

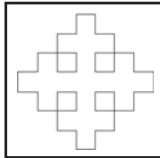
CONNOR

AUTUMN 2007

The Magazine of the Diocese of Connor

connections





An innovative project in Glenavy has transformed a derelict church building into a bustling activity centre for young people.

Since the opening of the Glenaiden Centre, incidents of crime and anti-social behaviour have decreased and St Aidan's Church car park is no longer a venue for underage drinking.

The Glenavy Youth Project, which is an association of voluntary and statutory bodies as well as individual members of the community, was set up in 2005 by community stakeholders seeking to provide activities or facilities for young people in a village where the population has trebled in 15 years.

Community Outreach worker John Farr said: "There was very little for the youth in our community before. Glenavy and Crumlin have grown extensively in recent years and most of the people have come from north and west Belfast. It has been a bit of a culture shock for them and us."

The primary focus of the project was to secure a lease for the old Sunday School hall belonging to the parish church. This had been derelict for years and the project has transformed it into a permanent drop-in centre for the young people of the village and the wider community. It is now the

oldest remaining building in the village, originally built in 1780.

Restoration work was completed by December 31 2006 with the official opening on February 16 this year.

John said: "From the centre a number of programmes and activities operate to develop young people educationally, physically, socially and spiritually. It also provides a base for a youth worker, volunteers and others who are operating in the area, with the building being used up to six evenings a week."

The Youth Committee was involved in designing the layout of the centre and organising programmes and projects, membership, rules and regulations.

The key funders of the project were the Lough Neagh Development Partnership (£54,000) and Lisburn City Council (£18,000) with additional support from other funders.

The PSNI, through the Assistant Chief Constable's Fund, provided £13,500 towards the equipping of the hall with a further £2,000 coming from local businesses.

Funding of £19,000 was secured from Lisburn Development Partnership to employ a part-time youth worker for 2007, and local man Jim Mulholland was appointed.

John said the PSNI had revealed that incidents of crime and anti-social behaviour in the village had decreased. "Three years ago we would have had to clear three plastic bags of rubbish from the church car park at weekends. The children used to gather there for underage drinking.

"Now that's not the case. Young people can see that the church wants to do something for them. It is all about building relationships. Relationships, not only with the young people but with groups like adult volunteers, the PSNI, Lisburn Council etc, are central to our work."

On June 18 this year, Lisburn City Council hosted a visit of the Irish President, Mary McAleese, at a reception in The Island Centre. Glenavy Youth Project was one of only eight groups of excellence from across the borough invited to make a presentation of its work to the President.

Speaking at the event, President McAleese singled out Glenavy Youth Project as an example of best practice. She stated that



when a community comes together to meet an obvious need with little else than passion and faith, miraculous achievements are evidenced and resources can

always be found. "The opportunity of a lifetime must be taken in the lifetime of the opportunity," she said.

Rector of Glenavy, the Rev John Rutter, said: "The biggest thing about this is it is a facility for our young people. We are giving them somewhere to go and develop. Any parish interested in the project is welcome to talk to us about it."



‘Pray for all who carry the **burden** of ministry and leadership’

The last few months have been bewildering and yet we have experienced the peace and presence of God. We have been overwhelmed by the warm and gracious welcome we have received in the Diocese of Connor.

I have been informed that we have come to the “promised land” and it is good to be here. Thank you to everyone for your thoughtfulness and prayers.

There are times when it is difficult to put into words what we are thinking and feeling. Years of experience in pastoral ministry have taught me that words are inadequate when faced with human pain. Faith is present but the circumstances do not make sense.

It was with profound sadness that we learnt of the death of the Rev'd Tom Priestley. Tom was a faithful pastor and priest. He was someone who spoke his mind and was a wonderful help to fellow strugglers.

To the parish of St Colman's, Dunmurry, we offer our prayers and support in their loss. Please also remember Tom's family in your thoughts and prayers as they try to live with the pain of bereavement.

As a diocese please pray for all who carry the burden of ministry and leadership. At a time such as this may we “carry one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ.”



The Rt Rev Alan Abernethy,
Bishop of Connor

Thank you for the privilege of being your bishop, please pray that I may be given wisdom and peace for the future.

