

CONNOR

connections

**Friends in
Action**

The water of life
pages 6-7



Celebrations for BB and GB in Whiterock

Two youth organisations in St Columba's, Whiterock, have marked important events. The Girls' Brigade has celebrated its 20th anniversary. In April 1994 the first company night drew 63 girls. Today St Columba's GB Company has a membership of 110. Highlight of the celebrations will be the 20th anniversary display in May.

The Boys' Brigade at St Columba's marked a special moment in the life of one of its leaders. Vaughan Rosbotham, Captain of the 115th Boys' Brigade, was awarded a British Empire Medal for services to Young People in Northern Ireland in the Queen's Birthday Honours.

Vaughan is the longest serving Officer in the company, having joined it at its foundation in 1956. He has been the Captain since 1971. To mark the occasion, the Rev Chris Easton presented Vaughan with a gift from the church members at the annual Enrolment Service.



Vaughan Rosbotham receives his British Empire Medal from Dame Mary Peters.

New Youth Council

A new Youth Council has been formed in Connor Diocese under the banner 'Engage.'

Headed up by the Rev Peter Ferguson, Engage will build on the many models of successful youth work already being undertaken in parishes across the diocese and will develop new projects in the future.

A first diocesan-wide youth event is being held in Ballymena on March 29 (see back page for details), with plans underway for Summer Madness and a youth weekend in September. Full details can be found on the Connor website.

Rural Deans named

The Rev Nicholas Dark, Magheragall Parish, has been appointed Rural Dean for Lisburn and the Rev David Ferguson, Ramoan and Culfeightrin, is the new Rural Dean for Ballymena.



Jill Hamilton, Children's Project Development Officer with Connor Diocese.

Creating ripples in children's ministry

Jill Hamilton has taken up the post of Children's Project Development Officer with Connor Diocese.

Jill has a degree in Applied Economics from the University of Ulster and a PGCE in Secondary Education. She is married to Geoff, Development Officer with SAMS (the South American Mission Society) who she met when she was a volunteer with SAMS in Paraguay.

Jill has taught in a number of primary schools and a special school where she specialised in working with children with autism. She has also worked with the Autism Advisory and Intervention Service within the Southern Education and Library Board.

Three months into her new role in Connor Diocese, Jill said: "I am beginning to find my feet and feel a sense of direction and some clarity about the way ahead.

"Children's ministry in Connor is going to be known as 'Ripple.' Ripple is all about serving God by jumping in, making a splash and creating ripples. As volunteer leaders we can sometimes feel our work with the children in our parishes is not very significant, but only God knows what effect we can have on the lives of those children as we share God's good news with them.

"Whether it is a through hosting a big children's event or by faithfully helping as a leader in a weekly children's club, we can make a difference for God in a child's life. What may seem like a small act of service to us at the time may have a far reaching effect."

Jill has been out and about in Connor, visiting rectors and parishes to see the children's ministry work going on in the diocese at present. Her aim is to support volunteers who lead children's groups with tailor made localised training and relevant and easily accessible resources.

"I also want to explore with parishes the development of different kinds of children's ministry such as homework clubs, Messy Church and other ways of doing children's ministry in a creative and fun way," Jill said.

"Children's ministry is a great way of linking to people in the community who may not engage in church, and is an outreach opportunity to get parents and families into church in a non-threatening way. It creates opportunities for further outreach with these adults, drawing them into involvement with groups within the church.

"The evangelist Dwight L Moody was quoted as saying: 'If I could relive my life, I would devote my entire ministry to reaching children for God!' Our work with children is so vitally important. Let's encourage one another, pray for our children and ask God to guide and help us."

The Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev Alan Abernethy, said: "We are delighted to welcome Jill to facilitate children's ministry, something we have said for some time is a very high priority for the diocese. I am sure she will be a gift to us all."

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Cover photo:


Kyle, a young member of Flute Band Church in Muckamore Parish, in tune during a practice night in the parish hall. Full story on pages 4-5.




Please contact us if you would like to contribute to the next issue of Connor Connections.

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**DIOCESE OF
CONNOR**

The need for God's presence every day

It was with great sadness that we had to postpone our diocesan trip to Yei in South Sudan.

Tragically this nation, which has suffered so much over the last decades through civil war, is once again facing the horror of violence and internal struggle.

It is difficult to comprehend the suffering of these people over decades and it is profoundly sad to see them facing an uncertain future and the awfulness of tribal division and bloodshed.

Please continue to pray for:

- the people of South Sudan - that there will be a quick and peaceful outcome for them of the present chaos.
- the Church in South Sudan - that it will be a channel of care and practical help to the people.
- communications to be maintained to enable help and support to be given to people in need.
- the coordination of relief programmes so that those in need will receive help.

Bishop Hilary has been encouraged by our response and by the knowledge that we are walking with them at this difficult time with our prayers and support. He has asked me to thank you for your willingness to help and he will keep us informed of any developments. Details of how you can help can be found on the diocesan website and we will update the website with any news we receive from Bishop Hilary.

I am very grateful for the response that many have already made to the crisis in South Sudan to help resource the local Church to be an instrument of God's grace and mercy in the midst of such human suffering and tragedy.

One of the challenges I faced in my visit to Yei was the observation that, in the Church in Sudan, there was no separation between Sunday worship and everyday life. They were acutely aware of their need of God's presence and help every day.

We have a danger in our expression of faith of finding it hard to connect our faith with the struggle of our everyday life. We can be so busy trying to maintain our buildings and manage the finances that we can find little time and energy for anything else.

In my own ministry, so much time and energy is taken up with Church matters, rather than connecting with people in daily life and helping to make those connections that Jesus spent much of his time nurturing, especially by being with people who didn't belong. This is one of the themes I hope to explore during the Lent course this year which will focus on discipleship and ministry.

Grace and peace to you all,

+ Alan Connor



Clergy and lay readers at a service to celebrate the 50th anniversary of St Paul's Parish Church, Lisburn, on Sunday January 26. Pictured are, from left: Canon Will Murphy; Mr Mark Jamison; Canon James Carson, rector; Mr Jim Neill, diocesan reader; the Rt Rev Alan Abernethy, Bishop of Connor; the Rev Paul Dundas, Christ Church, Lisburn; and the Rev Stephen McWhirter, curate, St Paul's. Photograph courtesy of Norman Briggs.



The Rev William Orr, rector of Muckamore, Killead and Gartree, and leader of Flute Band Church, plays along during practice.

'My prayer was: What is culturally relevant to the people here?'

Growing up in rural Rathfriland, William Orr watched the local Pride of the Hill flute band practice and longed to be part of it.

He joined when he was 16. "I loved it. I loved being part of a group of guys who had the same interest. We were the band to beat. I loved the friendship and the craic," William said.

"In my late teens I was bandmaster and took it very seriously. I even carried shoeshine in my pocket! I kept discipline and called the tunes. I loved looking well, marching well and sounding well.

"There are flute bands which are an excuse for drinking and we did have some people push the boundaries, but we were a competitive band and we had to focus. As well as that, the people who headed the band worked hard to protect what they had built up."

When he was 24 William left Pride of the Hill. "I left the band because I was called to ministry and wanted to give it 100 per cent. At the time it was the right thing for me."

William became rector of Muckamore, Killead and Gartree in 2007. A survey carried out by Muckamore Parish Development Association found that the estates which constitute the parish were 93 per cent Protestant, with less than 10 per cent of people practicing their faith in local churches.

"When I came here my prayer was 'what's culturally relevant, what is the most important thing to people living here?' There was my starting point," William said.

"I noticed that there were a few guys in church who used to be in a band. I asked

them to come together and play a few tunes and Flute Band Church (FBC) was born. I started introducing hymns that bands would know like Abide With Me and Shall We Gather at the River and then added to them. Now we only play hymns, usually in a blood and thunder style although we are introducing melody.

"I hope the experience of FBC will lead the person to become a Christian and then assess who they are, rather than allow who they are to be dictated by how they grew up."

William said Christians can belong to mainstream flute bands. "They can use their Christian faith and love of music to reach out to others. It is hard to do, but I encourage people to stay and be Christ in the band as others might be Christ in workplace," he said.



David Olliver, David Baillie and Ricky Hunter keep their eyes on the music during Flute Band Church rehearsals.



Lambeg drummer Ryan Mairs.



Eric Olliver plays during Flute Band Church practice.



Young Kyle gets a few tips from the Rev William Orr.



Flute Band Church flautist Paul Steele joins in during a practice session in Muckamore Parish Hall.

