

The Newsletter

December 2014

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Clonenagh Group of Parishes

Annatrim, Borris-in-Ossory, Lacca, Mountrath, Roskelton, Seir Kieran.

Rector's Letter

Trapped in the futile slaughter of trench warfare, on Christmas Eve 1914, the German soldiers at Ypres began decorating their trenches with candles, some even put up Christmas trees. They began to sing Christmas carols and the words of "Stille Nacht" reached the ears of the British soldiers in their trenches on the other side of No Man's Land. They joined in with the singing, "Silent Night, Holy Night". On Christmas Day 1914 as many as 100,000 men along the front came up out of their trenches and met each other amongst the mud and the barbed wire; tradition says that even football was played.

The Christmas truce caused problems for military commanders. Frontline soldiers had no desire to kill those with whom they had shaken hands. Along parts of the front the guns remained silent for days. In some places, fresh soldiers were brought in so that the business of ordinary men killing ordinary men might continue.

Christmas 1914 demonstrated a human bond between people who might have no words in common, but who found a bond in their shared experience of horror and violence. It demonstrated a desire for peace, a wish to be at home with loved ones, a wish for an end to the killing.

Read accounts of the First World War and what is often most striking is not the hatred of the enemy, a hatred encouraged by religious leaders on both sides who insisted that the killing of the enemy was supported by God; it

is not even the stories of prisoners being killed at the whim of their captors; what is often most striking is the deep respect the men on both sides had for each other, shown in the care for wounded prisoners and in the burial of the dead. Many of the Western Front cemeteries maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission contain the graves of German soldiers whose names were recorded and whose remains were treated with the respect accorded to the Commonwealth fallen. (Even when the Nazi invasion of Belgium and France came in 1940, incidences of deliberate damage to Commonwealth graves and memorials were rare. The cemeteries that suffered vandalism at the hands of the Nazis were the German ones, Hitler's hatred of the Jews prompting a removal of Jewish names from memorials). There was a bond between soldiers that crossed all barriers of language, nationality and politics.

The truce on 24th December 1914 showed the power of the story of Jesus to change the hearts of even battle-hardened men; it showed the power of the story to even bring a war to a halt; it showed what was meant by God being with us. This Christmas may the power of the story of Jesus change our hearts and may we know the power of God with us.

Happy Christmas.



Church of Ireland News

New Rector for Portlaoise and Ballyfin

The Revd Brian O'Rourke has accepted nomination as the new rector of Portlaoise and Ballyfin. A native of Castlecomer, Brian is a past pupil of Ballyfin College and was a school teacher prior to his ordination in 1992. He was rector of Newcastle in Co Wicklow until 1999, where he was succeeded by the Revd William Bennett and for the past fifteen years has been rector of Shandon parish, on the north side of Cork city. Brian is married to Agnes, who retired from her career as a national school teacher earlier this year. Brian's institution as rector will take place in the new year.

Belfast Church Wins First Ever UK Christian Social Action Award

The winners of the first ever Christian Funders' Forum (CFF) Christian social action awards were announced on 12th November. Members of the Willowfield Parish Community Association, which is based on My Lady's Road, Belfast, were celebrating last night as they received the award for the Best Transformative Community Project For Vulnerable Young People. They were nominated for the award by funder, The Hinchley Trust. This grass roots community based youth work project, which started in 2002, has since seen thousands of young people engage with their programmes over the years.

The project itself prioritises meeting young people where they are at, whether that's in schools, on the streets or via a weekly drop in centre, the leaders spend time identifying with the young people themselves what the social and personal issues are that may be affecting them on a day-to-day basis. They then look to address these needs whether it's low self-esteem, eating disorders, self-harm, loneliness or sectarian issues.

Archdeacon David McClay who is the Chairman of the Association said, "It's such a privilege . . . that the Christian Funders' Forum have felt fit to recognise what we've been trying to do here in Belfast in reaching and supporting young people, many of whom

are struggling and feel lost. We're passionate about what we do and want to see more lives changed through this project and this award encourages us to keep doing what we do."

Christian grant makers in the UK such as The Hinchley Trust and The Joseph Rank Trust, are increasingly working together to provide support and encourage excellence in Christian mission. The past few years have witnessed a rise in churches and organisations stepping into the gap and addressing key social needs, as the country has experienced a changing economic environment and significant cuts in funding for public services and charities. In light of this every year the CFF awards will identify and award the best of church and Christian social action projects, which are making a significant difference to thousands of people in communities across Britain. It will also continue to encourage and resource other local churches of all denominations to understand and address the social needs within their community – working together with other churches, local councils and police forces to build stronger and safer communities.

