News for the pews...

Facebook details are included for parishes that use Facebook. PLEASE NOTE - you do not have to be on Facebook to access a parish page. Just type the parish Facebook name or address, e.g. @ccmsp into your search engine on smart phone or laptop/tablet etc and click on the parish page.

Raphoe, Raymochy & Clonleigh
The Very Rev Arthur Barrett, Rector and Dean of Raphoe
Facebook: St Eunan’s Cathedral @cathedralraphoe

Sunday worship
As we are now currently in a further phase of ‘lockdown’, having moved to Level 5 of the government’s guidelines. It has not been possible to return to ‘in-church’ worship. However, following a brief intermission while Dean Arthur was on sabbatical leave during October, our services have returned to Facebook Live each Sunday at 12 noon.

Funerals
The funeral of Roy Barnett took place in his home on Monday 5th October, with burial afterwards in the Cathedral graveyard. The Reverend Judi McGaffin conducted the funeral.

The funeral of Tommy Gordon took place in Raymochy Parish Church on Monday 26th October, followed by burial in the adjoining graveyard. The service was conducted by Canon David Crooks.

Raphoe Cathedral Renovation Project 2020
The works to the Cathedral are progressing well, despite some challenges. Some bad weather has delayed work slightly, and also a redesign of the roof structure over the chancel and sanctuary was necessary, as some structural issues were discovered when the old tiles were removed. Otherwise work is progressing and the new slates are looking very well indeed. Further work involving the renovation of the clock faces and louvres is being undertaken, as well as essential lead work to the external ‘steps’ of the tower. We are extremely grateful to the All Churches Trust which has provided a very generous grant of £12,000. This will help us to narrow the financial gap. Donations can still be made towards the cost of the project (now budgeted to be in the region of €420,000) either directly to the Dean, or the Hon. Treasurer, or by Paypal via the cathedral’s website - www.raphoeacthedral.ie.

Convoy, Monellan & Donaghmore
Rector: Rev Canon William Long
Tel: 074 9101817
"Give thanks with a grateful heart"...at the time of writing we have just given thanks and celebrated the harvest gathered in. Yes I know we were late but I had hoped that we might have had the service physically rather than digitally. Oh well, we took the challenge as a positive and I was able to interview and include some of the farmers, Atty Hardy, Keith Patton, Paul Stewart and William Kee, with thoughts and prayers from the farm. It was also great to be able to include two readers from Meenglass Church, Irene Kee and Jennifer Rule as the church, due its small size, has been closed though this time of Covid-19. We also gave thanks with a grateful heart, a big thank you, for the generosity of the parish and beyond, (as you can see from the photo), in donating non-perishable food and toiletries. These will be passed onto the Finn Valley Family Resource Centre and then onto St Vincent De Paul, and will help needy families this Christmas.

...“because he’s given Jesus Christ his Son”...this Christmas will be different and we are going to make this difference a positive! We are going to try a Virtual Nativity, with the children playing the parts and videoing themselves telling us the story of Christmas. Thanks to DRY & SEEDS we hope to join in “Shine the light for Christmas’, a time to share the light of Christ this Christmas. At this darkest time of the year let the light of Jesus that has come into the world, shine brightly giving hope. Unfortunately it’s too early to say what the Christmas services will look like, yet I’m reminded of a little phrase I heard “we don’t need to save Christmas because Christ Jesus has saved us”! So on that positive note let’s shine the light of hope and keep safe.

God Bless, Rector Adam Pullen

“Saving Christmas?”
A lot of the public discussion around re-imposing Coronavirus restrictions has mentioned that these measures are necessary in order “to save Christmas.” Both the Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Tony Holohan, and the UK Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, have used this phrase. But thankfully, we don’t need to save Christmas. Indeed, we can’t save Christmas - Christmas saves us! The message of Christmas, in the words of Paul in 1 Timothy 1:15, is that “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” Perhaps instead of trying to preserve our consumer-driven, consumption-mad, sentiment-laden Christmas practices, we will focus again on the true glory of the Nativity - that God came to be with us in our darkness and to bring his saving presence and eternal hope into this afflicted world. That is a real reason to celebrate!

Plans and preparedness
At the time of writing (early November) 2020 we have gathered inside our church buildings on 23 Sundays and out of them on 21. It’s too early to know what combination of in-person and on-line worship will be possible at Christmas time. I would imagine our Christmas worship will be primarily digital (on Facebook.com/DonegalGroupofParishes) but if the opportunity arises to celebrate Holy Communion together in our 4 churches then we will do so with thankfulness and following all public health guidance. I’d love to see if we can find a way to sing carols - perhaps outdoors or even together in our own homes. Most important of all, I want us to make sure that no-one in our community is left behind, either in terms of the finance/food/fuel they need, or in terms of the human company and encouragement, which are equally essential. We must do all we can to ensure no-one goes hungry this season - whether through lack of food, warmth, friendship or hope.

Prayer
Let’s make this Advent a season of sustained prayer, focusing on the words with which the Bible’s thousand-and-more pages come to a close: “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God’s people. Amen.”
A Funny Old Christmas

‘The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it’. John 1:5

This Christmas, perhaps even more than any other, we need the light that shines in the darkness. We need to see its glow relieving our heaviness. We need to feel its heat warming our chill moments of loneliness and isolation. This pandemic has reminded us of the importance of that great commandment to love God and to love our neighbour. We need to look out for one another. We need to stay in contact with one another. We need to support our local community. We need to go to Christ, to draw close to him in prayer. We yearn for fellowship with one another again. We long for our church doors to open once more and to be able to join together in worship as we prepare to celebrate the birth of the Christ-child. Advent is the season of four Sundays which fall before Christmas Day.

Advent, as the season of longing, reminds us of our need of God, of our desire to draw close to him, of our need to be relieved of our heavy burdens. A relief that only God can bring. But the true blessing of Advent is that it is followed by Christmas, by the fulfilment of God’s promise, not only to come in the birth of the Messiah, but to come a Second Time to bring our longing to an end.

This Christmas our hope is built on the knowledge that this longing will come to an end. Christ will come. Our hopes will be fulfilled and our fears will be dispelled. Families will reunite. Friendships will be restored. Doors will be open. Christ will come, and we will celebrate. We will give thanks. We will be blessed by his presence, and that blessing will carry us through the challenges and uncertainties that lie ahead in the New Year. We know that this will come to pass because we faithfully believe that the light shines in the midst of this and every darkness, and this darkness has not overcome it.

As I write this, our church doors are closed. It is my deepest hope and prayer that they will be open for Christmas. If the church doors are open, we will have services on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, albeit with a much deeper sense of thanksgiving at being able to come together again. More details will follow closer to the time and will be dependent on local restrictions. If our church doors remain closed, we will continue our services online and we will find additional ways of celebrating the birth of Christ as the family of God.

I continue to keep each family in prayer and ask God’s blessing upon us all as we continue this difficult journey together. Even though we are apart at the moment, we stand shoulder to shoulder as brothers and sisters in Christ, under the authority of God and surrounded and upheld by his love.
Coronavirus, Level 5
A new language, a new outlook on life - "but not as we knew it." Questions about Christmas are on the tongues of many. It is very reassuring that Christmas is so important to so many people. It is very reassuring that family and close friends are so important to so many people. And this is good.

Anticipation and hope are part of Advent. We do all sorts of things in preparation - Christmas decorations, Christmas tree, presents, family meal, parties. When to bake the cake or pudding? One of my favourite things is lighting the Advent candles. The steady countdown; the four coloured candles representing hope, faith, joy and peace, lit, one each Sunday, as we journey through Advent, and the fifth candle lit on Christmas day, representing the Light of the World in a time of darkness. I have a photograph of my Advent candles, and a crib Sean and I were given for our first Christmas after we were married. It came from an aunt who had worked as a missionary in Nigeria. All the characters are Nigerian, which reminds me that Jesus came to rescue everyone, no matter what country or creed, rich or poor. He came to us all, without exception.

Most years we worry about Christmas presents and decorations and the big meal. But this year is different; we need to look at what is important. It is important to celebrate the birth of Jesus. To recognise our Lord as he became part of a human family, while we are surrounded by our own family. But not all the family may be able to be home, so we need to cherish them in our heart. Be patient and understanding. Advent is also about the anticipation and hope of the Second Coming of our Lord. We know Jesus walks with us during these difficult Covid days, but just as there will be a time when we can again have large family gatherings, there will be a time when Jesus will come again, and we will see Jesus face to face.