Grace and peace to you all,

✠ *Alan Connor*

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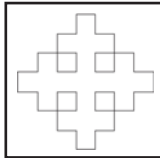
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Website: www.connor.anglican.org

COVER PHOTOGRAPH: LITTLE SORIN MCMULLAN, THE YOUNGEST PARISHIONER AT ST THOMAS'S, RATHLIN, PLAYS WITH HER PET SHEEP NIBBLER.

IF YOU HAVE ANY EDITORIAL COMMENTS OR WOULD LIKE TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE NEXT EDITION OF CONNOR CONNECTIONS PLEASE CONTACT:

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Memories of Paraguay



When Stephen and Eileen Trew and baby Elijah left Monkstown for Asuncion, Paraguay, it was just meant to be for two years. Eight years later the family, which now includes daughter Hannah, finally returned home to Northern Ireland.

So what makes a young couple with a five-month-old leave everything familiar behind to work in a country half way round the world?

Both aged 37, Stephen and Eileen attended the same Monkstown schools and the same church and couldn't stand the sight of each other. Their dislike was so intense they decided to speak to their rectors. They were told to pray about it, everything changed, and in 1994 they married.

"We both felt we wanted to use our marriage for ministry of

some kind," said Stephen.


Eileen was teaching in east Belfast while Stephen worked at Queen's University. For three years they looked into the options for Christian work, before the doors of SAMS, the South American Mission Society, opened for them.

SAMS first had an opening in Chile, but that fell through and Paraguay came up. A school in the capital Asuncion was looking for an infant teacher and an IT teacher.

Two weeks before they were due to go for interviews, Eileen found she was pregnant. "The plan had been to do the mission thing for two years and come back and start a family. When we found we were pregnant, Stephen said that's it, we'll just do the family thing. But I had wanted children for a while and was praying and praying, and God told me he was going to bless me doubly – he would let me



Stephen Trew, centre at front, with students at St Andrew's School, Asuncion.

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do the desires of my heart and have my children as well,” said Eileen.

The couple were accepted, Elijah was born in April 1999, and five months later the little family left for Paraguay, complete with four suitcases, cot, pram and carseat. “We totally went in faith,” added Stephen.

Asuncion is a city of 1.5 million in a country with a population of five million, and is one of the poorest in South America.

Three weeks after Eileen and Stephen arrived, the rector of St Andrew’s left, and teams working there took turns to run the services. After three years the couple led the teams and for four years ran the church. Hannah was born in 2001.

“Outside of the city few children go to school beyond the age of nine. There are periods of drought where people are in dreadful straits in the interior and poverty has a massive impact, particularly in rural areas,” said Stephen.

In the city children try to make money selling sweets, and many will call at doors begging for food or even just water.

The couple taught in St Andrew’s College, a private fee paying Christian school. Pupils were encouraged to help their fellow countrymen, and Stephen went on trips into the interior to dig wells, paint murals, and bring food and water. The students were also involved in community projects in the city.



A hug for Eileen from some of the pupils she left behind.

In state schools in Paraguay, all children have to provide their own materials – a tall order for families who cannot even afford shoes. St Andrew’s supported a sister school, the Annex, to ensure these materials were provided so more children could stay in education.

Sadly in Paraguay infant mortality rates are very high. All



Stephen and Eileen Trew back in Belfast.

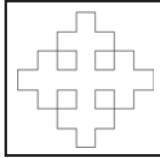
healthcare is private and is very limited in rural areas. People have to beg for money to buy medicine. Without treatment, a child with something as simple as diarrhoea may die.

Both Elijah and Hannah attended St Andrew’s. Although they visited Northern Ireland every two years, Eileen says Paraguay is their home. The family returned for good in July because Eileen’s mother is unwell.

“None of us have found it easy. The children understood we were coming home because Nanny was ill, but we all left a life. I don’t think we have ever done anything harder. When you are living in a different country your relationships and social network need to go a lot deeper because they haven’t got the background of years behind them,” Eileen said.

Stephen and Eileen will work for SAMS until the end of this year. Having sold their house a number of years ago, they have returned to a housing market Stephen describes as ‘unbelievable,’ but at present are living in a house loaned to them by St Jude’s, Belfast, a SAMS link church

“There is a desperate need for people who will step out in faith and do what God wants in building the Kingdom of God no matter what it takes. They may have to give up aspirations and a career for a time, but if it is building up the Kingdom of God that’s what needs doing,” said Stephen.



