery and kindness. Every Thursday we have applauded our wonderful NHS and other key workers. The weather has been incredible and the country has never looked so beautiful. Because of the reduced volume of traffic people have been able to listen to the birdsong, and air quality has improved dramatically in many parts of the world. Clergy have found new ways of ministering to parishioners. God has been with us – “an ever present help in time of trouble” (Psalm 46 v 1). Throughout the lockdown the stonemasons’ work was always going to be the slowest and most intricate part of the job, so it is wonderful that they have been able to continue and this will mean faster progress towards finishing when everything is back up and running. I hope you will feel encouraged by these pieces of news at this time. Know that you are in my prayers, now more than ever. Although we are not meeting in the church buildings, that does not mean we are not the Church. We (you and I) are the Church. And I really feel the hand of God guiding us at this time – that at such a time as we can meet in our church buildings again, we will be the stronger for it.
Like many parishes, we saw Covid 19 as something that was in the news but couldn’t imagine it was going to have directly on our lives. The month before the ‘lockdown’ was memorable as we buried four of our senior parishioners in as many weeks, a bad run for wee parishes. On a more positive note, Desertmartin Parish was preparing to celebrate the 200th Anniversary of our church building with a series of events across spring and the summer. Then everything changed. We were not parishes, people from across not only the local community but the UK and even Australia! An advantage of not only “pushing out” news and information onto parishioner’s phones was decided to set up not only a parish Facebook page, but also parish What’s App groups. The latter would have the combined advantages of not only “pushing out” news and information onto parishioners’ phones automatically, without the need to log into a Facebook page, but also helped retain the individual character of each with parish specific content.

We all had a very steep learning curve as we struggled to become competent with our “new tech”. Then addressing questions such as, setting people up in each group and how to do worship for an unknown and potentially extended period of time. The phrase “the partially sighted leading the blind” came to mind. However, after a few phone calls and help from old friends and the diocese, I found out how set up these groups and then how to post videos. Next, I dug out my old video camera. So a makeshift studio was set up the rectory to record sermons and reflections. Then the problems really started, typified by it taking up to 8 hours to upload a twenty minute video to Facebook, which would then repeatedly fail at the 99% upload point. Very trying!!! Apparently, it was all to do with a painfully slow and flaky internet connection. It turns out that you can only upload at a fraction of the download speed and out here at the rectory, that isn’t great to start with. The solution, was setting up a YouTube channel which works at least twice as quickly and allows the videos to be posted on the What’s App groups as well. Who knew.

I turned out that my old SD video camera was actually an advantage after all as the files are smaller than HD video ones. To cut a long story short, we now have a lot of “new” people who are members of our virtual parishes, people from across not only the local community but the UK and even Australia! An unexpected bonus in these strange times. So what’s next? Well, like some other parishes we are hoping to introduce some form of “drive-in church” but have discovered that without official regulations from the NI Executive, yet with the responsibility to respect Government “Guidelines” which many or may not have elements of flexibility built into them, together with public liability insurance implications, this is much more complicated than it first appears. However, where there is a will, there is a way, thanks to Gavin’s help in the Diocesan office. So, in addition to the good old telephone, remember those, maybe there will be some way of using video conferencing for meetings. However, many of the people who could receive the greatest benefit from this, don’t currently have the ability to access it. A bit of a “Catch 22” situation.

We have to be realistic and come to terms with the fact that parish life as we knew it will not return in a recognisable form in the near future. We could be facing limitations for many more months or even years in some form, so it is everyone’s responsibility and opportunity to find ways to help our parishes adapt and ultimately thrive in the “new normal”. I am looking forward to hearing all the creative ideas that you have to share. God Bless, Rev Mike.
In early Spring we learned that a virus had evolved to travel from Wuhan, China. Most of us thought, Asia had experienced these viral outbreaks before and we were hopeful that it could be locally contained. To be honest, few of us could have foreseen that the disease would travel so quickly to Europe and beyond. The Covid 19 virus soon travelled to the UK and our beloved Province resulting in many thousands of deaths. We will remember Boris ordered the lockdown at precisely 10:35pm on Monday 23 March 2020 resulting in unparalleled consequences that impacted on our families and social gatherings, that included unrelieved pressure to the closure of our precious church buildings.