Muckamore mission that is full of music

An energetic form of mission is reaching deep into the heart of the community around Muckamore Parish. *Diocesan Communications Officer Karen Bushby* drops into a meeting of Flute Band Church (FBC), an innovative project established by the rector, the Rev William Orr.

The notes of 'In Christ Alone' resonate round the parish hall at Muckamore as 11-year-old-Kyle snatches a little private tuition from Flute Band Church leader the Rev William Orr.

The hall quickly fills up with flautists and drummers. Ricky Hunter was in a band some 20 years ago. "I started coming to church and became a Christian in June 2011," he says. "Initially I was not really comfortable with the idea of a flute band in church, but William persuaded me to join.

"It is great craic. You get a real mix of people and it is a good place to learn. Some people think you cannot be a Christian and be in a band but you can. When you become a Christian life doesn't stop. My son plays here but his mum would not allow him to join another flute band because they can be associated with drinking and sectarianism. Here, we play for an hour, have a cup of tea, and William will give us something to think about.

"When we perform at events some of us give our testimony, which is often relevant to people listening. The group is really reaching into the flute band community. It can be scary and intimidating, but we need to get out there and do it. There is no point in just sitting here playing to ourselves."

Paul Dunlop, a drummer with Ballycraigy Flute Band, has been a member of FBC for two years. "I really enjoy it. We received funding to run tuition for young ones, it is a good learning environment for them," he says.

Paul has been attending church services since becoming involved in FBC. "It has been a learning curve. At our meetings we have prayer and discussion in a very relaxed atmosphere."

Young Kyle is all set for practice to start for real. He has been playing since his ninth birthday. "I get taught really well here," he says.

Eric Olliver has belonged to a number of flute bands. "The main thing that draws me here is that I enjoy listening to William's talks," Eric says. "They are always relevant and easy to understand. All sorts of things can be said in here but with no venom.

"Flutes bands have been looked down on over the past 10-15 years, and this is giving a different impression. We are going into churches and doing something good, playing music, giving a talk, serving a purpose."

It was Eric's son David, 19, who persuaded him to come to FBC. "William is really

approachable and all the lads help each other out," David says. "It does not matter what mood you are in, when you walk in here every trouble is lifted off your shoulders. We learn so much through William's teaching and from the stories the lads talk about."

David became a Christian in January 2012. "You would think flute band and church would conflict, but William has put them together for good use. This is church done differently and William brings a lot of that. He is somewhat unorthodox!"

One of the band's female flautists is Laura Robb. "There are only a couple of girls but you get used to the banter," she says. "We all have a good laugh and I enjoy the talks and the variety of music."

The time for chat is over as, after a prayer from William, the drummers take their place, and, from their haphazard positions on the eclectic sofas lining the walls of the hall, the flautists raise their instruments, poised.

If young Kyle filled the hall with his solo flute, then the ensemble of flautists, accompanied by the three drummers, quite literally raise the roof. Song of Resurrection; As the Deer; Shine... they play their way through a litany of hymns, conducted, and at times pulled up and corrected, by the rector with the flute /baton!

"Superb..." murmurs Bishop Ken Clarke, mission director of SAMS (the South American Mission Society). He is here to give a talk to members of FBC who are planning a trip to Paraguay with SAMS in 2015.

"People in South America love their music so they could bring their flutes with them they could compare notes on music!" said the Bishop.

Flute Band Church practice takes place on Wednesday nights in Muckamore Parish Hall. The members also bring their unique mission to church services, meetings and events around Northern Ireland. For details visit: www.muckamorekilladgartree.org.uk/



Drummers Ryan Mairs, Paul Dunlop and Samuel Chestnutt.

Discipleship and ministry are focus of Bishop's Lent talks

The focus of the Bishop of Connor's Lenten courses for 2014 will be discipleship and ministry.

Two seminars will be delivered in three venues – Bushmills Parish Centre, Jordanstown Parish Centre, and Christ Church, Lisburn.

Announcing the course details, the Rt Rev Alan Abernethy said: "As a Church, we have often talked about everyone having a ministry and, indeed, it is present in our baptismal liturgy.

"However, it is something that is difficult to implement and it is becoming more difficult to get volunteers in an increasingly busy and demanding lifestyle for many.

"In the Lent course, I will be focusing on what it means to be a disciple in our present culture and how we might continue to grow in faith as individuals and as communities.

"I will also be reflecting on how discipleship leads us to ministry and how every disciple has a ministry within the body of Christ, what this might mean and how we can seek to develop the ministry of all."

Dates, venues and a booking form can be found on the back page.

Flower festival in Carrickfergus church

St Nicholas' Parish Church, Carrickfergus, is hosting a flower festival from May 15-18.

This is one of the most historic and beautiful churches in the Diocese of Connor. Recently thieves broke into the church and destroyed a panel of one of the church's beautiful stained glass windows.

Vestry member Gillian Dalton said: "Two of the oldest wall memorials have started to crumble and Health and Safety are not happy with the height of the balcony rail the list goes on. Such are the joys of maintaining a 12th century building as the venue for a living and vibrant church."

Gillian said it was hoped that the flower festival, with the theme 'Lord, for the Years,' would defray some of these costs.

Groups interested in attending the flower festival should contact Jean on 07776 154 956, jean.stewart@live.co.uk with any catering enquiries.



People in a village in Burkina Faso gather to listen to the local pastor as the FIA well drilling operation carries on in the background. Inset: Drew Johnston of Lisburn Cathedral, chairman of Friends in Action, Northern Ireland.

Giving people the water of life in Africa

A charity headed by a Lisburn Cathedral parishioner is bringing both water and the gospel to remote parts of West Africa.

Drew Johnston is chairman of Friends in Action (FIA) Northern Ireland, which he founded with local man Mark Collier in 2002. Mark is now based in Burkina Faso.

In the past 11 years, the charity has drilled more than 350 wells, providing safe clean drinking water for some 350,000 people in some of the most remote villages in Africa. Up to eight teams travel to Africa each year and several of the volunteers are from Lisburn Cathedral.

FIA is an international charity, but its drilling ministry in Africa is run and directed in Northern Ireland.

While drilling for water is the charity's main focus, FIA has been involved in other one-off projects, including erecting a donated Bailey bridge (shipped from Northern Ireland) over a 300ft river in the Tanda region of Guinea, West Africa, which was often cut off by floods in the wet season. Since then FIA has also built a clinic, school and opened the first Christian Church in this Muslim area.

FIA first started well drilling in Ivory Coast but had to leave after a few months because of civil war. God then led FIA to Ghana and then finally into Burkina Faso.

"Burkina Faso is more than 90 per cent Muslim and is the fourth poorest country

in the world. It is hot and dusty for nine months a year and the people are in desperate need of clean water," said Drew.

"The average life expectancy in some villages is as low as 34 years. Women and children often have to walk up to four hours a day carrying 20 kilos water on their head."

When Northern Ireland Water analysed a sample of Burkina Faso village water, the bacteria in it was equal to the bacteria in raw sewage. "It is no wonder that average life expectancy is so low," added Drew.

FIA works in partnership with mission agencies and pastors already working in villages. The charity's aim is to demonstrate God's love and provision by offering the people a 'cup of clean water in Christ's name'. FIA only drills when requested by the missionary or pastor.

"We plan a year in advance and Mark and our team of geologists, hydrologists and drillers from Northern Ireland who live there have the area surveyed so when a volunteer team arrives members know exactly where to drill. Drew explained.

"FIA has to take care not to offend anyone by drilling in what the villagers call 'sacred ground.' We will only drill in common ground, ensuring the water is freely



FIA volunteers building a Bailey bridge in a remote village where the river often flooded in the wet season.



Women and children walk for miles to collect water that can contain as much bacteria as raw sewage.



Celebrations as villagers are given 'a cup of clean water in Christ's name' by volunteers with FIA, a charity headed up by Lisburn Cathedral parishioner Drew Johnston which drills wells in remote parts of Burkina Faso, West Africa.

available to all regardless of religion or tribal background."

Conditions during drilling trips can be basic. The team travels from village to village along rough tracks with a cumbersome convoy of drilling rig, tool trucks and generating gear. Accommodation is normally in beds protected only by mosquito nets and meals are prepared around an open fire.

Drew said drilling attracts a lot of attention, with people waiting for hours in anticipation of the first signs of water. "You can just imagine the impact that having clean water in their village brings. It's immeasurable in terms of health and quality of life. If the people no longer have to walk for hours to get water, the children will have more time to go to school, the women can earn an income by growing more crops and taking care of their families," he said.

