



Country singing star the Rev Jason Kernohan at home in the Rectory at Eglantine.

## Rev Jason is just a country boy at heart

He may have given up his career as a country music singer when he chose to be ordained, but the Rev Jason Kernohan can still get the feet tapping when he takes to the stage.

The rector of All Saints', Eglantine, recently featured on the BBC NI television programme 'Keepin' er Country,' recording Johnny Cash's 'Ring of Fire' with the Rev David McBeth, another country-loving clergyman!

And he was one of the stars of a sell-out concert in his own parish hall on April 19 which raised over £3,000 for parish funds!

Jason grew up in Ballymena listening to his dad William and mum Sylvia's country LPs, and was still at school when he started doing gigs in hotels and sports and social clubs. Aged 16, he joined a band, and a year or so later set up his own two-piece – 'The Jason Kernohan Band' – with his friend Nigel Black.

"I was playing every weekend. It is a great

incentive to come home with money in your pocket," he said. "I sang and played the midi-accordion, and Nigel was on keyboards."

After his A Levels, Jason decided to take a year out to do music – and never went back to studying until he started Theological College!

"I was taken on by a promoter here and started to do a lot of work in Scotland and England. At that time it would have been quite unusual for people our age to be 'the band,' but not any more."

He recorded his first CD in 2000, which sold well, and went on to record two other albums and a DVD.

Jason spent a fortnight in America in 2001,

arriving a month after the 9/11 attacks. He had gigs in Queen's and Long Island, and played an Irish Festival in the Catskill Mountains. But he was relieved to return home. "I didn't like the pace of life and all the travelling between venues," he said. "I was 21 at the time. I was offered the opportunity to go back for another two months, but declined to go."

He continued to be in demand in the UK. "The buzz you get out of entertaining is difficult to explain, it is partly due to the appreciation people show," he said. "It was certainly a good foundation for ministry. There were people who came to see me and tell me all their problems. I made so many friends and I still get letters from people asking what I am doing."

Church has always played a key role in Jason's life. He attended St Patrick's, Ballymena, and later moved to St Columba's after being asked to play the organ to cover a holiday. He went on to join the choir. "When I was in England and Scotland I always looked for an Anglican Church to go along to," he said.

In 2004, Jason was a Parish Reader. "I started thinking about ordination in my early 20s. Most people would have joined the Fellowship of Vocation for a year before going for selection – I was in it for years!"

Jason began his theological training in September 2007. "Most of my friends knew how I felt so it did not come a shock to them," Jason said. "I had a shock myself when I met Brian Lacey (now rector of St Peter and St James, Belfast) at the Fellowship of Vocation. We were at school together!"

Jason was ordained for the curacy of the Parish of Drumachose, Limavady, Diocese of Derry, where he remained for five years until his institution as rector of Eglantine in July 2015.

While in Limavady he continued to make music, doing concerts with local priest Father Eddie Gallagher, whose speciality was rock and roll and who did a mean Elvis! PEACE III funding allowed the duo to record a CD entitled 'In Sunshine or In Shadow' from the lyrics of 'Danny Boy' – Jane Ross, known for having written down the melody to 'Danny Boy,' is buried in the graveyard at Drumachose.

The CD raised £10,000 which was split between Jason's parish and Fr Eddie's Parish Church, St Mary's. The cross community grant also enabled the two clergymen to attend various conferences, even meeting the Archbishop of Canterbury's former envoy and Beirut prisoner Terry Waite.

Jason was pleasantly surprised when he moved to find Eglantine very much in tune with himself! "I was very pleased to find that I have a very musical congregation, and I have been able to put on concerts in the parish and the town. It is brilliant!" he said.

But Jason isn't tempted to slip into country music mode when taking services. "I always try to keep it separate. When people see me officiating, I am very traditional.

"It is a big transition moving from curate to rector, and I have a wonderfully supportive congregation. They are always willing to help in any way they can. They are very faithful. And they are very social!"

Jason has organised a country music concert each year since he arrived in Eglantine. Last year the special guest was TV and radio personality Hugo Duncan, and at this year's sold-out concert the celebrity guest was rising young star Owen Mac, just 15-years-old!

The 'Keepin' er Country' show, aired on BBC NI at the start of April, was also shown on RTE's 'Stetsons and Stiletos.' It has turned the Rev Jason into something of a local celebrity – he has been recognised when out and about!



Jason and the Rev David McBeth featured in the BBC programme 'Keepin' er Country.' Jason's dog Shelly is also pictured.

The banter between Jason and the Rev David McBeth, rector of Clooney Parish, Diocese of Derry, certainly provided good entertainment, and their duet is a popular number on David's new CD.

Jason says there has been an upsurge in young singers on the country scene, people like Nathan Carter, Cliona and Derek Ryan. "Today there is a very fine line between country music and pop. The music is much more upbeat and is very popular in rural areas, especially in the south. Line dancing is on its way out, it is now all about country jive," he said.

His wardrobe still boasts a selection of glitzy shirts. "In country music I think you have to be a wee bit glam sometimes. I still wear a sparkly shirt today if I'm asked to perform in concerts. I absolutely love it and it's black so it suits me very well," he said.



Jason singing at the Country Music concert in Eglantine Parish on April 19.

Jason has discovered he can combine his country singing with his job as rector. "God is not confined to church. God is everywhere," he said. "I still love the opportunity to perform. I sing at the afternoon tea dance at Halftown Hall, and I occasionally do a full concert. But I always say I cannot guarantee that I will be there. I am rector of Eglantine before anything else."

## Retirement after 27 years in Glencairn

After 27 years of ministry in Glencairn, the Rev Ken Houston conducted his final service for the congregations of St Andrew's and St Columba's on January 28.

In his sermon about the 'new things' God had created, Ken mentioned the 'new things' he was personally involved with, namely Training for Ordination into the Auxiliary Ministry of the Church during the early 1980s, and his appointment along with Captain Scott McDonald to ministry in St Andrew's, this being the first time that a stipendiary lay minister and an Auxiliary Minister (clergy) were appointed as a team to lead a parish.

Ken also spoke about the 'new things' in store for the parish in the future.

After a buffet lunch, speeches were made and retirement gifts were presented to Ken and his wife Patricia.



The Rev Ken Houston and his wife Patricia at the buffet lunch following his last service in Glencairn.

## Memorial Lecture

More than 180 people attended the third annual Clive West memorial lecture at All Saints' Church, Belfast, on February 20.

The speaker was Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali, President of the Oxford Centre for Training, Research, Advocacy and Dialogue and former Bishop of Rochester.

## Church Life Engage! event in November

A Church Life event taking place in Belfast on November 13 is aimed at helping churches engage in meaningful ways with local community life.

At 'Engage!', Diane Holt (Thrive Ireland) will lead a practical discussion on how to bring your church life and the Good News into your local community. Visit [www.churchresourcesonline.com](http://www.churchresourcesonline.com) for more information.