Gavin Wilson, John Greer, Rev Paul Dundas and Gary McCarter, all from Christ Church Parish, Lisburn, abseiling down the side of the Europa Hotel, Belfast, on September 22 to raise funds for the neo-natal unit at the Royal Maternity Hospital. At time of going to press they had raised £2,000.

Partnership project

Teenagers from Ballyholme parish in Bangor, Co Down, gave up a week of their summer holidays to run a programme of activities for children in north Belfast.

The Rev Canon Trevor Williams, rector of Holy Trinity and St Silas with Immanuel, Ardoyne, where the project was centred, said it was great for children in the area. "One of our priorities is diversionary activities. Over the summer rioting has become a pastime of many youngsters," he said.

"This scheme keeps children away from that and so benefits the whole community. It also gives the kids a bit of fun during the summer. With the extra leaders from Ballyholme we can do things we could not do ourselves."

History in Carnmoney

The Church of the Holy Evangelists, Carnmoney, was one of a number of Connor churches to take part in European Heritage Open Days in September.

More than 60 visitors viewed the church and graveyard, amongst them the Mayor of Newtownabbey Alderman Nigel Hamilton, who pledged to investigate ways of assisting with the restoration and repair of the graveyard.

Historic graves include those of the Mckinney family who came from Scotland in the early 1700s and the Grimshaws, famed for their linen mills. A magnificent Celtic cross marks the resting place of General William James Smythe (1816-1887), son of Samuel Smythe, former vicar of Carnmoney. William joined the Royal Artillery aged 17, served in the Kaffir War of 1835 and had 37 years of service in Fiji and India.

Dedication of the Spire of Hope

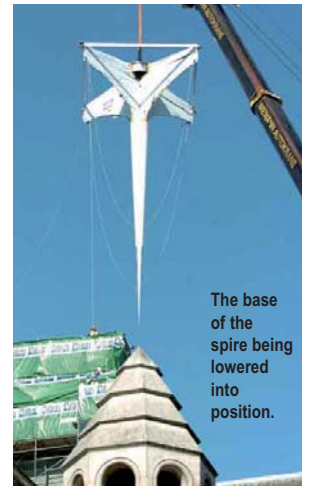
On the sixth anniversary of the 9/11 bombings, the Bishop of New York, the Rt Rev Dr Mark Sisk, was preacher at the dedication of the Spire of Hope at St Anne's Cathedral, Belfast.

The Spire was dedicated by the Most Rev Alan Harper, Archbishop of Armagh.

The project was overseen by the Dean of Belfast, Dean Houston McKelvey, and the spire was constructed in Switzerland.

Planning approval was granted in August 2006. The first section arrived on March 27 this year, and the final section was put in place at the end of April.

The Spire of Hope is the largest stainless steel structure in the UK and Ireland which has no actual foundations at ground level.



The base of the spire being lowered into position.

Its height (40m but 100m above ground level) above the Cathedral is equal to that of the Celtic Cross on the north side of the Cathedral.

The area where the base of the Spire enters the Cathedral is made of glass allowing visitors to view the Spire of Hope from within the building and enabling natural light to flow through.



Connor Commissioned Ministers' scheme celebrated the end of a busy year with a service of celebration at Ballintoy Parish Church. The diocese has commissioned 57 people in 12 parishes to carry out a range of roles from pastoral visitor to administrator and evangelist to youth worker. Photo by Ken Houston.

No joy in golf's Craigy Cup for home team

Connor hosted this year's inter-diocesan golf competition which took place at Massereene Golf Club in Antrim.

On a blustery day, 19 clerical golfers from five dioceses competed for the Craigy Cup in a team competition with the best three scores counting from each team of four players.

Home advantage proved to be minimal as the Connor team of Canon Hubert Gough (formerly of Templepatrick), Archdeacon Stephen McBride (Antrim), Rev Alan McCann (Holy Trinity, Woodburn) and Rev William Orr (Muckamore, Killead and Gartree) only managed fourth place behind Dublin, Armagh and Derry. Canon Ricki Rountree (Dublin)



At the presentation of the Craigy Cup are, from left: Gary Dowd, Ricki Rountree, Bishop Ken Good, Ian Gallagher and Mark Wilson.

won the individual prize with an excellent score of 34 points, our own Archdeacon McBride was second and Rev Gary Dowd (Dublin) was third.