He recalled the celebrations after one well was finished. "The well was beside a church that had only 19 parishioners. People had to walk three miles each way every day for water. We hit water at 7pm on the third evening. The local people started singing and dancing and they were still dancing at 4am. Membership of that church has increased to 149 and it is still growing."

Arthur Canning from Lisburn Cathedral has volunteered with FIA in Burkina Faso and has seen the difficulties families face on a daily basis. "Ladies have to walk several miles to get water so dirty you or I would

not even use it to wash our cars," he said.

"This type of mission is not necessarily for everyone. You need a certain amount of health and strength to do what is a physically challenging job. Drilling and welding skills are not essential, FIA will take anyone with a servant's heart who is willing to lift a shovel, push a wheel barrow, carry drill rods and even cook."

Arthur added: "You see how a well can change lives. When you give someone a cup of cold, clear water in Christ's name, you see what that means to them. The smiles on their faces are wonderful."

Arthur was also involved in the bridge project. "When it was complete the local Imam allowed the people to accept the Christian faith. The villagers named their bridge the Jesus Bridge. That is God's spirit at work," he said.

A volunteer team normally goes to Africa for two weeks and during this period FIA would hope to drill four to six wells. But the need is huge as currently the charity has requests for more than 150 wells.

FIA is a faith based mission agency and no one is paid a salary. One hundred per cent of donations go to drilling wells.



Getting water from an FIA well sponsored by St Michael's, Shankill Road, Belfast.



Lisburn Cathedral parishioner Arthur Canning volunteering at a well drilling site in Burkina Faso.

Drew said: "The average cost of a completed well in West Africa is £5,000 and a minimum of 500 people will benefit from each well. That's £10 to give some clean drinking water for life."

To learn more about donating, volunteering and the work of FIA, contact Drew at drewjohnston@faintl.org or visit www.friendsinaction.org.uk.

'Shrieks of pure delight' when the water starts to flow!

I have three strong memories of drilling wells in Burkina Faso. The first is of the crowds of villagers watching the drilling, waiting eagerly for many hours to see water appear from far below. The second is of their joy and ours at seeing the water coming to the surface.

The third is of meeting members of the Church there, who share the same faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and especially praying together at a well and offering thanks to our heavenly Father.

Denis Fullerton, Lisburn Cathedral, FIA volunteer

The difficult part of a well drilling trip is seeing the people waiting and watching, from the moment we roll into their village. Sitting like an expectant audience with their buckets, basins, five gallon drums, anything which will hold water. No pressure then?! The awful thought of failure and having to leave without a good result.

And the good bits? The whoops, the cheers and the shrieks of pure delight when the water starts to flow out of the parched ground they have walked on for generations.

Keith Forsythe, Lisburn Cathedral, FIA volunteer



Impact Carrick's Street Team all set for their daily clean-up.

God's love makes an impact in Carrick

A summer outreach in Carrickfergus has grown into something much bigger.

Churches have traditionally united for services in Holy Week, but in 2013 the Rev Peter Ferguson, curate at St Nicholas Parish Church, and clergy at Joymont Presbyterian Church were asked to organise youth events during Holy Week.

Up to 50 young people attended each of three evenings which included coffee bar style worship, fellowship and Bible teaching. "There was an overwhelming desire to see more of this working together," Peter said.

"We looked towards doing something in the summer that would be for the whole community in Carrickfergus and Impact Carrick was born."

The group refurbished an empty retail unit as the Impact Carrick Hub. Each morning people of all ages met for devotions and to listen to a speaker. After a group lunch participants turned their attention to practical outreach.

"We headed out and did all sorts of activities to show the love of God in our words and deeds. Our driving verse from the Bible was John 4:19 – 'We love because he first loved us,'" said Peter.

Impact Carrick's Street Team was busy cleaning up alleyways and estates. The Gardening Team refurbished an overgrown town centre community garden.

"People asked who we were and we were able to tell them we were churches working together, showing God's love in practical ways," said Peter.

The project's Sports Team organised

games at Marine Gardens, a Photography Team recorded everything that was happening and a Prayer Team ensured all activities were surrounded by prayer.

During the three days, the Impact Carrick Hub was open as a drop-in centre offering homemade refreshments. "This was a lovely opportunity to speak to people as they came in. A number of people also asked for prayer and we had an area set aside for that," said Peter.

"Many people were surprised to see the churches were working together for the Kingdom, everything was free, and there was no agenda."

Impact Carrick culminated in a free community barbecue in town centre with burgers, live music and old fashioned games. "The sense of joy was palpable and it was an opportunity to share the gospel in very simple ways," Peter said. "Everyone agreed that this had to happen again."

At Christmas the local council asked Impact Carrick to lead the Carol singing at the switch on of the festive lights.

Plans are underway for another week of outreach during summer 2014. "We know there are people back in church as a result of conversations during Impact Carrick," said Peter. "It showed the church reaching out to the community and now the community is turning to us. It has been very positive and we pray that it will continue to grow and bless the town of Carrickfergus which God loves so much and all its people."

Celebrating 21 years' growth in Woodburn

Holy Trinity Woodburn celebrated its 21st birthday on December 8. The church was planted in December 1992 by St Nicholas, Carrickfergus, and has grown from a congregation of 20 to a congregation of more than 200.

In 2004 a larger building had to be constructed to accommodate the growth in the youth organisations and Sunday worship. Each week around 600 young people pass through the doors of Holy Trinity through the various youth organisations.

£1,050 raised in memory of little Isla

Parishioners in Magheragall raised £1,050 for the Scottish Cot Death Trust at a Service of Nine Lessons and Carols on December 22.

The funds were raised in memory of Isla Nancy Rose Brash, daughter of Michelle Chambers and James Brash, who died on August 16 2013 aged just 14 months. Her mum Michelle was a member of the congregation from birth until she moved to Scotland, and little Isla visited the parish last July.



For over 20 years an annual table quiz held in St Patrick's Church Hall, Ballymena, has raised thousands of pounds for the church and charity. This year was no exception when the quiz made £750 for Crocus Special Needs Association. Well done to the organising team of Trevor and Isobel Halliday and Nina Marrs.

Festivals at Christmas

The newly restored St Colman's Church in Dervock, Derrykeighan, hosted a Christmas Tree Festival on December 7 and 8 giving people the opportunity to view the restored church. All the trees were linked by the theme 'The Life of Jesus.'

Lisburn Cathedral also hosted a Christmas Tree Festival. The theme was 'Journey to Bethlehem' and the festival, from December 5-10, included 60 imaginatively decorated trees. The council and Lisburn City Centre management provided an ice sculpture and lit the cathedral spire so it was clearly seen from a distance.



The Connor team which was due to travel to Yei in January at a prayer and share evening organised by CMS Ireland. They are, back from left: CMSI Mission Director Ronnie Briggs; Dr Frank Dobbs, Agherton; Drew Steele, Love for Life; Bishop Alan Abernethy; Judith Cairns, Love for Life and Lisburn Cathedral; Karen Bushby, Connor Diocesan Communications Officer. Front, from left: Jenny Smyth, CMSI Partnership Co-ordinator; the Rev Elizabeth Hanna, St Nicholas, Belfast, and Connor MU; the Rev Arthur Young, Kill O' the Grange, Dublin; Alison Skillen, St Polycarp's and Connor MU; Norman Thompson, Kill O' the Grange. Missing from the photograph is the Rev Andrew Sweeney, Ballymoney.

Yei visit postponed due to civil unrest

A visit to the Diocese of Yei by the Rt Rev Alan Abernethy and a team from Connor in January was postponed due to unrest in South Sudan.

Fighting in the world's newest state broke out in December, and quickly spiralled into tribal warfare between the Dinka and Nuer tribes. By early February, news reports indicated that 10,000 people had been killed and up to 800,000 displaced because of the unrest.

A ceasefire was signed by the rebels and government forces on January 23, but violations were reported on both sides and at time of writing there was uncertainty about whether the truce would hold.

The Connor team was due to depart for Yei on January 16 on a META (Mission Experience Team Abroad) facilitated by CMS Ireland. The two dioceses have had a formal partnership since 2007. On January 6, Bishop Hilary of Yei confirmed his diocese was postponing its planned Youth, Clergy and Young Family Members' conferences, which would have been supported by the Connor team, until the political situation is calmer.

The decision to postpone the META was taken by Jenny Smyth, CMSI's Partnership Co-ordinator, Bishop Alan and CMSI Director Ronnie Briggs. A trip by a team from Down and Dromore to Maridi Diocese in South Sudan was also postponed.

