

THE PARISH OF
ST PETER AND ST JAMES
BELFAST

PARISH NOTES

SEPTEMBER 2020

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



*Hilda Sherwood receiving her
Friendship Heart from St Peter's*

GOD . LOVING . PEOPLE

RECTOR'S NOTES

FORTHCOMING SERVICES

Nothing would make me happier than for us to forget about the Coronavirus and return to some semblance of normality. However, that is unlikely to happen in the immediate future. Within the Church, we still need to be extremely cautious, and we can only take small steps. There can be no leap towards a resumption of life as we knew it seven months ago. The Coronavirus has already prevented us from worshipping together to celebrate Holy Week, Easter, and Pentecost, and it will continue to affect our worship in the months to come.

Notably, there will be no immediate resumption of a 6.30pm service. Normally we would pause the evening services over July and August, and then restart them in September. As it stands, this will not happen. Likewise, there are no immediate plans to resume the 9am service, although this will be kept under review.

We will, however, recommence a 10am service from Sunday 20th September. This will be an entirely said service (with no singing—congregational or choral) lasting for just less than thirty minutes. It will have the main elements that you would expect in an Anglican service, but will be less formal. The congregation for this service will sit in the Chapel of the Resurrection. The intention at this stage is to run this service every Sunday thereafter.

As I explain every year, the date of our Harvest Thanksgiving is dependent (like Easter) on the lunar cycle, as the Harvest Moon is the full moon closest to the Autumn Equinox. That would make it quite early in September this year. If we did that, then unfortunately—given current restrictions—we would not be able to decorate the church and there would be no harvest hymns. I

have decided, therefore, to postpone the Harvest Service until the last feasible date—Sunday 18th October—in the hope that we can celebrate it with a bit more fanfare. Of course, if additional Lockdown measures are introduced by the NI Executive around that time, then we might just have to have a toned-down service this year and then celebrate it more fully in 2021.

KNITTED HEARTS

The social effects of the Coronavirus will have been very difficult for some of our parishioners—particularly those who live alone. However, I hope that through the telephone calls, emails, and online services, nobody will have felt entirely cut off from the community of the Church.

As a gesture of compassion and solidarity, three of our ladies knitted little hearts for distribution to parishioners. These hearts were placed in bags, with a note attached saying “With love from your friends in St Peter’s.” Many of these hearts have already been delivered, and it has been lovely to see the delighted reaction of their recipients.

I am very grateful to Patricia Houston, Annette Beattie, and Rosemary Johnston, for their expertise in producing these little reminders that the Church cares for one another, even though—



still in many cases—we cannot be together. If you have not received a heart, but would like one, then please contact me. Likewise, if you are a good knitter and you would like to help make the hearts, then please let me know.

SOCIAL DISTANCING IN CHURCH

To those of you who have been able to come to St Peter's in person, I am very grateful to you for following the rules. In order for us to remain open, it is vital that you:

- ◆ use the hand sanitiser provided at the entrance of the church,
- ◆ wear a face mask, unless you have a genuine medical reason for not doing so,
- ◆ follow the instructions of the officiant and churchwardens at all times,
- ◆ fill the church from the front, sitting where the churchwardens direct you to,
- ◆ avoid sitting or standing within two metres of other people (except those of your own household),
- ◆ remain at your seat throughout the service until instructed to leave,
- ◆ and do not congregate in close proximity to others before or after the service on church grounds.

Remember that we are implementing these strict rules in order to save lives. That might well include your own, or the life of someone you love. So thank you again for doing your bit in St Peter's to keep us all safe.

PARISH HALLS

Please note that until further notice, the use of our Halls by parish and secular organisations is still prohibited. In many cases, the organisations themselves are unwilling to meet together anytime soon, but more generally we cannot open the halls until there is a cleaning regime in place every day, and social distancing rules can be maintained within the organisations. When the Select Vestry decides to re-open the halls, then the organisation leaders will be informed.

GOD HAS DETERMINED A ROLE FOR YOU IN HIS CHURCH

In two passages of the Gospels, Jesus says “Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” In Matthew 18: 18 Jesus speaks those words in the context of reconciliation when two people fall out and then work to restore their relationship. In Matthew 16: 19 Jesus uses the same words to indicate the role that St Peter will have within the Church.

“Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” Depending on how your mind interprets the use of the verb “will” in English, the implication is likely that whatever we bind or loose here on earth now, will—as a consequence—be bound or loosed in heaven.

