ST Finnian's

DECEMBER 2026



A warm invitation to join us for special services during Advent & Christmas. (see inside for details).

Dear Friends

Have you ever noticed that our society is not very good at waiting? If you want to personalise it, I'm not too good at it myself. Do you ever find yourself drumming on the steering wheel with your fingers while waiting for the lights to turn green when you believe you need to get somewhere fast?

I think we weren't long back from our summer holidays in the latter part of August, when my wife announced that the Christmas channel had made an appearance and every week between August and Christmas there would be festive films on offer. On the cookery channels celebrity chefs have been showing us how to create the perfect Christmas dinner with all the trimmings since mid-October. After taking my wife out for breakfast in early November, we went to a nearby shop where a dancing Santa greeted us as we entered the shop with a jaunty rendition of Hark the Herald Angels Sing.

In the church, the season of Advent is more of a slow burner. The colours on pulpit frontals and on the communion table turn purple as it reflects a more penitential season. We think of sober themes like the return of Jesus, His judgement of the world and the need for us to be spiritually ready for his coming.

A friend of mine, who was married to a German woman, never put up their Christmas tree until Christmas Eve. Buying and storing a fresh tree until so late was tricky.

Even as I write these things it may seem as if the church is rather curmudgeonly and miserable in how it observes this season of Spiritual preparation for the birth of Jesus.

I want to suggest that as we prepare intentionally for the birth of Jesus, it always does something profound and important to our soul. Yes, there are presents to buy, yes, there are preparations to make for a special meal, there are often special events and parties to attend connected with our schools, workplaces and hobbies and friendship groups. It's wonderful to connect with people we don't hear from too regularly and to enjoy all these celebrations.

There's a danger though that we can lose perspective and fail to see or understand who we are really celebrating when He is often overlooked or tagged on as a very optional extra.

We would love to invite you to come on a journey with us over the season of Advent and Christmas. There will be an Advent Carol Service, a time of special music and readings which invites us to open our hearts afresh to God and think of his place within our lives.

There will be short reflective services on the three Thursdays in December before Christmas Eve at 7.30pm. Our first, on 3rd December, will use the meditative music from the Taizé community and the use of light to think together about waiting for the Lord. We continue to prepare for his coming in the services scheduled for 10th and 17th December. The service on 17th December recognises how difficult and painful this season is for many people for a whole host of reasons. Many families will be struggling with sadness and loss, some will be burdened by financial worries, there may be difficult family relationships which cause much stress. We want to bring these things before God in a service called 'Blue Christmas' for those who find this time of year particularly difficult.

There will be special celebratory occasions like our Messy Church afternoon on Friday 27th November from 3.30-5pm. There's a special all-age Christingle service on Sunday 20th December at 11am, the Advent Carol Service on Sunday 29th November at 7pm and the Festival Service of 9 Lessons and Carols on Sunday 20th December at 7pm. There will be the First Holy Communion of Christmas at 11pm on Christmas Eve and celebrations of Holy Communion at 9am on Christmas Day and on Sunday 27th at 9am. We have a Family Celebration of Christmas service on Christmas Day at 10.15am and on Sunday 27th at 11am, an opportunity to sing and hear the story behind many of our favourite Christmas Carols.

One of the things we have been trying to cultivate in our church is a culture of invitation. We invited people from the local streets around us to community picnics over the summer, to a Community Fun Day in September, to courses exploring the questions about Christian belief and practice during the autumn and we would love everyone to feel welcome to all our Advent and Christmas services and events. Very often a personal invitation is all it takes to encourage someone to come along and perhaps experience something very important and significant that may speak directly into their life. Could you be the vital link in that chain for someone, a friend or a member of your family?

Advent and Christmas is often a season when we think of others locally and internationally who are going through tough times and we thank everyone for their generous donations to the Samaritan's Purse Shoe Box Appeal, the CAP (Christians against Poverty) Christmas Appeal and the heartening response to the appeal for those affected by the flooding and mud slides in Nepal and Tibet during the autumn.