Violence in the North

The Rt Revd Ken Good, Church of Ireland Bishop of Derry & Raphoe, has strongly condemned the latest threats of violence:

'At any time it is completely unacceptable that any group should choose to resort to bullying threats of violence and even murder. It is particularly jarring as we approach Christmas, the festive season of peace and goodwill.'

The bishop added: 'There can be no place in this society for blinkered dogmatism which threatens violence to pursue its ends. In this city and community there is a groundswell of opposition against these outrageous tactics.'

Bishop Good has urged those issuing the threats to find a political outlet to voice their concerns. 'To argue a case or advance a cause, the way forward is to engage in the democratic process.'

Parish Notes

Marriages

On Friday, 10th October 2014 at Lacca Church, Victoria Knowles of Clonin and David Cuddy of Camross.

On Saturday, 22nd November 2014 at Mountrath Church, Avril Williams and John Hargroves of Castletown

Condolences to Mabel Peavoy and Marina Clegg and their families on the recent death of their niece, Joyce Wallace.

Fifth Sunday services: Advent Sunday, 30th November is a fifth Sunday of the month and our services that day will be Holy Communion at Mountrath at 9 am and a Family Service at Lacca at 10.30 am. At 7 o'clock on 30th November there will be a service of licensing of new diocesan lay readers in Saint Canice's Cathedral, Kilkenny. Among those being licensed will be Ms Nicola Rowan, who was our harvest preacher at Roskelton. If you are not able to be at the service in Kilkenny, please support Nicola and the other lay readers in your prayers.

Christmas market: Clonenagh Parish holds its annual Christmas market in the Parochial Hall in Mountrath on Thursday, 4th December at 7 pm There will be a great line up of stalls and we look forward to welcoming a big number of people for some great Christmas bargains. We need a big effort this year as we are looking at a large bill for the restoration of the windows of Mountrath church.

Help is requested to get hall ready for sale on Wednesday night at 8pm.

Carol services: There are lots of opportunities to sing Christmas carols,

please note the dates and times of our carol services:

Annatrim – Sunday, 14th December at 11 am

Borris-in-Ossory - Thursday, 18th December at 8 pm

Seir Kieran - Friday, 19th December at 8pm

Lacca - Sunday, 21st December at 4 pm
Mountrath – Sunday, 21st December at 7 pm

Safeguarding Trust Training: The Revd James Mulhall, the child protection officer in our diocese, will be holding a training session for all leaders and helpers involved in work with young people in the Parochial Hall, Mountrath on Tuesday, 16th December at 7.30 pm. The training is open to people from our neighbouring parishes. Please let the Rector know if you intend to be present so that we have some idea of how many people to expect.

Christmas services: The aggregate attendance at our Christmas services last year was over 400 and we look forward to good attendances this year. It would be good to welcome every person who claims membership of our parishes.

The services are as follows:

Christmas Eve, 24th December

7.00 pm Seir Kieran

8.15 pm Borris-in-Ossory

9.30 pm Lacca

Christmas Day, 25th December

9.30 am Roskelton

10.30 am Annatrim

11.30 am Mountrath

In order for all the services to take place,

they need to start very punctually, so please try to be there in good time.

Sunday after Christmas: Church services on the Sunday after Christmas feel always like a house at the end of an evening on which there has been a party: the visitors have all gone and just family and close friends remain. Because the numbers are small, the Rector plans to do three services himself. This means a slight adjustment in service times that day, Seir Kieran will be at 9.15 am, Annatrim at 10.30 am and Mountrath at 11.30 am. Mervyn Tomb will take the family service at Lacca at the usual time, 10.30 am.

Covenant Service: There will be covenant services, committing the coming year into God's hands in each church of the five churches in which there is worship on the first Sunday of the New Year, Sunday, 4th January 2015. We hope people will start the year as they mean to continue and will be present to make New Year spiritual resolutions.

Farmers' Service: Our annual service of prayers for the farming year and the blessing of the plough takes place on Plough Sunday, 11th January 2015, at Mountrath Church at 7 pm, when we shall welcome the Revd William Bennett, Rector of Newcastle, Co Wicklow, as our preacher. There were eighty people at the Farmers' Service last January, so we look forward to another good crop.