Both teams met on January 7 for a prayer

and share evening. Jenny Smyth thanked team members for their commitment. "To be able share with others who have concern in their hearts is a blessing and tonight we think about people who cannot eat, who don't have a safe place to sleep or who have lost family members," she said.

Bishop Hilary expressed sadness at the postponement of the visit. "We were prepared in mind and heart to welcome the team to Yei and to have this time of reconnection with Connor/CMS Ireland. By now we should have been busy putting last touches to the reception plans," he said.

"By the grace of God and the efforts of good people, we will manage to move beyond our divisions and develop a shared vision for the future of the whole country of South Sudan," the Bishop added.

CMSI launched an Emergency Appeal for South Sudan and Bishop Alan has asked parishes to support South Sudan both prayerfully and by raising vital funding.

In a letter to clergy, Bishop Alan wrote: "Most of the trouble has been many miles from Yei, yet some of these displaced people have walked with their families to Yei and other places where they know the church will give them refuge.



A scene in Maridi, South Sudan, where, like Yei, hundreds of displaced people have sought refuge.

He said Bishop Hilary of Yei could not guarantee the team's safety. "But there is another reason we cannot be in Yei now. The beds we would have slept in, the churches we would have worshipped in, the rooms where we would have run conferences for clergy and young people, have been turned over for accommodation for those who have fled in the fighting in places like Bor, Malakal and the capital Juba," Bishop Alan said.

Latest news from Bishop Hilary revealed that 1,171 internally displaced people have sought refuge in Yei. CMSI described the situation in Yei as tense, with sporadic gunfire at nights. Supplies of fuel and food have been disrupted by intermittent road closures to Juba and to Uganda.

Jenny said: "There are stories of incredible suffering emerging, with unaccompanied children turning up, and families being split up on the way, or the men being killed during the journey."

Emergency provision for a family of eight for two weeks costs £100. This will provide food, jerrycans, cooking pots, blankets and medical care. A donation of £5 provides one blanket; £8 provides maize meal for a family for a week; £15 provides beans for a family for a week.

Urging parishes to support the CMSI appeal, Bishop Alan said: "Please help us to help the church in South Sudan make life bearable for the men, women and children who have once again had to flee their homes due to fighting."

To donate to the appeal, please visit www.cmsireland.org/news/2014/01/14/south-sudan-appeal

'By the grace of God we will move beyond our divisions and develop a shared vision for the future of South Sudan'
Bishop Hilary



Maureen Wilson leads the way through the ruins at Masada.



Denise Murray, the Rev Bill Boyce and Eleanor Boyce in the queue for the Temple Mount.



A mural in a church in Nazareth.



Ladies in the Connor group cool their feet in the sea at Caesarea.



Sailing across the Sea of Galilee.



Floating in the Dead Sea!



Pilgrims on the shore of the Sea of Galilee where pilgrimage leader, Dean John Mann, celebrated Holy Communion.

Pilgrimage in the Holy 'happy and holy exper

A group from Connor Diocese visited the Holy Land in November for an 11-day pilgrimage. The 20 Connor pilgrims were joined by 11 from First Larne Presbyterian Church.

They were led by the Dean of Belfast, the Very Rev John Mann, and were based in Jerusalem and Tiberias.

Their first day dawned warm and sunny and by 8.30am the pilgrims were on top of the Mount of Olives. They walked the path that Jesus took on Palm Sunday, remembering Jesus crying over the city at a church whose roof looks like teardrops.

They read and prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane before visiting the site of the High Priest's house, descending into the prison cell beneath it.

After lunch at a convent outside Jerusalem, the pilgrims visited Yad Vashem, the Holocaust museum where, in a memorial to children, 1.5 million names are read out.

Next morning they queued for two hours but failed to get on the Temple Mount. Undaunted, they visited the Church of St Anne - an ancient church beside the pool of Bethesda.

They walked the Via Dolorosa; reading and praying as they made their way through the busy market, recalling the Passion story as they climbed the narrow streets to Calvary.

They finished the afternoon at the Garden Tomb, where the words inscribed above the entrance read: "He is not here, he is risen!"

Day three was a trip to Qumran, site of

the Dead Sea Scrolls, and Masada where a cablecar took the group up to Herod's desert fortress.

After a relaxing float in the Dead Sea the pilgrims visited the ancient city of Jericho where they saw Zacchaeus's sycamore tree. Heading back into the desert they stood in silence, absorbing the sounds of the wilderness.

Their first stop the next day was the Upper Room where they read the long Acts 2 Pentecost account. The group then crossed to Bethlehem, in Palestinian territory, visiting a Christian Co-operative where olive wood, mother of pearl and jewellery were all for sale.

They celebrated communion in the sunshine in the Field of the Shepherds and visited the nearby church where light comes only from high up in the cupola.

A two hour wait was required to join the queue to enter the cave under the Church of the Nativity in the centre of Bethlehem, but the pilgrims stood at the place of Jesus' birth for a few seconds.

They lunched in a hospital canteen - supporting the poorly resourced health provision in the Palestinian territories.

A number of pilgrims were up early on the Sunday to climb to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre for the dawn services



Enjoying the sunshine on their first day in the Holy Land. Photographs by Archdeacon Stephen Forde.

Land was a time of wonders' says Dean

(Roman Catholic, Coptic and Orthodox). Later, everyone attended Holy Community at St George's Cathedral, before a trip to the Israel Museum, home to a model of Jerusalem in Jesus's day

Next morning they travelled to Emmaus, stopping at Abu Ghosh to worship in a beautiful Crusader church and browse in a shop run by monks. Then it was on to Caesarea on the shores of the Mediterranean to visit the Roman amphitheatre before driving on to Acre, the last place the Crusaders held before being driven from the Holy Land.

The group reached their Tiberias hotel at 5.30pm, and many were up early next morning to see the sun rise over the Sea of Galilee.

They drove to Cana, scene of the first miracle, and in Nazareth visited the Greek Orthodox Church built at the site of Mary's Well, a spring where Jesus must have drunk as a child and young man. They also toured 'Nazareth Village,' a reproduction of Nazareth as it would have looked in Jesus' time.

The following day the group climbed to the Mount of Beatitudes where Jesus preached the 'Sermon on the Mount.' Here the beautiful gardens offer quiet space for contemplation and prayer.

They spent an hour at Capernaum where, after reading the stories of the house of Simon's mother-in law, the call of the disciples and the healing of the centurion's slave, some sat alone by the water's edge

Lunch was a St Peter's fish from the Sea of Galilee, and then the pilgrims boarded a boat, spotting all three species of kingfisher found in Israel – the Pied, the White-breasted and the Common Kingfisher.

The sea was calm and the boat stopped far from the shore. In the silence, the pilgrims read stories of the lake they were sailing on, of its storms and calms; of Jesus and his disciples, of fear and trust; of miraculous power and of awe.

On their final day, the Connor pilgrims reflected on the conflict in Syria as they visited the Golan Heights, occupied Syrian land still full of minefields.

Their last stop was the beautiful site that was once the city of Caesarea Philippi. Today the city is no more, but the fresh water spring that made it a place of settlement still gushes forth and the pilgrims gathered 'Jordan water,' for this is one of the sources of the river.

The pilgrims travelled home on November 22, saying goodbye and thanks to their driver Kamal and excellent guide Samer.

Dean Mann said: "The pilgrimage goes on, as our lives are lived out each day, in the faith we have celebrated hour by hour in the land of our Lord's birth, ministry, death and resurrection. A small chapter has been written in the lives of 31 pilgrims over the past 11 days – one that will not be forgotten – praise God for the chance to share these happy and holy experiences with others."



Dean John Mann and his wife Helen on the Mount of Beatitudes.



Time for worship in a cave in Bethlehem.



Archdeacon Stephen Forde, Kate Irving, Maureen Wilson and Stephen and Jennifer Haslett at the top of Mount Tabor, the Mount of the Transfiguration.



Demonstrating the tools a carpenter like Joseph would have used. This was in Nazareth Village, a reproduction of Nazareth as it would have looked in Jesus' time.

Archdeacon takes on role of MU Chaplain

The vicar of Antrim Parish, Archdeacon Stephen McBride, has been appointed as chaplain to the Mothers' Union in Connor

His first official duty was to host the diocesan Christingle service in Antrim in December along with Connor Diocesan President Valerie Ash.

"Over the next few months, through attendance at training events and Trustee meetings, I hope to get more of a feel of where the members in Connor are in their programming and hear what they might expect of me," said Stephen. "In the early stages of my chaplaincy it will be a ministry of presence and listening to discern where I can be of assistance.

