Parishes urged to support Baby Basics

Connor Diocese’s North Belfast Centre of Mission has launched an initiative aimed at supporting families in need by providing baby items.

Working from the Connect Base in Shankill Road, Baby Basics Belfast is a volunteer-led project aiming to support mothers and families who are struggling to meet the financial and practical burden of looking after a new baby.

It is the first in Ireland and is part of a growing network of Baby Basics centres across the UK.

Baby Basics Belfast is led by Diocesan Children’s Project Officer Jill Hamilton and Lead Pioneer Evangelist in the Centre for Mission, Sister Karen Webb.

Jill said: “Baby Basics Belfast works alongside health professionals from local Sure Start and Health Centres who refer families in need. We are then able to support the families by providing them with essential equipment, clothing and toiletries.” Baby Basics Belfast works in partnership with local churches and relies on donations from congregations.

“We ask participating parishes to support us for a month at a time by highlighting Baby Basics during the Sunday Service and asking the congregation to donate items that can be passed on to families in need,” Jill said. “Participating churches can request someone to come along to their church service or church group to explain what Baby Basics is all about and will be provided with leaflets containing all the relevant information about what to donate.”

One of the first parishes to step up to the four-week Baby Basics challenge was Glenavy, and Jill went to pick up the donations on March 21. “The congregation was so generous and donated an amazing array of items from the ‘shopping list’ provided,” Jill said.

A presentation of donations took place at Glenavy Parish’s Open Doors lunch. Open Doors is a monthly senior citizens morning which attracts around 80 ladies and gents.

Knitting and crocheting are among the many activities, and these nimble fingered ladies donate much of their work to good causes including Church Army Homeless shelters and premature baby units in hospitals. Jill said they were delighted to knit for Baby Basics.

“We received two big bags full of blankets, hats, booties, cardigans, coats etc, all beautifully handmade with love and skill,” said Jill.

The rector, the Rev John Rutter, presented the donations from the parish and Mrs Paddi Totten presented the knitted items from Open Doors.

Through Baby Basics, families receive a Moses basket or other container filled with essential items for mother and baby, and the project will also include items for dad and other siblings in the family if appropriate.

Jill stressed: “The health professional who understands the needs of the family is an essential link in the chain to ensure families receive items that are useful to them.”

Any parish interested in being involved with Baby Basics is asked to contact Jill Hamilton at jill@connor.anglican.org or Karen Webb at kazwebb@ntlworld.com.

Online resources just a click away

The Church of Ireland website now includes an area specially dedicated to sharing useful information with parishes. Called ‘Parish Resources,’ it has been designed with parishes in mind.

Resources are categorised by topic, such as ‘Select Vestry,’ ‘Parish Finances,’ and ‘People & Community,’ for example.

A spokesperson said: “This addition to the website is an important part of the Church’s longer term strategy. Our aim is that those who give faithfully of their energy, time and skills in service to the Church will find support and relevant information to help them in their vital roles.”

Get there by visiting www.ireland.anglican.org/parish-resources.

Vintage tea time!

A great time was had by all the ladies and gents who attended a Vintage Tea Party organised by the Lower Shankill Ministry Team on March 13.

There was an excellent turnout of parishioners for this event held in St Michael’s Parish Hall, providing an opportunity for the team to ask their senior citizens what type of activities and support the church in Lower Shankill can provide.
Manchester - terror is a dreadful weapon

The chaos, the confusion, the fear, the carnage are difficult to comprehend. How can anyone deliberately cause such pain and suffering to others?

The Manchester terror attack has left many grieving, many having to live with life changing injuries and many others with memories they will find hard to live with. Terror is a dreadful weapon of devastation and leaves its scars forever.

Our prayers are with all the victims of this atrocity and we pray that those who plan and carry out such acts will find ways of making peace.

In the midst of the bewildering scenes we are also grateful for the professionalism of the emergency services and hospital staff. There were also many random acts of kindness which give hope to the belief that darkness cannot extinguish the light. This has been expressed by the people of Manchester in their response as they have stood together refusing to give in to hatred and terror.

May we continue to live as those who are called to be light in the darkness and to be peacemakers.

Grace and peace to you,

The Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev Alan Abernethy, conducted a service of rededication on March 5 at the refurbished rectory in Ballymena Parish. This marked the culmination of more than 12 months of hard work and planning within the parish. Speaking on behalf of his family, the rector, the Rev Mark McConnell, thanked all concerned. "You have created both a wonderful home and a great place where we can share hospitality and be about God’s business together," Mark said.

There were a number of Connor winners in the Central Communications Board’s 2017 communications competition.

For the second year running, Belfast Cathedral picked up three awards. Connor Diocese was highly commended in the diocesan magazine category, and Ballymena Parish was runner-up for most innovative use of social media category.

St Anne’s Cathedral’s new website was awarded the top prize in the other/affiliated organisation websites category.

Awarding the Cathedral Digest first place in the other/affiliated organisation magazines category, the judges commented: “Strong layout, good amount of news and some interesting articles... An enjoyable read.”

The Dean of Belfast, the Very Rev John Mann, won the most engaging blog award.

As runner up in the most innovative use of social media (parish) category, Ballymena Parish was commended for: “A good use of photos and video ... numerous tabs; regular updating with over 650 followers, open to visitors but inwardly focused and a good explanation under ‘parish and clergy’ in the ‘About us’ section.”

The Connor diocesan magazine Connor Connections was commended in the diocesan magazines category for being “a clean and spacious design with good photos and news stories.”
Youth group helps change Derrick’s life

Just a couple of years ago, 13-year-old Derrick was collecting discarded plastic bottles to earn 12p a day on the streets of Kampala, Uganda.

Abaana has been partnering with local churches and other organisations for 19 years. It has built 13 schools in Uganda, and runs a number of children’s homes.

For Derrick, one of the highlights of the five-month tour was performing in Lisburn Cathedral and meeting the Cathedral’s Mettle Youth Group, who sponsor his place in an Abaana home.

The choir performed in the Cathedral on March 18, but Derrick had the chance to meet his friends in Lisburn when the choir called in for a couple of days in February.