Diocesan Synod thoughts: At the diocesan synod on 22nd October there was reflection on the results of the Church of Ireland census last year. A colleague in the North used to have a plaque on the wall of the vestry of his church which said, "For God so loved the world, he did not send a committee" and, attending synods with their emphasis on structures and procedures, it is

easy to understand how someone might be driven to such a view, there is always a danger of thinking that simply discussing something at meeting brings about change. The November 2013 Church of Ireland census showed that the average attendance across the 149 churches of the diocese was just 17 people on a Sunday, but when one look at the civil census figures for our diocese they show a Church of Ireland population of 19,360. Clergy will say that many of those people are from England, or elsewhere, and have no interest in church, but the national Census 2011 website says that 75% of the membership of the Church of Ireland is Irish-born, so even if all those who are not Irish are discounted, there is still a Church of Ireland population of 14,520, or an average of 97 people for each of the churches in our diocese. Our question should be how an average attendance of 17 might be brought closer to a potential figure of 97, that question is only one we can answer in our own churches for unless change happens locally, it won't happen at all. The church we meet in the pages of the New Testament is a church which is built from the local church upwards; the mistake the Church of Ireland often makes is to ignore the church we find in the Bible and to think that renewal can start with the General Synod, or with the diocese. Responsibility lies with ourselves.

Leprosy Mission boxes should be returned to Olga Telford by December 6th.

Clonenagh National School

Please mark your calendars with these important dates in our school calendar.

Christmas Fair: Saturday, 13th December 10.00 am- 3.00 pm in the Parochial Hall, Mountrath. Lots of goodies including Christmas trees, wreaths, bric-a-brac, raffle, cakes, hot chocolate,

crafts for children and much more. The day will include a visit by a surprise guest. Everyone is welcome.

Christmas service: Our Christmas service takes place in Mountrath church at 7 pm on Sunday, 14th December. Come along with all the family.

Tractor run: The fifth annual tractor run takes place on Sunday, 28th December leaving from Sheeran's pub in Coolrain at 1.30 pm. It is a great day out and includes a raffle, music and auction. Further details are available from Jane, 087 761 4974, or Jo, 087 266 4012. Happy Christmas.

Mountrath G.F.S.

Our Christmas trip to Santa Experience in Lisduff Adventure Centre Errill takes place on Friday 5th December and we look forward to an enjoyable evening.

GFS members are all busy completing Crafts and Bible Study for Diocesan Competitions.

Leaders and girls would like to wish everyone a Happy Christmas and Best Wishes for 2015.

At the November council meeting of the **Mothers' Union** in our diocese on 18th November it was announced that the Revd Margaret Sykes, who has been appointed as priest in charge of New Ross parish, will be the new diocesan president in succession to Mrs Maureen Lanigan who sadly died during September. The Revd Margaret is a deeply spir-

itual and strongly pastoral person and we pray for her as she takes up her duties.

We were joined by members of Ballyfin branch for our dinner at Seasons Bistro in Portlaoise on Thursday, 20 November. There was good food and good company and the evening was enjoyed by all.

Our final meeting of the year will be on Monday, 24th November at 8 pm in the Parochial Hall when we will be joined by Mrs Eileen Senior who will talk about Christmas crafts.

The **Dublin Welsh Male Voice Choir** are performing next Saturday 29th November 2014, at 8.00 p.m. sharp. The concert is being held in St Michaels & All Angels Church, Abbeyleix.

Tickets are €15 and include entrance into craft fair and a mulled wine reception. Doors open from 6.00 p.m. Tickets are available from the Abbeyleix South National School on the Ballacolla Rd. Abbeyleix Tel.: (057)8731920 or email: southschool.ias@eircom.net

Tickets are also available from the following shops in Abbeyleix: Fyffe's, William's Butchers, Casserly's Pharmacy, Horse-N-Riders, E.C. Pratt's garage & The Abbeyleix Manor Hotel.

More details on the Dublin Welsh Male Voice Choir may be found at www.dublinwelsh.com

Items for the Christmas 2014/January 2015 Newsletter need to be with the editor by MONDAY December 22nd AT THE LATEST, so that the Newsletter can be assembled in time for Christmas Eve, Wednesday December 24th.

PLEASE make your item as ready for publication as possible, and most important, please ensure that you spell names correctly.

Ideally, items should be submitted by e-mail to- newsletter@clonenagh.com

Otherwise to- Ivor Clegg, Cloncourse, Mountrath, Co. Laois. 057-8621277/087-2522162

This Newsletter and many older editions can be downloaded directly from

www.clonenagh.com

Smiles

Three men died on Christmas Eve and were met by Saint Peter at the pearly gates. "In honour of this holy season," Saint Peter said, "You must each possess something that symbolizes Christmas to get into heaven."

The first man fumbled through his pockets and pulled out a lighter. He flicked it on. "It represents a candle," he said. "You may pass through the pearly gates," Saint Peter said.

The second man reached into his pocket and pulled out a set of keys. He shook them and said, "They're bells." Saint Peter said, "You may pass through the pearly gates."