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light... For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:2,6)

Our Christmas services will be announced in accordance with Covid restrictions.
for the Lord; be strong and he shall comfort your heart; wait patiently for the Lord.”
(Psalm 27:17)

Thanks
We were pleased to benefit by way of a cheque for €1,750 from Mr Benny Kelly of Carrigart in September. This wonderful act of generosity was part of the proceeds of Benny’s 300 kilometre walk completed in August. This is the kind of sacrificial, public-spirited and ecumenical initiative that brings people together and gives hope for the future. Well done Benny!

Worship
It seems unlikely that churches will be open again for Sunday worship until December.

In the meantime the Priest in Charge, Canon Irwin will continue to broadcast a Service at 12noon on Sundays. You can tune in on: facebook.com/wgirwin.

From The Registers

Baptism
Sunday, 20th September: Éabha Rene McElhinney (Carrigart)

These months are going fast and when this issue comes out we will be facing Christmas. What that will be like? I have no idea; but one thing we can be sure of is that God’s message of the gift of life in Christ himself, will remain the same.

“The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel which means, God with us”. (Isaiah 7:14)

May I wish you all a Happy and Peaceful Christmas.

From David Griscome.
It’s Covid-19 All Over Again
Having actually held church services in July and August it was with some trepidation that we started September with some baptisms still to do, and a wedding planned for the autumn. As Donegal was threatened with lockdown again (well, level 3 restrictions - which included no in-church services) we ran out of time for the last baptism. A month later the wedding, very sadly, had to be postponed too. On top of those disappointments, there had already been the weddings that had been postponed, and the baptisms that were never planned!

The pandemic is throwing everything up in the air, as we find we can’t plan ahead with certainty, and can’t do normal things, but that is surely a good challenge for people who know and trust God - even if some of the restrictions on church services are probably disproportionate to the actual risks from short, socially distanced, mask-wearing, non-singing events in a large buildings that are only used once a week. Certainly other counties in the EU have now decided that churches should not be closed, especially given Freedom of Religion’s status as a Human Right and often a constitutional right - not just a legally permitted privilege.

Nevertheless, come October we were venturing online with our Harvest Thanksgiving Services, the second with Bishop Andrew as our (virtual) guest preacher in St Columba’s church, Gartan. Filming in church and adding hymns from the Church of Ireland recordings actually proved very popular. Especially popular was the children’s harvest service!

Now, as the year end approaches, there is not only Christmas but also the forthcoming celebrations of the 1500th anniversary of St Columba’s birth to look forward to. So we are now planning to record something for the anniversary of Columba’s birth in Gartan on 7th December, and to go online to celebrate Jesus’s birthday at Christmas - with the annual Service of Lessons and Carols, and Christmas communion with carol singing. Even if we are able to have in-church services as well, most people would not be able to attend under the likely attendance restrictions.

How things have changed in a few short months!

Christmas online:
Sun 20th Dec, 10.30am: A Service of Lessons and Carols from Conwal Parish Church
Christmas Eve, 7.00pm: A Service of Lessons and Carols
Christmas Eve, 11.30pm: Christmas Communion from St Columba’s Gartan
Christmas Day, 10.30am: Christmas Communion

In-church services, if permissible, will be announced nearer the time!

Taughboyne with Craigdoish, All Saints & Killea
Rev Canon David Crooks: Rector and Rural Dean
Tel: 074 914 0135  Mob: 00447871974658
Email: dcrooks@eircom.net

A provisional date, Sunday 10th January 2021, has been set for the Confirmation, which had to be postponed from last May. There is no way of knowing at this stage if the Confirmation will be able to be held on that date, as circumstances may alter. It may not be possible to complete the course by then. However, much of the important ground has been covered, and each young person will receive a folder containing notes on each topic in the entire course. In the circumstances, I think that this will be perfectly adequate. The young people are keen to be confirmed, which is a good sign, so we will get on with it! The candidates are Rachel Browne, Ellie Cox, Sam Coyle, Alan Devenney, Ava Garvey, Joshua Garvey, Natasha Gordon-Moore, Rachel Jeffrey, Stirling Moore and Rachel Porter. Please remember them in your prayers.

At the time of writing, church services cannot be held. A provisional date for return to church is Sunday 6th December - hopefully this can be achieved. However, it is impossible at the moment to arrange the usual Christmas activities, Carol Services, the Children’s Party and the various other social activities which take place around Advent and Christmas. If we can have Christmas Services, these will be as follows: Sunday 20th December, Service of Nine Lessons and Carols in Killea, 11.00am, Thursday 24th December, the First Eucharist of Christmas, St Columba’s Craigadooish, 11.15pm, and Christmas Day, Friday 25th December Holy Communion Killea 8.30am, Taughboyne 9.45am, All Saints 11.00am. Other arrangements, such as Advent mid-week services, will be announced if and when and where they can be held.
Congratulations again to Sean McClafferty on completing the Diocesan Reader course. His Commissioning has had to be postponed twice. It has now been provisionally arranged for Sunday 6th December in All Saints’ Church at 7.30pm.

In the present circumstances, there really is not much to report. The plague is decimating our finances. It will almost certainly mean that we cannot have our usual Christmas sales, valuable sources of income. However, please continue to pay in your Sustentation, and fill the Gift Sunday envelopes.

Whilst our own finances may be severely curtailed, parishes of Derry and Raphoe are being asked to support Bishop Hall Speers in Mahajanga in Madagascar. Whatever our financial difficulties, we are indeed rich by comparison. Bishop Speers desperately needs large sums of money to recruit, train, house and pay clergy. I will do a sponsored cycle some day in the new year from Moville to Newtown, linking the Moville and Donagh and Taughboyne groups of parishes, if you would support this, I would be very grateful. I have a personal interest, of course, as Bishop Speers is my brother-in-law. Anne and I attended his episcopal ordination in Mahajanga Cathedral nearly two years ago - in the blazing tropical heat!

Thank you everyone for your perseverance and prayers.

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**Fahan Upper and Lower**

**Rector:** Rev Judi McGaffin  
**Tel:** 07834561433  
**Facebook:** Fahanandbuncranachurchofireland  
“Cherishing and connecting with all God’s children”

**Cherishing and connecting with all God’s children**

Normally at this time of the year we are looking back to the start of another Sunday School year, community harvest services and suppers and looking forward to Christmas nativity plays, and packed churches, with a great community feel at the “midnight” on Christmas Eve and a family atmosphere on Christmas Day.

This year has been, and probably will be, different. We have in this group of parishes realised the losses endured by so many, but have also recognised the creativity released in many too! And in all of this chaos we have found that there is still much to look back on and celebrate and to look forward to too.

Although our Sunday School didn’t open again in September we have at 10am on a Saturday morning a PRAISE service (Prayer, readings and reflection, activity, inspiration and songs for everyone). We have “helpers” - Jack and Jill and Kevin and Kylie who are friends of CJ’s! Through this time together we have continued to encourage our ministry of art and craft that was started on Palm Sunday. On Harvest Sunday we revealed the first 2 of what I hope will be many collages of the work of so many people across the globe. Creativity that has helped many people worship and learn about God in a different way.

And although we weren’t in church we were able to broadcast an online harvest with at least some of the usual decorations! (It’s just a pity that as yet smells aren’t able to be transmitted over the internet! The “helpers” got into the harvest celebrations too!!) Our “helpers” have also been busy during our Zoom calls with St Mura’s National school as we learn about the Lord’s Prayer this year. It will be great to see and share the work that the students produce by the year end!

Zoom has also helped us to continue our Bible Study with weekly meetings looking at Mark’s and John’s Gospels.

Not to be deterred by COVID we celebrated our annual prayer week online this year! Each evening at 8pm we continued to celebrate creativity as we thought about the creation story through reading, reflecting, mediating, praying, and suggesting something to do, or continue to think about. We had a wonderful global congregation connecting with God and each other!

Looking forward Advent is a time for preparation and this year we will be really concentrating on our preparation for Christmas, with Advent calendars and something for everyone to do every day of Advent as we prepare! More information on our fahanandbuncranachurchofireland Facebook page and in the CJ section of this edition of n:vision.

We are also planning a Virtual Nativity play!

We have no idea what restrictions will be in place across our land in the future - so keep connected with us on our facebook page - fahanandbuncranachurchofireland - for worship and news and much, much more!
Due to the Covid pandemic, there really is not much to report. Once again, services cannot be held in our churches. However, Sunday 6th December has been set as the date when we might be able to return. This will be confirmed nearer the time. Sadly, it looks as if the usual Christmas activities - Children’s parties, Carol Services and the various social gatherings may have to be cancelled. However, if we can celebrate Christmas in our church buildings, the dates and venues of the Service of Nine Lessons and Carols and the Christmas Services will be arranged and announced as soon as possible.