Abaana is a charity based in Bangor. It was established by Scott Baxter, its Chief Executive, who was so moved by the poverty he encountered on a visit to Africa that he founded a charity giving hope to others, giving communities the tools to help solve their own problems.

Education is one of those tools and

Turn the clock forward less than 24 months, and Derrick is touring Ireland and England with the talented Abaana New Life Choir.

Neville Jones, the charity’s Assistant Director and a parishioner of Lisburn Cathedral, was involved in organising this, the charity’s first choir tour. He said Abaana’s sister organisation in Uganda helped identify the singers and drummers from all 13 Abaana schools.

On tour, the children were accompanied by 10 chaperones, four who travelled with them from Uganda. One of the local chaperones was 27-year-old Victoria Bell from Lisburn Cathedral, who took time out from her job as a teacher.

The children’s visit to Ireland caused great excitement among members of Mettle. Gareth Campbell, youth worker, said: “Three years ago Mettle decided they wanted to sponsor a child through Abaana. All the members now pay in every week, and they also organised a fundraiser which raised over £1,000!”

Meeting Derrick, the young people could see how his life has really been transformed. Due to family difficulties, Derrick ran away from home and walked three days to reach Kampala. He lived for three years on the streets, collecting plastic bottles, earning around 12p a day, just about enough to buy a chapatti (pancake).

In an interview for Connor Connections, Derrick spoke about his life then. “When I was on the streets I made some friends among the other children. They told me if I looked for plastic bottles I could sell them. They told me that I could look for food in dustbins.”

It was his friends who pointed Derrick in the direction of the programmes Abaana runs for street children.

“Some of my friends started to go. They said we could get a place in one of their homes and aunts and uncles will tell us about Jesus. You have to study a little bit too, but they said if you are a good boy you could get into the home.”

Derrick did indeed get a place in a home, and is now in P5 at Abaana’s New...
Choir wins hearts at The Hub!

The Hub Belfast welcomed the Abaana New Life Choir on Shrove Tuesday, February 28. Members won the hearts of all who were present at the home of the Church of Ireland and Methodist Chaplaincy at Queen’s University.

Abaana founder Scott Baxter spoke of the growing partnership between Abaana and The Hub following the visit in 2015 of a team of chaplaincy staff and students. This June (5th-18th), a second team visits Uganda to work with projects set up by Abaana and another local charity, Waakisa Ministries. Valerie Duff from Waakisa Ministries, a pregnancy crisis centre for Ugandan women, also attended on the day the Abaana Choir visited.

The children spent the afternoon in the Hub café, playing with the students, before enjoying pizza for tea along with the families and children of the Church of the Resurrection, the worshipping community at the heart of the chaplaincy.

The evening celebration itself was filled with songs, stories, and moving video content highlighting the great need in Uganda that Abaana and Waakisa are seeking to address.

Chaplain, the Rev Barry Forde, said: “It is a real privilege for us as a chaplaincy to work with an organisation such as Abaana. At the chaplaincy we work with young adults, many of whom live within the chaplaincy community, and all of whom go out each day to receive an education.

“We seek to grow the worship of God, communities of faith and a heart for reaching out to others. In Abaana, and indeed Waakisa, we have found locally based charities who are seeking to do the same for Ugandan children and young adults.”

Bangor Missionary Convention

The 81st Bangor Worldwide Missionary Convention takes place from August 18-29 with the theme: ‘You will be my witnesses.’

Most events will be held at Hamilton Road Presbyterian Church, Bangor.

Key speakers include Bishop Henry Orombi from Uganda. The Convention’s first main evening meeting will be held at St Anne’s Cathedral in Belfast on August 19 when Bishop Orombi will be joined by the Very Rev Dr Trevor Morrow with praise led by New Irish Arts.

For more information on all the events taking place during the convention, visit the website www.worldwidemission.org.
St Saviour’s Hall gets a new lease of life

The Parish Hall of St Saviour’s, Connor, has been given a new lease of life after being awarded funding from the NI Department for Communities.

Arlene Foster, then First Minister, and Paul Givan (former Communities Minister) announced last October that funding of £500,000 would be made available under a scheme to support improvement works for community halls across Northern Ireland.

The funding aimed at enabling community organisations in urban and rural areas to undertake minor works and improvements to their premises.

Mrs Foster said community halls brought immeasurable benefits to local people. “These halls are used by many community and voluntary organisations to provide vital services and are a place for local people to come together and strengthen relationships.”

Mr Givan said: “A Community Hall is much more than bricks and mortar for those who use them. They provide a gathering place where people can feel involved in their local community and supported in their lives.”

St Saviour’s, Connor, received a grant of £13,070 which has allowed the parish to paint the hall inside and out, replace the single glazed windows with double glazing throughout, and purchase and hang new curtains and stage curtains. The toilets have also been refurbished.

St Saviour’s Parish Hall after the work, funded by the NI Department of Communities grant, was carried out.

The rector, the Rev Ian Magowan, said: “It really is a tidy job. The double glazing is a great boost.”

The hall was hand built by parishioners in the 1970s, and the work funded by the grant means that it will be fit for purpose as a community hub for years to come.

Groups which use the hall on a regular basis include the ‘Women on Wednesday’ ladies group, the bowls club, a senior citizens’ group and the Young Farmers visited recently for their prize-giving.

Ian said: “It was not as if the hall was falling down but there was definitely work needed done. This will make it a much more comfortable environment for everyone who uses it, and the new windows, painted walls and curtains certainly enhance the appearance of the whole place.”

St Saviour’s Hall gets a new lease of life

CASC hosts mental health seminar

More than 20 clergy and other church leaders attended a seminar on issues surrounding mental health hosted by the Church of Ireland’s Church and Society Commission (CASC).

The Rev Dr Pat Mollan, Director of the Church’s Ministry of Healing at The Mount, Belfast, spoke on ‘Faith and Mental Health.’ Dr John Kyle, a GP, spoke on what he has learned through his experience. The third speaker was Lindsay Robinson, whose website campaigns for better support for maternal mental health matters.