Sponsorship was generously provided by Bob Esler, Manager of Ulster Bank in Antrim and the Isaac Agnew Dealership in Belfast.



Diocesan Youth Weekend

The Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev Alan Abernethy and his wife Liz (above) chat to Connor Youth Council chairperson Catherine Simpson at the Summer Madness barbecue.

The council is currently planning this year's annual youth weekend, the theme of which is Freedom! It takes place at the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum, Cultra, from November 23-25. Guest speaker will be Jeremy Gardiner of Youth Link. Further information and downloads on the Connor Diocesan website, www.connor.anglican.org.

New Rural Dean for Mid Belfast

The Rev Canon Gregory Dunstan, rector of St Matthew's, Shankill, Belfast, has been appointed Rural Dean of Mid Belfast.

He said it was 'an honour' to have been appointed Rural Dean by the Bishop of Connor, "The challenge

is to continue to look after a parish with the added responsibility of being a Rural Dean and being available to clergy in the deanery and with particular duties, particularly pastoral duties, in any parish that is vacant." Canon Dunstan said

Priests and deacons ordained in Connor

Three new priests were ordained in the Diocese of Connor at a service in St Anne's Cathedral on Sunday, June 3 by the Most Rev Alan Harper, the Archbishop of Armagh.

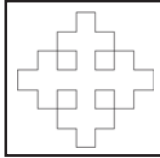
The Rev Amanda Adams was ordained for the Curacy of Ballymena and Ballyclug; the Rev Carole Harvey was ordained in the Auxiliary Ministry for the Curacy of Carnmoney and the Rev Harold Sharp was ordained in the Auxiliary Ministry for the Curacy of Larne and Inver with Glynn and Raloo.

And five new deacons were ordained in Christ Church Cathedral, Lisburn, on Sunday June 24 by the Archbishop.

Barry Forde was ordained for the Curacy of Coleraine, Campbell Dixon in the Auxiliary Ministry for the Curacy of Jordanstown, John McClure in the Auxiliary Ministry for the Curacy of Skerry, Rathcavan and Newtowncrommelin (Broughshane), Kenneth Gamble in the Auxiliary Ministry for the Curacy of Ballymacash and Mark Reid in the Auxiliary Ministry for the Curacy of Glenavy.

Thank God for a wee Bishop!

A comment made to the Bishop of Connor soon after his consecration. "Thank God for a wee bishop – I can eyeball you!" Mr Dessie Thompson was responsible for this observation, made during the Bishop's visit to St Mark's, Ballysillan. It has caused some amusement.



The Archbishop of Armagh, the Most Rev Alan Harper, the Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev Alan Abernethy, and the Archbishop of Dublin, the Most Rev John Neill, at the consecration.



The Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev Alan Abernethy, with the Rev Helen Houston, preacher at his consecration service on June 29.

Bishop be ministry in

The eighth Bishop of Connor was consecrated at St Anne's Cathedral, Belfast, on June 29, and enthroned in his Cathedral of Christ Church, Lisburn, on September 6.



A floral display in St Anne's Cathedral on the day of the consecration of the Bishop of Connor.

Clergy, parishioners and people from other denominations and worshippers were united to wish the Rt Rev Alan Abernethy God's blessing in his new ministry.



The Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev Alan Abernethy, flanked by his wife Liz, son Peter and daughter Ruth, on the day of his consecration.

Preaching at the consecration the Rev Helen Houston, Chaplain of St Rocco's Hospital, Warrington, Cheshire, said Connor's new bishop was a team builder who shared ministry and allowed those around him space to find their own giftings.

Ms Houston said the people of Connor would be a new friend and listener. "Those of us who have known Alan, and who've worked and worshipped with him would want to testify to the importance of Alan's relationship with God. Faith remains the bedrock and foundation on which his life and ministry are built," she said.

Twelve bishops of the Church of Ireland were present at the consecration, including the Archbishop of Armagh, Most Rev Alan Harper, at the service of consecration.

At the close of the service Archbishop of Armagh presented Bishop Abernethy with a new episcopal crozier for Connor diocese. D



The new Bishop of Connor knocks three times on the door of Christ Church Cathedral, Lisburn, to gain admittance for his enthronement service.

