

**THE PARISH OF TEMPLEMORE
SAINT COLUMB'S CATHEDRAL**



TUESDAY 26th APRIL 2022

**THE DEAN'S ADDRESS
at the General Vestry**

For the last two years we have lived with uncertainty. We have been unable to live our lives in the way that we would have wanted. Our movements have been curtailed by an unseen virus and we have had to learn new ways of doing things.

Many of us have embraced the changes and have become used to frequent handwashing, observing social distancing and wearing a face covering.

Many of these restrictions have now been lifted but we have not disbanded them completely.

We recognise that the virus is still active and we live in such a way so that we keep ourselves and each other safe.

The lifting of restrictions has allowed us here in the Cathedral to re-open our doors to visitors and tourists. For the best part of two years the doors of this Cathedral Church were closed and we were unable to welcome people to see and admire this beautiful place of worship.

But now, thanks to our volunteer helpers we have been able to open the doors again.

During 2021, three of our long-term and much valued Tourist Guides retired – Daphne Gallick, Ian Bartlett and Billy Begley.

Between them they had given many years of devoted service to this Cathedral and I acknowledge all that they offered during their time with us.

Their knowledge of the rich and varied history of this Cathedral and the way in which they recounted the story of events here was often commented on by visitors who valued their personal knowledge and expertise.

When the Select Vestry decided to introduce volunteer tourist guides those who signed up had to learn many facts and dates and important and relevant information.

Let me say a sincere thank you to those parishioners who volunteer their services on Thursday, Friday and Saturday each week. For many of us it has been – and continues to be – a learning experience.

We have had to learn important facts and commit important dates to memory; but that in itself helps us all the more to appreciate this place that we could so easily take for granted. We continue to receive requests from individuals and groups who wish to have a guided tour of the building and we are endeavouring, with the assistance of local people, to increase our opening times later in the year.

The year 2021 was a difficult year for some of our key workers.

Ian Bartlett, Ray Mace and others spent time in hospital; they have undergone surgery; and have been the recipients of our thoughts and prayers.

It is only when sickness strikes and we cannot avail of the services and the expertise of our key workers that we appreciate them even more.

Let me say “Thank You” to you for what you have done in the past.

We wish you better health and strength and the assurance of God’s healing touch in the days that lie ahead.

We are delighted that Ian’s situation, while still curtailing his movements, is improving and that he is still able to play a part in the life of this Cathedral.

The fact that the Rector’s Churchwarden was unable to fulfil his duties meant that the People’s Churchwarden had to shoulder many extra responsibilities. I know that all of our parishioners would want me to thank you Muriel for always going the extra mile. We thank you for all the extra work that you undertook during the past year.

It has been recognised that the role of a churchwarden can often be a stressful one; one that goes unacknowledged and that the churchwarden who is always on duty can sometimes feel unappreciated.

It was decided some time ago, by the Select Vestry, to appoint parishioners to assist the churchwardens in their duties; to allow them some time off – if they required.

These people are known as sidespersons and we hope to appoint a number this evening to assist the churchwardens in their duties Sunday by Sunday.

The absence of Ray Mace, through illness, for much of the year was a big blow to all of us. But we were so pleased that Jacqui Armstrong took up the duties of Secretary. Thank you, Jacqui, for the very efficient way in which you have guided us through the past few months.

We are so delighted that Ray's health is improving.

The Select Vestry has known for some time, but other members of the Parish may not be aware, that our Treasurer, Joanne Armstrong, has decided to stand down as Treasurer this evening. Joanne was appointed Treasurer at a meeting of the Select Vestry following the meeting of the General Vestry five years ago, in 2017.

In the past five years she has guided the Parish through some very difficult times. The past two years have been particularly difficult in that less money was coming in and bills still needed to be paid.

There was also the Furlough Scheme to be administered.

Joanne has worked closely with our bank and with the Representative Church Body in Dublin to secure much-needed funding.

It has been a pleasure to have worked closely with you, Joanne, and both I and the members of the Select Vestry and Parish wish you well for the future.

In matters financial we have also been ably assisted by our assistant Treasurer, Alan Thompson and by Muriel Hamilton who looks after all donations and thankofferings. We record our thanks to them for all their assistance during 2021.

The care and maintenance of buildings, particularly of older buildings, can present a constant pre-occupation to any parish.

This parish has quite a number of older buildings to care for and maintain.

The Cathedral, the Deanery, the Parish Office, the Music Room, the Cathedral Schools, Cathedral House and the Court Properties – not to mention the Car Park and the Cathedral grounds.

The care and maintenance of Cathedral property and grounds has over the years become the responsibility of the Glebewardens.

This evening I record our thanks to Charlie Ferguson and William Lynn who are assisted by Brian Doherty and Maurice Brown.

But very often the first port of call is to Robert McGonigle who has a great knowledge of the buildings and is able to advise on any action that we should take.