Outgoing Chair of CASC, the Rev Adrian Dorrian, said the speakers were helping church leaders to be better equipped to help others in the future.

Windows dedicated

New stained glass window panels at St Mark’s, Ballymacash, were dedicated by the Rt Rev Alan Abernethy, Bishop of Connor, on February 26. They complete a series of panels depicting the winged lion, the symbol of St Mark’s gospel, designed by David Esler of Leadlines.

Window panels dedicated at the service were donated in loving memory of David and Peggy Duffin by their family Valerie, Joan and Frank; in loving memory of Adrian and Mary Roberts by their children Paul, Ralph and Kathy and by the parishioners of St Mark’s, Ballymacash.

Departure deferred

The Dean of Belfast, the Very Rev John Mann, who was due to take up a new post in England in May, has deferred his departure from St Anne’s Cathedral because his wife Helen is suffering from Guillain-Barré syndrome.

In a message in the May issue of the “Cathedral Digest,” Helen thanked everyone for their messages of love and support and said: “We are so grateful for the prompt diagnosis and excellent treatment I received, and are assured that recovery should eventually be complete.”

Members of the North Connor Clergy Wives Fellowship attended a fork supper held on March 6 in Dervock Rectory by kind invitation of the Rev John and Mrs Eleanor Anderson. Picture courtesy of the Coleraine Chronicle.
13 decades of love and service

This year Mothers’ Union in Ireland celebrates 130 years, 13 Decades of Love and Service. Events have been taking place in the 12 dioceses in Ireland.

In addition to a pilgrimage on the north coast (see separate story) Connor MU has lent its support to the Mothers’ and Toddlers’ group in St Patrick’s, Coleraine.

An Anniversary Notebook and a Book of 13 Prayers for Indoor Members have produced, and Connor MU members are also looking forward to planting a tree in the autumn.

Mid Belfast Social

Connor Mothers’ Union’s Mid Belfast Area held a social evening in St George’s Parish Church on St Comgall’s Day.

Liz Waring gave a short history of St Comgall, and the Belfast Branch of the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society performed and led dances.

Daphne Murphy recited poems and readings and there was singing from Janine Burnside before supper served by the members of St George’s branch.

Pilgrimage marks MU 130th anniversary

To mark the 130th year of Mothers’ Union in Ireland, a number of events have been held in Connor Diocese.

The major celebration - The Mothers’ Union Way - was a pilgrimage by All Ireland President Phyllis Grothier to visit members in all 12 dioceses.

Between May 12 and 14, Phyllis, accompanied by the Worldwide President, Lynne Temby, visited members in the dioceses of Clogher, Derry and Raphoe, Connor, Armagh and Down and Dromore.

On May 13, the Diocesan President of Derry and Raphoe, Mrs Mary Good, brought the Presidents to the bridge in Coleraine, the border between the two dioceses. Here the party was welcomed in the centre of the bridge by Connor Diocesan President Valerie Ash, Diocesan Chaplain, Archdeacon Stephen McBride, and the Mayor of Coleraine, Mrs Moira Hickey.

After meeting members from local branches, the Presidents travelled along the coast road to Ballintoy to meet more members and take part in a short service. From there the pilgrimage moved on to Holy Trinity in Ballycastle, where the first branch in Connor Diocese, Ramoan, is celebrating its 125th anniversary. The Parish Centre was packed with members eager to meet the presidents.

After tea, speeches, and the cutting of two cakes, many members took part in a Prayer Walk around Ballycastle.

The day ended with a short service in the church. Lynne Temby with passion about Mothers’ Union. As a memento of the day, Phyllis and Lynne were presented with framed photographs of Ballintoy showing the church and Rathlin Island.

Lady Eames speaker at Festival Service

The Annual Mothers’ Union Festival Service was held in St Anne’s Cathedral on April 2. Many branches from across the diocese were represented and brought their banners for the procession.

The speaker was Lady Christine Eames, and the theme was Faith in Action.

Lady Eames spoke of the work of the Mothers’ Union throughout the world and encouraged all members to feel part of the worldwide effort. The Bishop of Connor was present to enrol new office bearers for the diocese and the Archdeacon of Connor, the Ven Dr Stephen McBride, Connor MU Diocesan Chaplain, and Diocesan President Valerie Ash also took part.
Streetreach 2017 partners Glenavy

Connor Youth Council is partnering with Glenavy Parish for this year’s Streetreach running from July 4-7.

Streetreach is the Youth Council’s local mission opportunity for young people aged 15 and over. It aims to bless people and communities in the name of Jesus. This is achieved through partnering with parishes in the diocese to enable young people to serve locally and encourage a local parish in their own mission.

Christina Baillie, Diocesan Youth Officer, said: “We are really excited to be partnering with Glenavy Parish for this diocesan opportunity. Streetreach has had a massive impact for the young people who have taken part over the past two years when we partnered with churches in north Belfast.

“The opportunity has made connections across the diocese and really enhanced the community feeling amongst the young people. I want to thank the Rev John Rutter and the parish for agreeing to host the team over the summer.”

Application and information forms are available at http://connor.anglican.org/children-youth/youth/whats-coming-up/. Streetreach costs £25 with an option to fundraise an additional £25 for resources for the team. It is a residential experience with the team staying together, and this is included in the cost as well as meals for the duration.

Christina added: “We would invite any young people to apply, whether they attended last year or haven’t experienced anything like this before, all young people will be very welcome.”

For further information contact Christina on 07753 312405 or email: christinabaillie@connordiocese.org.

Catherine and Ciaran address Diocesan Council

Connor Youth Forum members Catherine and Ciaran shared eloquently with the Diocesan Council at its meeting on March 23.

They spoke about the importance of Youth Forum, inviting new members from parishes across the diocese and demonstrating that there are young people in the diocese willing to serve.

They highlighted opportunities which Youth Council events have given them as individuals leading to development in their faith as well as helping them make connections with other young people.

Christina Baillie, Diocesan Youth Officer, said: “We really appreciate Catherine and Ciaran coming along to share with the Diocesan Council how the youth activities within the diocese have impacted them as young people.

