

Douglas Union with Frankfield - Easter General Vestry Rector's Speech 2022

Douglas Union – 26th April and Frankfield 27th April.

Welcome to the Easter General Vestry. It is good that after two years of unprecedented disruption due to the Covid pandemic, life is largely returning to what it was before 2020. The same is true in the parish.

We are an Easter people. While we acknowledge Good Friday, we don't stay in the darkness and isolation of the tomb. We are a people of faith, hope and joy. We believe that light triumphs over darkness, that joy overcomes fear, and that life conquers death. As I said in the services I led on Easter Sunday morning, it is good that we can gather to sing our Easter hymns with joy and enthusiasm under one roof and able to look one another in the eye. Yes, Jesus resurrected body bore the scars of Good Friday and we as individuals, as church communities and as wider society, bear the scars of Covid, we are being transformed and there is a brighter future.

Numbers attending worship are gradually increasing. We are not by any stretch back to what we were 3 or 4 years ago, but we are on the way back. It is good to see so many faithful regulars in church on Sunday mornings or at our weekday communion. I hope that those who have got out of the habit of church attendance, or still feel a little anxious, will come back over the summer period and fully integrate themselves again into parish activities when they reopen in the autumn. There really is no substitute for being together in a place where people have worshipped together for generations. While online services served their purpose when we had no other choice, physical presence and participation is the priority now. In John's Gospel we read 'the word became flesh' not that the flesh became word. To put it another way, God didn't communicate with humanity from a distance, sending messages, but came to live among us in the person of Jesus Christ. He taught, healed, shared meals, blessed, laughed and cried with others. Jesus sat alongside others. That is the model for parish ministry and activity. We are an incarnational people. We are a people who gather in person to experience the presence of the risen Christ in all that we do and are.

Some recent highlights

Commissioning of Kieran Hogan as a Diocesan Reader last June in St Fin Barre's Cathedral was one such highlight. Unfortunately, the congregation size was limited, and many parishioners would have been there in normal circumstances. I know you all appreciate Kieran's excellent sermons and the way he leads worship. His initial training year with me is nearing an end and he will be increasingly taking services on his own in Douglas Union with Frankfield. Kieran's step out in faith to offer himself for this ministry is a reminder to us all that we need to constantly recruit new readers and I am pleased to report that another of our parishioners, Dr Richard Scriven will be commissioned by the Bishop for this ministry in the near future.

Last Christmas, while the churches were open, numbers were very much restricted. Congregational singing indoors was not permitted. But this did not prevent us having an outdoor carol service in the grounds of St Luke's School. People came with the deck chairs, their blankets for their knees, warm clothes and for some, with their flasks of what they assured me was tea or hot chocolate! St Nicholas Brass Band joined us, and we also were led in our singing by the combined parish choirs. It was a wonderful

occasion and good to see so many there. Thanks to Olwen Anderson and the school choir too for their support and involvement.

The continuation of the Parish Walking Group since my initial challenge in January 2021 has been another encouragement. It was good that many members of that group switched their usual day to walk with me on the Fridays in Lent. Though not a fundraising exercise this time, it was a good way to meet up and enjoy conversation in the outdoors and coffee afterwards. All so good for mental health.

It was wonderful that we had 20 young people and two adults confirmed in this parish in March and we are looking forward to similar service in May, this time most of the candidates are in 6th class primary school or 1st year in secondary school. We held classes on Zoom and when we moved to in person classes in the church, the parents joined in too. Having candidates and parents participating together in confirmation preparation is something which I think should not be lost into the future, however we organise it.

End of term school services were held in both St Michael's Church and St Luke's just before Easter. The pupils prepared colourful 'Crosses of Joy' to be displayed in the churches. It was wonderful to see the buildings full again with enthusiastic and smiling faces. We realised what we had missed for the last two years. For some of the infant pupils, it was their first time in the church building. We look forward to regular school services and assemblies in our churches again for the remainder of this academic year.

I spent much of last week involved in setting up a property in Blackrock owned by the Lapp's Charity for retired clergy families. It had been occupied by Bishop Michael and Beth Mayes. It was now vacant and so the decision was taken, as it is not required by the Diocese for the time being, to provide a temporary home for a Ukrainian family fleeing the war there. We in this parish, along with the parishes of Carrigaline and Templebreedy, responded to a request from the bishop to furnish and equip this house. Ukrainian refugees as you know have been forced to leave everything behind and so arrive in this country with nothing. My appeals for support in this parish resulted in approximately €1500 in cash donations being given, as well as some substantial cheque donations being sent directly to the Diocesan Office. Last week, towels, bed linen, kitchen equipment, beds, tables, chairs and sofas, were sourced or bought thanks to your generosity and the help of our neighbouring parishes. All done within a couple of weeks. Hebrews 13:2 'Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.' Thanks to all those in this parish who supported this vital work. It is the church in many ways at its best and could not be done if you had sat on your hands or kept your money in your pockets. Thank you.

