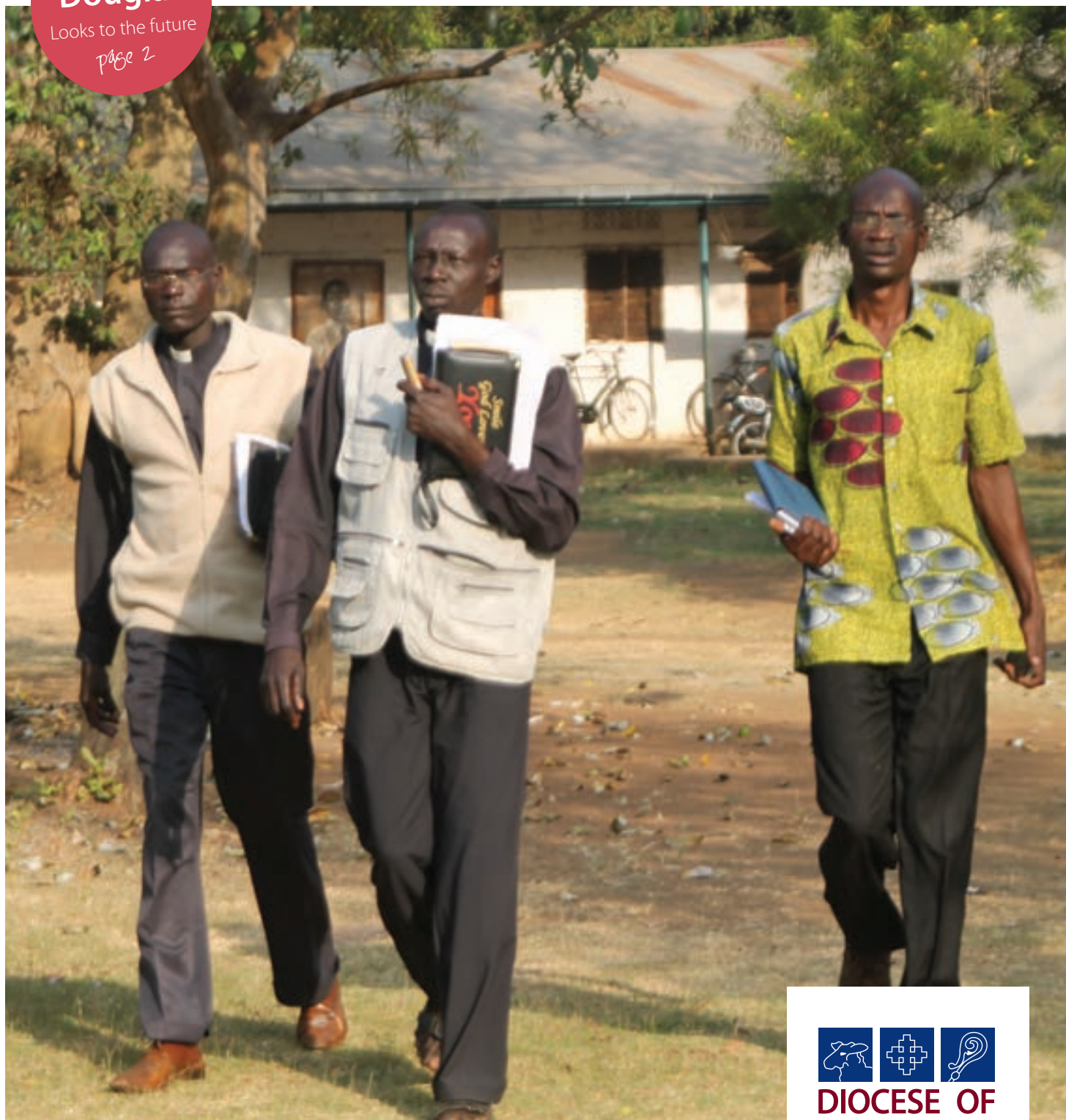


# CONNOR

## connections

**Trevor  
Douglas**

Looks to the future  
*page 2*



**DIOCESE OF  
CONNOR**

## Energize evenings in Ballymena Deanery

Ballymena Rural Deanery held a series of 'Energize' youth evenings on discipleship, supported by the Church of Ireland Priorities Fund.

The aim was to encourage young people to enjoy fellowship and teaching, share food, support one another in their walk with God and to equip them as disciples.

The first of these evenings took place in Portglenone on October 14, when worship was led by Laurence Bellew from Willowfield and the speaker was Gillian Millar.

The second was held in St Patrick's Hall, Broughshane, on November 4 and the worship was led by Sam Johnston.

Other evenings are planned. If you wish to know more about Energize in Ballymena Rural Deanery contact Lyndsay Williamson in Broughshane, Lucy Lloyd or Alan Ross in Ballymena or Catherine Simpson or the Rev Gary Millar in Ahoghill and Portglenone.



By Trevor Douglas, Parish Development Officer

Trevor Douglas, left, with Bishop Alan Abernethy and the Rev Phil Potter, Director of Pioneer Ministry with the Diocese of Liverpool, who led a seminar for clergy from inner city parishes and the inner city planning group at Church House in December.

## I look to the future with confidence

I find it hard to believe that I am in post for six months. I am hugely thankful for the welcome and support I have received from all whom I have met, Clergy, Lay and my colleagues at Church House.

Already there have been many highlights that have inspired me and given me a glimpse into what is to come. The evening session at this year's Synod was one such occasion when we all witnessed people sharing how they are being missional in their setting by making real and relevant connections with the local communities in which they minister.

Since taking up my post I have concentrated on making connections with as many people as I can throughout the diocese. I have met each archdeaconry on an individual basis and as a result of these meetings 14 parishes have invited me to help them with various projects. Some parishes want to develop new expressions of worship, some are hoping to build new facilities and others are looking at new ways to engage with communities.

Along with the work in parishes I have been

developing new links with both local and national government departments in order to encourage the formation of partnerships to assist us in important areas of ministry such as peace building and reconciliation. These important partnerships will, I believe, help to ensure that 'the voice' of the Church is heard and our opinion is sought as we continue to build a peaceful society in which to live.

As I look into the future, I do so with confidence in this diocese under the leadership of Bishop Alan. I am confident that we have received a God given vision that will enable us to witness the growth of God's Kingdom in this land. Can I please ask you to pray for me as I seek to do my small part in this mission God has called each of us to and may I thank you for allowing me to partner you in the work of God's Kingdom in the Diocese of Connor.



A pause point on the Advent Prayer Path.

## Advent Prayer Path

St Anne's Cathedral, Belfast, hosted an Advent Prayer Path from December 1-5. It included 12 pause points, ending at the Cathedral Labyrinth, a separate prayer path on the Cathedral floor for personal prayer.

The Very Rev John Mann, Dean of Belfast said: "The Advent Prayer Path allows you to focus your heart, mind and soul. In quiet prayer and reflection may God remind you of His greatness and hope for you and the world we live in."

## Over 60s' dinner

St Patrick's Parish, Ballymoney, treated its older parishioners to a delicious festive meal – for free.

The Over 60s' Christmas dinner, held in the parish hall, was attended by more than 100 ladies and gents. The dinner is funded by money raised through St Patrick's monthly car boot sale.

## Expert lectures in the Hub at Queen's

The Hub at Queen's University, Belfast, hosted a public lecture by Dr Os Guinness from Virginia, USA, on November 29.

His topic was: 'A world safe for diversity - living with our deepest differences in an

age of tension and conflict.'

The Rev Barry Forde, Church of Ireland Chaplain at Queen's, said: "Os is an exceptional communicator and thinker, especially in the arena of the engagement of faith in the public square."



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## Cover photo:

Pastors from parishes across Yei Diocese, South Sudan, arrive for two days training delivered by the Connor META team. Full reports on pages 8-17.




**Please contact us if you have any editorial comments or would like to contribute to the next issue of Connor Connections.**

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Bishop Alan prays with pastors of Yei Diocese during two days of training delivered by the Connor team.

## Reflecting on the beautiful people of Yei

It was very hot and the sun was overhead. The dust got everywhere and shoes and clothes had a filament of dust at all times.

The people were beautiful, a people who have experienced indescribable pain through decades of war and mayhem. In conversation with so many I was able to grasp something of the complexity and sorrow of so many stories.

The amazing part for me was that despite their past they are determined to make a better future for their children. Health and education are such important priorities for the journey ahead.

There were so many highlights of this trip and I am very grateful to all the team as they worked so well together and we had much fun and laughter as well as ministering to others and being ministered to by so many.

This is a link that I am delighted and privileged to be part of and I believe it will be of benefit to many of us in Connor and to the people of Yei.

