



## Obituary

# Jean Jeffery

15<sup>th</sup> May 1934 – 15<sup>th</sup> October 2022

*Information held in the obituary below, has been kindly contributed by Archdeacon Ken Higgins who gave the eulogy at Jean's funeral on Monday 24<sup>th</sup> October 2022, in St Donard's Parish Church, Bloomfield, Belfast*

On Sunday morning (16<sup>th</sup> October) I announced to the congregation of St Donard's the death of Jean and there was an audible gasp of shock. Jean had been in church just a couple of weeks earlier - sitting in the pew counting the number of people receiving Communion - as was her custom. It reminds us once again - should we need reminding - of the slender thread that separates life from death and the suddenness with which it can be broken.

Speaking to people afterwards, the main comment was that St Donard's had lost one of its Stalwarts and it has.

Jean has been associated with this Church since the age of 3 - when she was enrolled in the Sunday School - over 85 years ago!



Jean Stewart was born on 15<sup>th</sup> May 1934 at 132 Euston Street to parents James and Harriet. When she was only 6 weeks old, her parents moved to the village of Coagh in Co. Tyrone. Her father James was a painter and decorator, and he went there to find work. As a family they lived there for about two years before moving back to East Belfast and settling in East Bread Street.

At the age of 5 Jean began her school days in East Bread Street Primary and in the same year her little sister Iris was born. The girls shared a very happy home life together.

In 1945 Jean's Dad bought a shop selling wallpaper and paint on the Castlereagh Road moving the family which meant that Jean had to change school to Euston St Primary.

The Guiding movement played a big part in Jean's life from joining the Brownies at the age of 5 right up to being a Ranger until she was 18.

When Jean was 13 years of age she won a scholarship to the Belfast School of Commerce where she studied shorthand, typing and book-keeping and this led to her first job at the age of 15. She worked at the Northern Publishing Office and was paid £1 10shillings a week. Other office jobs came and went before joining the Civil Service working in the Traffic Branch of the R.U.C. This

was where she met her husband to be - motor mechanic - John Jeffery.

John & Jean were married here in St Donard's on St Patrick's Day 1960 and set up their first home in Victoria Drive, Sydenham. In those days, the Civil Service rule was that when a woman got married she had to leave so in 1960 Jean left the job she loved. She was in floods of tears. However, 12 years later, after having her children - Colin - Carol and Neale - she returned to work in the Civil Service and got her old job back at Traffic Branch where she remained until her retirement in 1998.

Tragedy struck in Jean's life when, in 1986, John suffered a heart attack and died at their home in Nendrum Gardens. Jean was left a widow at the age of just 52 after 26 years of marriage.

Colin, Carol and Neale eventually left home, got married and eventually gave her 6 grandchildren and more recently a great-grandchild. Her family was at her heart and much cherished and they in turn loved and supported her especially in these last difficult years as her health deteriorated.

Jean's life revolved around her family and her church activities. She was - as I said earlier - a stalwart here for 85 years and was involved in so many different groups and organizations and areas of service. She set up the first Bunny group here - now called the Rainbows - she sang in the choir until Covid struck - she served as Secretary to the Select Vestry for 16 years - was Secretary of the Mother's Union group and latterly the Focus Women's Group. She set up a group for Young Women in the early days and was compiled the monthly CONTACT magazine for St Donard's which went out to every house in the parish. But above all this - her greatest passion was for BELL RINGING.

Bell ringing in St Donard's began around 1950 for Jean, when the Girl Guide group was approached looking to recruit some new ringers and Jean was one. This passion continued all her life - ringing bells for over 72 years, and her great sadness in these last years was that she wasn't able to climb the steps up to the bell tower.

Stand out moments in bell ringing included ringing a full peal to mark the death of King George VI and the following year ringing two full peals on the day of the Queen's Coronation. She was a Life Member and Trustee of the Irish Association of Change Ringers, serving in various offices including Master, Secretary and Chair. She later went on to become the first female president of the Irish Association and held this office for the maximum term.



*(Ian McCullagh President 2004 – 2009 congratulating Jean on becoming the first female President of the IACR in May 2009)*

Bell ringing gave Jean the opportunity to travel throughout Ireland and England ringing in every church in Ireland with a peal of bells. She was invited by the Italian Bell ringers to join them in a tour of towers in the Garda region and some years later to join them for a fabulous week's ringing

tour in Rome - she even met Pope Benedict.

She was passionate about passing on her love of bell ringing and did much to promote and train the next generation of ringers. She would regularly travel throughout Ireland to help with training.

She was a member of the Society of Royal Cumberland Youths - this is one of the two most prestigious ringing Societies to exist - promoting excellence in ringing around the world - she remained a member until her death.

Her contribution to bell ringing was immense - here and elsewhere - and she was very affectionately regarded and respected in ringing circles throughout the UK.

Whenever Jean wasn't ringing bells, or travelling to meetings - or typing up minutes of various kinds - she enjoyed knitting, sewing and reading.

Someone once said ....

'if you find something to be right you stick with it - if you find something to be good you stick with it - if you find something to be true you stick with it.'

Jean stuck at things - her commitment to her family - her church - her faith - her passions - and I don't think she could have achieved everything she did in her time on earth, without her faith in God.

I read this .... "Guidance means I can count on God - Commitment means 'God can count on me'". Jean was someone you could count on - always reliable - always giving her best.

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In the Book of Common Prayer there's a lovely service of Preparation for Death and we used this as we gathered round Jean's bed in her last days in the Ulster Hospital. We commended her into the care and keeping of God and we prayed these words .....

*"Jean our companion in faith, the Lord who gave you to us has taken you to himself. He who died for you and rose again from death, is calling you to enjoy the peace of the heavenly city in which there is neither sorrow nor pain and where weakness is transformed into strength. He is calling you to see Him face to face that you may be made like him forever. He comes to welcome you with angels and archangels and all his faithful people that you may know in its fullness the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Enter into the joy of your Lord and give glory to Him.*

All I can say is .... There'd better be bells in heaven!!!