The third man started searching desperately through his pockets and finally pulled out a pair of women's glasses.

Saint Peter looked at the man with a raised eyebrow and asked, "And just what do those symbolize?"

The man replied, "They're Carol's."

* * *

A boy begged his father to get him a Christmas tree each year. Each year, the boy asked and the father told him, "I don't want to pay for it."

But the son kept begging. Unable to bear his son's whining, he picked up his axe one day and headed out of the house. Thirty

minutes later he returned with a great big Christmas tree. "How did you cut it down so fast?" his son asked.

"I didn't cut it down," the father replied. "I got it at a shop."

"Then why did you bring an axe?"

"Because I didn't want to pay."

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It was the day after Christmas at St Peter and St Paul's church in Borden, Kent. Father John, the vicar, was looking at the nativity scene outside when he noticed the baby Jesus was missing from the figures.

Immediately, Father John's thoughts turned to calling in the local policeman but as he was about to do so, he saw little Nathan with a red wagon, and in the wagon was the figure of the little infant, Jesus.

Father John approached Nathan and asked him, 'Well, Nathan, where did you get the little infant?'

Nathan looked up, smiled and replied, 'I took him from the church.'

'And why did you take him?'

With a sheepish grin, Nathan said, 'Well, Father John, about a week before Christmas I prayed to Lord Jesus. I told him if he would bring me a red wagon for Christmas, I would give him a ride around the block in it.'

Parish Diary

November

- 24th Monday.....Mothers' Union branch meeting (page 6)
- 27th Thursday.....Thursday Bible Club
- 29th Saturday.....Dublin Welsh Male Voice Choir concert (page 6)

December

- 4th Thursday.....Clonenagh Parish Pre-Christmas Market (page 4)
- 5th Friday.....G.F.S. Christmas trip (page 6)
- 6th Saturday.....Return Leprosy Mission boxes (page 5)
- 13th Saturday.....Clonenagh N.S. Christmas Fair (page 5)
- 16th Thursday.....Safeguarding Trust Training (page 4)
- 22nd Monday.....Closing date for January 2015 Newsletter items!**
- 28th Sunday.....Clonenagh N.S. Tractor Run (page 6)

Services & Readings

November 2014						
Fifth Sunday 30th	<i>Isaiah 64: 1-9 Psalm 80: 1-8, 18-20 1 Corinthians 1: 3-9 Mark 13: 24-37</i>	Mountrath 9.00am Holy Communion			Lacca 10.30am Family Service	
December 2014						
First Sunday 7th	<i>Isaiah 40:1-11 Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13 2 Peter 3:8-15a Mark 1:1-8</i>	Roskelton 9.30am Morning Prayer	Seir Kieran 9.30am Morning Prayer	Lacca 10.30am Holy Communion	Borris-in-Ossory 11.00am Morning Prayer	Mountrath 11.30am Holy Baptism & Holy Communion
Second Sunday 14th	<i>Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11 Magnificat 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24 John 1: 6-8, 19-28</i>	Seir Kieran 9.30am Holy Communion		Annatrim 11.00am Carol Service	Mountrath 11.30am Morning Prayer	Mountrath 7.00pm School Nativity Service
Thursday 18th		Borris-in-Ossory 8.00pm Carol Service				
Friday 19th		Seir Kieran 8.00pm Carol Service				
Third Sunday 21st	<i>2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16 Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26 Romans 16:25-27 Luke 1:26-38</i>	Roskelton 9.30am Holy Communion	Seir Kieran 9.30am Morning Prayer	Borris-in-Ossory 11.00am Holy Communion	Lacca 4.00am Carol Service	Mountrath 7.00pm Carol Service
Christmas Eve 24th	<i>Isaiah 9:2-7 Psalm 96 Titus 2:11-14 Luke 2:1-14, 15-20</i>	Seir Kieran 7.00pm Holy Communion		Borris-in-Ossory 8.15pm Holy Communion		Lacca 9.30pm Holy Communion
Christmas Day 25th	<i>Isaiah 62: 6-12 Psalm 97 Titus 3: 4-7 Luke 2:1-7, 8-20</i>	Roskelton 9.30am Holy Communion		Annatrim 10.30am Holy Communion		Mountrath 11.30am Holy Communion
Fourth Sunday 28th	<i>Jeremiah 31: 15-17 Psalm 124 1 Corinthians 1: 26-29 Matthew 2: 13-18</i>	Seir Kieran 9.15am Holy Communion		Annatrim 10.30am Holy Communion	Lacca 10.30am Family Service	Mountrath 11.30am Holy Communion