We hold in our prayers all who are dealing with loss and find this season difficult. If anyone finds it difficult to get out to church and would appreciate Holy Communion at home, please get in touch with the clergy and we would be delighted to come.
We hope you can join us for some or all of these special services. May I take this opportunity to wish you and your family a peaceful Christmas and every blessing for 2027.
With very best wishes.
Jonathan Pierce (Rector)
Telephone 02890 793822

PRAYER MEETINGS BY ZOOM

Our parish prayer meetings by Zoom will not take place during the month of December.

PRAYER WARRIOR

Do you have a concern or problem and would like someone to pray for you? If so, contact Robin by text or email, he will be willing to help. Your contact will be completely confidential, and no details will be passed on to anyone else unless you want them to.
Mobile:07513947504
Email: robsmill24@gmail.com

THURSDAYS IN DECEMBER

There will be short 35-minute reflective services on Thursdays in December at 7.30pm. On Christmas Eve, the First Communion of Christmas will be at 11pm.

Season of Advent



Thursday 3rd December
Keep watch (Taizé service) - 7.30pm.

Thursday 10th December
Prepare the way for the Lord - 7.30pm.

Thursday 17th December
Blue Christmas – a service for those who find this season difficult - 7.30pm.



Thursday 24th December
The First Communion of Christmas – 11pm.

Wednesday morning communion & prayers for the sick



The Wednesday morning communion service with prayers for the sick takes place **on Wednesdays at 10.30am.** Everyone is very welcome to join us for the service and for tea/coffee, scones and friendship afterwards in the Sextons' Room. **Please note that the last service for this year will take place on 16th December. Services will then resume on 6th January.**

ST. FINNIAN'S TODDLERS



The St. Finnian's Toddlers' Group will be meeting on Monday 7th December at 10.00am for a Christmas party with a special guest! **This will be our last meeting of 2026 and we look forward to meeting again on Monday 11th January 2027.**

SUNDAY SCHOOL BREAK

Sunday School will not be meeting on Sunday 27th December but will resume the following week (3rd January). Happy Christmas to all our children and their families.

CRECHE

During the 11am service there is a creche available for younger children who are not yet old enough for Sunday School. Feel free to bring your children to the Huston Hall before or during the service.

CHURCH OF IRELAND GAZETTE 2027

The subscriptions for the Church of Ireland Gazette are due for renewal. The cost has remained the same as last year - £47.50. If you wish to receive the Gazette next year, please contact Linda in the church office. Contact details can be found on the back of the magazine.

PLEASE ADVISE BY TUESDAY 5TH JANUARY 2027

MISSION BOX CONTRIBUTIONS

If you would like your Mission Box contributions to be included in the 2026 distribution to charities, please leave your box at the back of the church **by Sunday 6th December.**

Brian Lavery (Hon. Treasurer)

DIVINE HEALING MINISTRIES' SERVICE

There will be no Divine Healing Ministries' Service held in December. Services will resume in the New Year.

Norman Sleator

YOUTH GROUP

Youth Group will only meet once this month at 11am in the Coffee Bar on Sunday 13th December for a Christmas party.

FLOWER DONATION ROTA

DECEMBER

6th Mrs C Bell
13th Mrs L Campbell
20th Christmas flowers
27th Christmas flowers stay



CREGAGH CRAFTERS

Come along on a Tuesday morning at 10.30am and join in the fun. A warm welcome awaits with tea/coffee and plenty of chat. **We will finish for Christmas on Tuesday 15th December and will resume crafting on Tuesday 5th January 2027.**

Janet Johnston (07711885203)

LADIES' FRIENDSHIP GROUP

Hello Ladies,

We are only meeting once in December as the 4th Wednesday falls on 23rd. We will meet on 9th December at the usual time of 2.00pm. As it's the festive season, our afternoon will have a Christmas theme - mince pies obviously included! We hope that you can join us as we round off this year's programme. Wishing you and your families a very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

Helen and Team.

Julie (Mobile no: 07814928398)

BB/ANCHOR BOYS

The BB boys of all three sections have had a busy and varied programme since our return in September. We will continue with our activities until the Christmas break.