Once again, as Rural Dean, on your behalf, I thank most sincerely the Revd Mervyn Peoples and Mrs Maureen Williams for their conduct of services. I hear over and over again how much they are appreciated. A Confirmation at some date next year is being considered. There are, I think, about three young people who are eligible. Revd Mervyn Peoples has kindly agreed to see to this, and together, we can arrange Confirmation classes and a date for Confirmation.

Parish finances at this time are being badly affected, so even if it may not be possible to hold the usual fund-raising activities, please continue to give as generously as you can through your Sustentation.

However badly affected our finances may be, we are rich compared to countries in the poorer regions of the world. Derry and Raphoe Dioceses are being asked to support the Diocese of Mahajanga in Madagascar, and Bishop Hall Speers. His diocesan coffers are always empty, and he needs large sums of money to recruit, train, house and pay his clergy. I will do a sponsored cycle from Moville to Newtowncunningham someday early in the New Year. This would link the Moville and Donagh Group with Taughboye Group. I would appreciate your support. I have a personal interest, as Bishop Speers is my brother-in-law. My wife Anne, his sister, and I attended his episcopal ordination in St Luke’s Cathedral, Mahajanga in March 2019. It was quite an experience - an exciting mixture of high Anglo-Catholic worship, laced with 22 hymns and arm waving and Pentecostal style worship. A seven-hour service including a half hour sermon in Malagasy and speeches in 40 degrees heat!

I wish you all a holy Advent and as happy a Christmas as possible in these trying times.

At the heart of our Christian faith is a belief in God’s ability to redeem. In other words when the broken and sinful state of the world causes suffering, God is able to bring good out of it. When I have felt fearful or frustrated in this pandemic it is to that central truth that I have looked for comfort. This edition will come to you about Christmas time: the message of Christmas is one that the world needs very much.

The heart of Christmas is that God acted to redeem the world from evil. In the Christmas story the Church calls the world to remember God can redeem us from the suffering caused by this virus. Although the cost to the world around us is great, and the need to redeem the world, urgent, it is a need we hope will be met as God supports us by his presence. In part we look to scientists for a vaccine; to healthcare workers for a cure and compassion, and to one another to pick up new patterns of behaviour (physical distance, washing hands and wearing masks). All of this is important! Around all of these we also look to God; Christmas reminds us that he cares about us and about the effect evil has on us and he has acted to redeem the brokenness around us. Christmas is the very message the world needs now. It is not about escaping from the grim reality of Covid-19. It is an assurance that God is by our side in
this terrible time. Emmanuel, ‘God with us’, - that is the message we need to share with our families, our neighbours and it is the message we need to remember ourselves. Christmas is a time when we can see that the foundation of our faith is God’s love for us.

The other aspect, along with God’s love, is the call to fellowship, togetherness. Physical distance does not mean we should let relationships fade; it means we need to work a little harder to keep them strong. Modern technology, from the simplicity of a phone to the more complex forms on the internet, allow us to keep social nearness in a time of physical distancing. I’ve encouraged you before and do so again. Consider who you want to encourage with a phone call or text. When we recall Christmas, it is a time that makes us think of our loved ones and let us reach out with that same love to our friends and neighbours.

I want to finish by reminding you that as a clergy team we are here for you; and we are thankful that you are here for us. Let us meet together when we can; support one another in prayer and practical service; and let us hold unto hope that God gives us when He reminds us in the Christmas story that He is Emmanuel.

God bless you and keep you safe.
Yours in Christ,
Robert+

St. Augustine’s, Londonderry
Rector: Rev Nigel Cairns
Facebook: St. Augustine’s Church, Londonderry

Our Select Vestry - like many, I’m sure - has noted how our fundraising programme hasn’t happened this year! To proactively address this, we have launched a new addition to the St. Augustine’s Deli range. (see page 24).

Recently our church community has benefitted from two grants - one from All Churches Trust Growing Lives, and the other from the Church of Ireland Board of Education. The first grant will be used to help us to sort out many of the storage problems we have in our church hall. So far we have done a good clear out, repainted one of our storage areas and ordered a bespoke storage solution for the space. More importantly though, the grant will allow us to remodel some of the internal space within the church hall to create an area for our youth. The final part of our Growing Lives grant will help us to refresh the furniture and resources for our Kidzklub and creche. We are extremely grateful to All Churches Trust!

The Education grant will enable us to commission a narrated history of St Augustine’s, particularly highlighting the unique place it has as the oldest ecclesiastical site in the city, as well as our parish links to St. Columba, dating back to the sixth century. We hope this resource will be significant as the 1500th anniversary of St Columba begins to gather momentum, and we envisage the resource as being of educational benefit to the Key Stage 2 classes in our local primary schools.

During the month of October, the Rector, as well as other neighbouring clergy, was involved in the First Light Project, which was released on the DCSDC website on 1st November 2020. We were delighted to be involved in this once again, and we enjoyed picking up the theme of ‘first light’, which is pertinent at this time for so many reasons, not least All Saints, Advent and Christmastide.

Looking ahead, our Kidzklub leaders have taken up Kirsty’s offer and registered for the Virtual Nativity performance. We hope to be able to show this on the screen in church on a Sunday during Advent. During the earlier part of autumn, the church choir met once or twice (four metres apart!) to record some choral music for Harvest Thanksgiving and Remembrance Sunday. Subject to government guidance, we hope to do the same again soon. This will hopefully allow us to hear some of the much-loved Christmas carols in our services.

A full list of Christmas services and events will be in our Church Magazine and posted on our Facebook Page. In the meantime, the Congregation at St. Augustine’s brings you season’s greetings, and wish you God’s richest blessing as 2020 merges into 2021.
Thoughts On Covid 19
We are living in difficult times; two months ago we thought we were on top of the virus and winning this battle. However, in the space of a few weeks we felt as if we are back to where we were in April and May. We need to get to what we were doing back then and I know it’s very difficult. Every day we need to be praying for a vaccine. This is what we need more than anything.

In the middle of lockdown we stayed in touch with each other a lot better than we are at the moment. We need to get back to texting, phone calls, WhatsApp, Facebook and whatever else we do to keep one another’s spirits up. We need to re-ignite our awareness that many people are on their own and try to keep in touch with them.

We need to get back to a consistent prayer pattern. There’s a lovely verse in Proverbs 3 “In everything you do put God first and he will crown your efforts with success.” I have been carrying this verse around with me for many years so I know how true it is. Take a bit of time on your own, find a quiet place and pour out your heart to God, be assured that he will be right with you wherever you are. We need to get back to in-church worship if at all possible. We were going well with numbers increasing each week. However, this stopped when we had the tighter restrictions in Derry and Strabane Council area. We have very stringent protocols in place and if we follow these then there is no safer place to be than in our churches.

In the meantime stay safe, follow the protocols and may the Lord bless each one of you. Christmas Services will be on our Facebook pages.

In the meantime follow the protocols, stay safe and have a lovely Christmas. I plan to!
This is the Christmas edition of n:vision. But will there be a Christmas this year? Or will Christmas not happen? Will families be able to get together to celebrate the feast? Or will families not be able to meet together? Will there be traditional Carol Services this year? Or, will singing still be frowned upon? So many questions. So much uncertainty.

Life has been dramatically upended by COVID this year, and I know that children have been especially affected. The whole world is different! Will Christmas be different too? Most likely.

But I’m hoping it will be different in a good way. That the busyness and “clutter” of Christmas we’ve seen in the past will take a lower priority this year. That perhaps we’ll see Christmas with new eyes. That we’ll get back to the essential message of why Jesus came to this earth in the first place.

Now, I very much like Christmas. I just don’t need 3 months of it. This year, more than ever, it seems to go on and on - from October through to December! It goes on and on and on, with the pressure to buy, buy, buy.

Perhaps, this year more than any other in recent times, things seem bleak. No end in sight to the pandemic. No certainty as to what way we can celebrate this great event. Yet, there is a sense in which we should always celebrate the coming of Jesus. Is this not a good time to recalibrate how and why we mark the most wonderful time of the year. Should this be a time, not for a commercial windfall, but a time to give thanks to our God for giving us the most precious gift ever? In a time of deep darkness, God promised to send a great Light. Isaiah prophesied these words long ago, and time went by ... 700 years.