Parish Property

Maintenance is a constant reality in any parish, particularly ours which has such an extensive property portfolio. The focus this past few months has been very much on Holy Trinity Church in Frankfield. It is a gem of a building and was in serious need of repair. Stonework on the exterior was slipping and in danger, if left unchecked, of falling off. The chimney at the east end was leaning outwards and too would have collapsed. It had to be taken down and rebuilt. The roof needed attention as well as exterior pointing around the porch and sanctuary. The small bell tower needed some attention

and the metal frame holding the bell had to be replaced. Again, the overwhelming generosity of the parishioners in Frankfield was evident. Approximately €38,000 was donated towards the cost of this work. Thank you to them all.

Our parish hall in Passage West is ready and available for use again. Much money was spent on upgrading it in recent years. It was used during the covid restrictions on an occasional basis by the Indian Orthodox Community for worship. They are now back in St Michael's on a regular basis. I hope to see the return of Coffee Mornings and other events in Passage in the not-too-distant future.

The Old Schoolhouse in Blackrock is currently being used as an overflow classroom by the school. St Michael's NS is growing in size with 100 pupils at present and we hope that the school will see an extensive building programme on site next year. We are getting a very useful rental income for it from the Department of Education at present. Hopefully before too long, it will be back in parish use again. However, it was good that the building was occupied and maintained for the past two years by the school.

The Canon Packham Hall is another matter. Once the restrictions began to lift, I was making plans about the hall's reopening. However, a major leak in the water supply to the hall has frustrated that. You will hear more about this later. Suffice to say that the level of water loss would have resulted in the parish receiving a water bill of approximately €80,000 a year. The solution to the problem is complex and not helped by the fact that we share the site with St Luke's School. However, during the summer holidays, this work will be done, and we hope to have the Hall up and running again for parish and wider community use in September if not before.

People and Events

We are not just a property portfolio, we are primarily a community of people and to this I want to turn my attention now. This parish has always had a long tradition of committed and active lay people.

Music plays a vital part in our worship. Prior to the reopening of our churches, Florence Binions, who had been organist in St Michael's in Blackrock for over 25 years, indicated that she wished to step down. We thank her for her commitment over all those years. We thank Michele de Foubert who stepped in for several months to play each Sunday when we had the 11.30 service. We also thank Kevin O'Neill who has filled this vacancy to some extent, playing on the first Sunday of the month and for major festivals when he is available. We also have installed recorded music there. While it is not quite the same as live music, it means that the small congregation there are helped in their singing by the virtual choir and that we can have music to add to the atmosphere of worship when the congregation arrive for the early 8.30 communion there each week.

More recently Roger Ellis retired as organist in St Mary's Marmullane. He had played there faithfully for about a decade. We thank him as we welcome Veronica Tadman who takes over from him. Like the clergy she has to fly between services in Passage and Douglas every Sunday morning, but she has a dispensation to sleep during the sermon second time round! Bebhinn Ni Meara ceased as an occasional organist in Frankfield but has been replaced there by Michele de Foubert. Finding regular and committed organists is becoming ever more of a challenge and so we thank Veronica Tadman, Mark Slade, Michele de Foubert and Kevin O'Neill who do so much to enhance our worship week by week in Douglas, Blackrock, Frankfield and Passage.

Thanks

Now I come to a most important part of any AGM and that is to say thank you. I rate this parish very highly, each and every part of it. We are a union of three parishes, which along with Frankfield functions very well. It never ceases to amaze me how people just get on with it when a job has to be done. Whenever there is a big service or event, I know I can rely on key people to get the job done and help me and the other clergy to do our job effectively. I could refer to things that happen regularly, or in some cases week by week; Bible Study and Prayer Groups on Zoom, the School Boards of Management meetings, assistance at baptisms, weddings and also funerals, the Sunday services, Confirmation Group, the church decorators or those doing painting or maintenance or grounds keeping, Paula in the parish office, those who maintain the cemetery records, those who oversee our applications for heritage funding, our cemetery records and our finances. This parish is a very complex social and spiritual organisation. We do all this on a very modest budget as you will see when we come to the accounts. I think we all get great value for money given the round up I have just outlined! I can only skim the surface in this speech, but I thank you all for your work, prayers and support over the past year.

To you all I say thank you! Give yourselves a round of applause!

However, we now move on to business. Now you will elect the Select Vestry and also Churchwardens. Later this body will appoint a secretary and parish treasurer.

I also thank the current secretary Kieran Hogan (Douglas Union) Noel Locke (Frankfield) and our Treasurer John Kershaw (Douglas Union) Roger Flack (Frankfield) for their diligence in their respective roles. I thank the outgoing Churchwardens, Glebewardens, and those who have attended vestry meetings for their commitment to the parish over the past year.

I also want to thank Revd Hazel Minion for her support. For a couple of years, we have been without a curate, and she has been an invaluable help to me. I know you appreciate her ministry. Hopefully at the end of next month, I will be able to announce the appointment of a new curate. I also thank the lay readers in the parish; Keith Roberts, Wilfred Baker, Tim Jackson and most recently Kieran Hogan. We are all part of a team.

May God bless and guide us all in the year ahead. Thank you for listening.

Ven. Adrian Wilkinson