Christmas Break:

Company and Junior Sections - 15th December
Anchor Boys:16th December.

Return 2027:

Company and Junior Sections - 11th January
Anchor Boys – 12th January.

We would like to thank all those who have supported us during this session - especially parents, the Vestry and our Chaplains - and to wish you all a happy and peaceful Christmas.

Mothers' UNION
Christian care for families
Diocese of Down & Dromore

Hello everyone

Here we are in the midst of the run up to Christmas as shops and online retailers will try to persuade us to spend, spend spend! Can we resist? As I go home on the daily commute, I drive past Centenary House Salvation Army Hostel on Victoria Street. There is a striking bronze sculpture of "Homeless Jesus" lying on a bench with his face, body and hands covered with a blanket except for his bare feet which unlike anyone else's, have the nail mark wounds exposed. The artwork was created by a Canadian sculptor Timothy Schmalz. Often there are people, mostly young men sitting or standing beside the sculpture as a living reminder that homelessness has a long history and hasn't gone away. At Christmas time in the Nine Lessons and Carols Bidding Prayer these are the beautiful words which echo what the statue represents; "And because this of all things would rejoice his heart, let us remember, in His name the poor and helpless, the cold, the hungry and the oppressed, the sick and them that mourn, the lonely and the unloved, the aged and the little children; all those who know not the Lord Jesus, or who love Him not, or who by sin have grieved His heart of love". What a manifesto challenge for Christmas to all of us! Whether by contributing to the Black Santa and the Salvation Army Christmas Appeals or making ourselves aware of the work of homelessness charities like the Simon Community or Shelter and Centrepoint or just visiting someone who is lonely, we can all do our bit to make our world a less forbidding place.

We are sorry to note the passing of Agnes Thompson, a faithful long-serving member of our Branch and we remember Sarah who was such a caring support to her mum in these last years.

Please see the MU Midday Prayers and the Wave of Prayer for December.

Heather and I and the Committee thank you for all your support and wish all our members, families and friends a Blessed Christmas.