“We also want to thank the young people from Lisburn Cathedral and the Parishes of the Lower Shankill for contributing to a video which was played, outlining their engagement with events the Youth Council has organised. I sincerely appreciate the Diocesan Council engaging with what is on offer for young people and its continuing support.”

Youth Forum hosts event in Jordanstown

Connor Youth Forum hosted an event in Jordanstown on March 25 for other young people in the diocese to lead them through sessions, activities and share dinner.

There was a choice of seminars hosted by guest speakers and members of Youth Forum, as well as football, curry, freakshakes, a quiz and a session on identity, when the young people discussed issues they might not normally have the opportunity to talk about.

Diocesan Youth Officer Christina Baillie thanked all the young people involved in running the event, which was planned entirely by young people, and also adult contributors, Phil Howe, Graham Hare, Sam Neill, Stephen Whitten, Simon Henry and Sharon Hamill.
All set for Summer Madness!

The annual Summer Madness camp takes place from June 30–July 4 at Glenarm. To celebrate 30 years of this great festival, 30 campers from years gone by reflect on the Summer Madness Facebook page on their fondest memories of the camp.

They include our own Diocesan Youth Officer Christina Baillie, who remembers big smiles and closed eyes during photo sessions inside the tent when laughter was the order of the day, and the Rev Barry Forde, chaplain at Queen’s University, who bussed it to Enniskillen and after waiting for three hours trying to work out how to get to the camp at Castle Archdale ended up being chauffeured there in the back of a blacked-out RUC van!

Skills on display at Big Connor Contest!

Young people from across Connor Diocese put their sporting skills to the test in the Big Connor Contest organised by Engage Connor Youth Council on Saturday February 25.

Diocesan Youth Officer Christina Baillie described the contest, held in Glenavy Parish Halls, as ‘an amazing, competitive, intense, pizza filled, exhausting event.’

The young people were competing for the Big Connor Contest Shield and the competition attracted participants from Ballymena; Ahoghill; Lisburn Cathedral; Lambeg; Glenavy; St Peter’s, Belfast; Lower Shankill Parishes; All Saints’, Antrim; St Paul’s, Lisburn, and the Church of the Resurrection, Belfast.

During the day they pitched their skills against each other and tested their teamwork in dodgeball, uni-hoc, and volleyball, and battled to be the quickest group to “Escape the Room.”

The Youth Council ran all the fiercely contested sports with groups playing throughout the day, as well as a Chill Room with some space to play X-Box or enjoy a treat from the chocolate fountain.

The team from St Paul’s, Lisburn, was the overall winner, with Lisburn Cathedral and Lambeg in second and third places.

The winning team from St Paul’s, Lisburn.

Connor Youth Council is looking forward to Castlewellan

Connor Youth Council is looking forward to the annual residential weekend in Castlewellan from September 9–10.

Groups are invited to come along, whether it be a youth fellowship, Confirmation group or uniformed organisation. For more information contact Christina Baillie, Diocesan Youth Officer on 07753312405 or christinabaillie@connordiocese.org.

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St Patrick’s Event

The event, which welcomed invited schoolchildren on March 15 and 16, threw the doors open to families on the Friday, St Patrick’s Day, and Saturday, and closed with a special service on Sunday.

The place was buzzing on Friday and Saturday, with families taking the opportunity to learn more about Ireland’s patron saint in a fun and educational way. In the region of 1,000 people joined in over the three public days, with 300 schoolchildren attending in the first two days.

This amazing free exhibition and interactive story trail was organised by Connor Children’s Project Development Officer Jill Hamilton and Sister Karen Webb of the North Belfast Centre of Mission. They were supported by the Children’s Council and the Connor Development Team.

Patrick’s Mysterious Adventure was a family friendly event aimed at helping people of all ages to discover first-hand the adventurous life story of St Patrick. Actors re-enacted the tale from Patrick’s capture by Irish pirates to his return to serve the people of Ireland. The role of Patrick was admirably played by Ross Jonas of Play It By Ear, a Christian Drama group. Ross and

Hundreds of children flocked to Patrick’s Mysterious Adventure hosted by Connor Children’s Council in St Anne’s Cathedral.

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Not something you see every day! A Viking longboat “parked” outside St Anne’s Cathedral.

Hundreds flock to learn about Patrick’s Mysterious Adventure

The hard-working team which brought the tales of Patrick’s Mysterious Adventure to hundreds of children over five days in St Anne’s Cathedral.

Chris Neilands, standing, and Ross Jonas from Play it By Ear act out a scene from St Patrick’s life.

Bishop Alan has a laugh with volunteer Danielle McCullough, left, and Sister Karen Webb.

School pupils look for their snake picture, and right: The children get stuck into arts and crafts.
St Patrick’s Mysterious Adventure

The hard-working team which brought the tales of Patrick’s Mysterious Adventure to hundreds of children over five days in St Anne’s Cathedral.

Jill Hamilton and Karen Webb try out one of St Patrick’s boots for size!

The Vikings invaded Belfast on the Saturday of Patrick’s Mysterious Adventure.

St Patrick’s Mysterious Adventure concluded with a St Patrick’s themed all-age service on Sunday March 19.

Jill Hamilton said: “In hosting this event, our aim was to give visitors the opportunity to reconnect with the life story of St Patrick, discover more about him and be inspired by his faith and faithfulness to God.

“The event informed and educated visitors in an enjoyable and entertaining way about Ireland’s patron saint and encouraged people to come into St Anne’s Cathedral and experience something of the culture and early Christian faith as it dawned in Ireland.

The Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev Alan Abernethy, paid tribute to Jill, Karen and their entire team for organising what he described as an ‘amazing event.’

“There was an enormous amount of work put into this and the team achieved all its goals and more,” Bishop Alan said. “The volume of people who passed through St Anne’s to view the exhibition over the five days was fantastic. Well done to everyone.”
‘A breath of fresh air’ in north Belfast

Connect Base, the Diocese of Connor / Church Army North Belfast Centre of Mission in Shankill Road, was officially launched on February 8.