However, the original rendering of those words in the Greek language, clarifies the meaning, to the point at which it might even completely turn it upside-down. What the Greek says is: “Whatever you bind on earth *will have been* bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth *will have been* loosed in heaven. What’s happening in heaven, therefore, is not a consequence of what happens on earth. In fact, it’s the opposite: Whatever happens on

earth is a consequence of what happens in heaven. So when something is bound or loosed in heaven, it will then be bound or loosed on earth. What's important to note from this is that it is God who is in control, rather than God being controlled by us.

With that in mind, I want to talk about what St Paul says in Romans 12: 6-8. Here's what he wrote: "For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness."

What Paul is talking about here, is how the Church is not a one-man show. Yes, you might have one person up front on a Sunday morning preaching and teaching, but there are a multitude of Christian ministries. And they are not all embodied by the Rector.

Every member of the Church, has a function. They have a responsibility. They have a purpose. And by "they", I mean "you". In this particular passage from Romans he lists eight of those ministries, but elsewhere he lists others. And whilst they include what we would see as clear leadership roles, they also include very subtle forms of ministry, such as those who are generous with their time, their energy, their money, in order to help the Church. And even, as simple as it might seem, being cheerful. Bringing a wee bit of joy into someone's life when they're having a tough time—that's as much a form of Christian ministry, as getting up into the pulpit. But the reason I mention this in the context of the "binding and loosing" which I talked about earlier, is that it is our responsibility to implement here on earth what God has decided in heaven, and that is certainly the case when it comes to fulfilling our individual Christian ministries. Note that our individual roles within the Christian Church are not

determined by us. They are determined by God. He is the manager, who knows who is available to work for him. He knows what our strengths and interests are. He knows where we are, who we are with, and what we are capable of. And he decides: to *you* I will give this purpose. I will send *you* to this place. I will ask *you* to do this particular thing. And conversely he can decide what he doesn't want us to do, or what he no longer wants us to do. He binds and he looses in heaven. And we must then implement what he wants, here on earth.

What I urge you to do, therefore, is take it very seriously when the Church asks *you*—as an individual—to do something. Because if that request has come through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, then that is no different than your receiving a message from God himself that he wants you to do it. Do here on earth, what God has determined for you in heaven.

WE MUST REACH OUT INTO OUR LOCAL COMMUNITY

I reckon that at least twelve churches—of all Christian denominations—between St Peter's and the city centre, have closed down over the last thirty years or so. Undoubtedly more will follow suit in the years to come, particularly in light of the social and financial effects of Coronavirus. Indeed, unless something is done to reverse that trend, then even this parish will find itself in a bit of a predicament sooner rather than later.

So, what can we do to ensure that St Peter's survives, but also that it flourishes? Well, to answer that question, we need to understand why churches close. Usually, that happens when either the number of people in the congregation dwindles to the point where it becomes unsustainable, or there is not enough money in the church's bank account to pay for the minister, and the maintenance of the church building, and the running costs of the parish.

But the next question we need to ask is: how does a church get to the point where there are no people or no money? Plenty of books and internet articles have been written on this subject, and I am going to summarise what they say in six simple points. And there is some overlap between them. As I tell you each point, I want you to reflect upon whether you think it is true of this parish, and—where appropriate—if you think it is true of yourself.

1. The money raised by the Church each year is spent largely on routine expenditure. Very little is spent on developing Christian mission and ministries, or supporting other charities.
2. The Church is only interested in the people who currently sit in the congregation, and there is no interest in proclaiming the Good News outside the four walls of the church building.
3. Most members of the Church do not live in the local community, and have little or no relationship with the people living in the parish. They travel in from other areas in order to maintain their connection with the building or those who worship in it.
4. The Church is fixated on trying to return to the “good old days” of how it functioned in the past, rather than recognising that the world has significantly changed.
5. The Church has become stubborn about doing things in a certain way that the minister or congregation like (such as having a preferred worship style) rather than allowing worship and activities to develop naturally over time.
6. When faced with the need to choose between changing or closing, the Church either resists change, or ignores the problem, until they no longer have a choice, and they must close.

What we see in all of those six points, is a resistance to growth. A congregation becomes absorbed in trying to perpetuate what it’s always done, in the way that it’s always done it. They have no interest in trying to bring new people into the congregation, because that would be a lot of hassle, and it might end up changing things from the way that they like. And if a new person does venture into their congregation and doesn’t like how they worship or what they do, well—sure there’s another church a few miles up

the road they could try instead. In other words, the Church becomes self-centred. It exists only to keep itself happy. And it becomes little more than a Christian clique. Although with that sort of attitude, it would be hard to describe that as even being Christian.