"I am very aware of the huge collective energy and power for good the Mothers' Union members have, beginning in each parish and area and throughout the diocese. There are so many examples of practical Christianity, working out and living out the faith in ways that are difficult to number.

"Not only are the members of the Mothers' Union a visible presence and witness in the parishes in which there are branches, they do a vast amount of practical evangelism, often without knowing they were engaging in it. Curry in a Hurry, washbags for hospitals, baby clothes for newly borns, running crèches, visiting the housebound – the list is endless.

"The Mothers' Union has been trailblazing lay ministry long before the term was ever conceived and I hope that in a small way I can help to encourage the members to build on what they already do so effectively."

Flying Angel Centre celebrates 25 years

A number of events were held to celebrate 25 years of welcome and ministry in the Mission to Seafarers' Flying Angel Centre at Belfast Docks.

A Service of Thanksgiving was held in St Anne's Cathedral on October 13 at which the guest preacher was Secretary General of Mission to Seafarers, Canon Andrew Wright.

The Mission also hosted the Northern Ireland film premier of 'Capt Phillips' in the Strand Cinema on October 18, while an Open Day was held at The Flying Angel Centre on November 16.



Kieran, Roger and Fiona Thompson visiting Hilary, a boy they sponsor through the charity Compassion.

Sabbatical in East Africa is a journey to another world

By the Rev Roger Thompson, Rector, Cairncastle & Craigshill

'Bwana asifiwe!' is Swahili for 'Praise the Lord!' and I certainly am grateful to God for the opportunity to travel to East Africa with my wife Fiona and teenage sons Kieran and Nathan.

Last summer's trip formed part of my sabbatical from parish ministry and was a long-awaited return visit, since Fiona and I first met in Tanzania in 1987 when we were both CMS Mission Partners.

We joined a Work and Witness team from Larne charity Kids4school. In partnership with local churches, the organisation sponsors 650 primary school children in the Dodoma area. The team visited seven rural schools over two weeks, taking assemblies, RE and English lessons, playing games and distributing books and sports equipment.

It was quite a shock seeing how under-equipped the schools were – with class-sizes of 70 to 100 children, few desks and even fewer text books. Yet many of the teachers were achieving amazing results, and the children were full of life! Kieran and Nathan loved meeting them and were a great asset to our team - playing guitar and taking football and even rugby with the older boys.

In Arusha, northern Tanzania, we visited a little boy named Hilary who we sponsor via

the charity Compassion. By a remarkable 'God-incidence,' the day we visited was his 10th birthday! We met his minister and project leaders, called at his school and visited the tiny house, set in a small coffee plantation, where Hilary lives with his grandparents.

After a holiday in Zanzibar Fiona and the boys flew home, while I went on to Kenya for a further three weeks CMSI placement in All Saints' Cathedral, Nairobi. I was greatly blessed by my time here – from the moment I arrived at the Cathedral to witness the many hundreds of worshippers, including 800 children, 500 teens, 1,500 young adults and 1,700 seniors, and the rich variety of services.

I visited the slum communities at Kibera and Kayole, where local Christians have been working in partnership with All Saints' Cathedral and CMS Ireland for 20 years through the Urban Development Programme. It was a great privilege to be welcomed here, and to see the amazing transformation that has taken place in contexts of social deprivation that I found unutterably shocking.



The Rev Roger Thompson during his sabbatical in East Africa with the Rev Samuel Njoroge.



Dancers at a teen service in a church in East Africa.

an equally inspiring church community in the heart of the slum. The problems are enormous – overcrowding, unemployment, malnourishment, poor sanitation, HIV and other illnesses, addictions and lack of infrastructure.

Meeting parish evangelist Moses Musumba I was overwhelmed by the signs of God's kingdom growing here "like a root out of dry ground" [Isaiah 53:2]. Despite the abject poverty, Moses testified to the many strengths in the community – strong social bonds, hospitality and openness to God.

As in Soweto the church was both speaking and living the good news of Jesus - providing nursery schools, vocational training and a micro-finance scheme.

All four of us have been profoundly affected by the people we met in East Africa - it was both encouraging and challenging to see their commitment, faith, perseverance and generous spirits. I have returned to parish ministry in Cairncastle and Craigyhill refreshed and with a renewed determination to serve Jesus in Mission, both locally and globally.



A typical class is made up of 70-100 pupils.

My guide, Project Manager Louise Githire, brought me to Soweto, Kayole, saying: "Come with me to another world." In 1992 several slum communities in Nairobi were forcibly evicted. The Cathedral Provost championed their cause until the government provided land at Kayole to which they were relocated. Each household was given a plot of land measuring just 25 x 50 feet – but there was no infrastructure whatsoever.

The Urban Development Programme has sponsored children from the slums through school and college. Other projects have addressed areas of community need - brick-built homes; toilet and washrooms; a school and community centre; water supplies and medical care.

For Lucy Irungu, mentoring and educating the young was always a priority – and to that end she took 25 girls and four boys into her own home – alongside seven children of her own!

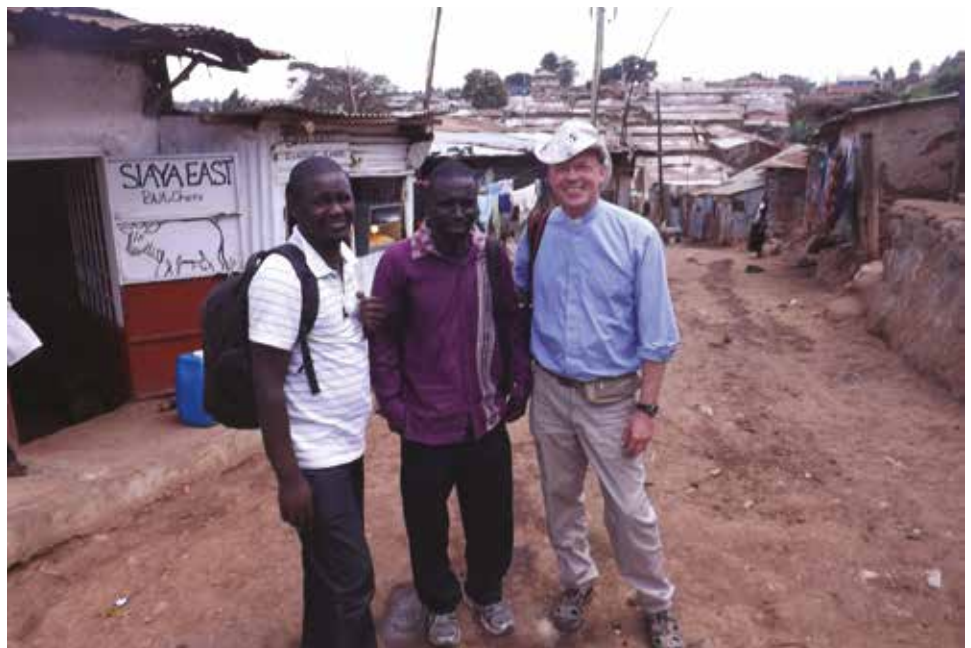
School principal John Omondi was one of the children Lucy took under her wing. "I can never repay the debt I owe to this community so now I work hard to make sure the next generation has the best possible education," John said. I was impressed by the progress of the school – with maximum use being made of scant resources, and plans to expand further to gain government registered status.



Shanty housing in Soweto, Kayole.

At the Church of the Resurrection of our Lord, where I was honoured to be invited to preach the following Sunday, the same spirit of faith, hope and hard work prevailed, centred on a vibrant worshipping community.

All Saints' Cathedral also supports church communities in Kibera - the largest slum in Africa – where half a million people live in conditions of indescribable poverty. I visited the parish of St Jerome and found



Roger Thompson with Kibera Evangelist Moses Musumba, centre.

New book 'tells the story of the church'

'The Church of Ireland – An Illustrated History' was launched by the Archbishop of Armagh Richard Clarke in St Anne's Cathedral on December 3.

In a foreword to the 400-page book the Archbishops of Armagh and Dublin state: "This volume comprises the work of over 60 historians, editors and photographers from all over Ireland with a diverse range of interests and approaches.

"Each tells the story of the Church in his or her own way and the variety of this material reflects the diversity within the Church of Ireland itself ... This book achieves the remarkable task of covering every parish or union/group of parishes, with illustrations of over two thirds of all the churches."

The Connor section of the book includes a foreword by the Bishop of Connor and a history of the diocese written by the Dean of Connor, the Very Rev John Bond.