Mr Des Scott, Deputy Chief Executive of the Church Army, travelled from Sheffield for the opening. He said the Church Army was delighted to be part of the vision the diocese has for the area.

The opening was attended by the Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev Alan Abernethy, clergy from the Mid Belfast Rural Deanery, diocesan staff, and other representatives of the Church Army.

Connect Base moved into two units in the Spectrum Centre last September, and is the working base for Church Army Evangelists Karen Webb and Stephen Whitten, along with Connor Children’s Officer Jill Hamilton.

The premises have a sitting area, multi-purpose space, a kitchen, office space, and a relaxing prayer room. A pool table and games consuls are proving popular with young people who have been taking advantage of the drop-in nature of Connect Base.

Guests were welcomed to the launch by Lead Pioneer Evangelist Karen Webb who related stories demonstrating how the new centre is already impacting on lives of people living in the area.

“We have been encouraged by our churches and our clergy who are so supportive and wanting to get on board with this project,” Karen said.

Mr Scott described Karen and Stephen as ‘a breath of fresh air.’ “Thirty years ago I was working in this area. People were trapped in their homes as it was a ‘no go’ area. Tennent Street and Shankill Road are very different today with all the shops and new houses,” he said.

“But there is still a sense of hopelessness, people are trapped by circumstances and sometimes they feel they want to give up. Hopelessness creeps into our churches, and often we look at the things we can’t do rather than the things we can.

“Karen and Stephen can be a catalyst, they can help you to build up your people.”

He added: “Church Army sees the vision the diocese has for this area, and we are delighted to be part of it.”

Bishop Alan told guests that this Centre of Mission was about partnership. “We are stronger together than we are alone,” he said. “I am grateful to the clergy for buying into this and to the Church Army. It is a great joy for me to say Connor is one of these first partnerships.”

The Bishop thanked Diocesan Council, the Connor team and particularly Diocesan Development Officer Trevor Douglas for sourcing funding for this new venture.

“This is a journey. I am not sure where it is going to lead but I have a profound sense that God is in this and that is all that matters, and God will bring His blessing,” Bishop Alan said.

Agherton ladies knit and natter for children in Romania

Members of Agherton MU and the parish Knit & Natter group had their needles clacking in support of two organisations working with orphans and children with life limiting illnesses in Romania.

On February 20, the MU welcomed Shirley Moore who spoke about her work with Hospice Emanuel and Casa Grace Foundation in Romania.

To support the work of these charities and bring a little joy to the children, the MU and Knit & Natter group undertook a joint project to knit chicks and ‘egg hats’ which were filled with a cream egg for the children.

They also donated knitted blankets and hats to donate.

Pancake giveaway!

Early on Shrove Tuesday, members of Christ Church, Ballynure, and St John’s, Ballyclare, braved the weather to serve up pancakes to the local community, sharing God’s love through a simple act of generosity.

More than 200 pancakes were given away to people going to work and school. The rector, the Rev Jonny Campbell-Smyth, said: “We could not have imagined the response, and thanks to all of our willing parishioners who have given up their time this morning for this community outreach.”

Keeping dry at the Strove Tuesday pancake giveaway in Ballynure and Ballyclare are parish treasurer Graeme Reid, Paul Reid, David McIthagger, the Rev Jonny Campbell-Smyth, rector, and the principal of Ballyclare Primary School, Kim Mulgigan.

Mr Des Scott, Deputy Chief Executive of the Church Army, speaks at the launch of Connect Base.
Elizabeth Houston-Ramsey/Spaulding left Ireland when she was three, and had never returned until the cruise ship ‘Caribbean Princess,’ on which she was holidaying, called into Belfast for just one day.

Elizabeth, who was born in the White Hospital, Lisburn, on April 22 1944, was accompanied by her husband Robert. Lifelong friends, they married a couple of years ago after both were widowed.

Elizabeth wanted to renew her marriage vows in the church in which she was baptised, and although the rector, the Rev Canon John Budd, was not available during their visit, he organised it that Elizabeth should have her wish.

She and Robert were escorted by parishioner Alan Walker, who plays in the Friendship Band NI which greeted the ship’s arrival, and at Christ Church the Rev Clifford Skillen was happy to conduct the service of renewal of vows.

Elizabeth is the daughter of Elisabeth Matthews and James Houston. Her grandparents were Jane and Samuel Matthews of ‘Iona Cottage,’ Co Antrim.

Elizabeth has never had any luck tracing her family in Northern Ireland. Although the ‘Caribbean Princess’ was only eight hours in port at Belfast, she told Canon Budd that it was her wish that since she could not contact any family here, she would like to revisit her parents’ church.

She said her mother had been back in the late 1950s, and since then Elizabeth has carried a picture of the ‘lovely church’ at Derriaghy.

“I would with all my heart consider it an honour if we could have a very brief service just the minister, my husband and I and take a few photographs,” she wrote to Canon Budd before her visit.

The couple were blessed with glorious sunshine on the day of their visit. After the service, they saw the register of Elizabeth’s birth recorded in the Christ Church baptism book. They toured the church, the graveyard and grounds and had lunch in a local restaurant before returning to Belfast Port.

Mr Skillen said afterwards: “It was a very emotional but happy occasion. It was a great honour and joy to be able to officiate at the service.”

### St Paul’s Sexton retires after 32 years

Mr Ken Burns has retired having been Sexton at St Paul’s Parish Church, Lisburn, for 32 years. Ken worked alongside three rectors during this period - Canon Ken Cochrane, Canon James Carson and the current incumbent, the Rev Arthur Young.

At a retirement tea on May 24, Ken received gifts from the Parish and Select Vestry, the GB, and the Church Lads’ and Church Girls’ Brigade.

### Installation of Canon

The Rev Gill Withers, rector of Greyabbey & Kircubbin, Ballyphilip & Ardquin, was installed as a Canon of St Anne’s Cathedral by the Dean of Belfast, the Very Rev John Mann, on Sunday March 5.
This year the Rt Rev Alan Abernethy chose ‘Stewards of Creation’ as the topic for the three seminars, and the large numbers in attendance, along with some of the questions raised during the course of the talks, indicated that this is an issue close to many hearts.

