

Parish of Saul and Ballee

"Beloved Disciples"



Pastoral Council Review
(March 2018-March 2019)

Dear Parishioner,

This year, 2018, has been another busy one in our Parish of Saul and Ballee. We have embraced as a Parish the Church's World Meeting of Families Celebrations throughout the year culminating in the visit to Ireland of our Holy Father, Pope Francis on the 25th and 26th August.

We, as Parish Pastoral Council (PPC) members continue to work with and support Fr. Paul Alexander in his Spiritual and Pastoral Ministry in the Parish. During the year, we have introduced some new Parish initiatives that have been highly successful and these will now become an annual celebration in our Parish as we grow in faith together.

As members of the PPC, we continue to meet monthly in the Pastoral Centre, with the exception of July, August and December. Our discussions and decisions made are as always guided, influenced and directed by the Holy Spirit and have the Five Diocesan Themes as a focal point throughout.

Open and Welcoming Church

During the year we continued to encourage new *Altar Servers* to come forward and have welcomed 6 new servers this year so far. It is great to see the children's' enthusiasm for this Ministry and their confidence growing as they attend the Parish Masses. Some of them would also serve in our other Parish Churches of Ballycruttle and Carlin.

Our *Pastoral Centre* has been a great asset to the Parish allowing us to run various courses, and is used by several Parish Groups, from St Vincent de Paul, our Parish choirs, our Flower Arrangers, our various Parish Committees and we even have a Parish "Knit and Natter" group use the Centre!

We continue to hold weekly *tea/coffee mornings* on a Wednesday after the 10.00am Mass, along with one on the first Sunday of the month after the 9.30am Mass. It is great to hear the "buzz" in the centre during these events and the Community Spirit which is so evident from these.

We held a highly successful "*MacMillan*" *Coffee morning* in September, organised by our Parish Secretary. This raised over £359 for Cancer Research. We thank all those who donated to this very worthy cause.



Lay Participation

During the year we had 3 *new Readers* join our existing Ministers of the Word in the Parish.

As a PPC we joined with our neighbouring Pastoral Council of Kilclief Parish for a joint *Retreat Day* in Tobar Mhuire, Crossgar on 24th November 2018.



Eucharistic Adoration in our Parish, which runs on a Tuesday morning from after the 10.00 am Mass to 10.00 pm has brought many blessings to our Parish. We are thankful to all those Parishioners who faithfully attend each week at their allotted times and we are

encouraged by the growing numbers of people who attend when they can throughout the day.

On the feast of Corpus Christi this year, Our Adoration Committee organised a *24-hour Eucharistic Adoration Vigil* culminating with a 6.00 am Mass in St Patrick's Church, Saul. This Mass followed guided prayer sessions, and periods of silent Adoration running throughout the night. These included the Rosary, Divine Office, Divine Mercy Chaplet and the Lauds. Again it was great to see our Parishioners support this vigil and indeed many returned for the early morning Mass to end this special celebration.

Saul Sunday on the 10th June was held at the Grotto on St Patrick's Mountain for the first time this year rather than on the 'High Altar'. It proved again to be a special day with over 250 people attending from around the area.

Communication

Our *Parish Newsletter* "The Spirit of Saul and Ballee" is published every quarter and keeps Parishioners updated with events in the Parish. This year we ran articles on the Marian Shrines throughout the world and included articles on Lourdes, Knock and Medjugorje. We also published our Pastoral Plan and details of Parish events and Pastoral Community events through the newsletter.

We continue to update *our website* and copies of our PPC Minutes and Pastoral Plan are displayed here for our Parishioners to read.

For those who do not have access to a computer, we display important information and copies of our Minutes on the *Noticeboard* at the back of St Patricks' Church, Saul.

Our *Facebook Page* also keeps Parishioners updated with the various events in the Parish and our Pastoral Community that has now been established.

We continue to keep in close contact with our *two Parish primary schools* during preparations for the Sacraments, school Masses and through Easter and Christmas competitions.