And then at just the right moment, Jesus came. Miracle birth. Light bringer. Hope instiller. Saviour and Lord. Given to “us”. To you. And to me. He came to dwell among us. He came to set us free. He came that we might have life, more abundantly.

In this time of uncertainty, we can rest assured, He is a big God. Nothing is too difficult for Him to handle. And He cares about all that concerns you.

Maybe this uncertainty is causing you heartache and anxiety. Not being able to see loved ones. Not being able to share meals with family and friends. Having to isolate for fear of catching the virus. Maybe, even, this is the year when that loved one was taken by Covid 19. Maybe this year you have experienced that sense of deep loss, and you’re feeling all alone this season, and fear or despair have gripped your heart. You can bring it to Jesus. All of it, the brokenness, the questions, the uncertainty, the pain.

The gospel is the real meaning behind Christmas, and it is able to unify and heal and refocus our priorities on what truly matters. When we’re troubled and hurting, when we feel lonely or afraid, He is our Wonderful Counsellor.

When we need a miracle in life, when we need someone to fight for us, He is our Mighty God.

God bless and stay safe.

John

Urney and Sion Mills
Rector: Rev Jonathan McFarland
Facebook: Parish of Urney Christ Church and Church of the Good Shepherd @urneyparish
I write this after our churches have reopened for in-church worship after many challenging months. How joyful it is to meet together in worship again, to sing hymns, to open God’s word, to pray for our needs and the needs of others and to be sent out in God’s world and for God’s mission.

Harvest 2020
This year things were slightly different but with God all challenges are opportunities. We held different services for different age groups so all were encouraged and provided for. We held Harvest Zoom Kids on Friday 9th October, an interactive Zoom meeting for parents and primary school children hosted by Sarah Emerson from Scripture Union. We also held Harvest Zoom Youth on Saturday 10th October, an interactive Zoom meeting hosted by Rev Peter Smith for parents and secondary school children. Then on Sunday 11th October we held three traditional Harvest Family services in church, Derg at 8:45am / Killeter at 10am / Derg at 11am - giving folks different options as we Give Thanks at Such a Time as This.

Butterflies of Hope
We partnered with local schools and nursing homes who prepared colourful Butterflies of Hope with Bible verses and prayers. These were displayed on Derg Parish Church railings as a sign of Christian hope at this time. They made a huge impact in our community.

Remembrance 2020
On Sunday 8th November we marked Remembrance Sunday with an Act of Remembrance at all our morning services. Representatives of the Royal British Legion were in attendance and we had a retiring collection at all services for the Poppy Appeal. On Sunday afternoon 15th November we held two afternoon services in Derg and Killeter for families called Poppy Kids. The children decorated Poppy Rocks and they returned and displayed them at this service and over the following weeks. Kirsty McCartney was our visiting speaker.

Advent and Christmas 2020
Already we are looking forward to the opportunities that Advent and Christmas bring to reach out into our community. This year some of our activities will be reimagined in a Covid safe way. In place of our Sunday School and Parish Family Christmas Party we plan to run a Christmas Car Trail, finishing in the stable at Bethlehem (Aghyaran, Once in Royal David’s City C.F Alexander Garden). We plan to use Play It By Ear Virtual Nativity this year as promoted by SEEDS and Derry Raphoe Youth. We will also take part in all the SEEDS and DRY initiatives for children, young people and leaders that are being planned.

Butterflies of Hope at Derg Parish Church

Drumclamph & Clare, Langfield Upper & Lower

Rector: Rev Robert G. Keogh
Tel: 028 8167 1433
Email: rgkeogh@utvinternet.com
http://www.drumclamph.derry.anglican.org
Facebook: Drumclamph ClareandLangfield

Carol Services
St. Andrew’s Clare: Sunday 20th December at 10:00am.
Drumclamph Parish Church: Sunday 20th December at 10:00am.
Lower Langfield: Sunday 20th December at 11:15am.

Christmas Eve
Holy Communion will be celebrated in St. Andrew’s Clare, starting at 10:45pm on Christmas Eve.

Christmas Day
Holy Communion in Drumclamph at 9:00am and Lower Langfield at 10:30am.

A united service for our group of parishes will be held in Lower Langfield Church on Sunday 27th December at 11:15am.

Prayer Point
At time of writing we are in a circuit breaker for the pandemic. We all need to pray for
the scientists that they will be able to develop safe and effective vaccines which are the key to ending the pandemic. 

God’s grace: To understand the word ‘imputed’, picture funds being transferred from one account to another. Banks do it every day. Imagine yourself totally destitute and unable to pay your debts. Then in an astounding act of grace someone assumes all your debts, and at the same time transfers to your account such ‘abundance’ that you never have to work. That’s what happened at the cross when God ‘imputed’ all your sins to Christ’s account, and ‘imputed’ all His righteousness to your account. Mind-blowing, isn’t it? Would you say, ‘I can’t allow you to pay all these debts alone, so I’ll work to prove self-worth of your grace’? We do that when we ‘add’ our good works to Christ’s finished work. Salvation is like health food labelled ‘no man-made additives’. Paul writes, ‘For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him’ (2 Corinthians 5:21). In the same sense God ‘made’ Jesus who never sinned, to be sin, He ‘made’ you who could never be righteous enough, to become righteous in His eyes. 

I feel such guilt when I sin.’ You’re supposed to! But when Christ took away all your sin, He took away all your guilt. So what are you feeling? Inner conflict! Your regenerated spirit is telling you that you can’t indulge in sin; it’s not who you are anymore!

Why did God do it this way? Because any righteousness we could achieve falls far short of what He requires. Rejoice - today God sees you clothed in the righteousness of Christ, therefore you’re always loved and accepted by Him.

Edenderry & Clanabogan
Rev Canon Robert Clarke: Rector and Rural Dean
Tel: 028 82245525
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Facebook: Edenderry Union of Parishes

With Us to be Like Us
There was a farmer who did not believe in the Christmas story. The idea that God would become a man was absurd. His wife, however, was a devout believer and raised their children in her faith. The farmer sometimes gave her a hard time, mocking her faith and belief in the incarnation of God in the baby of Bethlehem: “It’s all nonsense,” he said. “Why would God lower himself to become a human like us? It’s such a ridiculous story.”

One snowy Sunday evening his wife took the children to church while the farmer relaxed at home. After they had left, the weather deteriorated into a blinding snowstorm. Then he heard a loud thump against the window. Then another thump! He ventured outside to see what was happening. There in the field was the strangest sight: a flock of geese! They had been migrating south but had become disorientated by the storm. They were stranded on his farm, unable to fly or to see their way.

The farmer had compassion on them. He wanted to help them and realised his barn would give them shelter for the night. He opened the barn door and stood back, hoping they would make their way in. But they didn’t realise it would be shelter for them. So he tried to sho the geese in, but they ran in all directions. Perplexed, he got some bread and made a trail to the barn door. But they still didn’t catch on. Nothing he could do would get them into the warmth and shelter of the barn.

Feeling totally frustrated, he exclaimed, “Why don’t they follow me? Can’t they see this is the only place where they can survive the storm? How can I possibly get them to follow me?”

He thought for a moment and then realised that they would not follow a human. He said to himself, “How can I possibly save them? The only way would be for me become a goose. If only I could become like one of them. Then I could save them. They would follow me and I would lead them to safety.”

At that moment he stopped and realised what he had said. The words reverberated in his head. “If only I could become like one of them, then I could save them.” Then, at last, he understood God’s heart towards humankind.

He fell on his knees in the snow and worshipped God.

Greetings
To all readers, may you have a blessed Christmas, despite Covid-19, and hopefully 2021 will bring an easing of Coronavirus, bringing some degree of normality back into all our lives.
Happy Christmas! The preparations for Christmas this year are somewhat different than they have been in previous years, with the Covid-19 regulations limiting the ‘usual activity’. Packed churches enjoying Carol services and the First Communion of Christmas. However, we must be reminded of the simple nature of the first Christmas and preserve this quieter time to enjoy family and fellowship.

The past few months have been busy at Drumragh with Mountfield. In November, we bade farewell to our popular Curate Rev Sean Hanily, wife Cherith and baby Marcus as Sean embarks on his first incumbency in the Dublin Diocese. Sean and his family contributed significantly to the church communities over their 2 years with us and will be greatly missed. Nevertheless, we remain confident that they will flourish under God’s guidance in Dublin.

Church services continue to be broadcast online, with good success.