At each seminar, Bishop Alan explained that while he was no scientist, God’s people have a duty to look after God’s creation.

He discussed the church’s theology in terms of God’s creation, what is our responsibility as children of God, and looked at the issues of concern and how people can make a difference.

There was an opportunity for chat and fellowship and a browse at The Book Well stall during a refreshment break midway through each of the seminars, and Bishop Alan expressed thanks to each parish for its hospitality.
Significant response to Bishop Hilary plea

At the end of March, Bishop Hilary of Yei appealed directly to people in Connor to help alleviate suffering caused by civil war in South Sudan.

Since his appeal was published on the Connor diocesan website and social media, parishes and individuals in the diocese have donated almost £11,000 through CMS Ireland.

Connor and Yeí have been in partnership for almost 10 years. In his communication to Connor Bishop Hilary outlined the severity of the situation which has seen more than 450,000 people flee from Yeí to refugee camps in northern Uganda alone, while others have gone to DR Congo.

“When I visited the mega refugee camp at Rhino Camp on March 5, I was so overwhelmed by the huge needs of the refugees to be fulfilled in almost every aspect of their lives,” Bishop Hilary said.

“The range of needs is from lack of poles for constructing their makeshift dwellings of plastic materials to churches.

“The refugees’ complaints range from insufficient rations of dry food to lack of schools at all levels for their children. There are many young people in these camps, all very idle and having nothing to do. Many of them are stressed and traumatized and are in great need for counselling services in trauma and psychosocial disorders.

“They are considered to be at risk.

“The need of the pastors in the town is financial assistance. This will enable them to buy basic commodities like food, soap, salt, medicine if they can get it, and pay the fees of the children remaining in the town schools,” Bishop Hilary said.

Perhaps what really makes the list hit home is not just that it is a list of names, but at it is a list of friends, among them diocesan youth co-ordinator Amule, who met Bishop Alan Abernethy during his visit to Yeí in 2013, and Mary Giboka Solomon, MU co-ordinator, whose story about the horrors she faced in the last civil war featured in Connor Connections in 2011. Also Richard Ali, Dean of Immanuel Cathedral, who was also a great help with translating for the Connor team which visited in January 2013.

To make a donation which will go entirely to Yeí Diocese, look for the Yeí Appeal on the CMSI website. CMSI also has a general South Sudan Appeal.

CMSG describes the donations made so far by people in Connor as “significant.” Funds have already been sent to Yeí Diocese. Some were used for emergency feeding programmes for displaced people on the Cathedral compound - many of these people have now moved across the border into northern Uganda.

Fund have also assisted diocesan staff who have remained in their parishes in Yeí and are facing food shortages with their families. Assistance was also sent to the diocese to set up temporary diocesan systems in Arua, Uganda, to enable an effective response to the crisis in Yeí.

Lenten Lunches raise £26,000 for charities

The Parish of Whitehead and Islandmagee again held a series of Lenten Lunches, continuing a tradition going back 14 years. The initiative has raised £26,000 for seven local charities during this time.

A dedicated team of parishioners works hard to make and serve lunches and to provide a carryout and delivery service to people in their homes and businesses.

The rector, the Rev Canon Mark Taylor, said the parish was blessed to have great community support within Whitehead and from further afield. “We are hugely thankful to the many local businesses who support us each year, with their help and generosity we are able to keep our expenses down ensuring more money is available to support the charities,” he said.

Updated history of St John’s, Donegore

Margaret Bell, a parishioner of Templepatrick and Donegore, has completed an update to the book that she first produced in 1988.

This new edition of ‘A History of St John’s Church, Donegore’ brings the story up to date. The book was launched during Holy Week. The Rev Andrew Ker, rector, said: “My hope is that through the pages of this new edition those who worship here now, and others, will find a deeper connection with the place where they connect with God.”

Copies at £7.50 are available from http://thebookwell.co.uk/donegore or from the Parish Office.

St Mark’s MU

A special service followed by refreshments was held to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the Mothers’ Union at St Marks, Ballysillan. The preacher was the Ven Dr Stephen McBride, MU Chaplain and Archdeacon of Connor. Diocesan President Valerie Ash helped cut the anniversary cake.
Dedication of gifts in Regimental Chapel

New chairs and kneelers were dedicated by the Dean of Belfast, the Very Rev John Mann, in the Regimental Chapel in St Anne’s Cathedral on Tuesday April 25.

Families of those commemorated by these gifts were present at the service. Among them was Mrs Evelyn Creaney who saw a chair dedicated in memory of her husband Colonel John Creaney OBE QC TD DL. Col Creaney was Commander of the Fifth Battalion The Royal Irish Rangers and was Honorary Colonel of Queen’s University OTC and other Regiments. He was also Crown Prosecutor and his wife said his great love was the Irish Fusiliers, with whom he was commissioned in 1955. He died in 2008.

Korean War veteran Colonel Robin Charley OBE, 93, attended the service with his daughters. They donated a chair in memory of the officers and men of the Royal Ulster Rifles killed in action in the Korean War 1950-54.

Lt Col Harvey Bicker OBE of the Royal Ulster Rifles took the opportunity to try out the chair he had donated in memory of his uncle, Private Bertie Bicker, 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers, killed at Messines on March 23 1918.

Keep ing the bells ringing in Ballymena

An age old tradition carried on in only a small number of churches within the Church of Ireland is being kept alive by the bellringers of St Patrick’s, Ballymena.

They ring for services, weddings, funerals and Royal occasions, and for some of those charged with keeping the bells going, it is not just a task but a passion.

The bells in the tower of St Patrick’s date back to 1897 and were dedicated to the then rector, Dean Murray. There were originally eight bells, but these were recast in 1987 into 12, probably because the bells were on a wooden frame which was starting to move, making some quite hard to ring. They were recast by Whitechapel, London, and the 12 bells are each lighter than when there were eight.