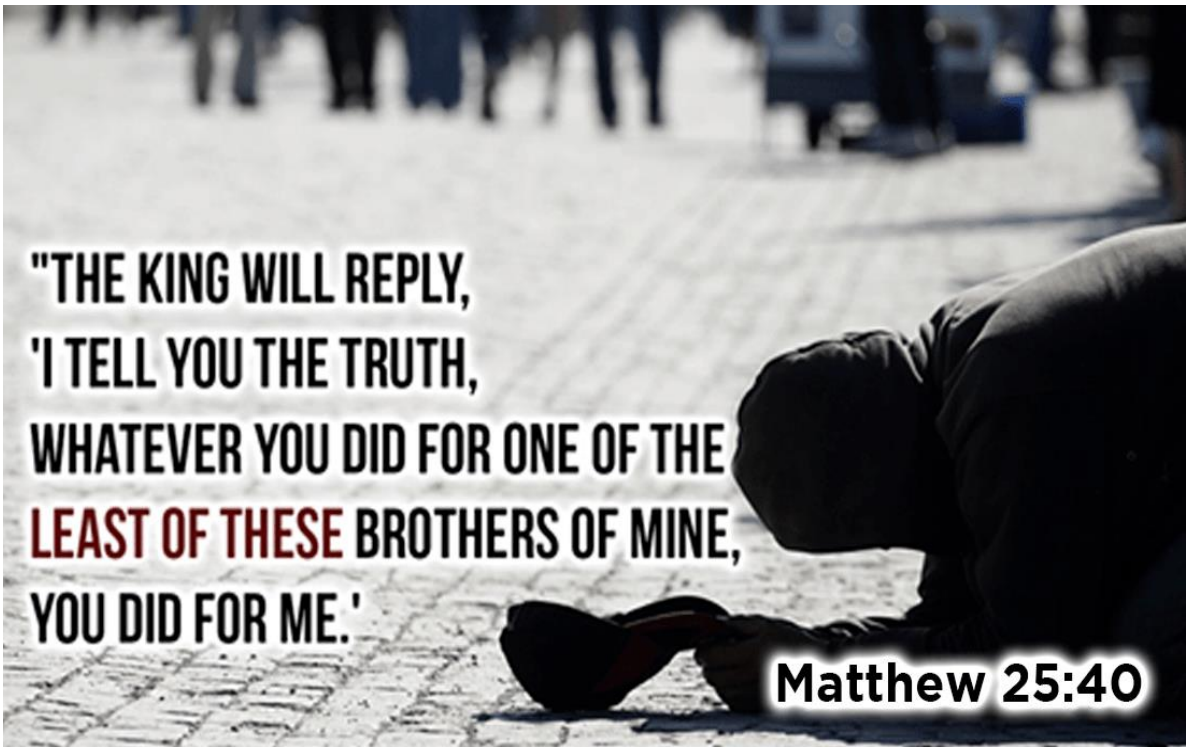
Dates for your diary: -

Advent Carol Service Monday 30th November 7:30pm in St. Columbanus Ballyholme Parish. Bus available. Contact Hilda Arnold on 028 9079 0924

We look forward to seeing you at the Advent Service in the church on 3rd December 2026 at 7:30pm and afterwards in the Huston Hall for supper and carols led by the Choir.

Saturday 9th January 2027 at 10:00am Spiritual Reflection by our Curate, Rev Dr Ryan Hawk and Holy Communion.

Angela Harvey,
Branch Secretary
Mobile 07596075081



Mothers' UNION
Christian care for families
Diocese of Down & Dromore

Mothers' Union Midday Wave of Prayer December 2026

1-2 December: Mpumalanga in South Africa; Central Buganda in Uganda; Zonkwa in Nigeria; Bo in Sierra Leone; Newcastle in England and Barrackpore in India

3-5 December: Akot in South Sudan; South West Tanganyika in Tanzania; Aba & Irele-Ese Odo in Nigeria; Coventry in England and Cuttack in India

7-9 December: Namibia; Mount Kenya South in Kenya; Northern Izon & Ijebu North in Nigeria and Durham in England

10-12 December: Lusaka in Zambia; Shyogwe in Rwanda; Sokoto & Ikka in Nigeria; Ely in England and Karimnagar in India

14-16 December: Fianarantsoa in Madagascar; Central Tanganyika in Tanzania; Calabar & Igbomina in Nigeria; Derry & Raphoe in All Ireland and Banks &Torres in Vanuatu

17-19 December: Lui in South Sudan; Embu in Kenya; Orlu & Awori in Nigeria; The Murray in Australia and Medak in India

21-23 December: Archbishops, Bishops and all clergy in the Anglican Communion

24-26 December: Refugees, internally displaced families & those living in a climate of fear

28-30 December: All involved with the responsibility of caring for & supporting family life

31 December: Mothers' Union worldwide

MOTHERS' UNION MIDDAY PRAYERS FOR DECEMBER 2026

Theme: Shining a light in the darkness

Reflection

'The light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it.' John 1:5

My daughter once drew and coloured me a picture in Primary School of two lightbulbs holding hands and gave it to me with the words written, "You are the light in my heart". It still hangs on my wall, a reminder to be a light for her every day. The world can feel like a dark and lonely place. As we get ready to step over the threshold into another new year, we must remember that we carry the light of Christ in our hearts, illuminating our way. So, in this season of darkness and cold let us shine that light for the world around us to see. And perhaps, if we shine our lights together as members of Mothers' Union, we will make a light bright enough to light the lives of those around us.

Monday: The true light

'The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world'. John 1:9

God in heaven,

We thank you that your light came into the world in the shape of your Son. As we celebrate the infant Jesus, in a stable in Bethlehem this Christmas, we ask that you would give us eyes to see Christ, the world's true light. In his name we pray. Amen.

Tuesday: Shine like stars

Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, 'children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.' Then you will shine

among them like stars in the sky. Philippians 2:14-15
Almighty God,
We pray that your Spirit would so guide and govern us that in our words and our actions we may be found to be blameless and pure so that the example of our daily lives, the outworking of our faith, may point others to Christ. Amen.