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Bishop Abernethy is congratulated by his wife Liz and daughter Ruth as he takes his place on his throne in Christ Church Cathedral, Lisburn.




The Bishop kneels during the service of enthronement on September 6.

service the new Bishop put on his episcopal ring, a gift from the family of the late Bishop of Connor, Jimmy Moore.

The Service of Installation and Enthronement took place in Lisburn on September 6, and it was here the Bishop began his ministry in Connor. He was installed and enthroned by the Dean of Connor, the Very Rev John Bond, at the command of the Archbishop of Armagh. The Dean also dedicated the Bishop's new Pastoral Staff.

In his sermon, Bishop Abernethy said: "My prayer is that we may learn to rejoice in our brokenness and weakness and thereby welcome and accept all who need to know that being a disciple is not about being good and perfect but it is about recognising that we are fellow travellers on the road of grace that allows us to be human and gives us hope that we might just be better people by that same grace."

The Bishop urged parishes to be places of welcome and acceptance. He concluded his sermon: "I look forward to journeying with you as your bishop and I pray that I may be filled with grace of God to help me be a channel of that same amazing grace. This is the grace that is about failure and hope."

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Despite their smart uniforms, these children are educated in a classroom that is open to the elements and lacks basic facilities such as desks and pens.

Connor Diocese has pledged to help the people of its link diocese of Yeii in a hugely practical way – by building a school.

The Yeii Schools Project, launched by Archdeacon Stephen Forde at Diocesan Synod on October 11, will mean better education and a better future for young people in and around the rural village of Mongo.

Although only 15 miles from Yeii town, it takes an hour and a half to reach Mongo by road, a journey Archdeacon Forde undertook during his visit to Southern Sudan in January.

“Most of the children at the school will until recently have lived in refugee camps or in the bush,” said Archdeacon Forde. “Bishop Hilary of Yeii is passionate about providing them with an education.”

Although at home their clothes are ragged and some don’t have the luxury of shoes, pupils at the existing Mongo school wear a smart uniform. “The uniform is an indication of the pride these people have in their children and their desire to see their children progress,” said Archdeacon Forde. “When they ask us to help them it is a partnership. They have the determination and enthusiasm but they do not have the resources.”

Mongo is one of six archdeaconries in Yeii, and Bishop Hilary wants to see a new school in each.

Mongo was adopted as a project by Agherton Parish in Portstewart which is well on its way to raising £20,000 for the first classroom block. As a diocese, Connor will build on this established link with the aim of providing sufficient funds to complete the entire school.

The present building comprises shacks with no walls, roofs with holes in them, and rough sticks which act as seating. There are no desks. Three classes are held outdoors, under a mango tree.

The uniform is an indication of the pride these people have in their children and their desire to see them progress

“It rains for five months of the year, and mango trees in Southern Sudan are no more waterproof than an oak tree here,” said Archdeacon Forde. “The children’s education has to be interrupted. This won’t happen if they have new solid classrooms.”

The new buildings will be brick built with a corrugated iron roof and concrete floor. All classrooms will be equipped with desks.

“There is no sense the education the children receive in Southern Sudan is inferior to the education they receive here in Northern Ireland,” said Archdeacon Forde. “They follow a similar syllabus, but are handicapped because they have no desks to lean on and no pens to write with, yet these are the future leaders of Southern Sudan.”

Bishop Hilary has identified assistance with education as a priority of the partnership. Archdeacon Forde said: “This is a project that allows every parish in the diocese to have an involvement in the partnership and allows every parish to engage in prayer.”

“It also allows each parish to decide how it would want to support this project. Some will want to take this on in a sponsorship way and do some special fundraising events or as a project they want to focus on over Christmas time.

“Other parishes may be committed to other mission projects and feel they cannot give a financial contribution. That’s okay if they can support us with their goodwill, prayers and an awareness of what’s happening.

“Others may want a stronger link with a church overseas and this will help them do this.”