The Present

For me it is truly inspirational how the vast majority of our Parishes reacted. In our own Parish I set up two WhatsApp groups one for the entire Parish and one for the Select Vestry. Both have been a great resource for me to communicate to my Parishioners. For those without social media, I use the simple tool of regularly telephoning to reassure them of my thoughts and prayers and twice I have also written to all households. On Sundays at our customary Church time, my wife Carol and I go into our Parish Church and lead a Service that includes prayers and bible readings. My reflections are increasingly Christ-centred, focussing on how Jesus walks with us through these unprecedented challenging days, filling us with words of Comfort and Hope. The service is then posted on the St Lurach’s Parish Facebook page. With the apparent increase in spiritually that the lockdown has facilitated, I am encouraged that so many people watch the service, some of whom are not regular church attenders and are now hearing Jesus’ loving invite to follow Him.

The Future

We are organising an outdoor service at which we will dedicate a sign of THANK YOU TO the NHS that will remain on Parish property until the end of the pandemic. Social distancing will be strictly maintained, and it will include a local Accordion Concert Band who will be seated 2 metres apart.

I intend to continue to glorify God each and every week and encourage our Parishioners and I can meet together in our splendid Parish Churches of St. Lurach’s and Kilrea. Until then I will endeavour to pray daily for God’s Mercy and encourage my flock to pray and grow in faith, so that we may together see God’s Holy name magnified in giving us the victory over this dreadful disease.

Errigal & Desertoghill (Garvagh)

Rector - Rev. Carmen Hayes
Tel - 02929558266

Recently I read that a long-time member of a church named St John’s Church launched a scathing verbal attack on its new rector for his radical new ideas and changes. “Reverend” he exclaimed, “If God weren’t alive today, He’d turn in His grave for He’d be so shocked!” I wonder how people would react if this Church didn’t exist? I can’t help but wonder, how would that elder manage to live today? Who would have believed that a ‘virus’ would act upon the church or our communities but changes that have been forced, not only statesman might’ve have coped with the lockdown, there are still a fear that is compounded because of the sense of aloneness or isolation that they are upon the church or our communities but none of us could have predicted how it would affect our lives, our churches, or the world. When it was announced that the buildings would close I found myself turning to my youngest son Timothy and saying, “HELP – how are we going to continue to be church in isolation?” Thankfully, he was more familiar with technology than I was, and on Sunday 22nd the KIT Group of Parishes went live and celebrated Mother’s Day. He also nagged at me to ensure we followed correct procedure with the appropriate licenses for broadcasting and we stuck within the law! Since the 22nd March we have broadcasted a service every Sunday with full participation with members of the congregation doing the welcome, the readings, the children’s talk, the intercessions, and the creed. Bishop Andrew and Bishop Ken Clarke have shared in our services and we look forward to Captain George Newell, Church Army, speaking in the coming weeks. Our New Beginnings Service is broadcast on the second Sunday of each month and our Team Ministry will continue to do things that wouldn’t be possible in church or the hall. Gillian, my wife, was quick to organise Zoom parties with the children and young people which resulted in both their joy and gratitude.

Aghadowey

Rev Louise Crawford-McCafferty
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40 Braince Road, Garvagh BT55 4EQ
Email: louisescrawfordmccafferty@yahoo.com

Each day brings something new. You wouldn’t believe how many ‘national’ days there are in June. June 1st - public holiday in Ireland and Father’s Day June 21st, are the better known ones, but there are so many other exciting days in June. Did you know that June 1st is also National Peninsula Day? Or 4th is Old Mads Day! 6th is Zombie day – diet or toy, I’m not sure which! Or 8th is Best Friends Day, 22nd is Choc Eclair Day, and 25th is Handshake Day!