Wednesday: God shines on us

'May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine on us'. Psalm 67:1
God of grace,
We pray that your face would continually shine upon us that in the dark times in our lives, when all seems dread and despair, we might turn again to you and still find a flicker of light. Amen.

Thursday: Giving glory to God

'In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven'. Matthew 5:16
Lord God,
Help us to live our faith in our own way; using our own gifts, celebrating our differences; but filled by the same Spirit, with the same call upon our lives, trusting in the same Lord Jesus Christ, beloved of the same God, giving the glory ever only to you. Amen.

Friday: The light in our hearts

'For God, who said, let light shine out of darkness, made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ'. 2 Corinthians 4:6
God of creation,
We thank you that in the beginning you made light shine out of darkness, and we thank you still more that you have put this light into our hearts. Open our hearts that we might see your glory displayed in the face of Christ, but also in the faces of all we meet. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Saturday: A guiding light

Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light to my path. Psalm 119:105

Heavenly Father,

We thank you for the lessons of Scripture, teaching us as we study your Word. As we seek a deeper understanding of the Bible in our daily devotions, may it be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Amen.

Final Blessing

May the light of Christ shine in our hearts, in our Mothers' Union Branches, in our communities and in this broken world as we seek to show Christ, our salvation, to others, and to make the darkness bright. Amen.

You bring light to the darkness, You bring hope and restore every heart that is broken, great are You, Lord. Let us shine a light for the whole world to see, a light for the glory of the Risen King. The darkness cannot overcome Your mighty power Jesus, Lord, now and forever more. Amen.

GENERAL MAINTENANCE

The church premises require regular maintenance to keep them in good order, so it is an advantage to have a regular schedule for works both for buildings and grounds. This gives people an opportunity to volunteer a few hours each month to assist in the upkeep of our estate. Accordingly, **the last Saturday of each month is designated as a work morning, duration from 9am to 11am** for anyone who might be available. Work would include general light duties, tidying up in the halls and church and optional pruning, spraying, brushing etc. ***We would particularly welcome assistance with some of the internal cleaning of the church and halls.***

The next date is **Saturday 2nd January.** See you then!

Jim Haughey, Glebewarden.

Services for December



Sunday 6th December (The 2nd Sunday of Advent)

9.00am Holy Communion
11.00am Connect Service (Church)
7.00pm Holy Communion

Sunday 13th December (The 3rd Sunday of Advent)

9.00am Holy Communion
11.00am Holy Communion
(Youth Group meet in Coffee Bar)
7.00pm Compline

Sunday 20th December (The 4th Sunday of Advent)

9.00am Holy Communion
11.00am All-age Christingle Service
(No Sunday School))
7.00pm The Service of 9 Lessons & Carols

Thursday 24th December (Christmas Eve)

11.00pm The First Communion of Christmas

Friday 25th December (Christmas Day)

9.00am Holy Communion
10.15am A Family Celebration of Christmas

Sunday 27th December (The First Sunday of Christmas)

9.00am Holy Communion
11.00am A celebration of our favourite Christmas carols

NO EVENING SERVICE



ST. FINNIAN'S HISTORY PROJECT
1932-2032

Many thanks to everyone who has already submitted a variety of interesting stories, memories and photographs to the St. Finnian's 100th anniversary history project. We would be most grateful to continue to receive your stories about the people, events and changes in the parish so please do have a think about anything that might be relevant.

Any contributions can be submitted on a Word Document for ease of editing. Please contact Linda in the church office.

If you are aware of anyone who may need help writing their memories, we would be grateful for any assistance from friends and family. If you would like to become involved in the planning and gathering of material for this project, then please contact Linda with your name and details.

This month our article is about the formation and work of the Ladies' Friendship Group. Thanks to Joan Logan and Helen McKnight for writing the article.