Faith Development

As a Parish we embraced the *World Meeting of Families Celebrations*. We introduced the *Family Prayer* as our Prayer after Holy Communion during our Masses and we had a growing number of parishioners who led this prayer. Indeed several of our young Altar Servers also led the prayer at our weekend Masses.

While we stopped reciting the prayer after the end of the WMOF, we were approached by some Parishioners to recommence the prayer again and dedicate it to our Parish families. The prayer is now said again at each Mass led by volunteers and our young altar servers and is a wonderful enhancement to our daily Masses.

During the month of May, as part of the WMOF *May Altar* initiative we recited the Holy Rosary at the grotto in the grounds of St Patrick's Church, Saul each Friday evening after the 7pm Mass. Our flower arrangers also provided lovely floral displays at the foot of Our Lady's Statue in the Church.

At our Easter Vigil and Sunday morning Masses we handed out almost 1000 bottles of Holy Water for the "*Blessing of Homes*". We included a prayer along with this for our families and Parishioners to say whilst they blessed their homes.

Our *Easter Sunday Dawn Mass* was held on St Patrick's Mountain at 6.00am and over 150 people attended.

The Official "*World Meeting Of Families Icon*" visited our Pastoral Community in St Patrick's Church, Downpatrick during the 21st -23rd June. Our Parish Priest, Fr. Alexander, along with Ministers of the Word, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, and our parishioners participated in most of the Concelebrated Masses during this time.

Our Parish was represented at the *Opening Prayer Service* in Downpatrick at the beginning of WMOF week in Dublin and a candle that was blessed during this ceremony was brought back to our Parish. This was then lit on our Altar in St Patricks' Saul during the whole of WMOF week.

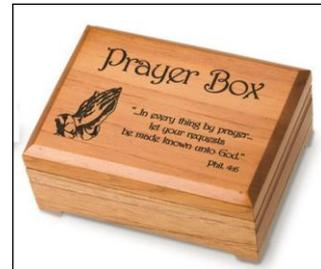
On Friday 24th August the Pastoral Community had a "*Family Fun Event*" in the RGU grounds, Downpatrick and our Parish had several representatives at this event.

On the weekend before Christmas, *Gesu Bambino Sunday*, families and parishioners were asked to bring along the child Jesus figure from their cribs at home, to have it blessed at our Church Masses. The baby Jesus from each of our Parish Churches were also blessed and wrapped up to be opened at the Christmas Vigil Masses in the Parish. Once again we had a terrific response to this, particularly from our younger Parishioners.

Our *Family Prayer Ministry* has currently 64 members and they receive special prayer intentions for the seasonal moments of the Church's year i.e. Lent, Easter, and Advent.

Our *Ministry of Praise*, which is a Prayer Ministry, has recently been promoted again in the Parish at one of our weekly coffee mornings. We got 11 new Ministers at this time. They together with our existing Ministers receive monthly prayer intentions for our Parish and our Community.

We are very aware, having experienced it ourselves through the years, that exam time can be a stressful period for students and indeed their families. So as Pastoral Council members we recognised this need and we suggested having a *Prayer Petition Box* for the whole month of May. A Student Mass followed this on the 25th May, which was well supported by our students and their families. Our local Gaelic Club postponed their training for the evening so that their players could attend this special Mass. It will now become an annual event in our Parish. The students and their families participated fully in the Mass by bringing up gifts at the beginning of the Mass, symbolising the following:



- A calculator to remind the students that they can count on the love and prayers of the Church and their families and friends.
- A globe of the world to remind them that wherever they go, God is with them and so they are never truly alone.
- A history book that reminded them God is not just an historical figure; He is with us in good times and bad.
- An exam candle, which was lit during the Mass and at each Parish Mass during exam time as we carried the students and their families with our prayers.

Family members led the Readings, Prayers of the Faithful and Offertory Procession.

Another initiative we began this year was a *November Mass for the Deceased*. It included all those Parishioners who died during the past year in the Parish i.e. from 31st October 2017 to 1 November 2018.

