

The coronavirus pandemic which has rocked the whole world is now in its third year, and this is our third Easter General Vestry meeting to be held in its shadow. While restrictions have officially been lifted, covid is rampant in the community at present- many of you may have had it at this stage and we certainly all know numerous people who are currently isolating due to Covid 19. It is for this reason that I decided to move tonight's meeting to the church, so that anyone who would be unable to or anxious about attending in person would be able to join us via our webcam. What a blessing the webcam has been over the course of the past two years- thank God for the technology which allows us to now blend our in-person and online worship.

For any who remain anxious about covid, the pandemic may seem endless, but we have certainly made good progress since it first visited our shores in March 2020. That progress is evident even over the course of these last three Easter vestry meetings; in 2020 our triennial meeting had to be postponed until the Autumn, and then held in the context of a worship setting in order to comply with restrictions on gatherings, last year saw us having to meet on zoom, so being able to gather together in person, at the correct time of year is a big step in the right direction.

More importantly, our church is now open for worship without restrictions on numbers or the need to collect contact tracing forms, and much to our delight we can enhance our worship with singing. I hope that over the course of all the restrictions we have had to endure that we may have gained a new appreciation for the simple things- the ability to gather together for worship, to chat outside the church or over a cup of tea in the parish centre, and to sing our hearts out to our favourite hymns. Obviously while some danger or anxiety still looms our numbers have not returned to pre-covid levels and many activities have not yet resumed, but bit by bit we are getting there. Making sure people can gather safely for worship continues to be our priority, but we will build back up all that has been lost when it is safe to do so. You will all have a role to play in making sure this happens.

As always I want to pay tribute to the people who have contributed so much to keeping the ship afloat, even in such difficult circumstances.

Mark Acheson for his constant support and contribution to the life of this parish.

Trevor Garrett, who has worked tirelessly throughout the pandemic and ensured that both our church and centre have been maintained and cleaned, that our grounds have been kept and enhanced, and that our Centre users have what they need in place when they need it .

Jonathan Boyle who has had the unenviable task of liaising with all the Parish Centre users in the midst of much uncertainty and shifting goal posts. Thankfully, we have a busy Centre once again, something which takes a lot of managing.

Our out-going church wardens Kris McCaffrey and Ola Obikoya for their commitment to their tasks and their vital ministry of welcome. Kris was living in Raheny when I first asked him to act as my Rector's Church Warden, but moved home to Monaghan shortly afterwards having had to resort to working from home. That's a very long way to drive every Sunday morning to attend church, but he has consistently done so with grace and good humour- thank you Kris. And Ola's commitment to duty means that her entire family are often first to arrive and last to leave here on Sunday mornings- so I want to thank Ola and also pay tribute to her family, the boys often being the only teenagers in church.

John Davis, who continued to single-handedly cleaned the pews which had been used at the 8.30 service before the 10.30 service up until restrictions were lifted a couple of months ago. To Stephanie Maxwell, our wonderful organist, who turned up to play us in and out even when we couldn't sing and used her talents and creativity to lift our spirits with the virtual choir last Christmas.

Albert Adamson who organises the readers rota every week, and all who proclaim the scriptures for us.

Nadine Watters, who continues to serve diligently and expertly as our hon. Treasurer, and Sandie Stirling, who lodges and keeps track of the donations made in the church envelopes and organises the tax reclaim on all eligible donations.

Jeanne Colvin, who has capably acted as our Hon. Secretary and a member of the parish Safeguarding panel- Jeanne is stepping down from both those roles this year to concentrate on recuperating from illness and we wish her well and keep her in our prayers. I'd also like to thank Rachel Rossney who has acted as our minute taker at Select Vestry meetings in Jeanne's absence.

The Glebe wardens, especially John Davis, who is ever willing to help sort out issues with the fabric of the rectory as they arise, and to Graham Walsh who took on the role last year and organised new locks on the front door and the power washing of the steps to make them safer.

Our Youth Club leaders, Nick & Aoife Schofield and Kris McCaffrey, who have all contributed to a very successful resurgence of our teenage youth club this year.

Those who have volunteered to go on the tea/coffee rota after church, allowing this valuable ministry of hospitality to resume.

The members of the outgoing Select Vestry for their commitment to the parish.

Brendan Teeling, our webmaster, for keeping our website and Twitter account up to date.

Iris Acheson, who quietly makes sure the linens are kept laundered and the flowers are kept refreshed in the church, and whom even a bad fall and significant injuries couldn't stop. Also, the other ladies who help with church flowers and decorating.

To all the parishioners who supported the raffle before Christmas, making it our most successful raffle ever, despite not being able to sell tickets at Nolan's or the Autumn Fair, and to all who have dropped in donations or made online donations including throughout the period of church closures. When you hear our Treasurer's report shortly you will have a good idea of the severity of the impact that Covid restrictions have had on parish finances- the importance of planned, regular giving and the need to be able to go ahead with an Autumn Fair this year cannot be understated, but as was the case last year, we have been spared some of the huge financial issues some parishes are now facing because of the generosity of parishioners who have expressed their love for and commitment to the parish by leaving bequests in their wills. While expressing our gratitude to them I would also like to respectfully ask anyone else who may be in a position to do so to consider leaving a legacy to the parish once their loved ones have been looked after- it could make all the difference in the future.

I wish to remember tonight those whom we have lost since our last Easter General Vestry: Mervyn Wisdom and Podge Hughes – we keep a few moments silence in their honour ...

Finally, I want to thank you all for the love and support which you have continued to give me and my family-it is my privilege to serve as your Rector and while being very far from perfect, I can only assure you of my continued best efforts in this regard. May God bless and protect us all as we strive to serve him together in this place.