Now, don't think that I am laying those charges at the feet of every church that has closed in north Belfast. Life is always much more complex than can be described in a ten-minute sermon. But there is a core of truth in what I've said that applies to most—if not all—of those former congregations. And it will sound ridiculously simple: the members of the local community stopped coming into the church to worship.

And in all likelihood they stopped either because nobody from the congregation went out into the community to welcome them in, or else when they did come in, they found a congregation who were more interested in *how* they worshipped than on *who* they worshipped.

So let's return to the question of how we here in St Peter's can ensure that we not only survive as a Christian community, but also thrive. Clearly, the answer is that we cannot allow ourselves to be focussed on the past, or on ourselves. We need to focus on changing as we move into the future, and on purposefully, methodically, reaching out into our local community and encouraging and inviting people to develop their relationship with God through Christ.

We must not simply content ourselves with being a worshipping church, we must become a missional church, which proclaims the Good News of Jesus Christ into the lives of those around us. Only then, can we fulfil the purpose that God has given us, which we heard in the words of the prophet in Isaiah 56: 8. "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. Thus says the Lord God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel: I will gather others to them, besides those already gathered."



PARISH REGISTER

Holy Baptism

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

Henry David Conor Watt

son of Graeme and Adele Watt, Carncoole Park

on 16th August 2020

Christian Burial

"At rest in the Lord."

Elisabeth Henry, Chestnut Grove

Cremation at Roselawn

on 14th August 2020

COVID-19—How we in St Peter's kept going

Rosemary Johnston

This year in church and community has been like no other. The change started so gradually—some sort of virus affecting Wuhan in China (a place most of us had never heard of). It started to spread westwards and Italy was affected with devastating results costing many lives. In church shaking hands at The Peace and friendly hugs were forbidden and hand sanitisers were used more widely. As the virus spread to Southern England and then further afield, what had been something unpleasant affecting other people somewhere far away, was now in the midst of us, generating fear of this deadly, invisible disease. The words coronavirus/COVID-19, pandemic and lockdown are now in use every day. We knew we were facing lockdown and all the various organisations as well as choir practice were cancelled. We had our last 'ordinary' Select Vestry meeting on Monday 16th March in the Main Hall so that we could be socially distant. This could happen as the Badminton Club kindly gave up their evening to facilitate us. The Annual General Easter Vestry was cancelled with no idea of when it can take place. The last Sunday service was on 15th March. Then on Monday 23rd March it was announced that the whole UK was in lockdown from midnight. It was all very strange. We could not go out at first; anyway everywhere was shut except for some food shops. But the Rector had already swung into action designating David Cromie and Sarah Coates to get groceries for those unable to get out. Everyone in the parish was contacted to find out how they were coping and if they needed food or just simply to have a chat to alleviate their sense of isolation and fear of this unknown disease. Gradually restrictions were eased and we could go a distance of no more than five miles. However, those who were 'shielding' for health reasons could not go out and this restriction continued until July 31st. Until recently families could not meet or visit loved ones in Care Homes which caused great distress. Even worse were funerals as at first no one was allowed to attend. A few were eventually able to attend burials but the worst were cremations as family members had to turn back at the cemetery gates while their loved one was taken on to the crematorium. It was extremely distressing and seemed cruel.

The Rector installed equipment to enable parishioners to see Sunday and Wednesday services conducted by himself, assisted by David Cromie. David also shared 'Reflections' on Sunday evenings, and the Rev'd Dr Ken Houston shared his thoughts on Thursdays. Sadly, Ken took ill, but he is now, thank God, recovering at home. Those who are not online

were able to listen to the Sunday service on the telephone which was a great benefit.

Then the word 'zoom' entered our vocabulary—nothing to do with cameras—but the Rector's desire to enable us to 'attend' Bible Study and the odd Select Vestry meeting. Unfortunately only those with the necessary equipment could avail of this. But the Rector came to the rescue once again. Keen that the technologically disadvantaged (or backward!) would not miss out, he organised a telephone 'zoom' connection which means I can join in the discussions. This has been a great help and it is lovely to hear the other members.

We have kept up communication with parishioners and we really feel that sense of being a church family, looking out for each other as Jesus would have us do. The church grounds have been kept immaculate thanks to Noel and Annette Beattie and some willing volunteers.

Then on Sunday 19th July the great day came. The Choir and Select Vestry members went to church for Morning Prayer (all masked up and hands sanitised) to see how the new, distancing, seating arrangements worked. I know, as the Rector reminds us that we, the people, are the church, but to meet and greet in person was just great. The seats have been reorganised to allow safe distancing and the five choir members (the number allowed as singing could spread the virus through exhalation) and the clergy enter the church from the corridor and process in single file to the chancel. On Wednesday 22nd Dora Hanna and I (wearing disposable gloves) put wafers into tiny polythene bags to be taken during Holy Communion. We do not go to the sanctuary as we do not receive the bread and wine from the Rector because of the virus.