Partnership has always been something I have found inspiring and challenging. We can learn so much from different cultural contexts and have so much to

give to others from our experience. It is hoped over the next few years to continue to develop this partnership including exchange visits with the clergy and people of Yei.

There are many photographs and articles in this edition of Connor Connections and they are an attempt to give a flavour of the visit and the potential for this link. Please pray for Bishop Hilary, his clergy and the people of Yei as they work to create a better future out of the pain and sadness of the past.

One of my abiding memories is the sight of people who have suffered so much being so grateful for what they have and able to express this in joyful song and dance.

I am grateful to Archdeacon Stephen Forde for his personal commitment to this link and his energy and passion in deepening it in the first five years.

Grace and peace to you all,

*+ Alan Connor*

## £192,000 presented to Good Samaritans

Representatives of 207 charities received a share of the £192,000 raised by the Christmas 2012 Black Santa Sit-out at St Anne's Cathedral. Special guests at the annual Good Samaritans' Service on February 3 were the Lord Mayor of Belfast, Alderman Gavin Robinson, and Lady Mayoress Lindsay Robinson.

The Dean of Belfast, the Very Rev John Mann, said: "Today the spotlight turns from the giver of funds to those who put the money raised to good effect.

"Each of you is part of an organisation that may touch thousands of lives in our community."

## New bannerette for Armoy and Drumtullagh MU

Armoy and Drumtullagh Mothers' Union dedicated a new banner when they hosted the Autumn Area Service of the North Connor Mothers' Union at Drumtullagh.

The service was led by the curate, the Rev Derek Steele and in attendance were Moira Thom, then Connor Diocesan President; Rena Lindsay, North Connor Area chairperson; Valerie Ash, Coordinator of the MU Faith and Policy Unit and new Diocesan President; and Merle McNabb, Area Prayer Representative.

Local branch officials who played a role in the ceremony included Beth Hayes, chairperson, Linda Glass and Betty Calvert.

Founder members of the branch were acknowledged – Elizabeth Laverty, Mrs Stewart-Moore, Alice Ferguson, Elizabeth McAuley and Mrs Price.



Maud Cochrane, oldest serving member of Armoy and Drumtullagh MU, receives flowers from Beth Hayes.

## Holy Trinity launches new praise album

The Praise Team at Holy Trinity Parish Church, Carrickfergus, released their praise album 'What a Saviour' in November.

Recorded, mixed and mastered at Chicken Shed Studio by Ruth Trimble this collection of contemporary worship songs aims to bring hope and encouragement.

All music is performed by Holy Trinity Praise Team and the album also features the talents of other parish musicians including a children's vocal group and teenage musicians. CDs at £8 are available from Louise Hanley on 028 9332 8976

## Parish Vision Day

Fifty parishioners from Ahoghill and Portglenone gathered in Portglenone Parish Centre for a Parish Vision Day on October 27. The event was led by Canon David and Mrs Hilary McClay.



Joy for these men and women as they receive their MU Literacy Certificates during Roberta McKelvey's visit to Burundi last year.

# Roberta steps down after 12 eventful years as a Trustee

Roberta McKelvey, a former President of Connor Mothers' Union, stood down in December as a key player in the MU worldwide.

She has been a Trustee for 12 years, and for the last six years was Provincial Representative Trustee - a voice for women in the provinces outside Britain and Ireland.

In August, she made a last trip abroad in her Trustee capacity, travelling to Burundi in Africa, a country with a long history of civil wars and plagued with corruption, poor access to education, political instability and the consequences of HIV/Aids.

"The church and Mothers' Union in Burundi form a very impressive alliance and are responsible for much of the support being given to communities throughout the country," said Roberta.

Her visit was an opportunity to discuss the MU's Literacy and Financial Education Programme with all those involved as facilitators or learners. Roberta was in Sudan in May 2001 to monitor and evaluate the initial Literacy and Development Programme launched in Burundi, Malawi and Sudan in 2000.

A science graduate from Ballymena, Roberta was first 'conscripted' into the MU at Dunmurry, following her marriage to Houston, former Dean of Belfast, who was then a curate in St Colman's. A year later the couple moved to St Hilda's in Seymour Hill where she became branch Enrolling Member and was subsequently elected to positions at area, diocesan and All-Ireland level. In the early 1990s she was elected Connor Diocesan President

and served in that role for six years.

"As Diocesan President I represented Connor at All Ireland level and also at the Worldwide Council at Mary Sumner House," Roberta explained. "I then became a Representative Member on the World Wide Council.

"The MU was becoming more involved in local communities in Britain and Ireland. Parenting Programmes and Child Contact Centres were being introduced and it was in central Belfast that the first Child Contact Centre was opened by the MU with the support of Bishop Moore and Connor Diocese. I was Honorary Secretary for 10 years and also served initially as fundraiser. This Contact Centre is still one of the busiest in Ireland."

After three years as Representative Member Roberta was voted by MU members worldwide to be a General Trustee, one of 17 members of the Trustee Board. "For the first six years my role was to determine the strategic development of the MU, overseeing the finances and insuring the work of the MU fulfilled its aims and objectives," Roberta explained.

"During that time I went to Sudan where they were introducing the Literacy and Development Programme. I was based in Khartoum in the north where there were a lot of people who had been displaced due to the conflict in the south."



While there, Roberta visited a number of refugee camps.

"While the Literacy and Development Programme was very exciting, the thing I remember most was the faith that people had despite living with nothing and with no prospects of things improving in the near future. I admit to wondering if I would believe if I had to live in the harsh conditions they were living in," she said.

"Because of the troubles in Burundi, a lot of people have lost out on education and cannot read or write. In the last 11 years 60,000 people have become literate as a result of the Literacy and Development Programme, which has been accredited by the government there. It really is changing lives."

Changing lives, particularly the lives of women and children, is something Roberta has been involved in for some time. During her six years as a General Trustee, she represented the MU at the UN Commission on the Status of Women which meets annually in New York and is a platform for women's issues and an opportunity to lobby governments.

"Faith groups are not usually part of the Commission, but the MU is well respected because it is worldwide and is working in different areas. In many of the discussion groups we were the only people who could draw on the experience of our members at grass roots."

As Provincial Trustee Roberta organised three gatherings of MU members from all over the world. These were held in Australia in 2008; Uganda in the same year and in Zambia in 2009. "These were the first special regional meetings we have had," Roberta said. "Organising them was not easy, but the meetings were successful and feedback was very positive."

Communicating with MU Provincial Presidents has been a key part of Roberta's role. The MU has more than 4.2 million members in 83 countries worldwide. UK and Ireland make up just one per cent of the membership. "It was often difficult for people to communicate. Many don't have easy access to email," said Roberta.

The daily difficulties faced by some members were apparent when Roberta was in Burundi, and yet it was their resilience and positive attitude that shone through. She visited all six dioceses seeing not just the success of the Literacy and Development Programme, but the projects local women are undertaking to make life better for themselves.

These included a palm oil extraction enterprise using a press powered solely



Roberta McKelvey.

by women and a baking business, both of which have been supported by MU Worldwide grants. The Financial Education programme had been particularly successful, Roberta said, forming savings groups that are transforming the lives of many by providing loans to finance small business enterprises.

"We saw the joy of people who can now smile because they have gained self-respect, self-confidence and can start new lives," said Roberta.

But there is much to be done in Burundi. Roberta met Francine in Bujumbura Cathedral.

"Francine was attacked by her husband. He chopped off both her arms above the elbow and it was a miracle she did not bleed to death. She has small children and is now being supported by the MU with a carer. Despite facing every day dependent on someone for help with every personal need, Francine thanks God for sparing her life and for those who support her," Roberta said.

"Domestic violence in Burundi and in many



Ladies in Burundi at work on their palm oil extraction business.

countries will be addressed once again at the UN next month."

Roberta retired as Provincial Trustee on December 31 but remains an MU member in Connor Diocese. "The MU is a caring group of people. We facilitate learning as part of God's Kingdom here on earth. All that we do is related to our belief and we pray for those with whom we work and those who work for us," she said.





Connor clergy and guests on the final morning of the conference in the Slieve Russell Hotel, Co Cavan.

## 'A diocese of very special people'

Connor Clergy Conference was held in the comfortable surroundings of the Slieve Russell Hotel, Co Cavan, in November.

Guest speakers were the Rev Canon Dr Heather Morris, President Elect of the Methodist Church of Ireland, and the Rt Rev Paul Butler, Bishop of Southwell and Nottingham.

Both presented stimulating and challenging addresses over the course of the three day conference. The 90 delegates also enjoyed worship, music, fellowship and the chance to relax.