Claire and Andrew Hudson were the instigators of the recasting of the bells. Claire, the Conductor of the Ballymena Hon Society of Bellringers, was tragically killed in a road traffic accident in 1995. A plaque in the bell tower of St Patrick’s, presented

Bishop Sam Poyntz

The Right Rev Dr Samuel Poyntz, a former Bishop of Connor, died peacefully on February 18. Bishop Poyntz was Bishop of Cork, Cloyne and Ross from 1978-87 and Bishop of Connor from 1987-95.

The Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev Alan Abernethy, said: "Bishop Poyntz is fondly remembered in the Diocese of Connor for his energy, his leadership and his sense of fun. He led this diocese through some of the difficult years of the Troubles with great courage and wisdom. Our prayers are with the Poyntz family at this time of loss."
in Claire’s memory by the Society of Royal Cumberland Youths, marks the day the Society visited to ring a peal of 5,040 bells at sunrise.

The late Sam Letters retired as Tower Captain in 2016 aged 85 after 71 years of ringing. The current Tower Captain is Colin Watt. He and his wife Loraine are both seasoned ringers.

Lorraine recalls how she was drawn into this world while watching Colin and her children in the tower. “Sam said stand up and hold the rope and the next thing he had me ringing a bell,” she said.

The bells are heavy, but a person’s size is not an issue when it comes to being a ringer. “It’s a misconception that you have to be musical or large in stature to ring bells,” Colin explained. “Our son could ring the tenor bell, which is the heaviest, when he was 10-years-old.

“Bellringing is very much an Anglican thing. We are calling people to worship. There are 16 churches in Northern Ireland where the bells are rung by hand.” Three of these are in Connor – Ballymena, St Patrick’s, Coleraine and St Nicholas, Carrickfergus.

Ballymena’s newest bell ringer is David Megawhgin who started in April 2016. “I was at the Communion service one Wednesday and someone asked if I would consider ringing the bells and after some persuasion I said yes,” he said.

“I was very nervous and extremely out of breath by the time I had climbed the 52 steps to the tower, but Sam was very gentle and very patient and within about 6-7 weeks I was allowed on the bell on my own.”

David explained that bell ringing requires two strokes. “Anybody can pull the rope down. That’s the easy bit, but you have to learn to control the bell and then to take charge. It is far more mental than physical. It is about following instructions and timing. When I stopped wondering what was going on above and could actually feel what was happening, that was it.

“I have yet to tell someone I ring bells and hear them respond ‘so do I!’” David added. “I always thought that it was something for the elite, that you had to be really high up in Church to ring the bells, but that is not the case.

“I like the challenge of learning something new, I also like the company, it is good fun.”

The ringers practice on a Friday. At present there are nine of them, and five is the minimum required to ring. The bells are rung on Sunday mornings and evenings, at weddings, and on special Royal occasions.

The tenor bell is tolled on its own, muffled on the down stroke to represent death, before a funeral, and muffles are put on all eight bells before they are rung on Remembrance Sunday – the muffling process takes an hour and a half.

The bells were not allowed to be rung during World War Two.

The role of the Tower Captain is to train people to ring and to pass on this ancient tradition. Colin is also the conductor, meaning he calls the order in which the bells are rung.

St Patrick’s attracts visitors who travel around different towns and cities ringing bells. Some of those who took part in the peal of 5,040 bells in 1995 are still doing the rounds of bell towers in the UK, Ireland and around the world.

For the Rev Mark McConnell, installed as rector of St Patrick’s in June last year, what happens in the bell tower is something of a mystery. “It a world all of its own to an outsider,” he commented on a visit to the tower.

Under the supervision of Loraine, Mark stepped up to the rope, all was going well, or so it seemed until Loraine told him sharply to release his grip. It appeared he had pulled rather too hard and the bell had turned right over.

“I felt the force of that,” Mark said. “I am a big fellow but I felt it was going to lift me to the ceiling. I felt out of control but then Loraine’s words reached me and I let go.”

Loraine was keen to stress that bell-ringing can be a dangerous activity, and injuries have occurred in many a bell tower. Even those sitting around the walls have to have their feet firmly placed on the floor to avoid any risk of a loose rope catching an ankle.

While the rector returned to the safety of the pulpit, the Bellringers continued their practice. Anyone interested in learning this tradition, who has the time to commit to both practice and regular ringing, is welcome to contact Colin and Loraine.

Sam Letters - a ringer for 71 years

Sam Letters, who died in March at the age of 86, had been a bell ringer in St Patrick’s, Ballymena, for 71 years. He was married to Patricia for more than 60 years and had two daughters – Tracy and Sharon.

An engineer by profession, Sam worked for Gallaher Ltd for many years. He was a lifelong member of St Patrick’s. He was a Head Chorister, a Sunday School Superintendent, and an officer in the Church Lads Brigade.

Sam was Tower Captain in Ballymena for several decades, was Chairman of the Northern District of Irish Association of Change Ringers, served several terms on the Executive Council and was a member of the Society of Royal Cumberland Youths. He taught countless young people to ring.

Sam was also involved in the Masonic Order and the Pentagon Probus Clubs.

Loraine Watt, one of Sam’s fellow bellringers, said: “Sam was gentle by nature. Never outspoken and never had a bad word to say about anyone. He will be greatly missed by family and friends.”
School is ‘a place of faith, light and hope’

A team from Christ Church Parish, Lisburn, visited St Apollo School, Kasizi, in the Diocese of Luwero, Uganda, in February with the charity Fields of Life.

St Apollo School was established in 2007, but had only one small building and many classes had to be held under trees. Christ Church Parish raised £75,000 and in partnership with Fields of Life two new blocks of classrooms were built. A team visited in 2012 to work on the classrooms. The parish continued to support the school and raised more than £24,000 for a staff residence which it helped complete on its last trip in 2015.

The team received a warm welcome. “We were truly blessed by the experience of this Fields of Life School in a remote part of Uganda,” the rector, the Rev Paul Dundas said.

“The programme was shaped by the needs of the school and Fields of Life. The four guys on the team worked hard in making 24 benches and 12 tables for the children in the nursery as well as two desks and two chairs for the nursery teachers and two bookcases and two blackboards. An amazing achievement by the men which will bring so much blessing to the nursery.”

