

People-led parishes are the only way forward writes Fr Brendan Hoban in the Western People 1.8.2023

There was a famous parish once with a famous priest. A hands-on man, he ticked all the boxes of expectation that his parishioners could possibly have hoped for. He was kind, generous, dutiful, approachable, hard-working. A people's priest, they called him. He visited the elderly on a regular basis and was happy to spend time in their company. He was 'good with the youth', parishioners said, befriending them, organising services for them, involving them in the parish. He was extraordinarily attentive to the sick, even visiting them in hospital. And, crucially, his sermons were invariably short and to the point. He placed a huge emphasis on church services, setting in place not just creative and imaginative liturgies for Holy Week and Christmas but immersing himself in family liturgical events like baptisms, weddings and funerals. His engagement with old and young was always appropriate and carefully measured. And the parish bulletins he produced every week were admired far and wide. People wondered at his commitment, his energy and his ability to respond to the variety of needs – sometimes conflicting – that arose in the course of parish life. What increased the gratitude of his parishioners was not just the fact that he responded so admirably to the needs of his parishioners but that the bishop had left him almost 18 years in the parish. The priest himself used to joke that he thought the bishop had forgotten about him!

But all good things come to an end and in time the priest was transferred to the far end of the diocese. His successor (people felt) was less engaged, less a people's priest, more restrained than his highly gifted predecessor but, people reassured themselves, once he settled in he would soon respond to their expectations. However, gradually the people noticed his laid-back disposition. When someone commented to him that he hadn't turned up to the weekly Foróige meeting, he was said to have paused slightly before responding that he wasn't good with young people and that he probably lived on a different planet from them. He would take a rain-check on that. When someone wondered out loud why ill parishioners in hospital were no longer being visited, he confessed that he was uncomfortable visiting hospitals. When someone mentioned that the elderly expected him to spend more time with

them on his First Friday calls he replied that he was never 'good at that'. When someone asked why the quality of the parish bulletin had deteriorated he seemed to have difficulty understanding the question. The crisis in the parish was obvious. It was clear from the new priest's skill set that the array of services they had taken for granted during his predecessor's time were on hold. Eventually 'the movers and shakers' of the parish felt the need to intervene. They organised more supervisors for the Foróige club, and cohorts of people to visit the sick in hospital and the elderly in their homes. Other interested parties were prevailed on carry their weight in supplying the services that, for whatever reason, were beyond the reach of their new priest. Many years later when the new priest went home to God, the bishop informed the people that there was no priest available to replace him but that a neighbouring priest would supply basic services. It was, the bishop informed them, 'gratifying to know that through the ministry of their last priest, the people of the parish were now engaged in effectively running the parish'. It would, he added, make the transition to a priest-less parish much easier. He commended their last priest for his foresight in preparing them for the future and congratulated the parishioners for responding to his call.

At present now in parishes all over Ireland an historic transition is taking place. Faithful readers of this column will know – because I've mentioned it so often – that priests are fewer, older and wearier and that for parishes to survive the people will have to step forward (through their Parish Councils) and accept responsibility for running parishes in the future. (It is sufficient to state one telling statistic. At present, in Dublin diocese with over a million Catholics in 199 parishes, there is only one student studying for the priesthood). At present Irish parishes are in an intermediate space between being priest-led and people-led, between now and the cliff-face in declining priest numbers that is staring us in the face.

There are two obvious responses. One is to continue to spread an ever-declining number of priests over as wide a canvass as possible with priests helicoptering around an ever-increasing number of parishes. The other is to establish an orderly but speedy transition from priest-led parishes to people-led parishes. There is no other way. We are at a point now where the vast majority of priests and people recognise that truth as well as their responsibility to engage in delivering it. For either party not to engage would be a form of disloyalty even betrayal of our people and our priests at a time when, without such engagement, the prospects are grim. In the words of one priest, we are facing our 'impending obsolescence'. Putting our best foot forward is what Pope

Remembered In Mass		
Donoughmore		
Sat.12th Aug	7pm	T J Walsh (12th)
Mon.14th Feast of Assumption	7pm	Wedding Anniversary the Intention
Tues 15th Feast of Assumption	11am	Nancy & Joan Noonan the
Fri 18th		
Sat. 19th	7pm	Gerard Glynn (1st)
Knockea		
Sun 13th	11am	Willie Dooley (1st)
Wed.16th	10am	No Mass
Sun 20th	11am	

Francis is urging us to do as the Rome Synod this October will attempt to do. If priests and people (and bishops) fail to respond to the test that confronts us, it will be difficult to see any way forward.

National Heritage Week event-Public Lecture An Antique & Storied Land presented by Mr. Tom Toomey Wed. 16th August 7.30-9.30pm DKR Community John Sheehan Courthouse Exhibition Centre Ballyneety V94T6FA . Further details contact John @061351515, 087 1260525. Tom @086 3114867, email :dkrcomm5@gmail.com

Annual Parish Knock Pilgrimage: Thursday 17th Aug Bus is fully booked up, Bus will depart Day Care Centre @10am Many thanks Bridget 061 351023.Naomi 086 6072593 Margaret 087 2775103 for arranging this day trip.to Knock

Pop-up Bakery with Bernie Kett at the Day Care Centre this Friday 18th august 9-11.30, all welcome

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The Eircode for St. Patrick's Church, Donoughmore is **V94 V6T3**.
Knockea is **V94 D938**.
Pastoral Unit 'Sli Padraig' Patrick's Way ;Donoughmore /Knockea/ Roxboro, Queen of Peace, Holy Family

Wedding Anniversary Congrats To Noel & Katherine Jackson, The Glen Ballyneety on their Diamond wedding celebration.

Good Luck to the O'Callaghan family John, Gee and their son Aiden as they move to Marrakech, Morocco.

Recent death Sympathy to the family of Duncan Hayes Leeds England & Fairgreen Bruff May he rest in Peace.

DKR Comm. Café courthouse Ballyneety Fridays 10.30amc call in for a free cup of tea/coffee any Friday morning

Weekly Lotto €5,800 no winner, winning No's 6,17,18,21 Lucky dips. 1.J. Wade 2.Sarah Dunne 3.James & Finn Kelly 4.Josephine Hayes 5.Mary Scanlan 6.Frances O'Brien Next Jackpot €5,900 Draw Tues 15th Aug. 9.30pm the Cats Cradle Many thanks.