Conference opened with a Eucharist Service led by the Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev Alan Abernethy, who welcomed the guest speakers as well as some special guests from the Diocese of Dublin and Glendalough, Archbishop Michael Jackson, Dean Dermot Dunne and Mr Michael Webb.

Introducing the first of his three talks on children's ministry, Bishop Paul said they linked with the diocesan vision strategy themes by focusing on engaging with children in our culture, enabling change for children and empowering children's ministry.

Bishop Paul painted a picture of the culture in which our children are growing up. He

followed this with an examination of faith development and the spirituality of children. His third talk looked at empowering children. To do this, he said relationships were absolutely key.

"We can run the best programmes in the world, but if we don't work on relationships, they will fail," he said.

Other key issues when empowering children's ministry are prayer, committed leadership and finance, the Bishop said. "Most of the children's work in our churches is done on a shoestring and relies on people's generosity."

In her very engaging, and often amusing, manner, the Rev Canon Dr Heather Morris introduced her Bible Study by telling how Bishop Alan had invited her to simply speak about Jesus. Heather stressed the importance of the old old story, and in her second address spoke of the pattern of 'dying and rising' in the life of Jesus.

Heather concluded her three talks with a look at how Jesus ministered and how he found the time to do all the things that he did. "Remember that it is not all about us. It is not all about our effort, that you are not



Taking part in worship on the last day of conference.



The Rev Mercia Malcolm, Carnmoney, and the Rev Gary Millar, Ahoghill and Portglenone, relax during a coffee break.



Enjoying lunch at the Slieve Russell are the Rev Chris Easton, Whiterock, the Rev Canon John Budd, Derriaghy, and the Rev David Ferguson, Ramoan and Culfeightrin.



on your own. Jesus is Lord. He is seated at the right hand of the Father. He lives forever to intercede for us," she said.

On the second evening of conference Bishop Alan updated clergy on diocesan issues. But first he told them: "I am only too aware of how lonely and difficult parish life can be. How much time you give to people in pain.

"I value you and I pray for you and I pray that in all you give you also have time to receive. I pay tribute to you in your tireless work and devotion to what can be difficult tasks."

Worshipping together was an important part of conference. Proceedings opened with Holy Communion. On the first evening there was an atmospheric Taize service, and on the next evening a service of sung Compline, while conference closed with a second Eucharist.

Before departure, Bishop Alan expressed thanks to Richard Ryan, manager of the Good Book Shop, for both leading the music and for manning the popular book stall along with his wife Julie. He thanked Dean John Mann and the Rev Jonny-Campbell Smith for their contribution to the music.

The Bishop also paid tribute to the Rev Canon Peter McDowell for preparing the liturgy and to his secretary Rosemary Patterson for all her work in organising the conference.

Bishop Alan said the conference had allowed him to sit back and observe. "It has been beautiful to watch and behold the friendship you give to one another," he told clergy. "It is a real gift in this diocese of very special people."

The Ven Barry Dodds, Archdeacon of Belfast, extended thanks to Heather. "In this time together with your leadership we have seen Jesus," Barry said. "You have challenged us wonderfully with your words."

Expressing thanks to Bishop Paul, the Ven Stephen Forde, Archdeacon of Dalriada, told him that, like that other well-known Nottingham character Robin Hood: "You have plundered a wealth of knowledge and experience of ministry with children and shared it with us."

Stephen also expressed deep gratitude to Bishop Alan. "We have enjoyed being here and what you have done for us but we want above all to thank you for the passion which you hold for us," the Archdeacon said.



The Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev Alan Abernethy, centre, with guest speakers the Rt Rev Paul Butler, Bishop of Southwell and Nottingham, and the Rev Canon Dr Heather Morris, President Elect of the Methodist Church of Ireland.



Richard Ryan, manager of the Good Book Shop, leading the Compline service on piano supported by singers, from left: The Rev Jennifer McWhirter, the Rev Roger Thompson, the Rev Peter Ferguson, the Rev Jonny Campbell-Smyth and the Rev Mark Taylor.



Bishop Alan, front, fifth from left, and clergy at the conference join together in worship. Guest speaker Bishop Paul Butler is on the right in the front row.

# Team members reflect on time in South Sudan

It was such a privilege to visit the charming people of South Sudan – they may be impoverished physically but certainly not spiritually. Their dependence on God and their love for Jesus had much to teach me about gratitude and joy.

Life is hard for them but God is their provider and strength as they take responsibility for their most basic of needs. Not once did anyone bother us looking for handouts nor did I hear a child cry or argue with its mother.

Rev Andrew Sweeney

The visit was very fulfilling because I was able to achieve some effective teaching of small group education methods to healthcare staff and nursing students. The staff at the Martha Primary Care Clinic welcomed the ideas I was proposing for setting up an on-going education meeting. The County Health Office will extend the principles of the group to the other primary care units in Yei County if this proves to be popular and useful.

The fellowship of our diocesan team was a spiritually enlivening process, with morning and evening prayers and sharing of experiences each day.

Dr Frank Dobbs

This opportunity has been incredible but I wonder how I can put into words what I have seen and shared. I think it is part of the mystery, you can hear stories and share photographs and in some way try to understand, but is only in being there that you can really experience it.

People with very, very little, but with everything I strive for. Smiles, joy, peace and grace. I have so much to learn from their outlook and from their utter dependence on God. People for whom your very 'being there' was all that mattered. People who will have a special place in my heart forever.

Judith Cairns

The great characteristics I saw in the people of Yei were faith, determination and joy - their faith is an inspiration. In every time of worship they proclaim: "God is good all the time" and this belief and trust in the Lord flows through their lives.

They are determined to build new communities with good schools, improved health care and vibrant churches and they are undertaking the great challenges they face with a depth of joy in their lives and in their worship that really did my heart good!

Canon Sam Wright

From getting onto the coach to Dublin Airport, this team was like a tight-fitting jigsaw. META stands for Mission Experience Team Abroad, and one of the main objectives is that the team has a positive engaging experience visiting a CMS Ireland Global Partner.

The team worked exceptionally well together, supporting and being there for each other, laughing and crying together, praying and fellowshiping together, enjoying each other's company, worshipping and dancing together and ministering to one another. We experienced a genuine communion that truly fitted together like a jigsaw.

We became close and God used us in unimaginable ways, but the experience we come away from Yei with is one we will not easily forget and one in which we were unfathomably blessed.

David Gough, CMSI



Partnership was reaffirmed and relationships strengthened when a team from Connor visited Yei Diocese, South Sudan, in January.

The team was led by David Gough of CMS Ireland, who facilitated the trip. It included the Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev Alan Abernethy; Archdeacon Stephen Forde, rector of Larne; Canon Sam Wright, rector of Lisburn Cathedral; the Rev Andrew Sweeney, rector of Ballymoney; Dr Frank Dobbs, Agherton Parish; Judith Cairns, Lisburn Cathedral, and Diocesan Communications Officer Karen Bushby.

They were warmly welcomed by Bishop Hilary Luete Adeba of Yei and his diocesan team. Connor has been in partnership with Yei since 2006 and since then a number of teams have visited Sudan.

This new country is emerging from decades of war. The second Sudanese civil war, which ended with the signing of a peace agreement in 2005, lasted more than 20 years, with the loss of 1.9 million civilian lives. Over four million were forced to flee their homes to bordering countries like Kenya and Uganda, while others survived in the massive Sudanese bush.

Since 2005 many have returned to their homes and the population of Yei rocketed from 50,000 six years ago to an estimated 185,000 in 2011 when the south finally achieved its independence.

There are signs of progress everywhere. The hospital now has doctors, three years ago it had none, there are banks which actually hold cash, everyone has a mobile phone and many are anxious to share their email addresses. There is a new Post Office, but ironically no postal service! We learn that malnutrition no longer exists in rural Yei, and the market, which three years ago was bare, is bursting with the most wonderful fruit and vegetables. Soldiers are rarely to be seen but scavenging Black Kites are common.

The ECS Guesthouse has built more bedrooms and meeting rooms. It even has an internet connection. The town is bustling and the shops are overflowing. Frank even spotted an ice cream seller on a bicycle! Children can be seen eating crisps and guzzling fizzy drinks. Motorbikes are plentiful and in the countryside small enterprises are taking shape.

In the village of Longamere, for example, David and Judith met former politician and village elder Manoah, who decided to support his underpaid local clergy, not with money, but with seeds. During the first year he gave each rector 50 Matoki





A girl carries a little baby in Mongo village.

# Connor team's joy-filled visit reaffirms partnership with Yei

seedlings, in year two he gave them each five avocado seeds. The result was clergy were able to feed themselves and their extended families.