Paul and the six ladies on the team delivered a series of lessons on the life of Jesus to four combined classes. “We were deeply enriched when the children sang, did their prayer drills and showed appreciation for what they learnt or received,” Paul said.

“We held a sports morning each Thursday for the children. This was great fun as they learnt new games and some new rules!”

The ladies worked with the nursery children on two Thursday mornings with varied programme of games, stories and songs, and on both Wednesdays they met with the ladies of the community, sharing Bible stories and producing liquid soap to sell on the community day. They also distributed two Singer sewing machines as well as bras which were well received by around 100 ladies.

The rector met a group of men including teachers and people from the community to look at the Bible stories of Rahab and Ruth and shared testimonies of faith and life.

Gifts for the children included underwear, football kits, stationery and Bibles in English. Lunchtimes were spent playing football, rugby, netball and volleyball in the school grounds in soaring temperatures.

Paul said: “The school building had been retiled in January as well as being repainted. It was wonderful to see the staff accommodation being used by staff, enabling them to be on site as well as starting to produce crops and look after pigs and chickens.

“The highlight regarding buildings was the
completion of the latrine for the adolescent girls at the school under the ‘I am Girl’ project. The building was officially opened by Bishop Eridard. This building again drew attention to the need for girls to have an education and be supported during adolescence.”

Building work continues - the foundations for the piggery were being dug on the last Thursday of the team’s visit.

A big celebration was held at the school as the visit by the team neared an end, when a band and children walked team members along a small dirt track for over 1km with ‘music, cheers, jubilation and joy.’

There were speeches, songs from the school choir, poems, a meal and lemonade. Paul spoke on behalf of the team to give thanks to the Lord for the two weeks at an amazing school and all that was shared and experienced to enrich the learning.

“We truly enjoyed being with the children as we sang, prayed, played, laughed, danced, read God’s Word, listened to them, met parents or grandparents, witnessed their smiles and hope as they receive an education in a context of Christian love and care,” Paul said.

“This is a community of hope. There are challenges for the school to attract pupils who will pay the school fees for the whole year as well as creating the income-generating projects such as the piggery, tuck shop and liquid soap.

“But small steps are in progress in this community. Thankfully 51 children have their education sponsored through Fields of Life at the school.”

Paul said the team had witnessed the improvement of the children’s English since Christ Church’s last visit two years ago, and he paid tribute to the dedication and commitment of the staff under the leadership of the principal Madame Esther and vice principal Godfrey Kaliba. Great news was that four P7 pupils had transferred in January to Bethel Royal boarding school for the first time in the history of the school!

During the two weeks, the parish links with the Diocese of Luwero were furthered. Team members attended the Esther women’s prayer group led by Jane, the wife of Bishop Eridard. The Bishop and his wife also hosted the team in their home for dinner one night.

On February 18 Paul led a day-long seminar for the clergy wives of the diocese looking at the theme of ‘calling’ from the book of Ephesians and the following day the team attended morning worship at St Apollo where Paul preached on Ephesians 3: 20,21.

The church community afterwards provided the team with Sunday lunch of liver, potatoes and cabbage. The team also had the opportunity to have tea one evening with Charles and James whose training in the church the parish is supporting. Charles will be ordained in December to serve in Luwero Diocese.

Some of the team visited Kwoko Hospital and delivered a defibrillator and slide sheets for use in the hospital. They met Denise Wilson (CMS Ireland) and Tanya Baker (Crosslinks).

Throughout its stay, the team was supported by Bridget, Link worker from Fields of Life. Paul said: “Bridget is a women of great faith, godly wisdom, gentle spirit, wise counsel who laughed with us and guided us in our programme and time at the school. We were enriched by her being part of our team. She is a blessing to Fields of Life and to the kingdom of God”

The group stayed at the Diocesan guesthouse at Luwero and during the two weeks no one was sick and there were no emergencies. Even journeys on bumpy dirt tracks passes without incident!

Reflecting on the visit, Paul said: “The location of St Apollo School is in the ‘Killing Fields’ area of Uganda, but now it is a place of faith, light and hope. Our journey and partnership continues as a parish. For parishioners who have been on the three teams, the school community has a place in our hearts and lives. God is good”

Team members were Beth Harris, Audrey Knowles, Roberta Thompson, Janice Thompson, Jane Marks, Beverley Thompson, Richard Thompson, Gary Knowles, Paul Dundas, Raymond Geddis and Johnston Boyle.
Volunteering at St Anne’s Cathedral

The staff of St Anne’s Cathedral, Belfast, which serves the dioceses of Connor and Down & Dromore, is augmented by volunteers. Some have served for a number of years while others, including students and people seeking experience while looking for full-time employment, volunteer for a short term. All are welcome and their contribution is valued. We are seeking volunteers for various roles:

**STEWARDS**

Stewards welcome visitors as they arrive and are usually the first point of contact in the Cathedral. They answer questions from our visitors, and get to meet people from all over the world as well those who live locally. Most of the stewards volunteer for two hours a week. Many also act as tour guides.

**TOUR GUIDES**

Tour guides are responsible for showing groups of people around the Cathedral and answering their questions. Groups vary in size from 2-3 people up to 30. There are four scheduled tours each day.

**VERGERS**

The Verger leads members of the clergy and dignitaries in processions, carries ceremonial candles and undertakes roles in the sanctuary of the Cathedral at the Communion Services. Young people doing their Duke of Edinburgh Award will find that volunteering in the Vergers’ Team counts for the service component of the Award.

**PRAYER MINISTRY**

In a new initiative, and as a way of connecting more closely with parishes in the two dioceses, St Anne’s wishes to create a Prayer Ministry Team, made up of volunteers to be available at a regular time for anyone who wishes to receive prayer for themselves or for others.

**FOOD BANK**

The Cathedral also wants to operate as a distribution point for the North Belfast Foodbank and needs volunteers to serve on a rota basis.

If you would like more information about volunteering as a steward or tour guide, please contact Janice@belfastcathedral.org. For other volunteering positions please contact the Rev Canon Mark Niblock at 028 90328332 or deansvicar@belfastcathedral.org.