We celebrated Harvest by welcoming Rev. Liz Fitzgerald of Gweedore St Patrick (Bunbeg) as our guest preacher, with a congregation of 84 filling St Columba’s Church to almost capacity under Covid-19 guidelines!

The ‘Building Our Community through Rebuilding our Church’ project continues apace, with the scaffolding now moving from the front elevation of St Columba’s Church Omagh (Drumragh) to the side elevations. The façade now looks wonderfully refreshed and we are excited that the project should be finalised in the next 3/4 months.

At the time of writing these notes what Christmas 2020 will look like is still anybody’s guess but it will definitely be like no other Christmas we have ever experienced. Coronavirus Covid-19 continues to cast a very dark shadow over our land and over so many other countries right across the globe.

Christmas this year will be disappointing for many, particularly if families and friends cannot get together for the traditional festive celebrations, and if current restrictions on worship are still in place. It will be an incredibly difficult Christmas for those who have lost loved ones during the past year. Our thoughts and prayers are very much with them, as well as with all who have suffered in one way or another as a result of the terrible pandemic that has blighted the world since the start of the year. We are being bombarded with so much bad news on a daily basis that it would be easy to become depressed and despondent, and forget that Christmas is essentially a story of good news for the whole world. In Luke 2 v 10-11, the angel said to the terrified shepherds, “Do not be afraid, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord.” Surely that is the message the world needs to hear at this incredibly difficult and stressful time. Christmas is a celebration of the coming of Jesus - Immanuel, “God with us”. The God who visited this earth in human form on the first Christmas is still with us, and He has not turned His back on the world He has created nor given up on us, His creation. Difficult days may lie ahead but whatever may happen we know that we are not alone for God is with us and He will never leave us nor forsake us. That assurance enables us to face the future with renewed hope and confidence. Jesus, the Word made flesh, came to show us what God is like and to assure us of His boundless love and goodness. My prayer is that you and yours may know His presence, peace, and protection this Christmas and throughout the coming year.

A Closing Thought
God writes with a pen that never blots, speaks with a tongue that never slips, and acts with a hand that never fails.
Baptisms
Baronscourt Parish Church, August 2nd 2020, Maya Rene Mary, daughter of James and Carol McCafferty, 27 Greenvale, Victoria Bridge.

Baronscourt Parish Church, August 16th 2020. Zac, son of Kenny and Stacey Allison, 21E Golf Course Road, Newtownstewart.


Greenan Parish Church, Poppy Elizabeth Kirk, daughter of Rodger and Suellen Kirk, Glenlark, Gortin.

Greenan Parish Church, Nathan James Kirk, son of Rodger and Suellen Kirk, Glenlark, Gortin.

Lower Badoney Parish Church, October 11th 2020. Lucy Rae Robinson, daughter of Andy and Erin Robinson, 3 Glen Road, Newtownstewart.

Ardstraw Parish Church, October 11th 2020. Connie Frances, daughter of David Monaghan and Mandy Wilkinson, 49 Moyle Road, Newtownstewart.

Greenan Parish Church, November 1st 2020, Arabella Louise Geraldine, daughter of Shannon Murphy and Kimberley Ballantine, 21 Winter Gardens, Omagh.

Marriages

Baronscourt Parish Church, September 18th 2020. Emma Cummings and James Warnock.

Burials
Baronscourt Parish Church, Barbara Crofts, late of Ballyrennan Road, Newtownstewart. Funeral service took place at Hood’s Funeral Home, Newtownstewart on September 3rd 2020 followed by cremation.

Lower Badoney Parish Church, James Hayes, late of Main Street Gortin. Funeral took place in Lower Badoney Church on September 17th, followed by burial in the adjoining cemetery.

Ardstraw Parish Church, Pam Donnell, late of Tully Road, Mountjoy. Funeral Service took place in Ardstraw Parish Church on September 27th, followed by burial in the adjoining cemetery.

Lower Badoney Parish Church, June Cochrane, late of Beltrim Crescent, Gortin. Funeral service took place in Armstrong’s Funeral Home, Omagh on October 8th, followed by burial in Lower Badoney Churchyard.

Facebook Live
Services continue on Facebook Live each Sunday afternoon at 4pm and Wednesday evening at 8pm.

Parish Weekly
As the pandemic continues to restrict church activities, we have decided to once again suspend circulation of the Parish News, mainly due to the fact that there isn’t any “parish news” except for Births, marriages and deaths. Instead, for the duration of the pandemic, we will distribute a weekly leaflet entitled “Parish Weekly, which will contain details of upcoming services, a short message from the Rector, the Collect of the day, the Readings, some prayers and the Sunday Sermon. To avoid handling and distribution of paper, the Parish Weekly will be emailed to parishioners each Friday. Parishioners are asked to print a copy and pass it on to family members or others in your social bubble who do not have access to email or Facebook. Copies can be obtained by emailing the Rector at ivandinsmore@hotmail.com

Kilcronaghan, Ballynascreen Tobermore & Six Towns
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In the build-up to Christmas 2015, Starbucks removed the word ‘Christmas’ from their paper cups, “in case the word Christmas would cause offense”. Since then they have advertised: ‘countdown to red cups,’ which is a time when they look forward to a festival, during which they serve ‘seasonal beverages’ in red cups. In the build-up to Christmas 2020, the word ‘Christmas’ has been grabbing headlines, as journalists speak of how: ‘Christmas 2020 may be cancelled.’ It seems that the advertisers dream as to ‘what Christmas should be like’, has caused people to become confused as to what

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Hi everyone, I trust you are keeping well. As I write this article I’m entering my second day of ‘self-isolation’.

One of my household tested positive for Covid 19 and I have been advised to hide away for two weeks. Of course the reason for isolating is to keep others safe, to help ensure that the virus isn’t spread beyond the confines of the Rectory. I must say how grateful my family and I are for all the messages from my parishioners offering prayer and practical support. We are most appreciative. However this whole concept of ‘isolation’ has got me thinking about the early Church and its propagation of the Gospel. I’m reminded that, ‘the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.’ Acts 2:47b. I’m pretty sure that their number was added to because of at least two things:

1. The work of the Holy Spirit convincing others.
2. The testimony of the believers and their willingness to share the Good News with others.

I’d imagine it would have been much easier for the members of the early Church just to...
sit quietly in a ‘holy huddle’ offering their praise, praying heartfelt prayers, reading the scriptures and supporting one another in every way. Praise God they never chose to do only these things. They knew that Jesus never called the Church to be a Church in ‘isolation’. Jesus charged his disciples to ‘Go and make disciples...’ Matt.28:19.

As I sit in isolation I do so fearful of spreading the coronavirus to others. I want to protect them from falling ill or even dying as a result of me carrying something to them that they certainly don’t want or need. When it comes to the Gospel and it’s sharing, I wonder if, sometimes as Christians we are happy enough to isolate ourselves away from others. Is there a hesitancy to do as Jesus commanded? For example, work to make disciples.

Friends, we have a gospel to proclaim, and this good news should be spread, like a virus, to others at an ever increasing rate. Surely the gospel message is every bit as infectious now as it was at the time of the apostles. God’s virus, his infectious word, doesn’t bring weakness, illness or death, No! Among a host of other things it brings, hope, it brings strength, it brings joy, it brings peace and true Life. Let’s not leave the spread of the ‘Gospel virus’ to ‘the minister’ or the ‘super Christian’.

Let’s be willing to fulfil the commission all believers have been set; ‘to go and make disciples’. I wonder, is it time to come out of isolation?

As we approach Advent, Christmas time and 2021 and we recognise that the usual way we celebrate these festivals will be somewhat curtailed this year, let’s consider whether our New Year Resolution should be to ‘come out of isolation’ fulfil the great commission and spread the Good News ‘virus’ so that many will come to New Life in Christ.

Christmas and New Year blessings to you all,
Colin

We are delighted to say the church has been reopened since the beginning of October for Sunday morning worship under the Church of Ireland protocols and we have been very encouraged with the response of parishioners. It has given us the opportunity to experiment with modern technology and modern praise and worship music. We have had our first Covid-19 restricted Marriage Service as well as an evening Baptismal Service. Steadily people are becoming more confident and attending and getting used to wearing face coverings and entering by one door and leaving via another! The online service continues for parishioners still not in a position to attend church and it remains a great way to stay in touch with the parish. Any praise to God is worthwhile and it is always better done in a fellowship.