But change is slow. There has been little or no investment in roads and as long as they remain in their potholed state development of infrastructure will be difficult. In the countryside children wear clothes donated to charity shops in the developed world, their feet are often bare. They eat cassava and maize, goat and scrawny chicken. They have improvised toys and only half of the children in South Sudan go to school.

In Yei electricity is provided by a generator, which shuts down from midnight to 7am.

But this diocese has one wonderful resource – its beautiful people. And it was building relationships with these proud and faithful people that the Connor team most delighted in.

In the course of seven days in Yei they visited the various institutions run by the diocese, including the Martha Clinic with its new children's ward and eye clinic, and the Vocational Training College (VTC).

They prayed together daily under a mango tree in the gardens of the ECS Guesthouse,

and there were many moments of fun and laughter as the team bonded and worked together.

A new Partnership Agreement was signed by the two Bishops, formally extending the Connor Yei link for a further five years at Yei Diocesan Synod, where Bishop Alan was guest preacher.

During the trip GP Dr Frank Dobbs held a number of meetings at Yei Hospital, and ran training sessions for local nurses and staff of the Martha Clinic. Some team members had a tour of Yei Hospital.

A key task for the team was delivering training to pastors from parishes in and around the large Yei Diocese. Sessions were held in the very African surroundings of a communal tukul, or payot, and were led by Stephen, Bishop Alan, Andrew and Sam, while Judith, a parishioner at Lisburn Cathedral and Chief Executive of the Waringstown-based Love for Life, delivered training specific to youth leaders. There was much singing and dancing as well as focused learning and meaningful prayer over the two days.

The team had a heartening meeting with representatives of Yei Mothers Union,

and on the Sunday preached in different churches around the diocese.

A visit to Mongo village where Connor funded the new primary school was a joyous occasion, with the community turning out in force to welcome the visitors and express their thanks to the people of Northern Ireland.

The team were also guests at a dinner hosted by Bishop Hilary at his home, and one unplanned but very rewarding event was an invitation to address a week-long youth camp taking place in the carpentry warehouse at the VTC.

Bishop Alan, Judith, Andrew and Sam delivered four short talks which enthused and inspired the 300 strong audience of young people from across the diocese, and on what was their last night in Yei the team all joined in lively worship to a fantastic African beat!

We hope the reports and photographs in this mission-focused Connor Connections will give readers some insight into the Diocese of Yei and its beautiful people. For more pictures please visit the Photo Gallery on the Connor website: [www.connor.anglican.org](http://www.connor.anglican.org)

# Agreement signed for five more years

An agreement to extend the partnership between the dioceses of Connor and Yei was formally signed by the two Bishops at the Yei Diocesan Synod.

The extension for a further five years was approved at Connor Synod in October.

In his lengthy 'Charge' on the opening day of Yei Synod, Bishop Hilary said the essence of partnership was prayer, practical aspects in terms of provision of material things like funds for development, and exchange visits which encouraged the partnership to move forward.

Bishop Alan preached at the Synod opening service when each team member was warmly welcomed. Greeting delegates, the Rev Andrew Sweeney expressed envy of the singing and dancing as well as the cathedral's technology!

In his address Bishop Hilary said the Diocese of Yei covered 11,274 square kms. It is made up of six archdeaconries, 63 parishes and is served by 105 pastors.

This was the first Synod since South Sudan gained its independence in July 2011. Bishop Hilary said that since then the situation had changed from uncertainty following the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement [2005], to expectation.

"We are yet expecting to achieve full security for the citizens of this nation, strong Christian communities transformed from within, development in the form of provision of essential services such as

schools, health care, clean drinking water, good roads, enhanced agriculture for sustainable food security, reduced poverty levels and the emancipation of the freedom of the citizens," he told Synod.

He urged delegates to pray "that God will give us the peace we desire and a... better future for our children."

Yei Synod ran over three days and looked at the usual issues including administration, budget, church and society. Peace building and reconciliation were also on the agenda, as was the Constitution. Bishop Alan joined the debates when he was available, and with his support Bishop Hilary was able to achieve approval of a Constitution.

The Synod and the signing of the Partnership Agreement attracted attention from the local media. Reporters Daniel from the 'New Nation' newspaper and Alfred from 'South Sudan Today' interviewed both Bishops and Archdeacon Stephen Forde about the Agreement.

"Since independence we can cover anything," Alfred explained. "For a long time Yei did not have any newspapers because so many people could not read and write, but in the last four years more people are wanting to access information." The interviews were also broadcast on the local Spirit Radio.



Bishop Hilary addresses Yei Synod.



Bishop Alan at the top table.



Music from Mothers' Union Synod delegates.



There is more dancing than at Connor Synod! Christmas decorations still hang in many churches.



Delegates on their feet during Bishop Alan's sermon on the opening day of Yei Synod.



Reporters Daniel and Alfred get the story.



The Bishops sign the new Partnership Agreement, or 'Memo of Understanding,' in Immanuel Cathedral.





Mum Joyce and her baby boy, just four days old.

# Smiles and signs of hope at Yei Hospital

Yei Hospital is still a depressing place. We were forbidden to photograph the dishevelled wards, where patients lie in grotty, mismatched sheets, paint peeling off the walls.

But there are signs of progress. Three years ago this was a hospital with no doctors. Today, there are six doctors, eight clinical officers and 49 nurses.

In medical wards patients are being treated for illnesses such as malaria, pneumonia and dysentery, burns and fractures. But there is a shortage of mosquito nets, mattresses and bed pans.

In the sleeping sickness ward one little girl dozes, recovering from an infection that attacks the internal organs after a bite from a Tsetse Fly.

There is a sense of organisation to this hospital that wasn't here before.

In the children's ward we meet Nura, one of nine children's nurses. There is no money for uniforms. Medicines come in from the Government every three months, but Nura says it is not always enough.

A smiling Josephine feeds her newborn twins in the maternity unit. Sadly before we leave Josephine learns she needs a blood transfusion. There is no blood bank, the blood will have to be donated by a relative.

There are three midwives in the hospital, and caesarean sections can be carried out. There are other signs of progress, a new building for leprosy, sleeping sickness and TB patients, the ART centre for Aids/HIV patients looks quiet, incidences of Aids/HIV are low in South Sudan. A new training centre is under construction.

Frank learns that the Yei National Health Training Institute has seven lecturers, six more than when he last visited in 2010, and a full intake of student nurses, midwives and laboratory assistants. Here Frank gave a talk on small group learning.

The County Health Office has trained Traditional Birth Attendants and Community Health Advisers who provide basic health services in villages. There are now three primary care doctors in the area.

The Martha Clinic, run by Yei Diocese, saw 24,000 patients last year. "There is no other health centre in South Sudan that sees that number of patients, even the Government hospitals," Bishop Hilary says proudly.



Frank delivers a training session on small group learning at the Martha Clinic. Frank was promoting small group learning as an economic and effective way of continuing professional education.



Inside the busy children's ward at Martha Primary Care Clinic.

Martha runs a clinic in Lanya and a mobile clinic which visits rural villages. £35,000 is needed to keep the mobile clinic running for the next year.

In July 2010, a Connor team opened the new children's ward at the Martha Clinic. The unit has nine beds. Today it is busy. "We have almost run out of space," says Bishop Hilary. "Hundreds of children suffer illnesses like malaria and acute bronchitis. If they are brought here their survival rate is very, very good because the staff are doing such a good job." Adjacent to the children's ward is an eye clinic.

In Yei, Frank met with the Medical Director of the hospital, the Director of the Health Training Institute and the County Health Officer. He delivered training at the hospital on Peptic Ulcers and Diarrhoea and Malaria. He also gave a presentation on small group learning at the Martha Clinic, and visited a private hospital outside Yei.

Yei is a fertile land, many of its people are subsistence farmers. "A survey of malnutrition found that there was none in the countryside," said Frank. "But many children living in Yei are malnourished because there are not enough jobs and their parents live in poverty."





The joy of the occasion is obvious in this lady's face.



Younger pupils at Mongo Primary School sing a welcome.

# A warm w gracious

The people of Mongo turned out in force to greet the Connor team when they visited the school built with funding from this diocese.

Among the welcoming faces were three the Connor group was especially delighted to see. Timothy, Moses and Isaac, all teachers at Mongo Primary, trained at Yei Teacher Training College thanks to financing from the parishes of Larne, Agherton and Lisburn Cathedral.

So it was with real joy that Archdeacon Stephen Forde, rector of Larne, met with Moses; Canon Sam Wright, rector of Lisburn Cathedral, exchanged handshakes with Timothy, and Dr Frank Dobbs from Agherton said hello to Isaac.

After the 16 mile drive along a dusty rutted road, which to be fair has improved since three years ago, the team was greeted by a large crowd singing and dancing its welcome.