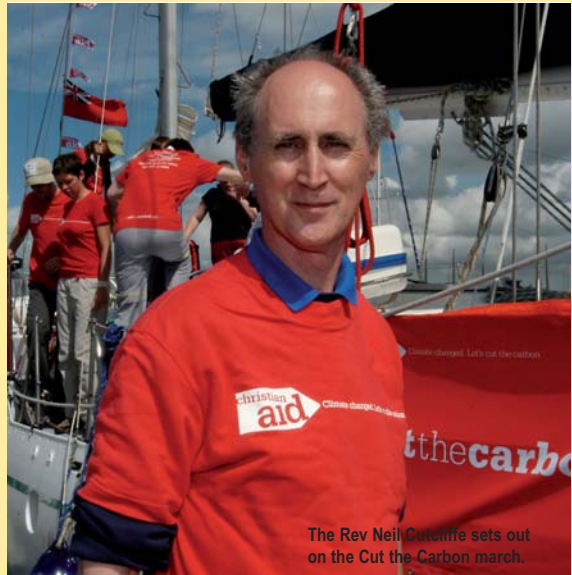


Boys at Mongo School sit on narrow benches in the draughty, dusty classroom.

Archdeacon Forde said the Schools Project was the first step in developing the partnership with Yei. “We will also need people with practical and theological skills to go to Yei and train the trainers, and there may also be the chance for youth teams to go out,” he said.

Bishop Hilary is currently in England taking an MA in Leadership Renewal and Mission. It is hoped he will be able to visit Connor to talk about Yei and the partnership.

Brochures on the Yei Schools Project are being sent to every parish, and can be downloaded from the Mission section on the Connor Diocesan website. Cheques, payable to ‘Connor Yei Link Project,’ should be sent to Mr David Cromie at Diocesan Office.



The Rev Neil Cutcliffe sets out on the Cut the Carbon march.

1,000 mile hike for Mossley rector

The Rev Neil Cutcliffe is hopefully putting his feet up after completing a gruelling 1,000 mile walk to raise awareness of the impact of global warming in developing countries.


The rector of Mossley parish was the only Irish walker in Christian Aid’s Cut the Carbon march.

The 20-strong group, including 10 of Christian Aid’s overseas partners, took 11 weeks to walk from their departure point in Bangor, Co Down, through Scotland and England, via the Labour Party conference in Bournemouth, before arriving at the London Stock Exchange on October 2.

Neil said: “Ninety five per cent of people in the British Isles are aware of the fact of global warming and 28 per cent are aware that it is already causing dramatic change as we speak. The trouble is only seven per cent of people are aware that, as individuals, there is something we can do about it. It is that figure of seven per cent we hope to increase as a result of this march.”

An experienced long distance walker, he has taken part in a variety of events including a hike from John O’Groats to Lands End and the Four Peaks challenge for charity.

Speaking before he left, Neil said: “This is not just about walking, it is about lobbying, meeting MPs and stopping off at major companies, talking about the problems of global warming, which will be quite challenging.”

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Canon who shaped history retires

The Rev Canon Kathleen Brown, MBE, one of the first women ordained in the Anglican Church, retired as rector of St Paul and St Barnabas in September.

Canon Kathleen Brown's retirement as rector of a parish was a somewhat quieter affair than her ordination as a priest 17 years earlier.

Kathleen made history when on June 24 1990 she and the late Rev Irene Templeton were the first women to be ordained Anglican priests anywhere in Europe.

She has spent most of her ministry as rector of St Paul and St Barnabas in Belfast, overseeing the union of the two churches, and watching them flourish.

Kathleen's name was in the headlines again in June this year when she was awarded an MBE for services to the community in the Queen's Birthday Honours after being nominated by her parishioners.

In September, aged 67, she bowed out of her parish, but intends to continue a life of ministry as well as pursuing her love of travel.

A native of Knock, Kathleen was brought up in St Columba's parish and was a pupil at Bloomfield Collegiate school. She trained in physiotherapy at the Royal Victoria Hospital, qualifying in December 1961. In October 1964 she sailed to Canada, working in a hospital for a year, and travelled on to the USA, Fiji, and New Zealand.

Kathleen returned home to work in the Ulster Hospital, before training to teach physiotherapy. This took her to the London Hospital in Whitechapel, where she was to meet her first husband Brian Young. The couple moved to Northern Ireland but Brian died suddenly from lung cancer in 1982.

Kathleen had been involved in the Women's Study Fellowship at Belfast Bible College, and after Brian's death went on to Queen's to study for a BD. "For me it was a purely academic and therapeutic exercise. You don't have too much time to worry about your grief if you have an essay to get in. I promised myself I would never miss a deadline," she said.