Kilrea, Tamlaght O’Ruddy - Crumlin & Lower

Rector: Rev Gay Millar

By now we are all familiar with the phrase, “The Church has left the building” and the reality that our buildings have been closed There was always the possibility of a pandemic but not the scale it has affected the world but none of us could have predicted how it would affect our lives, our churches, or the world. When it was announced that the buildings would close I found myself turning to my youngest son Timothy and saying, “HELP – how are we going to continue to be church in isolation?” Thankfully, he was more familiar with technology than I was, and on Sunday 22nd the KIT Group of Parishes went live and celebrated Mother’s Day. He also nagged at me to ensure we followed correct procedure with the appropriate licenses for broadcasting and we stuck within the law! Since the 22nd March we have broadcasted a service every Sunday with full participation with members of the congregation doing the welcome, the readings, the children’s talk, the intercessions, and the creed. Bishop Andrew and Bishop Ken Clarke have shared in our services and we look forward to Captain George Newell, Church Army, speaking in the coming weeks. Our New Beginnings Service is broadcast on the second Sunday of each month and our Team Ministry will continue to do things that wouldn’t be possible in church or the hall. Gillian, my wife, was quick to organise Zoom parties with the children and young people which resulted in both their joy and gratitude.

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Lamentations 3:22-23 “The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning, great is your faithfulness”

Continued on page 52

In SUMMER 2020

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51
There were many changes each day – the first that hits me is almost at the end of the day when I watch the news and hear how many people have died from Covid 19 and how sad we are. I appreciate our politicians at least commenting on how each number is a person, a family in grief, a loss from our nation, our world.

And then news each day of changes in the USA about the protests and riots. I have been on protests in America that have had more than 15,000 people in attendance and it was peaceful from beginning to end, so I know Americans know how to tell their government they aren’t happy with things as they are. What disturbed me most today was President Trump ‘wading’ through peaceful protestors in Washington to get a photograph of himself outside an Episcopalian church holding a Bible. This news is being discussed worldwide and a minister in Australia hit it on the head when he said, “The Bible is a book that you don’t read – it reads you. As a message of divine mercy, it exposes our need for that mercy. The Bible holds up a mirror to human nature and human society.”

Trump has yet to express any compassion or mercy towards the losses of Covid 19 or the loss of life that led to the protests and unfortunately riots. Jesus commands us to love one another; this was nothing new in New Testament times.

The Hebrew Scriptures used similar words in the law - Leviticus 19:18 “You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself’ I am the Lord.” This is an ancient commandment that needs to be lived out today as much as ever.

What have we learnt during lockdown?

Camus-Juxta-Bann (Macosquin)

Rector: Rev Paul Lyons

www.camus-juxta-bann.org

With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God’s grace was so powerfully at work in all them. Acts 4:33

What have we learnt during lockdown?

The suddenness of the change the coronavirus brought to everyday life surprised everyone. During the early part of the year we heard about the spread of the virus in other parts of the world. Very few (including myself) had any real idea about what impact it would have. Initially, I could see that people were in shock and fear. This reminds me that in life there will always be surprises, many are good, some are not.

On our final Sunday, 15th March, before restrictions are lifted we’ll continue to make. We all hope that when the current restrictions are lifted we’ll continue to appreciate all those who serve our daily needs.

Adversity can also bring opportunity. When we last met to worship in St Mary’s I didn’t think I would be embarking on a new way of communicating in the following weeks. Sunday online Facebook messages have become the ‘new normal’. Thank you to those who helped with the technology advice! Along with regular worship songs and hymns being posted, there are now more people being reached than on a regular Sunday in the past! God be the glory! God’s keeps his promises! Signs were put onto the church door and noticeboard on 17th March informing people that church worship and ministries were cancelled due to the Coronavirus. At the bottom of the page a bible verse (Psalm 46:1) was added: “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in times of need.”

During lockdown many people have told me of how they have found this promise to be true. God has continued to meet all their needs.

We’ve been reminded the Church is the people and not the building. As a church, what we have missed the most is being together. Yet, as I’ve spoken to many people on the telephone I’ve been encouraged by how church members have contacted others to offer support and help. Everyone is saying the same thing: I hope it will not be long until we can see each other again. What a comfort it is to experience the caring support of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

As the future, we’ll continue to learn more about God’s faithfulness as events unfold...

The Lord has been faithful to all our parishioners and we are grateful for all this time that we have had to think and appreciate the value of what we have. We have appreciated the support that we have received from our children and their families and the support of our brothers and sisters in Christ. As we look to the future, we will continue to learn more about God's faithfulness as events unfold.

Continued from page 51...
If you have to be in lockdown, Castlerock & Dunboe is a pretty good place to be. Thanks be to God for this fantastic weather! Before lockdown, Rev. Chris was on-hand for socially distanced chat and prayer as ‘Beach Pastor’. Unfortunately as restrictions came into force, that became impossible but when things are lifted it might become more of a regular thing.