These people waited patiently while the team were treated to refreshments in the parish payot, and again raised their voices in song when the team rejoined them.

After a welcome from Archdeacon Jackson Duku of Mongo, Bishop Hilary addressed the crowd which included pupils in uniform, toddlers, MU ladies, the parish youth group,



A face full of character.



Bishop Alan and Frank get the Mongo community singing!



The team with members of Mongo Parish youth group who fondly recalled the visit by a young team from Lisburn Cathedral in 2011.



Under the shade of the mango trees David, Andrew, Judith, Sam and Stephen listen to the speeches.



Cheeky smiles from these ladies!



With Bishop Alan is Mongo pupil Nathan Mawa who made a speech thanking Connor for his school.



Andrew presents gifts from Ballymoney Parish to the Deputy Head Jumo Simon Elizara.



Mongo parish youth group performs for the visitors.



Frank exchanges an African handshake with Isaac, whose training was supported by Agherton parish.





Teachers Isaac, Moses and Timothy, whose training was funded by Connor parishes, with some of the Mongo pupils.



Stephen gets to know Moses, whose training was funded by Larne Parish. David captures the moment!

# Welcome from the people of Mongo

and many older members of the community, including the wonderful Boma Chief who has not aged a day since our visits in 2010!

A wonderful moment came when Nathan Mawa, a P7 pupil, stepped forward to speak. "We the pupils of Mongo Primary School extend our happiness to the people of Northern Ireland because they made us to study in a standard classroom," he said in English. "These classrooms will stay for very many years, even our grand grandchildren will also study here. We thank them 100 times."

Thanking his teachers, Nathan added: "They really struggled very much. They made us to pass every year very well."

Just how well Mongo school is doing was revealed in a presentation by Deputy Head Juma Simon Elizara. The school has 359 pupils, six government teachers, six volunteer or community teachers, four newly trained teachers from the Teacher Training College, including the three supported by Connor parishes, and three non teaching staff.

The pass rate at P7 was 85 per cent in 2010, 91.3 per cent in 2011 and last year 95 per cent of all P7 pupils passed their exams. "Mongo Primary School is regarded as number one out of all the schools in Otago Payam," Juma said proudly.

The school has 13 PTA members, and seven Senior Management Committee members. "These groups work hand in hand with the school administration which has really increased the pupils' general performances," he said.

But Jumo highlighted challenges ahead, including poor payment of teachers and a lack of equipment such as computers, printers, photocopiers, even desks, cupboards and bookshelves. He was delighted with a gift of notebooks and pens brought by the Rev Andrew Sweeney from the parishioners of Ballymoney.

Thanking Bishop Alan and the Connor team, the Boma Chief said: "There has never been a day like this in Mongo before and that is thanks to you Bishop, and thanks to all the people in Ireland."

Pupils from Mongo Primary school sang a song, and members of the youth group, who had become good friends with a team from Lisburn Cathedral which spent several days in Mongo in 2011, put on a display of music, dance and drama.

Bishop Alan and CMSI's David Gough spoke on behalf of the visitors, and the Bishop had everyone singing yet again, before a late lunch and the bumpy road back to Yei.



The colourful procession which greeted the visitors makes it way to Mongo School.



Judith gets to know new friends!



These young people are intrigued by the team's desire to take photographs of them.



The village elders dance their welcome.



Young people sing and dance in procession.



The Boma Chief points to the school as he expresses the community's thanks to Connor Diocese.



Two gentlemen listen with interest at Mongo school.



The gift of learning. In front of Mongo Primary School are team members with Bishop Hilary, Deputy Head Jumo and Isaac, Timothy, Moses, the three teachers trained by Connor Parishes.



## Positive response from local pastors

"The diocese is 60 miles that way and 45 miles that way and this training session has brought us together as priests. I hope my special friends from Connor will come back and give us training in the practical part of life and management and leadership skills."

Rev Satima Bida Abraham



"I learned more things so I can deliver the original message of God to the people in my parish. If God wills it this team will come back to tell us more so we understand more."

Rev Seme Remo Satimon, above

"I learned a lot about the Book of Nehemiah which gave me courage for being faithful despite the challenges we face in the church and in ministry. Judith's sessions on youth leadership will really help us to reach out to young people and make them come into our church. Our young people need to have hope in their lives."

Rev Gismala Beneth

"The sessions were very good. I got some skills for leading my church."

Rev Simon Sandega



We introduced Pastor Samuel, above, in Connor Connections three years ago when we learned he was training to be a dentist. He now runs a small practice at his church. He told Andrew that while an American had taught him how to drill teeth, God had taught him to fill teeth! Thankfully none of the team had toothache in Yei! Samuel said: "I enjoyed the teaching and the team's style of teaching, especially the bible studies on Nehemiah, the fun and the questions."

Rev Samuel Zagba



Rev Andrew Sweeney speaks about sustaining a healthy spirit.



Judith gets the youth leaders ready for action!



Two little girls stop by to see what is going on.



Bishop Alan has the pastors holding up their shields.



Andrew prays with local pastors, and, inset, a lady pastor beautifully dressed for training.



Trainee Mary takes her chances on the clingfilm chair during one of Judith's sessions for youth leaders.

## Relationship teaching goes down with a bang!

Never work with children, animals or... balloons – at least not if the temperature is in the high 30s!

Chief Executive of Love for Live, Judith Cairns, refused to be deflated when the balloons she had brought to demonstrate how to make a chair popped soon after inflation on the afternoon of her second training session for youth leaders.

Undaunted, Judith helped her avid trainees to successfully make a chair fit to hold the weight of the Rev Andrew Sweeney from nothing but clingfilm! And local children playing nearby had an explosive time with the remaining balloons.

Judith led two sessions for youth leaders, as well as contributing to the training sessions delivered by other members of the Connor team. She focused on issues common to all young people, whether they live in Northern Ireland or South Sudan.

These included identity, value and selfworth, understanding what pressures young people and youth leaders face, and the importance of building

strong healthy relationships.

Judith, whose suitcase was tipping the scales rather dramatically at the airport, produced a variety of aids to share with the youth leaders, introducing games that would inspire young people and teach them a lesson at the same time. Some required no actual materials – catch me when I fall backwards, as showcased by Stephen and Andrew, a perfect demonstration of trust.

Over the two days, Judith developed a close relationship with her group, it was wonderful to see some of the young women in particular blossom as their confidence grew. One penned a short letter asking 'Miz Judith' to be her penpal.

Judith's empathy with young people was clearly demonstrated when she preached at the Youth Camp on the team's last night in Yei. Each young person would have left that night knowing they were unique and perfect in God's sight.

Find out more about Love for Life at [www.loveforlife.org.uk](http://www.loveforlife.org.uk).





Canon Sam Wright gets ready to deliver his training.



Pastors take in what Bishop Alan says.



The payot hums as pastors and the Connor team pray for each other. CMSI's David Gough is pictured.



One young pastor raises her shield.



Archdeacon Stephen Forde delivers training on Nehemiah as Judith looks on.



The payot at the Vocational Training College where the Connor team delivered their training sessions.

## Training worth a song and a dance

It would be fair to say that it was with some trepidation that the Connor team set out on their first training day for pastors of Yei Diocese.

Their carefully planned three day schedule had been cut to two at the last minute and the venue identified for their sessions was a dark, dusty, disused room.

A new venue had quickly been identified – a payot, or large tukul with half walls, in the grounds of the Vocational Training Centre, - with the first session getting underway on Friday, not Wednesday as had been planned. With so many changes would anyone turn up?

So it was with great joy and not a small amount of thanksgiving that the Connor team watched the pastors, male and female, of varying ages, stroll up to the payot that first morning. There were 35 from across Yei Diocese, a perfect number.

After asking the pastors to switch off their mobile phones (really!) Archdeacon Stephen Forde welcomed the trainees, encouraging them to introduce themselves and tell everyone their favourite food. Beans, cassava and chicken were high on the list – no burgers or vindaloos here!

Stephen based his teachings on Nehemiah, drawing parallels to the situation past and present in South Sudan. Many of those present had spent the civil war either in exile or hiding in the bush. They are all faced with the task of rebuilding their homeland. Stephen also gave a talk on preparing for a bible study, helping the group prepare a bible study on Nehemiah 9.

After lunch the Rev Andrew Sweeney

spoke about sustaining a healthy spirit, using Rembrandt's painting The Return of the Prodigal Son to illustrate his talk and encourage input from the pastors.

This session opened with a duet of 'Rejoice' by Bishop Alan and Andrew, with the pastors needing no encouragement to get to their feet and join in. Bishop Alan then requested the local pastors lead the Connor team in singing and the payot resounded with joyful praise.