Presenting Canon George Irwin and his wife Deirdre with a gift for 25 years service in St Mark's, Ballymacash, are Kaye Somerville and Hilary Morrison.

25 years recognised in Ballymacash

In December Canon George Irwin celebrated the 25th anniversary of his appointment as rector of St Mark's Church, Ballymacash.

He came to Ballymacash from his previous incumbency in Movilla Parish, Newtownards, on December 2 1988.

Since then he has seen many changes, not least in the fabric of the church which has just completed a major refurbishment of both the church and parish halls.

Two of the original parochial nominators, Kaye Somerville and Hilary Morrison, paid tribute to Canon Irwin and a presentation was made to him and his wife Deirdre.

Canon Irwin, who is Chairman of the Lisburn Christian Aid Committee, will be going to Zimbabwe on March 21 for a 10 day visit with a group from Christian Aid Ireland.



Cathedral music tutor Catherine Harper's enthusiasm is infectious as pupils from three north Belfast schools sing at the launch of St Anne's cross community Choir School in November.

Music reaches heart of the community

St Anne's Cathedral echoed with the joyful sound of dozens of young voices raised in song at the launch of its cross community Choir School.

Pupils from Edenbrooke Primary, Sacred Heart Boys' Primary and Cliftonville Integrated took part in the launch on November 5.

St Anne's is aiming to build a new cross community Boys' Choir by forming a strong musical relationship with the local schools on the pattern of St Anne's Cathedral in Leeds. The Cathedral's professional singing tutors are now teaching singing in the three schools daily.

This musical outreach into the community will not only train children so they may one day be part of the Cathedral choir, but it will take the Cathedral's musical expertise into the community of which it is a part

The Dean of St Anne's, the Very Rev John Mann, said: "I believe St Anne's should not only have an open door to the people of Belfast, but an intent to take what we have been given in abundance to share with everyone – and especially with children.

"The Choir School project is close to my heart and will happen because of the vision of our musicians, the enthusiasm of the schools and the faith and courage of the Cathedral Board to resource it."

Jonny Manning, principal of Edenbrooke, said: "We are excited about the amazing opportunity that the Cathedral singing project will give our pupils both musically and educationally."

Principal of Sacred Heart, Patricia Quinn, said: "I would like to thank the Dean for

offering Sacred Heart Primary School this marvellous opportunity and hope that the boys flourish from this experience."

Brenda McMullen, principal of Cliftonville Integrated, said: "We are very privileged to have been selected and welcome the musicians into Cliftonville with open arms."

At the launch, there were gasps from the children when they walked into the vastness of the Cathedral and realized this was where they would be singing. They truly rose to the occasion as, conducted by Cathedral singing tutor Catherine Harper, they gave a beautiful rendition of an African version of Incey Wincey Spider!

Around 60 primary school children took part in the launch – just a tenth of the number the project will reach. Boys from the three schools sang in their first full service in St Anne's at Christmas. Boys from all schools will be welcome to audition when the choir is being recruited.



At the launch of the Choir School are, from left: Dean John Mann, Catherine Harper, Dame Mary Peters, Dave Stevens (Master of the Choristers), Patricia Quinn, and the Rev Martin Magill, PP, Sacred Heart.

CBE for pioneering clinical geneticist

Professor Patrick Morrison, a parishioner of St John's Parish, Malone, was awarded a CBE in the Queen's New Year Honours list.

Professor Morrison is a consultant clinical geneticist, with a special interest in cancer genetics, at the Northern Ireland Regional Genetics Service at Belfast's City Hospital. He holds honorary professorships in Human Genetics from Queen's University and the University of Ulster.

He was awarded the CBE for services to healthcare in Northern Ireland.

Professor Morrison, 50, is married to Anne and is father to Richard and Peter. He grew up in Ballymacash where he attended St Mark's Parish Church, where his parents Hilary and Jean still worship.

He said he was surprised and honoured to receive the CBE. "I'm sure it is for all the work I've done for patients with difficult genetic disorders over the last 25 years here," he said. "I introduced the concept of preventative surgery for patients with hereditary thyroid cancer based on DNA testing in 1990 in a family from County Antrim, and set up our familial cancer service in 2000."

Professor Morrison said in the early days people were reluctant to have preventative surgery because they felt it was too radical or too frightening, but things had changed.

"Since Angelina Jolie had her preventative surgery for hereditary breast cancer last year, we've been inundated with enquiries although already nearly 2,000 people have been tested for hereditary breast cancer genes in Northern Ireland over the last 12 years and several hundred carriers have had early diagnosis and preventative screening," he explained.

"I also run clinics for patients with terrible neurological disorders including Huntington disease and different types of ataxia and muscular dystrophy."

Professor Morrison said his research had helped patients greatly.

"My CBE was a great honour but as I came into work on the morning after the news was published, my clinic in Royal Maternity Hospital on Tuesday December 31 had eight ladies all of whom received bad news about the pregnancies they were carrying.

"That, along with the three urgent ward referrals early that morning in the children's hospital sorting out all sorts of problems, quickly meant that my head was back to normal size within minutes of entering the hospital – the coal face of the NHS is a great humbler."



Professor Patrick Morrison CBE.

He said his was a great job to do. "A large part of it is reassurance, when we can tell people they don't have a particular gene. But if we find they do, we can take steps to prevent illness occurring. In some cases, like Huntington's, there is no cure, but we can help people to prepare better for the future."

Professor Morrison added: "I always think everyone entering the hospital is under great stress and pressure and the least anyone in my position can do is to shake hands, say hello and try and explain simply what is happening as often reassurance is all patients need from a caring professional."

Professor Morrison, who plays piano and enjoys reading and listening to music in his spare time, is looking forward to receiving his Honour at Buckingham Palace.

New CAP centre in Ballymoney helps families manage debt

A new CAP (Christians Against Poverty) Centre has opened in St Patrick's Parish Church, Ballymoney.

The 22-strong CAP team began taking appointments in November. Centre Manager Beth Thompson said: "We

are hoping to use the CAP formula to make a difference in people's lives in our community."

The branch launched its 'Don't Wait' campaign following news that nine million people are suffering with debt with just a fifth actually seeking help. [Money Advice Service, November 27].

"A lot of people just don't realise that free help is available," said Beth. "It can be hard to admit help is needed but debt is very difficult to escape without professional assistance.

"This campaign is about taking that first step, knowing no one will pass judgement. We just want to look forward to the future."

Beth works from the centre in St Patrick's Parish Church. For more info visit www.capuk.org or call 0800 328 0006



CAP Centre Manager Beth Thompson (centre) with members of her team in Ballymoney.



Cathedral librarian Paul Gilmore and Dean's Vicar the Rev Canon Denise Acheson with the CS Lewis book.

Book records impact of work of CS Lewis

Belfast Cathedral marked the 50th anniversary of the death of Belfast-born CS Lewis by opening a new book chronicling reflections on the impact of Lewis' work by the general public.

'CS Lewis' Chapter One' invites people to record how they have been influenced by the renowned author in a specially commissioned leather-bound book.

Cathedral Librarian Paul Gilmore explained: "We have called it CS Lewis' Chapter One because Lewis saw death as beginning 'Chapter One of that great story.'

"This is about celebrating his enduring legacy and that is why people are invited to contribute a line or an essay, a comment or a quotation, which captures for them how Lewis' legacy has enriched their lives and fed their imagination."

The Bishop of Connor, the Rev Alan Abernethy was among the first to pen his thoughts in the book. He wrote: "The writings of C S Lewis have been a constant inspiration and challenge to me on my journey of faith with Jesus.

"The following is a profound challenge: To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you."

St Katharine's Harvest with a difference!

At Harvest, St Katharine's, Belfast, is decorated with non-perishable food items which have gone to others in greater need.

Last October, gifts of tinned and packet foods were donated to The North Belfast Food Bank (Trussell Trust).

The rector, the Rev Canon William Taggart, said: "We in St Katharine's have been supporting the Food Bank from its conception with a 'food box' at the back of the church for parishioners to put items into weekly."

Irish classes popular in St George's Parish

St George's Parish, Belfast, is demonstrating that the Irish language is alive and well in the Church of Ireland through a variety of services and activities.

The church, which in December hosted the Annual Civic Carol Service with the support of Cumann Gaelach na hEaglaise (The Irish Guild of the Church) has been running weekly classes in Irish in its hall.

The classes, under tutor Niall MacLochlainn, and funded by the Ultacht Trust, are now in their fourth session, with 30 students in the current class.