THE LADIES' FRIENDSHIP GROUP

The Ladies' Open Door Friendship Group began in 2014 at the suggestion of Iris Hay. Apparently at that time she approached the Rector, Noel Battye to explain to him ''ladies of a certain age need somewhere to go in the afternoon as it's not suitable for us to go out at night.'' At that time, the long running ladies' Wednesday Afternoon Bowling Group had dwindled in numbers and had come to an end, leaving a gap for those who still valued company, conversation and friendship. In response, the Ladies' Open Door Friendship Group was formed, offering a welcoming space for retired ladies to meet twice a month on Wednesday afternoons in the Huston Hall.

From the outset, the group was intentionally informal with the emphasis firmly on chat, companionship and getting to know one another better. Once the group was established, Iris Hay passed leadership to Joan Logan, who alongside Barbara Carlisle**,** and later Eileen Bell developed a varied and engaging programme. Meetings ranged from quizzes and craft activities to afternoon teas and annual outings. The programme also featured a wide selection of speakers, often ladies from within the group sharing their hobbies, travels, or reflections on working life before retirement. Barbara Carlisle was one of the first speakers telling of her nursing career in the Royal Victoria Hospital paediatric haematology department. Clergy visited regularly too, with every new Curate being warmly invited for an informal "getting to know you" conversation.

The Group ran very successfully until 2020, when the Covid pandemic brought a temporary halt to gatherings. The isolation of those years made friendship and company more important than ever and thankfully the group was able to restart under the leadership of Helen McKnight with the help of Julie Cunningham, Caroline Wilson and Dorothy Whiteside. It continues to meet twice a month on Wednesday afternoons, going from strength to strength and maintaining its original purpose: offering friendship, welcome and a place where ladies can simply enjoy being together.

We continue to offer a wide range of speakers, and I am delighted that ladies have joined us from the community or other parishes. The age group is wide, and everyone is welcome.
It is difficult to mention speakers at the risk of leaving out valued speakers, but here are some afternoons remembered by various ladies.
Amy Wall gave a talk about her service in the Ulster Defence Regiment including teaching the ladies to march! Amy was also Treasurer for many years. The books and invoices she handed over to me were immaculate, but this makes me smile every time I use it - Amy loved cats, so it is no surprise she kept the money in a pencil case with KITTY written on it--typical Amy!
We have had various local history talks including Aidan Campbell, the Evolution of the Belfast Workhouse, the Women of Clifton House and Polish Airmen in NI in WW2. We have extended these meetings to men who have found them very interesting.
From our own congregation, we were delighted to have Helen Sanlon demonstrating her art and Adrienne Smyth showing us 'A Crafty way of Living'.
We have also enjoyed some music afternoons, light exercises and trying our hands at craft!
As I close, I mentioned the inclusion of men on some occasions, but our greatest surprise was when we were having an afternoon tea party to mark the Coronation of Charles III. Some ladies enjoyed reminiscing about the Coronation of Elizabeth II when we had the surprise visit (only a few days after his coronation ceremony) of His Majesty Charles III and Queen Camilla.
With a varied and interesting programme scheduled until 2027 we welcome all ladies of the parish and community and look forward to strengthening our friendships.
Please drop in and visit us on the 2nd and 4th Wednesdays of the month at 2pm.

Joan Logan
Helen McKnight

ST. FINNIAN'S CHOIR

It was (perhaps!) St. Augustine who said, "When you sing, you pray twice." It is certainly a privilege to help to lead the worship in our church and having singers at the front really helps the rest of the congregation. It also benefits us, the choir members, in body and mind. We're introducing some changes to the way the choir operates.

In the morning service, we will have a non-robed choir that will sing the tune only to the hymns and songs. We hope this will allow **all** enthusiastic singers to consider sitting in the choir stalls to give a good lead to the congregation. Please know you will be very welcome. Attending practices will not be necessary for morning choir members.