I would also like to include in our thanks the great work that is undertaken by John Hetherington. He is our groundsman and he ensures that the grounds are always in pristine condition. He also undertakes cleaning duties in the Cathedral. John, as I have often discovered, is a man of many talents and he carries out his duties always so cheerfully.

I would also like to record my thanks to the members of the Select Vestry who played their part during 2021. Every meeting during the year was held on Zoom and I thank Robert McGonigle for facilitating us. Attendance at our meetings is always very good; seldom do we have an attendance of less than 90%. Our meetings usually last between one hour to one and a half hours. There can at times be differences of opinion but every person is encouraged to contribute his and her comments and all views are respected.

I have mentioned Cathedral House, one of the Court properties.

It is, as you know, home to St Columb's School of Music.

I wish to record our thanks to Louis Fields and Nicky Morton particularly who, over the past months, have renovated the caretaker's flat at the back of No 1.

The newly refurbished tutor rooms will be a wonderful facility.

The heating system throughout the building has been considerably improved.

The bulk of the cost of this work – from which we all will benefit – has been borne by St Columb's School of Music Directors.

During 2021 we were able to acknowledge the success stories of a number of individuals who have played a part in the life of this Cathedral in past years.

Former parishioner Ian Gallagher was appointed a Canon of Saint Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin.

Former parishioner and member of the Choir, Jack Wilson, was appointed Graduate Organ Scholar at Ely Cathedral.

Former parishioner, Organist and Master of the Choristers, Ian Mills was appointed Vicar of the Benefice of Chew Valley West in the Diocese of Bath and Wells.

Our present Organist and Master of the Choristers, Dr Derek Collins, was elected President of the Ulster Society of Organists and Choirmasters – following in the footsteps of Tim Allen and of Ian Mills.

Mention of the Choir allows me to say that two of the younger gentlemen of the Choir – Lukas Lynch and Leo Collins – joined the National Youth Choir of Northern Ireland.

And during 2021 Lukas was appointed Philip Mehaffey Memorial Organ Scholar here in Saint Columb's Cathedral.

The children and young people of this Parish may not realise it but they are benefitting in the Sunday School from over 120 years of experience from a dedicated team of teachers. The teachers are Irene Hewitt (Superintendent), Gail Ferguson, Lynsey Hewitt, David Dougherty and Holly Callen.

Katie Hewitt, Lauren Bell and Ellie McIntosh complete the team as Sunday School helpers. We are delighted that the lifting of restrictions has enabled the Sunday School to function in a more 'normal' way and that our Family Services can once again involve our young people in reading lessons and prayers.

I would encourage the parents to support the Sunday School teachers and all of the events that they hold for the benefit of the children and young people.

On Sunday 27th June 2021, six parishioners were confirmed by Bishop Andrew Forster. They were Darren Burnett, Ava Copestake, Jack Duddy, Jake Hewitt, Ellie McIntosh and Melissa Duddy.

This year, on Sunday 29th May, four parishioners will be confirmed.

Elliot McClintock, Sam Reilly, Emily Fielding and Kali Dalzell.

I thank the Sunday School teachers for their input over the years and I thank Canon John Merrick who conducts a number of sessions in the weeks leading up to Confirmation.

In the past Confirmation was thought of as 'a passing out parade'.

Young people had done their time in Sunday School and felt free to leave the Church and do their own thing.

We recognise that it isn't easy to keep young people in the Church after Confirmation – but we mustn't act as if it was inevitable that we will never see them again.

We can take some comfort from the fact that some of the young people who were confirmed in recent years now help in the Sunday School. We must consider carefully, and prayerfully, how more young people can be encouraged to remain in the Church and play their part as active members of this Parish.

One of the ways in which young boys are encouraged to remain in the Church has been through their membership of the Cathedral Choir. We are grateful to Dr Derek Collins and Nicky Morton for the guidance and training that they deliver. While it is encouraging to note that nine boys are members of the Choir it is disappointing – and a matter of some concern – to note that only two of the boys are members of this Parish.

I know that Nicky Morton and Louis Fields, prior to COVID-19, were very active in recruiting new members from local schools. This has not been possible for two years. However, now that restrictions in local schools have been lifted it will be possible later in the year to try and recruit new members.

I know that Dr Derek Collins and Nicky Morton would like to see the excellent music tradition in the Cathedral recognised more widely; and now that the Cathedral has re-opened to visitors it is hoped to be able to hold Lunchtime Recitals in the Cathedral on certain days in July. We look forward to these when they occur and ask for your support.

Fundraising in a Parish that does not have a hall available for use will always prove to be challenging. However, we have an intrepid group of parishioners (The Events Working Group) and they came up with the idea of holding a Festival Fayre here in the Cathedral just before Christmas. It was planned as a small scale fundraising event to show parishioners and local people that the Cathedral was alive and well.

We met on Saturday 11th December 2021 and it is true to say that the proceeds of the event – and subsequent donations – surpassed our highest expectations. I don't have the final total at hand but it certainly was over £3,000. I want to thank the organisers, the helpers and most of all everyone who supported this event.