The weekend the Festival should have come back bigger and brighter next year, DV.

As two memorial services on line. I learnt a lot about stress. In all of this I believe we all learnt that the important people in society are not the people many in society thought.

Dungiven & Bovevagh

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We’ve been asked to write about what we’ve been doing since lockdown and what our hopes are for the future.

What we’ve been doing

1. Communication - We’ve tried to keep people up to date with developments, and sharing stories hope in the church or local community. We continue to publish our Sunday News sheet which people appreciate getting. Our Facebook page has been very busy!

2. Pastor Care - supporting people via telephone, email or Zoom and, most importantly, in prayer.

3. Worship - We decided to make our Sunday Service available on YouTube because it would allow a degree of participation. We invite members of the congregation to record the readings, prayers or other parts of the service at home. Two members of the church have taken turns, week about, to provide video kids talks which are

Continued on page 56...
5. Fellowship - Although we can’t be together physically, we see one another each week in the “virtual parish” at the end of our broadcast services, where we share photos of parishioners engaging in various activities. Our Zoom Quiz is great fun, and we’re trying a Virtual Soup Lunch!

6. Service - At a time like this churches can become self-absorbed, so we’ve encouraged people to volunteer to support others, and raised funds for the Bishop’s Appeal and Leprosy Mission for people in much worse circumstances than our own.

Coronavirus (COVID-19) is impacting all of us-both in the church and in our communities. The very fabric of everyday life has changed before us; these are unprecedented times. Who among us could have imagined that churches, factories, airports, retail shops, community centres and the like ever being shut down? Many people, especially those who are elderly living on their own and those who are sick, feel a sense of isolation that compounds the fear. And many of us, even if we’re not on our own or sick are equally worried about our own health, our families and what the future holds. In the midst of all this, we are challenged to find new and exciting ways to communicate the message of salvation found only in Jesus Christ and to relate the Sunday readings to what’s going on around us.

What are my hopes are for the future?
1. That we will remember to prioritise the things we have discovered are truly important, especially God.
2. That the Church will be able to connect with a much wider range of people by using the learning it has gained by having to do things differently.
3. That somehow we can find a way to better equate our society and our world so that financial reward depends less on power and more on value.

I recall ending my last notes saying we were travelling through Lent towards the celebrations of Easter Day. I did not think we would be celebrating it via Facebook service! How things have changed in such short time. Parishioners are now able to fast forward the service, cut the sermon off and pick and choose when and where to watch Sunday worship. Some have been able to watch the service in their PJ’s. It will be interesting to see how they turn up at church on the first Sunday back.

Covid 19 will be remembered as the time when Rectors became multi-media stars or failures. We look forward to the Bishop awarding “Diocesan Oscar’s” to the clergy when this is all over. There have been some steep learning curves over the past 11 weeks or so. But isn’t it great how the Church can adapt so quickly? Many have complained that the Church is slow to move with the times. I think on this occasion we had no choice but move and move quickly. The way we do ‘Church’ may be different, but the eternal message of God’s saving work remains the same. We have had to cancel many events during this time and my heart goes out to those many brides and grooms and no doubt mothers of the bride, who had put so much effort into organising the big day. I have had to rearrange 7 weddings already during this period and looks like a few more will have to do likewise. 2021 is going to be a joyful year in the parish, God willing. There have been some sad events as well as have conducted funerals with small numbers of immediate family around the graveside. Those who have been bereaved by the loss of a loved one have not had the opportunity of being comforted by their wider social contacts. We continue to pray for each of you and ask the God of Comfort to enthrall you in his loving, comforting arms and bring you peace. This year for our Children’s Day service the Rector was cut off air, and puppets, children and Sunday school teachers took over the service. What a wonderful job they did as we thought about Jesus being the light of the world.
Chapter News

We offer our congratulations to The Venerable Robert Miller and The Reverend Canon Sam McVeigh, both of whom were ordained in 1995 and who will celebrate the 25th anniversary of their ordination this month. To The Very Reverend Raymond Stewart and The Reverend Canon Walter Quill who was ordained on 26th June 1960 and who will celebrate the 60th anniversary of his ordination this month. During this time of lockdown it is not unreasonable to find that we will cope better on some days than on others. In order to prevent negative thoughts and feelings from building up inside me and to look after my mental health I have recently returned to an activity that I enjoyed some years ago - writing poetry.