As we move from Autumn into Winter sadly our parish groups will not meet, but online get-togethers are planned and we hope by early Spring that there may be some light in this very long coronavirus tunnel we are all enduring. My favourite liturgical season is Advent and it is upon us again. I love lighting the Advent Wreath candles and the dramatic readings from Isaiah coupled with the focus on John the Baptist and Mary. I hope and pray that during these strange times we can all take Time Out in Advent to reflect on the readings and prepare ourselves for the Second Advent when our Lord and Saviour will return to claim His own. For us in Ballyscullion we will indeed take Time Out in Advent during the three Wednesdays, 2nd, 9th & 16th to reflect. Depending on the situation if we can’t meet in the Church Hall we will revert to Zoom.

From all at Ballyscullion, we wish you a peaceful and Holy Christmas and a very blessed New Year.

Time Out in Advent, three Wednesdays in December, 2nd, 9th & 16th at 7.30pm.

Sunday 20th December, Advent 4, socially distanced, non-singing, Carol Service at 11:30am (What a challenge!)

Thursday 24th December, Christmas Eve, socially distanced Holy Communion service at 7pm.

Sadly no service on Christmas morning this year.

Sunday 27th December, Christmas 1, Christmas Worship at 11:30am.
The Parish Church is now open for worship. It’s just not the same, is it? Of course God tells us “where two or three are gathered together, there am I in the midst”. So even though it feels different God dwells in this holy place and he unconditionally accepts our worship. Words like protocols, mitigations, thermometers, hand cleansing gel, masks and visors roll off our lips on a weekly basis.

Yes, we are prepared to worship the Lord in the Beauty of Holiness, but we don’t easily adapt to changes in our worship. We are facing new challenges almost every week - broadcasting and uploading the service for Facebook. These are all new methods of communicating the Gospel that tests us to the very core of our spiritual being.

My 35 minute service is being well received, but I have had to do some soul searching in finding new ways to express the Everlasting Truths that Jesus does not take away the Covid -19 in our time frame, instead he travels with us along the journey of our recent lockdown with it’s many ups and downs. As Christians we need to hold on to some basic biblical truths - certainties if you like - that can help us maintain our faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Recently, I reflected on the story of Jesus calming the storm on the Sea of Galilee. I reminded my flock that the pandemic is just like the storm. Both bring fear, as we see in the lives of both ourselves and the disciples. We need to be reminded that God through Jesus Christ will calm the storm of the pandemic in due course.

In the meantime we must remember, STORMS WILL INEVITABLY COME TO ALL OF US, DON’T WORRY ABOUT ANYTHING. THANK GOD FOR ALL HE HAS DONE FOR US IN THE PAST. GO TO JESUS WHEN THE STORM COMES PRAY ABOUT EVERYTHING.

These are - dare I use these words - protocols and mitigations to help us live for God in these unprecedented days of the corona pandemic. They are simple yet profound measures that can help us get through these unparalleled days. Hopefully, I will be able to add another word - Vaccine - as God gives the scientists wisdom from on High.

We may be experiencing lockdown rules and regulations at present, but let us remember that we are about to celebrate the coming of Jesus Christ as a little babe, born in a manger our Saviour and Lord. Hopefully, we can all worship Him at Christmas as we remember the words of that great carol - “O Come Let Us Adore Him - Christ the Lord”

Rector of St. Lurach’s, Maghera and Killelagh, The Rev. Terence P Kerr

A Sunday School teacher had her year 1 class draw a nativity scene. One youngster had done a fine job in drawing the baby in a manger, with Mary and Joseph and the animals; but the teacher noticed with anxiety that he had drawn a little fat man right beside the manger. She asked, “Johnny, that isn’t Santa, is it?” Johnny answered indignantly, “Of course not, that’s Round John Virgin.”

I can tell you that lovely wee story because it’s now early November and I can officially mention the “C” word, that’s the ‘Christmas’ word. It goes without saying that Christmas at a whole lot of levels is going to look vastly different this year, because of the other “C” word (the Coronavirus word), that is currently dominating all of our lives!

I remember waking up on the morning of the 18th March 2020, believing that the previous days had been some sort of nightmare: church services suspended, people and families self-isolating and business’ closing all around us. It was scary. That said, I also remember thinking that this crisis, if we used it properly, could become an opportunity for the church. The folks of St Paul’s and Moyletra have really embraced that challenge and it’s not
Kilrea, Tamlaght O’Crilly Upper & Lower
Rector: Rev Gary Millar
Facebook: The Parishes of Kilrea, Tamlaght O’Crilly Upper & Lower @kilreatamlaghtocrillyupperlower

On Sunday 1st November Bishop Andrew preached at a united service in St Patrick’s Church Kilrea. During his sermon two words caught my attention, “look up”. Two words we need to hear as we continue to face the uncertainty of this pandemic, “Look up”. Look up from the problems we are facing and see the God who is in control of all, the God who loves us perfectly and completely. It’s amazing that when do that, when we look up to God our fears lessen and we begin to feel his peace and his strength. The Psalmist says, I will lift my eyes to the hills, where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord the maker of heaven and earth.” My friend look up!

The number of centenarians in the parish has grown from 2 to 4 with Jane Crockett reaching 100 at the beginning of November and Letty Murphy in December. We wish Jane and Letty a very happy and blessed 100th birthday. This year Christmas will look different and we are currently thinking through a number of ideas including a Muddy Church, a united Carols by car light, Christingle and other services. Further details will be in the parish magazine.

We plan to hold an online Car Boot / Auction in January. Further details will be available in the parish magazine. Items for the auction may be left in Innisrush Parish hall.

I wish you all a very happy and blessed Christmas and may you know the peace of Christ in your hearts and home
Best wishes and blessings

Aghadowey
Rector: Rev Louise Crawford-McCafferty
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A spiritual seeker came to a Rabbi and asked, “Teacher, why doesn’t anyone see God nowadays?” “People aren’t willing to look that low,” the Rabbi replied. The Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem has a tiny doorway, so small that anyone passing through must stoop low in order to enter. How appropriate! For we do not come to Christ -ever- by exalting ourselves. We come to Him only by bowing low, by bending the knee, by following the example of Shepherds and Magi of old. It’s going to be a different Christmas this year for sure. It isn’t going to be the same even if the government relax

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the regulations. Many people have lives that have changed beyond the way they ever imagined. I do hope we will see the real reason for Christmas. It’s definitely not about the presents or parties. It’s not even about being able to go to church! It’s about the reality that Christ came as a vulnerable human baby to show us our worth to God.

I was really encouraged by Robin Swann our Health Minister, who took time to send a video message to children about Christmas. Some children at school had said they were worried about Santa coming. Robin told them he was the ‘Elf’ Minister, and he had a word with Santa and the other elves and all would be grand and not to worry. As adults we know we cannot add a single hour to our lives by worrying but children do worry too and they might seem like small worries but we need to encourage and bless them in this time.

Share this prayer with your children/grandchildren and friends’ kids if you wish:

Dear Lord Jesus, You are so special to us all, and I am glad we have a season to celebrate the day You were born. If I can be a helper and tell someone about You, keep me brave as I talk, and help me to know what words to say. Christmas is a good time to tell others what we know about You. I love You, and in Your name, I pray. Amen.

Blessing: We thank you, Lord, for Christmas. Grant that we may be grateful enough to keep it not for a day but for always. In the name of Christ, whose coming is a mystery, whose life is a miracle, whose ministry in word and deed and death is salvation, and whose presence is now our highest hope. Amen.

**Camus-Juxta-Bann (Macosquin)**

**Rector:** Rev Paul Lyons  
**www.camus-juxta-bann.org**  
**Facebook:** St Mary’s Church @camusjuxtabannconnections

‘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 them all.’ Acts 4v33

‘Where am I looking...?’ Each year as Christmas approaches I often hear people lament about how this wonderful time of the year seems to be losing its true meaning. As I write we are in the midst of the second pandemic spike and no one knows what the Christmas celebrations will look like this year. As many people have rightly said, ‘These are very strange days we are living in.’ Yet, despite the powerful influence of commercialism and the understandable concerns the pandemic brings, I wonder could this year be a time for the world to hear clearly the true meaning of Christmas?

As I observe society in these days I’m seeing people whose lives are marked by frustration, fear, weariness, impatience, anxiety and selfishness. Frustration with the government guidelines and restrictions, fear about the economic impact, weariness of hardworking keyworkers, impatience with the lack of freedom, anxiety about mental health and the selfishness of those who don’t care how their actions affect others. It’s not a very uplifting observation!