Having been postponed on a number of occasions we are now delighted that the Open Garden at Creevagh House (the home of William and Elma Lynn) will take place on Saturday 21st May.

I thank William and Elma for very generously offering us the use of their garden and I hope that as many parishioners as possible will help with the preparations and support the event on the day.

The Events Working Group is always open to receive ideas from parishioners – but we would also be delighted if parishioners would undertake some fundraising activities in the name of the Cathedral.

The Cathedral is a place of worship. Its main purpose is the worship Almighty God. And I wish to place on record my appreciation of those who assist me in carrying out my duties as Rector and Dean.

I, particularly, value the friendship of Canon John Merrick whom I have known for forty years. He is a great support to me and a loyal supporter of the Cathedral.

In our duties as ordained priests we are supported by other people in the conduct of worship.

David Bell, Simon McGonigle, Aubrey Fielding, Elizabeth Mills, Heather Fielding and, within the past few months, Jacqui Armstrong.

I welcome Jacqui as our newest Parish Reader and wish her well in all that she does.

We have already seen her in action and can agree that she has passed with flying colours.

I would, also, wish to thank Raymond Nesbitt, the Dean's Verger, for his services to me and to the Cathedral. COVID-19 restrictions prevented Raymond from attending church for much of the past two years. Thankfully, he has now resumed his duties within the life of the Cathedral and we wish him well for the future.

Safeguarding Trust issues have been on the Agenda of every Select Vestry meeting for some time. I thank Elizabeth Fielding and Malcolm Hewitt, who along with me, are members of the Safeguarding Trust Parish Panel. Elizabeth and Malcolm have years of experience that they willingly share with us and their advice has enabled the Select Vestry to deal efficiently with what many of us see as complex issues.

One of the new requirements from Safeguarding Trust NI is that a Parish Safeguarding Trust Report must be presented at the meeting of the General Vestry. That will take place shortly.

One of the sad consequences of COVID-19 was that fewer people attended church. When the Cathedral had to close for many weeks and months people had to stay at home, but when the Cathedral was able to re-open many people were still reluctant to return.

We were, thankfully, able to engage with these people – and also each Sunday with people in England and in Australia – through on-line worship. This engagement continues to the present day and I suspect will be a feature of parish life for many years to come.

This on-line facility has been updated over the past year and we hope to be able to install a second camera soon that will enable baptisms to be seen.

We are indebted to Robert McGonigle who has been involved in all of this from the very start. In more recent months he has been assisted by Janelle McClintock to whom we are also grateful.

I know that Robert and Janelle would appreciate showing other parishioners – particularly but not exclusively anyone with computer skills – how to operate the system with a view to joining the team.

If you are interested, have a word with Robert and Janelle.

There are two other people whom I wish to mention and to thank for their work in the Cathedral.

On almost every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon you will find me in the Parish Office. The occupants of the Office can sometimes be found drinking coffee but generally we are busy at work – preparing Orders of Services for Sunday worship or preparing material for the Parish Magazine.

Linda McGonigle is an excellent Parish Secretary. Nothing is too much trouble for her. And I deeply appreciate her friendship and support.

Her husband Robert is a man of many talents. From organising cleaning rotas, rotas of volunteer tourist guides, to relaying Sunday Services on-line, to fixing computers, heating systems – and a whole range of other things.

Thank you, Robert for all that you do. I genuinely do not know what we would do if you ever decided to retire.

I like to refer to the Cathedral as a family; and in all families we try to support each other. Scripture reminds us to rejoice with those who rejoice and to weep with those who weep; and we have done so many times during 2021.

10 children were baptised; 5 couples were married; and 11 parishioners were buried. These are statistics but every person to whom we ministered has a face, an identity, a name.

Those who were baptised were –

Harlee Kilgore, Archie Mitchell, Willow Curry, Jonah Singh, George McIvor, Riley Appleby, Theo Thompson, Brandon Gillespie, Nelly Smyth and Harriet Todd.

Those who were married were –

Peter Norris and Georgia Mitchell, Louis Fields and Anna Kilgore, Christopher Kerr and Helen McCrossan, Gary McMackin and Lucy McGonigle, Keith Robinson and Robynne Blair.

Those who died were –

Billy Wilson, Dale Bone, Billy Walker, Iris Carruthers, Raymond McKittrick, Pearl Lynch, Catherine Miller, Elvin Love, Rosemary Kelly, Renee Moyse and George Dunlop.

In presenting this Report on many of the activities of the past year and in mentioning some of the events and activities planned for this year I am conscious of the fact that we are a family. We are a team. We constitute a Body in this place.

Scripture reminds us that every part of the human body has a place and a purpose.

No part can be done without. I hope that this is your experience as a member of this Parish; that you feel loved, needed and appreciated.

We cannot, sadly, give each of you a hug to show you that you are appreciated – but I hope that these simple human words will convey to you that we cannot do without you.

