

Killyleagh Parish Newsletter
St John the Evangelist
August 2025



Lift Up Your Gaze

A phrase that has been stirring in my heart for several weeks is: “Lift up your gaze.” This phrase appears several times in Scripture—like when God says to Abram, “Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are” (Genesis 13:14), or when He tells Isaiah, “Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these?” (Isaiah 40:26).

Whenever God invites us to lift our gaze, it’s to shift our perspective—to see not just what’s around us, but what God already sees and knows.

When I was younger, my parents often told me to “look up at the beauty around you” while hiking. It’s easy to stare at our feet, watching each step for fear of stumbling. While that may be necessary sometimes, constantly looking down develops a kind of short-sightedness. We lose the ability to envision where we’re going—or what is possible.

I believe it’s time for us, as a parish, to lift our gaze—to look beyond what we currently see and imagine the future that God has in store. A future where great things—even the impossible—can happen in Killyleagh.

Rejuvenation: Where We Are and Where We're Going

A recurring theme in my sermons has been our parish vision. We are now 18 months into a season of rejuvenation—intentionally reviving and implementing strategies for spiritual and communal growth.

While we are financially stable - thanks largely to fundraising and our charity shop - for long-term, holistic sustainability we must return to our core mission: evangelism and discipleship, the very heart of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19–20).

Earlier this year, I wrote the following to our newly elected Select Vestry:

“As we look prayerfully to the future of Killyleagh Parish, we stand on the threshold of a vital opportunity—a call to reimagine and reinvigorate our church life together. This is more than a strategic task; it is a holy invitation to allow the Holy Spirit to breathe fresh life into our parish, making it a beacon of light, hope, and belonging for all generations...”

We are being called to become a welcoming, multi-generational parish—a spiritual home for all ages. This involves not just renewing our building, but transforming our hearts and mission. We want to become a “third space” in Killyleagh: not just a place of worship, but a place where people come to connect, heal, serve, and grow.

Our Six Strategic Focus Areas

We've identified six key focus areas to guide our rejuvenation journey—each paired with a practical “mini project”:

1. Parish Identity and Visibility

- Strengthen branding, signage, and social media so people know who we are and what we offer.
- Share testimonies and transformation stories that invite others into belonging.

2. A Welcoming and Accessible Church Space

- Improve worship accessibility (screens, sound systems, space reordering).
- Create a permanent hospitality area—perhaps removing a few pews for comfortable seating.
- Establish a welcoming culture: welcome packs, follow-up calls, and mentorship pathways.

3. Family Ministry and Youth Outreach

- Strengthen Kids Church not just for children, but to equip and support parents.
- Use our Youth Club as a vital bridge to engage young families.
- Host family-oriented services, seasonal events, and community fun days.

4. Discipleship and Leadership Development

- Equip lay readers and leaders for pastoral care, mentorship, and evangelism.
- Establish small discipleship groups for prayer, study, and spiritual growth.

- Form a core ministry team focused on prayer and outreach.

5. Evangelism and Courses

- Offer Alpha and other seeker-friendly programs.
- Provide clear next steps for newcomers to grow in faith.

6. Meaningful Worship

- Create worship experiences that resonate with both seekers and seasoned believers.

This is not about “doing church differently”—it’s about becoming spiritually renewed, rooted in prayer, and joyfully obedient to Christ.

Mini Projects in Progress

Our Select Vestry is overseeing the following key projects:

- Audio Equipment Upgrade – Including a modern loop system for hearing aid users.
- Welcoming Entrances – Entry enhancements to ensure inclusive access.
- Hospitality Space – Dedicated space for fellowship.
- Outreach Initiatives – Support for young parents through the Youth Club and Mums & Tots, including mentoring and parenting workshops.
- Church & Graveyard Tours – Self-guided tours with printed or digital historical boards.

- Flooring Improvements – Assessing carpet replacement, repair, or removal.

These are tools, not ends in themselves—they support our core mission of discipleship and outreach.

A Changing World Needs Unchanging Hope

We must acknowledge today's fast-paced world: people are more mobile, more digitally connected, and often more spiritually disconnected. But what hasn't changed is humanity's need for Jesus in their search for meaning.

This year, the bishop has encouraged all parishes to embrace the diocesan theme: "Speak Jesus." This is our opportunity to lift our gaze, speak hope, and proclaim the Good News that "Christ came into the world to save sinners" and "to seek and save the lost."

To that, I add: "Love Killyleagh." Let us love our town through acts of service, compassion, outreach, and presence. Whether it's hosting community events or simply chatting with neighbours—we reflect the love of Jesus when we show up with open hearts.

Your Invitation to Get Involved

Here's what to look out for—and how you can engage:

- Parish Reader Team – A group of people stepping into more visible service through prayer and ministry during worship.
- Website Relaunch – A huge thanks to Jana for spearheading our updated digital presence.
- Musician Search – We continue to seek a part-time church musician (paid role). Despite diocesan and Down Recorder advertisements, we've had no enquiries. If you know someone, please connect us.
- Look out for our new prayer room in the Parish Centre. It can be used by anyone needing a quiet space.

A Final Word

Let's not miss this moment.

Let us lift our eyes, renew our hearts, and step forward—together—with faith, courage, and expectancy. There is so much God can and will do when His people respond.

Feel free to write a reply letter by emailing me at minister@killyleaghparish.com

Rev. Eben Grobbelaar

Notices:

Weddings

Mark Clifford

Tara Rowan Hamilton

Confirmations

Robert Jess

Junior Dickson

Eva Alexander

Faye Alexander

Holly Heron

Beth Heron

Anne Lennox

Sophie Hendry

David Bell

Lindsey Wilgar

Mckenzie Armour

Louise Murray

Baptisms

Charlie Martin

McKenzie Armour

Lindsey Wilgar

David Bell

Elliott Bell

Kayde Armour

Porsche Irwin

Mia Clarke

Deaths

Roberta Adair

Samuel Davidson

Andrew Ward

Jean Murphy

Frank Finlay

Jacqueline McKee

Frances Cheivers

Upcoming Events:

10 August	Family Fun Day
24 August	All services resume
26–29 August	Diocesan Bible Week – Holywood Parish
31 August	Witness Night (Evening of prayer and praise)
21 September	Rev Stu Armstrong – Guest preacher
12 October	Rev Catherine Simpson – Guest preacher
26 October	Harvest services; Rev Claire Aylward as guest Special collection for new sound system
9 November	Remembrance Sunday

Recruiting enough volunteers to maintain the grass and gardens of the graveyard has been challenging. As a result, the parish has had to employ a contractor to cut the grass.

This is a public space, used by many in the community — not just parish members. We kindly ask the wider community to consider making a regular or one-time donation to help cover the cost of maintaining the grounds. Banking details of the parish can be found on our website: www.killyleaghparish.com

Some Christian trivia:

1. Which Old Testament figure was taken to heaven in a whirlwind, without experiencing death?
2. Who was the Roman emperor at the time of Jesus' crucifixion?
3. What was the original language of most of the New Testament?
4. Which church council in 325 AD produced the first version of what we now call the Nicene Creed?
5. Which apostle is traditionally believed to have been exiled on the island of Patmos, where he received the visions of Revelation?
6. Who nailed his 95 Theses to a church door in 1517, sparking the Protestant Reformation?