So what is the response of the Church? Whilst it is important to listen and be compassionate we also are the bearers of good news that is relevant for everyone at this time! In Psalm121 the psalmist writes, ‘I lift up my eyes to the hills, where does my help come from? It comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.’ King David in the midst of his trials and tribulations in life realised that as he focused his attention on God it brought him comfort, protection and guidance. As we enter the season of Advent, we want to make a conscious effort to focus our attention on what God has done through the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. In lighting the Advent wreath candles each week we remember again the good news that Jesus Christ brings hope, love, joy and peace to all who follow him.

For lifting our eyes to Jesus brings hope of a different future. Lifting our eyes to Jesus brings love as we recall He is the Saviour of the world. Lifting our eyes to Jesus brings joy as we listen and walk with Him daily. Lifting our eyes to Jesus brings peace in these unsettling times. This Christmas as we lift our eyes and focus on Jesus may we echo the words of Saint Paul, ‘Praise God for this incredible, unbelievable, indescribable gift’ 2 Corinthians 9v15

**Christmas Celebrations at St Mary’s, Macosquin**

Friday 4th December 6pm Macosquin Christmas Tree Lights switch on.

Wednesday 16th December 6.30pm Christingle in church.

Sunday 20th December 10.30am Nativity (with a difference!) in the Upper Hall.

Sunday 20th December 6pm Carols around the Christmas Tree (Outdoors).

Christmas Eve 11pm Holy Communion service in church.

Christmas Day 10.30am All Age Family Celebration followed by Holy Communion in the church hall.

Sunday 27th December 10.30am Morning Worship on Facebook.
**Killowen (Coleraine)**

Rector: Rev Donard Collins  
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Facebook: Killowen Parish Church @killowenparishchurch  
“May we show Christ’s love + teach his Word.”

**Castlerock, Dunboe and Fermoyle**

Rector: Rev Chris MacBruithin  
Facebook: Parish of Castlerock & Dunboe @CastlerockDunboe

Christmas has not been cancelled in Castlerock and Dunboe - it is just going to look very different and to be difficult for some people. But it is very definitely not cancelled!

The first Christmas looked like it might be derailed when Caesar ordered a census and the Holy Family had to travel the perilous journey to Bethlehem. King Herod tried to cancel Christmas when he massacred the infants of Bethlehem and the surrounding area. The birth of the Messiah didn’t look at all like people expected or wanted. Teenage pregnancy, unsanitary maternity conditions, the burden of regulations imposed on the whole population ...

Our celebrations of our Saviour’s birth will go ahead but, yes sadly, they will look quite different and it will be difficult for many of us.

The annual Carols by Candlelight service in Christ Church can’t go ahead in its usual form, but we will be putting together a service in online format for 4pm on Sunday 20th December. ‘Frozen’ fans can look out for ‘The Gospel according to Olof’ and other pre-Christmas activities.

Services continue weekly on a booking basis, and these are livestreamed on Facebook @CastlerockDunboe. We are so grateful to our newly formed Communications Team, who ensure people stay connected, and to our team of volunteers who ensure our safety each week. Mothers’ Union and Kids’ Club continue 'by extension', with leaders delivering newsletters and activity packs door-to-door.

In-church or online, we look forward once again to celebrating the great mystery of the Incarnation, God-with-us, even if it looks different. On Christmas Eve, a Service of Holy Communion will be held in Christ Church at 10 pm, with Christmas morning services in Castlerock at 9 and St Paul’s at 10.30 am.

To all, wishing you a very happy and holy Christmas!

**Drumachose, Limavady**

Rector: Rev Canon Sam McVeigh  
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Facebook: Christ Church Limavady @christchurchlimavady

Once again Christmas is almost upon us. Preparations began a lot earlier for many because of fear and insecurity. The fear and insecurity that the Covid-19 Virus has brought to our world. What restrictions will be in place over the holiday period?

During Christ’s earthly ministry, he took people exactly as he found them, but he did not leave them. And so it is today. He wants to take us and our world just as he finds us, especially in this distressful and anxious time. He makes no pre-conditions. We do not have to qualify for his presence. We do not have to prove ourselves. He takes us as we are and he is happy to enter into the situation we are in. It was into this kind of situation that Jesus Christ was pleased to be part of and to

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November is a time of remembrance. Every year on 11th November, we remember those who lost their lives on all sides during so many wars and battles around the world - especially in World War One and World War Two. On the Sunday previous to the 11th - we gather in our churches to offer our thanks to God for their lives and their memory. As we wear our poppies with pride - albeit in such a different way this year - we do so to honour those who gave their tomorrows for our todays. As we remember them we also remember the One who made the ultimate sacrifice for us all on the Cross at Calvary, winning the battle over sin.

Platinum Wedding Anniversary
Jim & Tillie Milliken of Carrick Parish Church celebrated 70 harmonious years together on 12th October 2020. Our heartfelt congratulations to them both!
In all honesty like most parishes in the Diocese we have had to resort to online worship since March, opting for pre-recorded services and Wednesday evening Bible Studies via Zoom. It has helped to maintain fellowship and social contact, but no alternative to ‘face to face’ and heart to heart’. In Bovevagh we began drive-in services from a lorry in early summer and these have evolved now that we have re-opened the church. The vestry installed a first class outdoor audio system that relays all our indoor worship to the car park. Worshippers have the option of coming inside or staying in the car. Outdoor harvest decorations and dismissals in the car park help the sense of inclusivity. What has all this taught me? For one thing, restrictions implemented in the name of disease prevention may at times be deemed necessary. However, lawmakers must never forget that the parts of our lives that make us feel normal are not mere luxuries, but are the very things that make us human. No one knows exactly what the church will look like once the current practice of social distancing is over. I am not entirely convinced that online efforts have secured any new or lasting recruits. It is wise to dig deep into the underlying stats of YouTube and similar, rather than just using the raw number of ‘hits’ as a measure of reality. That said I THANK GOD for WhatsApp and Zoom, which have been, and will keep being, a marvellous communication tool to parishioners.

Some are predicting difficult times ahead for churches. Others are saying the church will come back stronger than ever. I doubt any of us really knows, but I am happy to stay faithful and remember God has a plan. The important thing to remember is that the Church is God’s idea – His work in the world today (Matthew 16:18). Covid, hell or anything else cannot touch it! God is certainly able to take care of His own.

Hope is infectious, even healing. Many look to a vaccination to lift us all out of the cycle of lockdown and break free from the constraints of living with this ‘pandemic’. Maybe it will. One thing is for sure though – remembering the birth of the Saviour will come as it always does, with that same message that Jesus is our only HOPE for this life and eternity.
The Church is dead. At least that is what the many experts and books and articles on the subject say. It seems everyone has an opinion and Covid -19 is apparently the final nail in the coffin. Poor old Church. Let’s try this though - the Church is not dead, rather it is middle-aged! I should know because on the middle-aged spectrum I am at the wrong end. So the Church is middle-aged and is readjusting to the new circumstances, as all of us with creaking knees have to do. Middle-age means a transitional period of ups and downs and the Church is no different. Some Sundays attendance numbers are up, other Sundays they are down. Easter, Christmas Eve, baptism, confirmation services are well attended and they give the hope and encouragement that the Church is connecting.

Until that is the following Sunday. Like middle-age the Church has to surf the wave of good days and bad days - one day sore knees, the next, not so sore knees. But is success really gauged by numbers? Jesus’ ministry would suggest not. This is not the 1970s or 1980s. Middle-age means quality time, for example, with children who have flown the nest. Middle-age for the Church means more quality time with smaller congregations, a heightened online presence, more out-of-the-box thinking and not sweating the small stuff.

Does middle-age mean you stop living, or, stop being creative? Does it mean you give up? Of course not. So why would the Church? The Church too can and will evolve with creativity, with its ace in the hole - the guidance of the Holy Spirit. He hasn’t gone away you know! Middle-age means adapting. Middle-age is not premature death - you are still actually alive and still able and ready to listen for God and where He is calling you into this new era of your life. So with the Church, an organisation that proclaims resurrection, and that means real life, not middle-aged life, rather, abundant life, eternal life. Way to go Church!

Not very person whom God used or uses is a teenager - some of those He used were really old - some were at least twenty five! The Church is not dead. The Church is middle-aged and is good to go. For the Church age is but a number. Christmas is coming, a timely reminder in the year ‘two thousand and coronavirus’ that our God is still with us. We can say without any reference to data or statistics “for unto us a son is given … and He will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” Isaiah 9:6

A blessed Christmas to you all from the Grouped parishes of Cumber Upper, Cumber Lower, Learmount and Banagher, unfazed as we are by age, coronavirus, or Chelsea FC’s dodgy defending.