She was based at the Union Theology College and in 1982, at the age of 42, had no expectations of ordination. But in 1985 the Church of Ireland passed legislation allowing the ordination of women to the diaconate.

"I didn't know where I stood on women's ministry myself so I had to sort my own head on that," recalled Kathleen. "My ministry stands on the fact that it was women who went from the tomb to say that Jesus was alive. My commission is the same – to go and spread the news that Jesus is alive."

As she was still considering her future the first woman

accepted for ordination, Catherine Poulton, went to train in Dublin.

“Coming to the end of the summer term in my penultimate year at Queen’s I was reading Ezekiel 3. “It said go to your own people, I am sending you to your own people, not people of a strange tongue or language,” said Kathleen. “I have been Church of Ireland all my life and had always been asking Lord, where? Home or abroad?”

Her mind made up, Kathleen was accepted for ordination and joined Catherine as the first female students at the Church of Ireland Theological College in Dublin.

In 1988, a year after Catherine was the first woman to be ordained deacon in the Church of Ireland, Kathleen was also ordained into a permanent deaconate for the curacy of Carrickfergus, where she had earlier spent a month on placement.



Kathleen (left) and the Rev Irene Templeton on June 24 1990, the historic day of their ordination as priests.

communion,” she recalled.

After another two years as curate, Kathleen was instituted rector of St Paul’s in Belfast in October 1990. In 1995 St Barnabas closed, and the parishes were united.

“The past 15 years have been exciting and interesting. It has been a time of seeing God working and his love expressed in a community which is deprived and has suffered. It has been good to be part of a community which has a wonderful heart and is a generous community, but one which has experienced atrocities,” she said.

“A lot of inner city churches are failing. We are not. This is a community which needs to be shown that God loves them and God’s love is unconditional. That’s what I have tried to do.”

The first woman in St Anne’s Chapter, Kathleen married widower Alfie Brown, a parishioner, in 1998. Alfie, then 81, was 23 years her senior. He died in 2003. “We had five very happy years before his health failed,” said Kathleen. “I have now a step family who have been tremendous to me.”

She said the MBE was a total surprise. “I am very honoured. This is the sort of thing that happens to other people.”

As well as a visit to Buckingham Palace to collect her MBE, Kathleen hopes to travel in her retirement, and to remain in ministry. “I would hope to continue ministry, wherever God calls me to. But I feel the time for running a parish is over,” she said.

**The Press was there
from all over the world...
It was like walking in a
minefield.**

But there were murmurs that the legislation to ordain women to the priesthood was closer than originally thought. By chance Kathleen was at General Synod the day the motion to ordain women priests passed its third reading. “It was awe inspiring,” she said. “But I was also very aware that there were people who were hurting, whose world had collapsed because they believed that it was wrong. You had to be so sensitive.”

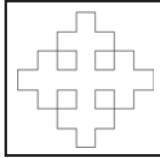
The Rev Kathleen Young and the Rev Irene Templeton were ordained priests by Bishop Samuel Poyntz. “It was massive. I will never forget it,” said Kathleen. “The Press was there from all over the world, and some of the questions were very tricky, it was like walking in a minefield.”

That evening, away from the media glare, Kathleen celebrated her first Holy Communion with parishioners in Carrickfergus.

“We were the first female Anglican priests in Europe and that was the first time a woman had celebrated a



Parishioners bid farewell to Canon Kathleen Brown at a farewell party in September.



Johnny Currie and Ambrose Armstrong lean on the wall of St Thomas's Church, Rathlin, for a chat after Sunday service.



An island parish

Ah – life on the ocean wave! Not always so fair for the Rev Neal Phair who often had to brave swirling swells and gusty gales to take his services in St Thomas's, Rathlin Island.

When he arrived for his final service before departing the incumbency of Ballintoy, Dunseverick and Rathlin to become chaplain to the Dublin Institute of Technology, the weather was in fact fair, though it must be noted that he arrived at the door of St Thomas's with his life jacket still in place!

Rathlin is Connor's most northerly and most isolated parish. The island itself is L shaped and is less than eight miles square, with a permanent population of just 80, although that number increases in the summer.

Up until 1956 the parish had its own rector who lived on the island, but in subsequent years Rathlin has been looked after by the rectors of Dunseverick and Ballintoy. Rectors have had to brave all sorts of weather to make it to the island for Sunday service (monthly for most of the year) and if the conditions are too harsh, the service is cancelled.