This was held on Friday 16th November and a large crowd attended. 14 Family members carried a candle to the altar for their deceased loved ones. This is another initiative that will become an annual event in the Parish.

Our *Annual Carol Service* was held on 10th December in St Patrick's Church, Saul. Our three Parish choirs came together along with our two Parish Primary Schools, St Patricks, Saul and St Joseph's Ballycruttle. It was a lovely start to our Christmas celebrations and a good crowd went back to the Pastoral Centre afterwards for a cup of tea and some delicious treats!



During Advent the local Knights of St Columbanus ran a four week *Advent Course* to prepare us for the coming of Jesus at Christmas. A good number of our Parishioners attended these talks held after the Friday evening Mass in St Patrick's.

We also thought this year that we could help others less fortunate than ourselves at Christmas time. So we decided to appeal on behalf of a local food bank in Downpatrick for non-perishable foodstuffs. The volunteers of *Fountain Food Bank* then distributed these to those needy families just before Christmas. Once again we were overwhelmed with the Parishioners response. We thank all those who donated to this worthy cause.

In November, as more and more warnings were being circulated locally regarding all types of computer scams, we held a "*Raising Awareness of Scams*" Talk in the Pastoral Centre. This was a very informative talk given by a local Community Banking Officer who was accompanied by a local PSNI Community Policing Officer. We hope to run this course again at a later date in the year.



To develop our Faith further both at personal and Parish level we have held "*The Beloved Disciples Course*" for four weeks in October. This was held in the Pastoral Centre after our Wednesday morning coffee time and was well supported. Caren Collins of the Living Church Office and Deacon Anthony Briody from the Diocese of Raphoe, who was on

secondment to the Living Church, facilitated the course.

Personally, I have attended the annual *Faith and Life Convention* in Our Lady and St Patrick's Grammar School, Knock in Belfast on Saturday 29th September. This was an excellent day and it is a great opportunity to meet and talk with other Parish members across the Diocese.

Our PPC Secretary and myself also attended the *Faith Development Conference* in the Crowne Plaza Hotel, Belfast on 27th October. Paula McKeown, Caren Collins and Deacon Anthony Briody of the Living Church Office along with Laura Whinnery of Alpha NI, Tim Stevens of CaFe and Johnny Sommerville of Scripture Union Ireland facilitated this course. This was a great taster session for Courses that can be run in any of our Parishes in the Diocese.

Clergy

As members of the Pastoral Council we continue to help and support Fr. Paul in his Spiritual and Pastoral Ministry in the Parish.

The Year Ahead

Over the coming months we hope to continue building on our existing Parish initiatives, including the likes of the Student Mass, The November Mass for the Deceased and supporting another worthy cause at Christmas time.

We also have plans over the next year to run further courses from the CaFe Resources like the Let it Be Course for Our Lady, The Strength to Strength course which covers daily prayer and the Alpha Course for Youth in conjunction with our local Gaelic and football clubs.

Fr. Paul and myself represent our Parish on the Downpatrick Pastoral Community Forum that meets every few months along with the representative members of surrounding Parishes. We will continue to keep you updated with any developments from the Pastoral Community.

As a parish we have the privilege of welcoming Jackie Breen, a candidate for the Permanent Diaconate in the Diocese. Jackie will spend some time with us as part of his Pastoral Ministry for the Diaconate. We also keep him in our prayers along with the other 8 men and their families who have joined Jackie in this important Ministry.

So as you have read, we have had a lot happening in our Parish already and God willing this year we will build on this further, as we continue to grow together in our Catholic faith.

We would also like to take this opportunity to thank all our Parishioners, our Committee members, our various Pastoral Ministers, our young Altar servers and their families, and all our volunteers throughout the Parish for their help and support over this past year. We ask you to continue to support Fr. Alexander and us and to pray especially for our Parish as we grow together in God's Faith.

Our River of Roses Display 2018



Fr. Paul Alexander
Parish Priest

Vivienne McCormick
Chairperson, Parish Pastoral Council