

Well hello and good morning.

It is such a joy to join the United Parish of Christ Church and St John's.  
It's such an honour for me, my wife and my daughter.  
We do love you and we pray for you.  
You are a great part of our conversations and memories.

I want to thank Pastor Jonny for this honour and this invitation.

As we celebrate Father's Day and as we look and reflect, I want to say I have been an biological father to my daughter for one year, and now approaching 26 days

But I have played as a Father figure to many since the year 1999. I have had spiritual and social sons and daughters. My community refers to me as fadé which means dad. It was a name give back in high school in 1999.

My biological dad went to be with the Lord when I was very young. I have very faint memories of him. My journey has been in the hands of great women who moulded me into the person I am today. I stayed with my Grandmother for 4 years and then went to a Catholic Students' home which was managed by the Asuncion sisters - all this time with my mum.

In learning social ministry the Urban Development Programme (UDP) has been very instrumental and under the leadership of 4 great women. This includes Louise, Cathleen and my mum Lucy.

In the passage that was read to us, we find what is commonly known as the Lord's Prayer.

And today during this Father's Day I want us to reflect on the Lord's prayer.

The disciples have been watching the life, the prayer life of Jesus and perhaps they have been amazed by the outcome of his prayer. And at one particular moment they ask, "Lord, teach us how to pray".

Teach us how to pray was their very request.

In teaching the disciples how to pray, the Lord's prayer also teaches us a few things about God, and this is what is going to form our reflection today.

God is our Father who is in heaven. Therefore things I would really like us to share this morning consider us as a family, as a community and as individuals. More particularly with a lot of reflection as a father, and as one who takes care of community.

So the background I am going to share with us, is 4 things and is going to be formed as  
I as a dad to a biological beautiful daughter;  
I as a dad to young people growing in our community  
But also as a member of that community, as a son, and part of that community

The first thing that the Lord's Prayer teaches us is to be relational.

The very opening of the Lord's Prayer is 'Our Father'.

Our Father gives us an identity of God as a Father. The very moment that Jesus says 'this is how we pray' and he opens the prayer saying our Father. Therefore we get an identity as this God as a Father and to us.

A father to the nation and a father to the whole world.

But God as a Father He is very relational.

And therefore Jesus is son of God, who invites us to share with his Father. He invites us to be part of his family.

In the world where we are living, there is a great need for fathers to be relational to their families. Relational to their community members who might be in need of a father figure in their lives.

In fact we are living with a community where fathers are very few. But we are living in a place and a time where people are seeking to relate. Can fathers be available for their families, can fathers be available for their wives, can fathers be available for their children?

Human beings are created to be social and every child seeks to relate. But Christ is pointing us to God as father, he is giving us an example that every father can emulate. But again God as a Father, he needs us as his children to go back to him and relate to him.

Therefore the relationship is not about the Father to the children only, but also the children loving the Father. This should be the experience in schools, this should be the experience in the home, this should be the experience in the church and in the community. The father relating to the children and the children relating to the Father.

Every evening when I am going back home, and finding my daughter waiting for me, it is such a joy. I have to be there for her, because she is also there for me

That takes us to the second point – after being relational, we have to be available. Every moment we are praying the Lord's Prayer, we are inviting the heavenly king, we are inviting the heavenly Father to be available for us. When we say let your Kingdom come we are inviting his reign as a King.

One of the greatest joys is the joy expressed by a daughter or a son when the father when the mother, when the parents are available, there is great joy in the family.

We are living in a time when you are having absentee fathers. Every child, every family member wants to connect with a parent who is available.

They want to connect with a father, they want to connect with us emotionally, the children want to connect with us socially. Everyone has to be available for the other. The dad, the

mother has to be available for the children. But the children must also be available to the Father. And the church also has to be available for the community. The community has to be available to the church.

The nights that we walked in the streets with the street pastors were among the best moments. The moments that the pastors took to the streets in the rain, just to ensure that the young people are safe from any possible harm, whether harm from each other, or from external community members. What a joy when the street pastors, both men and women, provide that fatherly love in the streets. That was one of my greatest moments in Ballyclare.

But again as we become relational to our children, as fathers become available to the children, and children become available, one of the key important things at that point is that Fathers have the responsibility to provide. In the Lord's Prayer Jesus says Give us our daily bread. We all have needs. We all can meet the needs of each other. We need food. We have emotional and social needs. And we also have spiritual needs.

Every father has an innate drive to help the family have food and meet other needs, but so does the duty of every boy, every girl to be good stewards of the resources and gifts we have been provided with.

God as the Father has given us a great environment, a good world, but because of poor stewardship at times we are suffering from climate change. It is a call upon all of us to be stewards of our climate, and in the same way everything that is provided back at home, we indeed need to be good stewards.

At times our Father who is in heaven entrusts us with bread, entrusts us with material gifts, not only for the sake of us but for the sake of the other person. At times it is toys to the young people. God has not just entrusted to us to only meet our own needs, but also to meet the needs of the greater community.

That's one of the things that the Foodbank at Ballyclare helps to meet

In a community, and a time with a pandemic, you have also got to think about the other.

So as our parents provide for us, then we need to take care of the resources that we receive, to be good stewards

And finally, every father, every family, has to guide and lead. Psalm 23 tells us about the Lord who is a good shepherd. Our heavenly father loves leading us. It is the divine duty for every father to lead and guide the family in the right way. But children, boys and girls, they bring a lot of joy to the parents when they obey. It pleases our parents. It pleases our fathers, it pleases our mothers when we are obedient children. And then you can pray to God our Father in heaven, who will be our guide and lead us.

So as we conclude this reflection, the Lord's prayer is a great invitation for everyone to seek a relationship that will bring positive benefits. This can start from the family level and extend to the community and schools. As we relate, so let us be available, let us be available

to those who need us and our love. Let us be grateful to those who have been available for us.

You don't have to be a father to be available to the children that need you. At whatever level you are, you can be a blessing. Every child can be a blessing to another child- the older to the younger child. But also more important at this particular moment, in a world where a lot of children are without fathers, and in a world of absentee fathers let us be available. Let us also bring this love, and let us provide for them.

Let us be grateful to those that have been available to us, perhaps as we go back home, as a child you can be grateful to your father. You can tell them about the many things they have done for you, and you are appreciative of this.

And therefore in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, we are grateful for sharing this. God bless you. I love you so much, and my family loves you so much. God bless you.