P.S. Is it still possible to buy Algipan?

Editor’s note: Yes, according to the Google gospel!

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Faughanvale

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Sunday worship 11:00am also on www.youtube.com/channel/UC4UkpoxdtOSZwaUdvL5nZtg/videos?reload=9

There has been some talk in the press about whether the politicians will be able to "save Christmas" this year, apparently without any intended irony! The truth is, of course, that it is only Christmas that will be able to save us. The words of the herald angel to Joseph ring out down the ages, “You shall call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people….” He came as the Light of the World to save us from the darkness of sin and death, in our lives, and in the world around us.

I’m hoping that this year, more than any other, people will be open to the gift of God that brings salvation, and even within our restricted circumstances, we as a church will be doing all we can to bring that message to as many people as we can.

Mahajanga

Our diocesan appeal for the diocese of Mahajanga was launched at the very time we began to move into another lockdown of sorts. Not great timing! But we as a parish will be doing our utmost to support
it. because Bishop Hall Speers has asked for help and, as he is someone who has deep roots in our diocese, we want to respond with generosity; 2. because it’s good for us to be reminded that, bad and all as things are here, there are others whose need is even greater than our own.

**Christmas Services**
Whether we can gather physically for worship or watching at home we will be celebrating the joy of Christmas in our worship as usual.

**Virtual Nativity Service**
13th December 11am - our children will be cooperating with a professional drama company to produce a Nativity not to be missed.

**Carol Service**
13th December 11am - the timeless service of lessons and carols but presented in an online format

**Christmas Day**
10:30am - short family worship followed by Communion for those who wish to stay on

**Christmas Gifts**
We normally encourage parishioners to bring gifts to our Nativity Service for local families in need, but with current restrictions that probably won’t be possible this year. However, we are aware that the need will be greater than ever, and are looking for ways to continue to support the homeless and hungry this year. Keep your eye out for details.

**And Finally…**
It’s just been announced that Santa Claus will be unable to do his usual house to house visitation this year. “It’s not that we’re worried about Santa himself transmitting the Covid-19 virus. But we do have concerns about his little helpers,” said a spokesperson from the Department of ‘Elf and Safety.

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**Clooney**
Rector: Rev David McBeth
Email: allsaintscloney@btinternet.com
Facebook: All Saints Clooney

We are about to begin the season of Advent, a time to prepare and look forward to a gift from God. We will continue to look forward to the birthday celebrations of that gift coming into the world, “the Word made flesh”. As to how, is all a bit of guess work at present! As a parish we have had to adapt over the past 9 months as we continued to worship within the framework of the various protocols, and we will find a way to allow us to celebrate the birth of Jesus in a meaningful way this year.

At the time of print, we intend holding mid-week Advent Services as follows:
Wednesday 2nd & 16th Dec, Newbuildings
Wednesday 9th & 23rd Dec, Glendermott all at 7.30pm.

Carol services will be held on Sunday 20th December - 10.15am in Newbuildings and 6.00pm in Glendermott.

On Christmas Eve we will hold our traditional Community Crib service in Newbuildings at 4pm. There will also be the Midnight Communion Service in both churches commencing at 11.30pm.

On Christmas morning there will be a said service of Holy Communion 1 in Glendermott at 8.30am and Newbuildings at 10.00am.

Those are the plans which may or may not happen so keep an eye on our Facebook page for updates.

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**Glendermott & New Buildings**
Rector: Rev Canon Robert Boyd
Tel: 028 7134 3001
Facebook: Glendermott and New Buildings Church of Ireland

Curate: Rev Iain McAleavey

Continued on page 62...
Another Chance is our Mission and Outreach Centre which has just celebrated its 5th birthday with a thanksgiving service in Glendermott Church. We were delighted to welcome Bishop Andrew as the preacher. This imaginative initiative has grown each year and we are so grateful to all the volunteers who give up their time to improve the life so many people through the funds we raise. We may have celebrated our 5th birthday, but we are in the infancy of our mission and outreach. We have just secured another unit at the Glendermott Business Park and have plans for rapid growth in our generosity and witness to the wider community. Hopefully as life gets back to some sort of normality in 2021, we will be unveiling our plans to you.

Rev Iain joins May and myself as we wish the readers of N:Vision a peaceful, blessed and safe Christmas.

Festival Eucharist (Order Two). The Celebrant and Preacher will (DV) be The Right Reverend Andrew Forster.

The Tutors of St Columb’s School of Music will present an online Christmas Concert on Friday 18th December at 7.30 pm. The students will be represented by Ava McGinn, the Roy Adams Memorial Piano Scholar. There will be an online voluntary donation to a charity.

One of the negative effects of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is that it proves to be extremely difficult to plan future events with confidence. One does not know if restrictions will be imposed again, meaning that the events will have to be postponed or cancelled.

Early in the year the Events Working Group at Saint Columb’s Cathedral planned to hold a Christmas Tree Festival in the Cathedral from Thursday 10th - Monday 14th December. Due to COVID-19 this event has been postponed until December 2021.

This year, unfortunately, the Candlelight Advent Procession on the evening of Advent Sunday, 29th November, will not be held and the Festival Service of Nine Lessons and Carols will be a low-key service on Sunday 20th December at 11.00 am.

Christmas Day will (DV) be celebrated on Friday 25th December at 11.00 am with
The strangest thing happened last week; in fact, just like buses, two of them happened right after one another. A couple of friends of mine were so disgusted by the relentless litany of depressing stories in the news recently that they each - quite independently of one another - decided to change their viewing and listening habits. One decided not to watch or listen to any news at all, for a time, while the other opted to restrict his viewing to one news bulletin a day.

I understand how my friends felt. I am an ardent consumer of news - radio, TV, newspapers, online - but even I have felt the ‘pressure gauge’ in my head rising into the ‘red zone’, where blood vessels are at imminent risk of bursting.

A number of years ago, while working in BBC radio, my editor and I were challenged by a regular listener - an intelligent, progressive man - to produce a programme featuring nothing but positive stories. It was an interesting proposition, so we agreed. Within an hour, our phone lines were lit up by furious licence fee-payers demanding to know, “Have you no news?”

News is a very subjective thing. How should it be defined? In the BBC, it had to be ‘new, true and interesting’ (a requirement honoured more in the breach than the observance in many bulletins). I remember reading a definition that worked well for me: ‘If a dog bites a man, that’s not news; but if a man bites a dog - that’s news!’

There has been plenty of news, of late, but very little to raise the spirits: the rejuvenated coronavirus; uncertainty over lockdowns; a toxic US presidential election campaign; the spectre of Islamic terrorism in Europe; difficult trade negotiations; economic concern and climate change anxiety. It’s easy to see why people become disheartened.

No matter how discouraging the news, though, this seems to be the way people like it - the more depressing the better. Nobody forces us to read newspapers with lurid front pages, or to watch news programmes with an ‘if-it-bleeds-it-leads’ approach, but we do. I suspect there is a cost to this. We know anecdotally that even in the best of times relentless bad news affects people’s mood and wellbeing. How much worse must it be in our current circumstances?

The constraints on movement and social gatherings during the pandemic have been demoralising, and the restrictions on worship have been a source of anguish. And chundering away in the background is the incessant, unforgiving, often dispiriting 24-hour news cycle.

So, what’s to be done about this? Should we run up the white flag? Should we draw the curtains, stay in bed, pull the duvet up over our heads? Should we wander the streets and supermarket corridors with fingers in our ears and gazes averted?

The time has come to fight fire with fire, or rather bad news with ‘Good News’. In Matthew 11:28, Jesus says: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” After eight months of COVID, people are weary, they are burdened. It has never been more necessary for them to hear the Good News.

This is not just the responsibility of clergy. Everyone who considers himself or herself a Christian has a role to play. Do you remember our diocesan vision - Transforming Community, Radiating Christ? We can all play our part by doing the right thing, wearing our masks, keeping our distance, following the rules, showing concern for one another, and loving our neighbour. That’s real communication. That’s radiating Christ. That is the real Good News.
Articles must be with the editor no later than 12noon on 24th February 2021.

Editor: kmcateer51@gmail.com or c/o The Diocesan Centre, London Street, Londonderry BT48 6RQ

Parish notes must be with the assistant editor no later than 12noon on 3rd March 2021.

THE DEADLINE IS NON-NEGOTIABLE

Magazines will be available for collection on 26th March 2021.

Disclaimer: Views expressed in n:vision may not be those of the Church of Ireland or the Editor.