The second day's training sessions were kicked off by Canon Sam Wright on the topic of Galatians. The afternoon session was led by Bishop Alan, who reflected on the story of the return of the prodigal. It was clear that many of the trainees were bemused and delighted to see a real Bishop singing and dancing and generally having fun with them as well as imparting words they all found so helpful.

There was much joy and laughter over the two days. But there were serious moments too, when some of the group spoke of the horrors they had experienced during the civil war. The Connor team was aware how privileged they were to hear people speak of horrors they might never have shared openly before.

In small groups the pastors and team members prayed for each other, the payot literally humming with murmured prayers. The voices grew louder, pain of a tortured past, hope for the future, the prayers more fervent as the voices floated heavenwards through the payot's open walls.





Judith with members of Yei Mothers' Union

## MU are 'backbone of the church'

They had had a long day at Diocesan Synod but members of Yei Mothers' Union were happy to give up their evening to meet with the Connor team.

They spoke about the work they do untiringly for the women and families of this scattered diocese. Bishop Alan thanked them for their ministry, saying they were the backbone of the church.

Co-ordinator Mary Gboka Soloman outlined the objectives of Yei MU, namely stressing the importance of marriage in church; encouraging parents to bring up their children in the church; helping them to work using their hands; giving comfort to widows and helping women in difficult marriages.

The Yei branch has 30 women trained to raise HIV/Aids awareness in parishes, and it transports pregnant women to town for ante-natal services, and trains Traditional Birthing Attendants (TBAs) to offer ante-natal treatment in rural areas. "Thankfully the child mortality rate is decreasing," Mary said. She added that lack of transport continued to hinder the work the MU does in rural areas.

They train women in crafts such as soap making, sewing and knitting, so they can set up small businesses. "Most have not gone to school. We teach them how to manage their money and how to add, subtract and divide using sticks and stones," said Mary.

The team presented the ladies with small gifts from Connor and Ballymoney MU.

Daria Kwaje, former MU co-ordinator in the provinces, said: "During the war some of us were in Khartoum, some in Juba and some in the bush. Like many others I have come back. This is my homeland. We are still trying to build ourselves so we can reach the level God wants us to reach. We need your prayers to build our strength. We are happy that the Mothers' Union in Connor does not forget us here in Yei."



Judith greets some of the smartly dressed students at Yei Teacher Training College.

# Training people to rebuild South Sudan

Blacksmiths, tailors, cooks and teachers are all being trained in their professions in two wonderful enterprises only a few hundred metres from Yei Diocesan Office.

The church-run Vocational Training College, or VTC, trains young people from far flung villages in trades including car mechanics, carpentry and driving. Principal Joyce Sitima explained that courses now include blacksmithing, catering and tailoring.

Metal is widely used in doors, gates and decorative window security bars, so the fruits of the smithys' labour are evident.

The food served at the ECS Guesthouse had improved dramatically since visits by previous Connor teams because the chefs had completed the catering course.

Joyce explained that the VTC currently employs 18 staff, and 115 students graduated last year. On their last two evenings the team found themselves in the carpentry warehouse which had been transformed into the hub of a summer camp for 300 young people.

In the grounds of Yei Teacher Training College two three storey buildings rise impressively. The college is not church-run, but Bishop Hilary is chairman of the Board.

Principal James Kepo said a lot of effort had been invested in developing the college infrastructure. "Many country schools do not have enough teachers," said James. "We want to introduce a new course so we can train teachers to work in both primary and secondary schools."

James thanked CMSI and Connor for



Vocational Training College Principal Joyce Satima talks about the courses on offer to David and Stephen.

supporting the training of teachers. Agherton Parish sponsored a group of five teachers including Isaac; Larne supported Moses and Lisburn Cathedral supported Timothy. All three are now working in Mongo School and were there for the team visit to Mongo.

"Education in this country has traditionally been provided by church and this is still the same even after independence. This is the most successful teacher training college in South Sudan," said James.

"This country has come a long way and has a very painful history. We see this as an opportunity to train a new generation of teachers and leaders who will not only teach the children but will teach them about the love of Christ."

The college trains up to 300 teachers a year. Only 1.5 million of South Sudan's three million children attend school.

The team toured the complex, seeing the nearly complete female living block which will accommodate 144 students and is due to officially open in March, and the impressive Academic Tower with its state of the art science labs and computer suite.





The stunning scenery around Longamere.



Bishop Alan preaches in Yei Cathedral.



Members of Immanuel Cathedral Choir sing.

# Privilege of sharing Sunday worship

Members of the Connor team were invited to preach at a number of different churches in Yei Diocese on Sunday January 20.

Bishop Alan preached in Immanuel Cathedral in Yei, Canon Sam Wright was in St Paul's Church, Archdeacon Stephen Forde was in Jigimoni Church, Rev Andrew Sweeney was in St Philip's, Dr Frank Dobbs was in the thatched Nyogwe Church and Judith Cairns and CMSI's David Gough were in Longamere Parish.

Welcoming Bishop Alan to the packed congregation at the 7.30am English language service in the Cathedral, Bishop Hilary said: "The partnership with Connor is very strong." Bishop Alan encouraged the congregation to join him in singing 'Rejoice,' before preaching on the Parable of the Sower. Later that morning he also preached at the Bari service.

In Longamere, 13 miles from Yei along a rutted dirt track road, Judith and David were greeted by Archdeacon Moses. Their climb to the impressive Longamere Church was a walk reminiscent of the wedding scene in *Mama Mia*!

Judith spoke about challenge, focusing on the story of David and Goliath. To the delight of the congregation, she showed everyone how to do a high five, a low five and for the little ones a baby five!

A moving moment occurred when one woman brought a basin of sorgum as her offering because she had no money.

David told parishioners: "We have come to meet you, greet you, dance with you, sing with you and worship with you. Partnership is relationship and as we get to know each other we understand what our needs are and how best to help each other."

Andrew's service in St Philip's lasted three hours! Andrew said afterwards. "It was a lovely service and my sermon was at the very end. It was the first time I have ever been interpreted, and I had to remember the key things I wanted to include."

Sam's first service in St Paul's was in English at 8am. The Bari service began at 10.15. "They had me up dancing and I got them to sing 'Walking in the Light of God,'" Sam said. "The children's choir were all in uniform with white shirts and cravats with a blue cross."

Frank, dressed in a lay reader's attire loaned to him by CMSI associate John Spens, said: "The thatched church was full, it was lovely and shady and there were lots of people looking in through the open windows. They followed the Prayer Book which they have been learning for five months."

Frank also preached at the Bari service where again there was plenty of dancing. "I must have had all the children attached to my hands at one stage," Frank laughed.



Following a reading in his Bible in Yei Cathedral.



A lady pastor who helped lead the Cathedral service.



Climbing up to Longamere Church.



Judith joins the dancing after preaching in Longamere.



Stephen outside Jigimoni Church where he preached.



David speaks about Partnership in Longamere.



Beautiful smiles in Longamere Church!



## Stirring things up in Larne and Inver!

On November 25 the Parish of Larne and Inver held a special service to mark 'Stir-up' Sunday (Christ the King).

Stir-up Sunday takes its name from the Collect of the day which begins, 'Stir-up, we beseech thee, O Lord...' Traditionally the words of the Collect remind people of the need to prepare for Christmas and 'stir-up' their Christmas pudding!

The rector, the Ven Stephen Forde, Archdeacon of Dalriada, led the service and with the help of Ignite Youth Fellowship, the teenagers of the parish made a Christmas pudding in church, while the curate the Rev Jim Caldwell preached, his sermon relating how each ingredient of the Christmas pudding represented a key aspect of Christian faith.

## Police chief dines in Greenisland

Chief Constable Matt Baggott was a guest at a Big Parish Breakfast hosted by the Church of the Holy Name, Greenisland on Saturday September 1.

More than 100 people attended the breakfast, organised by parishioner Daniel Jones. Daniel had personally invited the Chief Constable and was thrilled when he agreed to come.



Daniel Jones with the Rev Paul Lyons, left, and Chief Constable Matt Baggott.

## Morning Call in Broughshane

More than 100 people of all ages came together for Morning Call, an informal act of worship in the church hall at St Patrick's, Broughshane, on Sunday December 9.

Dean John Bond, who conducted the service, said: "It was an uplifting and joyful occasion."



Young girls at work grinding seeds.



Chief Executive of Christian Aid, Rosamond Bennett, learns about the work from women involved in one of the projects sponsored by the charity.



The group brought out bottles of bubbles which were a real hit with the children.



This courageous little girl has recorded the work of the seed bank project and has shown her film worldwide.