Finally, on Sunday 26th July, the church opened to everyone. Sadly there are some not able to attend as they have to stay isolated due to medical concerns. There were 34 in church—all names had to be recorded in case someone became ill as everyone must be contacted. Now we are grateful that Wednesday morning Holy Communion has also resumed.

Church life is slowly, carefully, returning to near normality. The fear of a second wave of the virus continues to dominate our lives and we know we could again be in lockdown. But many of us believe we have become more united as a parish, concerned for each other's mental and physical welfare and led so well by our Rector, the Rev'd Brian Lacey, who has gone to extraordinary lengths to help us all join in the worship of God, not only in the Sunday and Wednesday services, but also as a church family, living out the teachings of Jesus in love and kindness.

During this period of confinement, it is a sobering thought that many people throughout the world are imprisoned for their faith or forbidden to worship as freely as we can. Many dare not admit they are Christians for

fear of persecution or torture. What must it be like for prisoners cut off from family and friends with no means of communication and suffering unimaginable cruelty? How can they remain strong in their faith under such treatment? And many do remain strong and pay the ultimate price. The least we can do is to remember them in our prayers and ask that hard hearts might be softened and compassion shown.

At the time of writing none of us knows what the future holds. A second wave of the virus has popped up around Europe and in other countries including some who seemed to be managing well. With so much uncertainty I think of Peter's words to Jesus—'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.'



On behalf of the Bell family we wish to thank all in the parish for their kind thoughts and prayers on the passing of Rene. *Colin*

I would like to thank the Rector and Parishioners for their kind wishes with cards and presents for my 80th birthday and also to Robert and the choir for their excellent rendering of 'Happy birthday'. I was totally overwhelmed. *Daphne*

Parish Notes On-line

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

Parish Elections

A meeting of the General Vestry (postponed from Easter) will be arranged in the coming weeks/months. The date/time of the meeting has not yet been decided, but this will be communicated in due course at church services, on the parish Facebook page, and by email. All registered members of the parish are encouraged to attend. As well as receiving a report on parish finances, a new Select Vestry will be elected to serve until Easter 2021.

My experience of COVID-19

Heather Tweedie

I want to tell you all of my experience of Covid-19. Sitting in my flat alone I suddenly began shaking violently all over my body. The next four to five days of my life simply don't exist for me. I don't remember being in an oxygen tent, neither do I remember washing, feeling sick, or rocking with coughing. Slowly I began to get better. I was in a large, dark ward. The entrance and exit were by one door only.

I suspect most people turned to God for a crutch to get through with his help. I tried very hard to seek help and never to forget to give thanks. I did try but often failed.

As we made good progress, some of the patients began to help the nurses, by giving porridge, or washing someone's face and hands. Sometimes we did not speak but simply held the hand of someone going to intensive care—probably going to die. One always felt a sense of fear everywhere—not of dying, but of what way you might die.

We talked a lot together and we felt uneasy about the world at large, and fearful for our children and grandchildren: Would they ever find a better world and some normality?

We need to help others, by being kinder, more thoughtful, and to see the simple beauty of nature—birds, animals, and wild flowers.

Covid-19 is a vicious enemy. Daily I pray that a cure will be found. I talk to God as my heavenly father as I used to talk to my earthly father—always with a prayer for a better world. I send thanks to those who pray for me. May you all remain healthy.

Covid Dichotomy

Sandra Hutchman

Many normal things are missing from my life just now—
but blessings outweigh them by far.

Hugs are top of my list—
but I have the love of family and friends.
Many do not.

Leaving my complex—
but I live in a lovely apartment.
Many are homeless.

Sundays with my church family—
but Jesus has always been with me.
Many have never known Him.

Feeling 100% health-wise—
but I have been blessed with rude health for decades
and I shall recover.
Many are not so fortunate.

Lunching with friends—
but I have plenty of food delivered.
I will not starve.

Cycling on the tow path—
but I have the ability.

Fresh air—
but I have a balcony to sit on to feel the warmth of the sun
and the wind on my face.
Not everyone has this wonderful space.

I have vision to read books and marvel over the beauty of nature; the
colours of the sky, the ever-changing patterns on the river.
Many cannot see.

I can hear bird song, children's laughter and familiar voices.
How can I complain?

The majority of people in the world live in poverty.
I know I am truly blessed.