Or, as in the case last Christmas, the service simply has to go ahead without the rector.

On Rathlin, it seems, everyone knows everyone else, and the atmosphere in St Thomas's is more than relaxed. With no organist, and only seven regular members, it is hardly surprising that churchwardens Julie-Ann McMullan and Liz Withers are very laid back on a Sunday morning. They chose the hymns, limited to the taped music available, and with a different rector each week, the same hymns do emerge with amusing regularity.

On his last visit, the Rev Neal Phair told parishioners and guests: "This is a sad occasion for me. It has been wonderful coming over to the island, working with the islanders and visitors and being on this beautiful island in general."

Bell ringer Johnny Currie was born and bred on Rathlin. His great great grandfather came to the island from Scotland. "I have never tried life on the mainland, although I have been on holiday there," he said. "It is easier to live here now than it was 30 or 40 years ago, with electricity and a water supply and better boats."

His sister Doreen Hood was in church with her three-year-old grandson Max, who was visiting the grave of his great grandparents. "I left Rathlin to go to school on the mainland when I was 11, but I would never fail to come

back, I still think of it as home,” she said. “You can take the person out of Rathlin but you cannot take Rathlin out of the person.”

Ambrose Armstrong is the son of the late keeper of the east lighthouse, and grew up in the lighthouse. Although he left the island in 1950 and no longer has family there, he lives on Rathlin every summer, and returns frequently during the year.

He has many memories of childhood. “We used to go down the cliffs to fish from the rocks, if you saw someone doing that now you would kill them. There is great freedom on this island, especially for children. Everybody knows them and looks out for them.”

Jane Wysner was in church with her sons Conor, 11, and Peter, 8. She first came to Rathlin as a child when her father, Canon JM Barton, would stay in the island rectory for a month each summer to take the services in St Thomas’s.

“I now bring my own family back every summer. I love the peace and tranquillity and spirituality of the island. There is a great sense of community, and even though we chose not to have any electricity in the house there is always plenty for the children to do,” said Jane.

Julie-Ann McMullan is a blow-in to Rathlin. She moved to the island from Portballintrae five years ago and married islander Peter-Gerard. They have a one-year-old daughter named Sorin. Peter-Gerard is a farmer and Julie-Ann works in St Mary’s Primary School which has just four pupils.



The Rev Neal Phair arrives to take his final service on the island.

“Peter-Gerard was the last baby born on this island, and I wanted my baby to be born here too,” Julie-Ann said. However, Sorin was breach, and Rathlin went on full scale alert when Julie-Ann went into labour a week early.

“The coastguard came in, the firemen came in, everyone was standing round my bed. They called the search and rescue helicopter which came from Scotland to take me to hospital in Coleraine,” said Julie-Ann.

Dramas like this apart, Julie-Ann thinks life on Rathlin is much the same as on the mainland. “The one thing we would appreciate is somewhere to go to have a bite to eat. The restaurants and chippy are only open for a couple of months. When I was pregnant I survived on semi-skimmed milk and dulce.”



Rev Phair with churchwardens Julie-Ann McMullan and Liz Withers (top) and (bottom) Doreen Hood shows grandson Max the family grave.

Julie-Ann’s home is quite remote, and the family live there happily surrounded by a variety of ‘pets’ including llamas, donkeys, guinea pigs and pet lamb Nibbler. The previous evening the McMullans had thrown a sheep shearing party with a large number of islanders among the revellers.

The sun was beaming, and Rathlin looked tranquil and beautiful. But it is not always like that. Often bad weather will cut it off from the mainland for days on end.

“Last winter was really bad and we were cut off for five days in January. We were down to pot luck in the freezer!” said Julie-Ann. “But I do love being stormbound, no one can get to you and you cannot get off the island.”

Liz Withers and her husband came to holiday on Rathlin five years ago and never left. An accountant, she works from home. “I love the landscape of Rathlin and I love the freedom. This is a great community and everybody looks out for each other. For me there are no downsides. I love all the seasons. When it is really heavy rain and a cold wind I love to sit by a big fire. I love to go walking when the sea is coming over the walls.”

The incumbency of Dunseverick, Ballintoy and Rathlin is currently vacant.

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