John and Helen meet a Dalit mum and daughter.

The Dean of Belfast, the Very Rev John Mann, witnessed the struggles of daily life for the poorest of the poor during an 11-day trip to India with Christian Aid.

John and his wife Helen travelled with Rosamond Bennett, Chief Executive of Christian Aid, and Deborah Doherty, Head of Church and Community. They visited projects working to improve the standards of living, health and education of the Dalit people, considered the lowest strata of Indian society, and a project supporting those who are HIV positive.

A portion of the money donated to the annual Black Santa Christmas Sit-out at St Anne's Cathedral goes to Christian Aid for work overseas.

After a briefing in Delhi the group flew to the city of Chennai and drove to Pondicherry to visit a project working with Dalit families. The project, run by Dalit people themselves, is working to support the Dalit community in upholding their civil rights including equality in education, healthcare and access to the courts.

Back in Chennai, John preached (in his socks – shoes were removed at the door!) at the Tamil Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd. "After I preached in English, the priest delivered a summary in Tamil," said John. "The Church was using the Revised Common lectionary so we had the same Gospel as we did in the Cathedral that Sunday, showing a real sense of unity."

There were some differences, for example to receive communion wine a person tilted their head back and the priest poured the wine into their mouth. "Thankfully, I was giving out the bread, otherwise it could have got messy!" John said.

John and Helen flew to Madaurai in the centre of south India, and drove to Theni in the countryside, where they visited a former leprosy hospital, which now focuses on patients who are HIV positive.

"We met with some really inspirational women in this place. In fact, in the experiences we had in India generally it was the women who were the inspiration," said John. "In Theni, women from different villages have come together to form self-help groups, supporting families with health issues and especially those discovering the shattering news that they are HIV positive.

"Many of these women were themselves HIV positive and as such they were able to form a network of volunteer health visitors who could really engage with those who found themselves in the same predicament. They were able to give advice





Photos: Deborah Doherty

Rosamond Bennett and Deborah Doherty of Christian Aid and Dean John Mann and his wife Helen with some of the many inspirational ladies they met in India in November.

# The inspiring women of India

and to encourage all pregnant women to be screened in order that, if HIV positive, they could take steps to avoid passing the infection on to their new child. Through their dedication and hard work, 98 per cent of pregnant women are now tested, whereas before the project began it was about seven per cent.

"All four of us found it inspiring that these women who are so poor themselves are prepared to give so much in order to support those who are in a similar predicament in their own community."

The group also visited some of the villages and experienced the effects of poverty found there. Of one village John said: "Most of the houses were either damaged, or were mere temporary structures, there were no toilets and everyone slept on the floor. Electricity hadn't reached this place. With its open sewers and lack of possessions the signs of a community needing a lift were everywhere. They did have clean water from a pump, which was a considerable blessing."

The group flew on to Hyderabad. The most religiously divided of all Indian cities, it is 52 per cent Hindu, 42 per cent Muslim. "Christian Aid is supporting COVA, a community outreach programme involved in promoting social justice, aimed at bringing people of different faiths together. Hyderabad has had inter-faith riots over

the past 40 years and COVA sees Belfast as an inspiration, showing how they can resolve their differences," John said.

Unfortunately John and Helen both fell victim to the infamous 'Delhi Belly.' "Next morning, I felt like curling up with a hot water bottle, a duvet and a DVD, but instead we drove for two hours into the countryside to Zaheerabad, where we visited what was probably the most inspirational of all the projects we saw," said John.

"Twenty years ago, the Dalit people of this area were starving. The women came together and with help from a Christian Aid sponsored project, they encouraged families to grow their own food. They cleared and dug the ground themselves. When the land was ready they were loaned money by the project to buy seeds. Twenty years later, these women are not only feeding themselves and their families, but others as well."

The women have created a community seed bank, storing 150 different seeds, and run the only organic seed outlet in the whole of India. They are also teaching local schoolchildren about the seeds, to ensure that their legacy is passed to the next generation. "Their work is recorded in film, by a 10-year old girl, who has been brought up in an uneducated family in very poor conditions," said John. "Yet this girl



The seed bank project involves ladies of all ages.

has travelled abroad, showing her films and talking of what they are doing."

The women have also set up their own local radio station, where the Irish group were recorded singing 'Molly Malone!'

The group returned to Hyderabad and flew the next day to Dubai, en route for Dublin and home. "The few hours in Dubai had quite an effect upon us, for the sheer unapologetic flaunting of wealth after the scenes we had witnessed in India were just too big a contrast to contain," John commented.

Reflecting on the Black Santa Sit-out, John said: "The money taken on the Cathedral steps is going towards vital work, and a small amount goes a very long way. Through Christian Aid the money is being put into the hands of people who know what to do in local communities who badly need our help."





Synod 2012 took place in St Brigid's Parish Church, Glengormley.



Frances Moreland, Kaye Somerville and Valerie McKay, all from St Mark's, Ballymacash, at Connor Diocesan Synod.

The Christian faith was talked about in a 'positive and real way' as Connor Diocese did Synod differently at St Brigid's Church, Glengormley, on October 4.



Taking part in the on-stage interview panel are, from left: Trevor Douglas, Parish Development Officer; the Rev Roger Cooke, St Patrick's, Coleraine; the Rev William Orr, Muckamore, Killead and Gartree; Peter Blake, St Paul's, Lisburn, and question master the Rev Barry Forde, chaplain at Queen's University, Belfast.

In a break from the norm, the formal business of the Synod was conducted prior to the evening meal. Standing orders were suspended for the second Synod session which moved Connor's Vision Strategy to the next phase by looking at how the vision can work in real situations.

Speakers included Dr Paul Coulter from Belfast Bible College, who spoke about 'Maintenance or Mission' and Tim Magowan from Tearfund, who addressed how parishes could make 'A Local Connection.'

A key part of the evening was interviews with the Rev William Orr, the Rev Roger Cooke and Mr Peter Blake, with the questions posed by the Rev Barry Forde, Chaplain at Queen's University.

William revealed how his own interest in flute bands had been a way of engaging members of local 'blood and thunder' flute bands with Muckamore, Killead and Gartree churches with outstanding results, and how getting involved in a controversy over a July bonfire has reaped benefits for the entire community.

Roger, rector of St Patrick's, Coleraine, spoke about the Daybreak service which has been so popular with families that at the previous Sunday's Daybreak at 9.30am in the parish hall more than 300 were present.

Peter, from St Paul's, Lisburn, told how after making an arrangement with a local restaurant he had gone out and asked people face-to-face to come for a free meal and the chance to follow the Christianity Explored course. The first night there were 30 people there.

"For six weeks we got together to eat



Archdeacon Stephen Forde and the Rev Jim Caldwell with a group from Larne.





Senior Registrar Canon Edgar Turner speaks at Synod.



Hands raised as a motion is agreed at Connor Diocesan Synod.



The Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev Alan Abernethy, addresses Synod in St Brigid's, Glengormley, flanked by Chancellor Derek Rodgers, left, Diocesan Secretary June Butler and Diocesan Accountant David Cromie.

# Exploring 'things that matter' at the annual Connor Synod

curries and sausages and chips and study St Mark's Gospel," Peter said.

Bishop Alan's presidential address in the earlier part of Synod was largely focused on the three strands of the Vision Strategy – engaging communities, empowering ministry and effecting change.

Closing or grouping parishes in the face of decline was not the way forward for churches in the city of Belfast, but the Church instead has to find more creative and imaginative ways of being church in the city, the Bishop said.

He paid tribute to "those who have kept the faith and enabled parishes to continue in some very difficult circumstances."

Reflecting on the Vision Strategy, the Bishop said: "We are at a critical point in the life of the church and it is very important that we continue to seek the wisdom of God as we wrestle with the many issues facing us."

He added: "The speed of change in the last few decades has been rapid and the cultural backcloth to the mission and ministry to which we are called is very demanding."

The Bishop said that with a shortage of finances and the decreasing numbers being ordained in the last few decades, this was a 'God moment.'

Change would not be easy, he said. "Change is always painful and stretching, but when handled carefully, honestly and with consultation it can and will bring new hope and energy. As someone said to me at one of the deanery meetings, 'we have to do something, we cannot bury our heads in the sand.'

"The journey has begun and there is no blueprint for where we need to go but I hope that there is the desire to discover what it is we are being called to do and to follow. That will mean many conversations and much prayer as we journey together."

Bishop Alan said his role was not to tell people what to do, but to listen, encourage and enable.

He paid tribute to Peter Hamill who had moved on after giving 'wonderful service' as training co-ordinator, and welcomed Trevor Douglas, newly appointed parish development officer to the diocesan team. "He comes to us with great experience and skill at being able to develop the ideas and dreams that we will need to have as we look to the future," said the Bishop.