The choir for the evening service sings in 4-part harmony but **everyone** is welcome. Currently, women are particularly welcome. We have a great leader in Mark, who is skilful at teaching us the music, whatever our ability. Our practices take place at 7:30pm - 8:30pm on Thursday evenings between Harvest and Easter. We also meet at 6:30pm on Sunday evening to practice for the psalm and canticles. The practices are busy but there's always time for a good laugh! It would be great if you could come to both services on Sundays but attending one is fine: several choir members do this. Psalm 95 starts: Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord!... Let us come before Him with thanksgiving and extol Him with music and song. We would like to invite you to join us as we do our best to do this. Please speak to Jono, Ryan, Mark or any choir member if you are interested.



St. Finnian's Pilates

Hello everyone

As this is the December magazine, season's greetings and wishing you a Merry Christmas. I don't know about you, but I find it difficult to take a celebrity endorsement at face value and especially if it comes through a social media source. I find that usually they're promoting some product (which we never knew we needed) or some wonder treatment that you must scroll through endless adverts and sometimes inadvertently sign up to a subscription to find out the secret behind its efficacy. So, you can imagine my surprise when I came across an article in my msn feed that read: "the one simple back pain exercise that Twiggy, 77, has sworn by for over a decade". This immediately grabbed my attention as the one thing that most people will complain about from time to time (and especially with a few more birthdays under your belt) is a stiff or sore back, and so I read on to see what this exercise could possibly be and if I had missed the silver bullet for back pain. For those of us of a certain vintage, including me, Twiggy was the iconic model and global icon of the swinging sixties (if you haven't heard of her, just ask your mum). It turns out that she hurt her back around a decade ago and, when she went to a therapist about it, was advised to start Pilates to build up her core and protect her spine. According to the article I read, she now practices Pilates once a week and was quoted as saying "It's turned my life around and I would recommend it to anyone over 40." As you can imagine this was music to my ears as I had also been advised by my physio to do Pilates after damaging my back in a car crash when I was in my late 30s and found that it worked for me (that's another story for another time.) Sadly, it's a fact that according to the NHS, up to 80% of us will be affected by lower back pain at some point in our lives and it could result from an accident or simply doing the weeding without paying due respect to your lumbar region. Whatever the cause, the likelihood is that you or someone you know will be complaining of lower back pain. The good news is that Twiggy was given excellent advice as a recent clinical study found that Pilates-based core training, resulted in a significant reduction in back pain after just 4 weeks for those who participated in the clinical trial, and they also improved their core stability and posture. The study suggested that the main benefits came from the activation of the deep core muscles and the reduction of mechanical stress on the spinal structures. So, there you have it; not all celebrity endorsements are rubbish, especially if they're not urging you to part with your hard-earned cash and this is one I'm more than happy to pass on. Before I sign off, might I suggest that a Pilates exercise mat would be an excellent Christmas present! Until the next time, take care and keep moving. ***We finish for Christmas on Wednesday 16th December and resume on Wednesday 6th January 2027 at 7pm.*** **Everyone is welcome. If you want to find out more about Pilates, please contact me - John Waterworth by phone (+447941368546) or email at jcwworth@yahoo.co.uk**

CONTACT DETAILS

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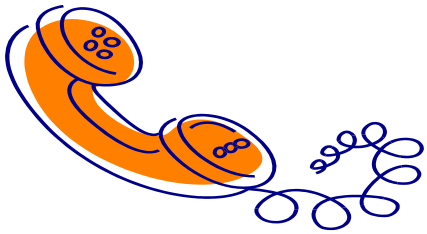
ryan.stfinnianscregagh@gmail.com



Church Office Hours

Tuesday 9.00 am – 2.00 pm
Wednesday 9.00 am – 2.00 pm

TELEPHONE: 028 90792793
office.cregagh@down.anglican.org

MAGAZINE BY EMAIL

Why not receive your magazine by email and help the environment by cutting down on the use of paper? If you would like to receive your magazine this way, contact Linda in the church office on Tuesdays and Wednesdays between 9.00am - 2.00pm. Tel. 028 90792793 or email office.cregagh@down.anglican.org

Magazine

Please send articles for inclusion in the **January** magazine to office.cregagh@down.anglican.org **or** telephone the Parish Office 028 90792793 by NOON on **Tuesday 1st December.**

Don't forget to check out the church website:

www.stfinnians.org



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