The Rev Hayden Foster, assistant priest at St George's, said: "We have had a few Irish language services over the past five years and there has always been a big crowd. There is a great ecumenical content to the services."

The success of these services demonstrated a need for a bilingual prayer book, and the Ultacht Trust provided the funding. Cumann Gaelach na hEaglaise launched the bilingual services book, 'Holy Communion and Other Services of the Church of Ireland' at the Carol Service in St George's in December. At this, the Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev Alan Abernethy, gave a blessing in Irish and the Lord Mayor, Máirtín Ó Muilleoir, read a lesson.

Dáithí Ó Maolchoille, Chair of the Irish Guild of the Church, said: "The parish of St George's should be rightly proud of their tremendous efforts to promote the greater use of Irish in their services. We also wish to commend Bishop Alan Abernethy on giving the blessing in Irish."

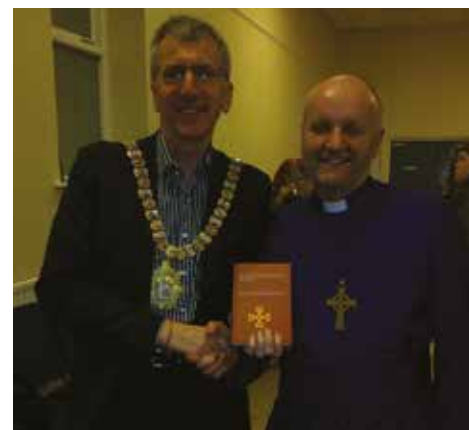
Hayden, who was formerly rector of Whitehouse and St Ninian Parishes, but has now retired, does not speak Irish although he is learning. His wife Maire is a fluent Irish speaker.

"I was a rector in the south of Ireland and managed a National School. By law we had to push our teachers and pupils to have Irish, yet I was managing the school and did not speak it," he said.

"I think it is important that the world sees that we do have an Irish tradition in the Church of Ireland and when we take services here in Irish they are Church of Ireland services. There is also an aspect of reconciliation to this."

Irish language services in St George's are held at 3pm on the first Sunday of each month, and take the form of Compline or Evening Prayer. The classes are held every Wednesday from 6-7pm and are aimed at beginners, with students assessed as they progress. Anyone who is interested in getting involved is welcome to come along any Wednesday.

"There is a growing interest in learning Irish among the Protestant community," said Hayden.



The Bishop of Connor and the Lord Mayor of Belfast launch the new bi-lingual prayer book at a Carol Service in Irish in St George's.



Irish language students who attend classes in St George's Parish Church, Belfast, with tutor Niall MacLochlainn.



Some of the 'brides' show off the beautiful wedding dresses from bygone decades which were modelled at the 'Wedding Dresses Through the Ages' event in St Colmanell's, Ahoghill.

42 brides walk up the aisle in Ahoghill!

Forty-two wedding dresses from nine decades were modelled in St Colmanell's Parish Church, Ahoghill, during an innovative fund raising event.

The 'Wedding Dresses through the Ages' extravaganza was a unique insight into how bridal fashion has changed in every decade since the early 1930s.

There were dresses from four generations of the same family married in 1934, 1957, 1972 and 2012. There were classic dresses, dresses with trains, homemade dresses, short and long, white and coloured dresses - all reflecting the different stage of life the bride was at when she married.

The scene was set at a reception with a display of wedding photographs of all the brides along with anecdotes of their big day. The brides entered to a selection of wedding music played on the church organ by Nigel Wilson.

A packed St Colmanell's was specially lit for this evening of nostalgia and was a memorable setting for the finale in which a model from each of the nine decades walked down the aisle as a piper played 'Highland Cathedral.'

Eighty people were involved organising the show and there was a great spirit of fun and of working together. The event raised more than £2,500 for the parish's building fund.

The rector of St Colmanell's, the Rev Gary

Millar said: "The thought of more than one bride arriving at the church door at the same time is any rector's nightmare but when 42 brides arrive and there is only one groom - now there's a problem!"

He added: "This was a thoroughly enjoyable evening, a trip down memory lane and loads of hard work."

The models enjoyed the event too, as their comments afterwards indicate:

"The buzz and excitement in the church hall was almost like a real wedding morning... The smell of perfume and flowers in the air, a stitch here and there, veils and dresses pinned and fixed." Penny

"I found the wedding dress experience to be absolutely wonderful. It took me right back to my wedding day." Maxine

"A wonderful evening of fun and fellowship. It was a joy to share in so many family memories and to hear mums, daughters and granddaughters share stories of their special wedding days!" Amanda

"I felt really proud and special to be asked to wear two beautiful wedding dresses, one from 1950s and the other from my own generation. I hope the owners enjoyed watching as much as I enjoyed wearing the dresses." Grainne

Bicentenary of St Saviour's, Connor

St Saviour's Parish Church, Connor, has celebrated its bicentenary.

The present church was consecrated in 1813 but the site is much older, dating back to the fourth century when it was a monastic site. To mark the occasion the parish organised a number of events including a Scottish Ceilidh night; a historical talk by Roland Spottiswoode; and a Stew Night with entertainment by Matthew Warwick.

That evening a bicentenary cake was cut by the Rev Ian Magowan, rector of St Saviour's, and the Rev Sam Jones, a previous rector.

To conclude the celebrations a special Service of Thanksgiving was held on October 6 led by the rector. The guest speaker was the Rt Rev Alan Harper OBE, former Bishop of Connor and Archbishop of Armagh. This was well attended by local dignitaries including Joan Christie, Lord Lieutenant of County Antrim and the Lord Mayor of Ballymena, as well as clergy, friends and members of the congregation.



The Rev Sam Jones (previous rector) and the present rector of St Saviour's, Connor, the Rev Ian Magowan, cutting the St Saviour's 200th anniversary cake.

St Barts' light party

On All Saints' Day, November 3, children from St Bartholomew's Parish in Stranmillis were treated to a 'Light Party.'

After enjoying games the children made take-home crafts reflecting the theme of light, and thought about how they should be people through whom the light of God should shine. During worship they were encouraged to pray for themselves and any issues that concerned them.

Bishop inspired by Christians from all over the world

The Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev Alan Abernethy, attended the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Busan, Korea, in November.

The Bishop was one of 3,000 delegates. He was asked to attend by the Standing Committee of the General Synod of the Church of Ireland, as nominated by the Commission for Christian Unity and Dialogue.

During the Assembly, Bishop Alan was elected to the WCC Central Committee to represent the Church of Ireland. On his return home, he said: "It was a privilege to have been in Busan for the 10th WCC Assembly. The inspiration of being with Christians from all over the world, to worship, study and share friendship together was very special.

"To be disturbed by some of their stories living the faith in some very difficult circumstances. To be challenged to recommit myself to work and pray for the unity of Christ's church for which he prayed."

Bishop Alan wrote daily reports during the Assembly. Extracts from these give a flavour of his experiences in Busan.

Day One: My body clock is struggling as I have lost nine hours somewhere. Highlights were a presentation on HIV/Aids and a reflection on the theology of victims modelled and incarnated by Jesus.

Day two: For lunch I visited a 'Pizza Hut' and no it wasn't a pizza but spaghetti! The afternoon included a regional meeting of European delegates and an ecumenical conversation about

theological education and ecumenical implications.

Day three / four: The cultural mix, denominational variation and the geographical spread makes our morning bible study discussions fascinating.

In the evening I had the joy of sharing a Eucharist for All Saint's Day. The Primate of the Anglican Church Of Korea, Paul Guen-Sang Kim, presided and the Archbishop of Canterbury preached.

Tomorrow I am preaching in Busan Cathedral and the Bishop of Busan, Onesimus D S Dark, is celebrating Holy Communion.

Day five: We were called to worship by Korean drums - quite a contrast to church bells. The morning plenary had as its focus Mission. It highlighted the common challenges and opportunities for mission in light of global developments.

After lunch there were 'Mandang Workshops.' There were 22 to choose from. I attended 'Stop Climate Change Now! Save people's environment and livelihoods.'

Day six: We began today with a call to worship on the gentle beating of a gong. We sang a beautiful Kyrie from the Russian Orthodox, a song in English and Tuvaluan and a joyful feet-tapping song from Namibia.



Bishop Alan at Busan Cathedral where he preached on November 3. He is pictured with Ka Hyun McKenzie Shin and Professor Esther Mombo of Kenya.

I took this afternoon off to rest. This is a wonderful privilege and joy to be here but it is exhausting.