Around 300 members attended the Synod which was preceded by a Service of Holy Communion in St Brigid's Church.

Closing Synod 2012, Bishop Alan said: "One of the joys for me this evening was

to sit and listen and to be encouraged." He added: "This is a Synod that has been talking about the things that matter."

Paying tribute to the Bishop for his leadership, Canon Sam Wright, Lisburn Cathedral, said: "This Synod has been a venture of faith and was a risk worth taking."



Canon John Budd, Derriaghy, at the head of the table during the meal served by the ladies of St Brigid's.



Heather Kingan and Sheila McCormick were among the delegates at Synod.



Team Esther at the finish line in Cambodia. From left: Irene, Nathan, Margaret, Sylvia, Eileen and Leah.

## Ladies tackle charity trek in Cambodia

Two staff members from Church of Ireland House, Belfast, waded through waterlogged paddy fields, battled wild foliage and hiked a mountaintop plateau to finish Marie Curie Cancer Care's Trek Cambodia.

Sylvia Lockhart and Safeguarding Trust Officer Margaret Yarr were members of a six-strong team which undertook the challenge in October as a tribute to Sylvia's late mother Esther.

They were part of a group of 34 trekkers from Northern Ireland and the six of them raised an amazing £19,505.

The walk began on a dirt road. "Soon we headed into the jungle which was hot and humid and because of the heavy monsoon rain was very muddy," said Margaret. They covered 22km that first day.

The rain added to their challenge on day two. "We came to several waterways that looked impassable and we had to take our boots off and wade across. With more than 30 of us this was very time consuming!" said Margaret. "One of the rivers was chest deep. We kept our boots on for that!"

Much of their route was through paddy fields. "We had to walk on a narrow strip of ground between the rice fields. It was like walking on a beam, the rice plants were huge and the water on either side of the path was very deep," said Margaret.

The third day saw the group ascend the holy Kulen Mountain. "It was extremely tough," said Margaret. "The mountain was

very steep and rocky and it was almost lunchtime before we reached the plateau at the top. Even that was on an incline."

That night darkness set in before some of the trekkers reached camp, and local people had to bring the last of the group out of the jungle on the back of motorbikes.

Another day and a half's walking brought the group to the finish line, and after a rest they visited Angkor Wat, the largest temple complex in the world.

During the walk, team member Irene suffered a torn cornea when a branch caught her eye, but was able to carry on. Sylvia reacted to the sap from the foliage which infected her legs, and everyone suffered swollen ankles, but there were no serious injuries.

Margaret said: "I enjoyed it but I would not do it again. I had done no training and I feel this was a wonderful achievement. It is also excellent that the trek raised so much for Marie Curie."

Sylvia, however, is itching to go again. "It was a brilliant, brilliant experience and I would do it again tomorrow. There was a great team spirit and the craic was fantastic," she said.

## Grace, harmony and strength on Camino

The Rev Canon Jim Carson, rector of St Paul's Lisburn, spent a period of Sabbatical leave following the Camino de Santiago.

He walked the entire Camino – a distance of 796 kilometres – between August 25 and September 31.

His walk began at St John de Pied in France along the Route de Napoleon to Roncesvalles, continuing through Pamplona, Burgos and Leon, to Santiago de Compostela, passing through the regions of Navarra, La Rioja, Castilla Y Leon and Galicia.

Jim said: "In terms of personal pilgrimage some like to make their Camino in 33 stages, one for each year of Jesus Christ's life on earth. There is also the need for resting and that may mean travelling for 40 days which is symbolic in the Christian season of Lent when we can remember Jesus fasting for 40 days in the desert."

Pilgrims require a pilgrim passport which is stamped in the hostels along the way and at the end of the Camino they receive their certificate of completion.

"There is always someone else on the road and something new to see or reflect upon along the way and in the true spirit of the Camino, pilgrims stay in Pilgrim Hostels," said Jim.

"I found God's grace and provision for the road; harmony and beauty in the midst of God's creation and a new strength and endurance to complete the walk.

"One also gains an appreciation of how travel may have been in New Testament times for the Apostles, particularly St Paul, though each night we had the blessing of a hot shower, a hot meal and a bed."

The trek has become more and more attractive to pilgrims in recent years. "The Camino, while being an ancient pre-reformation path-way, to many folk today is in fact a new opportunity to find God again" Jim said.



Canon Jim Carson on the Camino de Santiago.



## Re-dedication of Lisburn Cathedral

A Service of Re-opening and Rededication was held in Lisburn Cathedral on December 2 when the preacher was the Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev Alan Abernethy, who dedicated the building.

The cathedral was packed and Lisburn Ladies Harmony Choir performed two sets during the service, adding to the atmosphere of thanksgiving and celebration.

The historic building has been subject to a series of renovation and refurbishment works. Phase one was completed two years ago and involved exterior work including re-pointing, repairs to the spire, replacement of the weather vane, repair of the east facing stained glass window and partial replacement of the roof.

The phase two works were all internal and included rewiring, new lighting, new seating, a coffee area, new audio visual provision, carpeting and redecoration.

The rector, Canon Sam Wright, paid tribute to the select vestry, the sound and vision team, architect Des Cairns and the main contractor Annvale Construction Ltd.



Christ Church Lisburn played something of a ringer when they enlisted the services of the Bishop of Connor to strengthen the football team they put out against a local Simon Community team. But it was to no avail as the match ended 6-5 in favour of the Simon Community. The match, played at Lisburn Leisureplex on November 28, was organised to mark Homeless Awareness Week.

## Institution in St Thomas, Belfast

The institution of the Rev Paul Jack as rector of the Parish of St Thomas, Eglantine Avenue, Belfast, took place on October 10.

Paul has a primary degree in Biochemistry and a Master's degree in Biotechnology. He worked in industry prior to training for ministry in Dublin. He was curate assistant in St Patrick's, Jordanstown, for two years before moving to Seagoe Parish where he was curate assistant for almost six years.

In May 2007 he became rector of the United Parishes of St Simon and St Phillip. Belfast.

Paul is married to Claire and they have three children, Susannah, Patrick, and Katherine.



All set for Samaria. The Leprosy Mission team including four Jordanstown parishioners - Karen Hambleton is second from the left, Grace McCabe is third from left, Ricky Darling is kneeling at the front and Matthew Anderson is wearing the hat in the back row.

## Building homes and friendships in Tanzania

A team of four from St Patrick's, Jordanstown, travelled to the village of Samaria, Tanzania, East Africa, last October to join a Leprosy Mission Project.

Team members were Ricky Darling, Grace McCabe, Matthew Anderson and Karen Hambleton. **Ricky writes:**

On our first morning I watched the sun rise from 5am. Sunrise in Africa is like the splendour of God unfolding before your eyes. The words 'be still for I am the Lord thy God,' came to mind.

I was sad to find the old workforce I had become friendly with when I last visited in 2010 had been replaced, but found the two teams worked twice as efficiently than those employed in 2010 - things change!

In 2010 we completed the brick work in two houses up to ring beam. This year we managed the brick work of four houses up to ring beam, two houses' ring beams were completed, two foundations dug and laid, two foundations dug ready to be laid, four houses fitted with windows and doors

The efficiencies of the new builders gave us more free time to engage with the children, some of the Elders and young people.

On our third day a media company arrived announcing that a Serengeti brewery would be adopting Samaria, providing funds to complete the fitting of doors and windows for two houses and provision for a borehole. Our team agreed we would find working on a project partly funded by a brewery unacceptable.

In Dodoma we met representatives from a local university. We were hoping for technical support in the form of a student

field worker, creating a development opportunity benefiting the village, the student and the university. The university wanted funding, money we did not have, and we were all very disappointed.

In a chance meeting in a cafe we encountered a man working for the UN providing foot pumps suitable for irrigation, seed, technical support, and free food programmes aimed at helping small farm holdings to increase farming yields - all for free! He just needed an introduction to the village elders. We left this in the hands of God and await news of implementation.

We met with the Elders of the village, and talked of our friendship, our achievements, our plans to meet their aspirations, our commitment to the village and about the offer from the brewery. We explained they needed to consider this and to decide the path they preferred to travel. The villagers without hesitation said that they had no desire to partner with Serengeti brewery. One Elder, Thomas, likened us to the Good Samaritan he said "we had stopped to lift up and care for our neighbours unlike so many who had passed them by."

On the Sunday we attended church for a three and a half hour service. It was the most humbling, joyful, exciting and up lifting experience and it was too short!

Every aspect, component, goal and objective in this project has been placed by God's hand I have been privileged to be involved.

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