Here is one entitled ‘Do not worry’.

‘Do not let your hearts be troubled’, Jesus tells us in Saint John, ‘trust in God my heavenly Father and in me, His only Son. Cast your cares upon my Father, see His loving, smiling face, He will take away your worries, such is His amazing grace’.

Tell your Father all your troubles; don’t pretend that they’re not real, bring to Him your inner secrets, tell Him how you really feel. Place your prayers upon the altar, leave them at the Cross of love. For your father up in heaven hears you from His home above’.

‘Peace, Shalom, is what I offer when your cross is hard to bear, it’s my way of saying clearly, ‘O my child, I really care’. Do not feel alone or worthless, you mean all the world to me, Trust in me and in my Father, and our love will set you free’.

‘Though these days through which you’re passing will remain for some time yet Don’t despair about your journey, keep on smiling, do not fret. Even though you cannot see me, I am not so far away. And I’ll walk along beside you to protect you every day’.

Psalm 89:36

...that his line will continue forever and his throne endure before me like the sun.

To The Reverend Canon Walter Quill who was ordained on 26th June 1960 and who will celebrate the 60th anniversary of his ordination this month.

To The Reverend Canon John Merrick Pastoral Assistant

He once courted publicity by promising to build a wall to keep Mexicans and other Latinos out of his country. As this year’s Feast of Pentecost approached, however, President Donald Trump found himself ensconced in the White House with a newly-strengthened security fence and a wall of riot police separating him from thousands of anti-racism protesters.

The New York Times reported that Secret Service agents - nervous for his safety - had “abruptly rushed the president to the underground bunker used in the past during terrorist attacks”. The President disputed the newspaper’s version of what happened but the hashtag “#bunkerboy” became a trending term on Twitter. It was an ignominious position for the ‘leader of the Free World’ to find himself in.

President Trump - who wears both his Christianity and his law and order credentials on his sleeve - got to the Oval Office partly through his ability to read the public mood. It was a faculty which seems to have deserted him in the wake of George Floyd’s death at the knee of a Minneapolis police officer. It was hard to imagine things getting much worse for the first citizen but, if the Trump presidency has taught us anything, it is to expect the unexpected.

His walk across Lafayette Square, on the Monday evening after Pentecost Day, for a photo opportunity outside the fire-damaged St John’s Episcopal Church, earned the President scathing headlines. Around twenty, dergy and thousands of demonstrators were manhandled off the streets by riot police to facilitate the stunt. President Trump posed briefly in front of the boarded up ‘Church of the Presidents’ - holding aloft a Bible - before retreating to the White House again.

In the half century since Dr Martin Luther King’s assassination, the United States has elected its first black president, and there are many show business and sporting role models for young blacks to emulate. But it’s our problem, too. Recent research on Coronavirus deaths highlights the disproportionate impact the virus has had on black and minority ethnic communities; and black and brown communities on both sides of the Atlantic are regularly found at the wrong end of social deprivation and unemployment charts. We’ve got to be blind to miss it.

President Trump got one thing right on his publicity stunt outside St John’s Church - the link between the Bible and politics. As the Archbishop of Canterbury said two years ago, Jesus was ‘never party-political. No wing of politics - left or right - can claim God as being on its side. But Jesus was highly political.’ God expects those who claim to act in his name to be the same, Archbishop Welby said ‘That means action - and words’.

voices to the growing clamour for change. We, on this side of the Atlantic, have often viewed racism as ‘an American problem’, but it’s our problem, too. Recent research on Coronavirus deaths highlights the disproportionate impact the virus has had on black and minority ethnic communities; and black and brown communities on both sides of the Atlantic are regularly found at the wrong end of social deprivation and unemployment charts. We’ve got to be blind to miss it.

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In the half century since Dr Martin Luther King’s assassination, the United States has elected its first black president, and there are many show business and sporting role models for young blacks to emulate. But racism is still deeply entrenched in American society. The Archbishop of Canterbury and the Pope have been among the many religious leaders who have added their