Day seven: The bible study was focused on the question of justice, 1Kings 21:1-22. In the context of different cultures it was fascinating and disturbing. Discussing this with people from around the globe, especially those who live with poverty and hunger, made the scriptural probing all the more intriguing.

Later, at the final meeting to elect the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, I was elected to this committee. I am delighted to represent the Church of Ireland in this way and I know I will find it stimulating and challenging.

Day eight: The theme today was 'paths to peace.' There are people in my group from Syria, Palestine and parts of Africa who live in a war zone and are wrestling with peace. There were others who talked of murder and crime in places where there isn't war and that is not peace. Peace is not just absence of war and conflict but something deep within the human spirit.

Day nine: I have the first meeting of the Central Committee this evening and then to bed for a few hours sleep before I begin my journey home.



Ruby celebrates her 100th birthday!

Congratulations to Ruby McMichael, a parishioner of St Brigid's, Mallusk, who was 100-years-old on December 3.

Ruby, who now lives in Jordanstown Care Home, was joined by her extensive family for a birthday party. Among the guests were Ruby's rector, the Rev Bill Boyce, and the Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev Alan Abernethy who are pictured (left) with Ruby.

Ruby was born in Co Tyrone and on leaving primary school she entered household service with the local estate owner. She later trained as a nurse at the Tyrone and Fermanagh Hospital in Omagh where she met her husband James in 1936.

Ruby and Jim later settled in Carnmoney where they joined St Brigid's. Jim passed away in 2001.

Christian mentoring topic at CPAS event

The first Saturday day conference organised by the new CPAS Ireland Steering group was attended by 38 people on October 19 and held in Christ Church Parish Halls, Lisburn.

The Rev James Lawrence, CPAS Leadership Principal, led the day on the theme of 'mentoring.' During four sessions, he unpacked the meaning of Christian mentoring, the qualities of mentors and mentees, and how to set up mentoring in a parish or organisation. There were opportunities for group discussions. Any organisation, church or diocese can contact James Lawrence directly at CPAS for further information or training.

The next day conference is on March 27 in Lisburn on the theme of 'Keeping watch over ourselves in leadership.' This will be led by Graham Archer, CPAS Director of Ministry. For details visit the CPAS website or contact the chairman, the Rev Paul Dundas, on 0774 0589465.



Florence Ringland, 95, who knit the Dean of Belfast's Black Santa scarf, enjoys a visit from Dean Mann.

Florence delighted to see Black Santa!

Belfast's Black Santa, the Very Rev John Mann, took a break from his daily sitout on the steps of St Anne's Cathedral in December to visit a very special lady.

Florence Ringland, aged 95, began knitting a new scarf for the Dean when she first heard he was leaving St John's Malone for St Anne's, and had it finished in time for his first sitout in December 2011.

Since then Dean Mann has worn it with pride every day of the sitout on the Cathedral steps and for numerous photo shoots and television interviews!

Delighted to see the Dean, Florence commented: "I'm glad you are still wearing the scarf as long as it does the job!"

The 2013 Black Santa sitout raised £196,000 which was distributed to 205 charities at the annual Good Samaritans' Service in St Anne's on February 2.



Ladies and gents from the Church of the Good Shepherd, Monkstown, and St Oliver Plunkett's Parish, Lenadoon, who were involved in the knitted Christmas Tree project.

Knitted trees a real message of peace

Members of the Church of the Good Shepherd, Monkstown, and their friends in St Oliver Plunkett's Parish, Lenadoon, crafted two unique Christmas trees for the festive season.

The ladies of the two churches, one joint Church of Ireland / Methodist and one Roman Catholic, spent months knitting green squares which were fashioned into two full sized trees!

Priest in Charge of the Church of the Good Shepherd, the Rev Arlene Moore said the trees carried the real message of peace and goodwill at Christmas.

After Christmas the squares were reshaped into blankets and distributed to charities.

The knitted trees were the idea of Mrs Joan Trew, a member of the Church of the Good Shepherd Craft and Fellowship Group which meets on Thursdays.

The church has strong links with the RC parish of St Oliver Plunkett's in Lenadoon. During the summer the Thursday Club had been over helping St Oliver Plunkett's Gardening Club prepare the grounds for Feile an Phobal, the West Belfast Festival, when the knitting project was mentioned.

"It was so enthusiastically embraced by those present that we decided to work on it together," said Arlene. "As a result knitting

needles were clacking all over Lenadoon!"

The same enthusiasm for the project was shown by the people of Church of the Good Shepherd and the surrounding area.

"Exchange visits continued with people going from one side of the city to the other all through the tensions and riots of the summer, bags of knitted squares in hand, in at least forty shades of green," Arlene added.

Seven months and over 2,000 squares and hundreds of knitted decorations later, one tree stood in St Oliver Plunkett's and one in Church of the Good Shepherd. Eglantine Timber provided wood for the frames which were put together by members of both churches. "It truly has been a joint endeavour knitting not only the squares but people's lives together," said Arlene.



Curate's study included in new publication

A study by the curate of Jordanstown Parish, the Rev Jonny Campbell-Smyth, has been included in a new publication.

The first of the new Braemor Studies Series was launched in October.

The series of publications features the best of the final year dissertations by ordinands at CITI.

Jonny's study 'New Monasticism – a Catalyst for the Church of Ireland to Connect with Society,' was one of the first three to be published.

The booklets from Church of Ireland Publishing and are aimed at broadening the reach of contemporary theological debate emanating from CITI

The Bishop of Connor's Lenten Talks 2014

The theme for the Bishop's Lenten Talks 2014 will be

Discipleship and Ministry

The talks will be in two parts, held in three different locations across the diocese. Please see details below.

✂ =====

Booking Form

I wish to book for the forthcoming Lenten talks

Name: _____

Parish: _____

Contact No: _____

DISCIPLESHIP

Tuesday 4 March - Bushmills Parish Centre ☐

Monday 10 March - Jordanstown Parish Centre ☐

Tuesday 18 March - Christ Church, Lisburn (Church) ☐

MINISTRY

Tuesday 25 March - Bushmills Parish Centre ☐

Tuesday 1 April - Jordanstown Parish Centre ☐

Monday 7 April - Christ Church, Lisburn (Church) ☐

Please return to:

Rosemary Patterson, Bishop's Secretary,
Church of Ireland House, 61-67 Donegall Street,
Belfast BT1 2QH. Tel. (028) 9082 8870; email:
rpatterson@diocoff-belfast.org



ENGAGE CONNOR YOUTH
PRESENTS:

"THE EVENT"

FOR ALL YOUNG PEOPLE
AGED 11 AND OVER

Sat 29/3/14 *

7pm @ St Patrick's Parish Hall,
Ballymena

- Youth involvement and exciting news about future events!
- Mark Ferguson Band!
- Pizza!
- Interviews with local celebs..

Count Your Blessings

As Lent approaches our thoughts often turn to what we can give up. However Lent should also be a time to reflect, pray and be thankful for the goodness of God. 'Count Your Blessings' is Christian Aid's Lent resource which contains daily reflections to help inspire people as they give thanks for God's blessings in their lives. This year, 'Count Your Blessings' focuses on the story of Wahid Fatir Mohammed Babakr and his family, from Zanan Bchuk. Like much of northern Iraq, this village has experienced decades of conflict. After fleeing to safety during Saddam Hussein's violent campaign against the Kurdish people, Wahid returned to find devastation so great he couldn't even identify his own home. Now, with the help of Christian Aid partner REACH, the village has been transformed. Through the rebuilding of homes and the building of a new reservoir, tarmac road and greenhouses, Wahid and the Zanan Bchuk community have been able to

create new and better lives for themselves. Wahid's story can be read in the 'Count Your Blessings' leaflet and, by joining us on this journey, you can help bring an end to poverty for people like Wahid and his family. Starting on Ash Wednesday, 'Count Your Blessings' leads you through 40 thought-provoking reflections, uplifting stories and practical actions which can be taken in solidarity with the world's poorest people. A special version is also available for children and for those aged 16-25. Christian Aid is also launching a 'Count Your Blessings' app. Available from Google Play or the Apple Store, the app delivers these daily reflections straight to your smart phone, iPad or tablet. More information about these, and Christian Aid's other Lent resources, is available by contacting Christian Aid Ireland on 028 9064 8133 or by visiting www.christianaid.ie/lent. So this year, rather than giving up treats for Lent, why not also think about what you can give?

Make Lent count



40 inspirational reflections to help you to pray, act and give, delivered straight to your smart phone or tablet.

This Lent, download the **free app** – search '**Count Your Blessings**' in your app store.



christianaid.ie/lent

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